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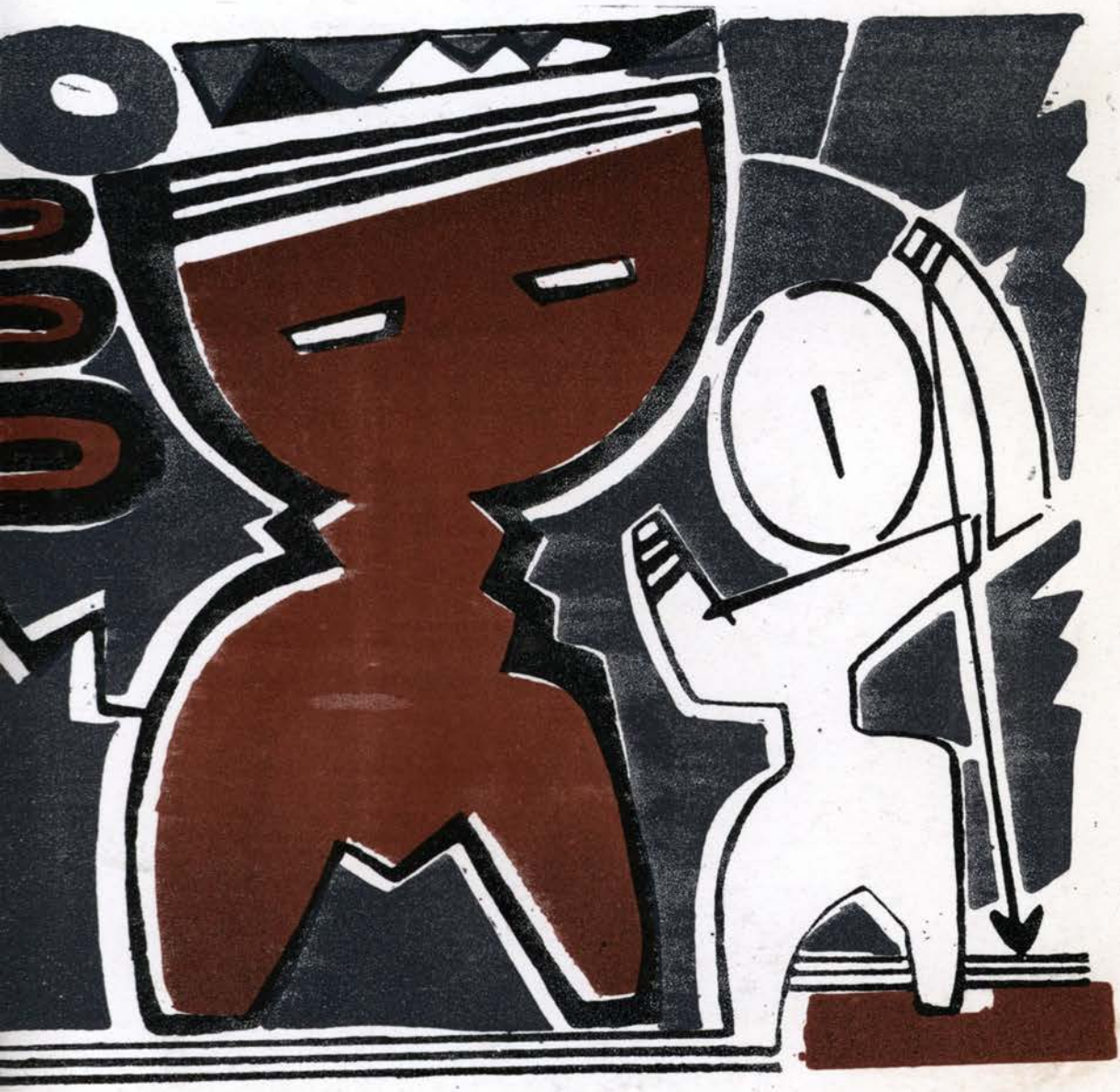
Special Issue ***Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: The Sierra Leone Civil War***



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Ibrahim Abdullah and Yusuf Bangura

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Africa Development is the quarterly bilingual journal of CODESRIA. It is a social science journal whose major focus is on issues which are central to the development of society. Its principal objective is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas among African scholars from a variety of intellectual persuasions and various disciplines. The journal also encourages other contributors working on Africa or those undertaking comparative analysis of Third World issues.

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Africa Development, Vol. XXII, Nos. 3/4, 1997

Introduction

Ibrahim Abdullah*

> The agony: I say their agony!
> the agony of imagining their squalor but never knowing it
> the agony of cramping them in roach infected shacks
> the agony of treating them like chattel slaves
> the agony of feeding them abstract theories they do not understand
> the agony of their lugubrious eyes and battered souls
> the agony of giving them party cards but never party support
> the agony of marshalling them on election day but never on banquet nights
> but above all the damn agony of appealing to their patience
> Africa beware! their patience is running out.
> Sly Cheney-Coker, 'Peasants' in *The Graveyard also Has Teeth*, London, 1980.

On Sunday, 25 May 1997, a group of heavily armed soldiers stormed the central prison in Freetown and released some of their comrades who had been arrested in connection with an attempted coup d'état the previous year. There were violent clashes between the armed soldiers and Nigerian troops guarding the broadcasting station and the State House. The bloody takeover — unprecedented in the history of coups in Africa — was marked by a sustained orgy of violence by troops loyal to the armed soldiers.[1] Houses were forcibly entered, vehicles commandeered from their owners; property, public as well as personal, destroyed and looted; and scores of civilians killed. By Monday, 26 May, the declared leader of the group, Major Johnny Paul Koroma, proclaimed an end to the six-year war that had ravaged the country, and appointed Foday Sankoh, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leader, as the

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1 The violence, mainly against civilians, surpasses the bloody takeover of July 1966 in Nigeria which led to the assassination of General Ironsi.

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number two figure in the new regime. The deposed civilian regime was replaced by an Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) composed of members of the RUF and the soldiers who organised the coup.

How do we explain this random violence in a context of state collapse and extreme poverty? What are the connections between the violence in the capital city and the drama of violence and counter-violence that has been the hallmark of the civil war in Sierra Leone's countryside? What are the specificities of the Sierra Leonean situation and how does it differ from other areas in the continent that have experienced civil war and armed insurrection? This special issue on the civil war in Sierra Leone, the first serious attempt to explain the origin and dynamics of the crisis, begins to explore some of these questions. Key to understanding the present crisis and the dynamics of the war and violence is the centrality of youth culture.

The volume deals specifically with the social origins and dynamics of the war; the intellectual foundations of the RUF; the role of student radicals in the development of rebellious youth culture; the emergence of the Kamajoi militia; the 'sobel', or renegade soldier phenomenon; the collaboration between the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) and the RUF; and the recent bloody takeover of the state by the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLMF) and the RUF. All the papers address aspects of Sierra Leone's vibrant youth underclass culture, which, the contributors agree, is central to the drama surrounding the war and the continued violence. In this respect, the volume is a pioneering enterprise: the first scholarly attempt to interrogate rebellious/lumpen or underclass youth culture in the Sierra Leone society and its role in fuelling the crisis. It therefore departs from, and is critical of, previous attempts at explaining the crisis by using the Liberian war as a starting point (Richards 1995; Riley 1995; Abdullah 1996).[2] It also differs from publications that have tried to impose externally derived, chiefly Western, conceptual frameworks on the subject. These do not take into sufficient account the empirical reality on the ground. One such publication advances the notion that the war can be read as a revolt of 'excluded intellectuals', and that a post-modernist lense is required to interprete the revolt of such intellectuals (Richards 1996).

The primary analytical focus of this Special Issue is on developments that are internal to Sierra Leone: how lumpen or underclass youth culture and the

2 The first two attempts by Africanists read like journalistic accounts with very thin evidential base; the narratives were therefore anchored on the Liberian war.

emergence of a radical student movement coalesced to produce what later became the RUF. For it was these developments, we argue, which laid the groundwork for the emergence of the RUF.

The paper by Ishmail Rashid deals with the cultural and social connections between students and lumpen youths, and examines the role of these two groups from the perspective of subalternity. By tracing the cultural connections between students and lumpen youths in the 'odelay' (or masquerade) societies and the 'potes' (a popular rendezvous for rebellious youth), Rashid argues that the culture of resistance that characterised youths in Freetown was formed in the context of non-conformism, student radicalism, reggae music, and drugs. The context within which this culture flourished was also marked by a progressive deterioration of the economy, which meant constricting opportunities for youth, the collapse of public institutions, dwindling revenues from mining (the principal source of state revenue), and an intolerant political culture that drove subalterns into a decidedly confrontational stance. As Rashid demonstrates, students confronted the state on a national scale in 1977 and 1985. The linkages between rebellious youth culture and social change were not only marked by the incorporation of student radicals in the NPRC military government that came to power after the 1992 coup. In Rashid's analysis we begin to see the social and cultural linkages — shared cultural repertoire — between the RUF and the NPRC.

Ibrahim Abdullah's paper explores the social and intellectual linkages between the RUF-to-be, the student movement and the marginal youths — or lumpens — by tracing the genealogy of rebellious youth culture in the city of Freetown. Anchoring his analysis on Sierra Leone's post-independence political culture, Abdullah argues that the marginalisation of youth and the absence of a radical political culture was a factor in explaining why rebellious youths generally turned to bland pan-Africanism, and other seemingly radical ideas, such as Gaddafi's Green Book and Kim II Sung's Juche idea, in pursuing an ideational alternative to guide their action. The absence of a clear ideological direction and the uncritical acceptance of vague populism explain why the burgeoning group of 'revolutionaries' in Freetown and elsewhere had no emancipatory programme. This partly elucidates why those who were responsible for recruitment turned their attention to any individual, but mostly lumpen youths, willing to undertake military training.

Thus from July 1987, when the first group of would-be cadres left Freetown for Benghazi in Libya via Accra, to April 1991, when the RUF attacked Bomaru in Kailahun District, no concrete programme of action was formulated. The Basic Document, which came to represent the RUF's political

message, was drafted in Ghana before the trip to Libya. It was essentially a critique of the neo-colonial regime. Lacking a concrete platform and a broad social base on which to anchor its ideas about society, and what it hopes to achieve by taking up arms, the RUF was seemingly left with no alternative but to resort to vague populist formulations about injustice and exploitation. When this message failed to attract any meaningful support from the people, the organisation replied with indiscriminate violence against women, children, and at times, whole communities. The wanton violence and mayhem against the very people it claimed to be liberating, alienated the RUF from the people and provided the objective condition for the emergence of a peoples militia — the Kamajoi.

As Patrick Muana's seminal piece on the Kamajoi militia in the predominantly Mende speaking areas — the major theatre of war — clearly demonstrates, it was the monstrosity of the violence unleashed by the RUF and the inability of the RSLMF to protect the civilian population that compelled the people to organise a popular self-defence unit to keep the two warring factions in check. The war not only exposed the incompetence of the RSLMF to defend the citizenry against the senseless violence perpetrated by the RUF, the chaotic conditions engendered by war and the availability of arms led to other unsavoury developments: banditry, collaboration between the two armed groups against the defenceless citizenry, and plain armed robbery. Muana is sensitive to the broad political and constitutional issues that the formation of the militia raises, particularly its relationship to the army and the Mende-centric nature of its organisational structure. In problematising the issue, Muana emphasizes the need for a national debate on the relevance of the army and the importance of developing a non-ethnic specific militia. This is significant because it engages the popular perception among victims and non-victims about the collaboration between the RSLMF and the RUF.

This allegation of collaboration between the RSLMF and the RUF is the thesis of Arthur Abraham's provocative paper. Abraham argues that the war was deliberately prolonged because of the congruence of interests between the NPRC and the RUF. This informal understanding was a product of the identical economic interests of the young military officers and the RUF: both were deeply involved in the mining of diamonds. The involvement of senior officers in diamond mining meant that the rank and file — the 'ragamuffins' recruited into the army by the NPRC — who were not so privileged, were allowed to engage in illegal activities to supplement their meagre incomes (Abraham in this volume). In this free for all atmosphere the officers lost control over their men, widespread looting and killing of civilians became the norm, so that in the end the nation was compelled to listen to the voice of

the anguished population: the soldiers and the rebels are the same. This popular perception from below was strengthened by the NPRCs unilateral declaration of a cease-fire, at a time when the RUF was allegedly on the run, and subsequently, by the opposition of both the NPRC and the RUF to a return to civilian rule. In the end the people opted for a civilian regime.

Rashid and Abdullah lay the groundwork for an understanding of the social origins of the RUF, while Muana and Abraham help us to come to grips with the dynamics of the war and the reasons for its continuation. Yusuf Bangura's review essay contextualises some of these issues and broadens our understanding of the milieu — political, economic, social and cultural — within which the drama of war unfolds. He argues forcefully against the 'excluded intellectual' thesis put forward by Paul Richards by examining the specificities of Sierra Leone's political economy. It was not patrimonialism per se that was responsible for the collapse of state structures in the late 1970s and 1980s. Rather, it was a specific form of accumulation and certain forms of political development — such as the centralisation of power under the All People's Congress, the destruction of civic forms of opposition, the active underdevelopment and destabilisation of the countryside, and the deliberate use of state violence by the ruling APC government in settling disputes — which provoked the crisis that led to the war. Bangura's conclusion brings us back to the larger question: the breakdown of state structures as a result of a particular kind of accumulation in economies that are very rich in natural resources and yet heavily dependent upon foreign aid for public investment programmes. These socioeconomic and political developments and the consequent alienation of the youth, not 'excluded intellectuals', help to explain the broader context for the war.

If Yusuf Bangura's review essay and subsequent developments in Sierra Leone especially after the May 25 coup have exposed the bankruptcy of the excluded intellectual thesis in understanding the dynamics of the RUF,[3] Lansana Gberie's paper on the bloody takeover of power in 25 May should make us also sceptical of the notion of a 'militariat' in explaining the events of bloody Sunday (Riley 1997). By looking at the composition of the coup leaders and their actions in the city and elsewhere, Gberie argues that it was

3 The RUF's participation in the current AFRC government has clearly shown that apart from the few individuals who represented the RUF in the Peace Commission under Tejan Kabbah's administration, the organisation has no other educated individuals of note. Individuals like Sam Bockarie, Mark Lamin, Eldred Colins and Kallon — who represent the RUF in the AFRC — barely possess post-primary education.

not the militariat — junior officers who lack the clientelist ties of more senior officers — who were behind the coup. Rather, it was the lumpen or underclass elements, those 'criminally disposed and undisciplined', whom Marxist literature had incorrectly assumed were incapable of doing battle on their own behalf (Gberie and Abdullah in this volume). By privileging lumpen culture in his explanation of the takeover, Gberie underlines the salience of this important but neglected social category in understanding the crisis in Sierra Leone. It is indeed tempting to suggest that the bloody takeover approximates the dictatorship of the lumpenproletariat. The atrocities committed by the so-called 'People's Army' — the two organised and armed factions of the lumpenproletariat — continue to denude the notion of a militariat of any explanatory power.

The discussion on lumpen culture and the RUF's destructive violence by a group of Sierra Leonean academics on the Leonenet e-mail Discussion Forum underscores the problem of youth alienation in Africa generally. Yusuf Bangura's reflection on the Abidjan Peace Accord, which was signed on 30 November 1996, underlines the complex problems involved in the demobilisation and resettlement of ex-combatants. Whether there is a negotiated settlement with the current regime in Sierra Leone or a return to the original peace accord, the issue of demobilisation will undoubtedly remain central to the peace process. Our fervent hope is that this special issue will provoke an exchange of ideas that would deepen our understanding of the crisis and open the way forward for a lasting solution to the problems of youth alienation and violence not only in Sierra Leone but in Africa as a whole.

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Introduction

Ibrahim Abdullah*

> L'Agonie : Je parle de leur agonie !
> l'agonie de s'imaginer leur misère noire sans jamais la connaître
> l'agonie de les laisser croupir dans des huttes infestées de cafards
> l'agonie de les traiter comme des esclaves en capture
> l'agonie de leur tenir des discours abstraits dont ils ne peuvent comprendre le sens
> l'agonie de leurs yeux aux regards lugubres et de leurs âmes meurtries
> l'agonie de leur offrir seulement des cartes de membre de parti mais de ne jamais leur apporter le soutien du parti
> l'agonie de ne les rassembler que le jour des élections mais jamais les soirs de banquet...
> mais par-dessus tout, cette maudite agonie de leur demander patience
> prends garde Afrique ! Ils vont être au bout de leur patience.
> Sly Cheney-Coker, «Peasants» in *The Graveyard also Has Teeth*, Londres 1980.

Le dimanche 25 mai 1997, un groupe de soldats fortement armés attaquent la prison centrale de Freetown et libèrent certains de leurs collègues qui avaient été arrêtés à la suite d'une tentative de coup d'Etat perpétré l'année précédente. Il y a de violents combats entre les soldats armés et les troupes nigérianes chargées de la protection de la station émettrice et du siège du Parlement. Ce coup sanglant — sans précédent dans l'histoire des putschs en Afrique — se caractérise par la violence inouïe des troupes favorables aux soldats armés.[1] On assiste à des violations de domiciles, à des réquisitions de véhicules privés, à la destruction et au pillage des biens publics et privés, et au massacre de populations civiles. Le lundi 26 mai, le chef de la junte, le Major Johnny Paul Koroma, proclame la fin de cette guerre qui aura ravagé le pays pendant six ans et nomme le leader du Revolutionary United Front

1 La violence, en particulier celle perpétrée contre les civils, dépasse celle du sanglant coup d'Etat qui en juillet 1996 au Nigeria avait conduit à l'assassinat du Général Ironsi.

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(RUF), Fodé Sankoh, au poste de numéro deux du nouveau régime. Le régime civil déposé est remplacé par un Conseil révolutionnaire des forces armées (AFRC) formé par le RUF et les soldats qui ont organisé le coup.

Comment expliquer cette violence aveugle dans un contexte d'effondrement de l'Etat et d'extrême pauvreté?

Quels sont les liens entre la violence constatée dans la capitale et la tragédie de la violence et la contre-violence qui a caractérisé la guerre civile dans l'arrière-pays sierra léonais?

Quels sont les particularités du cas sierra léonais et en quoi est-il différent de celui des autres régions du continent qui ont connu la guerre civile et l'insurrection armée? Ce numéro spécial sur la guerre civile en Sierra Leone, qui constitue une première et véritable tentative d'élucider l'origine et la dynamique de la guerre, commence par l'étude de quelques-unes de ces questions.

Bien appréhender l'importance de la culture des jeunes constitue un élément clé dans la compréhension de la crise actuelle et la dynamique de la guerre et de la violence.

Ce numéro traite en particulier les origines et la dynamique sociales de la guerre; les fondements intellectuels du RUF; le rôle des étudiants révolutionnaires dans le développement d'une culture rebelle chez les jeunes; l'émergence de la milice Kamajoi; le phénomène «Sobel» ou du soldat incontrôlé; la collaboration entre le National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), (gouvernement de transition) et le RUF; et le récent coup d'Etat sanglant perpétré par les Forces armées de la République de Sierra Leone (RSLMF) et le RUF. Tous les articles traitent des aspects de la dynamique culture de sous-classe des jeunes de Sierra Leone, qui, de l'avis de nos collaborateurs, est d'une importance capitale dans la tragédie qui couvre la guerre et la violence qui se poursuit. A cet égard, ce volume constitue une expérience pionnière, il est la première tentative intellectuelle de mener une réflexion sur la culture de sous-classe des jeunes rebelles marginaux au sein de la société sierra léonaise et sur son rôle dans l'exacerbation de la crise. Par conséquent, il part des précédentes tentatives dont il a une vision critique et qui tentent d'expliquer la crise à partir de la guerre libérienne.[2]

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2 Les deux premières tentatives effectuées par des africanistes se présentent comme des reportages de journalistes avec une faible part d'évidence; les récits étant alors basés sur la guerre libérienne.

Il se démarque aussi des publications qui ont tenté de placer coûte que coûte ce sujet dans des cadres conceptuels empruntés à l'étranger, notamment à l'Occident. Ces derniers ne prenant pas suffisamment compte de la réalité empirique du terrain. Une des publications évoquées ci-dessus avance l'idée selon laquelle on peut voir en cette guerre la révolte des «intellectuels victimes de l'exclusion», et qu'il y a lieu d'interpréter la révolte des dits intellectuels selon les canons post-modernistes (Richards 1996).

C'est ainsi que la première approche analytique de ce numéro spécial porte sur des changements internes à la Sierra Leone: comment la culture de la jeunesse marginale ou du sous-prolétariat et l'émergence d'un mouvement estudiantin radical se sont-elles combiné pour donner naissance à ce qui deviendra plus tard le RUF. Parce que nous pensons que ce sont ces changements-là qui ont rendu possible l'émergence du RUF.

L'article d'Ishmail Rashid porte sur les liens culturels et sociaux qui existent entre étudiants et jeunes marginaux et examine le rôle de ces deux groupes du point de vue du subalterne. En affirmant que les liens culturels entre étudiants et jeunes marginaux ont leurs racines dans les sociétés d'«odelay» (ou de mascarade) et dans les «potes» (rendez-vous populaires de la jeunesse rebelle), Rashid soutient que la culture de résistance qui caractérise la jeunesse de Freetown s'est construite dans l'univers du non-conformisme, du radicalisme estudiantin, de la musique reggae et de la drogue. Le contexte dans lequel cette culture s'est développée est marqué aussi par la crise économique grandissante qui se traduit par la raréfaction des opportunités pour la jeunesse, l'effondrement des institutions publiques, la baisse des revenus miniers (principale source de revenus de l'Etat) et par une culture politique intolérante qui a poussé les subalternes à adopter une attitude résolument conflictuelle. Comme le montre Rashid, les étudiants ont eu à affronter l'Etat à l'échelle nationale en 1977 et en 1985. Les liens entre la culture de la jeunesse rebelle et les changements sociaux ne portent pas seulement les empreintes de l'intégration des étudiants radicaux dans le gouvernement militaire du NPRC qui a pris le pouvoir à la suite du coup de 1992. A travers l'analyse de Rashid, nous pouvons entrevoir les liens sociaux et culturels, répertoire culturel identique entre le RUF et le NPRC.

L'article de Ibrahim Abdullah explore les liens sociaux et intellectuels qui existent entre le futur RUF, le mouvement étudiant et les jeunes marginaux en situant les origines de la culture de la jeunesse récalcitrante ou les sous-prolétaires à Freetown même. En basant son analyse sur la culture politique d'après l'indépendance de la Sierra Leone, Abdullah soutient que le fait de marginaliser la jeunesse et l'absence d'une culture politique radicale

font partie des raisons pour lesquelles les jeunes rebelles se tournent généralement vers un panafricanisme fade et vers d'autres idées apparemment radicales telles que le livret vert de Gaddafi et l'idée de Juche de Kim Il Sung, cela dans le cadre de la recherche d'une alternative idéologique qui puisse orienter leur action. L'absence d'une orientation idéologique clairement définie et l'acceptation toute docile d'un populisme vague offre un début d'explication du fait que les groupes de «révolutionnaires» de Freetown et des autres régions du pays ne disposent d'aucun programme de libération malgré leur expansion. Ceci explique en partie pourquoi les responsables du recrutement ont plutôt ciblé les jeunes marginaux, désireux de subir une formation militaire. Ainsi, de juillet 1997, lorsque le premier groupe de prétendus cadres a quitté Freetown pour se rendre à Benghazi, en Libye via Accra, à avril 1991, lorsque le RUF a attaqué Bomaru situé dans le district de Kailahun, aucun programme d'action concret n'a été formulé. Le document de base qui, par la suite, est devenu le manifeste du RUF a été rédigé une première fois au Ghana lors du voyage pour la Libye. Il n'est, ni plus ni moins, qu'une critique du régime néocolonial. Ne présentant ni un programme concret ni une base sociale importante sur laquelle fonder son projet de société et les objectifs qu'il souhaite atteindre en prenant les armes, le RUF n'a eu d'autre alternative que de recourir à de vagues slogans populistes sur l'injustice et l'exploitation.

Ce message n'ayant pas permis d'obtenir un soutien populaire significatif, l'organisation a alors adopté la violence aveugle contre les femmes, les enfants et parfois contre des communautés tout entières. Cette violence absurde et ces destructions contre le peuple même qu'il prétendait vouloir libérer, ont aliéné le RUF du peuple tout en engendrant les conditions objectives de l'émergence d'une milice populaire: les Kamajoi.

Comme l'indique l'article original de Patrick Muana sur la milice Kamajoi des zones d'expression Mende — principal théâtre de la guerre — c'est la monstruosité de la violence déclenchée par le RUF et l'incapacité des RSLMF (Armée nationale sierra léonaise) à assurer la sécurité des populations civiles qui ont amené ces dernières à mettre sur pied un groupe d'autodéfense chargé de surveiller les deux factions en guerre. La guerre n'a pas seulement révélé l'incapacité des RSLMF à protéger les citoyens de la violence absurde du RUF. En effet, les situations chaotiques qu'elle a engendrées et la prolifération des armes ont permis le développement d'autres maux: banditisme, alliance des deux groupes armés contre des citoyens sans défense et vols à main armée. Muana est sensible aux grandes questions politiques et constitutionnelles soulevées par la création de la milice, notamment en ce qui concerne ses relations avec l'armée et la nature mendecentrique de sa

structure organisationnelle. En problématisant la question, Muana met l'accent sur la nécessité d'organiser une conférence nationale sur la pertinence de l'armée et sur l'importance de développer une milice qui ne soit pas à dominance d'une ethnie donnée. Cette approche est intéressante dans la mesure où elle sensibilise l'opinion publique, victimes et non-victimes inclues, sur la question de la collaboration entre les RSLMF et le RUF.

C'est cette allégation de collaboration entre les RSLMF et le RUF qu'Arthur Abraham développe dans son article provocateur. Abraham soutient en effet que la guerre a été prolongée délibérément dans l'intérêt commun du MPRC et du RUF. Cette entente officieuse, mais non officielle, a été rendue possible par le fait que les jeunes officiers de l'armée et le RUF partagent les mêmes intérêts économiques; tous les deux étant profondément impliqués dans l'exploitation des mines de diamant. L'implication des officiers supérieurs dans l'exploitation du diamant signifie que les hommes de troupe les «ragamuffins» (va-nu-pieds) enrôlés dans l'armée par le NPRC — qui n'ont pas beaucoup de privilèges, peuvent se permettre certaines activités illégales pour augmenter leurs maigres revenus (Abraham, dans ce numéro). Dans cette atmosphère de laisser-aller total, le commandement perd le contrôle de ses hommes, pillage et tueries de populations civiles deviennent monnaie courante; de sorte qu'au bout du compte, la nation a dû écouter la voix de la population qui vit dans l'angoisse: les soldats et les rebelles sont tous les mêmes. Cette perception populaire à partir de la base a été renforcée par la déclaration unilatérale de cessez-le feu du MPRC au moment où le RUF, selon certaines affirmations non vérifiées, était en fuite, et plus tard par les refus et du NPRC et du RUF de revenir à un régime civil. Finalement, le peuple a opté pour un régime civil.

Rashid et Abdullah offrent une base de compréhension des origines sociales du RUF, tandis que Muana et Abraham nous aident à saisir la dynamique de la guerre et les raisons de sa continuation. L'essai de revue de Yusuf Bangura contextualise une partie de ces questions et élargit le champ de notre compréhension du milieu — politique, économique, social et culturel — dans lequel se déploie la tragédie de la guerre. Il contredit catégoriquement la thèse de l'«intellectuel victime de l'exclusion» de Paul Richards en examinant les particularités de l'économie politique sierra léonaise. Ce n'est pas le patrimonialisme tout seul qui a provoqué l'effondrement de l'appareil étatique vers la fin des années 1970 et 1980.

C'est plutôt le fait d'une manière particulière d'accumuler des richesses et de certains changements politiques — notamment la centralisation du pouvoir au niveau du «People's Congress» (Congrès de tous les Sierra Léonais),

l'abolition des formes civiques de lutte politique, le sous-développement et la déstabilisation active des campagnes et l'usage délibéré de la violence publique par le gouvernement APC dans la résolution des conflits — ce qui a donné naissance à la crise qui, à son tour, va conduire à la guerre. La conclusion de Bangura nous ramène à une question plus importante: l'effondrement de l'appareil étatique en tant que conséquence d'une manière particulière d'accumuler des richesses dans des économies riches en ressources naturelles donc largement dépendantes de l'aide étrangère aux programmes d'investissements publics. Ces changements socio-économiques et politiques et l'aliénation de la jeunesse qui s'en est suivie, non celle d'«intellectuels victimes de l'exclusion», aident à décrire le contexte plus large de la guerre.

S'il est vrai que l'essai de revue de Yusuf Bangura et les changements survenus par la suite en Sierra Leone, notamment après le sanglant coup d'Etat du 25 mai ont mis en lumière l'impertinence de la thèse des «intellectuels victimes de l'exclusion» dans la compréhension de la dynamique du RUF,[3] l'article de Lansana Gberie sur le sanglant putsch du 25 mai devrait aussi nous laisser sceptique quant à la notion de «militariat» dans son récit des événements du dimanche sanglant (Riley 1997).

En observant la composition du commandement de la junte et ses actions dans et hors de la capitale, Gberie soutient que ce n'est pas le militariat — les sous-officiers qui n'ont pas les mêmes relations de clientélisme que les officiers supérieurs — qui est derrière le coup. Ce sont plutôt les éléments incontrôlés ou du bas de la hiérarchie, ceux-là qui sont «des criminels indisciplinés» et que la doctrine marxiste a traité à tort de gens incapables de combattre pour leur propre compte (Gberie et Abdullah dans ce numéro). En privilégiant la culture des marginaux dans sa relation du coup d'Etat, Gberie souligne la présence de cette couche sociale importante mais ignorée dans les efforts de compréhension de la crise au Sierra Leone. C'est vrai que l'on peut être tenté d'assimiler le coup d'état sanglant à la dictature du sous-prolétariat. Les atrocités commises par la prétendue «Armée du peuple» — les deux factions armées et organisées du sous-prolétariat — contribuent sans cesse à dépouiller la notion de militariat de tout pouvoir explicatif.

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3 La participation du RUF à l'actuel gouvernement a montré qu'en dépit du nombre limité d'individus qui représentaient le RUF à la commission pour la paix, sous l'administration de Tejan Kabbah, l'organisation ne comptait pas d'autres personnes instruites. Les personnes comme Sam Bockarie, Mark Lamin, Eldred Colins et Kallan — qui représentent le RUF dans le AFRC — ont a peine un niveau du secondaire.

Le débat sur la culture des marginaux et sur la violence destructive du RUF par un groupe d'intellectuels sierra léonais sur le Forum par courrier électronique du Léonenet met en exergue le problème de l'aliénation de la jeunesse un peu partout en Afrique.

La réflexion de Yusuf Bangura sur l'Accord de paix d'Abidjan signé le 30 novembre 1996, souligne les complexités de la démobilisation et de la réinsertion des ex-combattants. Qu'il y ait une solution négociée avec l'actuel régime sierra léonais ou un retour au premier accord de paix, la question de la démobilisation sera vitale au processus de paix. Aussi, émettons-nous nos voeux les plus ardents pour que cette question particulière permette un échange d'idées qui puisse approfondir notre compréhension de cette crise et ouvrir la voie vers une solution durable du problème de l'aliénation de la jeunesse et de la violence, en Sierra Leone et dans toute l'Afrique.

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Subaltern Reactions: Lumpens, Students, and the Left*

Ishmail Rashid**

Introduction

As the State repressed dissent in the mid-1970s, subalterns — students and lumpens — took the leading role in challenging its legitimacy.[1] Their actions provoked reform and eventually a military coup, which was dubbed a 'revolution' in 1991/92. This article focuses on the political activities of Fourah Bay College students and Freetown's 'lumpen youth' who presented the most militant and coherent challenge to the state between 1977 and 1992. It is a critical reflection on our country's and our generation's history. With the kind of academic writing and journalistic reflections on the period that are passing as 'history' and 'into history', it is important that the actors see themselves in the literature.[2]

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1 The term 'subaltern' has been used here to denote marginalised and subordinate groups within the society. It refers to those who do not control or have access to apparatuses of power in the post-colonial state. See 'General Introduction' and the article by Gayatri Spivak, 'Can Subalterns Speak' in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (eds.) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, New York, 1995; Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', *Subaltern Studies I*, Delhi, 1982.

2 Articles and texts by political scientists are particularly guilty of this omission. William Reno completely ignores the role of subalterns in protesting state corruption and forcing governments to respond, especially in 1977 and 1991. See William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*, Cambridge, 1995. See also Sahr Kpundeh, *Politics and Corruption in Africa*, Lanham, 1995.

* I wish to thank Myron Echenberg, Ibrahim Abdullah and Yusuf Bangura for their comments on the initial draft of this paper.

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Consider Kaplan's journalistic piece, 'The Coming Anarchy', in the *Atlantic Monthly*, for example. The Hobbesian and Malthusian brush with which he painted the *West African* landscape inflicts considerable injustice on the youth of Africa and Sierra Leone. By inventing them largely as 'criminals', medieval mercenary throwbacks and 'loose molecules in an unstable social fluid', he demonstrates naiveté about the context, culture and circumstances that produced them (Kaplan 1992, 1995:32-69 and 401-409).[3] Paul Richards (1995), the British anthropologist, is among scholars who have chosen to engage Kaplan and provide 'a more exclusively African perspective'. However, by reducing the cultural and political influences on youth militants, especially in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), to 'CNN' images, 'Kung-Fu Films' and 'Libya revolutionary populism', Richards replaced one simplistic analysis of youth political activism with another. A more critical perspective should take into consideration the dynamic urban youth political culture in the 1970s and 1980s.

Student Radicals as 'Left'

In Ethiopia, Nigeria and Ghana, small university-based Marxist-oriented groups usually represented themselves as the vanguard of anti-establishment opposition in the 1970s. In Sierra Leone, that role was assumed by student radicals (*Review of African Political Economy* 1985:1-14). The term 'radical' refers to the self-conscious representation by the more militant section of the student population in the 1970s and 1980s. Briefly defined, radicalism was a mixture of anti-establishment (University and Central Government), non-conformist and populist attitudes and actions. The most active agents of radicalism were students in the humanities and social sciences. The 'Left', within the context of this essay, refers to the radical tendency which emerged in the early 1980s. Individuals and groups reflecting this tendency began espousing and organising around more coherent political ideas which were 'populist', 'socialist' or 'pan-Africanist' (Abdullah 1995:195-221, Denzer 1973:413-452 and 563-580).[4] They were not merely content with opposing the system; they advocated its replacement with alternative models. Nkrumah's united socialist Africa, Castro's Cuba, Gaddafi's Libya and Kim Il Sung's Korea featured among some of the desired models.

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3 He has elaborated his Malthusian and Hobbesian themes on Sierra Leone in his recently published travelogue.

4 Radical left politics in Sierra Leone had a tradition dating as far back as I.T.A Wallace-Johnson and the *West African* Youth League. By the 1970s, it had all but disappeared.

The primary terrain of student politics, Fourah Bay College's (FBC) campus, started out in 1827 as a sponsored Church Missionary Society (CMS) theological institution.[5] It subsequently came under government control and in 1973, was amalgamated with Njala University College (NUC) to constitute the University of Sierra Leone. Being government funded, the university generally, and the college specifically, were not immune to problems faced by the state. In a similar fashion, the college was not immune to problems of the larger Freetown community, since many of its constituents, students, faculty and workers, came from it. These links are masked by the rather detached location of the FBC on Mount Aureol or 'Mount Olympus' as its denizens called it. The strategic hilltop site, nonetheless, provides students with the opportunity to create a fairly protected space for political activities and for the translation of their discontent into popular urban actions.

The ethnic, cultural and social diversity of the student populace is reflected in the plethora of clubs hosted by the college. Among these were Gardeners and Auradicals, founded in the early 1970s and the homes of the radicals. Membership of both clubs ranged between 30 to 50 students in the 1970s and 1980s. New members were recruited from those students who displayed a 'positive' attitude and anti-system posture. Gardeners, the more militant, met in the college's Botanical Gardens to smoke marijuana and 'politicise' about the ills of the society. In the late 1970s, it produced an annual magazine, *Frontline*, with a distinct blood-drenched-fist-clasping-a-barbed-wire logo (Richards 1995:168).[6] The magazine covered several aspects of campus life, but what made it different from other campus publications was its anti-government (or anti-Siaka Stevens) and anti-Lebanese (specifically anti-Jamil Sahid Mohamed) lampoons and cartoons.[7] The most politically

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5 Originally a theology institution, FBC expanded greatly in population, infrastructure and curriculum after World War II. By the mid-1970s the student population increasingly took on a national character reflecting the cultural, ethnic and regional diversity as well as the class character of Sierra Leone. See D.L. Sumner, *Education in Sierra Leone*, Freetown, 1963.

6 Contrary to Paul Richards assertion, Southern African liberation struggles exercised a far much stronger influence on Gardeners than Libya. Gardeners was not a 'Libyan inspired' cell but a group that grew out of the youth and student culture of the 1970s.

7 Much like an eminence grise, Jamil Sahid Mohamed, a well-known 'Afro-Lebanese' business magnate, wielded considerable power and influence over Siaka Stevens and his cabinet. Mohamed was involved in business transactions touching on nearly all aspects of Sierra Leone's economy.

active and vocal students usually came from the ranks of these radical clubs in the 1970s.

Radical clubs exerted considerable influence on campus politics. Political competition centred around controlling the leadership of the Fourah Bay College Students' Union (FBC-SU) and the National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS). Both unions dealt with issues pertaining to student welfare on campus and provided the bridge between students and university administration and the central government. Since student leadership was elected annually, policies tended to be discontinuous. Political competition was vibrant as 'radicals' and their supporters battled with 'fixity', a voting block of largely matured students who tended to vote en-bloc for conservative and more moderate candidates. The problem of 'fixity' also tended to reflect ethnic politics. No single group dominated campus politics. The pendulum swung from one to the other yearly depending on the configuration of forces and the relevant issues of the day. Student politics was the sum of the contradictory and complementary interests and personalities that defined it. Upwardly mobile, largely dependent, and from diverse backgrounds, students in their politics, espoused a mixture of idealistic, pragmatic and opportunistic tendencies. Defending the masses, a popular refrain in students, was sometimes inextricably linked with protecting their privileges and future prospects.

Student radicals provided the vital link between students on campus and the lumpens in the city. Like many students in the mid-1970s, they were of the same generation and shared similar sociological characteristics with Freetown lumpens. College radicals, however, participated more actively in the coded linguistic and cultural practices of the marginalised urban youth. They frequented *potes* — places in the city which formed the cultural and organisational foci of the city's lumpen youth — to fraternise, politicise, discuss social problems and smoke marijuana with them. Student radicals reproduced these *potes* in the male dormitories, sometimes attracting lumpen youths on campus. In short, the *pote* as a formation and a place became a forum for political discussion and exchange of ideas between student radicals and the urban lumpen youth.

The Freetown Lumpen Youth

'Lumpen', the abbreviation of lumpen-proletariat, has been utilised in this essay for the want of a more appropriate collective term to describe a conglomerate group with diverse social and ethnic origins. It is therefore used primarily, in its crude Marxist sense, to represent that strata of the society that cannot fully employ or sell its labour power because of capitalist

transformation, restructuring or retrenchment (Marx and Engels 1955:20-21).[8] Whether labelled *raray-boys*, *savis-man*, *dreg man*, or *liners*, the emergence of the Freetown lumpen population was a function of the colonial political economy at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.[9] Escaped and freed rural slaves and peasants began drifting then into the city in search of employment and settling largely in peri-urban enclaves. Their numbers grew steadily with the poor performance of the Sierra Leone economy. The opening of iron ore and diamond mines in the 1930s failed to stem the drift. Worried about crime, vagrancy and destitution, the colonial government, supported by the Freetown elite, passed a plethora of legislations and took actions to ethnicise, control, stop and reverse the rural-urban drift (Harrell Bond *et al.* 1987:30-40 and 135-141). The efforts failed. They remained in the city providing irregular casual labour. In Krio middle class perception, the city's lumpen population became associated with all that was decadent in the society — sloth, petty crime, gambling, prostitution, drug taking and violence.

By independence in 1961, lumpens had emerged as a relatively coherent social group with identifiable cultural forms, dress habits, lingo and mode of behaviour. They 'tied' their shirts and sprinkled their Krio with slang. They frequented peripheral areas in the city like Mo Wharf, Sawpit, Customs Kroo Bay, Magazine and Kanikay. These areas hosted brothels as well as *potes*. *Potes* were fixed and temporary spaces set up by this underclass for smoking marijuana, gambling and planning cultural activities. Among their major cultural activities were the *odelay* masquerade processions and lantern parades (Nunley 1987). *Odelay* processions, which were organised during public holidays, included a *billah* man (the *ode's* guide), *ode* (the decorated masquerade), musicians and revellers. Lantern parades commemorated largely the end of the Muslim Ramadan fasting. By the 1970s, *odelay* and lantern societies had proliferated in the city, reflecting not only the demographic expansion of the group but also the participation of working class elements in

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8 Marx's definition of Lumpenproletariat as 'the dangerous class, the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the old layers, may here and there, be swept into the movement by proletarian revolution; its condition of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue', is definitely inadequate, if not inappropriate, in this context. It has been used for the want of a better term to hold together the urban unemployed in Freetown.

9 I am grateful to Ibrahim Abdullah who was willing to share his ideas and research notes on lumpen youth and lumpen culture in Freetown.

these cultural forms. Tolerance by the city's populace came grudgingly since the Krio middle class regarded *odelays* as corrupt versions of their older hunting societies and because of violence among members of the *odelay* societies.

This violence among lumpens spawned the mystique and terror that came to be associated with some of their better known members. Abayomi Alhadi (alias Highway), Bra Bankie, Bra Langbo Sugbala, the John brothers, Bunting and Clinton, and Bra Karay became legends of violence in their time. In the 1960s and early 1970s, this group provided a pool of hired thugs for politicians of the All Peoples Congress (APC) party. Mobilised largely through networks created by S.I. Koroma, Vice President of the government of Siaka Stevens, they terrorised the APC's opponents during the 1962, 1967, 1973 and 1977 elections. In 1972, they were so effective that the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) withdrew from the elections. As the wider populace became disenchanted with APC's rule and terror tactics, these older lumpens lost all public sympathy.

The character and culture of the urban lumpen population began to change dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s. The post-independence youth who had benefited from the expansion of educational facilities came of age. By the 1980s, they represented possibly the largest single social group in the city. The labour market failed to absorb them as the country's economy stagnated and then began retrenching. Youth unemployment was as much a problem of the structure of the economy as it was of the type of formal education given to the youth. Its colonialist emphasis on providing a bureaucratic and professional class meant that they were largely lacking in vocational and technical skills. This new lumpen element included youths from Krio middle and lower middle class families. Being literate, they were more aware of the country's problems and more critical of its political leadership. With their unfulfilled higher aspirations, they tended to be strongly anti-establishment and rebellious towards authority. This shift in generation and attitudes coincided with and was reinforced by the changing local and global popular cultural context within which they operated.

Iconoclastic and avant-garde, the emerging cultural landscape supported soul music, rock 'n'roll, reggae, Afrobeat, drugs, Afro hairstyles, mini-skirts, bell-bottom trousers and platform shoes — cultural staples consumed by youths internationally. In addition, the Sierra Leone youth danced to Super-combo, Afro-National dance bands, Sonny Okosun, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Osibisa, Bob Marley, Bunny Wailer and Peter Tosh. Although older lumpens also partook in the emergent culture, its most active consumers were

the younger ones who were more literate and politically conscious. These younger lumpens saw *potes* not only as centres for gambling and smoking marijuana, but also places of radical political discussions. Although they continued, and expanded, their participation in the *odelays*, they attempted to create more politically oriented organisations. The All Youth Organisations (AYO-WIZZ) formed in 1975 attempted to bring together members of these groups for more progressive ends. It was this younger group of lumpens who interacted with the student radicals in the *potes* and shared the same culture with them.

This culture, with its militancy, activism and rebelliousness, expressed in music, language, attitudes and dress-codes, resonated with the political struggles of students and youths in other parts of Africa and the world. The last, more militant stages of the U.S civil right movements reverberated in Africa. In Ghana, the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) was challenging the military regime of General Kutu Acheampong. In Southern Africa, liberation struggles gathered momentum and the youth of Soweto openly confronted the Apartheid State. Everywhere it seemed the youth was in ferment. Exiled South African students and itinerant leaders of African liberation movements brought their experiences to FBC and Sierra Leone. By then, slogans and images of Nkrumah, Mandela, Che Guevara, Mao, Karl Marx and Malcolm X had become part of youth iconography. In this emerging culture, the youth — lumpens and students — shared a growing disillusionment with and rebelliousness toward the status quo.[10]

The global and domestic economic crisis of the 1970s reinforced the disenchantment and militancy within the youth culture. The global oil-shocks of 1973/74 accentuated the structural and fiscal problems in the primary commodity-based export economies of Sierra Leone (Parfitt and Riley 1989:126-147). The yearly budget deficits from 1975 hovered between 50 and 60 million leones. The price of fuels and other imported commodities increased while production and prices of primary commodities fell. Unprofitability forced the closure of the iron ore mines at Marampa in 1978. Official output of diamonds declined although the relatively high prices

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10 See *Awareness Magazine*, 1974/75 and subsequent yearly issues in the late 1970s. The articles and poems in the magazine reflected this changing student and youth political culture.

provided the government with some financial relief.[11] The decline of diamond production was a consequence of the depletion of resources and the development of a 'parallel' economy by Lebanese entrepreneurs and their political allies. Overall, export revenues fell while import expenditure increased. In many African countries, including Sierra Leone, this translated into major fiscal and budget deficits.

The fiscal crisis was a function not only of international forces but also of domestic politics and the structure of the post-colonial economy. The APC had assumed power in a post-colonial state rife with economic and political problems. The terms of trade and government revenues from export of primary products were already deteriorating before the global oil crisis. The leadership of the party and the government had to contend with opposing political forces outside and within its ranks. To consolidate his leadership, Siaka Stevens eliminated and excluded potential rivals from the political process, and replaced 'true political competition with a struggle for his favour' (Reno 1995:111, Hayward 1989:165-180). He deprived local politicians of access to resources and alternate sources of power by promoting Lebanese entrepreneurs at their expense, especially in diamond business (Zack-Williams 1982:72-81).[12] Through Lebanese entrepreneurs and specially created state institutions, he accumulated resources for personal enrichment and the maintenance of his political patronage (Reno 1995).

The most visible aspect of Stevens's strategy was the intimate public and private relationship that emerged between the President and the 'Afro-Lebanese' business tycoon, Jamil Sahid Mohamed. Steven utilised Jamil to invest his wealth in private commercial investment and foreign banks and to bankroll the state when it needed urgent financial relief. The latter strategy may have added to the veneer of political stability but it exacerbated institutional decay and public corruption. By 1977, what Stephen Riley described as 'the debilitating effect on the development of personalised or neo-patrimonial rule and policies' had become evident (Parfitt and Riley 1989:127). The state was in serious crisis.

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11 In 1976, diamond exports declined from 731,900 to 481,400 carats while no iron ore was exported in 1976, after the export of 1.3 million tonnes in the previous year. Food exports were about 15-20 per cent of the import bill, showing the country's large dependence on the mining sector.

12 Stevens's marginalisation of indigenous Sierra Leoneans from accumulating resources from mining continued a process originating in the colonial era.

In radical student politics, and indeed, in popular perception, Siaka Stevens and Jamil Sahid became both the shorthand and embodiment of the country's crisis in the mid-1970s. The relationship between the two men represented the negative fusion of private and public immorality and corruption. The more Stevens utilised his links with Jamil Sahid to resolve food, fuel and salary problems, the more negatively the public perceived the relationship. It was, therefore, not surprising that student dissent against the state and its ruling elite took the form of direct protest against these men and their relationship.

Confrontation and Co-operation 1977-1982

The deteriorating economic conditions and growing youth militancy provided the context and the catalyst for the most significant intrusion into national politics by students since the 1960s.[13] The stage was set by the visit of President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia in January 1977 to brief the Sierra Leone government about the progress of the Liberation Movement in Southern Africa. Zimbabwean students, supported by FBC students, demonstrated in support of their country's struggle. After this, ideas on a demonstration on national issues gained ground among student radicals. They decided to utilise the 1977 Annual University Convocation to express their discontent against the national leadership of Siaka Stevens. Their protest started innocuously. Stevens, members of his government, and the Vice-Chancellor had assumed their usual pride of place at the convocation without incident. Towards the end of the ceremony and in the middle of his speech, a group of 'radical' students plucked out their concealed condemnatory placards and hurled invectives at him — on corruption, brutality and larceny. According to George Roberts, the spark for the protest was a rumour that Stevens had appropriated $40 million from the national treasury. Surprised and humiliated by the incident, Stevens hurriedly left the campus without completing his speech (Roberts 1982:252-254).

The responsibility for the planning and the execution of the demonstration still makes for some interesting conversation and banter among those who participated. However, key 'radicals' suggest that the student union leadership had been dragged into the conspiracy. The action had been plotted by radicals who saw the Convocation as an opportunity to embarrass Stevens. Even

13 Students made significant forays into national politics in the 1960s. They participated in the one-party debates of the late 60s; protested against corruption under Sir Albert Margai; and provided the 'major inspiration behind Sierra Leone's strong stand against UDI in Rhodesia'. *Times*, August 23, 1974; *Times*, July 19 1974.

though Gardeners did not plan the action as a club, its members were among those who planned and executed it.[14]

In retaliation, government supporters unleashed 'a counter-demonstration' on campus two days later. About 500 thugs drawn largely, but not exclusively, from the APC Youth League descended on campus with banners saying 'Siaka Stevens is unshakeable' and 'abolish all aid to the University' (*West Africa* 1977). Kemoh Fadika, a seasoned APC youth, led the demonstration. He allegedly occupied and converted the principal's office into a command post for the operation.[15] Students were brutalised and extensive damage wrought on campus property. Armed units of the Cuban-trained para-military Internal Security Unit (ISU, later called Special Security Division (SSD)), personally controlled by Stevens, followed on the trail of the thugs\youths, allegedly to control the situation. They joined in the operation and arrested a number of lecturers and student leaders. Hindolo Trye, the student union president was later picked up at Lumley, a suburb of the city and taken to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters at Pademba Road.

As news of the 'counter-demonstration' spread, FBC students and other students mobilised pupils and students in various parts of the city with word that FBC had been closed by the government. On February 2, 1977, chanting 'no college, no school', thousands of secondary school students converged at the Cotton Tree and the CID in the centre of town where Trye was being held. Trye, who wore a red cap, gave a clenched fist salute to the crowd. The ISU unsuccessfully attempted to disperse the crowd with tear-gas. The demonstration continued to the east end of the city where it degenerated into looting and vandalism when lumpen elements joined. By the end of the day, 40 people had been killed and many wounded. In the succeeding days, lumpens and students in Bo, Kenema and Kono took up the protest. They burnt native administration and government buildings as well as private houses.[16] The government declared a State of Emergency. Enforcing the

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14 Communications with Ibrahim Abdullah who was a frequent visitor to the University campus. Among some of his friends were the 'radicals' and he was privy to some of the pre-demonstration discussions.

15 Kemoh Fadika, popularly known as waju-waju, happened to be have been the 'billah man' for 'Liner odelay'. He was appointed as the deputy ambassador to Nigeria shortly after this incident. He later became Sierra Leone's ambassador to Egypt.

16 In Pujehun, 'seven local administrative courts and Treasury Houses were burnt down'. *West Africa*, 28 March, 1977.

emergency produced regular street battles between ISUs and the youth. The practice of violently engaging the security forces during protests became ingrained in youth political culture.

Although lecturers, trade unionists and the general public sympathised with students and youth actions, no organisation came out unequivocally in their support.[17] As the crisis took on a national character, what had been a spontaneous anti-Stevens demonstration became a more coherent political challenge with the release of a list of student resolutions on February 8, 1977. The resolutions called for 'free and fair elections,' lowering of the voting age to 18, reduction in constituencies and cabinet posts, abolition of deputy ministers, reduction in defence spending and the 'disarmament of the Internal Security Unit (ISU)'. One resolution stressed, 'non-Africans have too much say in our economy, especially Lebanese and Indians.' Their demands were democratic and nationalistic and echoed the sentiments of many Sierra Leoneans.[18] The opposition SLPP, which clearly benefited from the students' actions, produced their own statement two months later.

With the stability of the state threatened, the shaken Stevens's regime conceded to the demand for elections in May 1977 and lowered the voting age to 18. It ignored the other demands. Before then, the student union president, Hindolo Trye, appealed for calm and understanding, and agreed to cooperate with the government over national radio (*West Africa* 1977:391, 398). Conducted under a state of emergency in June 1977, the elections were neither free nor fair. The APC unleashed its now seasoned 'thugs' and the ISU. Amid widespread violence, harassment, killing and destruction of rural settlements, only a mere 15 opposition SLPP candidates squeaked through to parliament. The majority of APC candidates, including some university lecturers and doctoral researchers, went unopposed (Daramy 1993:201).[19] These lecturers and researchers who became politicians, and later government ministers, included Abdul Karim Koroma, Abdulai Conteh and Joe Jackson.

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17 The Senior Staff Association of Fourah Bay College issued a statement condemning government 'invasion of the campus' but did not openly endorse the student protest. The Labour Congress criticised the counter-demonstration. 'The Sierra Leone Congress wished it to be understood that if no action is taken to release all students already detained it will sympathise with them'. Cited in George O. Roberts, *The Anguish of Third World Independence*, pp.255-256.

18 College students' statement, 8 February 1977.

19 Cynics euphemistically dubbed the exercise 'General Selections' instead of General Elections.

'Unopposed, dem pick am, he day insae dae' (Unopposed, s/he has been chosen, s/he is in) became the popular refrain of broadcasts, and a source of popular parody.

The autocratic state under Stevens had rallied from the brink of crisis. The students, lumpens and the opposition SLPP offered no serious political alternative. The president had rallied around the disaffected sections of the elite by playing up the insecurity and instability created by political confrontations. The parliament, dominated by APC cronies, denied the SLPP 'official opposition' status (*West Africa* 1977:1448, 1607). Instead, Stevens and his APC pushed through the One-Party Constitution in a fraudulent referendum in 1978. SLPP members had the choice of either crossing over to the ruling APC party or vacating their seats. Only one SLPP member, Mana Kpaka, chose to vacate his seat. Evident in this process of political re-consolidation and state revitalisation was the cooption of a number of lecturers who had criticised the government's actions against students in January 1977 and its 'invasion' of the campus.

The 1977 student intrusion into politics had limited gains. If anything, it had served to revive a government under crisis. Nonetheless, some of its positive consequences were palpable. A tradition of anti-system or anti-government confrontation had been launched. Institutionalised in 'All Thugs Day' as January 31 came to be known on FBC campus, it served as a rallying point for radicals (Fyle 1994:139). Radical student leaders graduated into radical journalists with the launching of the *Tablet* newspaper and continued their anti-government critique and confrontation. The editor, Pios Foray, received a hero's applause after successfully defending himself in parliament against contempt charges by Brigadier J. S. Momoh.[20] Momoh later became head of state. Attempts to launch a political movement that would transcend the contradiction of students and lumpen politics failed. The

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20 Pios Foray and Hindolo Trye later went into exile in the United States as a consequence of the APC's repressive tactics. They continued their journalistic activities by publishing the short-lived *Tablet International* and the underground *Tawakaltu* newsletter. This tradition of radicals establishing newspapers was continued by Paul Kamara, who set up *For Di People*, in the early 1980s. *For Di People* maintained a strong pro-students stance in the 1980s and 1990s.

Movement for Progress in Africa (MOPA), modelled after MOJA in Liberia and Gambia, which was set up, was quickly banned by the government.[21]

As far as the relationship between students and lumpens is concerned, a clear distinction needs to be made. On one hand, the group of politically motivated and mobilised party thugs had challenged and attempted to repress students' rights to protest. They discredited themselves in the eyes of younger lumpens and students. On the other hand, a younger generation of youth and school children had lent their critical support to the students' demands. Many of these later graduated to student radicals or joined the ranks of the lumpens in the blighted climate of the 1980s.

The confrontation emphasized the hiatus between the 'older' and 'younger' lumpen culture. The politics of collaboration was giving way to the politics of confrontation. The terror and mystique cultivated around the older lumpens began to wear thin after 1977. Many of them retreated from active thuggery. For its subsequent terror campaigns, the APC relied more heavily on the lumpen youth from the hinterland. Like the older group, the younger urban lumpens continued to be a fixture in politics especially during elections. Unlike them, however, they had no set loyalties to the APC or the political system. They regard elections as opportunities to *chap* (make a fast buck) and had no hesitation in joining students in their continued confrontations with the state. This ambivalence notwithstanding, it was evident that youth culture of rebellion was changing into a 'culture of resistance', analogous to the one which Nkomo identifies in South African 'ethnic universities' in the 1970s and 1980s (Nkomo 1984:151-152).

Confrontation and Repression, 1982-1988

Instead of concentrating on resolving the endemic social and economic problems, Stevens had used his consolidated position to pursue his ambition of becoming a 'respectable elder statesman' of African politics. He hosted a lavish OAU conference in 1980 at tremendous cost to the country. Student antagonism against the government persisted. They protested the conference with a strike on campus which the government ignored (*Tablet* 1980). In 1981, they burnt the official car of the Mayoress, June Holst-Roness, who

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21 Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) was an active anti-government force in Liberia and Gambia. Among the initiators of MOPA were Jimmy Kandeh, Jeff Bowlay Williams and G. Cleo-Hanciles.

accompanied the visiting Mayor of Hull to the campus. Stevens blamed the Mayoress for going to the campus.

Siaka Stevens's moment in the African spotlight pushed the country into deeper insolvency and fanned the flames of further social discontent. The 1980s were marked by government struggles with a growing foreign debt, recurrent budget deficits, decline in agricultural and mineral exports, smuggling and foreign exchange problems (Hayward 1989:174-177). Institutional corruption became pervasive as the cost of living rose steeply. 'Vouchergate', the first in the line of many official embezzlement scandals, broke out in 1982 (Kpundeh 1995:62-63). Meanwhile, chronic fuel, power and rice shortages plagued the urban centres. Youth unemployment continued to increase.

Those who protested the deteriorating conditions suffered the wrath of the regime. When the Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC) struck for better wages and conditions of service in 1981, their leadership was intimidated and their strike broken. The anti-government *Tablet* newspaper had its printing facilities raided and destroyed by APC party thugs. It is noteworthy that students' response to both the strike and destruction of the *Tablet* printing press was muted.

In fact, what engaged students attention was the deteriorating conditions on FBC campus, and this produced opportunism among the student leadership. In seeking alleviation for chronic campus problems, student leaders between 1981 and 1983 entered into an uneasy alliance with Alfred Akibo-Betts, an APC youth-league member, with an established reputation as a thug (*Tablet* 1978).[22] As a parliamentary assistant in the Finance Ministry, Akibo-Betts reinvented himself as an 'anti-corruption crusader' and successfully insinuated himself into campus politics. When the APC wanted to restrain Akibo-Betts during the 1982 General Elections, students defended and campaigned for him in the Freetown Central 1 constituency. His opponent, Wilsworth 'Ajoti' Morgan, another youth-league member, and leader of the lumpen Kaibara city *pote*, received a rough ride from students. The government later cancelled the elections in the constituency and Akibo-Betts was seriously beaten up by other party thugs. He sought refuge with students. The alliance with Akibo-Betts divided the campus radicals. The anti-Akibo radicals recalled his

22 As a parliamentary special assistant in the Ministry of Social Welfare, Akibo-Betts and a group of thugs had stormed into a dance organised by the Engineering Society of Fourah Bay College in 1978 and manhandled three students.

days of thuggery and maintained uncompromisingly that he was still a part of the corrupt APC system. Pro-Akibo-Betts radicals, including Abdul Gbla, the 1981/1982 FBC-Students' Union president, were expelled from the Gardeners Club.

The fracture among the radicals coincided with the rise of the left tendency. Starting in 1982, new radical groups — Green Book Study Club, the Pan-African Union and the Socialist club — gained prominence on campus. Although these clubs had shared membership with the Gardeners and Auradicals, they were decidedly different in ideological orientation. They began to eschew the 'drug' culture and advocate a serious ideological engagement on campus. The Green Book Club promoted ideas of revolutionary mass participation in 'Popular Congresses and Committees' (Gaddafi 1978).[23] The Pan-African Union, which took over where MOPA left off, advocated 'total unity, liberation and development of Africa under a just and egalitarian system (*Pan-African Union Information Brochure* 1992).[24] They organised seminars, meetings and rallies on campus. Their lingo shifted from *man dem*, the comradely salutation, to 'com' and 'brothers' and 'sisters'.[25] The youth culture of resistance was shifting to 'revolution' and being given more coherent organisational forms.

International political shifts helped galvanise these developments. Libya, under pressure from the U.S. and France, developed an aggressive 'anti-imperialist' foreign policy in *West Africa*. Through its People's Bureau, it sponsored Green Book Study Clubs and demonstrated a willingness to give military training to young militants, if necessary.[26] The struggle against Apartheid in South Africa also intensified. Images of youth confronting the South African police, the 'Free Mandela' campaign, and the Namibian liberation struggle were disseminated widely among the lumpen youth and students, through the media and efforts of exiled ANC, PAC and SWAPO students in Sierra Leone.

23 This is one of the central political ideas of Gaddafi's revolutionary theory.

24 It is the central tenet of the organisation's ideology and it is clearly indicated in all their literature.

25 The term, 'com' short for comrade gained wide circulation. 'Brothers' and 'Sisters' was preferred by the Pan-Africanists and had a more restricted usage.

26 For discussions of Libyan foreign policy, especially the role of the Foreign Liaison Bureau and Revolution Command Council (RCC) in spreading Libya's revolutionary ideology see Ronald Bruce St. John, *Gaddafi's World Design: Libyan Foreign Policy, 1969-1987*, Worcester, 1987; Mohamed El-Khawas, *Gaddafi: His Ideology and Practice*, Battleboro, 1986.

Around this same time, the first signs of potential state collapse became evident.[27] The government and its institutions increasingly became incapable of responding to the recurrent budget deficits, currency devaluation, commodity shortages, and rampant corruption. The crisis which had started in the 1970s deepened in the 1980s. Cracks appeared everywhere. The army, the SSDs and the unions showed signs of restiveness. The army and SSD clashed in the city after an incident at a football match at the National Stadium. The Sierra Leone Teachers' Union and the Sierra Leone Labour Congress asked again for higher salaries and better conditions of service. Siaka Stevens, who had previously been able to manoeuvre his way through the contentious forces, began to show vulnerability. The vulnerability was evident in his inability to paternalistically or decisively resolve the problems through his networks. It was similarly apparent in the reaction to his equivocation on going for a life-presidency or departing from politics (*West Africa* 1985). Serious internal squabbles surfaced among the members of the APC party over his continuity in office and succession.

The hint of life-presidency provoked a student demonstration in January 1984, which disrupted an APC party congress at City Hall. Joined by the lumpen youth, students carried placards condemning Siaka Stevens's perceived intention to use the congress to declare himself president for life. The demonstration ended in the arrest of two students and the looting of shops in the east end of the city. Daniel Kamara, the 1983\84 Student Union president, spearheaded the action. Four months earlier, he had marched Arthur Porter, the Vice-Chancellor, Eldred Jones, the FBC principal and key college administrator to the State House to demand an improvement in student living conditions. Stevens shut down FBC for three months and instituted a commission of enquiry headed by Justice Kutubu.[28]

The Commission investigated, and found not only evidence of poor conditions on campus for students but also serious administrative mismanagement. Testifying, Eldred Jones, principal of FBC catalogued 'chronic problems of poor library facilities, overcrowding in hostels and classrooms, shortage of chairs in lecture rooms and poor food' (*For Di*

27 For a good discussion of the origins of the collapsing state see Jimmy Kandeh, 'Predatory Regime Continuity and the Demise of the Sierra Leonean State', *Canadian Association of African Studies*, May 1996, Montreal.

28 The College was reopened after the 1993/94 FBC-SU president, Daniel Kamara, apologised to the president. Students mobbed and nearly beat him up for the apology (*For Di People*) March 1984.

People 1984). The government never released the report. Instead, it became leverage to get the FBC administration to rein in the students. The administration tried to do so by changing registration procedures. It insisted that all students should sign an agreement of 'good conduct' before being accepted into the University. The 'agreement forms' were objects of much derision and ridicule when they were first introduced in 1984.

The 'agreement', nonetheless, became a useful instrument of tackling and then repressing the 1985/1986 student union leadership and the radical left-wing students on campus. In March 1985, the Mass Awareness and Participation (MAP) Student Union leadership, under Alie Kabba, was elected unopposed with strong support from the campus radicals. Members of the Union leadership included Green Book, Gardeners and Pan-African Union members. The MAP government had made no secret of its intention to translate the current radical left ideologies on campus into practice. It went on a propaganda offensive with 'populist' and 'anti-government' posters on FBC campus and the city. When a student was caught stealing, a people's tribunal was set up, and he was summarily disciplined. Alarmed by the militancy of the new student leadership, the vice-principal, C.P. Foray, refused to speak to them when they marched to his residence to complain about water and food.

The administration and students were on a collision course. K. Koso-Thomas, the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor of University of Sierra Leone, of which FBC was a constituent college, became embroiled in the attempt to contain the new FBC Students' Union leadership. The students gave him the opportunity, when they collected dormitory keys at the end of the Easter term, to prevent a lock-out the following term — a clear infringement on the responsibilities of the then unpopular Student Warden, Jenkins Smith. Rumours were quickly disseminated that the students intended to use the hostels as barracks to encamp Libyan mercenaries. Using this as an excuse, the Vice Chancellor and Principal, Eldred Jones, called on the SSD to remove the students who were staying on campus for the Easter break. The SSD raided the campus, brutalised and forcibly removed students who were staying on campus. The incident led to a city-wide demonstration.

By the time the college reopened for the Epiphany term in April 1985, the University administrators had declared 41 students, including the student leadership and 2 female students, 'ineligible' to re-register (*West Africa* 1985:911, 1021). Student protests against the decision of the university produced a campus demonstration which ended in the burning of the Mercedes Benz car of Cyril Foray, the vice-principal. The confrontation continued in the city where students were supported by the city's lumpen

youth. By the end of the day, cars had been smashed, government buildings stoned and shops looted. The university eventually suspended and expelled a total of 41 students. Three young lecturers, Olu Gordon, Jimmy Kandeh and Gilbert Cleo Hanciles were sacked.[29] Hanciles and Gordon were members of the Pan-African Union; all three were deemed friendly with students. Alie Kabba, the FBC-SU president, and four other students were arrested and detained for two months for allegedly burning the vice-principal's car.[30] The case was later thrown out of court. The campus purges were well-timed, coming a few weeks before the APC convention to choose a new party leader and president. To ensure a smooth transition, the APC needed to repress troublesome constituencies.[31]

Part of the 1985 student leadership ended in exile in Ghana. They completed their degrees and some returned home. If the state and university authorities felt they had taught the radicals a sharp lesson, they were right. They learnt that confrontation merely produced more repression and violence. Some, like those in the Pan-African Union, recognised the limitation of confrontational campus politics. They branched out to the city to tap the potential of the urban youth while emphasizing the need for political education and organisation. Others, less patient, decided the only way to change the 'system' was through military means. Between 1985 and 1991, some of the militant lumpen youth and students who could muster the necessary political connections slipped into the army. Others, joined by rural lumpen youth, trickled out to receive military training in Libya. The precise role of student radicals in facilitating this training and in the emergence of the RUF need thorough investigation. The resolution of the conflict would hopefully produce data for such a study.

In the interim, Stevens engineered a successful transfer of power to his protégé, Major-General Joseph Saidu Momoh, the head of the army. The transfer of power to Momoh represented an attempt by the elite to revitalise the collapsing state and extend the life of the APC regime. The change was greeted with popular euphoria. Momoh promised to instil discipline in public

29 All three petitioned the University. Jimmy Kandeh and Olu Gordon took the university to court for wrongful dismissal. Kandeh won; Gordon stopped pursuing the case after a while.

30 The students charged were Alie Kabba, Haroun Boima, Derek Bangura, Isreal Jigba and Mohamed Barrie. *West Africa*, 10 June, 1985.

31 See 4 March , 1985, 29 April 1985, 6 May, 1985, 20 May, 1985 issues of *West Africa* magazine to get a sense of the politics of transition in Sierra Leone at that time.

life and improve the lot of Sierra Leoneans. To strengthen his power base, he solicited support from the 'lumpen' youth. The Paddle Odelay Society granted him the honour of leading their masquerade in 1985.

President Momoh failed to deliver on his promises. Despite his much vaunted military credentials and vacuous 'Constructive Nationalism', national indiscipline persisted. In fact the rhetoric of 'nationalism' stood in sharp contrast to the presidents' 'ethnicisation' of power evident in his dependence on a small cabal of Limbas from Ekutay. James Bambay Kamara, the Inspector-General of Police and a leading member of Ekutay, acquired considerable power in the process. Kamara also incurred much public censure.

The Momoh regime could neither halt the institutional decay nor repair the economy. Official corruption magnified as 'Squandergate' succeeded 'Vouchergate' (Kpundeh 1995:63). The economy, with its high inflation, devaluation, blackouts, rice and fuel scarcity, hung around the necks of Momoh and his cabal like albatrosses. Unlike Stevens, their attempts to create informal networks of power by bringing in Israeli businessmen and other foreign interests to invest in the economy failed (Reno 1995:155-176). As early as 1986, the youth of the Paddle Odelay Society which Momoh had tried to woo, had nothing but invectives for him when their masquerade was permitted to parade again.

Revival and Revolution 1988-1994

For three years, students' union politics was effaced from Fourah Bay College. Pushed into the city, the Pan-African Union continued the mobilisation of youth — students and lumpens. It established a working relationship with the different 'lumpen' youth organisations that had emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s. Some of its closest allies were the politically and socially active Mandela Youth Organisation and Freetown Players. It reached out and established cordial working relations with the unions and the radical press (*For Di People*), but its base was always the youth. In 1991, the Pan-African Union was instrumental in setting up the Mass Democratic Alliance (MDA), which incorporated many social, cultural and political youth groups. In short, the Pan-African Union continued to build on the radical left tradition.

The Student Union of FBC, revived in 1989, complemented these efforts and continued the tradition of anti-government confrontation. In 1991, it called for multi-party politics, immediate dissolution of the Momoh government and the establishment of an interim administration to oversee

elections.[32] A major demonstration which had been planned to back up the resolutions had to be called off because of the massive government mobilisation of security forces at Model Junction and on the advice of journalists, politicians and Pan-African Union members.[33]

Beleaguered by a crumbling economy, a divided party and attacks from different angles, the Momoh regime conceded to multi-party politics and elections in 1991. As elections drew nearer, there were indications that the government intended to rig the elections. This was when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), under the leadership of Foday Sankoh, struck. With the help of Charles Taylor of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), he attacked Bomaru, Kailahun District, Eastern Province on March 23, 1991, with the goal of ending 22 years of APC rule.

In spite of the numerous interviews given by its leader, Foday Sankoh and other spokespersons, the RUF remains a shadowy political and military organisation. The publication of a propaganda booklet, *Footpaths to Democracy* (1995), provided an insight into the ideology and objectives of the RUF. Coming four years after the launching of the war and in the wake of the RUF's agreement to peace talks, it may have been a shrewd public relations piece to mend its poor image. The contents of the booklet show an eclectic assemblage of anti-establishmentarianism, Pan-Africanism, populism, environmentalism, communitarianism and religious Unitarianism (Revolutionary United Front n.d.). It contained scathing criticisms of the APC regime, reminiscent of the period of the anti-government censure of the student radicals in the 1970s and 1980s (even though the APC was not in power when it was issued). Its three key populist ideals — 'Arms to the people', 'Power to the people', and 'Wealth to the people' — strongly echo the rhetoric and language of the radical left in the mid-1980s (Revolutionary United Front n.d.:37-41).

The interview given by Philip Palmer and Fayia Musa to Ambrose Ganda, the editor of the newsletter, *Focus on Sierra Leone*, also offers another tantalising indication of the more concrete links between the RUF and student radicals (*Focus on Sierra Leone* 1995).

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32 Interviews with Foday Kamara, FBC student (1987-1992) Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 27 April, 1995.

33 Model junction is the intersection at the foot of Mount Aureol. By controlling this junction security forces can effectively check the movement of students into the centre of the city.

Palmer, an FBC mechanical engineering graduate, is a Front Line Commander of the RUF while Musa, an ex-student of agriculture at Njala University College, is a spokesperson for the RUF. Both men are in their thirties and claim to have been radicalised by repressive actions of the Stevens regime against students protests in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In justifying the RUF recourse to violence, the men offered three reasons, namely failure of peaceful anti-government opposition, realisation that 'power lies in the barrel of the gun', and the need to create 'a people's militia ... to empower ordinary people' (*Focus on Sierra Leone* 1995).

Momoh sent the army to combat Foday Sankoh and the RUF, a job which it did with mixed results. Most of the soldiers who bore the brunt of the fighting were young — they had been freshly drafted from urban youth settings into the army. Even as insurrection weakened the decrepit state, its minders continued their corrupting ways. On April 29, 1992, a group of young unpaid and disgruntled soldiers stormed the capital city and toppled the Momoh regime. They instituted the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), a regime of largely twenty-year-olds under the leadership of Captain Valentine Strasser.

To consolidate itself, members of the new regime fished for support from the student population and the lumpen youth. The national radio played 'non-stop rap and reggae music' on the day of the coup d'état (Opala 1994:195-218). Students and youth took over the city and demonstrated in their favour.[34] These early demonstrations provided critical support for popular acceptance and consolidation of the NPRC. The leadership of the FBC Students' Union was vociferous in its support of the regime.[35] Lumpen youths also rallied in support of the regime. In an explosion of civic pride and 'revolutionary zeal', they cleaned the city, painted murals and images everywhere, repaired pavements and filled potholes. These acts by youths and students gave the regime the 'revolutionary aura' it needed (Opala 1994:197). It is easy to understand why the lumpen youths and student radicals would

34 Interview with Foday Kamara.

35 See the video by Hilton Fyle, *Sunrise in Paradise*, 1992. The student leaders interviewed were vociferous in their support of the new military regime.

identify with the new NPRC regime. Apart from their age, they believed they shared the same political and cultural roots and aspirations.[36]

The RUF, the NPRC, Students and Youth Traditions

The NPRC incorporated elements from the culture of resistance and revolution cultivated by students and lumpen youth in their early political phraseology and ideology. 'Binding One Love' became a popular catch-phrase for revolutionary solidarity and support.[37] Slogans like 'Mass Awareness and Participation (MAP)' and 'Mobilisation for Reconstruction' were taken right out of the student experience of 1985 and used to rally youths and students. The sum of these efforts was an eclectic collection of catch-phrases and statements which wore thin as the NPRC stayed longer in power and the initial euphoria died.

The regime coopted radicals. Hindolo Trye, former student leader and 'hero' of the 1977 demonstrations, and Kandeh Yumkella, president of Njala Student Union in 1979/80, were given ministerial appointments (*Awareness Magazine* 1980). Student radicals of the 1980s also provided propaganda for the regime. Mahdieu Savage, a.k.a Karl Marx, was a member of the NPRC public relations committee as well as editor of the *Liberty Voice*, the ideological mouthpiece of the regime. Martin Mondeh edited *Daily Mail*, a government-owned newspaper. The task of mobilising the youth and students fell to the National Social Mobilisation Secretariat (NASMOS). Hassan 'Priest' Sesay, another student radical, became one of its coordinators. Without a clear ideology, direction and leadership, NASMOS achieved little. Many other 'radicals' were coopted in different capacities at State House and other areas of the government bureaucracy. Some of them were included in the personal staff of the NPRC members.

In spite of its cooption of student radicals and attempt to create a political ideology, the NPRC did not represent a significant divergence from the regime it overthrew. Although it promised to end the war swiftly, it continued

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36 The alleged architect of the coup, late Lt. Ben Hirsch, frequented campus and interacted with the leadership of the student union in the 1980s. Three of the six coup makers had strong links with the students in the early and mid-80s. Lt. Tom Nyuma grew up on the FBC campus where his father worked and was a member of the Pan-African Union. Lt. Komba Mondeh's brother, Martin Mondeh, was a campus radical and deeply involved in campus politics from 1984 to 86. Lt. Karefa Kargbo dropped out of college in the late 80s to join the army.

37 'One Love' comes from the lyrics of reggae musicians Bob Marley and Peter Tosh.

fighting the RUF throughout its four years in power (*Focus on Sierra Leone* 1996).[38] It eventually became mired in the corruption that it avowed to curtail. Lastly, it conceded elections and allowed a transition to civilian rule in March 1996, only after popular opinion and the international community gave it no choice. When elements in the 'reformed' NPRC attempted to disrupt the elections, it was the youth who defied them and ensured the election proceeded.[39] Economically and politically, retrenchment continued. The ranks of the unemployed swelled as a consequence of the war and the regime's uncritical implementation of IMF conditionality for restructuring the economy. The conditionality included massive retrenchment of government workers, floating of the *Leone* and privatisation of government corporations. In the end, a regime that had promised 'revolution' for the youth delivered little.

The alliance between the NPRC, its empowered youth faction, and other youths (students and lumpens) lasted briefly. Although the regime gave buses to the students, campus conditions remained abysmal. The consequent confrontations led to repeated closure of FBC and Njala University College. In 1994, the NPRC set up a Commission of Enquiry, headed by Prof. Kwame, Vice-Chancellor of University of Science and Technology, Ghana, to investigate the continuing disturbances and the conditions on campus. It forwarded a programme for a multi-billion *Leone* refurbishment of campus buildings and academic facilities. Significantly, it also recommended the recall of lecturers and students who had been dismissed or expelled from the University. Much has not come out of the report.

Conclusion

In its seizure of power, the NPRC and its supporters represented, to a certain extent, an empowerment of a section of the student and lumpen youth elements. The young soldiers were products of the 'culture of resistance' in the 1980s. The weakening and retrenchment of the APC regime created the opportunity for these 'subalterns' to become a 'ruling group'. Conversely, the RUF, which created the opportunity for NPRC's takeover of power,

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38 The RUF have claimed on several occasions that the NPRC leadership reneged on an agreement they made in the war front that the conflict should end after the coup.

39 Capt. Valentine Strasser was replaced by Brigadier Julius Maada Bio in a palace coup, 16 January, 1996. *The New Citizen*, 18 January, 1996; *Vision*, 18 January, 1996. For youth and popular demonstrations against the regime's attempt to hold off elections, see *For Di People*, 7 March, 1996.

represented the culmination of a strand of the same culture. Both had seized on the desire for revolution among the youth. The NPRC took the shorter route, a coup d'état. The RUF took the longer one, a protracted guerrilla struggle. Both were empowered by the acquisition and deployment of the instruments of violence. Both failed to deliver the 'Revolution' they promised. Instead they produced tragedy for Sierra Leone.

If the empowerment of the RUF and the NPRC failed to bear positive fruits, it was because their political culture had little time and opportunity to develop beyond its non-conformist and anti-establishmentarian content. The newly emerging revolutionary ideology and forms never had the time and opportunity to mature before the group became empowered. The weight of the contradictions of their changing culture led them to reproduce some of the worst aspects of the system they hoped to replace. Their marginality and inability to forge concrete links with the majority peasant and working class population further ensured the failure of their revolutionary project.

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Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)

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> We recruited 54 boys, mostly from Bugisu, and started training them at Nachingwea. Unfortunately, once again, these boys had not been well-selected. They had mostly been working in towns like Nairobi and had a*kiyaye* (lumpen proletariat) culture. They began misbehaving in the Frelimo camp and soon after their training, the Tanzanian government dispersed them.
>
> I took personal charge of the Montepuez group and stayed with the boys during the training months in Mozambique because I feared that some of the recruits might be undisciplined *bayaye*, like those of 1973, and they might have caused us problems. With my presence in the camp, however, we were able to suppress most of their negative tendencies and attitudes.
>
> (Yoweri Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed : The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda*, Macmillan, 1997, pp.85 and 90).

Introduction

When the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone (RUF/SL) entered Kailahun District on 23 March 1991, few people took them seriously or even realised that a protracted and senseless war was in the making. The corrupt and inept government in Freetown was quick to label the movement the handiwork of Charles Taylor; the incursion, a spillover from the Liberian civil war. This erroneous representation of the movement and the war was echoed by the media, both local and foreign; it later appeared in one scholarly investigation as 'the border war' (Fyle 1994). Twelve months after the initial

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attack in Kailahun, a group of rebellious officers from the warfront trooped to Freetown, the seat of government, and literally seized power from the corrupt politicians amidst popular support from the masses.[1] Calling itself the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), it declared its intention to end the war, revamp the economy, and put the nation on the path to multi-party democracy.

What is the relationship between these two events? What is the common link between the 'Revolution' (coup d'état) in Freetown and the 'Revolutionary' movement in the hinterland? What did the coup plotters, most of whom were in their twenties, share with those who had started the insurrection that gave them the opportunity to launch their 'revolution' in the city? Why did both movements borrow the same 'revolutionary' script? We provide answers to some of these questions by examining lumpen culture and youth resistance in Sierra Leone. For it is this oppositional culture which connects the 'revolution' in the hinterland (RUF) and the one in the city (NPRC). Both were products of a rebellious youth culture in search of a viable alternative — without a concrete agenda — to the bankrupt All Peoples Congress (APC) regime. To understand the historical and sociological processes which gave birth to the RUF, with which this paper is concerned, it is necessary to situate the investigation within the context of Sierra Leone's political culture, especially the glaring absence of a radical or viable alternative. It is this absence of a radical alternative or tradition, we argue, which paved the way for the bush path to destruction.

A Radical Tradition/Alternative?

The demise of the militant Youth League inaugurated by Sierra Leone's legendary Pan-Africanist cum revolutionary, I. T. A. Wallace Johnson, in 1939 did not immediately witness the end of radical labour/political agitation (Abdullah 1995; Denzer 1977). What it did was to close the formal avenues for radical political agitation through a series of concessions, in the form of constitutional arrangements, which eventually led to independence. Eliphas Mukunoweshuro has admirably mapped out the contours of this process of negotiation in his study of decolonisation in Sierra Leone (Mukonoweshuro 1993; Kilson 1966; Cartwright 1970). The sanitisation of politics, which was its outcome, did not adversely affect the labour movement. Labour activists

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1 No serious study has been done on the 1992 coup d'état but see the following: Fyle 1994, Zack-Williams and Riley 1993, Kandeh 1996.

inspired by the Youth League tradition of continuous agitation and strikes, such as Marcus Grant, Henry Georgestone and George Thomas, were influential in shaping the process of remaking the working class inaugurated by the colonial office and the labour department once Wallace-Johnson had been imprisoned and the organisation proscribed. The battle over an independent working class organisation and movement was the most important factor which shaped post-war politics and labour agitation in the mines and in the city of Freetown. The incorporation and subsequent cooptation of prominent labour leaders — Akinola Wright and Siaka Stevens — into positions of authority in the era of decolonisation did not blunt the radical edge of labour politics. This was evident in 1950 when strikes and riots rocked the iron ore mines, and again in 1952 when diamond miners in Yengema demanded a wage raise and shut down the mines for two weeks. In February 1955, Marcus Grant with the active support of Wallace-Johnson defied the colonial state and called a general strike which paralysed the city and forced colonial officials and employers to concede to workers' demand for a raise and the right to bargain directly with their employers.[2]

The Youth league tradition was, therefore, alive in the 1950s; but it did not assume a national dimension nor did it emerge as a coherent and organised force in post-colonial politics. Arguably, it was partly because of the subsequent defeat of the Youth League, and partly also because of Wallace-Johnson's exit to Ghana that radical politics or a leftist tradition was shunted out of Sierra Leone's political culture. Attempts to continue this radical tradition with a working class party — Sierra Leone Labour Party — were abandoned after the party was defeated in the 1957 elections.[3] Elsewhere on the west coast, notably Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal, a radical tradition was kept alive in the labour movement and in national politics. What, therefore, marked Sierra Leone's post-independence politics was not its tolerance of a leftist tradition — in the labour movement or in national politics — but its conservative orientation and uncritical support for the West. The APC's pretence at reviving the Youth League tradition —

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2 These issues are discussed in Ibrahim Abdullah, 'The Colonial State and Wage Labour in Post-War Sierra Leone: Attempts at Remaking the Working class, 1945-1960'; Ibrahim Abdullah and Ishmail Rashid, 'Uprising Discourses: Workers, Peasants, and the State, Sierra Leone, 1955-56', American Historical Association Conference, New York, 1997.

3 Marcus Grant and the other executive members of the Labour Party subsequently joined the victorious Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP).

Wallace-Johnson gave his blessing to the party — was betrayed by its ethnic composition and empty socialist rhetoric which initially fell on deaf ears.[4] It was only after the party made an impressive start in the 1962 general elections and then swept the polls in the 1964 city council elections that it was able to establish its credentials as a viable opposition. Siaka Stevens's trade union career, and the party's predominantly working and lower-middle class leadership, lent credence to its claim to radicalism. This was in sharp contrast to the SLPP which was dominated by the upper- and middle-class professionals and their 'traditional' allies, the Paramount Chiefs.[5]

But the APC in power was markedly different from the party in opposition or when it controlled the City Council. Perhaps because it was under the watchful eye of an SLPP government in power, the APC tenure at the Freetown City Council was relatively free of any blemish; it allowed for checks and balances. The APC government after 1968 was something else. Once it had successfully reduced the number of SLPP members in the House of Representatives through fraudulent and not so fraudulent election petitions, in which the judiciary fully acquiesced, the party quickly began to dismantle the national coalition cabinet that was instituted in 1968. This move signalled the beginning of the APC's consolidation of power, and opened the road to a one-party dictatorship (Lavalie 1985).

From 1970 when the first attempt to unseat the government was made by Brigadier John Bangura and others, to the alleged coup attempt involving Mohammed Sorie Forna and fourteen others, for which Foday Sankoh, the RUF leader, was jailed, to the fraudulent elections of 1973 and 1977, the party did all it could to stifle the opposition and consolidate its power. By 1978 when the one-party state was declared, the SLPP had become disabled due to the incessant arrest and detention of its members. The general atmosphere of violence against any form of organised opposition or dissent, and the simultaneous centralisation of power in the hands of the party and the Pa, as President Stevens was normally referred to, transformed the state and by implication politics into an affair for and by APC members and supporters.[6] This centralisation of politics made access to resources impossible for non-members; it made membership of the party a sine qua non to get by;

4 The party's red flag and socialist rhetoric were seen as symbols of its radical orientation.

5 For a detailed account of this period see John Cartwright, *Politics in Sierra Leone*, Toronto, 1970.

6 See APC, *The Rising Sun*, London, 1982.

exclusion literally meant death by attrition (Hayward 1989; Kandeh 1992; Zack-Williams 1990). There was nothing 'shadowy' or informal about this state. Its alleged 'shadow' character, to use William Reno's outlandish formulation, was neither literal nor metaphorical; the existence of the state or the informal networks which is the foundation of Reno's formulation was real to those who experienced it; and it meant death or total exclusion for those who challenged its power.[7] It was within this context that university students and the youth emerged as the informal opposition to the corrupt and decadent APC.

Uprising Discourses: The Making of an Informal Opposition

The search for an alternative political space — not necessarily a radical one — to the SLPP did not emanate from the youth. Nor did the youth make any organised or independent contribution — based on their own agenda — towards the defeat of the SLPP. The immediate post-colonial period, from independence in 1961 to 1968, was characterised by a tussle for power between the two organised political machines: the SLPP and the APC. If the youths were involved, their role was simply one of foot soldiers. Their marginalisation was concretely expressed in the form of party youth wings (there were also women's wing); an arm of the party always peripheral to where real power was located. Their performance could therefore be read as a ritual; it always begins with a crisis situation, and their mobilisation as thugs to do the dirty work. Once the project is complete, they fall back to the status quo ante, as wings, waiting for yet another assignment. Examples of these youth 'activities' are the Ginger Hall massacre (Akibo Betts-led and inspired); the violence at Mobai, Kailahun bye-elections; the attack on Fourah Bay College (Kemoh Fadika-led and organised); the large scale violence at Kurubonla, Kabala (Kawusu-Conteh-led and organised); and the Sanda massacre (led and organised by Thaimu Bangura). These events now form part of the iconography of political violence in Sierra Leone. This reading of their political role does not mean that those who joined the so-called youth wing were all thugs or simply auxiliary troops. People like A. A. Seray-Wurie, Caleb Aubee, Alfred Akibo-Betts, Adewole and Olufemi John, Mohammed Samura, Kemoh Fadika and Kojo Randle started their political careers as members of the APC youth league. But their role was strictly limited to 'action oriented tasks' and occasional trips to communist countries.

7 William Reno originally formulated his concept of the shadow state with reference to Charles Taylor's so-called Greater Liberia.

It was only in the 1970s that the party gave those who were still in the fold a rightful place in the sun.[8]

An interesting angle to ponder is why youths. An obvious historical parallel is Wallace-Johnson's Youth League. Was this performance of youths a throwback to the youth league era of the 1930s? Siaka Stevens's admiration and respect for Wallace-Johnson is well known. Was this therefore a conscious attempt to re-enact that tradition by revisiting the youth league days? These questions on historical memory and performance are tantalising not least because Wallace-Johnson's activities were youth-centred: employed as well as unemployed youth. And he had argued in the heydays of youth league radicalism in the 1930s that the youth of Sierra Leone would one day assume the mantle of radical leadership and redeem 'the Athens of West Africa' in the eyes of the Black World and of humanity.[9] Is this therefore the Wallacian dream come true or is it a caricature? I would argue that the youth project which started unfolding under the APC in the 1960s, and which inevitably culminated in the emergence of the RUF/NPRC, does not constitute a re-enactment of the Wallacian script because it lacked the discipline and the maturity that Wallace-Johnson was known to constantly emphasize in his writings and speeches. Even so, it raises an interesting historical question: the role of historical memory(ies) in the construction of a radical project.

Paul Richards, a British anthropologist who has studied Sierra Leone's war, does come to grips with the role of youth in the drama surrounding the war and the continuation of the war (Richards 1995, 1996; Abdullah 1996c). But his heavy reliance on resources of the forest (he should have concentrated on the trees instead of the forest) to explain the war totally neglects the central political importance of rebellious youth culture, not youth, in shaping the process leading to the rebellion and the continuation of the war. This youth culture, which became visible in the post-1945 period, had its genealogy in the so-called 'rarray boy' culture.[10] It is a male-specific oppositional

8 The National Youth Movement (NYM) formed in 1963 was an important outlet for Freetown youths. It later became the nucleus of the APC youth league. Interview: Adewole John and Cecil Blake, both founding members. For a brief autobiographical sketch see Cecil Blake, *Through the Prism of African Nationalism: Reflective and Prospective Essays* , Freetown, 1990.

9 For Wallace-Johnson's view on this and other issues see La Ray Denzer, *I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League*

10 'Rarray boy' is a pejorative term for 'underclass' youth. It is also used in Nigeria with reference to rebellious youth culture. I have used the term 'lumpen' instead of rarray boy.

sub-culture which easily lends itself to violence. In Nigeria, these kinds of youth are referred to as *yan banga* and *jaguda boys* (or the now popular *area boys*) respectively; in Algeria, they are called *hittiste*; in Uganda they are generally referred to as *bayaye* — they are to be found in every city in Africa (El-Kenz 1996; Truilizi 1996; Museveni 1997). Their role in post-colonial politics, especially their discourse on empowerment/disempowerment, is only now beginning to attract scholarly attention.

In Sierra Leone, the first generation of 'rarray boys' acted as thugs for the politicians; they played this role because of their contradictory consciousness (Abdullah 1996a, 1996b; Opala 1994). Mostly unlettered, they were predominantly second generation residents in the city, whose abode, the *pote*, (a popular peri-urban area of relaxation for unemployed youths) was also a cultural/leisure space constructed around the *odelay* (masquerade).[11] They are known for their anti-social behaviour: drugs (marijuana), petty theft, and violence. Their periodic carnivals on public holidays are always held under the watchful eyes of the police; they needed permits for their carnivals, first from city officials and later from the police.[12] Their revelry and riotous behaviour alienated them from the city inhabitants: they were a good-for-nothing bunch who mainstream society believes should be best avoided.

This representation of lumpen culture began to change in the 1970s particularly when middle-class youths and other respectable groups became key players in this popular culture. The character and composition of the *pote* also began to change as *odelays* emerged as a more reputable element of the urban cultural landscape. Yet this change was replete with all the contradictory tendencies inherent in lumpens as a social category. Thus, whereas politicians were interested in taming and coopting this culture to ensure a ready supply of thugs to do their dirty work, the entry of middle-class youth and others in the *pote* as participants in the periodic carnivals, transformed the culture as well as the nature of the *pote* from an area for social misfit into one of political socialisation and counter cultural activities (Abdullah 1996a). A majority of the middle-class youth elements were still in high school but participated in the drug culture, and gradually acquired the mannerisms and iconography of the emerging popular culture.

11 The *pote* shares a lot in common with the *shebeens* in Southern Africa. See Michael O. West 1992.

12 For a study of 'odelay' as urban art see John Nunley, *Moving with the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa*, Urbana-Champaign, 1987. Nunley's study is silent on the politics and sociology of this oppositional culture.

Others dropped out of school entirely, following the footsteps of the original *rarray boys*. The entry of this new crop transformed the social composition of the *pote*. This change coincided with the coming of reggaé music and a decided turn to the political.

The influence of music was at first local: it was the rhythm of local rock musicians, drug and political talk. It started in 1971 with Purple Haze, a musical group in the city of Freetown; then came Super Combo from Bo, followed by Afric Jessips, Suberb Seven from Liberia, and Sabanoh '75. The reggae music of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer and Jimmy Cliff, and the confrontational political lyrics of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's Afro-beat added a further dimension to the repertoire of youth rebelliousness and non-conformity. Liberation struggles against settler colonialism also contributed to the development of this new oppositional culture. The *pote*, like the English pub, became an arena for discussions centred on what was popularly referred to as *DE SYSTEM*. Foday Sankoh, the RUF leader, echoed this 1970s' discourse in a recent interview: 'I said when I come out (from prison) I will organise the system'.[13] System *dread* became a slogan and a rallying call for alienated youths in the *potes*, mostly unemployed. The popularity of marijuana — the drug of choice — brought diverse groups to the *pote*. *Pote* language gradually began to filter into mainstream society. Lumpen youth culture was suddenly at the cutting edge in the development of the Krio language — the vocabulary expanding to incorporate *pote* terms from gambling, petty theft, and hustling. The transformation from *rarray boy* to *savis man* — as they subsequently became known — was complete with a new language and an iconography of resistance. This transformation was signified by the link between town and gown.

Ishmail Rashid has explored the connections between this new lumpen culture and Fourah Bay College (FBC) students, a constituent college of the University of Sierra Leone. What comes out clearly in his work is the emergence of 'organic intellectuals', who were in the forefront articulating some form of change. In the 1970s the group included many high school drop-outs and some unfortunate GCE 'O' and 'A' level holders, who were mostly unemployed. Some later went to the university, but the majority joined the city's expanding army of unemployed who lingered mostly in *potes* and the numerous working class pubs. These groups were conversant with the political philosophy of some distinguished Africans; they knew in outline the

13 Interview, *Concord Times*, December, 1996, p.9.

history of the slave trade and the dehumanisation of the African which it entailed; they could make connections between the colonial past and the post-colonial present; and generally espouse some form of Pan-Africanism. *Pote* discussions were spiced with generous quotes from Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley, Kwame Nkrumah, Wallace-Johnson, and at times Haile Selassie. Some of these *pote* types had read a little bit of Kwame Nkrumah and Frantz Fanon, a bit of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, and some undigested Marx and Lenin, thanks to Soviet Progress publishers.[14]

By the 1980s, university students, particularly those at Fourah Bay College (FBC), were a respectable bunch in the *pote*; they had become a reference group for their unfortunate brothers. Their role in the 1977 demonstrations enhanced their status *vis-à-vis* other groups in the *pote*. In the *pote's* code of honour, essentially an extension of the general clientelist relationship in the society, due regard was given to the *pote* 'savis man', who was also a student at FBC. Their unfortunate brothers listened to them as they preached, smoked and conscientised in the safe confines of the *pote*. It was within this milieu that the change from *savis man* to *man dem* took place. The camaraderie had come full circle; one love and brotherhood was the slogan of this new group of youths, evident in the popular support the 1977 demonstrations received from this youth constituency. From this vantage point the series of student protests in the 1980s become intelligible. The students, who were immersed in the rebellious youth culture, became the most articulate group to oppose the APC. They utilised the platform of student politics to launch an attack on APC rule and to call for radical change.

The 1977 student demonstrations were organised and led by students who were participants in this rebellious culture.[15] The Gardeners' club, much maligned by outsiders, was central to some of the demonstrations in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[16] By the early 1980s, other politically oriented student groups had emerged — The Green Book group, the Juche Idea of Kim III Sung, the Socialist Club and Pan-African Union (PANAFU). There is no evidence that these students were influenced by the ideas of Alvin Toffler, the

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14 Kwame Nkrumah's *Class Struggle in Africa* and Fidel Castro's *History Will Absolve Me* were popular texts.

15 In the interview referred to above, Foday Sankoh claimed to have been involved in the 1977 student demonstrations. There is no evidence to support this spurious claim.

16 Interviews with radical students at Fourah Bay College and Njala — the two campuses of the University of Sierra Leone — who were members of Gardeners and Future Shock clubs in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

American futurologist.[17] These new groups debated strictly political matters and saw the student union as an effective medium through which they could channel their grievances at the national level. They were different not only because of their decidedly political thrust but also because some of them eschewed the drug culture, a central pillar of this rebellious culture.[18]

The 1977 students demonstration was not the first time that students were involved in national politics. FBC students were involved in the APC-inspired agitation against the introduction of a one-party system under Sir Albert Margai. When the APC came to power in 1968, the populist Alfred Akibo-Betts sponsored the establishment of a youth league on campus. But like the lumpens before them, the students did not enter the political arena as independent actors; they were brought in as foot soldiers in the service of a mythical common agenda. The year 1977 was therefore the first time that FBC students, as a body, intervened in the political arena as an informal opposition with a clear-cut agenda. The initiative was taken by radical students, who did not anticipate the consequences of their actions. The demonstrations exposed the fragility of the APC regime; it was an extremely popular action. Siaka Stevens was forced to grant some concessions: a general election was called three months later. In spite of its limited gains, the demonstration was successful: it revealed the potential of organised protest by students.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the APC government became involved in student politics by attempting to sponsor candidates. The move to draft noted radicals on campus did not succeed but it revealed the polarised nature of student politics as the nation entered the turbulent 1980s. The economic downturn in the early 1980s, partly fuelled by the lavish hosting of the 1980 OAU conference, and the dwindling mining revenues, exacerbated by rampant smuggling, affected the provision of scholarships for students as well as expenditure on health and other social services. The increase in the ranks of

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17 Paul Richards, in *Fighting for the Rain Forest,* suggests that Alvin Toffler's ideas were influential among radicals at Njala campus. This prompted him to make the rather spurious connection between the RUF's alleged emphasis on technology and its non-existent emancipatory project. Manan Deen and Francis Deen — two founding members of Future Shock — denied this influence. Francis was emphatic, 'I have never heard of this Toffler guy'! Interview, Oct.-Dec. 1996.

18 These new groups ranged from the politically serious to the unserious. The Juche group became identified with alcohol instead of socialism... 'Juche' was synonymous with beer drinking!.

the unemployed continued to shape the discourse in the *pote*. And the muted talk about revolution in 1977 gave way to open talk about revolution. How this revolution was to be prosecuted was never systematically discussed, nor were other options explored. But the talk about revolution, vague and distorted as it was, remained alive in the discourse of rebellious youths. Thus, the language shifted from *man dem* to comrade, and finally to brothers and sisters, symptomatic of an ideological change particularly amongst the *pote* revolutionaries in the numerous study groups in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, and Koidu. This change was evident in the political groups which had emerged at FBC campus in the early 1980s. Anti-imperialist slogans were now appropriated as part of this youth iconography.

Meanwhile, student-administration relations on FBC campus deteriorated. A student demonstration in January 1984 resulted in a three-month lockout. A commission of inquiry setup to look into the frequent complaints of students and conditions in the campus was favourable to students.[19] By 1985 the administration was determined to discipline students and keep state interference to a minimum. The appointment of an ex-police Chief, Jenkin Smith, as warden of students, reflected the change of policy.[20] It was in this context that a radical student union leadership emerged. The Mass Awareness and Participation (MAP) student union President, Alie Kabba, was elected unopposed while he was in Libya attending the annual Green Book celebration. The MAP was a loose coalition of radicals involving members of the Green Book study group, the Gardeners' Club, PANAFU, and the Socialist club. Its fierce rhetoric, bordering on adventurism, alarmed the college administration. The new student union government did not follow in the footsteps of previous student union leaderships who only commented on national issues during crisis situations. The former took the initiative, partly as a result of the popular youth culture of which it was part, to link up with youths in the city. Their publicity campaign spawned numerous anti-government posters and graffiti on campus and the city. A 'people's tribunal' adjudicated between students; it served as a check on anti-social behaviour. It was a popular union government based on an imaginary 'people's power'. These activities, along with rumours that the student

19 The Kutubu Commission report was never published.

20 This was the first time an ex-police Chief was appointed to the position of warden of students. His strict regime made the College administration very unpopular with the students.

leadership was being sponsored by the Libyans, did not endear it to the administration.

What remains unclear in the muddled accounts of several participants is the source of the wild campaign of disinformation about Libyan sponsorship and involvement in student politics.[21] Perhaps, Alie Kabba's trip to Libya prompted the charge about Libyan sponsorship. If this was the case, it was indeed a flimsy ground on which to base such a serious allegation. The trip was neither clandestine nor was Kabba the only student who travelled with the Sierra Leonean delegation. There were two faculty members on the delegation: Cleo Hanciles and Moses Dumbuya. Whatever the case, the charge of Libyan involvement was serious enough to provoke another student lockout.

The events which led to the expulsion and suspension of some 41 students was connected to the alleged Libyan links with the student leadership. The students were accused of holding on to their keys during the Lent semester break because they intended to camp Libyan mercenaries in their hostels. Neither the college administration nor the government investigated the charge. What the college administration did was to invite the notorious State Security Division (SSD) gendarme on campus to literally 'flush' students from their hostels. When the college reopened, the administration was faced with a militant demonstration which subsequently engulfed the city. In the ensuing melee, the principal's car was set on fire. Three faculty members — Olu Gordon, Jimmy Kandeh and Cleo Hanciles — judged friendly to the students, lost their jobs. Olu Gordon and Cleo Hanciles were founding members and patrons of PANAFU. The student union president, Alie Kabba, and four other students — Haroun Boima, Olutumi Mark, Samuel Foyoh and Kai Banya — were arrested and detained for two months. They were later arranged and then released for allegedly burning the principal's car.

The action of the student radicals could be described as infantile. They were neither politically mature nor sufficiently well disciplined to realise the shortcomings of whatever leverage they imagined they might have on the administration or the state. They naively thought that mere rhetoric would deliver their puerile call for 'people's power'. Compared with the 1977 leadership, the 1985 leadership was more organised, though politically

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21 The newspaper accounts are silent on these issues.

immature as well. The 1985 group could not grasp the inherent limitations of student politics and the dead end of confrontational politics.[22] Elsewhere on the west coast, notably Nigeria and Ghana, this confrontational stance had taught students a bitter political lesson (Olugbade 1981; Oyedeji 1980). The unpopularity of the regime was a factor which shaped student militancy: the students enjoyed tremendous support on campus and in Freetown. But the utterances of Alie Kabba, the union president, was according to some of his closest advisers, too immature. The interview he granted to the BBC about the change — 'Mount Aureol will not be going to the State House this time; the State House will have to come up' — was in the words of one of his closest comrades 'a stupid mistake'.[23] Their expulsion from FBC ended a phase in the making of an informal youth opposition. Henceforth, the baton passed to the lumpen youths and their organic intellectuals (some graduates of Fourah Bay and Njala) in the numerous study groups and revolutionary cells in Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Koidu.

Why did student radicals, obviously far backward in comparison to their counterparts in Nigeria and Ghana, embrace the word of bland Pan-Africanism and Libya's Green Book ideology? Why did Gaddafi's Green Book 'take root' in Sierra Leone and not in other West African countries? The students in Nigeria and Ghana supported the anti-imperialist stance of Colonel Gaddafi and applauded Libya's uncompromising position on Africa's liberation and Third World independence. But they did not embrace the Colonel's message partly because they were wedded to marxian/dependency political economy analysis and, partly because they were critical of Gaddafi's 'Third Universal Theory'.[24] Furthermore, radical students in Nigeria did not theorise the role of students as vanguards of the revolution because of the existence of a recognised radical fringe in national politics and a radical labour movement. Their position on the Nigerian 'revolution' was always articulated from the vantage point of an alliance of progressive forces. The

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22 'Students do not make revolutions' was a popular saying during and after the 1977 demonstrations.

23 Interview with radical students, October, 1996.

24 The following works were influential: Claude Ake, *Revolutionary Pressures*, London, 1978; Dan Nabudere, *The Political Economy of Imperialism*, London, 1978; and some of the exchanges published in the Dar-es-Salaam journal *Utafiti* in the late 1970s. For a good summary of the debates on the Nigerian left see Narasingha P. Sil, 'Nigerian Intellectuals and Socialism: Retrospect and Prospect', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31,3, 1993.

disastrous attempt by Isaac Boro, a student leader in the 1960s, had seemingly foreclosed this option for student radicals in Nigeria.

The poverty of the student movement in Sierra Leone with regard to ideology and the lack of a post-colonial radical tradition, was probably the principal factor in explaining the attractiveness of Gaddafi's Green Book.[25] Their failure to critique Gaddafi's ideas is indicative of their level of political consciousness. Thus, they did not attempt a critical analysis of Gaddafi's populism and could not make the obvious connections between the Green Book and Libya's foreign policy. No attempt was even made to understand the Colonel's support for Idi Amin or Gaddafi's claim to Chadian territory (Ogunbadejo 1986; Simons 1996). It is this lack of critical ideas — this failure to search for one based on a thorough analysis of the situation — which explains why pan-Africanism was uncritically appropriated; and why bland revolutionary pan-Africanism became an option. Pan-Africanism was therefore the ideational context within which the movement unfolded; Libya, the midwife of the 'Revolution' to be.

Ghana and Libya: The External Connection

The expelled student union president was not the first president to visit Libya. Abdul Gbla was the first student union president to visit the Libyan Arab Jama'riyya in 1983. But Gbla's visit was not clandestine; he was invited to participate in their annual revolutionary celebration. He went with two other students — Abdul Gabisi and Nurudeen Wilson — and two faculty members: Cleo Hanciles and Moses Dumbuya. Gbla received an executive treatment; he had a session with the Colonel and was specifically asked to stay after the celebrations. He, however, declined the offer because of fears of getting involved with the Libyans.[26]

The Libyans entered Sierra Leone in the mid-1970s and began to make in-roads into civil society by using religious as well as non-religious channels to establish a presence. They provided generous grants to Haja Aisha Sasso for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca; established links with the powerful and crafty diamond dealer, J.S. Mohammed, who arranged a state visit for Siaka Stevens (Stevens could not stand the Colonel and turned down the invitation to go to Benghazi); provided a printing press for the *Tablet* newspaper

25 Some of the radical students interviewed attribute this to youthful adventure; others thought it was the money. Interview with radical students, Freetown and the US, Oct.,-Dec., 1996.

26 Interview with Abdul Gbla, former student President, FBC, 1981-1982; Oct.-Nov., 1996.

through J.S. Mohammed; and sponsored Green Book study groups at FBC. They generally maintained a low profile, and gradually worked their way into State House. Their alleged bankrolling of the 1980 OAU conference in Freetown remains unsubstantiated.[27]

If the ex-student leader was not the first student president to visit Libya, how did he establish the link which eventually led to the training of Sierra Leoneans in Benghazi in 1987 and 1988? It is quite possible, based on interviews with student radicals who knew Alie Kabba, that he had visited Libya before 1985; his occasional disappearing acts lent credence to such beliefs. Why did the expelled students (who were allegedly provided with a generous grant to pursue their studies) choose Ghana, not Nigeria or Liberia — two other English-speaking countries in the region — to pursue their studies?[28] The choice of Ghana may not be unconnected with Jerry Rawlings's support for Libya, and therefore an ideal place to pursue their goal.[29] From the standpoint of the Libyans, the expelled students were in exile to prosecute the 'revolution'.

When Kabba and others were released from prison their first port of call was Conakry, Guinea. From Conakry, they travelled to Ghana. It was a People's Bureau official, as the Libyan embassies are known, who instructed them to proceed to Ghana where they subsequently gained admission to the University of Ghana at Legon.[30] As noted above, the choice of Ghana is significant. During this period the Libyans were busy trying to set up their African revolutionary army to pursue the Colonel's dream of controlling the Azou Strip in Chad. Ghana had a regime sympathetic to Libya's foreign policy; Jerry Rawlings's 'revolutionary' pretensions also endeared him to the Libyans. Libyan foreign policy was crafted in the 1980s in furtherance of a specific goal: 'Revolution'. Everything about Libyan foreign policy in West Africa in the 1980s therefore revolved around this idea. It was this aspect of Libyan foreign policy — revolution in West Africa — which interested individuals like Alie Kabba; and before him, Charles Taylor, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) warlord, and the confused Kukoi Samba

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27 Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, alleges that the Libyans paid part of the cost for hosting the 1980 OAU Conference in Sierra Leone.

28 The four expelled students enrolled at Legon University reportedly received $6000 each from the United Nations.

29 Burkina Faso, a French-speaking country, would have been another possibility because of the Libyan presence.

30 Interview with some of the expelled students, Freetown and the US, Oct.-Dec., 1996.

Sanyang (known as Dr. Manning), who proclaimed a dictatorship of the proletariat in the Gambia in 1981.[31]

The Libyan connection brought in some money — to further the 'revolution' — which made it possible for the expelled students in Ghana to provide sponsorship for four others who joined them the following year, bringing the number to eight. Kabba was known to be a frequent visitor to the People's Bureau in Accra; he made numerous trips to Libya, and occasionally to Guinea. It was during this period that he met Charles Taylor of the NPFL who had been imprisoned in the United States and Ghana, Kukoi Samba Sanyang, and other so-called revolutionaries who criss-crossed the Ghana-Burkina-Faso-Libya revolutionary triangle (Tarr 1993; Ellis 1995). Kabba's relationship with these types validated his 'revolutionary' credentials. This was important because the Libyans are notorious for dealing with a single individual. We know very little about their relationship with the Irish Republican Army (IRA). What is known about Libyan connections with revolutionary organisations in Africa suggests that they always operate through a contact person. It is through this contact person that they channel funds and issue directives about 'revolutionary assignments'. This was the type of relationship they had with the several Chadian factions they supported in the 1970s and 1980s; with Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM); and Kwame Toure's All African People's Revolutionary Party (AAPRP). The onus of communicating with the organisation therefore rests with the individual. In a situation where there were no formal organisational structures or even an organisation, as was the case with the Sierra Leonean group, such individual risked being accused of embezzlement and corruption. Such was the case with the ex-student leader through whom the Libyans channelled whatever resources they had for the Sierra Leonean project.

What the Libyans did not understand, or rather did not want to understand, was the fact that the ex-student leader had no constituency outside FBC campus. Perhaps because the Libyans have never experienced or made a social revolution, they were incapable of distinguishing between inflammatory student rhetoric and a revolutionary movement in the making. It is also possible that they recruited only those who would be willing to do their dirty work. The story that students in Ghana were doing 'revolutionary' work in an anti-imperialist organisation which they wanted the Libyans to sponsor was a

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31 For an account of the centrality of Ghana and Burkina Faso as a haven for 'revolutionaries' in the 1980s see Tarr 1993, Ellis 1995.

cover to get the funds coming from the Colonel. This view is supported by those who went to Libya as well as those who were in Ghana.[32] In spite of this, the Libyans still channelled the resources for the Sierra Leonean project through Kabba. When he was given a 'revolutionary' assignment to attack US targets in Freetown, Kabba could not get the job done. When he tried to subcontract the job to PANAFU, by promising monetary support, his proposal was turned down. And when it was time to deliver recruits for military training in Libya in 1987, Kabba and his group in Ghana had no alternative but to turn to Freetown.[33]

By the time the recruitment exercise commenced there was no programme of action nor was there any guideline on the procedure and mechanism for recruitment. The students in Ghana did not espouse a concrete political philosophy which would have provided a theoretical guide for their commitment to armed struggle nor did they operate through any formal political structure or organisation. They remained, throughout their stay in Ghana, an informal political group linked together by their common experience of expulsion and their commitment to radical change. There was, therefore, no common ideological platform nor was there an acceptable political programme besides acquiring military training. The period from April 1985 (when students were expelled from FBC) to July-August 1987 (when Sierra Leoneans started leaving for military training) saw a shift in the composition of the radical groups in the city of Freetown and elsewhere. Student unionism had been proscribed at FBC so that the centre of operation for the radicals became the city of Freetown, Bo, Kenema and to a lesser extent Koidu. This shift catapulted those radicals operating in 'revolutionary' cells in the forefront of the movement for radical change. It was therefore to these groups, especially PANAFU, that the students in Ghana turned for recruits when they were ready to embark on the bush path to destruction.

The expelled students and others who called themselves 'revolutionaries' were not the first to initiate a call to arms nor where they the first to emphasize the need for military training. In 1967 the APC had established training camps in Guinea under the command of the then Col. John Bangura, and after the 1977 student demonstrations, the insurgency alternative was

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32 Interviews with some of the expelled students and those who went to Libya to train in 1987/88. Freetown and the USA, Oct.-Dec., 1996.

33 It was after Kabba graduated from Legon in 1987 that the recruitment of Sierra Leoneans for military training started.

freely discussed in radical circles. In the early 1980s, some victims of APC repression in Pujehun District — the Ndorgborwusui — had expressed an interest to arm themselves as a form of protection against state-sponsored terrorism.[34] What the student group and their allies appropriated was therefore the collective property of the growing army of potential insurgents/dissidents. Armed struggle had become part of the folklore of the revolution to be. The major difference is that it would not be an ex-military officer (Col. Bangura had been discharged in the army by the SLPP regime) who would co-ordinate the new call to arms. By a curious irony it turned out to be an ex-corporal in the signal unit who had been convicted for his involvement in a coup attempt that would champion this ancient call to arms and pursue it to its logical conclusion: the overthrow of the system.

The call came from Accra, Ghana, in June/July 1987. Before then, the issue of recruitment had been debated in Accra, where some of the expelled students reportedly expressed preference for the *pote* types. This was severely criticised (but never rejected) on the grounds of political consciousness and the need to do more political work. Since they had not sufficiently done their homework among the masses, this option was considered dangerous. Back in Freetown, a special session of the PANAFU congress reluctantly tabled the issue. The majority decided against an adventuristic enterprise in the name of revolution. This decision led to a split in the union between those who supported the move to go to Libya and those who were against. Those in favour were in the minority; they were eventually expelled from the movement. Among these were Abu Kanu (Commander BK), a founding member of Future Shock club and a graduate of Njala University College, and Rashid Mansaray, an activist from Freetown east end, who had left the country in 1986 to join the MPLA in the fight against UNITA in Angola, only to be told to return home and pursue the struggle in his own country. Abu Kanu, Rashid Mansaray and others left Freetown in July 1987, via Conakry and Accra, for Benghazi, Libya.

Another group, which included Foday Sankoh, left in August 1987. Sankoh's group included recruits from Freetown and the provinces. A group consisting mostly of high school students from St. Edwards arrived in January 1988. The different dates in their arrival had something to do with the availability of funds and the difficulties of convincing would-be recruits of the necessity to undertake military training. Politically conscious individuals were

34 The Ndorgborwusui rebellion was the first rural uprising against the APC.

not specifically targeted as recruits. For once PANAFU had rejected the idea of participating as an organisation, the project became an individual enterprise: any man (no attempt was made to recruit women) who felt the urge to acquire insurgency training in the service of the 'revolution.' This inevitably opened the way for the recruitment of lumpens. It is therefore not coincidental that only three of those who went to Libya had any form of employment.[35] Paul Richards's imaginary construct about excluded intellectuals in the RUF remains a nonsensical proposition not supported by evidence.[36] The ex-student leader who was in charge of disbursing funds never disclosed the amount available; nor did the Libyans listen to the incessant complaints from the Sierra Leonean contingent about his handling of the situation.[37] But the problem did not start in Libya; it started in Ghana even before the first recruits arrived.

Kabba's control of the purse, his clandestine and not so clandestine connections with People's Bureau officials in Accra, and his reported unbridled ambition to be the spokesperson of the 'revolution' had begun to sow seeds of discord within the student group in Ghana as early as 1986.[38] His central position as the 'peripatetic co-ordinator' of the project was because of his link with the Libyans.[39] When Kabba reportedly told his comrades that he would not undertake military training for medical reasons, they were therefore suspicious.[40] Others questioned his sincerity and commitment which on one occasion led to physical confrontation.

There was no concrete programme about what was to be done once the military training was over; nor was there any debate about the programme of action to be adopted. The only available document — *The Basic Document of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL): The Second Liberation of Africa* copiously quoted in the RUF propaganda booklet *Footpaths to Democracy : Towards a New Sierra Leone*, Vol. I — was essentially a critique of the neo-colonial regime. It was originally a PANAFU call for a popular democratic front (PDF), which was subsequently redrafted

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35 There was one high school teacher, an engineer, and Sankoh who was a photographer.
36 See Yusuf Bagura this volume.
37 Sankoh has consistently indicated that he parted company with this group because of their interests in money. See *Concord Times*, December, 1996.
38 Interviews with some of the expelled students and those who went to Libya to acquire insurgency training.
39 These are Alie Kabba's words.
40 According to Kabba this issue was never discussed.

and edited by Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray to reflect the armed phase of the 'revolution'. Parts of it were butchered to appear as Foday Sankoh's words. But the document had nothing to do with Sankoh or the RUF; it predated the formation of the RUF. It was appropriated by Sankoh and his vanguard after they entered Kailahun in 1991.[41] The document was produced in Ghana before the departure for military training in Libya.

Perhaps, the tragedy of the 'revolution' to be has to do with the fact that those who recruited Foday Sankoh underestimated his capacity to think and act politically. Sankoh was recruited by a PANAFU member, Ebiyemi Reader, who was active in Freetown in the late 1970s. He left for the hinterland after a key member of his group departed for Cuba around 1980. It was when Ebiyemi Reader, an eclectic organic intellectual, settled in the diamond area after a stint in Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry, and organised a 'revolutionary' cell, that he discovered Foday Sankoh.[42] Sankoh became associated with his group, attended meetings and started, for the first time, to acquaint himself with pan-Africanism. But Sankoh was not interested in reading. He was an action oriented individual who was impatient with the slow process of acquiring knowledge and understanding of the situation, which a revolutionary project entails. Put in another way, Sankoh was a militarist.[43] Before this period his world view did not go beyond the Sierra Leonean border; his ideas remained that of an angry man who had an axe to grind because of his imprisonment. His critique of what was popularly referred to as *DE SYSTEM* was still party and personality centred. Yet, he was willing to listen and eager to learn. His age and involvement with youths, some of whom could have been his children, earned him some respect and sympathy — Hence the reference to him as Pa Foday or Papei. There is evidence that Sankoh did not abandon the possibility of seizing power through another military coup. His idea of revolution, if he had any before this period, was to seize power by any conceivable means. So when the call to troop to

41 The document became part of the propaganda material of the RUF to be when Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray teamed up with Sankoh after their return to Sierra Leone in 1988. For excerpts from this document see *Foothpaths to Democracy: Towards a New Sierra Leone*, Vol. I (no date). Alie Kabba has claimed authorship of this document.

42 In the *Concord Times* interview Sankoh claimed to have started a study group in Bo. This is not correct.

43 He also claimed that he wanted to use PANAFU in 1986 but 'they were only concerned about South Africa and the rest of the world, forgetting that we have our own local problems'. This is also doubtful because it was through PANAFU that Sankoh was able to make the trip to Libya. See *Concord Times* interview.

Tripoli came from Accra, Sankoh willingly joined the crowd. What the others did not realise was that they were paving the way for Sankoh who had waited for just this kind of opportunity.[44]

Majority of the recruits were opposed to Kabba's decision to skip military training — cowardice and deceit some charged — on health grounds. It was, however, impossible to put up any organised opposition because the Sierra Leonean contingent was scattered in the various camps that littered Benghazi. It was only Kabba who knew where all the groups were; he alone could locate people in their respective camps. The issue took a dramatic turn when Alie Kabba refused to grant Sankoh exemption from military training on health grounds. Even though Sankoh pleaded that he be excused on the same grounds — he had problems from a previous surgery — Kabba refused. As a military man, Sankoh knew what he was talking about. But he did not win the battle; he had to give in because the odds were against him. Kabba on the other hand was able to skip training because he was in a position of strength.

When Kabba subsequently installed a 'revolutionary' high command, supposedly to direct the Sierra Leonean contingent, it was stoutly opposed by the majority of the recruits. The charge that he wanted to establish himself as the spokesperson of the movement was echoed; others simply repeated what they had been told about his undemocratic practices; while others made it clear they were not interested in pursuing the project any longer. In the ensuing confusion, attempts to get Kabba to account for money he supposedly got for the whole recruitment project proved impossible. There was even talk of eliminating those who decided that the project was not worth pursuing. In the end the motley collection of 'revolutionaries' who went to Benghazi, about thirty-five, some say fifty, left Libya frustrated and divided.[45] Some decided to forget about the experience; others decided to pursue the goal of 'revolution'. The return trip from Libya ended a phase in the bush path to destruction.

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44 Interview with PANAFU members and those who went to Libya in 1987/88. In his attempt to write his own story Sankoh claimed he left for military training in 1986. Again, this is incorrect.

45 Sankoh alleges that 150 youths were trained outside Sierra Leone. This figure is a gross exaggeration. Perhaps he is referring to those who were trained in Liberia. According to him 'we were eleven at first and I later sent about 150 men'. The number of Sierra Leoneans who went to Libya between 1987/88 were not more than fifty. Alie Kabba said about two dozen went.

The Making of a Lumpen Movement

All those who went to Libya, and who later became involved in the RUF, including Sankoh, returned to Sierra Leone before the launching of the armed struggle. Attempts were made to recruit and train cadres in the Yele area; this was however abandoned because it was considered risky. Up to this point Sankoh had not emerged as the leader of the movement; there was no organisation; instead, it was a loose collection of individuals who had returned from military training in Benghazi. 'At the beginning, there was no leadership. All of us were all (*sic*) organisers',[46] Sankoh revealed in a recent interview. Among those who returned to Sierra Leone determined to pursue the 'revolution' were Foday Sankoh, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray. They formed a closed-knit group in the city, met periodically to discuss strategy, and embarked upon another recruitment drive. This time, it was decided that they should leave Freetown and settle in the provinces. It was this move to the provinces which opened the link between the RUF to be and the NPFL in Liberia. From the time they left Benghazi in 1988 to the period when they entered Sierra Leone as armed combatants, this trio travelled extensively in Sierra Leone and Liberia exploring avenues through which they could further their 'revolutionary' objectives. It was during one of these trips that they allegedly came into contact with NPFL officials.

According to one source, Sankoh met Charles Taylor in Libya in 1987, who then invited him to join the NPFL. This account does appear credible because the NPFL was originally constituted as a pan-African movement with membership open to all Africans. The Gambian, Kukoi Samba, was a founding member and vice-president of the NPFL. What remains uncertain is that the meeting took place at all. For Charles Taylor had parted company with the Libyans around June 1987. This was even before Sankoh and others went to Libya. Charles Taylor did meet other Sierra Leoneans in Libya and Ghana in 1986, and again in early 1987. If the meeting did take place in Libya why did Sankoh fail to take up the offer at a time when he needed it? This would have been an opportunity for Sankoh to establish his independence when it was apparent that the Libyans were backing the expelled student leader and were not going to provide the arms and ammunition needed to launch the 'revolution'. If Sankoh had met Taylor in Libya, he

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46 Sankoh was referring to 1986 when in fact this is true of the period after 1988. See *Concord Times* interview.

would definitely have turned up at Po, Burkina Faso, where the majority of the NPFL fighters were trained. There is no evidence that Sierra Leoneans were trained in Burkina Faso. Sankoh, the master strategist, would hardly have missed such an opportunity. The other account, that they came into contact with an NPFL official in Freetown, where Taylor had been detained with a Burkinabe passport, seems to confirm what subsequently happened.[47]

By mid-1989 a deal had been sealed between the two groups : Foday Sankoh and his group would help Charles Taylor 'liberate' Liberia, after which he would provide them with a base to launch their 'revolution'. After this informal alliance, the *Basic Document* — was amended to reflect the change. The historical relevance of the name 'Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone' is intriguing. Wallace-Johnson's West African Youth League was always the West African Youth League/Sierra Leone. Whether this was done at the instigation of Charles Taylor or whether it was a leaf from the Wallacian script is not clear. Yet it remains an aspect of the pan-Africanist image with which the organisation wants to be identified. There is no evidence that any Sierra Leonean took part in the initial NPFL attack on Nimba county in December 1989. What we do know is that Sankoh, Kanu, and Mansaray were in Freetown up to a week before the initial attack at Bomaru to convince those who had gone to Libya to join the RUF. Their activities alarmed some PANAFU members who threatened to report their presence to the police.[48] By November 1990, some members of this group, notably Kanu and Mansaray, had seen action as NPFL combatants.

From the time they left Libya to the period when they entered Kailahun, the group did not organise an election, nor was there a central committee. The loose organisation was headed by a collective leadership of three: Sankoh, Mansaray and Kanu. It was generally agreed that Sankoh would be the spokesperson for the group. When on 23 March 1991 the Revolutionary United Front entered Bomaru in Kailahun District it was Sankoh who announced to the world what the RUF was all about. By then *The Basic Document* had become the RUF manifesto, with Sankoh as leader.

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47 It was this NPFL official who introduced Sankoh to Charles Taylor who had just been released from detention in Freetown in 1988. Sankoh even claimed that they 'should have actually started in 1988 or 1989' but 'because there was no outlet and inlet (entrance and exit) that was why our struggle was delayed'. See *Concord Times* interview, Dec., 1996.

48 Rashid Mansaray reportedly bought all the available maps in the government bookstore. Interview with some PANAFU members and those who were in Libya.

The insurgency force from Liberia was composed of three distinct groups: those who had acquired military training in Libya — predominantly urban lumpens — and had seen action with the NPFL as combatants; a second group of Sierra Leoneans, resident in Liberia, mostly lumpens; and a third group of hard core NPFL fighters from Liberia, on loan to the RUF. Contrary to Paul Richards's account, the Sierra Leoneans recruited in Liberia were not 'political exiles and economic refugees' (Richards 1995). The so-called 'Sierra Leonean migrant workers some of whom joined us to cross the border to start our liberation campaign' were in reality lumpen Sierra Leoneans resident in Liberia.[49] This social composition of the invading force is significant in understanding the character of the RUF and the bush path to destruction.

The Character of the Revolutionary United Front

How revolutionary is a revolutionary movement which slaughters and terrorises the very people it claims to be liberating? What yardstick do we use to judge a movement which claims to be revolutionary without revolutionaries? To understand the character of the RUF, we need to look at the social composition of the 'RUFfians', their policies, their actions and their pronouncements. We need to go beyond their rhetoric and examine the contradictions in their pronouncements and actions; the silences, and the (mis)representations, about themselves and their programme. The wanton destruction of life, the hacking of limbs and the slitting of pregnant women was so disturbing that Foday Sankoh was compelled to make a special plea: 'Yes, we have committed atrocities. One day we shall stand before the people and ask for forgiveness' (Amnesty International 1996). In whose name were those atrocities committed?

The Revolutionary United Front is a peculiar organisation. It does not share any of the characteristics — ideology and organisation — and discipline which marks revolutionary movements in Africa or elsewhere in the world except the use of violence to attain power. The RUF is similar to RENAMO which was formed as a counter-revolutionary force to sabotage the Mozambican revolution and whose *bandido* activities did not cease when Dlakama and his leadership were compelled to reinvent themselves as

49 *Foothpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone*, p.7. Interview with Sierra Leoneans who returned after the NPFL attack on Monrovia, Freetown, Oct., 1996.

liberation fighters and democrats (Young 1990). Unlike RENAMO, the RUF started as a 'revolutionary' movement. What connects the two is the wanton violence on women and children, the systematic destruction of the economy, and the general terror in the countryside.

Paul Richards's assessment of the movement leaves too many substantive issues unanswered. His comparison with the Shining Path also neglects the historical contexts within which the two movements evolved. The Shining Path was formed by radical intellectuals who were inspired by Mao. There are no radical intellectuals in the RUF nor has the movement established any meaningful relationship with the peasantry based on the acceptance of a common programme produced within the context of a revolutionary dialogue. What marks the RUF is the chronic lack of cadres imbued with any revolutionary ideology. Its lumpen base has made it impossible for the movement to attract support from any social group. It is not surprising that the only movement with revolutionary pretensions comparable to the RUF happens to be the NPFL. This is not coincidental: they are products of the same cultural milieu; their membership is recruited from the same lumpen groups; and they employ the same tactics — indiscriminate use of drugs, forced induction and violence — to further their goal of capturing power. The torture and eventual murder of Sergeant Doe by the former NPFL commander, Yormie Johnson; and the mutilation, murder and rape of innocent women and children by the RUF, are acts that are incompatible with a revolutionary project. These 'revolutionary' acts, one would argue, were committed again and again precisely because of the social composition of these movements and the lack of a concrete programme of societal transformation. A lumpen social movement breeds a lumpen revolution.

The RUF's *Footpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone* contains words and phrases lifted from Mao Zedong and Amilcar Cabral. Hurriedly drafted in London and tossed back to the Zogoda — the RUF headquarters in the Sierra Leone rain forest — for approval, it was subsequently reformatted complete with the RUF anthem and generous quotes from the head of ideology, Foday Sankoh.[50] 'We moved deeper into the comforting bosom of our mother earth — the forest' ... 'The forest welcomed us and gave us succour and sustenance' ... 'Why we continue to fight' are taken from Mao

50 This is a propaganda document hurriedly put together by Addai Sebo of the International Alert, the conflict resolution group based in London. The second volume is yet to be published.

and Cabral. If the RUF cadres or leadership had read Mao and Cabral they would have related to the peasantry in a different manner; if they had read Cabral they would not have recruited lumpens. For Cabral had cautioned, based on the PAIGC experience in Guinea-Bissau, against the recruitment of lumpens in revolutionary organisations. It is tempting to attribute this to Frantz Fanon who is quoted on the first page of *Foothpaths to Democracy.* But this would be reading too much.[51]

There is, one would maintain, no revolutionary theory which guided the practice of the movement. If there was/is any theory, it evolved on an *ad hoc* basis as a result of their experiences in the forest. The RUF document acknowledges this: 'Initially we fought a semi-conventional war relying heavily on vehicles for mobility. This method proved fatal against the combined fire power of Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana ... Frankly, we were beaten and on the run ... We dispersed into smaller units, whatever of our fighting force.... We now relied on light weapons and on our feet, brains and knowledge of the countryside'.[52] If the RUF leadership was immersed in any revolutionary theory and practice it would have come to grips with the basics in guerrilla warfare, and thus avoid a 'semi-conventional war'. A semi-conventional war in a context where people are not politically organised could only lead to collective self-destruction. The RUF could have acquired its fighting skills on the battle field, but it did not learn how to relate to the people in the area under its control. Thus, instead of implementing a revolutionary programme it embarked on a campaign of terror in the countryside. This aspect of the RUF begins to explain why the peasantry, the natural ally of most revolutionary movements in the so-called Third World, deserted the movement. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the predominantly rural Mende South-East, the major theatre of war, the RUF cadres are referred to as the *Njiahungbia Ngonga,* meaning riff raffs/lumpens/unruly youths.[53] The bulk of the current RUF battle front commanders are lumpens from the rural south-east. These include Capt. Mark Lamin, Major Sam 'Maskita' Bockarie, and Major Morris Kallon.

The so-called communitarian principles, which Richards alleges that the RUF established in the enclaves under its control, has nothing to do with

51 The quotation 'Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfils it or betrays it' is taken from Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth,* the chapter 'On National Culture'.

52 *Footpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone,* pp.10-11.

53 See Patrick Muana in this volume.

Green Book ideology. Such populists pronouncements as 'Every member of the community has rights to basic needs (food, housing, health, and transport)' (Richards 1996) are consistent with the demands of movements like the RUF seeking to sell themselves as popular movements. Actions such as the redistribution of 'food, drugs, clothes and shoes from 'liberated' government sources' (Richards 1996) do not in themselves constitute revolutionary practice. These should be seen as populist propaganda rather than influences from the Green Book. If the RUF has any ideology that ideology is definitely not one shaped by the Green Book. Its populist rhetoric backed by some *ad hoc* measures — such as the change from semi-conventional to guerrilla warfare — were designed as survival tactics to win support from the very public it terrorises. Richards's assumption that the Green Book was influential in shaping the views of student radicals led him to look for Green Book signs that were markedly absent in the RUF. Ironically, none of the student radicals whom Richards claimed were influenced by the Green Book joined the RUF.[54]

When the RUF first entered Sierra Leone in 1991, the movement was divided into two sections: vanguards and special forces. The former were sub-divided into two: those who trained in Libya in 1987/88 and lumpen Sierra Leoneans recruited in Liberia. The first group included Sankoh himself, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray. Vanguard members sat on the war council, which was constituted before they entered the country in 1991, and were in charge of administrative day-to-day affairs, including intelligence in the areas under their control. The special forces were those NPFL fighters on loan to the RUF. They were directly under the control of Rashid Mansaray who was very popular and had distinguished himself as a combatant with the NPFL before 1991. The erstwhile commander-in-chief, Mohammed Tarawalie (Zino), was also with this group. Foday Sankoh was and still is the head of ideology. This organisational set up was reconstituted after the special forces of the NPFL were recalled in 1993. The reorganised RUF was still headed by the elite vanguard followed by the *wosus*, those who were recruited and trained in the Kailahun and Pujehun areas before the departure of the special forces. They are now the dominant group in the movement. Below them are the

54 This is not to say that the *Green Book* has nothing to offer. For the political and philosophical relevance of the *Green Book* see Cecil Blake and Saleh K. Abu-Osba, eds., *Libya: Terrorist or Terrorised*, Ontario, 1982.

standbys, mainly captives and conscripts, followed by the under age combatants.

If the initial wanton violence against innocent civilians, which the RUF concedes, 'became a nightmarish experience for our civil population' (mainly women and children), was attributed to the special forces on loan from the NPFL, why did the violence continue after they left?[55] An explanation for the continued violence and mutilation of innocent civilians has to be sought in the composition of the movement, its lack of discipline, its indiscriminate use of drugs (of all sorts), and the absence of a concrete programme besides vague populist formulations about foreigners and rural development. The first major crack within the RUF was connected with the indiscriminate violence and terror against civilians in areas under their control.

In August 1992, Abu Kanu (Commander BK) was executed by firing squad for failure to follow instructions (FFI) and conniving with the enemy. The following November, Rashid Mansaray, another leading vanguard commander, was executed for technical sabotage — failure to defend a strategic position against the enemy. He was tried in front of the last two-storey building on the Koindu-Kailahun road and shot by firing squad. These trumped up charges were masterminded by Sankoh to get them out of the way. They were the only top-ranking members who were with Foday Sankoh before the formation of the RUF; they were popular with the cadres and could have contested the position of leadership if there was a general congress or a popular assembly. They were also among the two leading strategists in the movement.

There is evidence that Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray were not happy with the random violence that RUF forces were committing in the name of the 'revolution'. An ex-PANAFU member in the Sierra Leone army reported that the area under Kanu's control was generally peaceful and well organised; he reached out to explain what the RUF was about to the peasants and was not engaged in unnecessary violence against civilians. Rashid Mansaray's opposition to the indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians was one of the reasons why he was executed. This was confirmed by his second-in-command who served as provost to I.H. Deen-Jalloh, the former head of RUF intelligence. Stories about the slitting of pregnant women and the raping of

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55 *Footpaths to Democracy*, p.8. According to this document they departed in May 1992. Interviews with captured RUF fighters however suggest that they left in 1993; others insisted that there were Liberians and Burkinabes as late as October, 1996.

young girls, some of whom were forcibly taken as 'wives', were common.[56] Once the movement had established some presence with the help of Charles Taylor, and Sankoh had acquired some modicum of respectability with his new found pan-Africanist credentials, he had no need for these vanguards anymore.

Those who subsequently became key players in the movement were those who did not know Papei, as Sankoh was called before 1991, or the prehistory of the RUF. Philip Palmer, Faiya Musa, I.H. Deen-Jalloh, Gibril Massaquoi, Bockarie Maskita, Mark Lamin and the former public relations officer Abubakar Sankoh, joined the movement after they returned from Libya or after they attacked and occupied Bomaru in 1991. It is indeed strange that a movement which claims to be revolutionary not only failed to attract popular support from radicals in and out of Sierra Leone but also failed to receive support from the very people in whose name it allegedly took up arms.

Youth Culture and Violence

The involvement of youths in political violence is not particularly new. The *veranda* boys of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) in Ghana — they were not violent — are, arguably, lumpens. By lumpens, I refer to the large unemployed and unemployable youths, mostly male, who live by their wits or who have one foot in what is generally referred to as the informal or underground economy. This group provided some of the fighting force, not the original trainees, for the Mulele rebellion in the Congo in the 1960s, the MPLA and FRELIMO in Angola and Mozambique, ZANU and ZAPU in Zimbabwe, the fighters of Guokouni Waddei and Hisen Habre in Chad, the UPC in the Cameroons, the warlords in Liberia and the Revolutionary United Front.[57]

Whereas the 'classical' liberation movements had policy guidelines with respect to the recruitment and training of lumpens, the new movements — with the sole exception of Museveni's NRM — are more concerned with having people who could wield weapons in the name of 'revolution'.[58] The lack of discipline and a clear-cut ideology begins to explain why the RUF

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56 Interview with underage girls captured, abused and molested by the RUF; Oct., 1996.

57 For the recruitment policies of one of the classical liberation movements in Africa see Josiah Tungamirai, 'Recruitment to ZANLA: Building up a War Machine' in *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, by Ngwabi Bebe and Terence Ranger, eds. London, 1995.

58 For Museveni's NRM see *Sowing the Mustard Seed* ; Mahmoud Mamdani, 'Uganda Today', *Ufahamu*, 15,3, 1986-1987.

tolerated all sorts of terror and anarchy in the name of revolution. Another important difference is the influx of more teenagers as lumpens; a true reflection of Africa's economy in this age of economic recession and structural adjustment. This new development has significantly narrowed the age differential between the leadership of these movements and the rank and file. In the case of the RUF, with the exception of Foday Sankoh and a few others who were not in the original group, the bulk of the leadership and membership are below thirty-five. This is also true of the NPFL in Liberia.

In his perceptive analyses of the social structure in Guinea-Bissau, the late Amilcar Cabral laid bare the considerations which informed the recruitment efforts of the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau, and identified this particular group as the crucial link between the urban-rural network so important to the success of the PAIGC. But Cabral, as usual, was careful not to generalise; he mapped out the specificity of the situation in Guinea; he did not provide a blueprint for activists (Cabral 1969). Cabral was referring to the same group which Frantz Fanon had singled out as the only revolutionary force in the continent: the lumpen proletariat. Fanon's analysis ran counter to orthodox Marxists who had nothing but contempt for lumpens — an idea which stems directly from Marx's obsession with proletarian consciousness and revolution (Fanon 1961). This line of inquiry was pursued by some British-based Africanists in the 1970s. They argued that the lumpen proletariat is incapable of taking political action on its own because it always ends up fighting the battles of others in the political realm (Cohen and Michael 1973).

But the so-called second independence struggles tell a different story, at least in the Sierra Leonean context. The Revolutionary United Front is not only a product of lumpen culture but its membership is also lumpen. It took political action and proclaimed a 'revolution' which reflect the true character of its lumpen base. The movement does not possess the revolutionary drive nor the maturity to undertake a concrete analysis of the situation, which comes with a revolutionary project. It has no revolutionary intellectuals and the radical students who originally spearheaded the call to arms are not involved in the project. Lacking an alternative source of arms (the Soviet Union is no more), it had to depend on exploiting the resources available in its area of operation to pursue its 'revolution'. Its failure to win the sympathy of the very people it claims to be fighting for compelled it to recruit its army from lumpens and juveniles, two vulnerable groups to whom their bush path to destruction appeared more appealing. It is this lack of a clear-cut programme, the wanton use of violence for violence sake, and the absence of a well-articulated ideology, which disqualifies some of these second independence movements as a vehicle for progressive change in Africa.

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The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency*

Patrick K. Muana**

Introduction

On 23 March 1991, a group of armed combatants attacked and subsequently occupied the remote border town of Bomaru in Kailahun District. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL) led by a cashiered corporal, Foday Saybana Sankoh, then declared its intention to overthrow the centralised, corrupt, and repressive All People's Congress (APC), and revamp the economy by wresting control of the national mineral wealth from foreigners.[1] This armed insurrection soon turned reckless massacre, culminating in the mass displacement of the civilian population, food blockades, disruption of humanitarian supplies and the effective destruction of all income generating sectors of the national economy.

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1 Foday Saybana Sankoh officially declared his intention to invade Sierra Leone in an interview on the BBC Focus on Africa programme.

* Most of the information contained in this paper was obtained from individuals whose identities cannot be compromised for security reasons. These include Kamajoi leaders, commanders, and rank and file, former RUF combatants, Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) personnel, Sierra Leone Police personnel, Chiefs, Elders, Members of the local defence committees, staff of non-governmental organisations involved in humanitarian relief work, internally displaced civilians, senior government officials, and former government officials. I would like to thank Professor Paul Richards, Department of Anthropology, University College, London, and Dr. Ibrahim Abdullah, Department of History, University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

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As insurgency became mass murder and starvation, counter-insurgency degenerated into wanton pillaging and murder. Large ungovernable swaths of the country were controlled, exploited, and fought over on the one hand by rebels who proffered pseudo-revolutionary scruples, and on the other hand by undisciplined soldiers who enriched themselves by looting with zealous intent. With the seeming breakdown of the national army, squalid refugee camps situated around the safe urban enclaves of Bo, Kenema and Makeni which had been inundated by Internally Displaced Civilians (IDPs), organised self-defence militias. These self-defence militias became the counter-insurgency forces.

The most important of these militias, which has been deployed in all the contested conflict zones, is the Kamajoi militia.[2] This paper examines the failure of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to maintain mass civilian support for the movement, the formation of the Kamajoi militia, its controversial status as a parallel defence institution, and issues surrounding its future role in nascent democratic politics.

Youth Culture and Insurgent Military-Civilian Relations

The immediate origins of the RUF can be explained in terms of the interaction between campus-based radicalism and violent youth activism. Alie Sanjhan Kabba's 'revolutionary philosophy' of 'We-ism' at Fourah Bay College had sought not only to establish a 'sane enclave' of new politics through mass activism but to make students active participants in the process of change at the university and national level. The deteriorating relations between students and college administrators led to a campus-wide protest in 1985. The expulsion of students and the dismissal of three faculty on charges of participation in subversive politics opened the road to insurrectionary politics.[3] Libyan agents facilitated Alie Kabba's exit from the country to Ghana from where he maintained close contacts with Libyan embassy agents

2 'Kamajoi' is a Mende word that has been defined in the media as hunter. The word itself comprises two components: Kama and Joi. 'Kama' is usually used in an adjectival position as in Kama kama hinda: 'something mysterious'. 'Joi' is the clipped form of the word sowei meaning a 'past master, an expert'. With consonant mutation in southern and southwestern Mende dialects, 's' is mutated in intervocalic positions to 'J'. With some words in the eastern dialects however, there is no mutation. This explains why the word is 'Kamajoi' in those southern and southwestern dialects and 'Kamasoi' in the eastern dialects. Kamajoi or Kamasoi literally means 'a past master at doing mysterious things'.

3 See Ishmail Rashid and Ibrahim Abdullah in this volume.

or 'People's Bureau' officials, and recruited youth from 'radical' study cells and *potes* into what he has euphemistically called a 'self-defence cadre' for the citizens of Sierra Leone.[4] Youth activists from urban based 'study cells' were recruited to undergo military and ideological training in Benghazi, Libya. After striking a tactical military alliance with Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), this group launched the RUF insurrection in 1991.

The urban disenchanted youth who formed the bulk of the original invading force have always been significantly removed from the civilian population. Their aberrant recreational pursuit of smoking marijuana and their disregard for traditional authority structures made them appear as 'social deviants' to others in the community. Conceptions of marijuana as a drug that induces clinical delusion and anti-social behaviour persist in the country. The less educated of these unemployed youth had been intermittently unleashed on the civilian population as the youth wing of the repressive APC. The violent and often fraudulent activities of the *rarray man* is social anathema. A prejudiced Sierra Leonean populace was unlikely to heed calls from this sub-group of perceived social drop-outs and malcontents for a 'foreign act' of bloodshed and mass pillage as a way of changing their own lives.

Such behaviour partly explains the failure of the RUF to mobilise the civilian population. The appalling atrocities committed by this so called 'cadre of self-defence fighters' only galvanised the civilian population into counter-insurgency. The humane front of the RUF which involved lavishing looted goods on the captive population was soon defaced by public executions, rape, public beatings, forced labour and crass disregard for traditional norms of social propriety that had existed in that region. The beheading of traders in Koindu and other local notables in the border districts, and the public humiliation and execution of authority figures like chiefs and Imams did not reinforce the revolutionary message of the RUF that it had ostensibly launched the insurrection to overthrow the APC government.

The Liberian Special Forces (from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia), whose brief was to spearhead the RUF insurrection and establish training bases deep inside Sierra Leone, brought over ethnic grievances unique to the Liberian civil war. The public executions of Mandingo and Fula traders made the APC government's propaganda about the foreigners of the 'incursion'

4 Personal communication. With the atrocities committed by the RUF against civilians, the term 'self-defence cadre' smacks of sadistic hypocrisy.

more credible to the majority of Sierra Leoneans. Their acts of pillage and rape were endorsed by Foday Sankoh as necessary courtesy to their NPFL commando allies who were central to the RUF programme for the total liberation of Sierra Leone. Their position became untenable only when they unleashed their wrath on a group of captive 'medicine men' who they accused of not preparing genuine bullet proof jackets for them (iron jackets). The summary execution of most of these 'medicine men' and the subsequent execution of some of the indigenous Sierra Leonean recruits led to the withdrawal of a large section of the Liberian contingent.

But the actions of the RUF remained unchanged even after their NPFL allies were supposedly withdrawn. Civilian captives were forcibly worked as carriers and virtual slaves on pain of death. Their movements were restricted and every move from one town to another had to be authorised by a Town Clerk. Errant civilians were publicly tied and beaten — *tabay* and *halaka*. Civilians were also deprived of scarce food resources and the saying that 'the civilian has no blood' was common currency in RUF combat ranks.[5] In RUF-controlled enclaves local 'town commanders' comprising the unruly youth in the villages — *njiahungbia ngonga* — were handed a carte blanche to enforce their understanding of discipline and compliance. Local vendettas were exacted by public beatings, killings, and wanton pillage. Certainly, the dissonance between RUF 'ideology' and 'humanitarian' record was no incentive for target populations to embrace the RUF cause. Government propaganda played on these fears. An act of changing civilian lives that involved summary executions, rape, forced labour, pillaging of their possessions, burning of their houses, and depriving them of food served more to alienate the civilian population from the RUF combatants. Although the APC government was widely detested, the RUF was unlikely to overthrow it by a popular nationwide uprising. The coup d'état in 1992 and its promise of a democratic dispensation initially took the moral initiative from the RUF cause. The large scale offensive in late 1992 and early 1993 led to a recapture of RUF occupied territory in the Kailahun and Pujehun Districts.

The RUF recovered from this large scale offensive launched by a newly recruited and equipped army and embarked upon what they termed as the second and third phases of their struggle. The movement devised a two-pronged strategy to revamp its image both at home and abroad. At the national level, it played on the increasing evidence of indiscipline and

5 This saying devalues civilian life; it justifies starvation of civilian captives.

mismanagement of the expanded army. It must be noted that the NPRC government had recruited mainly urban unemployed youth to augment the dearth of manpower to resist and crush the rebellion. Like their colleagues in the RUF, these new recruits could not resist the temptation to appropriate the properties of civilians fleeing the fighting and to harvest cash crops and work alluvial diamond mines. Professionalism became mired in incompetence. This same group of unemployed urban youth was impelled by the same impulse of self-enrichment that had motivated them to participate in violent urban activism. The much detested 'desensitisation' of RUF fighters by the administration of marijuana, amphetamines, and *kumijara* also became common practice in an erstwhile professional force that also added crack cocaine and morphine to the concoctions.[6]

Soldiers looted, raped, ambushed civilian traffic and even raided towns far behind the front-line. The RUF played on this increasing indiscipline by launching a new hearts and minds campaign pointing out that the soldiers were responsible for atrocities against civilians. RUF units wore captured military fatigues in bloody raids on civilian settlements and deliberately littered the site of the raids with military identification tags. This campaign was so effective that no difference could be made between the RUF and renegade soldiers that the civilians referred to as 'sobels' — soldiers in large civilian settlements and potential rebels outside those areas. Long range patrols by the RUF, hit and run raids, and abductions deep behind government lines only validated the RUF campaign that soldiers were fighting against themselves and exacting appalling atrocities on civilians. The army was demoralised and it was not uncommon for soldiers to abandon their positions at will as rumours of conspiracy between their officers and the RUF made the rounds.

With the loss of faith in the army, a traditional hunter guild from the Koranko dominated Koinadugu District called the Tamaboro was formed. It played a significant role in the 1993 offensive against RUF forces in Kailahun District. But the movement was effectively destroyed when its headquarters at Kabala was attacked and its leader killed. That the Tamaboro group was not significantly influential in the south and east of the country was because it lacked real traditional support from the displaced civilians. The ethnic and cultural differences between the Tamaboro and the displaced predominantly

6 Kumijara is a local herb that is a potent intoxicant when boiled. Crack cocaine is known in military circles as 'brown brown'.

Mende population meant that active participation in the counter-insurgency force could not be facilitated.

Meanwhile, the moral ambivalence of the RUF hearts and minds campaign further alienated civilian support. The RUF's revolutionary objective changed from an overthrow of the APC to a call for democracy against a hapless military junta that controlled not more than a few urban enclaves. This was given resonance in the international media by the widely publicised abduction and release of foreign nuns and volunteer expatriate workers in 1994. Humanitarian relief and food convoys were attacked and burnt down with the intention of reinforcing the RUF's message of the government's incompetence to provide security for its own people and the need for the junta to submit to the call for democracy. The RUF even threatened to shoot down Medecins Sans Frontieres' aircraft airlifting food supplies into Kenema and Bo where hundreds of displaced civilians were dying everyday. Their plan for the subjugation of the civilian population through terror and demoralisation by starving those civilians holed up in urban areas backfired. The RUF had again misjudged the civilian disposition to their movement. The RUF image as a contemptible force of bloody killers who raped, pillaged at will, and abducted civilian captives for use as slave labour had not been reformed in the least.

The increase in the size of the army had also compromised professionalism with the result that some of their own troops either defected to the RUF or operated as autonomous bands of renegades protecting only areas of economic interest to themselves. Civilian resentment for this ineffectual army of deserters and looters was as intense as it was for the RUF fighters, notwithstanding the several attempts by the junta to change the leadership and management of the force. The starving and displaced population was convinced that the notion of national defence and governance had collapsed and this consequently galvanised them into effective resistance of both the RUF and the undisciplined national army.

The Politics of Internal Displacement : The Making of the Militia

If the RUF's offensive and propaganda had demoralised the army and consequently led to a collapse of central authority, it had failed to break the hold of traditional chiefs on the civilian population. The RUF's rural administration through unregenerate town commanders and its treatment of captive populations had been no incentive for the civilians to stay in RUF-controlled territory. The large scale displacement of civilians to urban settlements meant that the powers of the traditional chiefs were maintained. This power was reinforced by the politics of relief distribution. Humanitarian agencies relied on the co-operation of chiefs not only to maintain lists of

civilians from their chiefdoms but also to communicate donor policy and assist in the occasional monitoring and verification exercises. Raids on a refugee camp at Gondama only reinforced the image of the RUF as wanton killers. Attempts to take Bo and Kenema in December 1994 met with stiff resistance from the civilian population who stormed their attackers with shotguns, machetes and stones. Here and in other areas, traditional chiefs confidently endorsed the formation of self-defence militias to protect displaced civilians.

In this they were encouraged by the precedent set by the late Captain Prince Ben-Hirsch who had recruited and armed local vigilantes to stem the RUF advance in the Segbwema sector as early as 1991-1992. His death in an unlikely ambush was interpreted as a deliberate deterrent to other members of the armed forces and, some contend, a ploy by the APC government to prolong the war and therefore defer the democratic process. Dr. Alpha Lavalie's role with the Tamaboro offensive and the organisation of local vigilante forces was a convincing signal that local defence initiatives more than the tattered national defence mechanism could succeed in ending the war. His political stature was derived from his leadership of the SLPP, which enjoys traditional support among the majority of the displaced population. His cordial relationship with the traditional leaders meant that his local self-defence initiative was very popular and well supported. He deployed displaced *Poro* (male secret society) initiates to act as guardians of their settlements, enforce traditional Mende warfare curfews, and act as a local defence force. He also elicited support from the military junta to procure shotguns and ammunition for these militias. His death in a land mine explosion did not dissuade traditional leaders from replicating the exercise in other large civilian settlements threatened by the RUF and renegade soldiers.

The case of Chief Hinga Norman of Telu Bongor, the incumbent Deputy Minister of Defence, is instructive. A Sandhurst trained ex-military officer, he deployed a local defence militia in his chiefdom headquarters of Telu to resist RUF fighters. Although lightly armed, these local defence militias were effective against the RUF by not only using their knowledge of the local terrain to good advantage but in engaging the small mobile guerrilla units that are the hallmark of RUF battle formation in the second and third phases of the war. The RUF reacted to this stubborn resistance with a bloody attack in late 1994, allegedly decapitating a minimum of 100 inhabitants of the town. Chief Norman evaded the attackers and from the southern provincial headquarters, Bo, he co-ordinated the formation of the Kamajoi militia. The politics of displacement and the need for security aided this development. Chiefs replaced the loss of central authority with a reasonable degree of semi-autonomy. On the military front, they could ensure total allegiance and

commitment of the force under their command and also monitor all military risks of possible defection and infiltration.

The panoply of factors which account for the failure of the RUF to convince the civilian population and the relationship of distrust between the civilians and the army has been delineated. The politics of displacement and the collapse of central authority expedited the formation of local self-defence initiatives by displaced civilians on whom the RUF and the army had unleashed a reign of terror. This coalition of interests was necessitated by their shared predicament and the largely uniform cultural and ethnic identity in the south and east. It was invested with adequate moral legitimacy and it enjoyed universal communal acceptance. The return to multi-party politics and the victory of the SLPP in 1996 emboldened the displaced population to register long suppressed regional sentiments. This happened against rumours that the indifference of the central government to the war was a deliberate conspiratorial ruse to maintain political hegemony over the Mende. Only legislative power could facilitate this and more significantly, only a block vote in the southern and eastern areas could determine the outcome of a democratic multi-party contest in their favour. The traditional leaders therefore ensured the emergence of a political party and president that would support their own defence agenda as much as alter the nature of political hegemony and power distribution in the country. The emergence of the Kamajoi movement was therefore not fortuitous.

The Formation of the Kamajoi Militia

The myth of RUF invincibility had been established in the Sierra Leonean psyche both through its terror campaign and in its defiant successes against government troops and the Tamaboro militia. As in most modern and ancient African conflicts, RUF fighters allegedly indulged in cannibalistic rituals to harden them in battle. This was reinforced by a resident pool of medicine men who manufactured 'iron jackets' and prepared herbal solutions for the protection of RUF fighters. The army was demoralised by persistent reports of RUF commando-style raids deep behind what was supposed to be the front-line, and units were run ragged and ambushed by RUF patrols. The RUF took advantage of this massive disarray to launch its biggest offensive of the war that brought its units within 30 miles of the capital. For a counter-insurgency force to succeed, this myth of RUF invincibility had to be challenged by an even greater myth with the requisite psychological force to restore confidence in the displaced population. The revival of the mythic qualities of the Kamajoi hunter guild with similar accoutrements of war and magical powers of divination was therefore urgent.

This aspect of the Kamajor militia meshes neatly with other civilian based counter-insurgency militias in Africa. For instance, the myth of the invincibility of RENAMO fighters had been established not by reference to the copious military assistance from the Rhodesian and apartheid South African armies but by its reign of terror and its claim that its fighters were protected by ancestral spirits. Like the RUF, conscripts were forcefully committed to their ranks through a process of inductive violence — the committal of a witnessed public act of violence. Effective counter-insurgency came by way of the establishment of an even greater myth in the person of Manual Antonio who claimed to have died as a child and had been resurrected to conscript a counter-insurgency force to fight the RENAMO rebellion. His Naparama militia recruited mainly local *deslocados* who were tired of RENAMO terror and the scorched earth offensive occasionally undertaken by the FRELIMO. As with the Kamajoi militia, these *deslocados* had a shared ethnic identity — most of them, including Manual Antonio, belonged to the Macua ethnic group which dominates Zambezia province. The Naparama challenged RENAMO's reliance on ancestral protection with a potent concoction of magic, *Barama*, which not only neutralised the opposition's magic but made their weapons of war useless against the spears, bows and arrows with which most of the militia were armed. The nature of this magic of invincibility is such that the military victories reinforced communal support and acceptance so crucial in ensuring voluntary conscription and demoralisation of the opposition's forces (*Africa Confidential* 1991). It is worth exploring how African wars have been fought at this psychological level through traditional magic and assistance of the spiritual world. For psychological supremacy to be achieved, the counter-insurgency force has to be invested with a superior myth. It also has to command a reasonable level of success and moral legitimacy to be assured of a reserve force of volunteers.

To situate the Kamajoi in historical and socio-cultural context is to discuss the centrality of the guild in narratives about Mende origin, settlement patterns, and cosmology. Mende verbal art, from oral historical narratives to folk tales, is redolent with references to the Kamajoi. Reverence is accorded this guild of largely reclusive professionals that has persisted in all oral historical narratives about the Mende.[7] Their inexplicable feats; their intimate

7 Patrick Muana, 'Mende Verbal Art', Ph.D. Dissertation, 1997; University of Sheffield, England.

knowledge of the terrain, medicinal and edible flora and fauna; relentless spirit, and indomitable courage are not only ideal qualities of manhood in Mende culture but have also underlined and reinforced the mysticism and near reverence that has characterised this institution. Membership of the guild is strictly masculine and potential candidates are rigorously selected by past masters who judge a candidate's suitability with the intervention and assistance of supernatural powers. As with all 'reclusive' professions, their esoteric knowledge is transmitted and attained through a prolonged process of apprenticeship and initiation, and maintained only by strict observance of the taboos and proscriptions that govern membership of the guild.

The centrality of the Kamajoi guild in narratives about the establishment of Mende settlements and in the defence and administration of those settlements is the single key legitimising factor. Endowed with powers of divination, invincibility, and omnipotence, the Kamajoi embarks on a symbolic quest into the unknown. Alone or accompanied by a reputable 'medicine man', he travels to distant lands, conquers either man or nature and starts off a settlement. The conquest of nature is symbolically achieved in the killing of the king of the beasts — either the leopard or the elephant. Little wonder, therefore, that the leopard coat as symbolically used for decorating the most important incarnation of Mende spirits — the gbeni — and the elephant tusk (*buwui*) are very central to the institution of Mende chieftaincy and Mende society in general. The blowing of the *buwui,* for instance, to announce the arrival of chiefs is a symbolic restatement of the power of the chief as established by the founding father over man, beast, and nature.[8] The Kamajoi all at once straddles and transcends this tripartite but intertwined Mende cosmological divides of man, forest/beast and spirit. After killing the animal, the Kamajoi, out of benevolence, invites people to build a settlement in the vicinity and partake in the spoils of his adventure. In return for the provision of food and security (by killing the king of beasts and defending them in times of war or attacks by other warriors) the Kamajoi received loyalty and in this way established his power over the settlement, its people, and the surrounding forests.

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8 All hunters must report the killing of a leopard to the chief. While the dead animal is being moved to either the chief's palace or the shrine for initiation into the Poro (Kaamei) the head is veiled with a piece of cloth and all women are expected to bow and cheer in submission as the procession goes along.

A number of issues emerge from the above discussion. There is the intricate relationship between traditional magic, mysticism and Islam. This historical relationship remains unexplored and an investigation may be very informative for understanding aspects of modern Mende religion and society. There is also the issue of community support which is very central to counter-insurgency operations. It is apparent from experiences elsewhere that without the hearts and minds of the people counter-insurgency becomes either an exercise in genocide or voluntary mass suicide. The Kamajoisia can take legitimacy for granted because of a viable and extant traditional pattern of communal loyalty. Although, until the establishment of 'ruling houses' by British colonial administrators, leadership was determined by the warrior who at anytime could guarantee the security of a people in a certain settlement and other settlements inhabited by his military allies, the unwritten contract between the ruler and the ruled in Mende society has not changed significantly (Abraham 1975). It may have been weakened by British indirect rule and centralised APC dictatorship but its role in traditional cultural organisations like the Poro and Wundei has been sustained. The politics of displacement and the NPRC's loss of effective administrative control over large areas of RUF- and RSLMF-occupied territories meant that alternative governing systems that could provide protection, facilitate, and possibly expedite, the resettlement of a displaced and besieged population, were sought. The emergence of a traditional leadership guild naturally filled this vacuum.

But to justify its popularity amongst the internally displaced civilian population, the Kamajoi image had to be reinvented, its activities recontextualised to invest the institution with the moral legitimacy of a self-defence force whose final objective is to bring the war to a conclusion and resettle people back in their villages destroyed by the RUF. The origin of the Kamajoi militia as it is presently constituted, however, remains obscure. Interviews with Kamajoi militia fighters and displaced people in the camps around Bo yielded the following amorphous account:

> Following an RUF attack on a village in the Jong (Jange) Chiefdom, the rebels are reported to have massacred people in the village including a great 'Kamajoi' and medicine man called Kposowai. His brother Kundorwai, is said to have been captured by the rebels, forced to carry looted goods and tied ('tabay') securely for the night whilst the rebels pitched camp. As he drifted to sleep in spite of his pains, Kundorwai is said to have had a vision of his brother who had been killed the day before. The ropes fell loose and the elder brother invested him with the authority to take the message to all able-bodied Mende men that the defence of their own lives, homes, wives and children was

> a sacred duty. To assist them in that task, Kposowai is said to have shown Kundorwai a secret concoction of herbs and instructed that a stringent initiation process should precede the 'washing' of the warriors in the herbs. This concoction would make them invincible in battle, impervious to bullets, and endow them with powers of clairvoyance if all taboos were kept. Kundorwai is said to have then slaughtered the RUF rebels, freed the other captives, and trekked several miles to a secret hiding place where he initiated the first set of men (Interviews 1996).

The veracity of this account cannot be ascertained by recourse to empirical interrogation, but the structure of the narrative fits into the pattern of Mende historical and mythical narratives explaining spiritual and physical phenomena. The dominant trope of the dream, the prescription of a mission, and an adherence to a set of rules is vaguely familiar in Mende verbal art (Patrick Muana, 'Mende Verbal Art'). This 'mystical' dimension of the origins of the Kamajoi movement achieves the requisite psychological clout even amongst the opposition's forces. It serves as both propaganda and spiritual weapon against the RUF whose conscript ranks comprise mainly Mende and Kissi youth. The psychological powers of the Kamajoi is known and feared by this group of RUF combatants.

The Kamajoisia are neither peasants nor village dwelling hunters as most uninformed media sources suggest. The pre-war occupation of the Kamajoisia varied from farming and driving to working as casual or seasonal labourers and craftsmen. These fighters are conscripted with the approval and consent of the traditional authority figures, maintained and commanded by officers loyal to those chiefs. This ensures a high level of commitment on their part and an insurance against atrocities on the civilian population on whom they rely for sustenance, legitimacy and support. Conscription is by Chiefdom levies imposed on chiefs and their people. The Chiefdom elders *(ndorblaa)* are responsible for the financial and other responsibilities that are needed to facilitate initiation *(ngiyei)*. More significant is the selection of the conscripts. The prime condition for conscription is to be a Mende of local parentage; good behaviour can be guaranteed by reference to the Chiefdom people and the chief. The prospective conscript must also be a member of one of the traditional societies for cultural induction. Membership of the guild has always been masculine for cultural reasons. Most Kamajoisia interviewed justified the exclusion of women as an expedient strategy against the risks of the secrets of the society being compromised.

Initiation of the conscripts is undertaken by a resident 'medicine man': a *Kamo* who is versed in the Koran and has a very high reputation for interaction with immanent supernatural forces. During initiation, one of the

Kamos claimed, all seven heavens would open up. The conceptual parallels between this process and the administration of *Barama* as in the Mozambican case is revealing. However, the unique relationship between Mende cosmology, Islam and the nature of protective magic is evident in this ritual. From the intricate web of taboos that rein in the activities of the Kamajoisia, an intelligent postulation may be that initiation involves a process of exclusion and tutelage during which they are taught the nature of the magic they are receiving, the taboos and other proscriptions, the procedural steps for implementing that magic, and the expressive and behavioural culture of the guild. Former RUF combatants, former collaborators and infiltrators are said to be weeded out by a supernatural detection system at the initial stages. If all these fail, the infiltrators and people associated with witchcraft will fail the penultimate graduation test, which involves firing at the conscripts with live rounds of ammunition. The graduation ceremony is claimed to be a public event and most IDPs and others in the area can vouch for the veracity of the act, although fewer than none would be guaranteed eye-witnesses. On graduation, the Kamajoisia are armed and deployed in accordance with their native administrative divisions into chiefdoms and sections. With the prescription of a disciplined code of conduct, this recruitment procedure safeguards against infiltration. It also deploys local citizens with intimate knowledge of the terrain on their own turf. More significantly though, it consolidates the power and hold of the traditional Chiefdom authorities who are mainly resident with the civilian IDPs and play a crucial role in the decision making process of the guild.

The Kamajoi command structure is rigidly hierarchical. The head of the whole structure is called the Grand Commander, but the identity of the individual is a matter of secrecy amongst the Kamajoisia. It is thought that he is the founder of the movement and he resides somewhere in the Bonthe District — Bomu liehun. He is represented in different sectors by lieutenants who have been apprenticed to him and who have been granted licence to initiate other Kamajoisia. It is thought that he heads a 'super-council' of Chiefdom and sector representatives. These sector commanders are called 'Chief Kamajoi' and they liaise with the traditional chiefs, initiate, deploy, and command the Kamajoisia in their own sectors. Most are resident in hotels within Bo and Kenema. In consultation with the Chiefdom authorities and at short notice, they can deploy men in areas to be fortified, conduct preliminary trials for former RUF combatants and then refer them, where necessary, to the Chiefdom authorities. They are linked to the Deputy Defence Minister, through the chiefs, who maintain very close but questionable relations with this force. An important rank within the Kamajoi militia is the Kamajoi

Police (KP) who, like the military police of the national army, are entrusted with the duty of enforcing discipline and strict codes of conduct amongst the Kamajoisia. They are usually outstanding Kamajoisia who have excelled in battle and command a lot of respect within the force.

Of importance to the counter-insurgency unit is the Patrol Commander. Usually chosen on the strength of their experience and expertise in battle, they co-ordinate intelligence gathering, select targets, survey the terrain, and act as vanguards for joint Kamajoi/military offensives. The Kamajoisia also have an intricate intelligence network of spies and informants who are either veteran Kamajoi militiamen or usually civilians who live in IDP camps and villages. They announce their presence to uniformed Kamajoisia by a secret network of coded signals. They spy on the Kamajoi militiamen and report back to the chiefs and Chief Kamajoisia. This group of spies regulates the conduct of Kamajoi fighters in combat zones. Some of them are former RUF captives and usually scout enemy territory to either help other civilian captives escape or gather information on the disposition of RUF forces in a certain target area. The procedure for recruitment and monitoring the Kamajoi fighters, therefore, ensures discipline, cohesion and loyalty. There is commitment to serve on the part of the militiamen who are restrained from committing atrocities on civilians or conducting themselves in any unauthorised way. The commitment inherent in this dual security and peace contract between the Kamajoi and the community calls for moral and logistical support from the civilians in return for the total commitment of the fighters in 'liberating' the towns and villages.

The size of the Kamajoi militia has given rise to numerous speculation. Although there does not seem to be a central high command where figures are collated, there is evidence that Kamajoisia are issued with identity cards showing their name, place of origin and photograph. On the basis of a rough estimate of 100 villagers per Chiefdom in the south and east of the country, the figure as at October 1996 could be put at just over 2,500 men. However, this figure has been increasing as a result of the influx of potential recruits in the IDP camps. Recently, recruitment has been based on the township (*taawui*) rather than the larger chiefdom level (*ndiwui*). Volunteers have been encouraged to travel to centres where they are screened by local Defence Committee officials in conjunction with chiefs and other IDP authorities and then passed on to the *Kamos* for initiation. As noted above, the Kamo, who is also a Chief Kamajoi, is the operational commander of that force, and all the fighters are personally loyal to him and the local Defence Committee that facilitates and co-ordinates logistical support. The Kamajoi force has been expanding as the capture of chiefdoms necessitates the initiation of another

force for the outlying areas and adjoining chiefdoms. The volunteers are encouraged by the self-justifying rhetoric that the war is one of survival of the fighters and their kinsmen.

This communal support extends far beyond the ready pool of voluntary conscripts and the provision of strategic intelligence for the Kamajoi fighters. Unlike other counter-insurgency movements, the Kamajoi militia relies mainly on the community for material and logistical support. Most are dressed in a locally woven 'V' neck designed cloth sewn as a sleeveless (*kpakibaa*). This is worn with the big shorts (*mbele gutiiwai*) that reach down to the knees; a design reminiscent of the traditional Kamajoi attire. It must be noted though that poplin and other types of fabric have been used for the uniform although the style is generally identical. A couple of Kamajoisia have been sighted wearing long flowing robes. Depending on the Chiefdom that one is from and the unit one is attached to, the colours of the Kamajo uniform (*maayii*) are the traditional cream and khaki (*joun*), maroon to darkish brown (*kigbi*), and green (*nimii*). The garments are usually spotted (black) almost to resemble a leopard's coat. Caps are made of the same materials. The Kamajoi apparel is bedecked with cowry shells, horns, small mirrors, and talisman in woven notches. Some carry fly whisks and wear jingles on their calves. They wear an assortment of footwear: from plastic sandals to sport shoes.

A major question about logistics that emerges is that of troop transportation, deployment, supply and communication among Kamajoi units. The war in Sierra Leone has been a series of low technology guerrilla engagements. Few major battles were fought for the Daru Military base, the Koidu diamond mines, and the repulsion of the RUF offensive on Freetown. With a network of highly inaccessible roads, the insurgents isolate and destroy military outposts. After the dissolution of the RUF-NPFL military pact, weapons and medicine were procured by ambushing army supplies and raiding hospitals. There is also evidence that RUF traded cash crop produce and diamonds with Guinean traders for 'sardine tins': small arms and ammunition. Using bush paths (bypass) to evade concentrations of government forces, RUF fighters raided villages and towns far behind the government's official front-line. This strategy had the effect of throwing the government troops into disarray. These bush paths were also very important for communication between RUF bases. Although there is evidence that the RUF operated a number of solar-powered radio sets, they relied on an efficient courier system using these bush paths especially when there was a danger that information broadcast to other units on the airwaves could be intercepted by high technology equipment used by Executive Outcomes. Knowledge of this network of bush paths (which was

mastered by local boys conscripted into RUF ranks) was therefore crucial to RUF military success in the second and third phases of the war.

The army of mainly urban unemployed youth who had been domiciled in the cities for most of their lives were at a perpetual disadvantage and in constant danger of running into ambushes. The torrid atmosphere of civilian mistrust for their professional misconduct did not help the situation. The formation of the Kamajoi counter-insurgency force meant that the great tactical advantage enjoyed by the RUF over the army has been lost. The Kamajoisia are local people, some of whom have been hunters and farmers in their chiefdoms with a very intimate knowledge of the local terrain. Some of the Kamajoisia had been civilian captives who had been used by RUF combatants for the portage of loot and therefore have excellent knowledge of routes used by the RUF to evade the army and access their bases. Infiltrators and escaped captives updated this information on the latest location of RUF camps. The Kamajoisia also used these same bypass routes for faster access to their rear bases and towns. Most of the Kamajoi units trek on foot to and from the front-line and important information is relayed by an efficient traditional *tutunjiangamui*.[9] This ensures strict confidentiality and secrecy and highly reduced military risk. Some Kamajoi units have been transported to distant areas by army and public vehicles. In public vehicles they sit at the top of the vehicles because proximity to women and to where women sit is proscribed. However, it must be stressed that the Kamajoisia do not have their own fleet of vehicles and some of their senior commanders justified this with a witty remark that 'the Kamajoi is a fighter, not a driver, so he does not need a car'.

It has been emphasized that the war is one of small guerrilla engagements. The organic fighting unit of the RUF, the commando group is less than normal platoon size and large scale deployments have been few.[10] Air power, such as the bombardment of Pendembu by Nigerian Alpha Jets in 1992, resulted in huge civilian casualties. Howitzers and other high calibre mortars have been effective only in discouraging appreciable RUF reinforcements for major military engagements; they have not been decisive. Armoured Personnel Carriers and Tanks have been confined to army bases because of their

9 This is the spy who acted as courier under cover of darkness in traditional Mende warfare.

10 Information from RUF combatants is that the regular 'commando unit' (which is the raiding party) does not exceed twenty-five men under arms. See *Footpaths to Democracy*, 1995, pp.10-11.

worthlessness in engagements in much of the hinterland. Anti-aircraft guns and heavy calibre machine guns have been used by government forces. The war in Sierra Leone is being fought with small arms: the rocket propelled grenade being the heaviest weapon used in most engagements. The insurgents had the advantage of mobility with their sparse equipment — usually a rifle and a spare magazine or a grenade launcher and some rockets — through the bush paths. This tactical advantage has also been challenged by the Kamajoi who have only small arms and use the same bush paths. They carry small knives (*kpekei*), swords (*kibowei*) and shotguns (*singubaa*: single barrel shotgun). Some carry automatic rifles which they claimed have either been captured from defeated RUF fighters or seized from renegade troops and army deserters.[11] These automatic rifles are mainly AK47 rifles — most with sawn-off stocks — and a couple of them were armed with G3 automatic rifles. RUF fortifications have been softened by mercenary-operated military attack helicopters, and artillery and rocket barrages by the Guinean and Sierra Leonean armies. It is not immediately clear how the Kamajoisia procure ammunition and more weapons for their growing numbers apart from the few captured from RUF combatants or seized from army deserters and renegades. Their complaint that they were still anticipating a long overdue supply of high calibre arms and ammunition from the SLPP government through the Deputy Defence Minister, was public secret among the Kamajoisia in October 1996.

The Militia in Action

The Kamajoisia have registered stunning successes on the battlefield. An initial southwestern sweep saw the demolition of the major RUF training and operations base at the African Development Bank oil palm project in Gambia. This was followed by a slight northern swoop on the diamond mining town of Sumbuya and the seizure of the strategic Bumpeh and Serabu towns which had been crucial deployment areas for RUF attacks on the bauxite and rutile mines in the Moyamba district. From their operational Headquarters in Bo, the Kamajoisia have opened up another front to the north of Bo towards the gold mines of Baomahun which they captured in September 1996 along with the RUF fortified camp at Tungie. Further south and southeast, the RUF had embarked on the American Vietnam-war strategy of building strategic hamlets by burning villages and herding all the civilian captives into a secure and

11 Soldiers and some of their officers interviewed complained that some of their colleagues had been forcibly disarmed by the Kamajoisia especially in the Moyamba and Kenema sectors.

monitored single location. As in the American case, these were effectively concentration camps where civilians were arbitrarily detained, and, in the RUF case, worked to death on communal rice farms.[12]

The capture of Kortumahun was followed in quick succession by the overrunning of Bandawor. Jui Koya, Sendumei, and Menima fell and by mid-October 1996, the Kamajoisia had surrounded the national headquarters of the RUF at their inaccessible Gola forest hideout called the Zogoda. The headquarters were destroyed and hundreds of surviving civilian captives were 'liberated' and taken to Kenema and outlying towns. A final lunge from the southeast led to the capture of the heavily fortified southern RUF base in the Soro Gbema chiefdom in November 1996. To the northeast, the Kamajoisia have consolidated the military hold on Panguma and Tongo and have captured the strategic RUF base at Peyama in late October 1996. By the time the Abidjan Peace Accord was signed on 30 November 1996, the Kamajoisia had deployed in the Manowa-Segbwema-Bunumbu axis to deter RUF advances and cut off the retreat of stragglers into their only remaining operational base in the Kailahun District at Giema. The Kamajoi military successes can be explained in part by the desertion of RUF bases by combatants who lacked the will to confront this counter-insurgency force. Other RUF captives complained about everything from the lack of ammunition to the fear of the supernatural powers of the Kamajoisia as reasons for their easy defeat. Their comrades in arms have fled across the border into western and northwestern Liberia. Humanitarian organisations have reported the arrival of about 3,000 RUF combatants under the command of RUF Major Mark Lamin in ULIMO-K occupied Bopolu in Liberia.

The Abidjan Accord has not led to the cessation of hostilities as expected. IDPs have complained that returning villagers have been maimed by RUF fighters and expressed disquiet about their suffering as displaced persons whilst the despoilers of the land were selling off their cash crops in a cross border trade between the RUF and Guinean traders. The RUF has been trying to isolate its captives and followers from the Kamajoisia and other potential security risks by depopulating villages and insisting that their demobilisation and re-integration should naturally precede a resettlement of civilians. With

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12 Testimonies from captives who survived the ordeal intimate that more people died of starvation whilst working on these propaganda -driven rice farms than were killed by RUF combatants. *Foothpaths to Democracy*, p.12 refers to these rice farms as a triumphant 'communal and private enterprise' and that 'seedlings were supplied free'.

fears that the core of RUF combatants that had escaped the south-southwestern offensives into Liberia may re-group and re-launch a counter-offensive from their remaining Giema base, the Kamajoisia have launched a preemptive offensive into the border Kailahun District. This January offensive has seen the capture of the last remaining RUF base at Giema and the strategic towns of Mendebuima, Giehun, Bandajuma Sinneh, Borborbu, Kailahun (District headquarters), Gbalahun, Dia, Sandiallu and Nyandehun Mambabu. The RUF losses have included high profile members of the leadership such as their overall military commander, Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Tarawallie. The remnants of RUF forces in the Moyamba District around the Bradford-Rotifunk area were surrounded and starved of provisions by the Kamajoisia in spite of an official government White Paper released in January advising RUF to receive food and medicine at specified locations in the country.

In the Tonkolili District, RUF remnants have run amok on a number of occasions on looting sprees to augment their dwindling supplies but remain hedged in by both a military presence to the north and west and a Kamajoi presence to the south. The RUF leadership has complained bitterly in the international news media and has recently questioned the reasons and procedure for the UN's decision to deploy 720 peacekeeping troops in Sierra Leone. They have argued that the decision violates or ignores Articles 8 and 11 of the Abidjan Accord, and have called for a smaller force of 50 to 60 neutral monitors. For a force in danger of incurring the wrath of Kamajoi militia men, the doubts remain whether another phase of the Sierra Leone war is imminent.

The Kamajoi militia remains resolute in its bid to resist and fight the RUF and, for the present, it remains a highly committed, well-motivated and disciplined force. It should be reiterated that a majority of these Kamajoi militia have not only been victims of RUF violence but have lost property and relatives in the bloodbath perpetrated by the RUF. In these cases, the nature of the counter-insurgency war cannot easily be divorced from individual inclinations to exact revenge for personal ills suffered. There is evidence that RUF prisoners of war have been summarily executed once their roles are ascertained either by captives or by supernatural divination through one of the several Kamajoi charms. RUF combatants interviewed revealed that a majority of them would rather flee to a military outpost where they may be sure of staying alive than surrender to the militia.

The Kamajoisia have also clashed with government troops. Military personnel thought to be disloyal or committing acts of civil impropriety have

been beaten and in some cases summarily executed. The Kamajoisia have stepped up action against soldiers who have been looting in the countryside albeit with significant losses on both sides. Soldiers have been executed in Mattru Jong over palm oil that the soldiers had looted, and several Kamajoisia were killed in the ensuing clashes. A tussle over roofing zinc allegedly looted by soldiers at Njala led to the summary execution of 12 Kamajoi militia men in November 1996 after they were stripped of their protective charms. Brutal and bloody clashes took place in Bo around the military bases of the First Brigade Headquarters and the 17th Battalion in the Government Reservation area. The biggest clash was at Kenema in September 1996 where an unspecified number of Kamajoisia and soldiers were killed after Mwalimu Sheriff, a Chief Kamajoi, was tortured and killed by soldiers revenging the death of some of their number. Health workers put the figure of dead at over 80 on both sides. In both cases, the Chief of Defence Staff and cabinet ministers had to intervene to reconcile the fighting forces. The animosity runs deep and there is still so much mistrust between the soldiers and Kamajoisia that some government troops refuse to mount joint patrols and military operations with the Kamajoisia. The Kamajoisia have extended the remit of their duties to threatening perceived RUF collaborators in the NGO sector such as workers of the Red Cross, by pronouncing that their safety cannot be guaranteed in combat zones. These excesses seemed to have been accepted by the government and the community at large as part of the operational brief of the Kamajoisia.

Peace, Insurgency, and Counter-Insurgency

The controversies dogging the Kamajoi militia seem to transcend their operational excesses. The constitution of the Republic of Sierra Leone is unequivocal in investing the armed forces of the Republic with the duty of defending the territorial integrity and the lives and properties of Sierra Leoneans. The army's ordinances clearly state conditions for eligibility to serve in this constituted national force. The constitution proscribes the formation of armed militias within the sovereign Republic of Sierra Leone excepting overwhelming parliamentary consent for such a force and following a clear procedure of due review by the armed forces and services committee, including armed services chiefs, defence staff, and the defence secretary. There is no evidence that this statutory procedure was followed in the formation and deployment of the Kamajoi force. Unless perhaps one justifies the existence of the Kamajoi force as an exceptional force constituted by the people of Sierra Leone in defence of the country's territorial integrity, the militia's status is unconstitutional. The legislature has yet to regularise the

status of the militia as an armed force within the borders of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

What intensifies this constitutional ambiguity about the status of the militia are those uncanny undercurrents of party politics and ethnicity. The Kamajoi militia guaranteed security during voting in February 1996 after the armed forces chief, Brigadier J.O.Y. Turay, announced that the army was pre-occupied with other duties. Fearing that this was a ploy by the army to maintain its hold on the reins of power, the Kamajoisia were deployed in the south and east of the country. They provided security for the electorate in spite of RUF threats of renewed violence. The election results indicate a near hundred per cent vote for the ruling SLPP which the majority Mende ethnic group in the south and east of the country has traditionally supported. The urgency of that region's security needs was apparent in the appointment of a Kamajoi chief, retired Captain Hinga Norman, as de facto Defence Minister. This coupled with the strict ethnic criteria for conscription into the Kamajoi militia provides reason for asking whether the government has prudently tackled the issue of ethnicity that has historically dogged democratic and repressive politics in Sierra Leone since independence.

Kamajoi commanders have deflected the ethnic charge by noting that a majority of the RUF combatants also belong to the Mende ethnic group. This argument may set the Kamajoi apart from the Interamhwe militia of Rwanda. What it does not justify is the unwholesome ethnic composition of the force and whether its armed existence does not pose a threat to inter-ethnic peace in Sierra Leone if it is perceived as a guarantee for Mende domination of politics in the new democratic dispensation. One would argue that whereas a reorganisation of the national army is an urgent task, the strengthening of a regional militia with identifiable but questionable loyalties seems to have been given pride of place.

As with other counter-insurgency forces on the African continent, there is possibility of a danger that it can be manipulated for the same macabre purposes. The Kamajoisia themselves openly express definite political and ethnic loyalties to the SLPP and the force seems to be firmly bonded together by a collective experience of trauma, privation and victimisation both under the APC and with the RUF insurrection. Some even perceive this as a historic opportunity to redress the injustices of partisan development and thuggery suffered under the APC by the Mendes. Kamajoi military success has been rooted not only in their fighting prowess but in the large number of desertions from RUF ranks. Ideological fatigue and a perceived loss of focus in the armed struggle has convinced a number of RUF cadre to surrender.

Government military and logistical support for the Kamajoi militia has been covert although government-hired military advisers in Executive Outcomes closely co-ordinated all the Kamajoi offensives. The President, Ahmed Tejan Kabba, has consistently identified his government's military and peace strategies with the Kamajoi agenda. He threatened to sanction an all out Kamajoi offensive if the RUF did not sign the Abidjan Accord by 1 December 1996 and again justified the recent Kamajoi offensive in the Kailahun district in his Myohaung Day Parade speech on 23 January 1997.

The government is also relying on the power of traditional chiefs in the south and east of the country to whom the Kamajoisia are loyal. As army units are being disarmed, re-organised and confined to barracks, the Kamajoi militia has assumed a prominent role as the major combat force for the government. Although the management of the army has changed and the reported incidents of indiscipline on the decline, the Kamajoisia still remain distrustful of most of the soldiers and not much co-operation has been negotiated between the two fighting forces in the country. This new web of political loyalty is fraught with grave implications. The chiefs have more than a consultative role in national defence and politics. They are guarantors of the electoral success of the SLPP government. It is therefore unlikely that Kamajoi excesses may be investigated and punished. The hope is that the army-Kamajoi clashes can be reduced to a minimum if a country-wide conflagration is to be avoided. The consolidation of the SLPP's administrative hold on central authority through the chiefs, may hinder proceedings for urgent local government reforms that may witness a delimitation of the power of chiefs. The SLPP government is unlikely to alienate the chiefs who can deliver the electorate in the south and east of the country. Besides, alienation could easily culminate in the formation of semi-autonomous warlords and have a destabilising effect in the country.

The government is also unlikely to honour all its statutory obligations under the Abidjan Accord without reference to the goodwill of the Kamajoi commanders and chiefs. There are reports of restlessness amongst the Kamajoi militia men who face an uncertain future whilst RUF combatants are being rewarded with generous resettlement and re-integration packages. This is against popular anger at the scale of destruction of lives and property by the RUF during its six year insurrection in the country. Although the Abidjan Accord calls for the complete cessation of hostilities and a general clause on the demobilisation of all combatants, there are no specific references to what the government's plans are for this expanding force. That the Kamajoisia are an obstacle to the peace process is an observation recently made by the RUF in the wake of the 'unprovoked' Kailahun offensive. With a record of

operational excesses against RUF combatants, it is even more unlikely that RUF combatants would be guaranteed security if they are disarmed and resettled in communities where armed Kamajoisia reside. Most Kamajoisia and IDPs have sworn revenge on RUF combatants for atrocities visited on them and are unlikely to be deterred by government indemnities. The Kamajoisia themselves pose a real security problem for the state. Its ranks of mainly unlettered and unskilled men are expecting generous bonuses from the SLPP government in recognition of its services. A high percentage of them are hoping to settle down in civil life after the war. However, with a damaged economic infrastructure, it is unlikely that the government can provide requisite opportunity and employment structures to absorb them.

There are grave implications for national security if these trained fighters remain unemployed and government undertakings to them remain unfulfilled. A seemingly unjustifiable resettlement policy for IDPs and former combatants may cause real disaffection amongst the ranks of the Kamajoisia. Even when the RUF leadership concedes to general demobilisation, the government may need a security system that can guarantee the safety of the resettled people and improve security in the country. Deep mistrust for the army by the IDPs means that the government may still need the armed presence of the Kamajoi militia. In the event, what will be the fate of demobilised RUF combatants? If the force is reconstituted as an armed national guard, one wonders whether its relationship with the national army will improve. Can its strict ethnic orientation be changed without enervation of its succinct social and cultural specificity? Answers to these outstanding issues can only be speculative. Whatever decision is eventually taken by the government about the management of the Kamajoi militia, there are seamless implications for the democratic dispensation in Sierra Leone.

In spite of all these controversies, the Kamajoi militia remains a significant military force to reckon with. The nature of RUF insurgency and the wanton unprofessional conduct of a bedraggled army, coupled with the politics of internal displacement and ethnic uniformity gave rise to this counter-insurgency force. Unlike guerrilla movements elsewhere, the RUF lost the initiative in the war not only because it failed to mobilise the population but also because it lost control of the terrain to a popular community inspired and supported counter-insurgency force of victims of its atrocities. The controversial status and role of the Kamajoi militia in democratic politics in Sierra Leone has yet to be fully played out. This makes the Kamajoi militia an urgent social and constitutional issue that should be tackled as a matter of national priority.

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War and Transition to Peace: A Study of State Conspiracy in Perpetuating Armed Conflict

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Introduction

When the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) entered Sierra Leone in 1991, Corporal Foday Saybana Sankoh, the RUF leader, said he was waging a 'struggle' against the corrupt and oppressive regime of the All People's Congress (APC) government under President Joseph Saidu Momoh. A year later, Momoh was overthrown by disgruntled young officers from the war front under Capt. V.E.M. Strasser, who formed the government of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). Everyone believed the war would end but it did not. Sankoh said he was continuing his struggle against the NPRC because it was not a legitimate government of the people whom he assured he wished to 'liberate'. For the next four years, the RUF was pitched against the NPRC, or at least this was what the world was made to believe. A critical reading of the events surrounding the war and its continuation would reveal the rather complementary nature of the activities of both the RUF and the NPRC-cum-military.[1]

Thus instead of fighting each other with the arms procured by the resources and taxes of the country, both tended for the most part to avoid each other, and turned against unarmed and defenceless civilians, when in

1 In this paper, NPRC denotes the 'inner core' of soldiers who kept their grips on power and determined the course of state actions, both in government and the Army, thereby engaging the latter in the former, and numbing the distinction between these two arms of state.

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actual fact they were supposed to have been protecting them. Both the RUF and the NPRC were engaged in pillaging the resources of the country, especially diamonds, and both succeeded to a very great extent, by deft subterfuge, to unleash a campaign of disinformation regarding their real intentions. The RUF and the NPRC were opposed to the holding of general elections as a prelude to ushering in the democratic process; they saw elections and peace as separate issues and preferred peace before elections. Above all, the conduct of the war seems in all probability to have been determined more by the NPRC government and less by the RUF. How do we explain the evolution of this extraordinary identity of interests between the RUF and the NPRC and the dominant role of the NPRC in determining the course of the war?

After a year in power, the NPRC began to entertain delusions of continuing to stay in power indefinitely, obviously taking a cue from the Rawlings's example in Ghana. Everything the NPRC did would appear to have been subordinated to this ambition of staying on in power-state governance, prosecution of the war, and other matters of public affairs. In the pursuit of this objective, the government failed in its duties, encouraged the continuation of the war, destroyed and/or displaced those it was supposed to protect, caused the state to wither, and shattered an already declining economy, until the people rose up at the first opportunity, to put an end to these brutish acts. The duplicity of their actions was obvious to the people who were thoroughly disgusted.

From Conflict to Collaboration

When the RUF captured Bomaru in Kailahun District in April 1991, it said it had come to 'liberate' the people from the 'corruption of the APC'. The army was in bad shape and 'were really caught with our pants down', the then Army Commander revealed in an interview (*West Africa* 1995). This enabled the RUF to advance quickly until, with the assistance of Guinean troops, the rebels were pushed back to the border area where they started. The nature of the savage RUF terror campaign has been widely reported and documented.[2]

In April 1992, disgruntled officers from the war front who came to Freetown ostensibly to protest poor salaries and conditions of service, ended up overthrowing the APC government, and formed a military government styled the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). It has been widely

2 See Amnesty International Reports.

suggested that there was a secret 'collaboration agreement' between the RUF and the NPRC, but the young military officers, elated at the easy manner of their success, ignored the RUF, which remained quietly at base. The RUF itself confirmed this informal agreement, and saw the action of the NPRC as a breach of confidence, more especially because it attributes the origins of the NPRC to the political education that was provided by the RUF (Revolutionary United Front 1995:25-29). The NPRC was indifferent to negotiating peace and determined to resolve the problem by an outright military victory, and stuck to this position for the next two and half years. During this period, the army grew five times in size and pressure was put on rebel positions. Then in mid-1992, disappointed and desperate, the RUF took the offensive and over-ran the diamondiferous Kono District, recapturing some of its original positions in the process. The government continued to press the RUF and in April 1993, captured their 'capital', Pendembu.

Although it seemed as if the end of the war was in sight, the involvement of the army on a large scale in Kono probably brought a change for the worse in the official prosecution of the war. Diamonds were introduced into the war equation. 'Thereafter both parties to the conflict alternated military operations with alluvial diamond mining activities' (Richards 1996b). While the senior military officials were busy helping themselves to the resources of the state, the less privileged soldiers felt resentment and found ways of helping themselves as well. This was partly responsible for the rise of the *sobel* phenomenon, i.e. government soldiers by day becoming rebels by night, and law abiding citizens by day transforming themselves into rebels under the cover of darkness and committing atrocities. As the war continued, *sobels* operated in broad daylight posing a major security problem for those in the war-affected areas (*West Africa* 1995:24-30). The army hierarchy was never happy at any accusations the press levied against *sobels*.

What the public and most serious commentators believed to have been happening is this: the senior NPRC officials (civilians and soldiers), busy enriching themselves, could not satisfy the wants of ragamuffins they had put under arms, and so turned a blind eye to the misdeeds of the *sobels*. The *sobels* attacked towns under the guise of rebels and looted property; they could 'sell-game' — government forces withdraw from a town, leaving arms and ammunition for the rebels behind them. 'The rebels pick up the arms and extract loot... and then themselves retreat. At this point, the government forces reoccupy the town and engage in their own looting, usually of property (which the rebels find hard to dispose of), as well as engaging in illegal mining' (Keen 1995). With this kind of collaboration, the government soldiers shared an interest not only in looting to enrich themselves, but in creating the

(false) impression that the rebels were a formidable enemy. This way, the war would keep going to the benefit of both the NPRC and the RUF. The RUF itself has confirmed that NPRC troops run away and leave behind quantity of weapons and ammunition (Revolutionary United Front 1995:13). Foday Sankoh told the press several times that a vital source of obtaining arms was from the NPRC troops.

Government soldiers could use rebel tactics pure and simple, or reach an accommodation with the RUF, exchanging arms and uniforms for cash or diamonds. 'Sometimes, the method was to drive a supply truck into a pre-arranged ambush and abandon it' (Richards 1996a). Thus the RUF could rearm and continue fighting. Because of this modus operandi, government announcement of the capture of the myriad 'rebel bases' never led to an abatement of the war. The government clearly knew what was happening, and condoned it. To cover this up, a few 'rebel suspects' were usually incarcerated. The most glaring of government troops which attacked civilian targets were usually brought to trial on charges of aiding the enemy, in order to deceive the world. While government admitted the role of its troops in looting, it down-played the magnitude and significance, usually assuring the nation that the 'situation is firmly under control' and yet the war kept spreading (*West Africa* 1994).

The situation was further compounded by the probable multiplicity of 'rebel groups' involved in the war — about half a dozen or more (*West Africa* 1995). Apart from the RUF, these included not only bandits who saw an opportunity presented by the anarchy to acquire some wealth for themselves, but also disgruntled soldiers, with various loyalties and motives, e.g., those recruited into the Army by political means and were die-hard supporters of the APC; troops loyal to individual senior army officers who were not happy at the NPRC sweeping the carpet from under their feet; supporters of dismissed senior officers; or those fearing that the war was ending and wanted to acquire as much as they could before the game was over. All of these joined the war, and helped to create the impression that the RUF was very powerful.

But in actual fact, relative to the ambitious scale of its planned operations, the RUF was resource-poor. Hostage taking in 1995 was meant partly to bargain for 'logistics' — weapons, and in the case of the seven Catholic nuns, medicines, a generator and satellite telephone (*West Africa* 1995). The RUF were able 'to project an image of great power' due to high levels of organisational efficiency, but which in itself was meant to compensate for resource-poverty (Richards 1996a:8). Thus the RUF alone is not to blame for

'the continuing destruction of our country... the rebels have many different faces... there are rebels among us (soldiers), there are mercenaries among us, some of them our own people. The problem is not the RUF alone' (Conteh 1995). This was the honest view of someone who had been a commander of the army for a period during the war.

As early as the end of 1993, the NPRC was in a position to crush the RUF as it had promised the people. This has been abundantly confirmed by another ex-Army Chief, Brigadier J.O.Y. Turay, who saw service as Brigade Commander in the war. He attests that 'the war would have been history since 1993, but for the fateful command and orders of my then Commander-in-Chief, Captain Strasser' (*The Echo* 1996). The RUF rather shamefacedly admits this because there is no way to deny it. 'By late 1993, we had been forced to beat a hasty retreat... we were pushed to the border with Liberia. Frankly, we were beaten and were on the run...' (Revolutionary United Front 1995:10-11). But somewhere along the line, the young military officers had been awakened to 'the love of money', the proverbial 'root of all evil' and it dawned on them that if the war ended, the democratisation process must follow, and they would be out of power, and therefore lose the opportunity to enrich themselves. The new strategy then was to allow the RUF a hiatus to regroup if they were hard-pressed, and thereafter re-launch, and/or by encouraging *sobels* to go on vicious rampages after the fashion of the RUF. In this way, the war would keep going; the NPRC would continue to stay in power; and the officers would continue enriching themselves; or at least, so the NPRC might have thought. Consequently, the NPRC had to accommodate the RUF.

This turning-point could be traced to quite early in the regime's life. It has been reported that Strasser's troops, engaged in mining diamonds in Kono in mid-1992, were unmindful of the RUF, who surprised them and captured Kono (Reno 1995:175). Perhaps more dramatic was the re-emergence of Serge Muller, an Antwerp-based diamond dealer, who through his agent, Mahmud Khadi, had been given the contract of marketing Sierra Leone's diamonds by President Momoh, and both of whom had fled when the APC was overthrown, and the NPRC took over. Muller is reported to have admitted undervaluing the country's diamonds at the instance of Khadi. Khadi was later found to have embezzled state funds and was ordered by the Marcus-Jones Commission of Enquiry to pay back to government about £1.5 million. It was believed that this action would have sealed the fate of Muller's involvement in the country, especially as the NPRC was trumpeting an official moral imperative of 'transparency, accountability, and probity'.

But Muller was to make a bold come back to the astonishment of most people who knew what was happening. In June 1992, a consignment of diamonds was exported to London which included a 73 carat light blue gem. Muller claimed to be the only channel by which to market Sierra Leone's diamonds abroad under the Momoh contract, and took a court injunction against the proposed public sale in London by the Government Gold and Diamond Office (GGDO). The consignment of diamonds was brought back to Sierra Leone by GGDO, but the public was not informed of what happened thereafter. But by the end of the year, Muller was back in Sierra Leone and was entertained at the highest level, and on his return to Antwerp in his private jet, went along with two high-ranking NPRC officials. A civilian cabinet minister in Strasser's government protested to Strasser about playing ball with Muller because, according to the disclosures at the Marcus-Jones Commission of Enquiry (Sierra Leone Government 1993), the government of Sierra Leone should not have had anything to do with the likes of Muller. He was politely listened to, but the new deal the NPRC was about to strike with Muller for the country's diamonds went ahead.[3]

Few months after this, one of the great mysteries of the NPRC regime occurred: Captain Strasser, Head of State, without any official information even to his deputy, stealthily disappeared from the country for over a week. He was later traced to Antwerp, apparently as guest of Muller. A Swedish newspaper reported that Strasser had gone to sell 435 carats of diamonds valued at £43 million! The story was latter carried by a local newspaper — *The New Breed* — whose editor, Julius Spencer, was charged for sedition, libel and false reporting (*The New Breed* 1993).

Towards the end of 1993, the NPRC ruled that anyone who disclosed information leading to the arrest of smugglers would be entitled to 40 per cent of the value of the goods seized. Then in early 1994, a 172 carat diamond was seized in a purported anti-smuggling operation. The public was not told who gave the information leading to the seizure of the gem, but after it was auctioned for $2.8 million, the NPRC Principal Liaison Officer responsible for Mines instructed the GGDO to pay 40 per cent of the amount to one of his colleagues! Clearly, diamonds, as one obvious way of getting rich quickly, had been so impressed in the minds of the NPRC that nearly every major decision they took was subordinated to the desire to get rich at

3 Editor's note: The author, Arthur Abraham, was Secretary of State for Education, a cabinet post, in the NPRC government of Valentine Strasser.

any cost — and in this case, the price paid by the country for the avarice of the NPRC will take time to be fully assessed.

In April, the army recaptured Pendembu which had been used as Sankoh's 'capital'. The speed and determination of the army to recapture this vital town signalled the end of the war. Strasser himself echoed this national expectation, when during his first anniversary speech he stated that 'the conclusion of this brutal and savage war is in sight' (*West Africa* 1993). But in actual fact, no significant progress was made to recapture the district capital of Kailahun, only seventeen miles away for the next several months. When Kailahun and Koindu were finally captured at the end of 1993, civilians were not allowed to return there. And then, what was considered a fatal mistake, the 'fateful command' Brig. Turay referred to, was the announcement by Capt. Strasser of a one month unilateral cease-fire and amnesty for the rebels, apparently without any discussion with Brigade Commanders. This allowed the RUF to regroup and counter-attack from Pujehun District early in the new year. Thus, what was for all practical purposes the end of the war, did not materialise, and it sprouted forth in a manner that for the next two years, would instil terror into the hearts of all the civilian population.

Finally, a few imponderables are still worth considering. First, the RUF has been operating in several areas of the country and taking hostages from one end of the country to the other. It is difficult to imagine the RUF moving in small unobtrusive groups when carrying hostages. And yet they have gone on in this fashion officially undetected. Second, it is a well-known fact that Sankoh made his capital at Giema, some ten miles southeast of Kailahun when he was dislodged from Pendembu. But there was continued official silence about Sankoh's headquarters, and throughout the entire war operations, not a single attempt was ever made to assault Giema. This location is close enough to Buedu, which was given by Mrs. Iye Kallon as the seat of Foday Sankoh, after she and three other RUF agents were captured in Conakry on an arms procurement trip (*West Africa* 1996). The government invited the Press to interview each of them on television. However, after two of them — Mrs. Kallon, Public Relations Officer, and Mr. Barrie, diamond valuer for RUF — were interviewed, the interviews were abruptly discontinued. Were they giving out too much information to the public to suspect that indeed between the NPRC and the RUF, there was a lot in common or that they were collaborating?

War Against Civilians

From all accounts, it would appear that this is the only rebel war in Africa which is not an ethnic civil war, but gross human rights abuses are

perpetrated by the armed fighters. In a recent report, Amnesty International stated that 'Government soldiers were responsible for widespread human rights violations, including torture, mutilation and extrajudicial executions.... RUF forces were responsible for gross human rights abuses including torture, hostage-taking and deliberate killing of civilians' (*Expo Times* 1996).

Up to 1993, the RUF was mostly responsible for atrocities committed against the civilian population. The RUF terrorised villagers by committing violence against chiefs, traders, minor officials and persons of influence in the locality, and forcibly recruited and encamped youths for military training. These latter were 'sometimes forced at gun point to take part in atrocities against family members or community leaders. Villagers report being required to witness the terrifying spectacle of public beheadings in which the victim's neck was cut, working from back to front, with a blunt blade. The purpose... youth conscripts could not escape for fear of reprisals' (Richards 1995).

After the accommodation of the RUF by the NPRC in 1993, the *sobel* phenomenon came into existence, and both the government troops and RUF turned against the civilian population. The RUF burnt undefended villages and avoided direct confrontation with government troops. *Sobels* would attack the civilian population and loot their property, but commit atrocities similar to and sometimes worse than those of the rebels in order to shift the blame to the RUF. The majority of towns that were completely razed since 1994 were destroyed in this way. The *sobels* were just replicating at the local level, what their masters were doing at the national level. The ostentatious display of wealth by the NPRC soldier-rulers became a dangerous example, which poorly paid and badly trained troops wanted to emulate. Since the NPRC had no money to pay them adequately, it turned a blind eye to the atrocities they committed in the process of looting civilian property to equally enrich themselves.

West Africa magazine captured the mood correctly when it said 'the real tragedy is that both the NPRC and the RUF appear to be out of touch with the majority of the public. None... puts human suffering high among its priorities.... for some reason (they) do not seem greatly bothered....' (*West Africa* 1995). As for Sankoh, he has been rightly described as 'a man so blinded by the 'rightness' of his vague calls for social justice and his eclectic assortment of ideological influences, that he has become oblivious to the pain his struggle has brought his country' (*New York Times* 1996). It is precisely in response to this situation that civilian defence groups commonly called Kamajoisia have sprung up to do for the people what the NPRC government

abdicated from doing — defend them.[4] In Bo, they confronted the military for control of the town and successfully took charge of it.

Disinformation and Subterfuge

Once the NPRC had set themselves to plundering the resources of the state to enrich themselves, they had to keep the war going in order to stay in power and thus maintain the opportunity to plunder. To cover their real intentions, it was in their interest to confuse the issues as much as possible. The RUF, for propaganda and political purposes, would take credit for what government troops were doing against their own citizens. At the same time this afforded the NPRC an opportunity to pretend to bow to pressure for democratisation, while intensifying the war in order to create a rationale for continuing to stay in power. In this, the NPRC succeeded by an extraordinary degree by disinformation, subterfuge and legerdemain, to deceive everybody including themselves, because in the end, the forces they had let loose by subterfuge went out of control and eventually swallowed them up.

The first thing was to allow or create 'political interference and overlap between the NPRC and the Army' so as to cloud the 'role of the Army beyond recognition'. With little or no professionalism in the Army, 'many of the young military men with their new-found powers have proven unable to perform in government roles for which they are so unsuited and untrained'. This was a 'serious handicap', which threatened to 'render the entire nation ungovernable'. Brigadier Kellie Conteh (1995) was writing like a professional soldier, wishing to divorce the Army from governing, because 'there is a direct link between the political overlap and lack of professional military leadership to the suffering of our people, in terms of looting, displacement from their homes, killing and other atrocities'. Brig. Conteh's worst fear for democratisation was 'the constraint of the civil war which can be used as an excuse for extension of military government' (Conteh 1995). Here, we can see clearly that he was obviously a misfit in the NPRC context, advocating the very opposite of what the NPRC now stood for.

When Pendembu was recaptured in 1993, the story of Sankoh having been shot in the leg but managed to escape was deliberately put out by the government. But for enquiring minds, this was unimaginable because having been shot in the leg, Sankoh would obviously have had to be limping on one leg. As such, what could have stopped government troops from out-running

4 See Patrick Muana in this volume.

him and physically capturing him? Of course, the last thing the NPRC would have wanted was to capture Sankoh. This story which gained currency for over two years, was fuelled by Sankoh's own silence and by 1994, it came to be believed that Sankoh no longer existed. Thus, while the people of Sierra Leone were being deceived by the government that the end of the war was in sight, the NPRC and the RUF continued to plunder the country, the former selling diamonds in Belgium, the latter in Ivory Coast, and yet each side kept blaming the other (*West Africa* 1995).

By the end of 1994, the NPRC which had previously refused to negotiate peace with the RUF, offered to do so for the first time having declared an unconditional cease-fire (*West Africa* 1994). This gave a hiatus to the RUF to regroup, and in the next few months, 'rebel attacks' spread like wild fire hitting every part of the country that had been hitherto immune from attack. Tonkolili and Koinadugu Districts were hit at the end of the year; early in 1995, Njala University College, Sierra Rutile mines, Sieromco mines, (all in Moyamba District), Port Loko and Kambia Districts were all hit and by April, the 'rebels' occupied Songo and Waterloo (only 20 miles from Freetown) and 'threatened' the capital (*West Africa* 1995, *New African* 1995).

By all accounts, the pattern of 'occupation' of all these districts was the same, and the active collaboration of government soldiers is beyond any dispute. For instance, according to Amnesty International, government 'soldiers present in Kambia that day (of the attack) and who should have protected them were nowhere to be seen at the time of the attack' (*New African* 1996).

The same is true of the ambushes on the highways linking Freetown with the provinces. The most celebrated was the attack in August 1995 on a food convoy of 70 vehicles escorted by armoured personnel carriers and one helicopter gunship, in which 30 people were killed and over 20 vehicles destroyed (*West Africa* 1995). The convoy left Freetown in the evening and was made to pass the night at Waterloo, only twenty miles from Freetown. The suspicion was that it was to enable the soldiers to study the contents of the vehicles. Half way towards Bo, the convoy was halted by the soldiers who said they were going to search the area for rebels. The next thing that happened was firing on the convoy.

When Executive Outcomes took over and did a reconnaissance of rebel positions, they launched an onslaught that cost the RUF a quarter of its estimated 2000 fighters. Their leader said 'time is running out' for the RUF (*West Africa* 1995). Indeed rumours circulated widely that the war could be ended by the Executive Outcomes, but that government was putting obstacles

in their way. Thus, time did not run out just then. Both the Gurkhas and Executive Outcomes were not meant to end the war. They were only part of the NPRC game of deception.

In April 1995, Strasser reshuffled his cabinet, apparently to impress the international community that he was committed to the democratisation process. He was trying to reduce the military presence in government, which was explained as a desire to concentrate on the war. There could be no greater hoax. The positions of Super-Ministers who supervised groups of ministries and were styled Principal Liaison Officers, were abolished. But key ministries such as Agriculture and Mines, remained under soldiers, and those who returned to the army, received most unjustifiable promotions and were placed in all the key positions. Deputy Chairman Bio was promoted from Captain to Brigadier and appointed Chief of Defence Staff; Lt. K. Mondeh was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and appointed Director of Operations. The others were all promoted to rank of Lieutenant Colonel and appointed as follows: R. Glover, Director of Logistics and Planning; C. Mbayo, Chief Intelligence Officer; Idriss Kamara, Director of Internal Security and Special Operations; T. Nyumah, General Services Officer for Operations; and Karefa Kargbo, Director of Public Relations. The only odd man out was Kellie Conteh, promoted Brigadier and Chief of Staff, because he was not part of the original coup makers; he was a professional soldier with experience and did not like the involvement of the military in the government of the country. He was replaced in June by Brigadier J.O.Y. Turay, earlier retired, and then re-engaged on contract (*West Africa* 1995). Far from being a genuine step in the transition to civilian rule, these changes reduced the visible military presence in government (though not control), but tightened the grip of the NPRC on the army.

Strasser's message on the 30th independence anniversary was very interesting. To the astonishment of the whole nation, he announced a lifting of the ban on politics; the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC) set up since January 1994, was to call a conference to discuss the electoral process; a national commission for reconciliation was to be established; elections were to be held at the end of the year, and a civilian president installed in January 1996 (*West Africa* 1995). There was obviously a lot of pressure on the government to speed up the transition to democracy, but in the light of subsequent events, the NPRC was not sincere about these pronouncements. Three months later, political parties could still not function, and legislation to enable elections to go ahead was not passed for another nine months.

At the same time, the RUF said it had over 2000 fighters in Freetown, and threatened to launch an all-out attack on the capital, starting with kidnapping wives and children of government officials. With the spread of the war over the whole country in the preceding few months until it reached the entry point of Freetown — Waterloo — everybody believed that the threat to Freetown was real (*New African* 1995). This 'threat' to Freetown, real as it appeared then, was the supreme example of the success of the campaign of disinformation employed by both the NPRC and the RUF.

The RUF case was being over-stated by the Western press, and the NPRC Minister for Information, Arnold Bishop-Gooding, accused them of being 'a propaganda machine for terrorists... in their determination to destabilise the government and cause misery, death and pain to innocent civilians' (*West Africa* 1995). Strasser was warned by the Western press not to take the threat lightly, as he did not know the strength and determination of the RUF fighting force. Thus, 'instead of crushing the rebels, he finds himself in the embarrassing situation of being crushed by them' (*New African* 1995). The NPRC was 'fighting for its own survival in the teeth of vicious rebel attacks to force the regime from power' (*West Africa* 1995). Strasser must have been smiling to himself as he read these warnings.

There was a direct correlation between the pressure for democratisation and the intensification of the war. The NPRC would apparently bow to pressure and announce measures towards democratisation, but then would create conditions on the war front to render those very measures meaningless — or at least so the NPRC might have thought. The pressure for civilian democratic rule from the international community in 1994 led to the massive war spillage of early 1995 as well as the announcement of various measures for a return to democracy in April — only that with the intensification of the war, no democratic reforms would actually be possible. At the same time, Foday Sankoh would take advantage of the situation and create the impression of being very formidable. The truth is that far from being the besieged victim of the RUF, the NPRC was far more in control of what was happening in the theatre of war than has hitherto been conceded.

Vox Populi: Elections and Peace

During 1995, several organisations were involved in getting the NPRC and the RUF to come to a negotiating table — the UN, the OAU, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and International Alert. As early as May 1995, the Chairman of INEC, Dr. James Jonah, had a radio conversation with Foday Sankoh who threatened to disrupt elections, and ordered Jonah to pack up and leave the country because the RUF was opposed both to the peace talks and

the elections announced for the end of 1995. 'We say democracy and elections will have to wait until we have freed the country', Sankoh said (*West Africa* 1995).

Western observers ridiculed Jonah because he 'thinks that as a UN official, he was able to hold elections in war-torn Cambodia, so he could do the same in Freetown, war or no war' (*New African* 1995). This shows the extent to which the NPRC/RUF disinformation campaign had succeeded in deluding otherwise insightful observers. The paper went on to explain the decision to hold elections as due to Strasser's 'inexperience and fear of the rebels. It might have dawned on him that his troops could not stop the RUF's threatened attack on Freetown .... So, to save his face and that of the government, he had to surrender now than wait to be beaten by the RUF' (*New African* 1995). As we have tried to show, this was a complete misreading of the situation. Strasser and his NPRC had been manipulating situations, and thought they had a card to neutralise the election process. But it was here that he miscalculated most.

Meanwhile, the National Consultative Conference (called Bintumani I) held in August 1995, agreed overwhelmingly to hold presidential and parliamentary elections on 26 February 1996 (*Wanpot* 1996). This must have been a real shock for the NPRC, which made several efforts to botch the democratisation process, but every time, Dr. Jonah deftly outmanoeuvred them. Then, less than two months later, the NPRC announced a coup plot to overthrow the government and stop the on-going democratisation process (*West Africa* 1995). As subsequent events proved, including the trial of the suspects or the lack of it, it was not clear whether this was not one of the subterfuges that the NPRC had become adept at.

The NPRC was running out of cards. It then sponsored the formation of a political party which crystallised into the National Unity Party (NUP), the leadership of which Strasser was interested in, but did not show it clearly or early enough. In December, the Party 'elected' Dr. John Karimu, Strasser's Finance Minister, as NUP leader and presidential candidate. It was widely believed that on a previous occasion Strasser had tried but failed to get Dr. Jonah to agree to reduce the age requirement for presidential candidates down to thirty. Even after the NUP 'election', Strasser did not abandon the wishful thinking of becoming president (*The Echo* 1996, *Concord Times Spectacular* 1996). On 16 January 1996, a palace coup ousted Strasser for 'his attempt to impede the democratic process'. NPRC spokesman, Karefa Kargbo explained that the move was taken because of 'Strasser's blatant attempt to, today, force the NPRC to make some major legislative changes in the electoral laws of

this country and start machinations to ensure that he is installed as the next President, come February 26 (the date for the elections)' (*West Africa* 1996). His deputy, Brig. J.M. Bio, was installed as Chairman.

Meanwhile, in the discussions between the RUF and the OAU in Abidjan in December 1995, an extraordinary statement that took observers by surprise was Sankoh's remark that he was not targeting Strasser and the NPRC, but rather 'corruption which is the ideology of the APC', even though the APC had been out of power for nearly four years. *West Africa* commented that 'in fact the RUF appeared to have been complaining about the APC and its excesses rather than the NPRC' (*West Africa* 1996). Regarding the pending elections, Sankoh said they were the 'best thing' but were being conducted at the 'wrong time'. The RUF position was peace before elections.

For the first time, the identity of interests between the NPRC and the RUF had come out in broad daylight. Kumar Rupesinghe, Secretary-General of International Alert, is surprisingly a victim of the NPRC/RUF system of disinformation and subterfuge. On the democratisation process, he said 'talking to the NPRC, I am fully convinced that they want to hand over power. They are committed to peace and civilian rule. However, they would really like to see peace before they leave power' (*West Africa* 1996). The RUF said the NPRC was not their target, but the APC, and both the NPRC and the RUF wanted peace before elections. Thus, military rule would be prolonged, and collaboration between them continued in order to pillage the country. And the human cost? This was not the concern of either.

When Brigadier Bio took over from Strasser, he said the elections were on course, but then 43 Paramount Chiefs from the Northern province made a petition, and Bio called for a second Bintumani because 'people all over the country appeared to have changed their views on the election'. Bintumani II was duly reconvened on February 12, and unanimously decided in favour of elections going ahead as planned for February 26 (*Wanpot* 1996; *West Africa* 1996). This over-riding popular desire for elections was expressed notwithstanding the intimidating array of weapons displayed along the route to discourage turn-out. The Chief of Defence Staff, Brigadier J.O.Y. Turay, tried to use the security situation alleging that 'due to limited resources, the army can barely guarantee security during the elections'.

The electoral commission went ahead with plans for the elections on 26 February but the NPRC too went ahead with plans for peace talks on 28 February. Despite RUF threats, the elections went on remarkably peacefully with only few incidents, although the military engineered a series of loud explosions in the capital. The presidential run-off elections of March 15 were

even more peaceful. In the peace discussions with the RUF in Abidjan, the RUF agreed to a two-month unconditional cease-fire as a gesture towards ending the conflict (*West Africa* 1996). The new president, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) was sworn in on 29 March, and wasted no time in meeting with the RUF in Abidjan at which Sankoh agreed to an 'indefinite' truce. According to then Minister of Information, Mr. George Banda-Thomas, 'a final peace accord is round the corner' (*West Africa* 1996).

Conclusion

When the NPRC came to power in 1992, it prosecuted the war against the RUF vigorously and nearly brought them to their heels by the end of the year. Then diamonds entered the war equation, and the young soldiers entertained the lust for money. From 1993 onwards, the desire of the NPRC was to stay on in power and enrich themselves. The only way to do this was to collaborate with the RUF. Both turned against the civilian population and continued to plunder the country. Having created an identity of interests, government troops did much of the work for the RUF, spreading the war all over the country and creating the impression that the RUF was very formidable. By skilfully contrived disinformation on both sides, they succeeded in deceiving most observers. The NPRC yielded to international pressure for democratisation without the slightest desire to see it through. The turning point was to allow the people to decide their own fate. The people already knew the role played by the NPRC in the war, and with the record of our troops, there was 'a mountain of bitterness and hate' against the army, which Strasser himself mentioned in the independence day anniversary speech he gave. Once Bintumani I and II had decided unequivocally for elections, nothing again could stop the democratic wheel from turning.

The antagonistic posture of the RUF to the NPRC was more apparent than real, especially since they came to share a common identity of interests since 1993. The parliamentary and presidential elections greatly exposed the weakness of the RUF. Peace talks, which the RUF had opposed ever since, had to get underway once Sankoh perceived that the NPRC was running out of cards. Although slow-going at the moment, the peace talks have to continue because a resumption of conflict is increasingly unlikely. The RUF is war weary, and it is feeling the sense of isolation from neighbouring countries. Of course, there have been rumours of RUF regrouping, with the probable aim of resuming the war (*Expo Times* 1996). But carefully disseminating rumours to frighten people and give the RUF a psychological advantage was one of the early strategies of the RUF. It is probable that this

strategy is being employed again to give the RUF a stronger bargaining position in the current peace process.

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Understanding the Political and Cultural Dynamics of the Sierra Leone War: A Critique of Paul Richards's *Fighting for the Rain Forest*

Yusuf Bangura*

Overview

The closing years of the twentieth century have witnessed a spectacular rise in new modes of armed conflict which challenge standard conceptions of modern warfare. Most wars in the 1990s have been fought within countries rather than, as was hitherto the case, between states; the narratives or doctrines of the major world powers no longer define the ideologies and objectives of warring groups; small, highly mobile weapons, often supplied by illicit private dealers, seem to play a much bigger role than heavy conventional weapons in fuelling wars; combatants deliberately target civilians rather than armed opponents in prosecuting goals; and atrocities are freely committed as part of strategies aimed at publicising political statements. In countries that are rich in natural resources, such as diamonds, gold, timber, agricultural produce, drug-generating plants, and oil, the political goals of wars often interact with the multiple logics of resource appropriation, the drugs trade, the looting of private property, and vandalism. Such complicated outcomes have led many commentators to portray contemporary wars as being basically anarchical.

Paul Richards's book, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, seeks to challenge these conceptions of war as they apply to Sierra Leone — a country that is located in the rain forest region of West Africa, and which boasts of rich mineral resources, forest products, export agricultural commodities and marine resources. Even though Sierra Leone's six years of war has been very

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viciously fought, with highly destructive effects, Richards argues that it has nonetheless been highly rational, rather than random and anarchic. He believes that the military methods of the armed groups have been very effective in achieving their objectives; and that the war should be understood as a 'performance' or political drama or discourse, 'in which techniques of terror compensate for lack of equipment'. He analyses Sierra Leone's war as a crisis of modernity, which has been caused by the failed patrimonial system of the All People's Congress that ruled the country for 24 years.

Richards states that Sierra Leone's youth are part of a modern, trans-Atlantic creolised culture, with a sophisticated understanding of world events and global cultural trends that are shaped by video, film, radio and the print media. He insists that the war is partly fought by the creative use of these media resources. Richards argues that the crisis of patrimonialism has had a devastating effect on schooling, social services, jobs, and national communications infrastructure, which have blighted the hopes of most young people for meaningful life in the cities. Young people have been condemned, instead, to a miserable and insecure life in agricultural farms or as labourers in diamond-digging camps. Richards maintains that the fact that the war is fought in the rain forest, means that it can only be understood by examining traditional conceptions and practices of forest resource management. He believes that the rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), has a firm grasp of these traditions, and has effectively deployed its knowledge of them in prosecuting the war. This movement is said to be led by a group of 'highly educated' excluded intellectuals, many of whom have been living in Liberia as political exiles and economic refugees. They espouse Colonel Gaddafi's Green Book ideology, which is critical of the profit motive, and hold out the prospects for a new egalitarian society.

The book is divided into eight substantive chapters, an introduction, and a concluding chapter on war-peace transitions, which examines the prospects for peace and reconstruction. Reconstruction efforts, Richards states, should focus on local 'citizen action', on 'smart relief' rather than high profile assistance, and on the use of traditional cultural institutions and values — such as the accommodationist values of creolisation, initiation into secret societies, and the moral critique in the discourse on 'cannibalism' — which he believes have helped to stabilise these communities in the past.

Richards's book has many positive things to say about Sierra Leone, and seems genuinely interested in challenging widespread misconceptions of the country's war. His discussion of the dilemmas of youth, especially those located in the distressed regions of the forest, and who operate in an

environment of a shrinking state, opens up opportunities for further useful enquiry. His insights on the historical dynamics that linked the country's forest region to the world market, including the violent and exploitative exchanges that supported such linkages, are useful reminders about the problems which external influences have always posed to the livelihoods and physical security of rain forest communities. The brief sections on Pandebu (the last border village in Eastern Sierra Leone) and 'loose molecules', which deal with the formation of mixed diamond-mining communities in the border region, provide very insightful data and perspectives on the problems of social integration in that region. The information in these sections is based on field work material from a previous study on resources and subsistence strategies in the Gola Forest Reserve.

However, Richards's book is seriously flawed in several important ways. As this is the first book-length study of Sierra Leone's war, it is likely to be widely read by Sierra Leoneans and the public at large. It is important, therefore, to discuss these flaws, if only to ensure that future works on the subject do not repeat them. Firstly, driven by a need to prove that the Sierra Leone war is highly rational, Richards adopts only one logic — the RUF's logic of revolutionary change — to explain the dynamics of the war. The logics of resource exploitation, vandalism and random or barbaric violence are either ignored or not properly interrogated. Instead, the RUF is portrayed as a highly disciplined organisation, which seeks to transform society on the basis of what it says it will do in its published document, *Footpaths to Democracy.* Without any data to back up his claims, Richards concludes that the RUF was formed by a group of 'highly educated', excluded intellectuals who are capable of making rational decisions about their war goals and regulating the behaviour of their battlefield members. He does not investigate the social origins of the RUF cadre, which might have opened up other interpretations to the movement's chronic tendency to inflict blind terror on communities in the countryside. I discuss these complex issues under the first three sections of this review. The first section subjects Richards's rationalist framework to critical scrutiny; the second challenges his characterisation of the RUF as excluded intellectuals; and the third highlights the theoretical shortcomings and practical dangers of his analysis and conclusions about the RUF.

Second, Richards's book is flawed by his uncritical use of the concept of 'the crisis of patrimonialism' to explain the social realities that shaped the conditions for the war. He does not seem to have made any effort to check whether the general argument about an African patrimonial crisis, put forward by many Africanist scholars, fits the Sierra Leone data and reality. His failure to properly analyse the character of the Sierra Leone state means that he is

unable to concretely trace the political processes that made armed conflict and war an option in popular resistance to the authoritarian rule of the All People's Congress. Sections four and five of this review discuss these issues and suggest alternative ways of looking at the crisis and the political dynamics of the war.

Third, although Richards puts a lot of emphasis on the problems of youth, his analysis of youth culture is rather weak, and his conclusions about youth participation in the war are not always reliable: he is prone to hasty conclusions about, or far-fetched connections between, processes and events that have not been properly investigated. He also does not provide a differentiated understanding of Sierra Leone's youths: he is unable to distinguish between the strata of youth that are often called 'lumpens', or 'rarray man dem' in popular discourse, who are believed to be the driving force of the RUF's fighting machine, and other types of youth who, although disadvantaged, remain socially integrated into community and family institutions that guarantee social accountability. Richards uses survey data on the attitudes of non-war youth to make general conclusions about the effects of violent films and drugs on the youth in the RUF whom he has not interviewed. Section six provides a critique of this methodology for analysing youth culture and the conclusions about youth, the RUF, drugs and violence that he draws from his data.

Fourth, although Richards raises interesting issues for debate about war-peace transitions, his recommendations suffer from several basic problems. In his efforts to demonstrate the need to come to terms with local level initiatives, he ignores the point that some local activities, such as the 'attack trade' that he thinks should be privileged over 'high profile relief', have a potential to turn war into a way of life. Richards also demonstrates inadequate grasp of the social integration process that he refers to as 'creolisation' of the Upper Guinea Forest region and its role as a cultural resource for peace. Although he states the need to use traditional secret societies as a peace-building resource, he does not explain how this can be done in ways that will involve the participation of youth he has characterised as 'modernist' in behaviour and aspirations. And his recommendation of 'cannibalism' as an instrument to check patrimonialism is laughable. Since Richards flags the issue of patrimonialism throughout the text as a critical factor that triggered the war, one would have expected a more serious and systematic treatment of this problem than what he has offered his readers. These issues of war-peace transitions are discussed in section seven. I conclude the review with suggestions about ways of reforming the institutions

of state and society that may help the country to break out of the culture and logic of war.

Kaplan Versus Richards: A Case of Double Misconception?

Fighting for the Rain Forest is an elaborate critique of Robert Kaplan's influential article, 'The Coming Anarchy', which was published in the February 1994 edition of the popular American magazine, *The Atlantic Monthly*. Motivated by his previous journalistic reporting of the Balkan crisis, Kaplan sought to interpret the emerging post-Cold War order and warn of its consequences for world civilisation if nothing was done to protect areas that were still relatively free of some of its problems. He tapped into a wider current of Western fears about the dangers posed to social integration and global security by uncontrollable population pressures, environmental degradation, drug abuse, disease, crime and ethnic violence. He used Sierra Leone as an archetypal case to highlight the extent to which the forces for anarchy were already far advanced in some societies, which he thought might even be irreversible. In Sierra Leone, he believed, his key variables of disease, population explosion, environmental pollution, drugs, ethnic rivalry, and age-old African 'superstitious' beliefs have combined to produce several unsavoury outcomes: a bandit-driven war, youthful military rulers who display a shanty-town style of civic behaviour, and an increasingly strong articulation of an embedded African barbarity. In short, in the eyes of Kaplan, anarchy was already a fact of life in Sierra Leone.

Richards correctly questions this superficial reading of Sierra Leone's war and society. He devotes almost half of the book — four chapters — to disprove Kaplan's argument as it relates to population growth, environmental pressures, and media influences. He also highlights the fact, which most analysts of current African wars tend to miss, that the Sierra Leone war is not caused or driven by ethnic rivalry. Richards convincingly shows that Sierra Leone does not suffer from population pressure or an environmental crisis; and that its urban youth holds very modernist views about society and the world, using video, films and other types of media for self-improvement and not, as Kaplan and others believe, passively or as simple-minded copycats. Indeed, Kaplan would be surprised to learn that in the space of two years after the publication of his article, his archetypal anarchic society was successfully able to resist army rule, organise two consecutive national elections under unstable war conditions that ushered in a multi-party system of government; and that the bandit-rebels have signed a peace accord with a popularly elected government. Rather than lurching towards uncontrollable anarchy, what Sierra Leone's society demonstrates is a remarkable capacity

for self-generation, national accommodation, and a resilience to check the chaos that was threatened by a small minority of embittered and marginal war-drugged individuals.

However, despite his forceful and useful critique of the prophecy of the impending anarchy, Richards runs into trouble because of his fixation with Kaplan and his Western audience. In his effort to disprove Kaplan, he introduces a lot more confusion in the 'debate' on barbarism: i.e., by his superficial treatment of traditional values and institutions, his posing of questions that do not allow him to recognise aspects of barbarism that the rebel war has demonstrated, and his 'glorification' or misunderstanding of the violence or atrocities of the RUF. Given the fact that Kaplan did not do any serious research and never lived in the country to understand its history and dynamics, what he said about Sierra Leone could have been dismissed by Richards in one or two pages. Most Sierra Leoneans I know of who have read Kaplan do not take his broad views about the country seriously: they are hardly concerned about Richards's patronising call 'not to be worried about (the) expatriate intellectual misappropriation' of so-called African ideas from their African social contexts, or New Barbarism (p.163). Instead, Richards's fixation with Kaplan prevents him from probing deeply into the real dynamics of the war as they relate to society, politics and the economy. If one eliminates the issues that do not speak directly to the war, the book could actually have been reduced from its current length of about 200 pages to a full-length journal article of 30 or 40 pages.

Richards uses the concept of 'New Barbarism' to construct an alternative reading of the Sierra Leone situation. Where New Barbarism talks of mindless, random, anarchic or irrational violence, Richards posits rationality, organisation, discipline, and calculated visions of social change by a movement that is led by excluded, 'quite highly educated dissident' intellectuals (p.1). In other words, in the rationalist framework of Richards, the RUF is not a bandit group, but an organised movement with a clear political programme for radical social change. Richards's rationalist perspective suffers from three basic errors. Firstly, he does not explain the nature of the old barbarism, which would have helped his readers to assess the validity of the new type. In several locations in the text, Richards gives the impression that there is an authentic old barbarism, but he does not tell us what it is. The New Barbarism thesis becomes a convenient straw on which to weave his very limited material on the war and his more interesting work on the environment to produce a full-length book on the conflict.

Second, by treating all behaviour as rational, even in the most chaotic of conditions, the concept of rationality loses its heuristic value: it becomes difficult to say when a seemingly rational action is in fact irrational, when judged from the stand-point of competing alternatives and the information and resources that may be required to pursue other or more 'rational' outcomes. Every action, it seems, can be explained or justified as rational when seen from the limited standpoint of an actor, even if it can be shown that there are better alternatives to achieving the actors' preferred goal or objective. The cutting-off of hands to prevent adult villagers from voting may be a rational RUF strategy, as Richards insists, but one would have to stretch rationality to its limits to explain the logic behind the decision to subject to the same treatment 9 and 10-year-olds who do not vote.

The third problem relates to the deeply flawed view or assumption that rational actions cannot be barbaric. Simply because one can make rational connections between the RUF's strategy of cutting-off hands and the goal of preventing people from voting does not mean that the method used to achieve the goal of 'no-vote' is not barbaric. Yet, Richards's rationalist method prevents him from properly scrutinising the rational behaviour of the RUF. Haunted by Kaplan, his main preoccupation gets reduced to one goal: to show that RUF atrocities are rational and, therefore, not barbaric. Apartheid, Atlantic slavery, the Interahamwe call that led to the massacre of Tutsis, the Holocaust, Pol Pot's rule in Cambodia, and the cutting-off of Congolese people's hands by Belgian colonial officers, were all very rational responses to problems as perceived by the perpetrators, but they were also barbaric acts of violence against the victims and humanity. The failure to problematise the rationality of the RUF led to a rather poor grasp of the character of the RUF and the nature of its violence.

Mary Douglas's Excluded Intellectuals and the RUF's Violence

Richards's intellectual patron for understanding the RUF and the nature of its violence is Mary Douglas, a social anthropologist who has done general work on institutions, knowledge creation and the behaviour of socially excluded intellectuals. He quotes Douglas liberally in several locations of the book without questioning the relevance of what she has to say for the Sierra Leone situation. Douglas's work forms part of a growing literature on the social determinants of ideas and beliefs as they are articulated in different institutional settings. Excluded intellectuals often hold very abstract ideas and theories of social change, and are sometimes caught between two opposing realities: the pressures of mass equality, which capture the world of the underprivileged; and the social and political hierarchies that serve the rich and

powerful, and blight the hopes of radical intellectuals for purposeful egalitarian change.

Excluded intellectuals develop a discourse that rejects prevailing development orthodoxy, calling instead for radical transformations of society. Faced with arbitrary state power and repression, such intellectuals may become small sectarian groups, consumed by their own visions, texts, discourses and constant re-reading or 'deconstruction' of their societies. Exclusion and abstract intellectualism in the face of powerlessness may expose such groups to destructive violence, which itself may become a text to reinforce social bonds among group members as well as to discredit the legitimacy of the existing order. This reading of radical intellectuals and violence has been well analysed in several academic texts under the rubric of discourse theory. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development also sponsored studies in the early 1990s on eight contemporary revolutionary social movements which have theorised violence as a central aspect of political struggle.

It is significant to note that these types of studies have focused on movements that are led by intellectuals (David Apter calls them 'cosmocrats'), who use violence strategically, and as organised discourse, to open up opportunities for revolutionary social transformations. One important logic of such violence is to delegitimise the state, by forcing it to reveal its inherently violent character to the public when it hits back violently at insurrectionary group members. Although not always successful, such movements often try not to provoke violence to the point where their message gets consumed by the violence, and the movements themselves become alienated from the wider public they seek to liberate. The radical revolutionary skeptics who Douglas and similar authors have in mind are 'educated and privileged' (Richards quoting Douglas, p.xxv), not semi-educated, partially tutored radicals, or individuals straddling the margins of society, who may be prone to random violence or weakly structured responses. Examples of the former are Lenin and the Bolshevik movement in Russia; Mao and the Chinese Communist Party; Che and his Latin American guerrillas; Ayatollah Khomenie and the Iranian mullahs; Cabral and the PAIGC in Guinea Bissau; Machel and Frelimo in Mozambique; and Guzman and the early Sendero Luminoso, or Shining Path movement, in Peru. One could also mention campus-based radical intellectuals who may be cut-off from mainstream national politics. The question is whether the social origins and intellectual content and quality of the RUF fit the Douglas-type model. In other words, how accurate is it to treat Foday Sankoh and his RUF comrades as 'excluded intellectuals'?

A Sierra Leonean historian, Ibrahim Abdullah, has written a very insightful paper entitled 'Bushpaths to Destruction: The Origins and Character of the RUF', in which the first major attempt has been made to understand the origins and social basis of the rebel movement (See Abdullah in this volume). Abdullah interviewed a large number of the key individuals who played active roles in the early formation of the movement. He combined this information with his long-standing work on the social history and culture of the marginal youths of Sierra Leone to offer very compelling insights into the character of the RUF. From Abdullah's account, we learn that the RUF does indeed have some intellectual origins: it emerged from the popular struggles of radical students, a large number of whom were expelled in 1985, following violent student demonstrations; three faculty members who were noted for their radical visions of social change also had their services terminated. A section of these students and one of the expelled lecturers ended up at the University of Legon in Ghana and undertook ideological and military training in Libya with a view to carrying out a social revolution in Sierra Leone.

Foday Sankoh, a retired corporal with limited education, who was imprisoned in the 1970s on an alleged coup plot, was recruited into a sub-group of a radical student-led movement, the Pan-African Union (PANAFU), which had some ties with the Ghana group. A major split occurred within PANAFU on the question of whether or not the movement should support the military training of cadre in Libya to carry out the anticipated Sierra Leone revolution. Sankoh joined the faction in Ghana that was led by ex-student leader and co-ordinator of the Libya operation, Alie Kabba. The Libya group later split up into various tendencies during and after the military training: some, including the leading individual of the group, Kabba, decided to pursue different careers out of Sierra Leone; several of those who returned home opted out of the military project; and Sankoh and a few others set up the RUF to pursue the goals of the revolution. Indeed, despite the split, the ideas and most of the statements in the RUF's main documents that explain its vision of social change were lifted verbatim from a paper which the Ghana radical group had written, and which PANAFU had discussed.

Abdullah's informants state that leading members of the Libya group theorised socially marginal, 'lumpen' individuals as essential elements or 'vanguards' in the strategies for the realisation of the Sierra Leone revolution; and that when PANAFU rejected the armed struggle road, recruitment for the Libya military project became a random exercise — i.e., anybody who expressed interest to go to Libya could do so irrespective of the ideological

status or competence of the individual. Not surprisingly, Abdullah finds that the majority of those who trained in Libya were either from the loosely structured 'lumpen' classes, or those with a troubled educational history. They were certainly not the Mary Douglas types of radical intellectuals who remained on the fringes of the political mainstream, but who could buy their way into the power structure if they so wished. Instead, the hard-core RUF 'intellectuals' is drawn from a stratum of Sierra Leonean society that is hooked on drugs, alcohol and street gambling. They have very limited education and are prone to gangster types of activities — sometimes acting as clients of strong 'men' in society or leading political figures and government officials.

Another Sierra Leonean academic, Patrick Muana, who has done pioneering work on a leading people's militia, the 'Kamajoisia', which has played a major role in checking the military advances of the RUF, confirms the point that most of the field commanders or 'wosus' of the RUF are drawn from a stratum of society that the Mendes refer to as *njiahungbia ngorngeisia* — unruly youth, or social misfits (Muana, this volume). Muana reports that these were 'semi-literate village school drop-outs', who despise traditional values and authority, and welcomed the violence of the RUF as an opportunity to settle local scores and reverse the alienating rural social order in their favour. Even Richards's discussion of the social dynamics and background of youth in the diamond-digging camps of the border region — many of whose youths joined the RUF — suggests that he is dealing with a similar phenomenon of 'lumpen culture' that Abdullah and Muana have described, even though he is unable to make the connection. It is important to note, as we assess the significance of these findings, that lumpens or marginals have been well theorised in Marxist literature as constituting poor material for progressive social change. Indeed, Amilcar Cabral, one of Africa's foremost revolutionary theorists, had warned in his writings on the social conditions of Guinea Bissau that liberation movements should not recruit lumpens for armed activities as they were likely to ignore commands and pursue agendas of vandalism.

It is now widely known that the very few educated individuals, Philip Palmer, Ibrahim Deen-Jalloh, Agnes Deen-Jalloh, Mustapha Alie Bangura and Mohammed Barrie joined or were coerced into the RUF when the war got underway: they played no role in shaping the ideology of the movement. They were captured in battle or abducted in raids, and subsequently converted into RUF fighters, spokespersons or administrators. Given the fact that Richards attaches great significance to the concept of 'excluded intellectuals' in explaining the RUF's violence, efforts should have been made to spell out

who the RUF leaders were, what their history or level of engagement with the movement was, and what kinds of revolutionary discourses informed actual RUF behaviour in the bush.

What we get instead are unverified assertions about the high level of education of the top leadership of the RUF, who are said to number about twenty or more members, and a few quotations from RUF documents, which, surely, were not written by the leading members themselves. Richards provides no evidence to support his claims about the presence of Sierra Leonean radical intellectual exiles in Liberia. There were Sierra Leoneans living on the Liberian side of the border who joined Sankoh to fight alongside Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia, and to form the RUF, but these were not intellectuals. The one individual whom Richards cites, Philip Palmer (p. 26), to support his argument, was said to have been gainfully employed in Liberia before he was overwhelmed by the Liberian war and recruited into the RUF. Those who knew him in his university days at Fourah Bay College say that he was never a member of any radical student movement. And Sankoh, the leader, can hardly pass as a highly educated, excluded intellectual. In short, his movement is not 'incorrigibly didactic', and he does not lead a 'group of embittered pedagogues' (p. 28).

Richards's RUF: The Big Lie?

The failure to problematise the RUF's rationality and use of specific types of violence leads to very serious errors in explaining what the RUF actually does in battle. One is left with the impression that Richards already had formed views about what the RUF ought to be, based on his uncritical appropriation of Douglas's concept of 'excluded intellectuals', and that what he then proceeded to do was to look for evidence that would support his characterisation of the RUF as an organised, disciplined, rational and goal-getting intellectually-driven movement. In chapters one and two, we are told that the RUF destroyed Njala University College as part of a rational plan to 'liberate' other internal 'exiles' or excluded intellectuals. One incident of record burning is enough to demonstrate the rationality of the action since those who did it may have wanted to disguise the fact that they never graduated. The wider issue of why the entire university was vandalised, literally destroyed, and emptied of its property was not a subject for serious analysis.

The attack on the rutile and bauxite mines in which buildings were burned and lots of property looted was rationalised by Richards as an anti-APC move, since the mines provided revenue for that party's patrimonial leaders. The fact that the APC was no longer in office when the attack took place, and that the mines' buildings were not only burned but that large amounts of

property was stolen by the RUF and some soldiers escapes attention in Richards's rationalist analysis. Richards later bemoans the failure of the RUF to convert the mines into 'insurgent' industries as other guerrilla movements have done elsewhere in the world, and questions the destruction of Njala in a context where educational standards are very low. But in the end, he concludes that the RUF's preferred choice of destructive acts should be seen as 'typical academic responses' (p. 27).

Richards also states that the RUF provided alternative bush camp education to the rotten or non-existent formal education in rural areas. Tattered revolutionary texts found in RUF camps are held up as proof of the alternative schooling that the RUF offered to youths whose educational aspirations had been aborted by the APC's failed patrimonial system. However, no effort is made to probe how this type of bush education compared with what many students who were captured in battle could have obtained in the schools which the RUF destroyed. Richards also reports 'neatly planned lines of huts in RUF camps' and interprets this to mean that the RUF seeks to provide 'model housing for all', citing the RUF document, *Footpaths to Democracy*, as proof (p. 54). The question of why the RUF always sets out to destroy or burn down village houses during its operations is never probed. Richards even claims that the RUF only destroys villages that are not defended (p. 55). But the issue of why any people's-oriented revolutionary movement should seek to destroy only 'undefended' villages is left unanswered. Furthermore, Richards tells us that Sankoh himself lacks presidential ambition (p. 55), is above politics, and that he runs the RUF through a collective leadership. This is rationalised as Green Book ideology, which preaches the importance of people's assemblies in decision making. It is indeed, very strange that no effort is made to examine alternative explanations to such claims — such as, for instance, the view that these claims could all be a smokescreen, which conceals a naked ambition for power, money and resources.

The RUF's ultimate aim, Richards asserts, is 'to replace Sierra Leone's patrimonial system with a revolutionary egalitarian system' (p. 59). The redistribution of stolen goods to young recruits of the movement is seen as one indication of the movement's egalitarian beliefs. It may not have occurred to Richards that thieves can also redistribute goods to members and loyal friends and supporters in society; nor does he ponder the kind of rationality that lies behind the decision to forcibly and randomly loot the meagre wealth of poor ordinary villagers in order to create an egalitarian society; or the RUF rationality which says that young villagers should be seized and transformed

into modern slaves, subjected to forced labour on stolen RUF farms, and bullied to provide the material and social needs of RUF combatants.

Indeed, because of the fixation with rationality, Richards evades or glosses over crucial forms of RUF behaviour that would have helped to shed much light on the character of the organisation: the systematic rape of women, which most people know about, is not addressed; the central issue of drug abuse is treated in just one paragraph; the beheading and systematic maiming of victims is hardly discussed; and the problem of random looting of property escapes serious scrutiny. Richards's last line of defence in sticking to his rationalist explanation is to say that the RUF's acts of violence 'may signal desperation, not terror' (p. 25), and that the mass destruction of the countryside seeks to drive home the point that the wider society 'is dangerous and corrupt', and that victims of RUF violence may then realise that there is no home to return to until the final victory of the RUF and the reconstruction of society along the RUF's vision of egalitarian development (p. 30).

Throughout this strange 'post-modernist' reading of the RUF's violence, Richards pays little heed to the voices of ordinary participants and victims of such violence, who keep insisting that the rebels are 'evil people' (p. 147; and p. 92), and 'evil thugs' (p. 149) who 'threatened the people to make them give (up) their property' (p. 91). Such voices are not allowed full rein in the analysis even though they are in line with what most Sierra Leoneans think about the RUF. When a wide, indeed, impenetrable gulf exists between the rhetoric of a movement and the reality of its behaviour, it becomes mandatory for scholars to revise their analytical frameworks and confront the reality itself. Failure to take into account the stark social reality, or at least what the majority of victims think it is, risks turning the works of such scholars into simple propaganda texts.

The one significant message of the war is the overwhelming, nation-wide rejection of the RUF's practice, including in areas that it claims to enjoy some support. The displacement of about one and half million villagers from their homes and the failure of the RUF to consistently administer any territory of consequence in almost six years of war should serve as sufficient testimony to its unqualified unpopularity and failure to advance its 'revolutionary' project. The vast majority of rural and urban Sierra Leoneans detest the RUF. Indeed, how rational is a movement whose methods of revolutionary struggle have simply served to alienate the bulk of society from its so-called revolutionary agenda? This is a question that Richards does not confront. The more the RUF uses barbarism to spread its message, the more

it drives the people it wants to liberate to the very arms of the state that the movement claims it despises.

What Richards fails to do is to situate the political programme of the RUF in its proper socioeconomic context, which should have revealed that the combatants themselves are pulled by a complex of contradictory forces: the pursuit of the long-standing goals of political liberation; the opportunities which war provided to loot the resources of the forest and the property of villagers for personal and collective gain; a 'lumpen' type of unaccountable, free-wheeling behaviour, which drugs and other anti-social behaviour-inducing mechanisms have generated or sustained among RUF fighters; and a tit-for-tat exchange in atrocities between the RUF combatants and government soldiers. In other words, RUF violence does not have only one logic, but several: there is obviously the logic of political violence, aspects of which are covered in Richards's analysis; but this competes, coexists and interacts with the logics of banditry, hedonism and brutality.

Understanding Patrimonial Rule and State Contraction

Richards uses a large number of perspectives to explain the origins and dynamics of the Sierra Leone war. Unfortunately, several of the explanations — such as those relating to the quest for Greater Liberia, regional competition, and student revolutionary populism — are not pursued in the empirical areas of the text, and appear instead as add-ons intended to enrich the book's sophistication. Throughout the text, however, Richards tried to use the theory and practice of patrimonialism consistently enough as a key explanatory variable for the war. What he calls 'the crisis of patrimonialism' stands out as his most important framework for understanding the factors that led to the war. This, therefore, merits comments as part of the book's problem relates to Richards's inability to ground his analysis in concrete historical and political processes and explore the complex factors that made armed struggle and war an option of political resistance.

Briefly defined, patrimonialism is a system of resource distribution that ties recipients or clients to the strategic goals of benefactors or patrons. In the distribution of 'patrimony', or public resources, both patrons and clients attach more importance to personal loyalties than to the bureaucratic rules that should otherwise govern the allocation of such resources. According to Richards, patrimonialism in Sierra Leone owes its origins to the patron-client linkages that were developed during 'the days of direct extraction of forest resources', which spawned a culture in which the rich and successful protected and promoted their followers and friends (p. 35; this is, of course, highly questionable). In the modern context, 'big persons' at the apex of

power compete for the country's resources and distribute them to their followers. Richards singles out one aspect of patrimonial rule, such as the use of resources to resolve conflicts and outbid opponents, as indicative of the nature of patrimonial politics in Sierra Leone. This is illustrated by an anecdote about former president Siaka Stevens, who was said to have been comfortably installed at State House with 'a number of mobile generators', but who always reprimanded riotous students for not having told him about the shortage of light on their campuses, since he could have personally fixed the problem for them and prevented the riots.

Richards believes that patrimonialism thrives in natural resource-rich countries, since the formal mining companies would be responsible for the difficult tasks of state provisioning (such as communication, schooling and health services) in the 'enclave areas', leaving the politicians or rulers to collect rents for their personal use (he seems to forget that pre-crisis Nigeria and other oil-producing countries with fairly large social provisioning and development programmes exist). Such patron-client arrangements, he insists, can easily lead to a depletion of state revenues, which can only be sustained by foreign aid. Richards states that 'African patrimonial systems of rule grew vigorously under Cold War conditions' as African client leaders played off one Cold War leader against another. But patrimonialism, he asserts, faced a double crisis in the 1990s: a crisis of raw material prices and sharp reductions in foreign aid.

This double crisis created a crisis of legitimacy: the state shrank, both physically ('in terms of communications facilities') and sociologically ('in terms of the groups it can afford to patronise'). Education and social services collapsed, and salaries were unpaid or insufficient to cover living costs, giving the president and a few senior figures in government considerable powers to determine who got access to the limited resources that remained. The crisis affected the 'next generation' located at one end point of the patrimonial chain, who could not afford to pay school fees. Unable to generate resources to help clients to pay such fees, the leader or chief patron, ex-president Joseph Momoh, declared education to be a privilege and not a right. 'A dangerous vacuum' was created, which the RUF then sought to fill by providing alternatives to patrimonialism.

Richards's analysis, which taps into common sense explanations and current discourses of the African crisis, captures some features of the Sierra Leone state and political economy, and is correct in concluding that state contraction or collapse creates possibilities for social unrest or war. However, there are several problems with his analysis of patrimonialism, which fails to explain

the kinds of state practices that forced some categories of Sierra Leone's youth to consider war or armed struggle a distinct option of political resistance. Richards is a bit slack in his efforts to transpose broadly held views about the African crisis to the Sierra Leone situation without ensuring that the socioeconomic data of Sierra Leone fit the wider argument. Sierra Leone does, indeed, suffer from a fiscal crisis, and the crisis in raw material prices and output (even closure or depletion of some minerals), including a heavy debt burden, is an important contributory factor to this crisis. Nationally-generated government revenue did take a plunge in the 1980s. However, the same cannot be said for foreign aid flows. Even though global official development assistance (ODA) has suffered a contraction of about 6 per cent in the period of the 1990s (Action Aid 1995), this decline has not negatively affected Sierra Leone's receipt of aid flows. Aid receipts have gone up consistently every year since 1987, except for 1990, which saw a sharp drop. In other words, official development assistance to Sierra Leone went up from US$ 68 million or 7.3 per cent of GNP in 1987 to US$ 99 million or 10.6 per cent of GNP in 1989; it dropped to US$ 66m or 8.1 per cent of GNP in 1990; but shot up to US$108m or 10.8 per cent of GNP in 1991; US$ 134m or 14.5 per cent of GNP in 1992; US$192m or 29.7 per cent of GNP in 1993; and US$ 276m or 42.7 per cent of GNP in 1994 (UNDP).[1]

Contrary to Richards's assertion that Sierra Leone is a victim of the ending of the Cold War in Africa (p. 36) and the drop in global ODA flows to developing countries, the picture we get instead is that of a country that has become astonishingly aid-dependent in the 1990s when the Cold War is supposed to have ended. It is important to note also that Sierra Leone never 'threatened to switch allegiance between communism and capitalism' in order to maximise aid from the 'Western and Soviet systems' (p. 36). The APC was not a 'Soviet-style one-party' regime, and did not have 'workerist associations' (p. 40). In other words, the APC was never a revolutionary vanguard party, and lacked the kinds of organisational structures that tied the Communist Party in the USSR to associations in civil society. Labour, army, and police leaders were made members of parliament under the APC's one-party regime, but this was part of a strategy to prevent unions, army

1 Note the radical decline of GDP in the 1990s. No doubt, the war and the disruption of formal productive activities may have contributed to this decline. It is possible, however, that much of the unofficial economic transactions, which gained prominence even before the war, may have been unrecorded.

officers and the police from disturbing the APC order. The party's organisational strength was only felt during periods of electoral competition or civil protests. Soviet aid to Sierra Leone came mainly in the form of scholarships, a large number of which went to members and friends of the APC Youth League. Instead, in addition to its links with Western countries, Sierra Leone cultivated closer ties with China, and used the latter's vigorous efforts to break its isolation from the rest of the world, to access financial and technical resources, and to develop trade links between the two countries. Indeed, by the early 1980s, China had become the third most important trading partner of Sierra Leone. The failure to properly contextualise Sierra Leone's crisis throws into considerable doubt the veracity of what Richards believes to be a patrimonial crisis.

It is important to note that the revenue crisis of the 1980s was partly linked to the informalisation of key industries like diamonds, and the collapse of the iron ore mines, both of which had previously provided much of the state's official revenue. This informalisation of public resources, which was later extended to other sectors like fisheries and gold, weakened government's capacity to collect revenue from state enterprises. For sectors which required heavy capital investment, such as rutile and bauxite extraction, formal large-scale production was allowed, but as Richards correctly notes, state functionaries and company officials set official rents at well below market values with 'unaccountable sums disappearing into patrimonial pockets'. The key point is that leading politicians became dominant figures in the process of destroying the formal institutions for resource extraction, the management of public sector enterprises, and the regulatory regime that had ensured the transfer of revenues from such ventures to the state. The value of diamonds alone that were traded unofficially in international markets has been estimated to run into hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

If Richards's argument is that government officials were chief patrons in this thriving informalised market for Sierra Leone's resources, it becomes hard to accept his view that there was a 'patrimonial crisis' in Sierra Leone. The picture that emerges instead is that of a fiscal crisis, which affects general state administration and provisioning, and the fortunes of those who depend upon the state for their livelihood. In other words, the poverty of the state is positively correlated with the affluence of the 'patrimonial' groups. These groups, as most Sierra Leoneans know, were insensitive to the plight of those who operated outside of the 'patrimonial networks', and who, therefore, had been badly affected or humiliated by the informalisation of the country's resources and the astonishing contraction of the state. Rising foreign aid receipts in the 1990s attempted to make up for the lost mining and parastatal

revenues, which now went into so-called 'patrimonial' pockets. Indeed, Momoh and his government waged a successful campaign in the UN system to redefine the status of the country — i.e., from that of a low income country to an LLDC (least of the less developed countries) in order to qualify for more concessionary loans and grants.

These efforts were pursued at a time when the APC government was busy dismantling the formal structures for effective revenue generation in both the public and private sectors, and selling off at a discount even some of the country's highly prized foreign assets to party supporters and foreign friends. The logic of the political class seemed to have been that the international community should be responsible for the welfare of the average Sierra Leonean, while government leaders, business groups and their supporters helped themselves to the country's rich resources. Patrimonialism was never threatened by such arrangements. Indeed, it was strengthened by them, as chief patrons or rulers passed on the burdens of national social provisioning and development to foreign aid agencies. Those who were outside of the so-called patrimonial system never stood a chance of benefiting from it. It is, indeed, unclear how marginal youth and Richards's excluded intellectuals could have benefited or suffered losses from the patrimonial system if they were not part of the patrimonial networks. From all accounts, these disadvantaged groups and other broad sections of the society suffered from the consequences of the crisis of the state and the deepening of the gains of patrimonialism — not from the crisis of patrimonialism.

Part of Richards's problem is the rather fuzzy way in which he applies the concept of patrimonialism to the Sierra Leone — indeed African — state. The African state has been poorly theorised in the works of most Africanists who have used the concept of neo-patrimonialism as a short cut to describe everything that the state in Africa does. As Thandika Mkandawire, the former Executive Secretary of the pan-African institution for the promotion of social science research in Africa (CODESRIA), once noted, Africanists who rely on the concept of neo-patrimonialism to describe the African state will have to explain why patrimonialism produced high rates of economic growth in most African countries in the 1960s and part of the 1970s, but dismal growth rates in the 1980s. Did patrimonialism suddenly emerge as a problem in the 1980s and 1990s? And why did patrimonialism allow one-party and military regimes to flourish in much of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, and not in the 1990s? The point, of course, is that the constant recourse to the concept of neo-patrimonialism could hide what is really very fuzzy thinking or lack of knowledge about the behaviour of African states and their actual dynamics. Those who use the concept of patrimonialism to explain the African crisis

should, at least, be able to concretely identify the patrimonial groups — both the patrons and the clients — and changes in the volume and patterns of resource distribution among group members for their explanation to be credible.

Authoritarian Rule, Patrimonialism and the Politics of War

Patrimonial arrangements constituted only one aspect of the problem of the Sierra Leone state. A full understanding of the political environment that created the conditions for the war requires analysis of other factors. Four such factors are worth mentioning. The first is the uncompromising and systematic centralisation of power under the governing All People's Congress, which gained power in 1968, following its victory in the elections of 1967 and a brief period of military rule. Despite much resistance from opposition political parties, the press and civic groups, full centralisation was achieved in 1978 when the APC made itself the sole political party in the country. The second factor was the equally systematic effort to destroy all forms of civic opposition — the labour unions, student unions, and the press — through repression, intimidation, and cooptation. Exit options, such as foreign migration, which grew in leaps and bounds in the 1970s and 1980s, reinforced the conditions for the shrinking of the civic arena and helped to reduce the political pressure on the government.

The third factor is the concentration of power in the capital and the neglect, or indeed, truncation, of development in rural areas. The concentration of power in the capital made it relatively easy for the ruling party and government to effectively deal with individual dissent or organised opposition. As part of the project to concentrate power in the capital, the district councils that provided a semblance of decentralised rule during colonialism and the first few years of independence were dismantled; and paramount chiefs became pawns of the government, which proceeded to make and unmake chiefs without regard for traditional procedures or democratic principles. Indeed, the only rule that governed decisions about who should be made chief was loyalty to the ruling party.

The fourth factor is the selective, but deliberate and undisciplined use of state violence to defend the APC order at specific conjunctures when it was challenged. A violence-prone para-military force, the Internal Security Unit (later State Security Division) was created; and politicians used the services of 'lumpen' or marginal elements of society to deal with party opponents and opposition civic groups. The language of violence as an instrument of political competition was freely used and justified in public speeches by leading members of the political leadership. The end result was a highly

repressive, anti-developmental political system, which rewarded sycophancy (or what Sierra Leoneans like to refer to as 'lay belleh'), and punished honesty, hard work, patriotism and independent thought. Works by Ibrahim Abdullah and Ishmail Rashid, a student activist in the 1980s, have shown that it is the political regime that came out of these processes, in the context of a shrinking state system and blocked opportunities, that provided the conditions for the birth of revolutionary dissident activities and, ultimately, the formation of the RUF.

If Richards had focused on these issues, some of which he recognised but described rather sketchily in only two pages (pp. 40-42), it might have been possible for him to tell a different and more interesting story, and save some of his material on environmental and population issues for other intellectual pursuits. Indeed, the failure to pay sufficient attention to the country's political history, culture and dynamics meant that critical issues that relate to the politics of the war itself were only barely mentioned or totally ignored. Indeed, significant insights about the politics of the war had become public knowledge by the time the book was ready for the press in January, 1996, which was subsequently revised after the May 1996 e-mail Leonenet debate on his article, 'Rebellion in Sierra Leone and Liberia'.

Readers would have liked to learn something about the structure, social background, values and strategies of the official military and how they relate to, and conflict with, those of the RUF. It is well known, for instance, that the military recruited a large number of 'lumpens' or 'rarray man dem' to prosecute the war against the RUF without checking their work records or social backgrounds. The army rapidly expanded in size by about five-fold during this period. Both the RUF and the military basically recruited individuals with similar social backgrounds to fight the war. And the drug culture was central to the social practices of both soldiers and rebels in the war front. This may explain why innocent civilians became the main victims of both warring parties. It would have been interesting to pursue the view that part of the barbarism that the RUF displayed in the field was a response to similar methods of war practices from soldiers in the front-line. Also related to the issue of the politics of the war is the question of how the war spread beyond the border zones to engulf practically every region of the country. Richards should have examined the political and military logic that facilitated this transformation.

It is important to note that there was a very passionate debate in the country when the RUF rebellion engulfed the whole country. It was widely believed that some sections of the army colluded with the RUF to achieve

this goal. Several military officers were even implicated by the military government and imprisoned for such acts of sabotage. By 1994, the military regime that was warmly welcomed by Sierra Leoneans for overthrowing the rotten APC government had lost much of its support as people came to associate it with the problems of the war. Indeed, a very important national conference at Bintumani Conference Centre in Freetown in July 1994, in which the military government solicited the views of all paramount chiefs about how to end the war, demonstrated the wide gulf that had emerged between the state and traditional rulers, including, possibly, their subjects: paramount chiefs from the war zones made categorical demands to withdraw the soldiers from the war front as they were absolutely convinced that soldiers or 'sobels' (soldiers-turned-rebels), as some of them came to be called, were partly responsible for the atrocities in the war.

This popular perception of the war process, as Patrick Muana tells us, was significant in the formation and growth of the 'Kamajoisia' militia movement as an antidote to the terror of both the RUF and the soldiers. It was also significant in understanding why the military regime was unable to pressure the chiefs in the war zone and the rest of the population to extend its stay in power in the events leading to the elections of February 1996. Most of these issues have been widely discussed by home-based Sierra Leoneans and covered extensively in the national press, but Richards does not seem to take the national press seriously, perhaps because of his belief that at times it contains 'more opinion than factually based news' (p. 113). He discussed the national press in only one short paragraph in the chapter on youth and the media, even though it is obvious that large sections of the youth population read these papers regularly as a source of news, opinions, entertainment, and education — in several ways, perhaps, using the national print media in the same 'skeptical but constructive way' that Richards talks about in his discussion of films and videos. Richards makes no reference to any discussion or reporting of the war in the national newspapers in his very extensive bibliography.

It is also well known that the RUF war fed, or ignited, deep-seated local conflicts in the war zones. It has been reported that 'rebels' sometimes selected which houses to burn and who first to kill, based on information supplied by willing or coerced local residents seeking to settle scores with their opponents in the local communities, whose politics had been influenced by the strategies of the ruling national political party. Richards briefly discussed one clear instance of this dynamic, the 'Ndogboyosoi' revolt in Pujehun, which he labelled 'rebellion from below', but treated it as one among several interpretations of the war, rather than as a key aspect of the

process of war itself. One would have liked to see how the tendency to use the war to settle local scores was articulated in such well-known cases as the RUF's brief take-over of, for instance, Koidu, Kailahun, Pujehun, Kabala, Yele, Mile 91 and Masingbi. A discussion of local political institutions and processes would have made more sense than the selective and superficial treatment of aspects of traditional local culture, which Richards even detaches from the politics of local communities.

Youth, Violence and War

Richards is correct in singling out the deepening crisis of youth and its exclusion from the social mainstream as important factors in explaining the early appeal of the RUF among certain strata of youth, and why the movement has been able to retain a core membership of loyal cadre, despite the serious setbacks it has suffered in the war. The political statement of the RUF, which, as we have seen, was drawn up by expelled radical university students, appealed to the concerns of youth and other disadvantaged groups in popular struggles to dismantle the corrupt APC regime and institute a just and democratic polity that would protect the basic needs of Sierra Leoneans. Those who hammered out the programme may have been partly influenced by Gaddafi's Green Book ideology, but it is doubtful that Gaddafi's text was that important in shaping the world view or programme of the movement itself. The ideas it propounds are drawn from a range of populist discourses that were current among many Left-wing university-based groups in the 1970s and 1980s. Richards's attempt to read Green Book ideology into every RUF action demonstrates a poor grasp of student politics and actual RUF field practices.

Sierra Leone does have a phenomenal youth crisis and Richards's book demonstrates this very vividly. Indeed, much of the narrative revolves around the problems and perceptions of youth as they relate to issues of livelihood, employment, education, media messages, the environment, and general survival strategies in the forest economy. Richards provides very useful insights when he discusses youth problems in border areas that he has previously worked on, which relate to his research project on ecology, culture and social systems. The three detailed individual testimonies in chapter four throw much light on the dilemmas of young people on the margins of society, and the role which violence has played in the history of forest communities. This violence, as each one of the narratives maintains, has always been driven by external forces or 'big men', anxious to exploit and destroy the forest's rich resources — such as the conversion of humans into slaves in the Atlantic trade, the depletion of the rain forest by timber merchants and colonial

officials interested in the region's high quality mahogany tree products, the near annihilation of elephants whose tusks were in great demand in Europe to make ivory keyboards for the pianos that adorned the homes of Victorian families, and the networks of unequal exchange that currently tie young migrant diamond diggers to powerful patrons in the urban areas.

However, in his efforts to give substance and flavour to his narrative, Richards displays a basic weakness in his method of work: he is too quick to establish connections and to indulge in unguarded speculation, often on the basis of very limited information or isolated experiences that may not have been properly investigated. This tends to do much damage to the credibility of the issues on which he seems to have much firmer information. Several illustrations will help to substantiate this point. In his treatment of the history of the Liberia-Sierra Leone border region, the status and social reach of the nineteenth century warrior Kai Londo's polity, Luawa chiefdom, featured prominently as a major source of perennial instability in the region.

Richards concludes on the basis of the evidence of just one individual from Liberia, who complained to him about the colonial border policy of the British, which split village communities and strengthened the power of Kai Londo's successors against groups in Liberia, that there was a strong call for a Greater Liberia among bush fighters that would encompass part of the old Luawa polity in Sierra Leone. This call is then said to serve as an 'advance for the NPFL, or RUF, or both' armed groups (p. 48), implying that the invasion of Eastern Sierra Leone in 1991 by the RUF and NPFL, which started the war, may have had something to do with this demand for the creation of a Greater Liberia. What started as a nice little story that was adapted from Arthur Abraham's study of nineteenth century politics on the border zone of Liberia and Sierra Leone turned out instead to be an effort to force conceptions of Greater Liberia on the Sierra Leone war. Richards is not bothered about the extent to which this appeal for Greater Liberia resonates among the majority of youth on both sides of the border and whether, in fact, it forms an important part of the strategies of both the RUF and the NPFL.

Another instance of hasty connections relates to the popular film, *First Blood*, and its likely effects on the behaviour of youth in Sierra Leone. The film is said by Richards to speak 'eloquently to young people in Sierra Leone fearing a collapse of patrimonial support in an era of state recession' (p. 58). Such a conclusion is drawn even though Richards provides no evidence that the young people who watched the film were part of the patrimonial system that he bemoans. And Rambo, the key character in the film, is likened to another Sierra Leonean 'youth trickster of Mende tradition', Musa Wo, who is

said to be a 'harbinger of fruitful innovation' in Mendeland, and whose stories are said to caution elders not to forget the 'energy and cunning' of the young. Richards then concludes that based on this experience of youth creativity that the destructive act of war by the 'young tricksters' of the RUF is 'to establish a national debate about a new and fairer patrimonialism' (p.59). There are many more of such types of unfounded speculation, which are likely to raise the eyebrows of readers who are familiar with the Sierra Leone scene.

The chapter on youth exposure to modern media addresses interesting issues on films, video and violence, but Richards equates the opinions of the bulk of the youth who have not been exposed to war with those of war combatants, whose views on the uses and abuses of video are clearly not sought in the survey. The fact that the former may creatively use film and video for peaceful imaginative and social pursuits does not mean, as Richards believes, that rebels do not 'feed Rambo films to their young conscripts as incitement to mindless violence' (p. 114). Richards fails to make a distinction between youths in war and youths in peace, and the likely effects of violent films on their different social experiences.

It is important to stress the point that the vast majority of Sierra Leone's youth are not war-prone. Most young people are linked to wider social structures that bind them to broadly shared community values and family-based systems of accountability. These social values and systems may have experienced considerable strain as a result of economic crisis, state contraction and war, but they have played a significant role in denying the RUF the bulk of the support it would have enjoyed from this group. The question Richards does not ask is why the majority of youth, including those in desperately poor situations, have not been attracted to the RUF's rhetoric of revolutionary change. My guess is that they have seen or heard about much of the RUF's violence to know that the RUF's project does not offer the path to stable youth salvation.

The vast majority of Sierra Leone's youth are anti-RUF. They sustain life as traders, artisans, farmers, apprentices, labourers, workers, tailors, dancers, dramatists, domestic and office helpers, etc. in the now over-crowded cities and small rural towns. They are to be distinguished from youths with loosely structured relations of work and family life: lumpens who, as Ibrahim Abdullah's study suggests, are the driving force of the RUF project, even if other types of youth may have been coerced or recruited into the movement. Richards does not pay special attention to this category of youth as the foundation of the RUF movement.

Furthermore, one would be wary to embrace his conclusion, on the basis of an opinion survey whose methodology is not even explained, that the youth have a capacity 'to devise imaginative solutions to the challenges posed by the global epidemic of drugs and violence' (p. 114), and that 'videos of violence may not be such a cause for alarm as some Western commentators choose to think' (p.104). Richards does not state what these imaginative solutions are, since his concern is to debunk the New Barbarism thesis. It is as if owning up to some drawbacks in youth behaviour would strengthen the case for New Barbarism! It ought to be stressed that lumpens abuse drugs and are prone to random violence in pursuit of objectives. And other non-lumpen categories of youth who are affected by drugs and excessive exposure to violent films may experience, and at the same time pose, serious social problems. These problems are not unique to Sierra Leone's or Africa's youth: they cut across most countries in the world, including in Western societies where they may have reached epidemic proportions. It does not help the search for solutions to these global problems to deny the fact that they constitute a problem for Sierra Leone's youth.

War-Peace Transitions

Let me now examine Richards's recommendations on conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives. Richards puts much emphasis on the need to assist the efforts of 'citizen action' in rebuilding Sierra Leone's society, and cites cases where local efforts at peace building are already manifesting themselves in the Bo region. Peace, as he correctly states, has to come from within, and from the efforts of local people. This is based on the view that international assistance may not be very forthcoming to provide the kinds of resources that would make the project of post-war reconstruction less painful. Even when such assistance is provided, he warns that it should be used strategically and not liberally: it should come in the form of 'smart relief', which should shift the focus of relief from bulk food items to 'knowledge-intensive assistance', such as the provision of seed systems, genetic information and farmer intervention; this should be supported by systems of broadcasting to facilitate constructive debates in local areas about war-peace transitions.

Relying on Alex de Waal's and Mike Duffield's works on famines and the shortcomings of international agencies in providing relief in famine-prone and war-torn countries, Richards argues that the current international obsession with 'high profile' relief may weaken the emerging peace-enhancing 'attack trade' regime in war-affected regions: 'attack trade' regimes are trade deals which local people strike with combatants as a survival and commercial strategy that is suited to environments of protracted insurgency. In any case,

he believes that by concentrating resources in particular areas, high profile relief has a potential to attract rebel attention and prolong wars. Richards's alternative is to make 'attack traders' contractors for the supply of relief items to refugee feeding programmes. It does not occur to him that 'attack trade' has a strong potential to endlessly feed wars, and legitimise war itself as a way of life in the regions where such trade occurs — the cases of Colombia, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Liberia and Angola, where 'attack trade' has turned war into huge commercial ventures escape his attention.

Richards identifies three Sierra Leonean traditions that he believes will help to contain the war and promote peace-building efforts. The first is what he calls the 'creolisation' of the Upper Guinea Forest region, of which Sierra Leone is a part. He highlights two types of creolisation: the creolisation that is a product of the Atlantic slave trade, which saw the resettlement of large numbers of Africans from different ethnic and regional backgrounds in Freetown, and which gave rise to Krio as a lingua franca in Sierra Leone; the other type of creolisation relates to what he refers to as the pre-colonial, largely sixteenth century, process of the 'Mandigization' of the forest communities — leading to the adoption of a simplified 'trade version' of Manika as lingua franca, even suggesting a Manika root for the Krio language. Creolisation, he asserts, promotes cultural convergence and accommodation, checks conflicts, and provides the necessary cultural resources for the management of peace and stability. The concept of creolisation is an emerging fad among Western anthropologists and linguists, who have been anxious to move the debate on African social formations away from the old concept of 'tribe' that has been shown to have no empirical validity to one that now recognises the inter-penetration of cultures and languages. Richards latches on to this debate without adequate work on its implications for the Sierra Leone experience, and draws very contentious conclusions about the peace-yielding properties of creolisation.

It is obviously the case that the Krio language is the lingua franca of Sierra Leone. It serves as an important medium of communication among the country's youth. The language itself has been highly enriched by a number of Sierra Leonean and other African languages. Having a common language that most people understand may help to promote social integration but it does not necessarily prevent or solve conflicts. If use of a common language is a significant constraint to war, the world would not have witnessed the genocidal carnage in Rwanda, Burundi and Bosnia, as the warring communities in those countries speak the same language. What Richards fails to analyse are the complex layers of social relations and contradictions that structure the behaviour of those who use the Krio language. The emergence

of Krio as a lingua franca has not eliminated other forms of ethnic identities and associations. Indeed, because of the wide use of the language, there are now several versions of Krio, which tend to reflect the ethnic origins and social or class status of the users. Besides, as a result of the systematic politicisation of ethnicity, beginning from the decolonisation period, the 'natural' process of 'Krioisation', which was previously associated with exposure to Western thought and practice, has considerably slowed down, if it has not been actually reversed.

Today, in Freetown, in addition to a large number of youth who still speak their ethnic languages in addition to Krio, there are many young people whose parents come from the provinces who speak no other language than Krio (they are probably a much larger group now than those who use the language as a mark of their identity) but who do not identify themselves as Krio. If ethnicity has not been politicised, the youth who speak only Krio should have automatically identified themselves as Krio, since they share fairly common values and aspirations with those who identify themselves as such. Instead, the former identify themselves on the basis of their parents' identities even though they may not understand the institutions and values that are associated with such parental identities.

An urban culture has emerged that is a product of the experiences of the various groups (literally all ethnic groups) that have shaped the everyday dynamics of the city. This culture cannot be reduced to that of any one ethnicity, or even the old type of Krio ethnicity. Instead, it embraces several aspects of these other types, as users incorporate or borrow whatever that is found useful for urban social integration and communication. This urban culture continues to co-exist with the relatively separate cultures, traditions and languages of the other ethnicities in the city. While there is a high level of social integration, particularly among the youth, politics tends to be strongly influenced by the pulls of ethnicity as opposed to the pulls of 'creolisation' or even of the new urban culture.

We encounter similar problems when we examine Richards's thesis on 'Mandigization' as creolisation. Here, Richards tries to force ideas on the Sierra Leone social reality that are largely relevant to other countries' cultural and linguistic experiences. It is true that the Madingo language and culture have had positive effects on several communities and languages in West Africa, including in Sierra Leone. Madingo competes with Fula as the language that is spoken in most countries in the region. Fula, however, failed to develop as lingua franca in any West African country, and is spoken largely by individuals who identify themselves as Fula. Fula was even

overwhelmed and absorbed by the Hausa language in Nigeria despite the fact that it was Fulani intellectuals and religious militants who sacked the traditional Hausa states and established the Sokoto Caliphate in 1804, which incorporated Hausaland and other contiguous areas. It is useful to note also that even though variants of the Madingo language are a trade-based lingua franca in several West African countries, Hausa is still the most widely spoken language in the region — claiming, perhaps, about 50 million or so speakers; and that there may even be more Yoruba (perhaps 20 or more million) and Igbo speakers (at least 15 million) than Madingo speakers.

The version of Madingo, Dioula, that Richards correctly cites, as a trade language in parts of the sub-region, is not used as lingua franca in Sierra Leone. Even though Madingo and Mende, which is the lingua franca of the East and South of Sierra Leone, are part of the Mande group of languages, Mende and Madingo are not mutually intelligible. Only Madingo, Kono, Koranko and Vai are mutually intelligible. The regional reach of Madingo, popularised by traders, Islamic teachers, praise singers and musical entertainers, has meant that many of the languages of Sierra Leone are flavoured with Madingo words. The word for a rich person in a non-related language, Temne, for instance, is 'yolla', possibly derived from the Madingo word, 'Dioula', meaning trader.

There has been a high level of cross-fertilisation of cultures and ideas among the various ethnic groups in the country. But Madingo can hardly be said to be the dominant influence in this process of social integration. Instead, it would seem that most groups have benefited from a long process of mutually beneficial cultural exchanges. Because of the strong hold of Mende in the South and East, and Temne in the North, Dioula could not serve the same purposes in Sierra Leone as it did, for instance, in Côte d'Ivoire and parts of Liberia. Instead, Madingo traders, teachers, artisans and musicians were absorbed into the expansive cultures of the Temnes and Mendes. This process of incorporating individuals into the cultures of dominant ethnicities is not unique to the Upper Guinea Forest region. It is a world-wide process in the formation of nations. Indeed, all African countries today have one or a few local languages that have emerged as lingua franca.

The same experience that Richards describes as creolisation holds for the development of, for instance, Arabic in the Middle East, Swahili in East Africa, English in the UK and in America, Spanish and Portuguese in Latin America, Italian in Italy, Lingala and Swahili in Zaire, Wolof in Senegal, Twi in Ghana, and Amharic in Ethiopia. In other words, the concept of 'creolisation' loses its heuristic value once it is shown that all modern

societies in the world have multi-ethnic and multi-lingual origins. This reality of shared history has not eliminated the scourge of war from our planet. Rather than creolisation being a crucial factor in checking the violence in Sierra Leone, it is rather the shared national experience of, and refusal to be intimidated by, RUF brutality that has kept the country together. We have also been lucky that the RUF movement was inspired by a radical youth vision of pan-Africanism and national unity — not ethnic divisions. Lumpens, we should also note, are generally not moved by ethnicity unless if they are employed by politicians to settle ethnic scores. On top of this must be added the rapid rate of regime turn-over, which made it difficult for some of the ethnic interests that were already building up around state leaders to consolidate their grip on power, and colour the popular discourses on the war.

The second tradition which Richards thinks will enhance the prospects for peace is that of the initiation of young men and women into Bondo/Sande and Poro secrete societies. He argues that these societies could play useful roles in civil defence and act as forums for debate on issues of war and peace, and training of youth in post-war reconstruction activities. Useful as these suggestions may be, Richards does not show how they could be achieved for a youth population that he has already projected as holding strong 'modernist' views and aspirations about society. Furthermore, while Richards recognises the positive values of these societies, adherents may find it disturbing to relate to the connections that he draws between the initiation rituals of these societies and the seizure of young people in forest areas for initiation into the RUF movement. He believes that both the RUF's and the communities' initiation activities form part of the same process of initiation of young people in 'bush schools' to 'adult ways'. He ignores the crucial distinction between traditional forms of initiation, which are forms of socialisation that enjoy community support, and the RUF type which is plainly terroristic, and which may have the consequences of destroying community institutions and values.

Richards's third traditional resource for peace building is 'cannibalism', which he thinks acts as an anti-dote to, or a 'moral critique' of, patrimonialism. He extracts sets of supernatural beliefs that are common in traditional societies to discuss how weaker clients can use ideas of 'cannibalism' to challenge the power of patrons or 'big men' in society. 'Cannibalism' refers to a deeply held belief in most traditional communities that certain types of people have supernatural powers to turn into animals — say leopards, baboons or crocodiles — to bewitch or 'eat' people whom they do not like. Richards assumes that this belief is restricted only to patron-client commercial relations, and that it is only weak patrons that have the power to

change into animals to bewitch clients. He also assumes that the wider society that loses from the modern system of patrimonial rule can invoke the traditional moral critique of cannibalism, by accusing modern patrons of practising cannibalism, thereby denting their legitimacy and capacity to rule.

The reality is that these beliefs cover all facets of social relations; and society has developed ways of dealing with them — such as employing the services of traditional experts such as 'soothsayers, 'murray man dem', and 'medicine men' to expose the activities of those who possess such qualities; and personal or family-based initiatives involving use of 'medicines', 'lasmami', and traditional power-enhancing devices such as amulets to repel such evil forces in the spirit world. However, it is difficult to see how the so-called 'cannibalism' method could act as a check on present day patrimonialism, especially when modern-day patrons know that these ideas lack empirical foundations, and when they have the means to employ the services of 'medicine men' or 'murray man dem' to counter the power of the so-called 'cannibals', or accusations of cannibalism. Reading this kind of stuff from someone who thinks that the crisis of patrimonialism is the most important cause of the war, creates the impression that Richards does not actually understand the society that he writes about.

Conclusion

Patrimonialism exists in varying degrees in all societies, irrespective of the character of their economic systems, levels of development, or political culture. In other words, personal ties, contacts, or networks, constitute inherent aspects of social relations, and influence the behaviour of public institutions. High levels of bureaucratisation can act as an important check on such personal ties and relations, but it does not eliminate them. The problem basically arises when formal bureaucratic rules become subordinated to 'patrimonial' arrangements or vested interests, making it difficult for those who are cut-off from, or do not want to be included in, the 'patrimonial' networks to benefit from the services of the state, and hold leaders accountable to their policies. Something of the nature of this problem took root in Sierra Leone under the long rule of the APC, whose leaders abused the formal rules of governance and converted a large proportion of the country's resources into private or informal property regimes, which they then controlled or profited from. Sierra Leoneans paid a heavy price for the triumph of this informalised, inefficient, and authoritarian order.

The challenge in post-war reconstruction, it seems, is not to aim for a 'patrimonial-free' polity — which is clearly unachievable — but to ensure that vested interests, or patrimonial groups, where they emerge, are

transparently regulated and held accountable to their public behaviour; and that the state system is structured in ways that can allow it to meet the minimum demands of groups who entirely depend upon it for such things as education, health, clean water, electricity, jobs and incomes. Issues of decentralisation; rural, grassroots development; the empowerment of local-level civic initiatives; the restoration and defence of healthy political competition; the protection of civil liberties and community values; and the de-linking of the state's coercive institutions from its past culture of violence should form important aspects of the strategies for a stable and equitable post-war society.

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The May 25 Coup d'Etat in Sierra Leone: A Militariat Revolt?

Lansana Gberie*

Introduction

There had not been any apparent signs of trouble in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, before renegade soldiers struck there on 25 May 1997. The civilian government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, an ex-UN bureaucrat who came to power after four years of military rule in March 1996, had turned the economy around from a negative growth rate of minus 6.4 per cent to a positive rate of 6 per cent in just one year. Soon after taking office, Kabba signed a peace agreement with a rural-based guerrilla group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), whose five-year campaign had devastated much of the country, killed at least 10,000 people (probably over 30,000 — mostly peasants), displaced about a third of the country's population of 4.5 million and wracked the mining-based economy. Investors and indigenous businessmen who had fled the country amidst the guerrilla campaigns were returning, and many in the country concluded that the good times were not far away. International donors generally expressed satisfaction, and the IMF, the World Bank and bilateral donors allocated over half a billion US dollars for reconstruction and rehabilitation.

The first indication that there was renewed trouble was a breathless announcement on the state radio, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service, by an unknown soldier, Corporal Tamba Gborie, in the early morning of Sunday, 25 May stating that Kabbah had been overthrown and a 'dawn to dusk curfew' (his words) imposed. Much of what preceded this announcement became clearer only later. That morning about two dozen heavily armed soldiers in civilian clothing had driven up to the main penal centre, Pademba Road Prisons, in three pick-up trucks and blasted it open with grenades. They quickly released about 600 convicts, some of them the country's most

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notorious criminals, out of the prison and armed many of them with guns stolen from a military depot. These were then led to attack State House, the country's seat of power, where they battled a small detachment of Nigerian troops stationed there under a defence pact signed with the elected government, and overwhelmed them. The next target was the state radio station, and by the afternoon, President Kabbah was ferried out of the country to neighbouring Guinea. The coupists declared him overthrown, and named Major Johnny Paul Koroma, freed in the prison break (he had been detained there following an earlier failed coup plot) leader of what they were pleased to call the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

However, the real news of the events of 25 May lay not in the overthrow of Tejan Kabbah. Accusing Kabbah of failing to consolidate the peace with the RUF, the AFRC immediately invited the rural-based rebels to the capital and announced that they were part of the new junta. Without apparent hesitation, the ragtag rebels poured into the seaside capital and took strategic positions in the city. The two forces, now described as the 'People's Army', declared the rebel war over and Koroma called on Sierra Leoneans to rally to his junta as they had brought peace at last. He declared that the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, who was in detention in Nigeria at the time, was the Vice Chairman of the AFRC — in short the deputy leader of the country.

In fact, the coup was believed to have been planned and executed with the active collaboration of the rebel army (*For Di People* 1997) and appears to be the culmination of a long period of collusion between a significant portion of the Republic of Sierra Leone's Military Forces (RSLMF) and the RUF rebels. This bewildering collaboration had given rise to the phenomenon known as *sobels* (soldiers by day and rebels by night). After over six years of unsuccessfully fighting a brutal war to capture the state, the RUF rebels simply 'marched proudly and jubilantly' into the capital, as Major Koroma himself put it, and took what amounted to full control of everything, including the lives of residents. Their appearance triggered a mass refugee movement from the capital to neighbouring states — Guinea, Liberia and the Gambia. More people, about 400,000, have fled Sierra Leone since the 25 May coup than during the entire vicious six-year war period.

How can these momentous events, which have aborted a hopeful one year experiment in democratic rule, be explained? Why did the military coup d'état occur and why was it so violent and difficult to stabilise? Why did the army, which had fought the RUF during the past six years, invite the rebel group to join them in their struggle against the lawfully constituted government? What is the social character of the individuals who made the coup? Is the coup a

conventional uprising of disgruntled low ranking military officers, or does it represent a much wider phenomenon of the assault of the state by armed groups who share common values and aspirations with underclass or lumpen elements in society? What has been the reaction of Sierra Leoneans, the regional community of West African states, and the wider world society to the military coup? And what prospects exist for a resolution of the crisis and the reinstatement of the ousted government?

Like the RUF Like the Army?

If the coup itself shocked a world which for sometime marvelled at the recovery of a country long dismissed as a hopeless or basket case ('beyond salvage', was how Robert Kaplan described Sierra Leone in 1994), the AFRC's public pronouncements have been no less devastating. In its 17 July 1997 'Position Paper' on negotiations spearheaded by ECOWAS with the aim of cajoling them out of power, Major Koroma declared that the RUF and the RSLMF share 'a combination of experience, talent and patriotism that cannot be questioned' (AFRC 1997a). That such a statement could be so openly made after six years of seemingly vicious war between the two forces reflected, perhaps, the naiveté of the AFRC leadership in assuming that they might gain sympathy by simply declaring the war over. But they were also stating what many Sierra Leoneans had known all along: that a significant component of the RSLMF was colluding in the acts of banditry and terror perpetuated against civilians by the rebels (See Abraham, this volume).

Sierra Leone's rebel war began in March 1991 after armed incursions by dissidents backed by the Liberian warlord, Charles Taylor. In six years, the war engulfed the country with a destructive force, leading to the almost total destruction of the country. By March 1996, an estimated 75 per cent of school-aged children were out of school, and 70 per cent of the country's educational facilities, already troubled by the time the war began, destroyed. Only 16 per cent of Sierra Leone's 500 health centres were functioning by March 1996, almost all of these in the capital and its suburbs (Smillie 1996).

The war, however, was deemed to have been over in late 1993 after the NPRC junta, expending over 18 million US dollars on arming and training the RSLMF and other allied forces (the irregulars, mostly local hunters), captured all strategic positions held by the RUF, including their 'headquarters', Pendembu, and devastated the rebel force itself. Eyewitnesses spoke of seeing a convoy of rebel vehicles heading towards Liberia (Richards 1996) and rumours, published as news by the nation's lively tabloids, freely circulated that the RUF leader himself had been shot. But to the surprise of many, the war escalated in early 1994. By February, the rebels were

threatening the capital. Many explanations have been offered for this sudden turn of events, but the real problem seems to have been that a significant portion of the NPRC's rather bloated army, fearing demobilisation after the war, simply decamped and drifted to the countryside to engage in freelance banditry, with some actually joining the RUF. Those who did not join actively cooperated with the rebels to create a state of chaos in which they thrived, while still maintaining their membership of the RSLMF.

In a shocking admission in late 1994, the NPRC declared that at least 20 per cent of its 14,000 strong army was disloyal. Captain Valentine Strasser, the NPRC's leader, characterised the sudden escalation of the war as 'nothing short of banditry, looting, maiming and raping'. He warned the public against 'harbouring a soldier who does not possess his authentic document... stringent action will be taken against all civilians found in possession of military uniforms and equipment' (*Vision* 1994). A local newspaper, echoing the same sentiments, described the conflict as 'naked banditry, the principal characters being undisciplined soldiers and unpatriotic Sierra Leoneans' (*Unity Now* 1994).

Koroma himself appears to have been at the centre of the *sobel* phenomenon. Reputed to have been a delinquent even in high school, Koroma joined the army in the early 1990s and quickly rose through the ranks due to his connections with the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) leadership, which ruled the country from 1992 to 1996. As head of a detachment of troops stationed at the Sierra Rutile mining company, Sierra Leone's last economic stronghold at the time (1995), he was widely believed to have connived with the rebel leadership to take over the mines and loot the company's property. The mines were thoroughly looted and vandalised. Eyewitnesses reported seeing soldiers in the looting, and some of the company's equipment was later found with soldiers in Freetown. Koroma was withdrawn from the war-front afterwards.

The aftermath of the AFRC coup followed a pattern of 'conquest' long established by the RUF. Looting and apparently aimless destruction of property, rape of women and general vandalism, were the order of the day during the first week of the coup. Over 100 people were reported killed, and the National Treasury, parts of the Bank of Sierra Leone and other important public buildings were burnt down. Freetown's cynical residents speculated that the burning of the National Treasury, which held accounts and documents relating to the running of the state's finances, might have been instigated by elements within the military related to civil servants who were then being probed for embezzlement by the Kabbah administration. But the arson sent

home a more significant message: formal bureaucratic state structures, particularly those representing accountability, were now no longer to be part of the scheme of things in the country. The troubled formal state in Sierra Leone had reached the stage which Ali Mazrui would describe as 'normative collapse' (Mazrui 1996).

It wasn't just that there was a rebellion or a violent and bloody usurpation of power (the bloodiest in the country's history). The formal state structures, authority, not to mention law and political order, had collapsed. After the burning of the Treasury and Central Bank, Major Koroma told the BBC African Service that his men had not done it intentionally and that they would be rebuilt — a statement which sounded hollow in view of the violent orgy of looting of homes, offices and shops which continued almost unabated for over a week. The junta announced the setting up of anti-looting squads which carried out summary executions of would-be looters, mostly civilian vagrants who had joined the soldiers in the carnage. The move seemed to have had some success insofar as there was hardly anywhere else to loot in the affluent parts of the capital. Even vehicles belonging to foreign embassies, aid agencies and the United Nations had been looted and wrecked. All the main supermarkets and shops had been vandalised. Despite the creation of the anti-looting squads — some of whose members are suspected of complicity in the looting itself — general lawlessness at night, including armed robbery and rape, continued. Some of the looting operations have been dubbed by those who commit them as 'Operation Pay Yourself' — obviously reflecting the financial problems which both the AFRC and the RUF faced in honouring commitments to their forces. It was impossible to talk about the junta having a writ at all, except that they controlled the radio stations, which broadcast daily proclamations from Koroma and his spokespersons (about four in the first month of the coup), and the key military barracks.

There hardly was any control even among the coup leaders. The unlikely coalition of RUF rebels and the RSLMF forces which constituted the AFRC and the so-called People's Army appeared to be particularly prone to instability. In the first weeks of the coup, several clashes were reported between the two forces at the military headquarters (seat of the junta), including at least one gunfight (*Washington Post* 1997).

Militariat or Lumpens?

Steve Riley has attributed the general mayhem which accompanied the take-over to the fact that the coup was the product of the 'militariat' — a social group of relatively junior officers and 'other ranks' in the army, who lack the clientilist ties of more senior officers and are therefore 'prone to

institutional instability and some orchestrated political violence' (Riley 1997). This distinction is unhelpful in the case of the AFRC, however. Certainly the take-over was led by junior officers (it was announced by Corporal Gborie), who then initially proceeded to arrest the senior officers. But the ruling council that was announced later is dominated by brigadiers, colonels and other officers, although the real power brokers seem to be army rank and file individuals like Gborie and the RUF forces commander, Sam Bockarie. A large number of junior rank soldiers and rebels were given posts in the Supreme Military Council. If the unnamed positions for civilian participation in this council are excluded, the lower ranks of sergeants, staff sergeants, privates, corporals and lance corporals accounted for 17 of the 22 positions occupied by the military — an unprecedented development in the history of military rule in the country and probably in Africa and the world (AFRC 1997b). But the chairman himself is a major, hardly a junior rank soldier.

Why is it that the AFRC, in contrast to all the 'militariat' types of junta cited by Riley, has so far failed to establish any sense of order among its men?[1] Six months after the military coup of May 25, the leadership was still complaining about general acts of lawlessness and anarchy perpetrated by its own members and supporters, which, it said, 'was inconsistent with state stability' (Sierra Leone Web page; News section; 19 November 1997). It is certainly not just that opposition to the coup, particularly the armed opposition offered by the Nigerian-led ECOMOG force, has not allowed the AFRC to consolidate. Indeed, much of the opposition has been sustained because of the wanton destruction and terroristic behaviour of the junta. The fact is that the convention of military life, never mind discipline, has collapsed because the people who dominate the so-called People's Army — and therefore control the AFRC — are from a social category which, irrespective of their colours, remain criminally disposed and undisciplined. They are the so-called 'lumpens' of Sierra Leone society.

The case for a class-based or 'lumpen' perspective on the origin and character of the crisis in Sierra Leone has been most persuasively made by Ibrahim Abdullah (in this volume). Abdullah believes that the violence in the country has been peculiarly brutal and directionless because the people who

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1 It is worth noting that the May 25 coup is not the first coup in Sierra Leone that has been staged by junior ranks of the army. The coup of 1968 which brought Siaka Stevens to power was executed by warrant officers of Class One level and below. Yet this coup was not violent and it did not lead to the breakdown of law and order.

constitute the insurgent forces and the army are mostly socially uprooted and criminally disposed youths who, because of their very nature, lack a progressive and transformative agenda. They are the lumpenproletariat whom Marx and Engels described as 'the dangerous class', 'the social scum... that passively rotten mass thrown off by the old layers, may here and there be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its condition of life, however, prepares it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue' (Marx and Engels 1848). In short, they are incapable of any revolutionary action, much less revolutionary discipline.

The pre-war RSLMF was 3,000 strong, and was made up largely of nominees of the All People's Congress party's fat cats who were recruited into the force by a patronage system designed by ex-President Siaka Stevens to ensure that the army remained loyal to the regime. This force, however, proved woefully inadequate to meet the challenge posed by the rebel incursions in 1991, and President Momoh, Stevens's successor, was forced to expand the force to about 6,000. Recruits were never properly screened, and Momoh's expanded army happened to consist, as his Foreign Minister, Abdul Karim Koroma, himself has admitted, of 'mostly drifters, rural and urban unemployed, a fair number of hooligans, drug addicts and thieves' (Koroma 1996) — in short, lumpens to the core. They turned out to be little more than a uniformed rabble which easily found more profit colluding with the RUF — an even more criminally-disposed group of lumpens, mostly recruited in Liberia and in the illicit diamond mining forests of eastern and southern Sierra Leone (Richards 1996) in acts of banditry and looting.

The army was further expanded by the NPRC, itself dominated by young men who originated from Freetown's slums, into a force of about 14,000. The result was that the element of command and cohesion, the hallmarks of military life, became increasingly alien to the RSLMF. Marx's analysis of lumpen capabilities is inadequate in the sense that in at least the Sierra Leone case, the lumpens had taken action all on their own, without apparently being the 'bribed tool of reactionary intrigue'. Now free from the control of civil society and government, these armed lumpens have conveniently jettisoned the conventions and restraints of military life, and even its symbols. It was perhaps the first example in Africa of street power taking over the state. At the junta's headquarters, AFRC members move around without their uniforms. Indeed, unlike all other military coups in history, this one was made by soldiers who were clad in civvies — and was crucially aided by common criminals who were serving jail sentences. That certainly goes above what could reasonably be seen as tactical consideration. Major Koroma himself has appeared in public, and given interviews to the international media, in denim

jeans and trade mark T-shirts. He even drove through the capital once in a stolen UN vehicle, clad in a University of Maryland T-shirt and jeans. RUF members in the AFRC reportedly tore off ranks from the uniforms of RSLMF members who attended a meeting of the council in May. Actions like these go above evidence of institutional instability: there was no longer any institution to speak of.

Evidence of an anti-state take-over could also be seen in the targeting of judges and magistrates, and even the Supreme Court building itself, which was reported to have been torched in the wake of the coup. Many judges and magistrates have had to flee the country for their lives as criminals they had convicted, and who suddenly found themselves in unlimited freedom after being sprung out of prison, looted their homes and physically assaulted many of them. The country's judicial system, needless to say, collapsed with the take-over.

AFRC's Justification for the Coup

In his first public statement after the coup, Koroma declared that the military had to overthrow the Kabbah government because his brand of ethnic-based politics had polarised the country into regional and ethnic factions, and that his democracy was flawed. Quite how this was so was not made clear; but the AFRC leader's insistence that Kabbah had given greater privileges to the southeastern-based militia, the *Kamajoi*, than that accorded the army, and that this had caused ethnic tensions, reflected a strong sense of resentment not just among the ranks of the RSLMF but increasingly among the country's opposition politicians, most of them hailing from the Northern province.

The Kamajoi, who number (circa) about 37,000, constitute largely Mende youths from the Southern and Eastern provinces, areas that were hardest hit by the rebel war, who organised to battle the RUF and undisciplined soldiers as a result of the failure of the RSLMF to contain the rebel menace (See Muana, this volume). Knowledge of the terrain and high motivation, which compensated for lack of adequate training and equipment, helped the militia to dislodge the RUF from key areas in the Southern and Eastern provinces and forced them to sign the Abidjan Peace Accord in November 1996. But engaging the RUF had also meant that the Kamajoi would confront RSLMF members who were colluding in the RUF banditry, the so-called *sobels*. Prior to the coup, there were many serious clashes between the Kamajoi and the soldiers, in some cases leading to loss of lives on both sides. The government of Tejan Kabbah even established a commission of enquiry made up of very prominent personalities from a cross section of society, and headed by the now deceased Bishop Keili, to examine the causes of these seemingly

incessant clashes, which threatened the stability of his government and the security of the country. Koroma charged that his take-over of government removed Sierra Leone 'from the brink of a calamity that is too horrendous to contemplate'. The coup, therefore, was 'not actuated by lust for power, nor motivated by malice or a desire to bring untold suffering on the people and Sierra Leone'. The cover up of the real intentions of the coup, of course, speaks volumes.

One of the junta's earliest radio announcements proclaimed: 'No more Kamajoi, no more civil defence groups. We are the national army. We have to fight for this country'. The junta claimed that Kabbah gave 35 billion leones per month to the Kamajoi and praised their efforts while the army received only two to three billion leones per month. This charge is of course false: the Kamajoi were a volunteer force without pay, and although they were praised for their efforts at combating the rebel menace, they received little logistical support from the government. The soldiers appeared to have been spurred into action mainly by Kabbah's attempt to halve the bloated but evidently incompetent army (reputedly 14,000 strong), partly to accommodate some of the RUF's fighting force (about 5,000 strong) to meet the demands of the Abidjan Peace Accord and to transform the army into a professional institution with help from Britain. Koroma and his men understood this move to mean that the army was being 'deliberately and calculatedly marginalised and disadvantaged', citing as evidence the 'drastic reduction in their rations, lack of adequate housing, arbitrary discharge of soldiers and retirement of officers from the army, without availing them of earned entitlements'. They were also very critical of the Deputy Defence Minister, Hinga Norma, who played a leading role in the formation and military activities of the Kamajoi before the Kabbah government came to power in March 1996. He was accused of being partisan in his treatment of the recurring conflicts between the army and the kamajoi.

These charges are, of course, largely inaccurate, and even if true, might have acted merely as an added incentive for the coup. Most of the soldiers who led the coup were linked to the defunct National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), which reluctantly handed over power to Kabbah in March 1996. Koroma himself belonged to the 'NPRC Camp' and owes his rise in the army almost entirely to his connections with senior NPRC officers. Captain Paul Thomas, a spokesperson for the junta, who Riley erroneously claimed is a Krio from Freetown (he is Mende from Njala Komborya), was an aide to Colonel Tom Nyuma, the NPRC's Defence Minister. Gborie was a bodyguard to one other NPRC officer. The coup leaders' first radio announcement called for the return to the country of two ex-senior NPRC

officers, Brigadier Maada Bio, who handed over to Kabbah, and Solomon Musa, a flamboyant former deputy chairman of the NPRC who was dismissed and then sent to study in the UK by Captain Valentine Strasser, the NPRC's first chairman. Musa has since returned and was immediately appointed Chief Secretary of State (in effect Prime Minister) by the AFRC. Bio declined the offer to join, but credible speculations place his elder brother, Steven Bio, a wealthy businessman who made his money almost exclusively as an arms contractor for the NPRC, as the main mastermind of the coup. He is believed to have forged the alliance between the soldiers and the RUF leadership while in exile in Abidjan after the first Koroma coup plot that was foiled, which finally gave birth to the AFRC takeover. The AFRC is, therefore, deemed to be only a cruder replay of NPRC rule.

Political Party Reactions to the Coup

The coup was condemned universally both at home and abroad, and a massive nationwide effort was almost spontaneously launched to overturn it. The Kamajoi was the first to vow armed resistance to the AFRC, but the vast majority of ordinary Sierra Leoneans showed opposition to the coup by simply staying at home and refusing to go to work even after repeated threats of dismissal by the junta. Out of this nationwide passive resistance soon sprang the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), incorporating almost all the pressure groups and civil organisations plus the local militia—the Kamajoi and the northern-based Kapra, another anti-RUF militia group—in the country. The local militia constituted the MRD's armed wing, known as the Civil Defence Force (CDF).

Resistance to the AFRC at first seemed to be undermined by the fragmentation of the country along political party/regional lines. The Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) to which Kabbah belonged, and which drew its support largely from the southern and eastern provinces, almost immediately condemned the coup. Condemnation of the coup was unanimous in the eastern and southern provinces, with a spontaneous mass demonstration against it launched in the southern city of Bo a day after the coup, in which soldiers were physically attacked. Parties allied to the SLPP, like the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), whose leader, Thaimu Bangura, was Kabbah's Finance Minister, although northern-based, also condemned the coup. Following Kabbah, most of the leaders of these two parties fled into exile in Guinea.

But many members of the United National People's Party (UNPP), a largely northern-based party whose leader, John Karefa Smart, lost the run-off presidential elections to Kabbah, increasingly aligned with the coupmakers.

The UNPP itself had split into two factions a few months before the coup: 14 out of 17 members of the parliamentary wing had been expelled from the party by Karefa-Smart; these members refused, however, to vacate their parliamentary seats, and colluded with other parties in parliament to frustrate the actions of Karefa-Smart, who was later suspended from parliament for one year. Some members of the parliamentary wing did not, at least initially, follow Karefa-Smart's seemingly pro-junta actions They joined other parliamentarians in passing a resolution which called for the reinstatement of the country's legitimate government and parliament. In contrast, Karefa-Smart became an envoy of the junta in its diplomatic efforts to frustrate the intervention of the Nigerian-led force in Sierra Leone. He was also one of the junta's delegates in the early rounds of the regional West African meetings to resolve the crisis. After his relations with the junta became strained, he put forward a position paper, which called for a national conference of representatives from all the political actors, ethnic groups and civic organisations; the release of the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh; and the creation of a public service that would reflect the ethnic character of the country (Karefa-Smart 1997). He also continued to campaign against the ECOMOG force intervention in the country. Thus, members of Karefa-Smart's wing of the party allied themselves with, and enjoyed the protection of, the junta. The same is true of the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) leader, Abass Bundu, who was also a delegate of the junta in the regional peace meetings. Bundu wrote a number of articles questioning the intervention of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone and calling for a national conference of all 'stakeholders' to resolve the crisis. Most members of the All People's Congress also supported the junta, with some, like Osho Williams, openly taking up ministerial appointments.

The alacrity with which these parties rallied to the AFRC helped reinforce the perception that this was a 'northern affair'. But this impression was more apparent than real for with the exception of Karefa-Smart, who was clearly actuated by sheer opportunism, none of these politicians could be said to have significant support from any part of the country. Bundu got less than 3 per cent in the elections that brought Kabbah to power, but his animus against the elected president seemed to have derived from the fact that he was disgraced by the Kabbah administration for fraudulently selling Sierra Leone's passports to dubious foreign businessmen. A court case against him was withdrawn by the Attorney General, Solomon Berewa, after he had paid half of the US$ 200,000 he was reported to have received from East Asian businessmen for the sale of the passports (Kabbah Government 1997). And the APC could only manage about 5 per cent of the votes in both the presidential and parliamentary elections.

The AFRC, in fact, has attracted mostly frustrated politicians, civil servants and business individuals from all parts of the country who felt marginalised under the civilian administration. Joe Amara Bangalie, the junta's 'Finance Minister', is a Mende from the south who was one of the All People's Congress' (APC) politicians disgraced by the NPRC and who had since been politically marginalised. Solomon Musa, the 'Chief Secretary of State' and 'Minister of Mines', is also a Mende from the south who was also disgraced by his colleagues in the NPRC. Pallo Bangura, a Temne/Limba from the north, who is the junta's 'Foreign Minister', was dismissed as Sierra Leone's permanent representative at the United Nations (a job he got from the NPRC) and replaced by James Jonah when the Kabbah government came to power. Bangura's attitude to the elected government had been, therefore, understandably hostile.

If such conflicting and opportunistic interests tended to initially polarise the country in the wake of the coup and undermine resistance to it, it was the prominent role which was perceived to be played by another frustrated (northern) politician, ex-president Joseph Saidu Momoh, whose All People's Congress (APC) government was overthrown by the NPRC in 1992, that helped unify the nation. Momoh, whose government was hugely unpopular across the country, is uncle of the AFRC leader. Strategic meetings of the junta were reportedly held at Momoh's residence, and the ex-president was provided a huge security force and staff. The AFRC's Chief of Staff, Colonel Samuel Sesay, elder brother of the chairman, was drafted into the army by Momoh. The prominence of this so-called 'Binkolo Cabal' (they are Limbas from Binkolo, a small northern town) helped crystallise the nationwide opposition to the AFRC. This was exemplified by a letter to the Nigerian Head of State, General Sani Abacha, signed by all the traditional heads from different ethnic groups in Freetown and other civic organisations, calling for an armed intervention to overturn the coup in August and prevent the APC from coming back to power (Community Leaders 1997). The Limba traditional chief was the only chief in Freetown who did not sign it. A highly effective radio station, FM 98.1, installed by the ousted government in ECOMOG-controlled Lungi, also helped to solidify opposition throughout the country against 'the common enemy', the so-called People's Army or the AFRC/RUF and their collaborators.

The Dynamics of Popular Resistance and Regime Terror

On 25 June, the AFRC announced that it had foiled a coup plot and proceeded to arrest and detain a number of senior officers, including Colonel Tom Carew, a northerner, and other prominent officers who originated from

all regions of the country. Prominent politicians linked to the SLPP, including Sama Banya, Elizabeth Lavalie (the country's most prominent female parliamentarian) and Abu Aiah Koroma, Kabbah's Minister of Presidential Affairs, were also arrested and detained. They were all released without charge about a month later. But the junta launched a vicious offensive against towns and villages they believed to be harbouring the Kamajois. Moyamba, a town in the south of the country, was attacked in June and sacked. About a hundred people were reported killed by the AFRC forces. On 28 June, AFRC forces struck at various parts of Bo district, killing 25 people and razing to the ground Telu, headquarters town of Jaiama Bongor chiefdom. This was the chiefdom in which Hinga Norman, Kabbah's Deputy Minister for Defence and leader of the Kamajoi movement, was regent chief. They also cold-bloodedly murdered octogenarian Paramount Chief, Sami Demby, uncle of Kabbah's Vice President, Albert Joe Demby.

The attack on press freedom and the political rights of vocal Sierra Leoneans has been unprecedented. Incidentally, although the AFRC claimed in its first post-coup broadcasts that the Kabbah government's assault on press freedom, particularly the passing of the widely condemned Newspaper Act (which was bound to restrict press freedom if signed into law; it was still awaiting presidential assent when the coup occurred), was one of the reasons for the take-over of the government, the junta has clamped down on journalists in a way that was never conceivable under previous regimes and governments. Soldiers have beaten up, detained, tortured and intimidated journalists opposed to the coup, and in some cases, their offices have been ransacked and their cars confiscated. In the event, only six of the 52 newspapers in circulation before the coup remain on the streets. Two leading independent papers, *Vision* and the *Standard Times*, in announcing their suspension of publication in August, cited the AFRC's hostile attitude towards the press in general and their editors in particular, for their decision to close down.

The AFRC remains a pariah junta, shunned by every government in the world. Sierra Leoneans abroad have also condemned and agitated against the coup. About a week after the take-over, 1,500 Sierra Leoneans demonstrated in Washington DC against the AFRC and called for United Sates' military intervention to overturn it. Through the Sierra Leone discussion group, Leonenet, some formed the Citizens for the Restoration of Democracy and quickly dispatched a letter to the UN Secretary General supporting the efforts of ECOWAS to overturn the take-over. Many of these agitations were launched in North America, largely as a result of the inspiration provided by

John Leigh, Kabbah's ambassador to the US, and James Jonah, the country's permanent representative at the UN.

Internal opposition to the coup took a dramatic turn in August after members of the National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS) announced a planned massive demonstration against the AFRC in Freetown and other parts of the country. The plan received the support of the Labour Congress, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the Women's' Movement and other civic organisations. But it was ruthlessly crushed in Freetown on Monday, 18 August by the rebel soldiers who attacked just everyone on the streets of the city with machetes, sticks and even live bullets. At least two students were killed as they tried to take cover at the Nursing Home, in the city centre, and another was murdered in his room in one of the students' hostels when the rebels invaded the Fourah Bay College campus. About 80 people were arrested and detained. In Bo, the country's second largest city, about 100 people who turned up for the demonstration were dispersed by units of the rebel army who attacked them with tear gas. Live bullets were also fired in the air to scare others away from the streets. At Lungi, however, where the AFRC has no presence, the demonstration went on without incident, with hundreds turning up to cry down the junta and demand the restitution of the elected government.

Naked savagery won the day in the capital but the point was clearly made: 'The brutal action of the Council in killing, wounding and maiming pro-democrats is an affront not only to the people of this country but to the whole world', wrote an editorial in the now suspended *Standard Times* newspaper (22 August 1997). It went on to say that '...the nation, particularly the students, had nonetheless succeeded in letting their voice heard; that they have not and will not tolerate the leadership of the junta no matter what resistance they would face'.

In spite of this overwhelming national opposition to the coup, the international media continue to portray the crisis in Sierra Leone mainly as a stand-off between the junta and the Nigerian-led ECOMOG force, which is currently enforcing sanctions against the illegal regime. The caption of one article on the coup in the *US News and World Report* (16 June 1997) simply read 'Non-democrats to the Rescue', and concentrated exclusively on Nigeria's role in trying to reverse the take-over and raising the tiresome moral issue of a military dictatorship fighting to restore democracy in another country while continuing to keep their own elected president in detention. Not surprisingly, supporters of the junta are harping on the same theme. In a letter to the UN Secretary General calling for a halt on Nigeria's 'aggression'

against the AFRC regime, Abbas Bundu, a former Secretary General of ECOWAS who lost to Kabbah in the electoral race for the presidency, raised the same point about the Nigerians and declared Nigeria's military actions as 'totally unwarranted and unjustified' (*Christian Science Monitor* 1997). The ECOMOG factor has been significant in the anti-junta movement, but this has to be placed within the context of the wide-ranging forms of resistance that Sierra Leoneans have shown at various levels to undo the military coup.

ECOMOG's Intervention and International Pressures

Armed resistance to the coup from the Nigeria-led ECOMOG force in Freetown has been sustained, albeit limited, and carried out within the context of an international and regional sanctions regime, which did not explicitly endorse the use of force to overturn the coup. Therefore, ECOMOG has had to tread very carefully in using force to enforce the embargo and weaken the resolve of the junta. Immediately after the coup was announced, the Nigerians, who were overwhelmed by the rebellious soldiers on the day of the take-over, quickly reinforced their positions in the capital. By 31 May, there were 3,000 Nigerian troops in Freetown and about 1,500 Guinean soldiers. Ghana also sent in a small detachment of troops but insisted on a negotiated settlement. By early July, after the failure of talks brokered by prominent Sierra Leonean personalities, Nigerian military officials and Western governments, aimed at providing a safe passage for the coupists and reinstalling the elected government, the Nigerians were prepared to strike. But the operation, code-named Wild Chase, was botched after John Karefa Smart, who was privy to the plans as a result of his earlier role in attempting to get the junta to step down, announced to the public the Nigerians' intentions. In the event, the junta and its rebel allies struck first, overwhelming the Nigerian forces that were thinly spread across the capital. The Nigerians responded by using their gunboats to attack the junta's military headquarters from the sea and in the ensuing confusion, the junta carried out air strikes against civilian targets and claimed that the Nigerians were responsible. Some Nigerian shells also missed their targets and hit civilian settlements. Over 60 people were reported killed as a result of this exchange.

The UN and OAU condemned the coup and gave support to the regional organisation, ECOWAS, to reverse it. The Commonwealth, describing the coup as 'a setback for the continent of Africa as a whole', suspended Sierra Leone pending a re-establishment of constitutional rule. The European Union suspended development aid, and all foreign missions hastily vacated the chaotic capital. The US, Britain and France quickly airlifted their nationals and other foreigners from the country. ECOWAS foreign ministers met in

Conakry on 27 June and agreed to pursue a three-pronged strategy, which was highlighted in a 14-point communiqué: 'dialogue, economic sanctions, and an embargo, as well as a recourse to force' as a last resort. It added that 'in order to increase the effectiveness of the above measures, the ministers ... recommended prior consultations among member states at the highest level' (The Ministers of Foreign Affairs 1997). The communiqué stressed that no country should recognise the junta, and called on the international community to support the ECOWAS initiatives and to provide humanitarian assistance to Guinea and other countries affected by the flood of Sierra Leonean refugees.

A four-nation committee comprising of the foreign ministers of Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, as well as the Secretary General of the Organisation for African Unity, Ahmed Salim Salim, was appointed to open a dialogue with the junta and to report back to the chairman of ECOWAS, General Sani Abacha, after two weeks. Of the West African countries involved in the crisis, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire took a more cautious approach — they pleaded for dialogue as opposed to the outright use of force to overturn the coup. Nigeria took a much tougher stand, arguing the case for urgent and rapid intervention to prevent the situation from further deteriorating and endangering other countries in the region. The OAU's Secretary General was in favour of 'any method that would restore the legitimate government in Sierra Leone'. The junta rejected the ECOWAS communiqué and, in a concerted effort to frustrate the plans of ECOWAS, sent emissaries to countries that were felt to be less belligerent to plead their case and ask for support.

Upon the advice of Ghana's President Jerry Rawlings and Ivory Coast's Konan Bedie, ECOWAS initiated negotiations with the AFRC in July to effect a peaceful resolution of the crisis in which Kabbah would be restored to power and some of the grievances of the soldiers addressed. Ghana's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Victor Gbeho, visited Freetown as part of the efforts to engage the junta in a dialogue. His reported statement that the situation in Freetown was peaceful and that the international community was being fed with misinformation about acts of lawlessness and mass killings, provoked strong rebuttal from the ousted government and Sierra Leoneans at large. Further diplomatic discussions and pressures led to a meeting in Abidjan on 17 and 18 July between the ECOWAS Committee of Four and the Freetown junta. A joint communiqué called for the implementation of an immediate cease-fire and 'the early restoration of constitutional order, consistent with the objectives of ECOWAS as spelled out in paragraph 4(i)' of the communiqué. This paragraph called for 'the early restoration of the legitimate government of President Tejan Kabbah'. The junta's delegation was

given time to 'return home and hold further consultations with the regime in Freetown in order to facilitate a consideration of the detailed modalities for the return of constitutional order to their country' (Economic Community of West African States 1997a). Although the provisions of the communiqué were very clear about what was meant by 'constitutional order', the junta's chief delegate, Alimamy Pallo Bangura — and, subsequently, Johnny Paul Koroma — insisted that the statement meant that the government of Kabbah could be reinstated, but did not guarantee that this would happen. The two sides agreed to reconvene in Abidjan on 25 July.

The meeting, which reconvened on 28 July, broke down on 30 July after Koroma announced that his junta 'would not be stampeded into hurrying matters beyond their appointed course' and proceeded to announce a transition programme which would see him in office until 2001. He defiantly asserted that his junta will fight 'aggression internally and externally...to the last drop of our blood' should ECOWAS decide to intervene militarily. The ECOWAS member states, especially those who had argued the case for dialogue, felt embarrassed by the behaviour of the junta's leader. It was now clear to the Committee of Four that the junta was not negotiating in good faith. Indeed, the communiqué of the meeting 'expressed dismay at the announcement by the illegal regime in Freetown, while the meeting was still in session, of its decision to suspend the constitution of Sierra Leone and remain in office illegally until the year 2001,' and ' found the new position of the Sierra Leonean delegation on the issue of the reinstatement of President Kabbah totally unacceptable'. Nigeria's Foreign Minister, Tom Ikimi, later told reporters that he believed the AFRC's envoys did not have any real mandate to negotiate. He concluded that the Committee of Four had no choice but to recommend to the Heads of State that the economic embargo against Sierra Leone should be tightened. The chief delegate and foreign spokesperson of the junta, Alimamy Pallo Bangura, may also have felt let down by the behaviour of his master. He defected, sought asylum from the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire, and tried to secure an international job as a reward for his defection. The junta's leader, Johnny Paul Koroma, later wrote a letter to him to reconsider his decision (AFRC 1997c). Bangura went back to resume his duties with the junta apparently when his contacts for the international job failed to pay off.

At an ECOWAS summit meeting in Abuja on 28 and 29 August, the Kabbah government, which was officially invited to participate, lobbied hard for tough action. On the recommendation of the Committee of Four, member states endorsed stronger sanctions against the junta, and agreed to extend ECOMOG's mandate to include Sierra Leone. This was to be called

ECOMOG 2, and would be placed under the same command of ECOMOG in Liberia. And the Committee of Four was expanded to the Committee of Five, with Liberia as the new member. ECOWAS reaffirmed its position 'to restore constitutional order to Sierra Leone as soon as possible'. It decided to place 'immediately a general and total embargo on all supplies of petroleum products, arms and military equipment to Sierra Leone and abstain from transacting any business with that country'. Member states further agreed to 'prevent from entering their territories, all members of the illegal regime, as well as military officers, members of their families, and other entities' directly connected to the regime. The funds held by members of the junta and civilians directly or indirectly connected to them were to be frozen. The export and import of commodities between Sierra Leone and member states were to be prohibited. The delivery of humanitarian goods could only be done with the 'prior approval of the Authority of Heads of States and Governments of ECOWAS'. And the sub-regional force, ECOMOG, was entrusted with the responsibility to 'employ all necessary means to impose the implementation of the embargo'. This was to include the close monitoring of 'the coastal areas, land borders and airspace of Sierra Leone'. ECOMOG was mandated to 'inspect, guard and seize any ship, vehicle or aircraft violating the embargo' (Economic Community of West African States 1997b).

The ECOWAS Committee of Five, Sierra Leone's permanent representative to the UN, James Jonah, and other African representatives at the Security Council, succeeded in getting the British government to sponsor a resolution to back the ECOWAS sanctions regime in Sierra Leone. The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously on the resolution on 8 October, 1997. Acting under Chapter VII (enforcement) and Chapter VIII (regional arrangement) of the United Nations Charter, the Council empowered ECOWAS to enforce an embargo against Sierra Leone. The resolution authorised ECOWAS to halt ships in order to inspect and verify their cargoes and destinations. As in the ECOWAS sanctions regime, the Security Council's measures included a ban on the sale or supply of petroleum and petroleum products and weapons and military equipment to the junta. The resolution also called for an international travel ban on all members of the junta and adult members of their families unless permission was granted by a special committee on Sierra Leone to be created by the Security Council. The Council is to periodically consider reports on violations of the measures adopted, and decide on requests for exceptions to the ban on importation of petroleum products and travel by members of the junta or their families. The resolution provided for the termination of the sanctions if the military junta relinquished power and allowed the restoration of Sierra Leone's

democratically elected government. The sanctions were to be reviewed by the Security Council 180 days after adoption of the resolution if they were still in force (UN Security Council 1997).

The UN and ECOWAS sanctions regime gave legitimacy to the decision by ECOMOG to occupy the country's only international airport, at Lungi, which had been in the hands of Nigerian troops since the early period of the coup. ECOMOG has also been vigilantly policing the sanctions. This has caused a critical shortage of basic necessities in the country, including food and fuel. Clashes between the Nigerian forces and the rebel soldiers have since been frequent, leading to loss of lives on both sides, but particularly on the side of the AFRC forces who are usually trapped in the Nigerians' well fortified positions. A large number of civilians have also died as a result of these clashes.

The Conakry Peace Plan

Although the junta declared its intention of remaining in power until 2001, sustained military and civic pressure, both national and international, forced it to sign a 'Peace Plan' on 23 October 1997, which committed it to hand over power in May 1998. In the two weeks leading to the peace meeting in Conakry, the ECOMOG force sustained its military pressure on the junta with a number of targeted bombings, some of which led to the complete destruction of the junta's military headquarters at Cockeril. With the intensification of the bombings, local residents, including opinion leaders, intensified their pressure on the junta to accede to the demands of the international community and spare the country of the impending catastrophe. Kabbah also made a very good impression at the UN General Assembly meeting in October, where he briefed member states about the nature of the crisis and the need to restore his government and constitutional order (Tejan-Kabbah 1997). He was to follow this up with a one day workshop on his government's plans for its post-coup first 90 days in office, organised by the British Ministry of International Development in London; and participation at the Commonwealth Heads of State Summit in Edinburgh, to which he was specially invited by the host government and the Commonwealth Secretariat. It was during this same period that the Security Council passed its unanimous resolution on the immediate restoration of the Kabbah government and supported the ECOWAS-initiated sanctions, including the banning of the junta and members of their immediate families from foreign travel (United Nations Security Council 1997). Also to be added is the realisation that despite the large quantities of arms at the junta's disposal, it has not been able to overcome the armed resistance of the Civic Defence Force. It was a

combination of these pressures that caused the junta to crack and to agree to cede power to the Kabbah government at the meeting.

Brokered by the ECOWAS Committee of Five, the Conakry Peace Plan (Economic Community of West African States 1997c; see also annex to this volume) called for the immediate cessation of conflicts, the restoration of the government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah on 22 May 1998, the demobilisation of all combatants by ECOMOG (to start on 1 December 1997), the commencement of humanitarian assistance (to start on November 15), the return of the refugees from neighbouring countries, the granting of immunity to members of the AFRC, and the release of the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, who had been detained in Nigeria before the coup on allegations of gun-running. The latter 'could continue to play an active role and participate in the peace process'. The accord also called for the formation of a broad-based government after Kabbah's restoration to power and ethnic balance in top level appointments to the public service.

Both the ousted government and the AFRC have accepted the Plan in principle but implementation has been undermined by the sheer instability of the junta. A few preliminary meetings have been held between ECOMOG and the junta to establish the groundwork for the deployment of ECOMOG troops in the country. Progress is reported to have been made in a number of areas, but the junta continues to raise objections in a few vital ones. The junta first called for the removal, and then reduction, of Nigerian troops in the ECOMOG force, as well as the immediate release of Foday Sankoh as conditions for the implementation of the Peace Plan. It has also opposed the disarmament of the army on the grounds that it is a national institution that is protected by the constitution. And it continues to unleash a dirty propaganda war against the ousted government it has agreed to restore. These acts of intransigence coincided with the new Liberian government's growing opposition to ECOMOG and the sanctions regime against Sierra Leone. It should be recalled that Charles Taylor, the president of Liberia, had worked closely with the RUF. According to the ECOMOG commander, Victor Malu, the illegal junta has no authority to decide the makeup of the ECOMOG force, and the disarmament programme will include the army. He has warned the junta to cooperate with the planned implementation of the programme or face the might of ECOMOG and the entire world. He has also insisted that the peace agreement does not call for the immediate release of Foday Sankoh. Despite the problems, a number of initiatives are underway to ensure that the disarmament and demobilisation plan proceeds as planned.

But the junta is also riddled with very serious internal problems. On November 1997, the AFRC announced that it has foiled a coup plot organised by some of its own members and staunch supporters. This coup is said to have been led by Steven Bio, a wealthy businessman who allegedly sponsored the foiled August 1996 coup plot against Kabbah. Bio, elder brother of the former NPRC leader Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, has been a powerful figure in the AFRC and is reportedly opposed to the Conakry plan to restore Kabba to office. A large number of soldiers and RUF rebels are reported to have been arrested. The leader of the junta, Koroma, is also reported to have sacked a top level official of the AFRC and suspended eight other soldiers because of their involvement in 'some dubious activities' aimed at undermining 'the revenue-generating capacity' of the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources. These are said to have been under 'mess arrest'. It is reported that the eight had 'set in place a reign of anarchy inconsistent with state stability'. (Sierra Leone Web Page: Sierra Leone News, 19, November). The soldier who announced the coup on 25 May, Corporal Tamba Gborie, is said to be among those arrested.

All of these developments reflect the dilemmas of a nation that has crumbled, not under the weight of perennial tyranny, but as the result of the ruthless activities of its own rogue soldiers. The commercial banks, schools and many government offices remain closed; there is mounting fuel and food scarcity and the World Food Programme has warned that the country faced famine in a matter of weeks if the stand-off continued. Fighting between the Kamajoi and the so-called People's Army has escalated in the southern part of the country since then. With Sierra Leone's infrastructure in shambles as a result of the six year-old war and the after effects of the AFRC take-over, the impoverished country faces very hard times even if constitutionality and order are restored. The nation's image is bound to suffer for a long time to come.

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Lumpen Youth Culture and Political Violence: Sierra Leoneans Debate the RUF and the Civil War *

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Overview of the Debate

The civil war in Sierra Leone has been marked by horrific violence, large-scale torture of civilians, pillage of rural institutions and industrial assets, and mass looting of village property. Despite this record of destructive violence, the Revolutionary United Front, which initiated the war in 1991, continues to espouse a liberationist ideology of egalitarian development, popular democracy and rural empowerment. The key question that Sierra Leoneans have been asking, therefore, is this: how can a movement which claims to be fighting for the poor commit at the same time high levels of atrocities against poor people? In other words, how can the RUF's violence of so-called 'revolutionary social change' be explained? And what lessons can be drawn from it?

The bulk of the RUF's fighters are very young people who normally reside in rural areas, with varying degrees of exposure to aspects of the urban economy, culture and society. Scholars, government officials, activists, the media and international development agencies have been trying to understand the nature and extent of involvement of young people in this and other wars in the region. A number of questions have emerged that are likely to throw

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* The debate was conducted on Leonenet's e-mail Discussion Forum on Sierra Leonean Issues in April, 1997, and edited with an overview by Yusuf Bangura.

enormous light on the problems of youth and destructive violence: What does knowledge of Sierra Leone's youth culture tell us about the war? Is there a relationship between specific types of youth culture and the RUF's brand of violence? Indeed, does the violence have anything to do with youth culture or are there other influences at play? What types of youth have been active in the RUF's war of 'liberation' and why has its violence assumed a bandit pattern?

A group of Sierra Leonean academics in North America and Europe debated these issues in April 1997 on *Leonenet*, an unmoderated e-mail global forum for the discussion of Sierra Leonean issues. The debate threw up interesting insights about the RUF, youth culture and violence that may be of interest to policy makers, researchers and the wider public. Firstly, the debate indicated that even though most youths share a common cultural experience, their involvement in the war has not been uniform. The main combatants in the RUF have been marginal or socially disconnected youth, who straddle both urban and rural areas, and who are often referred to in social science literature as 'lumpen'. The debate identified three types of such youth: the urban marginals (or 'rarray man dem'), some of whom received military training in Libya and were therefore central to the formation of the RUF; the 'san-san boys' (or illicit miners), who live very precarious lives in the diamond-mining areas, and who joined the rebel movement in large numbers when mining towns and villages were overwhelmed by the RUF; and socially disconnected village youth ('njiahungbia ngorgesia'), who are contemptuous of rural authority and institutions, and who, therefore, saw the war as an opportunity to settle local scores.

Contributors also identified other individuals from more settled backgrounds as collaborators or abducted participants, but it seems that the role of the marginal or lumpen groups and their location in the RUF's power structure have been decisive in defining the RUF's war practices. Indeed, the question was posed by some of the contributors whether the RUF war cannot be described as a revolt by the 'lumpen proletariat'. A major question that future research will have to tackle is the extent to which the social formation and values of the three marginal groups that are believed to be central to the RUF project can be said to approximate, or differ from, standard social science conceptions of 'lumpen' social groups.

A second issue in the debate concerns the heavy involvement of these three types of youth in the Sierra Leone military, whose ranks multiplied more than fivefold during the course of the war. War came to be regarded as a survival strategy by youth who had suffered high levels of social exclusion. Thus, the

participation of this category of youth on both sides of the war may partly explain why large-scale atrocities were also committed by the military. The debate highlighted the ways in which the institutions that had previously held lumpen groups in check brokedown and encouraged such groups to cease negotiating for, or demanding, inclusion in the social mainstream, and to opt instead for full scale brutal violence. However, it is important to note that most Sierra Leoneans remained totally opposed to the RUF and the brutal activities of the army. Indeed, as some of the contributors pointed out, it was the stabilising role of the more settled peasants and miners in rural areas (who later formed an armed militia: the 'kamajoisia') that checked the destructive violence of the RUF and helped to ensure that most of the displaced communities remained as united entities.

A third issue concerns the significance of comparative perspectives in the study of lumpen culture and political violence. Lumpen groups were shown to exist in several African countries (and elsewhere in the world). Indeed, the subject of 'lumpen' culture and resistance to the greed of Africa's post-independence rulers has been a central theme in some of the celebrated writings of Wole Soyinka. Contributors found strong similarities between the RUF's violence and that of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia and RENAMO in Mozambique. These three movements were said to be different from classical liberation or decolonisation movements and other contemporary armed groups in the continent. Contributors noted the similarities in values, organisation and levels of accountability among the groups that have dominated the first types of armed movements.

A fourth point relates to the difficulties that are often encountered by analysts in the conceptualisation of African social groups. Given the fact that most African languages are unwritten, tensions often exist between the actual behaviour of social groups that are undergoing rapid social change and the concepts that are used in traditional societies to describe their behaviour. This problem was encountered in the use of the Mende concept, 'njiahungbia ngorgesia', to describe what some contributors believed was the rural equivalent of urban lumpens or 'rarray man dem'. There was much disagreement among contributors on the meaning of the concept of 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' and its application to the rural groups that are known to have played dominant roles in the RUF's project. It is hoped that the debate would encourage ethno-linguists and social scientists to develop indigenous concepts that can adequately explain the momentous social changes that have taken place in the country and elsewhere on the continent.

Finally, the debate underscored the need for a well focused and comprehensive strategy that would address the problems of youth in general, and the plight of the socially marginal or lumpen groups in particular. Indeed, the success of the peace accord that was signed in November 1996 would ultimately depend upon progress to be made in solving the problems of social exclusion as they have affected the youth population.

Lansana Gberie

Let me start by raising two points that may help us to understand the RUF's acts of barbaric violence and its *ex post* rationalisation. The first relates to the movement's unremitting use of child combatants in carrying out atrocities. As a journalist, I visited Pujehun with a team of national electoral officers in late 1991 to observe former president Momoh's referendum on the one-party state shortly after the first 'liberation' of the town from the RUF. I was shown graves that had been hastily dug up by the streets in which were buried people who had been slaughtered by their own children (mostly pupils of the St. Paul's Secondary School). The children, I was told, were forced to commit these terrible acts by the RUF who liberally supplied them with drugs. These young fiends ran away with the RUF combatants when ULIMO (United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy) and the Sierra Leone government troops entered the town. It is clear that most of the RUF combatants (partly recruited in this way) are teenagers, even pre-teenagers, and are known to be most reckless with human lives. How does this use of children to commit atrocities reconcile with the view that the RUF war has been characterised by irresponsible acts of hooliganism and terror simply because it is led by lumpens? Isn't it the case that 'lumpens' are adults with some political aims, however odious or vague such aims may be?

The second point relates to Paul Richards's postulation in both his article in the Furley collection of essays, *Conflict in Africa*, and in his book, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, that among the cadre of RUF fighters who invaded the country from Liberia in 1991 were Burkinabes (and Liberians) who, he claims, were responsible for most of the terrorism of the early period. He suggests that such (unjustifiable) murderous acts caused the defection of most of the more conscientious Sierra Leonean members from the RUF. I know that the presence of Burkinabes in the early RUF invading force is a pretty controversial issue, but I accept the official line that there were, indeed, Burkinabe mercenaries in the RUF. How does this foreign element help us to understand the misdirected acts of terror by the RUF?

To conclude, I think that, perhaps, we may need a concise definition of what constitutes a 'lumpen' group in the Sierra Leone context to be able to

make the connections with most of the senior RUF members — the so-called 'vanguards' — that we now know about.

Yusuf Bangura

The two points Lansana has raised are very important. Let me first address the issue of the RUF's use of teenage or pre-teenage kids in Pujehum to kill their parents. This practice was surely meant to alienate such kids from their communities and to reinforce their bonds with the RUF. However, it is difficult to imagine how such 'rational' acts can enhance the so-called RUF programme of egalitarian social change. To me, such acts seek to bond seemingly fearless young kids to the RUF's project of mass terror, the expropriation of village resources, and the destruction of community life. The main culprits should surely be the adult commanders who provide the kids with the drugs to cause such abominations.

The second point concerns the role of the Burkinabe fighters in the war. Until alternative information is provided, I will also continue to believe the official line that there were Burkinabe fighters during the early phase of the uprising. People I spoke with in 1994, who have direct experience of the war, were categorical that some of the RUF fighters spoke only French. Now that many of the combatants are available for interview, it should not be that difficult to confirm or disprove this view. Incidentally, both the NPRC military government and the RUF believed that 'aliens' brought the atrocities to the war. I was home in 1994 when the government announced the withdrawal of ULIMO from the war. One of the reasons given by government officials was the high level of atrocities committed by ULIMO. In its *Footpaths to Democracy*, the RUF also blamed what it called 'veterans of the Liberian civil war' for the terror that it inflicted on the local population. It seems that the social character of the fighters in both the NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia, who were allies of the RUF) and ULIMO is similar to that of the RUF and the expanded Sierra Leone military (RSLMF). The 'aliens' may well have introduced barbaric violence to the Sierra Leone war, since they were already familiar with such tactics in the Liberia war, but the RUF and our military could have committed the same crimes even without the support of the 'aliens'. The key question is why the RUF failed to stop its horror tactics after 1992 when it claimed it had withdrawn the 'veterans of the Liberian war' from Sierra Leone.

Let me attempt a definition of 'lumpens'. Actually, I would prefer the local Sierra Leone concept of 'rarray man dem' or the stratum of socially estranged village youth in Mendeland, 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia', who Patrick Muana believes are central to our understanding of the atrocities committed in the

war. Anyway, 'lumpens', in social science literature, refer to socially uprooted, dispossessed, or 'degraded' individuals, often with very poor education. Three issues are central to an understanding of their social character. The first is the weak relations they have with legitimate work — they are mostly unemployed, and survive by their wits through petty theft, acting occasionally as casual labourers, pushing drugs, or carrying out 'dirty' assignments for big people in the society. The second is the weak relations they have with family and community life — they are largely alienated from the social mainstream, categorised as social misfits and potential trouble makers. The third is their freewheeling social life — they are often hooked on drugs, gambling and alcohol, and engage in street fights, often with very dangerous weapons. Because of their alienation from society, they may have no qualms about resorting to violence, in settling disputes, and destroying social institutions.

Lansana Gberie

I thank Yusuf for this insight. I have a small problem with his explanation of Patrick Muana's concept of 'njiahungbua ngorgeisia'. Patrick seems to think that these youths are necessarily 'lumpens', with a predisposition to violence and criminality, and that they are easy recruits for the RUF. I would like to disagree with him. The term in Mende simply refers to the more active segment of the youth population who may be peasants or diamond diggers; and many are certainly integrated into their communities. In fact, the term has a positive connotation in Mende to mean the smart, sharp and alert young men. A near-Krio (slang) equivalent may be 'savis man' (smart, street-wise youth), which certainly does not necessarily denote criminality. I'm not saying that some of the 'njiahungbia ngorngesia' may not be criminals, gamblers, or drug addicts, but these traits do not apply to the whole group. I agree that some of such young men easily joined the RUF for their own purposes but a lot of them fled the fighting. In fact, one of the first people to realise the potential of tapping into the 'njiahungbia ngorngesia' was the late Captain Ben Hirsch of the Sierra Leone military, who recruited many of such youths in the Segbwema area into a local militia. The RUF banditry was quickly checked. This local militia was the forerunner of the 'irregulars' who were recruited on a large scale by the NPRC military government, and subsequently the 'kamajoisia' popular militia (discussed by Patrick Muana in this volume). Most of the 'kamajoisia' could be classified as 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia'.

Ibrahim Abdullah

Patrick's use of the Mende term, 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia', to capture youth rebelliousness is not exclusivist. He is not referring to the whole group. If this group approximates what Lansana claims constitutes 'savis man' in Freetown, then Patrick is on firm ground. For the 'savis man' category cannot stand for all youths in Freetown. What cannot be contested is the fact that all youths share similar cultural symbols — language, mannerisms, dress code, iconography and so on. What makes some more rebellious, and therefore more political or violence-oriented, is a complex process, which relates to the sociology of the family, personal characteristics, peer pressure, etc. The group that Patrick has identified can pass as 'upline' (provincial) 'savis man' or 'bonga rarray man'.

Lansana Gberie

There is still a small problem. I would rather see 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' as local vigilantes. In fact, they were later mobilised into local vigilantes. If there is a shared cultural milieu — language, mannerism (?), dress code, iconography etc. — then the comparison stops there. There is really very little basis on which to construct them as lumpens (that is the uprooted, violence-prone youths that Yusuf defines). That a lot of these 'up line savis man dem' were later mobilised into the 'kamajoisia' militia group to fight for their villages tells us that they are not exactly the 'rarray man dem' or lumpens you find gambling in the main urban centres of, for instance, Freetown, Bo or Kenema. They are firmly integrated into their societies. This is my point.

Cecil Blake

There is an assertion Ibrahim made regarding youths that I need him to clarify further. He stated that 'what cannot be contested is the fact that all youths share similar cultural symbols — language, mannerisms, dress code, iconography and so on'. I find the claim interesting but am having difficulties with its wider implications, particularly since he seems to foreclose any contestation arising from the claim. To what cohort is he referring? Does he really mean all youths in a demographic sense? It is important to clarify the above since it will lead to a better understanding of the centrality of youths in the tale of death and destruction that has befallen Africa over the past two decades. Do we lump together, for instance, 'rarray man', 'savis man' and 'ose pikin' (a child who is under strict parental control) as youths who share similar cultural symbols to which he alludes?

The youth phenomenon is central to our understanding of the vicious wars that have been waged not only by the RUF, but also by the infamous RENAMO of Mozambique among others. We have patterns across the continent of the abuse of youth by greedy crooks parading themselves as revolutionaries, by cajoling them through various means — abduction, drug dependency etc. — into performing acts of violence that even the average 'rarray man' would find hard to do. Ibrahim should kindly elaborate further on his assertion in order to put the issue of 'youth' in a perspective that will help shed light on the RUF debate.

Ibrahim Abdullah

Cecil's question addresses a key issue in understanding the war and the continued violence not only in Sierra Leone but elsewhere on the continent. Let me rephrase the question this way: when and why do youth take up arms? To say that the common culture of youth in Sierra Leone cannot be contested does not mean that it is non-negotiable. The language, the dress code, the iconography, and mannerisms are constantly being negotiated in the dialogue which youths have with their communities, neighbourhood, family, school, etc. They choose what to say where and when, what to wear, and what to do in certain situations. Yes the 'savis man' and the 'ose pikin' share the same cultural repertoire. The 'ose pikin' speaks the same language like the 'savis man' — he has to, as a survival strategy, otherwise he will be called a 'bald head', 'dead', etc. (derogatory street slangs for youth who conform to mainstream rules). The 'ose pikin' knows about the drug culture but chooses not to participate. In short, the 'ose pikin' learns how to negotiate these boundaries prior to his 'cut out' (when he breaks out of parental control), if he eventually joins them, or if he decides to stay away from the crowd. The fact of being an 'ose pikin' does not preclude participation or sharing.

Of course, this argument does not apply to all youths because the location of youth makes all the difference. Thus, someone from Hill Station (middle class settlement) might know less about 'odelay' (masquerade society) than say someone from Magazine Cut (a high density, low-income area where the 'odelay' tradition is strong). Similarly, youth with rural background will differ from those in the east end of Freetown or Kingtom (areas of high urbanisation). For instance, the 'savis man' in Freetown is different from the 'san-san boy' (illicit diamond miners) in Kono and other diamond areas. But both are lumpens, in my view. These differences can be significant depending on what we are looking at. By and large, they are not too far apart from what could be called a representative sample.

To cast our net wider into the continent and in comparative terms, we find similar groups in African cities. In Nigeria, particularly in the North, these types of groups are called 'yan banga'. They were very active in the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s (they are not 'almajirais' — children attached to Islamic teachers for education and service). In the South of the country, precisely in the Yoruba areas, they are called 'Omo Garage' or 'Adogbo boys' (the former literally means garage kid, the latter area boys) because they are usually found in motor parks (called 'garage' in Yorubaland). These groups are also male-specific, and are very similar to the 'savis man/ rarray boy' phenomena in Sierra Leone. In Algeria, they are called Hittiste, because they are always standing against walls — it is this group that is responsible for the killings in Algeria today. And in Dakar, they literally control the streets with gangs and all. Museveni, whom I take very seriously (probably the Nkrumah of this generation of African rulers), has cautioned us about this group's role as revolutionary cadre in his autobiography, *Sowing the Mustard Seed.* He does not only talk about 'bayaye' (lumpens), but also about lumpen culture ('kiyaaye'). This is significant for as Yusuf points out in his review (in this volume), Cabral, another great African who participated in a social revolution, alerted us to the dangers posed by this group to any project of social transformation.

I argue in 'Bush Path to Destruction' (in this volume) about the lumpen origin and character of the RUF. What we now need to explore is why and how student and lumpen culture coalesced to produce a rebellious oppositional culture which subsequently came to challenge/contest political power? Did the 'odelay' phenomenon, which is Sierra Leone-specific, provide the common ground? Or is it the 'pote' (a recreational place for lumpens where the smoking of marijuana is prevalent), like the Sheebeen in Southern Africa, that is responsible for the change? Why did this not happen elsewhere except in Sierra Leone and Liberia? We need to provide answers to these questions if we really want to understand the specificity of the Sierra Leone case.

Yusuf Bangura

We are juggling with two issues here: the phenomenon of urban lumpen youth culture, which has been addressed by Cecil and Ibrahim, and its rural equivalent, which Lansana and Patrick (in this volume) have addressed. Patrick may have to explain whether what he describes in his paper as the social character of the 'njiahungbia ngorngesia' is the same as what Lansana addresses in his comments. My main interest in this is to understand the social or class basis and behaviour of the RUF. It is always useful to locate political texts, doctrines, or statements of social movements in their social

contexts. A populist text like that of the RUF may mean different things to movements that may be led, for instance, by workers, middle class intellectuals, peasants, or lumpen individuals. The interesting thing about the RUF's violence is that it is so similar to that of the NPFL and ULIMO in Liberia and RENAMO's in Mozambique. These movements differ considerably from the liberation movements in Guinea Bissau under the PAIGC, Mozambique under Frelimo, Uganda under Museveni's NRA, Zimbabwe under ZAPU and ZANU, the EPLF in Eritrea that waged 30 years of armed struggle for independence from Ethiopia, and the Tigrean People's Liberation Front in Ethiopia, which overthrew Mengistu's government.

One may need to find out why the nature of the violence committed by the latter groups differed from the violence of the NPFL, ULIMO, RUF and Renamo. It is not simply a question of youth, since all movements used young people in their armed struggles. Why were atrocities against civilians so rampant in these latter types of 'liberation' movements than in the others? Isn't it the case that the latter groups recruited fighters from very similar categories of youth and used drugs and terroristic violence to enforce bonding with the movements? I thought that one of Ibrahim's major contributions to an understanding of this problem is his effort in 'Bush Path to Destruction' to identify the cultural values of the individuals who are central to the formation of the RUF. It is relatively easy to verify this aspect of the youth phenomenon than a thesis that implicates all youth. In other words, rather than focus on youth in general, it is important to differentiate among youth to understand the social character of the RUF. Ibrahim's reply to Lansana about the need to look at 'the sociology of the family, personal characteristics and peer group pressure' is important — to which we must add linkages with productive, self-fulfilling and socially regulated work. Lumpens score very poorly in the area of work socialisation or regimes of workplace domination that ensure compliance with socially-sanctioned rules (note also that the literature on the industrial behaviour of first generation workers in Africa who are not sufficiently socialised into the industrial work process suggests that such workers tend to use violent methods against employers during industrial disputes).

What Ibrahim's insights on 'lumpens' demand is a systematic analysis of the social character and ideological orientations of the commanders of the RUF before they joined the movement. Based on Patrick's own investigations, these commanders are said to share similar characteristics with the urban 'lumpen' groups that Ibrahim identifies as important in the early history of the movement. What seems clear is that we are not dealing with a group of highly educated 'excluded intellectuals'.

Cecil Blake

Ibrahim is on to something here! I like the concept of a constant negotiation of the various characteristic features he identified, by youth from different locations and sociological backgrounds. I believe also that there is a significant aspect of 'choice' particularly by the 'ose pikin' who indeed has to survive in the wider youth environment when he/she leaves the confines of the home. It is precisely because of this negotiation process that one stumbles upon some 'ose pikin' down 'Long step' in Sawpit, negotiating indeed with prostitutes. It is also this idea of negotiation that lets us understand why 'rarray boy' or 'savis man' could be seen occasionally doing what we would consider 'honest' work to earn some bread for the day.

In fact, it is precisely this constant negotiation either to seek legitimisation or to go through an initiation process that ought to provide us with the key to the mind-set of those youths in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Mozambique involved in the atrocities of the 'wars' in which they were engaged. How did they perceive themselves and in what negotiation mold? To what extent were they carrying out the acts of terror consciously, knowing very well that lives of mothers, children (some like themselves) and fathers are being wantonly extinguished? Is it a case in which economic motive was the factor regardless of outcome? I do *not* equate economic motive with poverty at this juncture. My concern here is to find out the extent to which 'raw cash' as incentive had anything to do with motivating youth to perpetrate such atrocities.

I deduce from Yusuf's review (in this volume) and Ibrahim's previous work on the RUF that the pathological dimensions (read abnormal in this context) of the youths involved in the atrocities go beyond mere exposure to external Rambo-like influences. Something went wrong in the 'negotiation' youths get involved in to let them carry out such brutalities at the levels they did. There are many times during the war that many of us said quietly and even loudly at times: 'This is not the Salone I know!' Our task, therefore, is to answer the question from a culturally unique perspective (first Sierra Leonean and then African): what went wrong with the negotiation process? Secondly, under what situations do external interventions — mental, militaristic, economic etc. — impact so strongly on the negotiation processes of youth? Spare me the dominant Western paradigm.

I raise the questions above, because in one way or another, we all went through the negotiation process(es) and were by and large influenced by external factors along the lines mentioned above but chose not to go 'bad'. For instance, when I decided to play in a (musical) 'band' it was a conscious negotiation that led to my being perceived for quite a while as a 'rarray boy'

who would end up no where. Perhaps, if we tackle this issue of negotiation in a manner that would shed light on some of the questions raised above and others to be raised on this subject, we might be able to develop intervention programmes for youths that would assist them better in negotiating less lethally, the characteristic features identified by Ibrahim, and hopefully encourage them to move towards responsible citizenship.

Lansana Gberie

Cecil has raised an important point about the constant need for the youths in our social setting to negotiate. I have discovered that however irresistible the notion of class analysis is (what Yusuf finds so central in understanding the behaviour of African rebel movements) it inevitably runs into problems. The system that we are talking about is 'unformed' — rather fluid. I have the same problems with Zack-Williams's (*Tributors, Supporters and Merchant Capital: Mining and Underdevelopment in Sierra Leone*) and Paul Richards's (*Fighting for the Rain Forest*) analysis of the issue of tributors/freelance forest diamond miners in their respective books. We must make a distinction between the 'san-san boys' or roving freelance miners on the one hand and the settled miners and peasants on the other. The former group could be conveniently described (once removed from their pits) as lumpens. They are mostly urban 'rarray boys' who flocked to the diamond mining areas, accompanied by their basic traits — stealing, drug taking, gambling and forms of violence.

In contrast, the latter category is operating on their land, and pursue their diamond mining activities side by side with farming, fishing, etc. The latter have a strong stake in maintaining stability. Now, of necessity (everyone has to modernise!) even this group is often forced to adopt the iconography, dress codes, 'savis man language' of the uprooted 'san-san boys'/lumpens; but nevertheless they remain a check on the otherwise licentious 'san-san boys'. This explains, in large part, why such societies remained stable for so long with all the potential for massive subversion. But once the lumpen-driven RUF invaded and perhaps merged with some of these 'san-san boys', the stabilising factor was threatened. The settled peasant/miner group fled these areas and later regrouped into the 'kamajoisia' militia. And this leads to my problem with Patrick's conception of the 'njiahungbua ngorgeisia'. I identify them more closely with the stabilising factor. It would be very difficult, indeed, for any adventurist to recruit them for any 'revolutionary' project. This is why, perhaps, some of the individuals who organised the training of vanguards in Libya recruited the 'urban rarray boys' whose conception of

revolution seems to be the total extermination of peasant life (and not only peasant life!)

Ibrahim Abdullah

Cecil is really on top of this debate on youth culture. I believe we are getting something here. His point about what went wrong with the negotiation process pushes the debate forward. Similarly, Lansana's point about a stabilising group, i.e., the distinction he made between the roving 'san-san boys' and the settled peasants and miners, clinches the issue. Perhaps, what we are dealing with here is the interplay between structure and process. Was there something wrong with the negotiation process or was it a case of a viable opening through which the much desired alternative could be realised? As Lansana pointed out, the peasant miners had more to lose. And this is the issue: did those who join the RUF to participate in the orgy of violence have anything to lose? I think not — on the contrary they had everything to gain.

The situation in the 1960s when Cecil was growing up, and the period of the 1970s when I was growing up are fundamentally different from the 1980s or even the early 1990s. This will explain why the negotiation process broke down at a particular period, and the alternative that the RUF represented for these youths was a real one. Some of the kids I spoke with during my field work kept telling me that handling a gun empowered them — it made them somebody. Perhaps the lack of an alternative avenue through which they could have channelled their energy drove them to the other side. But it is important to note that apart from lumpens in Freetown who were in the RUF from the beginning, the bulk of the fighters were recruited locally — that is to say they are mostly from Pujehun and Kailahun, the border regions with Liberia. When we consider how backward these areas are economically, even though they produce coffee and cocoa, and how deprived they had been under APC (All People's Congress) thraldom, we begin to see what went wrong with the negotiation process(es) and why the question of choice tipped the balance in favour of a 'radical' alternative. It also raises an important question about class: the bulk of those in the RUF are not middle class kids. This has nothing to do with Rambo-like films. It tells a story about the political economy of Sierra Leone and the opportunities available to kids from different class backgrounds.

Yusuf is right about the need to go beyond the 'question of youth' if we want to understand the violence that has characterised these post-independence movements, particularly the RUF, NPFL and RENAMO. Yes, ZANU and ZAPU recruited youths mainly from schools, others joined voluntarily; they even recruited lumpens. The major difference is that all the recruits in the

case of the classical liberation movements were screened, debriefed and politicised before they became armed combatants. In the case of ZANLA, a recruit was first a 'comrade' (in the ideological sense) before graduating to the status of a combatant.

I also think that we should be careful with the Liberian and Mozambican examples. We know that the RENAMO project was originally a Rhodesian strategy to destabilise Mozambique, later taken up by South Africa. It would be interesting to know the extent to which the dynamics of the movement were driven by internal survivalist needs. In the case of Liberia, it needs to be emphasized that Charles Taylor was originally a Samuel Doe man, and that Prince Yormie (whose group murdered Doe) is a lumpen. At the level of ideas, Taylor's movement did have some intellectual origins (pseudo pan-Africanism), but it had nothing to do with the Liberian left-wing groups. None of those who were involved with the Patriotic Alliance of Liberia — Bachus Mathews, Togbana-Tipoteh, Amos Sawyer, and Boima Fahnbulleh — had anything to do with Taylor's NPFL. Nor was the Liberian student movement associated with it. And the kind of coalition that we see in the origin of the RUF is nowhere present in the case of the NPFL.

Perhaps we need to ask why these movements turned to pan-Africanism, and to Libya for support. Museveni did the same but produced different methods and results. Why is this so? Answers to these questions relate to issues of ideology and organisation.

Yusuf Bangura

Great insights have been provided by Cecil, Lansana and Ibrahim. This is what I want to see in analysing the RUF and the war — i.e. examining the social origins and actual behaviour of the individuals who form the movement; not a fixation with the texts of the RUF, which seek to rationalise behaviour that may not tally with real actions.

Extending Ibrahim's insights on the art of negotiating social boundaries, Cecil's point about the constant attempt by estranged youth to seek legitimacy in the wider society is absolutely important — indeed, very refreshing! As he said, the average pre-war 'rarray man' would even have found it difficult to commit the level of violence that Sierra Leone has witnessed in recent years. Society always has a way of holding the 'rarray man' in check, even when he operates outside of the socially agreed norms of behaviour — which in part explains why the 'rarray man' sometimes strives for legitimisation within society since he knows he cannot have his way. As Cecil said, the key questions we need to ask are: how did these social checks break down? and

why did the estranged youth stop negotiating and opt for all-out brutal violence?

In answering these questions, one may need to look at the following in addition to what Ibrahim has already highlighted. First, one may have to examine changes in the incentive structure, which the war may have brought about. The pre-war structure of incentives does not adequately reward marginality, whereas war turns the scales and rewards those who are bold enough to fight. Sierra Leone is rich in natural resources and offers rich pickings to individuals in the war front. Direct participation in war may be a high-risk venture for those who benefit from the pre-war order, but it is low risk activity for those who gain little or nothing from that order. Estranged, or 'rarray man', youth are more likely to be attracted to the war project than more socially-integrated youth. It is easier for the former to make the transition from petty 'rarray man' activities to heavy duty acts of horrific violence than the latter group — especially when horrific violence brings resources, status and bonding with a wider set of comrades, which they may not have enjoyed in the pre-existing order. Indeed, Foday Sankoh of the RUF understands this logic: he showers his young fighters with stolen goods they had not enjoyed in the wider society.

Second, access to arms may have a transformative effect on estranged youth. We grew up fearing the 'rarray man' for his knife ('ee go chuk yu' — he will stab you), but he knew that he could not impose his order on society by relying on knives alone — he would be overpowered. Guns are something else. They tilted the scales in his favour. Guns have an empowering effect on the socially estranged. The third factor is drugs. This is of course nothing new to the class of individuals we are dealing with. But I would like to believe that the quality of drugs and intensity of use may have increased dramatically in the war front. Intense use of hard drugs may erode self-control, enhance free-wheeling behaviour, and encourage acts of bravery.

The fourth factor is ideology. If people are dogmatically wedded to an ideology in seeking changes in society or in their personal fortune they may commit violence in pursuing such goals. This is well established in studies on revolutions and social change. Ideologues see the world in black and white: they hate compromises, consensus or accommodation. It's either all or nothing. Compromises leave a stain on the world they seek to create. The RUF does, indeed, have a political, or ideological, programme, which it got from the student movement. The main question, which Paul Richards fails to ask in *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, is how this ideology was *negotiated* by the young estranged fighters to suit their own ambitions and goals. My guess

here is that it may have reinforced their views about their own marginality and provided a rationale for the looting and outrageous violence they committed against society.

The fifth factor is the crisis of mainstream institutions. Ibrahim's point about differences between the sixties and eighties is absolutely important here. This will take us to a discussion of the collapse of formal education, job opportunities, and social services, including an analysis of authoritarian rule, general decay of state institutions, and the marginalisation of the areas that the war first impacted upon.

Now, my thesis, which comes from my reading of Ibrahim's analysis of the RUF (in this volume), is that if you give arms, drugs and a poorly developed ideology to marginal youth in a country with rich resources but massively eroded mainstream institutions, you are likely to get the kinds of violence that we have seen in recent years.

I thank Lansana for the powerful insight he has brought to the discussion on the social dynamics of the border region. I think he is on the way to making an original contribution here, which I hope he will pursue further. The distinction he draws between the 'san-san boys' who are socially uprooted, and the settled miners/peasants is very thoughtful. It has opened up an important dimension to our understanding of the social conflicts in that region, the rise of the 'kamajoisia', and the failure of the RUF, which relied on the 'san-san boys', to impose its order on the local population. Now, all of this is in the best traditions of class analysis. Classes do not need to be less-fluid or fully formed to be analysed. My understanding of a rigorous class analysis is one which differentiates between groups (including groups of the same class) to the degree possible, which captures what people do for a living as an important aspect of understanding their behaviour, and which is open enough to relate class experiences to other social, cultural and political influences in the wider society. What he has told us about the conflicts between 'san-san boys' and 'settled miners/peasants' is very much in line with what I consider to be a serious class analysis.

Alfred Zack-Williams

On reading the contributions so far, I have located four major concerns. Firstly, I cannot understand why we continue to utilise the nomenclature 'lumpen' for this subaltern group. In my response to Ibrahim's 'Bush Path to Destruction' (this volume), I drew attention to the shortcoming of such a terminology. I argued that it is an ethnocentric term (such as 'underclass' is in contemporary New Right discourse), a product of Marx's frustration with a non-revolutionary British working class. The term as it has been used

throughout this debate connotes emptiness. Recall Andre Gunder Frank's maxim 'Lumpen Bourgeoisie: Lumpen Development'. Indeed, the continuous utilisation only of the prefix of a much longer term, presents us with a dilemma: do we seek to deny the fact that the term in its original use refers to those who do not have even labour power to sell or what Spivak has referred to as 'the... subtraction of the working class in the Periphery from the realisation of surplus value and thus from "humanistic" training in consumerism'? Alternatively, as activists are we seeking to reconstitute a problematic term by injecting some revolutionary imperative into its meaning? It seems to me that this second approach is what Frantz Fanon did with the term 'native': transforming it from its ethnocentric, colonial roots as typified by the lying 'Sambo', and rendering it as the creator of a new society, the revolutionary peasantry. Clearly, if the intention is the latter, it is important that we get the nomenclature right.

This leads on to my second point. One important question that I feel the discussion has not seriously addressed (which incidentally is the core of my current work) is this: what impels urban and rural deracinated youth on to social movements such as the RUF. I have sought answers within what I have called 'family transformation and children's vulnerability to the RUF'. I guess, Ibrahim's call for a sociology of the family comes close to this analysis. To understand this attraction one has to look at the phenomenon of 'street children' in an essentially *gemeinschaft* environment. We need to look at the breakdown of social practices such as *mehn pikin* (wardship), and the very structure of the extended family structure.

Third, on the point of wanton violence from this subaltern group and the contrast to other social movements on the continent, I agree with Yusuf that we need to seek the answer in ideology. It seems to me that the RUF failed miserably in providing its cadres with revolutionary discipline — that they are liberators and protectors of the people. This is a fundamental principle of virtually all successful revolutions in the Third World. This lacuna in ideological teaching is one major difference between social forces that propel movements such as Laurent Kabila's triumphant march into the capital of Kinshasa to assume power and those such as Sankoh that either languished in the battlefield or faced overwhelming opposition from the public when they attempt to take the capital through collaboration with the military. It seems to me that access to arms, compounded by Western cultural opium (Rambo & drugs), could not explain the wanton violence of the RUF. In this respect, the RUF has more in common with RENAMO than with the MPLA or PAIGC.

Finally, on recruitment of 'cadres' in Kono by the RUF. We need to note that there is a long tradition in small towns and villages in the diamondiferous areas of Eastern and Southern Sierra Leone of what I have called 'gang masters' (*Tributors, Supporters and Merchant Capital: Mining and Underdevelopment in Sierra Leone*, Chapter 4), recruiting young men, through what I have called demonstration effects for the diamond field. I guess these are our 'san-san boys' of Kono. What all the subaltern categories share in common before the war, was a dangerous and precarious existence, which in fact prepared them for life in the theatre of war.

Kelfala Kallon

Let me introduce an economic angle to this debate by looking at motivations. Economists opine that people resort to war when the opportunity cost of war is low relative to the expected gains from it. Sierra Leone has had a high unemployment rate (of over 50 per cent of the civilian labour force) in recent years. This, to me, provides the key motivation for the war: people who have no stake in a society (i.e., a dependable job or property) are easy targets for movements like the RUF. In America and Western Europe, we see many marginally educated white youths who flounder from job to job becoming easy recruits for the Neo-Nazi, white supremacist, and anti-government causes. Recall that even when student 'radicals' took advantage of Colonel Gaddafi's patronage and went to Libya for military training, they merely used that as a launching pad for greener pastures. With opportunities for graduate school available and so forth, war seemed to offer little potential gains and a high opportunity cost. Hence, we don't find the likes of Alie Kabba and Ismail Rashid (student radicals of the 1980s) within the RUF. We can thus conclude that those who went to war must have had a very low opportunity cost of war. They are likely to have been unemployed and/or to have no personal property in Sierra Leone. Let's apply this hypothesis to the main players.

Firstly, in addition to his personal vendetta against the APC, Foday Sankoh (leader of the RUF) has no stake in Sierra Leone, since he really cannot be said to have had any personal property or dependable employment. Hence, the opportunity cost of going to war was very little for him. The potential gains (power) of levelling everyone else down to his pathetic level outweighed any potential costs. He would be destroying only other people's property. Secondly, most of the youths who are in the movement were conscripted. It is really not that difficult to understand why they joined: they did so to stay alive. Some among them joined after they saw how well looting of other people's property had transformed their erstwhile village colleagues into the 'upper-class'. Again, most of these youths had no meaningful employment

and, hence, no stake in the wider society. Thirdly, the 'captured' intellectuals lost everything when the RUF overran their homes. Once under RUF control, they realised that life was not so bad under RUF rule if one could read or write. Those who know the Deen-Jallohs (prominent members of the RUF) say that they were not even politically motivated prior to their capture as teachers at the Bunumbu Teachers College. But between saving their lives and the opportunity to recoup some of their losses by gaining some control over the RUF loot, one can see why it was easy for them to be convinced to sing the RUF song.

How do we understand the violence? Because Sankoh knew that there was no deep philosophical glue that bound his recruits to the cause, extreme violence was necessary to alienate recruits from their families and society. After one kills one's relatives, one becomes totally alienated from one's society, thereby making one give one's undivided allegiance to the RUF. I used to hypothesise that the former president, Siaka Stevens, did the same thing to his early Mende APC converts. To convince him that one was a genuine member, one had to take a truckload of thugs to one's village and 'sign' one's membership card with the cries and agony of one's people. Thus, early APC violence, which then was the worst form of political violence that Sierra Leone had seen, had one goal — to bind recruits to the cause. Perhaps, Sankoh had learned this lesson well in his APC days.

So, what do we do to prevent such calamities in the future? Manage the economic affairs of the state well so that people have a stake in the economy. I suspect that if most of the folks who joined the RUF had been gainfully employed, there would have been no RUF. They would have sought less expensive means to seek a redress of their grievances.

Patrick Muana

I am coming in rather late. Great points have been raised by Yusuf, Lansana, Ibrahim, and Cecil. And thanks Kelfala for providing those economic insights on motivation. I would like to revisit a few issues. Lansana has raised the point about the definition of the 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' as socially uprooted and detached 'lumpens'. My article, which discusses this group (in this volume), does not define them from a class perspective. The 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' are described as a group with low education; drifting in and out of low paid/seasonal/self employment; with some social attachment to, but contemptuous of, what I call the 'torrid traditional authority structure' of their village chiefs and elders (some demonstrating revolt by little misdemeanours e.g. 'nyaha yiesia' ('uman plaba' — customary court cases of adultery); debts; and then usually self-exile to other towns/urban settlements/mines ('keh ti ya

ndorhun'). In the villages, the 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' are those who may smoke marijuana, and live a life of little care — aping out a pseudo-urban existence ('bonga rarray man/upline savisman' in Freetown popular discourse). The interesting thing about the group is that they define their place in the village society as 'peripheral' in the sense of a 'superior social and cultural existence' (urbanised illiteracy, I'll call it). They do have a number of seething encounters/scrapes with traditional authority, native law and customs, and certain family and titular heads.

The point made in the paper is that the majority of 'willing' RUF conscripts were 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' who either chose to stay with their captors or were 're-captured' (according to them) and forced to join the combat ranks for the safety of their families (also in captivity). Once armed and privileged in the RUF (given positions as 'town commanders, and COs who were given a carte blanche to enforce their understanding of 'revolutionary discipline' and 'conformity'), local gripes were settled by the killing and beating (or 'tabay' and 'halaka') of the local inhabitants (who were this time their captives). This did not exclude the torching of houses and the destruction of 'kpuwuis' (stores). In fact, most of the displaced civilians can identify the RUF town commanders who tortured them by name and family history: underlining the fact that these town commanders played a major role in the perpetration of violence. In addition, their knowledge of the local terrain was an asset to the RUF war machine: re- infiltration of military outposts, SALUTE patrols, bypass routes, snake patrols for food and 'recovering' civilians in hiding. They fitted into the early Sankoh 'decree' that ethnicity should not be a factor in the 'RUF revolution' and, therefore, the combat ranks especially must be able to speak and understand Krio (the 'lingua franca'?) and refer to one another as 'brothers' and 'sisters'.

I make an effort to differentiate between the 'njiahungbia gorngeisia' who are 'wosus' within the RUF combat ranks and the 'marginalised' sub-groups who were conscripted into the Sierra Leone military as either auxiliaries (vigilantes without army 'numbers' as in the Ben-Hirsch '82nd airborne' that Lansana referred to,) or regulars; and those 'urban rarray man dem' in Freetown, most of whom never became part of the RUF enterprise when the war got underway. I also characterise the 'kamajoisia' as not just local farmers and hunters but as the young, displaced population which includes 'bonga savisman dem' who are strictly regimented and disciplined by the codes of membership of the 'kamajoisia'. The 'njiahungbia gorngeisia' within the RUF are referred to by those within the Kamajoi militia as 'dem we broder way dae fet de bad fet, dem wan dem wae dae do bad to we pipul

dem' (our brothers who engage in atrocities, those who do bad things to our people).

I am not also inferring 'criminality' in the sense of pre-disposition towards violence. But elements of this sub-group enjoy defying traditional authority and their induction into violence could not have been a very protracted process given the powers conferred on them as 'town commanders'. This holds true for their instinct for 'survival and self-enrichment'.

The other relevant point that Yusuf raises in his review (this volume) is that this group was not 'ideologically informed' before and during the RUF insurrection. Their only interaction with political upheavals may have come by way of the 'burning of houses' of 'system men' (those who benefit from the existing order) during student protests. Most of them interviewed (in captivity, I hasten to add), said that they had been fighting against the APC because the APC was corrupt and that the NPRC had not installed itself to take the nation to a democratic future of 'clean politics.' Questioned on the intricacies of the so-called ideological front that the RUF foregrounds, most of them shrugged their shoulders and said with a resigned look: 'dem teach we borku tin bot ar nor memba all...' ('we were taught a lot of things but I don't remember everything'). During the struggle, most of them had visualised themselves as top government officials once the RUF captured Freetown (a laughable proposition I dare say).

Can I add by way of a final point that this sub-group of 'njiahungbia gonga', known and despised now within their local settlements will make an effort to scupper the planned demobilisation process because it will mean a loss of their authority — a mortal risk if an armed Kamajoi force still exists as planned by the government — and total social displacement.

Ibrahim Abdullah

While responding to Patrick's comments, perhaps Lansana could also throw light on the role of the 'san-san' boys in the RUF project. Lansana's point about the stabilisation role of the peasant/miner group is a good one, but it opens up another angle to the question of whether as a result of its shaky material condition, this latter group could not have supported the RUF. In other words, would it be correct to argue that the interests of the 'san-san boys' are similar to those of the RUF — in the sense of chaos is good for business? Don't we have evidence of 'san-san boys' who are not in the RUF mining diamonds with the RUF? If the 'san-san' boys are easy recruits for the RUF why did they not throw in their total support for the RUF in Kono or elsewhere in the mineral rich areas? Or did they? His thesis on stabilisation will stand or fall on this question.

Lansana Gberie

Let me start with Ibrahim's question about the implied failure of the 'san-san boys' to join the RUF in large numbers in Kono. Is this really the case? The fact is that the RUF gained many recruits when they took Kono! The Kono attack was probably the RUF's best planned campaign. The RUF infiltrated the town months before they struck. RUF fighters easily merged with their friends in Kono (Sankoh recruited in Kono even before the March 1991 attack) and won them over with the promise of free mining in National Diamond Mining Company mine holdings. We are talking about 'san-san boys' who are clearly lumpens. A friend of mine who witnessed the attack told me about some 'pusher men' (drug-addicted youth) in the town who later turned out to be RUF fighters! On the day of the attack, just about 40-50 of the RUF fighters entered the town, who were then joined by their comrades all over the town, shooting and burning houses. The military detachment was easily overwhelmed by the confusion and led the flight from the town! Convicts who were freed from prisons — there were many — also willingly joined. One of them who was later captured on an espionage trip to Bo in 1994 explained how many of his likes were now members of the RUF and were freely mining diamonds around the Baama Konta area. It seems, as William Reno claims in his book (*Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*), that some of the town's notables also welcomed the RUF initially.

Now to Patrick's comments. My problem with his representation of the 'njiahungbia ngorngesia' isn't that some (few I would say) didn't join the RUF. But the majority certainly didn't — they fled, and regrouped into the Kamajoisia. They are not uprooted from their communities. They ape the urban lumpens, as I have noted, only up to a point: to be part of the vogue, even if largely a product of a sub-culture. The fact that these societies have so far failed to disintegrate suggests that the stabilising factor that I referred to are in the majority. The mad men are prominent but are in the minority. The majority is now trying to rebuild after the destruction wrought by the mad men. In every society, among every class, you find the never-do-wells, the 'no-gooders', people who are handy material for 'revolutionary' agitation. Take Fayia Musa (former public relations officer of the RUF). This chap failed twice to make the grades at the Njala University College, left the college without a degree and got himself a lowly paid job in Kailahun. Obviously, he couldn't stand the competition elsewhere. He must have been one of the 'bonga rarray man dem', the ones who felt peripheral to local authority or rather above it. He joined the RUF when they took Kailahun. In pre-war times, he must have seemed like Lakunle among the 'njiahungbia

ngorngesia' — a freak. Let's be clear about definitions here. My point is that the RUF is largely driven by the urban lumpens, the 'san-san boys'.

Compare the fate of Koidu (the principal mining town) and Bo (provincial capital of the south, and the country's second largest town). Why was it that the rebels easily took over Koidu but failed to take Bo which was less heavily 'guarded'? My answer is that the youths in Bo, the 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia', and other lumpen elements, were not prepared for that. Bo is their home (irrespective of their ethnic origins); their relatives live there. For those who were from their villages, Bo was the end of the journey — so they decided to resist the rebels, even though the RUF made explicit offers of bounty to them. They couldn't stand the idea of their town being taken over; they are firmly entrenched in their society, even if marginalised or jobless. Koidu is different. It grew up as a shanty town for migrant miners — mostly illicit miners, or 'san-san' boys. They are 'strangers' there; all they care about is the quick 'buck' or money. They care little about the town as urban migrant lumpens! So they easily joined the RUF.

Patrick Muana

I am under the impression that Lansana and Ibrahim are progressively constructing an exclusive social image for the 'san-san boys' and situating them within firm geographical boundaries — i.e. lumpen proletariat with a wholesome disposition towards criminality/collusion with the RUF, and generously concentrated only around the Koidu area. This description is unclear for the following reasons. First, the 'san-san boys' are mainly from different parts of the country seeking a bounty from the diamondiferous areas. These are social drifters, with low education, aping a pseudo-urbanised/westernised lifestyle, who have either deserted or temporarily abandoned their social commitments in their villages (for a number of reasons) and have few, if any, social ties in the diamondiferous areas (there are several stories of unclaimed/unidentified bodies in diamond mining accidents).

Second, members of this group find no opportunities in their places of residence, be it urban or rural, and then drift to the mines in search of opportunities. In that respect, they are socially and economically displaced and have to establish a new identity within the 'san-san boys' tradition. They are marginalised groups or lumpens in this regard. Most of them joined the RUF not because they were more disposed towards criminality and violence but like their counterparts who voluntarily joined the RUF in Kailahun, Pujehun, Bonthe, Bo, and Kenema districts saw the rebellion as a way of establishing a new hegemony: re-distributing the wealth/power of the economic overlords —

self enrichment. As I note in my article, this instinct was pronounced in the Sierra Leone soldiers' involvement in diamond mining when it held diamondiferous areas. Like the 'rarray boy' involvement in student protests, they joined the RUF to 'kapu' (or grab) their own and desert if and when they can.

Third, attention can also be drawn to the issue of geographical specificity of Lansana's and Ibrahim's analyses of this group, which in my estimation is privileged perhaps too subjectively. Members of this group are not restricted to only the Kono area. 'San-san boys' are voluntary hands either working for a 'Jula' (Mandigo trader) or engaged in illicit mining when they can steal and 'wash gravel' (processing, or washing, of diamonds in gravel). They are 'disconnected' drifters who can be seen in all diamondiferous areas in Sierra Leone: be it Pujehun, Sumbuya, Waiima, Kenema district, or Kono. I wonder how the gold-mining hands at Baomahun can be referred to (those who now constitute the main fighting force that is firmly holed up in the Kangari hills or the Sierra Rutile workers who were recruited in 1995)? Perhaps it may be worth looking at how the Executive Outcomes (pro-government mercenaries) used the 'san-san boys' in consolidating their military hold on Kono district after expelling the RUF, and what roles the 'san-san boys' played in establishing and later routing the RUF Pehyama base in the Tongo area. The issue I am raising is that like the 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia', a significant percentage of the 'san-san boy' population has been involved on both sides in the war whilst some have tried to establish an alternative lifestyle. Others have drifted back to the mines at Kono, Tongo and in the Kenema districts: euphemistically referring to the area as 'Angola'.

Fourth, the youth in Bo who organised and resisted the RUF attack do not fit into my definition of 'njiahungbia gorngeisia.' Those who led the counter-attack were neither mainly those rural dwelling social drifters I describe nor were they later to constitute significant numbers in the Kamajoi militia. Besides, the process of recruitment into the Kamajoi militia would not permit the conscription of the criminally disposed 'njiahungbia-gorngeisia'. Perhaps, the misunderstanding arises from the interpretations of the Mende term 'njiahungbia gorngeisia'. What Lansana has been describing is the general category of youth: 'Korngeisia.' When the adjective 'njiahungbia' is added, it modifies the term. The cultural information about the term is full of negative connotations. 'Njiahụngbia' implies defiance, cursory contempt for authority and social proscriptions, rebelliousness, and voluntary inclination towards defining one's own identity as peripheral ('ngi gba ti ma'...).

Saffa Kemokai

I would like to say something about the 'njiahungbua ngorngaa' and what motivates people to fight. I disagree with Patrick's description of the 'njiahungbua ngorngesia'. There are, of course, attributes of the 'njahungbua ngorngesia' that are similar to what Patrick describes, but this group cannot be viewed as village outlaws. As Lansana noted, 'njahungbua ngorngesia', in a traditional village setting, are deeply committed to their homes and are more of an asset to the village than what Patrick has described them to be: they are the bold ones who confront potential danger to the village; their care-free behaviour is used for the benefit of the village — not for lawlessness or antagonism towards the village leadership. They are the joy of the village and do not necessarily roam from village to village evading 'uman plaba'. They are loyal to the village and are willing to defend it. As to the question of why they would have joined the RUF, one cannot discuss this in isolation from the experiences of others who have been conscripted into the RUF. We need to place ourselves between two rifles pointing at us while our people are cut in pieces, and our sisters, mothers, grandmothers and aunts are raped in front of us. I think it is more than economic survival as economists would want us to believe.

Let me also make this point: it seems that we know more about the RUF fighters in the bush than about those who have sponsored the RUF rebellion from the outside. Has anybody done any work on the external dimensions of the RUF movement? — i.e. those who may be providing logistics, money etc. It will be useful to trace the history of Foday Sankoh from the time he was implicated in the coup of 1971 to the period his movement invaded the country in 1991. Who did he associate with during and after his release from prison? I want to believe that there is a *making* of the RUF. While we investigate the 'raray boys' and other marginal groups, we should also examine the 'clean ones' — there may be many 'san-san boys' in Mercedes Benz cars and air-conditioned palaces.

Patrick Muana

I think Saffa and Lansana are describing the 'korngeisia' of folk imagination: those characters in folk narratives who defy danger to defend kith and kin in their homesteads. Two points of correction before commenting on their suggestions. I am not suggesting that all 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' automatically became RUF combatants. Like the 'rarray boys' and 'san-san boys' etc., they have fought on both sides during this civil war (on the RUF side and on the Sierra Leone military/Kamajoi side.) Those who joined the

RUF and were appointed as 'town commanders' (administrators and militia commanders) in RUF territory were responsible for most of the local vendettas, the burning of houses, the tying up and beating of civilians ('halaka' and 'tabay'), the identification and killing of some of their own chiefs, Imams, and village elders. Those who later became 'stand-bys' and 'wosus' within RUF combat ranks were part of most of the RUF offensives throughout the country.

Two of my close friends who were captured in an RUF ambush were released only because an RUF fighter from Gbalahun village (7 miles from Kailahun; he had been a student at the Methodist Secondary School, Kailahun, before dropping out and setting up a small cigarette stall in his home village) recognised them. Many of the displaced civilians can identify the perpetrators of RUF violence as local inhabitants (most of them were 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' before the war). Sammy, an orphan of 7 who has been taken into care by Mohamed Gbassa (of AFRICARE, a local NGO at Kenema), still remembers and describes the gruesome death of his father at the hands of the RUF 'town commander' at Waiima, near Largo Njasawabu, as a local young man (a defiant young man) who had drifted to the mines and back into the village before the RUF onslaught on their village.

I also do not agree wholly with Saffa's suggestion that those young men ('njiahungbia ngorgeisia') were forced at the barrel of the gun to join the RUF. Most of the 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' who joined the RUF did so voluntarily and actively participated in brutalising civilians and burning houses. I spoke to one such combatant (Bockarie Fomba) who was handed to the 1st Brigade Head Quarters at Bo when he sneaked into the Gondama camp. In captivity, they try to cut a sorry image for themselves as forced into the RUF. When you listen to the victims and especially the catalogue of horrors they committed, you will know that these 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' were indeed not victims but central to six years of inhuman brutality behind RUF lines. The 'kamajoisia' also informed me that a majority of those fighting on the other side are local lads. They identified several by name and relationship to specific families. Of course, most are summarily executed.

I am against the APC propaganda that the RUF combatants are foreign brutes (Liberian and Burkinabe) imported into Sierra Leone by Foday Sankoh. The information on the ground is that the greater majority if not all of the RUF rank and file are local Sierra Leonean recruits (mainly defiant young men from the villages and towns captured by the RUF). Only some of the senior and middle rank officers are Liberian. The fighters know who is on the other side and the information from the army boys, the 'kamajoisia', and the

RUF captives is that almost all of these fighters are Sierra Leoneans and mainly young men/social drifters.

Perhaps, we need to re-think the view widely expressed in Bo especially that the Mendes have been victims of the war and that our 'young men' ('korngeisia') who have fought for the RUF were forced into doing so. Taking the sentiments out, the harsh reality is that a majority of the RUF combatants who have been operational in the south and east of Sierra Leone have been local Mende young men and not foreigners. These are the people who have been responsible for most of the RUF atrocities against civilians in this area. Of course, I admire the courage of the other young men who have chosen to join the 'kamajoi' militia and other vigilante forces and I have expressed this admiration in both this forum and in personal conversations. In fact, I gained invaluable access to the main 'kamajoi' commanders and their men because of the confidence they apparently had in me. However, to call a spade a spade, our young Mende men (especially the 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' who voluntarily joined the RUF) have been responsible for most of the atrocities and are active combatants within the RUF command and rank and file.

Ibrahim Abdullah

I think Patrick's reading of the discussion on 'san-san boys' needs to be corrected. Lansana and I were not carving any 'firm geographical boundaries'; and the 'criminality' bit is a legal angle that we did not impose on the subject. We were specifically concerned with the 'Kono' aspect. Perhaps this is what gave Patrick the impression that the 'description' is 'unclear'. Needless to say that we did not set out to describe 'san-san boys' as such. The 'san-san boys' in Kono are not predominantly migrants. There are Konos, lots of Kono youths, who are 'san-san boys'. There are also a lot of Madingos who are indigenous to Kono district who are 'san-san boys'.

It is also not correct to say that 'san-san boys' are 'socially and economically displaced' and therefore 'have to establish a new identity within the 'san-san' boy tradition'. Perhaps this is true with regard to Mendeland. This is not the case in Kono.

In Kono, the 'san-san boys' could be divided into two groups: those who are Konos and those who are migrants. 'San san boys' who are Konos start their life as teenagers who occasionally engage in what is called 'over kick' — meaning the rewashing of abandoned gravel or in some cases alluvial mining on the banks of the numerous streams and rivers which dot the Kono landscape. This can be done while going to school, and there are several cases of teenagers who abandoned schooling after they 'pick diamond'. There

is no investment involved in this kind of mining — only a shovel and a sieve. Migrants on the other hand come straight to mine. This is the difference. These are the ones that Lansana was referring to. The migrants have to legalise their stay in Kono — they need permits and are constantly harassed by corrupt law enforcement agencies. This legal hurdle constitutes a major difference for the migrant 'san-san boy'.

When Patrick mentions illicit mining he brings up the issue of criminality as defined by the state. There is nothing criminal about what artisanal miners do. It is only criminal because the law says so. There is a sense in which this so-called illicit mining issue constitutes the oldest form of resistance by subaltern groups in twentieth century Sierra Leone. Zack-Williams's study of Kono is clear about how the mining industry has done more harm than good to the country. There are different types of 'san-san boys': there are independent free booters, who are financed by rich individuals so that they could buy whatever diamond is mined; and there are others who simply engage in 'san-san' mining on the side. The illicit business comes in when the Sierra Leone Selection Trust/Diminco gravel are tampered with. Digging what is known as 'Maraka pit' to obtain gravel is also illicit mining.

What should interests us in this whole discussion of the survival strategy of marginal groups is their shifting and precarious material base and whether or not their life style or culture is conducive to social stability. This is what would make them support this or that patron or political group, which ultimately depends upon who will give them access to the much valued 'san-san'. But migrant miners do not just migrate to the mining areas as potential miners; they also go with their culture. It is how this culture survives, is transformed, and then remodelled in the light of the current situation that should concern us.

When the diamond rush started in the 1950s people migrated from all over the country to Kono. It was precisely in the 1950s that lumpen culture started to negotiate its way into Freetown society and culture. Is it coincidental that 'odelays' and 'ojeh' (masquerades) emerged in Kono and other mining areas? What we should look for is the regional variation of a lumpen culture that is nothing less than a national culture.

Ishmail Rashid

For me, the most productive area of the discussion has been the continuous disaggregation and elaboration of 'lumpens' in Sierra Leone — their generalities and specificity as well as their links with the RUF and the war. I have been waiting anxiously for the discussion to rope in the other half of the lumpen population: the NPRC military 'kabudu' (gang). Is it really possible to

analyse the war, its character and its consequences, without taking into consideration the NPRC 'kabudu' and those lumpen youth who actually fought on the other side? Where does the NPRC 'kabudu' fit in this framework of analysis? Were the 20 year-old brigadiers and colonels not products of the same class, generation, culture and environment as the RUF fighters? These ''lumpens' actually took over the state. Like the RUF, they recruited the lumpen youth to defend that state. What does this other half tell us about youth culture and intra-youth violence? After all, the APC fought the war for only a year, the NPRC fought it for almost four.

This instructive discussion has focused on the social origins of the 'lumpen' class. But what happens in the battlefield? How do we connect the origins of this group with the immediate circumstances of the battlefield? Did Sankoh and his RUF fight the war with a strategy in mind? (or the NPRC for that matter?). What did they want to achieve in the battlefield? If the answers to these questions reveal the kind of war we have experienced, how much can they tell us about the nature and organisation of the combatants (on both sides)? What do they tell us about the RUF and the NPRC/RSLMF? In short, I am pushing for an investigation which will reveal the dialectical relationship between the kind of war that has been fought, the conditions in the battlefield, and the atrocities that have emerged. How did these atrocities affect the combatants and the unfolding logic of the war? Here all the military jargon about war comes into play — command and control, discipline, doctrine, materiel, and strategy. How much do we know about these issues?

Lemuel Johnson

I discern a very enlightening thread on the issue of lumpen culture; the various summaries of the local and continental implications have been instructive. It would be interesting to have some thoughts, or at least, some speculation, about how 'san-san' or 'rarray' or 'lumpens' or 'Area Boys' fit into certain other dispensations of the state. For example, are they (ever?) factored into the agendas of certain international agencies — from the World Bank to the IMF; from DeBeers and its diamond operations to Coca Cola and Shell Oil Company? Do such agencies speculate: 'To what extent does the government that 'I'm' entering into partnership with have 'access' to such types of groups'?

There is the corollary issue, of course, of teasing out what such shaping institutions look like from the bottom up. There has been some suggestive, preliminary, thoughts here: ranging from 'Rambo-ism' to the (ir)relevance of Gaddafi's 'Green Book' to an implicit networking into the 'international'(?)

drug trade (through recruiting). One wonders: What does a 'lumpen's' access to an AK-47, for example, signify here? Does it tease out thoughts of wider maps of identity or resources? It is interesting to think of how those who employ or 're-situate' such 'area boys' negotiate the gaps in perception. What about the role of the image of the '007' psychopath in influencing bravery and violence? Did military training ever invoke '007s' or Rambos or clear-cut 'Kill-and-Gos' of the Nigerian variety that Wole Soyinka treats in his writings? Some of these images may be implicit in the Rasta 'bad bwoy' of both the Jimmy Cliff variety and the Bob Marley type. It is not clear to me that the visceral American urban 'gangsta' outlawry has the wherewithal to have taken root in Sierra Leone — beyond the incorporation of its *recitative* techniques in some of the pop music I have heard recently. Note that, collectively, these popular or mass-media images cover a twenty-five to thirty-year period. Any implications for a 'before' or 'after' political history of youth-and-violence culture?

There is need also for some nuancing of the history of 'rarray boys and drugs'; of the use of mind-altering, or body-transforming, substances — from kola to 'sass-wata'; from 'leaf' to 'juju' — in our culture. A study of the class, ritual, pharmacological, legal and journalistic dimensions of this issue may be vital for a full understanding of the changing value and use of these substances in recent times. What, after all, is the psycho-social or 'pharmaco-psychic' history of 'leaf' or 'lasmami' in our cultures? Plural note, here, because there is also a history of 'Big Men and Merecine-Man' connections to remember. So, what does one mean by 'drugs' among the 'lumpen' recruits? How, for example, had the use of 'diamba' (cannabis) been (already) integrated or contained? Was there a time when a rakishly handled cigarette was a high mark of being a certified 'outlaw'? What was new about the kinds of drugs that began to surface at, say, Fourah Bay College, during my last year of teaching there — 1972? Are these 'drugs' really 'hard drugs'? or merely 'uppers'; or serious measures of 'crack' or 'cocaine' or 'heroin'?

These last are of a certain qualitative difference (?) Given their terribly addictive nature, and therefore the urgency(?) or guarantee(?) of access and supply? How? So, is there some index of exactly what is being given, or assumed to be given, in the making of the culture of 'lumpen' or 'area' boys? Given such histories of mind-altering or body-changing thought, with what kind of consciousness does a recruit (a regular army soldier or an irregular rebel) approach a promise that there is a 'leaf' or substance that will do certain kinds of things outside the normal order of things? (Note: The 'stuff' in Soyinka's *The Road* gives Say Tokyo Kid a 'state' in which 'his eyes are fixed and glazed'. Note: there's a Ghanaian novel, K.A. Bediako's *A Husband*

for Esi Ellua, about Ghanaian soldiers going off to fight — in World War II — and about the role that Swedru, a major 'merecine' (medicine) site, plays in their experience. 'Yes, there is a man near Swedru who is renowned for his juju to make you immune to gunshot').

The following is from Wole Soyinka, *The Open Sore of a Continent*. From my view, it continues his interest in, and preoccupation with, the implications of 'lumpens' and 'rarrays', etc. They form a brittle, underclass, set in *The Road* - those 'touts' — with names like Sgt. Burma, Say-Tokyo Kid; Sapele Joe; and Salubi-salubility. So, too, Humphrey Bogart and Cimarron Kid, by the way, and 'The Captain'. Their greetings are as much 'Chief-in-Town!' and 'No Danger No Delay' as 'Delicate Millionaire!' 'African Millionaire!' In *Kongi's Harvest* they are moulded into a kind of mechanical/socialist Carpenter's Brigade. For Soyinka, it's clear that the implications have gotten darker and darker — that Area Boys are more dangerously insightful about 'privilege' and 'exclusion.' For, compared with the early 1970s of *Road* and *Kongi*, the present has intensified into the grotesque abuses of an even worse dictatorship. Thus, the crucial nature of the question that *Open Sore* also poses, indeed, highlights: *When is a nation a nation*? (p. 19).

In the citation that follows, about 'Area Boys,' Soyinka identifies the 'object of rancour' in a 'mansion' of abuse that has become so awful that 'every inmate becomes an uncertified structural inspector, (who) taps on the walls and reports: 'Unsound, decertified for human habitation!'

> Go to the markets, go to the mechanic villages, mingle among the 'Area Boys' of Lagos and Kano, travel incognito in a long-distance bus from Agege to Benin, Okene, Abuja, Kaduna, Sokoto, Maiduguri, speak to these 'unlettered' inmates of unprivileged mansions of 'my father's house', and the object of their rancour is inescapable: one mansion — and not even its entirety, just a chamber (the most luxurious, predictably), but the occupants of that chamber have developed a chronic propensity for alliances with kin interests from other privileged habitations of the total household. And the lifestyle and life mission of these indolent, spoilt scions of the household render insecure the foundations of a simple enterprise of cohabitation. Inevitably, these other dwellers resort to this question: 'Is it not more sensible to pull the rug from under such pampered feet by establishing our own self-subsisting habitation?' (p. 130).

Yusuf Bangura

Lemuel has highlighted very interesting issues on drugs, gang culture and guns in different cultural settings and the need to situate discussions of such issues in their historical and generational contexts. I should thank him for reminding us of Soyinka's long-standing engagement with 'lumpens' or 'Area boys'. That piece from *Open Sore of a Continent*, which ends with the 'Area

Boys' asking whether it is not 'more sensible to pull the rug from under' the pampered feet of the privileged kin of the 'household' and establishing their own 'self-substituting habitation' is most apt and adds to the concern about how our own marginal groups or individuals perceived their violent project against society. Indeed, Patrick reports that most of the 'unlettered', 'lumpen' fighters of the RUF 'visualised themselves as top government officials once the RUF captured Freetown'!! How close were we to what Ibrahim and Lansana have been calling a 'lumpen revolution' in Sierra Leone? It would be extremely interesting to pursue the argument that Ishmail makes about the NPRC and its use of similar 'lumpen' groups in the war front. I flag this issue in the review (this volume) but more in-depth work is required on it.

I also find the discussing on 'njiahungbia ngorngesia' very interesting. I suspect that both Patrick and Lansana have much in common in their analyses of the role of the 'njiahungbia gorngesia' in the war. It seems that Patrick extracts from a stratum of this group to discuss the character of the commanders or 'wosus' of the RUF. Lansana admits that elements of this group may have joined the RUF, but that the majority fled, and subsequently acted as a stabilising force by forming the 'Kamajoi' militia movement to challenge the RUF. The question I have is whether the group which Lansana thinks alternates between mining and farming, and which feels integrated into local society, is predominantly made up of what he describes as the 'njiahungbia gorngesia'. I would imagine that the peasant/miner group would be much larger than the latter, and would encompass the not-so-young/'sharp/alert', village artisans, and those who spend more time in farming or mining than in other secondary work activities.

If this is the case, Lansana's argument about the peasant/miner group constituting a distinctly rural, 'non-lumpen' stabilising force, is still useful—this group can then be seen as a counterweight to both the 'san-san boys' (in situations where these are the dominant 'lumpen-type' groups that acted as vanguards of the RUF), and the dispossessed, or 'partially urbanised' village-types of youth who Patrick describes as 'njiahungbia gorngesia', and who formed the 'wosus' of the RUF and 'town commanders' to administer RUF power in captured territories. I must say that I can recognise Patrick's roving, marginally integrated, partially urbanised rural youth and their 'non-conformist' behaviour in several rural settings that I am familiar with, both in Sierra Leone and elsewhere on the continent. As Cecil notes in our discussion on the Freetown 'rarray man', one should not treat the village marginal youth as totally unintegrated into local society. I think that the village marginal, who is exposed to some form of urbanisation, knows traditional village rules but does not always conform to them, and recognises

his limits in challenging traditional authority. But like the 'rarray man', the 'village non-conformist' can easily be mobilised for confrontational activities. Indeed, such types of individuals have been active in the violent interventions of political parties in the African countryside.

The point Patrick makes about the material interests of the 'san-san boys' is crucial. The 'san-san boys' have fought on both sides in the war, and are interested in the violence mainly for self-enrichment. This is in line with what has been observed in the literature about the political behaviour of marginal groups. Marginals are hardly driven by ideology or political principles: they behave instead opportunistically. It would be interesting to study how the RUF's populist message of revolutionary change was expropriated and internalised by the 'san-san boys', 'rarray man dem' and Patrick's 'njiahungbia gorngeisia'.

Lemuel Johnson

I would like to shed further light on the evolution of the 'lumpens' (not sure whether that's the right word now) I referred to in Soyinka's writings. Soyinka's treatment of the 'types' that now concern us, and him in the 1996 of *Open Sore of a Continent*, provide us with some interesting food for thought about the evolving map and widening ideologisation, so to speak, of a matter of over a quarter of a century now. Let me think out loud a bit about this, and do so by sketching out a certain cultural geography of the 'margins' that may be at work here, especially in light of our discussion; and because of the finer nuancing of how people get to be on the edge of social formations or spiritual relationships.

I start with the issue of *'lumpens' as defined by occult ties.* Here, Soyinka's 'marginals' are present in a more clearly Yoruba frame, I believe, in *The Road* (1965). The Professor's preoccupations in this play are not at all political, as such. Because he is engaged in a 'metaphysical' enquiry about Death, the 'marginals' circulate around him accordingly — in relationship to their closer affiliation with 'mask'; 'dance'; and the mysteries of 'agemo'. Their being 'on the road' (on lorry, truck, oil tanker) is very much related to the degree of their involvement with Ogun (the Yoruba God of Iron). But so, too, with the terribly important yet terribly marginalised services that their kind are now required to render in the economy of the post-independent state — from passenger service to log transportation to oil. Not to speak of inventive wiriness of electricity and telephone.

In any case, Yoruba Ogun is God of Iron and of the Road. Touts, lorry boys, half-educated, barely literate, the *Road's* marginals act out their dangerous/ surplus value and excesses — speed, recklessness, violence — in

accordance with prescribed demands. Ogun is a certain kind of God; he is presumed to demand road-kills, dogs, for example. Ogun's path and the nation-state's modernising ways converge in a strange co-mingling of taboo and violation, of order and disorder. In the driver's seat sits the 'lumpen' to whom the infrastructure has, in effect, surrendered the running of things. Meanwhile, Professor aligns his rather more esoteric pursuit of 'Meaning' with these 'lumpens' — since he believes, too, that Ogun may hold the key of some kind to some clarification. Ironically, his way proves to be blasphemous to the 'lumpens' he is presumably 'recruiting' for insight — and they kill him.

A different picture emerges when Soyinka treats lumpens as *Young Pioneers/Brown Shirts/'Nkrumah-ist' Brigade*. In *Kongi's Harvest* (1967) Soyinka's 'marginals' have clearly been moulded into another kind of collectivity, not by a Professor but by an Our Leader type; by The Great Man Himself. The 'lumpens' are now a recognisably composite Young Pioneers — of the Cold-War, Socialist- Fascist-Brigade variety. Contra the Ogun-defined frame, the language here is not 'occult'; instead, it's a matter of political slogans, marching songs, parodic measures of trade unionism. You know, 'Ismite Is Might!' One-Two-Three! Ismite is Might!' — 'our hands are sandpaper' stuff.

There are also *the socio-cultural geographies of 'lumpens'* as in *Open Sore of a Continent* (1996). Ibrahim's particulars about the Yoruba-ness of 'Area Boys' raises an interesting issue in Soyinka's *Open Sore*. For here, Soyinka deliberately, I assume, expands the (political? cultural? socio-economic?) geographies of 'Area Boys', whom he now tracks from Lagos (Ibrahim's specific clarifying space) through Benin into Kano, Sokoto, Abuja, and Maiduguri — all rather different cultural spaces; but the differences are now cancelled by the socioeconomic (?) map of deprivation that *Open Sore* focuses on. It all raises one of the sets of issues that preoccupy me in *Open Sore* — kinship and regionalism; alliances or disaffiliations across elite formations; affiliations across marginalised areas; also the Eshu and 'atavistic' contexts of evil and the materialist 'spoils of power' premise.

Finally, Soyinka's writings reveal the connections between *lumpen behaviour and the 'poli-thuggery' of the nation state*. A most interesting conjunction here, I think. Here, the issue falls under a kind of Bambay-ism (rule of the chief police officer, Bambay Kamara, under the APC government). The principal role is played by the Chief Inspector of Police. In Soyinka, the Police Chief is Sunday Adewusi; the next layer is made up of his 'Kill and Go' poli-thugs; then, underneath these the 'lumpen' thugs, who

are now 'gainfully' managed by the state's mechanisms of repression. In those years the 'head thug' called himself '007' — not 'Rambo'. He was 'a psychopath who styled himself 007', Soyinka explains about this character (p.67). In any case, this convergence of margins and centralised repression produces what Soyinka refers to as 'gladiatorial democracy' — nicely wicked expression — that thoroughly roughs up the dispensation of 'citizen' and subject' — margin and centre. The signal event here was, I believe, the murderous setting afire of a minibus at Ile-Ife during the events leading to the elections of 1983 (p. 66). This was done by 'thugs'; while the Kill-and-Go 'poli-thugs' watched, having received sanction to do nothing from Inspector-General Adewusi, himself acting on behalf of the 'ruling party'. Soyinka quotes Joseph Garba's 'Fractured History' (p.66) to substantiate his point.

Saffa Kemokai

Let me revisit the discussion on the concept of 'njahungbua ngorngaa'. My position on this concept is not simply borne out of sentiments. I am looking at traditional meanings and the kinds of attributes Patrick describes simply do not hold for this group. Here, I want to accept that we both come from different social settings and maybe our descriptions are influenced by those settings. I also challenge the view that 'njahungbua' means 'defiance' except in Gbandi or Loko, which are the other two languages that I know come close to Mende. But in Mende, I hold that 'njahungbua ngorngaa' means jovial person or play-boy (I do not mean 'ngahungbua'). The RUF menace has transformed the behaviour of even those who would have been described as well meaning or of good character — including doctors, for instance. Why then would 'njahungbua ngorngaa' be given attributes that deviate from standard conceptions of the term just because such youths have fought alongside the RUF and the 'Kamajoisia'? I am not arguing about the atrocities that have been reported. My contention is about who can be called 'njahungbua ngorngaa'.

Kelfala Kallon

As I understand the term, 'njahun gbua gorgasia' means youth who are predisposed to taking unnecessary risks. 'Njaahun gbua' is used to describe those who are not afraid of anything. They usually volunteer for hazardous duty in the village setting. Generally, the term has a more positive connotation than the meaning Patrick has given it. The above notwithstanding, it is easy to see Patrick's point of the 'Njaahun-gbua gorgeisia' voluntarily joining the RUF. Because they are by nature risk-takers, they are susceptible to RUF recruiting tactics, once they have been captured. This is because they,

more than anyone else in the village setting, are likely to view looting as a quick way to accumulate wealth, since they take unnecessary risks. The more risk-averse youth would flee at the first opportunity.

Patrick Muana

Perhaps a full definition of the word is necessary here again. 'Njia-' means 'wisdom/social proscriptions by elders or customary law/thought'; and '-hungbia' means 'to defy, rebel against, ignore, treat with contempt'. 'Njia gbia leihun', or 'layia gbualeihun', is a conduct that is censored in normal social interaction — e.g. between parent and child; elder and younger person; husband and wife, etc. In folk narrative and when the word is fondly used in everyday Mende life to describe acts of derring-do, 'njiahungbia' has the so-referred-to 'heroic' implication: those who can do what others cannot dare do in the village; the brave; those who scorn danger and risks; an almost mischievous delight in venturing into the unknown and engaging/confronting the dangerous, the inexplicable. They muster this excess energy for adventure because they have little or no 'mahindei' (social obligations and responsibilities like children and wives).

This folk definition is not lost on me and does not constitute the basis of my description of this group and their role in the RUF insurrection. I am not also saying that all 'njiahungbia-ngornga' automatically became RUF volunteers. I am talking about those who became voluntary RUF conscripts. I am also concerned with the social character of this group as semi-literate, unskilled, rural-based drifters who do not always have the strong social ties we associate with normal settled men. I am tying this in with their inclination towards self-enrichment and the unmediated instrument of power (violence) offered them by the RUF in an effort to tap their youthful and adventurous energy for their combat ranks and especially their knowledge of local terrain. I am also bringing into concert overwhelming empirical evidence that as 'town commanders', 'wosus', and 'standbys' in RUF ranks, they share a responsibility for the looting, the beating and killing of civilians, and for pursuing the RUF war in the country.

Lansana Gberie

I see that Patrick has resorted to ethno-linguistic analysis to prove his point. I think he should use Ishmail's suggested term 'kabudu' to describe the types of people he has in mind who joined the RUF to commit atrocities. 'Kabudu' is different from 'njahungbia gorgasia', although the line separating the two may look thin. 'Kabudu' (or gang), may have emerged from the great diamond rush of the 1950s (there was also the term Robin Hood, appropriate

only because it described people who were involved in illicit mining activities — they never gave to the poor). The 'njiahungbia gorngeisia', who were firmly integrated into their communities, were a counterweight to the 'kabudu' (mainly 'san-san boys', urban lumpen migrants in the diamond villages). It is easy to see that the 'kabudu', once overwhelmed by the RUF in their localities, joined the movement without much cajoling. I insist that this is not the case with the 'njiahungbia gorngeisia'. 'Kabudu', we should note, is lumpen language. It has been absorbed into almost all the languages of Sierra Leone.

Patrick seems to be stretching the idea of 'willing recruits' too far. He risks blaming the victims. Does he have evidence of people who left villages that were safe from RUF attacks and joined the RUF willingly? I agree that some people joined, once they were overwhelmed by the RUF, and turned out to be enthusiastic RUF fighters. But savagery, rape, and murder have been the defining characteristics of the RUF since they entered the country. When the RUF attacked and razed Telu to the ground, all the people in the next village (Mambona), including all the young men, fled either to Bo or Gondama. Ibrahim has made an analysis of the dynamics of the settlement trends in the Kono diamond mines. A similar pattern could be discerned in many of the diamond areas in the East and South (particularly Tongofield). The 'san-san boys' or roving freelance miners, should be separated from the settled miners/peasants. They are very different sets of people, although all are young.

Saffa Kemokai

Although in Mende, as in other languages, separate words can be joined to create an entirely new word whose meaning is dependent on its parts, I am afraid this is not the case with 'njahungbua' — it stands on its own. Patrick is wavering between njiahungbua(bia) and njahungbua and has conveniently constructed njia to replace nja/nje-eh (water/life) hungbua (fish around — literally).

There is no standard format for writing Mende. Therefore, my judgement of the terms under contention has been influenced by the meaning offered in the discussion. We should not confuse 'wasue', which I think correctly reflects the behaviour of the youth Patrick writes about, with 'njahungbua'. Let me elaborate further by examining the word 'njahungbua' (Patrick later called this njiahungbia/njia-hun-gbia). The two 'i's in 'njiahungbia' make all the difference: they make the adjective 'njahungbua' quite pejorative, for 'njia' literally means trouble, war or perpetual antagonism.

There is no heroism in 'njia'. 'Njia-hun-gbua(ia)' as distinct from 'njahungbua', is rather an unusual Mende construction and it can be manipulated to look like 'njahungbua'. Indeed, the linking of 'njiahungbia' to 'korngaa' is rather expedient and problematic. There is already an adjective that is similar to it in Mende, which is reflective of 'korngaa' or 'ndakpei'ysia'. Presumably, therefore, 'njiahungbia' must be furnished with another reflective noun/pronoun to link the RUF atrocities with the youth under discussion. Here, the best word is 'wasue' (defiance, arrogant, stubborn, etc.). I think that 'njahungbua korngaa' has been wrongly defined by Patrick to explain the social experiences of excluded youths in rural areas. I hope that efforts will be made to re-examine the question of what motivates certain classes of people to participate in this war, beyond the usual stereotypes that have been used to classify groups or individuals.

'Njahungbua', the subject of all this discussion, stands by itself as a non-pejorative adjective denoting heroism at the village setting and is traditionally linked to 'korngaa', and in most cases 'kpawuisia' (the unmarried ones). 'Njahungbua korngaa' are care-free but are not generally arrogant; they volunteer to undertake risks for their community because they see such risks as their responsibility; their defiance of village authority, as argued by Patrick, is in my view, misunderstood. Yes, they can stand out in a crowded court 'barri' and say 'no, Maada, that is not true', if they believe that justice has not been served, when everyone else is afraid to do so. There is nothing extraordinary about this in a village setting where issues of arbitration are concerned.

Patrick Muana

I guess the point is made that some of our rural youth (who enjoy taking risks and defying danger/authority/social constraints as Kelfala has confirmed and stressed: njiahungbiae), are committed RUF cadre who are responsible for the majority of human rights abuses in RUF-held territory. They have been positively identified by the internally displaced persons (by name, relatives, character/role/employment and skills in villages before the RUF attacks on those villages).

Let me start with Saffa's argument that the concept of 'wasue' better describes the kinds of youth that my article addresses than that of 'njiahungbia ngorngesia'. 'Wasue' is not the same as 'njiahungbia'. 'Wasue' is mischievousness; a kind of frolicsome waywardness when it suits the individual. A person can be described as 'wasue' if perceivably out of some instinct for self-satisfaction, he or she deliberately flouts advice. The individual does what he/she does 'for a laugh' and gets a buzz out of the

concern expressed by proximate kin/pals. 'Wasue' is evinced by all age groups and gender (including the elderly women), but mainly children.

'Njiahungbiae', on the contrary, is restricted to only mature rural-based, mainly single young men (between ages 17-35). Children, women, elderly and married men are excluded from this group. The noun is not considered in isolation of its intensifying post-modifier: it is always 'njiahungbia ngomga' when reference is made to that particular group of people and their social character. It is evident that at this age, young men in all, and especially Sierra Leonean, societies are rebellious and keen on establishing themselves within the social and power structures. On a positive note, they do harness these qualities for community development work and at the early stages of the war even joined local vigilantes to defend their towns. A number of them have joined the Kamajoi militia as has already been pointed out by Lansana and in my previous interventions.

On the negative side, they usually articulate protest against the authority of chiefs, defy proscriptions by elders, and especially when they are semi-literate, accumulate some money from their forays in the urban and mining towns, and return to the village to see their kinsmen. Here they not only continue defying the authority structure but do exhibit some of the lumpen culture of urban-situated types that they would have encountered in 'potes' and mining pits. They are indeed motivated in a big way by the impulse to do what they do to improve their financial status.

My argument does not privilege just a social description of the group and I am not making a generalised conclusion that all members of this group became RUF fighters. I am saying that having interacted with the pit, 'pote' and urban types, violent activism as an expression of political dissent may not have been new to them. Their impulse to improve their financial situation may not have deterred willing participation in the RUF free-for-all especially as they stood to gain some authority as 'town commanders' and combatants. They were not motivated by RUF ideology. Most of the violence they inflicted either had the mark of personal vendettas (village/personal quarrels/bush/family cases) or was done to facilitate looting. A majority of RUF combatants captured/killed have been identified by internally displaced persons and soldiers as perpetrators of the violence unleashed by the RUF on civilians. In short, what I am saying about the 'njiahungbia ngomga' is that there was inclination, cause, and motivation for a section of them to participate in the RUF's violence against the state. Saffa would rather stress the positive side to rural youth culture at the expense of considering their

induction into the murderous RUF gang and the atrocities they have inflicted on their fellow Sierra Leoneans.

Let me now address Lansana's argument about the relevance of the word 'kabudu', which surely diverts attention from the kinds of people that I am talking about. 'Kabudu' is a Krio borrowing from the English word 'caboodle', meaning a collection of persons/things. More appropriately, it is used in Krio to refer (I think) to a gang. I am not inferring a gang mentality in my description. I am referring specifically to individuals (rural-based social drifters) who joined the RUF, have been very active combatants, and have been committing grave acts against civilians in RUF territory.

Lansana also seems to be pitting the 'folk' conception of 'njiahungbia ngornga' as a stabilising force against the 'san-san boys'. The evidence shows that the distinction does not hold. Some 'san-san boys' have been also very crucial stabilising agents in various sectors of the war zone. There are a lot of 'ex-san-san boys' in the 'kamajoi' militia who have fought against the RUF insurgency. There were a lot of 'san-san boys' in the Kono vigilante militia recruited by Executive Outcomes to bolster the strength of the Sierra Leone military in the area. 'San-san boys' were involved as 'kamajoisia' in the assault on Pehyama (in the Tongo area) and Zogoda in the Koya area. 'San-san boys' are participants in the activities of the Eastern Region Defence Committee (EREDECOM) and were members of the K1 and K2 battalions formed by the late Alpha Lavallie. A lot of 'san-san boys' joined the army during the massive recruitment drive under the NPRC. There are indeed 'san-san boys' on the RUF side although the information is that they are only standbys and recruits and not senior officers (unlike some of the 'njiahungbia ngornga' that I describe.) I can supply the names of some of the popular 'njiahungbia ngornga' who are low rank COs and NCOs in the RUF.

Indeed some 'njiahungbia ngornga' managed to escape from RUF territory but a majority of those who stayed behind have been willing combatants and recruits. A peculiarity of the Sierra Leone civil war is that no one defined social class or group can be put to one side as a 'stabilising/destabilising' agent. Elements of all definable social groups in Sierra Leone have acted in one of the two roles be they, for instance, 'rarray boys', 'san-san boys', 'njiahungbia ngornga', 'children', 'women', 'chiefs', 'imams and pastors', 'medical workers', 'students', 'ethnic groups', or 'soldiers'. That is what makes our civil war intriguing.

Lansana Gberie

Patrick has raised an important point about some of the 'san-san boys' who joined the military. No one has ever doubted this. In fact the argument is that it is this group, this lumpen element, that was responsible for most of the 'sobel' (soldier-turned rebel) activities — the looting and general indiscipline associated with the army. When I visited Bo in 1994, I found that most of the once popular 'potes' (where marijuana is smoked) were derelict; police records showed that the incidence of theft had dropped sharply in the town (and this at a time when the population of the town had more than tripled by the influx of displaced people from the villages!). In fact, many of the lumpens, or 'san-san boys', had joined the army, and had perhaps found richer pickings attacking vehicles on the highway and looting villages. There certainly is a class basis to the rebellion. And I still maintain that Patrick's use of the concept, 'njiahungbia gorngesia', is different from the way it is used by folks in rural areas.

Patrick Muana

I do not deny the existence of lumpens in the army. I argue, on the contrary, that the army's professional incompetence in pursuing the counter-insurgency campaigns and its perceived role in unleashing violence of such magnitude on civilians was a principal factor for the formation of the Kamajoi militia by displaced chiefs and their subjects. Yusuf reinforces this point in his review (this volume).

My definition of 'njiahungbia ngorngeisia' as lumpen stands: be they RUF combatants or 'kamajoisia'. In the conclusion of my article, I point out aspects of their lumpen 'ideology' which are fraught with all sorts of dangers. I also raise possible questions about the future of these 'stabilising agents'. The majority of young men who stayed behind in villages were indeed 'willing recruits.' From the nature of RUF attacks, there are always comfortable advance warnings with raids on areas contiguous to military outposts and neighbouring villages and towns. Some of those captured believed in and were committed to the RUF agenda. I am not denying that forcible conscription did take place. Of course, there were abductions and forcible induction into the cycle of violence. I am directing attention to the great majority of active RUF combatants who did not need a second asking to be enthusiastic participants in the bloodletting. The RUF had a significant number of men under arms: up to 2,500 men under arms at the height of the war.

I would hesitate again to construct classes in Sierra Leone. I have opined elsewhere that the social character of the individuals battling on both sides in this civil war is largely amorphous. What has emerged so far are speculations that the RUF insurrection may be characterised as the 'revolt of the lumpen proletariat'. I am suggesting that the margins are too fuzzy for very clear categorical boundaries.

On the question of social origins of those who committed the atrocities, the story of the infamous Capt. Vangahun and Lt. Manawai of the RUF say it all. Residents of Bo, Kenema, and Panguma know who these two RUF commanders are — their background and their activities. There are a number of others who led RUF rebels to 'sorkoisiahun' (civilian hiding places) and actively participated in the execution of rivals/enemies with whom they had grievances at the villages prior to, or during, the war. The examples abound. The majority of amputees who are now living in huts around 'Fireball' (office of former Provincial Secretary for Southern Province in Bo) and Gondama will tell you that their hands, arms, fingers, ears, eyes, and noses were either cut or gouged by people who were formerly resident in their own villages. The recaptured civilians from Zogoda and Bandawor have the same story.

I am not questioning the status of the word 'kabudu' as a borrowing. The substantial issue raised is that 'san-san boys'/'komgeisia' who joined the RUF were not organised into gangs. Once we talk about gangs, we are talking about tangible and definable organisational structures. I am asking us to see RUF combatants as individuals who for various reasons and for shared motivations (possibly self-enrichment) joined the bloodletting.

Yusuf Bangura

It seems the discussion is getting bogged down on the concept of 'njiahungbia ngorgesia'. Let me attempt a synthesis and address the issue that has cropped up on the social character of the RUF.

It seems to me that what Patrick is saying is that there is a group of youths who are weakly integrated into village communities, who occupy central positions in the RUF war and governance project; and that these youths are responsible for the large scale atrocities that the RUF has committed against villagers. The question is whether individuals in this group can be called 'njiahungbia ngorgesia'. Patrick thinks that they can be, and provides an ethno-linguistic analysis of the concept to support his argument. Lansana and Saffa say they cannot be so referred as the concept of 'njiahungbia ngorgesia' conjures a positive image. Kelfala believes that irrespective of the term's positive image, it should not be surprising if

individuals in the group joined the RUF and committed the atrocities that Patrick describes — this is because members of this group are known for their propensity to take 'unnecessary risks'. Lansana thinks that the rural youth who Patrick's analysis refers to should be described as 'kabudu'. Patrick rejects this suggestion because of the 'gang' connotation that is attached to the concept of 'kabudu' — in other words, the types of youths he describes as willing accomplices to the RUF's violence did not join the RUF as a group but as individuals. I think we can focus the discussion on the social characteristics of the individuals who have actually participated in the RUF, and maintain the different interpretations of the concept of 'njiahungbia ngorgesia' (in other words, agree to disagree on the concept).

It seems also that the debate has thrown up three categories of youth who constitute part of a broad 'lumpen' social group or class in Sierra Leone: the urban 'rarray man dem', some of whom were said to have been recruited for military training in Libya as a prelude to the formation of the RUF; the 'san-san boys' in the border region and other diamond-mining areas, many of whom were said to have willingly joined the RUF; and sections of the socially disconnected youth in rural areas (described by Patrick as 'njiahungbia ngorgensia') who were town administrators and 'wosus' in the RUF's military command system. It has been pointed out that these three categories of youth can also be found in the Sierra Leone military and the 'kamajoisia'.

An interesting question is why these groups have been able to play a stabilising role in the 'kamajoisia' movement (have they consistently done so?) and not in the RUF and the Sierra Leone military. Does this tell us something about the balance of forces within the three military systems? Is it the case that the so-called 'lumpen' youth constituted not only a minority position in the 'kamajoisia' movement but that the system of military command and social accountability made it difficult for 'lumpen' youth to behave irresponsibly in the war front when pursuing the goals of the 'kamajoisia' movement? (the latter point is covered in Patrick's article on the 'kamajoisia'). It would be interesting to construct a picture of what it means to be an 'urban rarray man' (Ibrahim is already doing this in his research on lumpen culture), a 'san-san boy', and a socially disconnected youth in the village (or 'njiahungbia ngorgesia', if you like, à la Patrick). There are likely to be both common and divergent values and behaviour patterns among the three groups. From this we could then have a good understanding of the national characteristics of the social group that our discussion suggests has played a dominant role in the atrocities associated with the war. This could

be a contribution to the study of 'lumpens' as they apply to the concrete Sierra Leone setting.

Patrick is right about the need to avoid constructing classes in Sierra Leone where they may not exist. What is being demanded is an open approach that starts from the real experiences of people. In pursuing this kind of work, it would be difficult to avoid categorisation or classification — the hallmark of scientific enquiry. And classes or social groups should never be seen as self-contained or water-tight configurations — one should always look for the margins, the fuzziness and the fluidity in social relations. To say that all groups were involved in the war does not actually say much, because this, by definition, is the case. In other words, all civil wars affect all groups in society — but they do so unevenly, and throw up different forms and degrees of participation from the public. An interesting analysis is one which is able to explain what these social differences are in terms of levels of participation, the balance of power within social movements, distribution of authority, and social accountability.

The RUF may have had teachers, farmers, Imams, civil servants etc., but how effective have individuals from these groups been in imposing on the RUF values that one usually associates with their professions? Did individuals from these more settled groups constitute the majority in the RUF? Did they command strategic positions in the movement? Did they try to push alternative values in the RUF project? Did they have any influence on the 'lumpen' groups? In short, what was the balance of power within the RUF movement? In the review (this volume), I talked about the need to see the RUF as a movement with multiple logics — the logic of political ideology competes with the logics of banditry, resource appropriation and brutalisation of rural folk. How does the logic of political liberation (which the educated individuals may have propagated) get internalised or negotiated by the 'unlettered', socially marginal groups that did most of the fighting? Perhaps what is needed is an empirical demonstration of who did what in the RUF project.

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Reflections on the Abidjan Peace Accord

Yusuf Bangura*

This paper was written in early January, 1997, one month after the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord. The legitimate government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah that signed the agreement with the Revolutionary United Front was overthrown on 25 May, 1997. The other key signatory to the agreement, the rebel leader, Foday Sankoh, has been in detention in Nigeria since March, 1997. His arrest coincided with a major split in the RUF, which was to have grave consequences for the agreement (RUF, March 1997). Sankoh refused to send representatives to the critical demobilisation and disarmament committee, thereby undermining the work of the Peace Commission, and making it difficult for the government to proceed with the disarmament process. He also refused to meet with the UN representatives in Côte d'Ivoire, and opposed the decision to send a 720-member United Nations peacekeeping force to help secure the peace. He called instead for a smaller force of 50 to 60 members (RUF, January 1997). All four Freetown-based RUF members on the key Peace Commission, which was set up to direct the work of the provisions of the Peace Accord, seemed keen to end the war, and declared their support for the new leader, Philip Palmer. The accord could not be implemented, however, as Palmer's leadership was contested by the bush commanders of the RUF who declared their loyalty to Sankoh. There were renewed conflicts between the RUF and the Kamajoi militia, on the one hand, and between the Kamajoi militia and the Sierra Leone army on the other. The latter had become very unpopular among rural people who accused it of collaborating with the RUF in destabilising the countryside. The military coup of May 25 confirmed the alliance between the RUF and the military as both groups announced a new so-called joint 'people's army'. Sankoh was invited to serve as the deputy leader, and several members of the RUF bush fighters were given posts in the new junta. Despite the setbacks in its implementation, the Abidjan Peace Accord is still seen by the ousted government, the international community and broad sections of Sierra Leoneans as the key framework for the resolution of

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the crisis. The article examines the constraints to, and the opportunities associated with, the implementation of the accord within the context of a democratising, war-tom society — the type that was in place before the armed seizure of power by the military and the RUF. The complete isolation of the junta and the resolve of Sierra Leoneans and the world community to reinstate the legitimate government underscore the need to understand the full ramifications of the Accord.

Introduction

The signing of the Peace Accord in Abidjan on 30 November, 1996, between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front was intended to mark the official ending of Sierra Leone's five and half years of war (Peace Agreement 1996). The war has ravaged much of the country's rural areas, killed more than 10,000 civilians, left hundreds of innocent bystanders maimed and traumatised, displaced almost a million and a half people from their homes and livelihoods, orphaned thousands of young children, and imposed financial and social burdens on much of the relatively stable population. One major consequence of the war, which post-war reconstruction efforts will have to tackle very quickly and decisively, has been the transformation of the country from a predominantly rural society of small, sparsely populated and widely dispersed villages into pockets of dense urban settlements. If one goes beyond the rhetoric of the main combatants, there is no doubt that this has largely been an anti-rural war. Medium-sized provincial towns like Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Koidu have suddenly become large urban settlements as villagers seek refuge in them as ultimate bastions of safety. And the capital, Freetown, could well have grown from a pre-war population of roughly half a million people to one million — if not, indeed, more.

The mass nationwide jubilation that greeted the signing of the Accord should be seen as a potent indicator of the basic unity of the country and the long-standing determination of most people to put an end to what they have all along rightly regarded as a senseless war. It is safe to conclude that although the country appears battered and exhausted as a result of the war, it is ready to face the serious tasks of reconstruction, rehabilitation and development as a single united entity. It is against this background of unity, hope, dedication to heal the war wounds, and to prevent a recurrence of the events that led to the war that I attempt to review the Abidjan Peace Accord. What does the Accord offer Sierra Leone? What are its strengths and limitations? Who among the key actors is likely to gain or lose from its implementation? Is it likely to provide sustainable peace? What steps should

be taken to ensure that the basic commitments made by the combatants to consolidate the peace are honoured and implemented?

Summary of the Accord

The Accord contains 28 articles and a short annex. Both sides to the conflict agreed to end the war 'with immediate effect', to ensure that 'a total cessation of hostilities is observed forthwith', and to give 'the establishment and consolidation of a just peace' a priority (Articles 1 and 2). A National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace will be established 'within two weeks of the signing of (the) agreement' to monitor the implementation of the provisions of the Accord. An eight-man team of Government/RUF appointees was announced by President Kabbah, comprising on the government side Sama Banya, Sheka Mansaray, Desmond Luke and Joe Jackson, and on the RUF side Fayia Musa, Ibrahim Deen-Jalloh, Mustapha Alie Bangura, and Philip Palmer.

Banya, Jackson and Luke have a history of flirtation with the discredited government of the All Peoples Congress, although Luke enjoys the distinguished record of being the only Cabinet minister to have resigned from the government of Siaka Stevens — i.e. if we exclude the controversial resignation letter of the late Finance Minister, Mohamed Fornah. To his credit, Luke has also been an implacable critic of military rule. Mansaray is a top level professional bureaucrat and Coordinator of the peace process at State House. Jackson taught Chemistry at Fourah Bay College before joining the APC government, and Banya is a medical doctor by training. One can assume that Deen-Jalloh, Musa, Palmer and Bangura constitute part of the top brass of the RUF. Musa is a well known spokesman of the RUF, and a former student of Njala University College. Palmer, an engineering graduate, is reputed to be a key strategist and a top RUF commander. Deen-Jalloh has been part of the negotiating team at Yamasoukrou in Côte d'Ivoire, a former teacher at Bunumbu Teachers College who, with his wife Agnes (sister of ex-military leader Maada Bio), joined the RUF when the college was over-run by the rebels. And Bangura is understood to be a Press Officer of the organisation.

This eight-man Peace Commission will establish, co-ordinate and facilitate the work of six new bodies, viz. a Socioeconomic Forum, Citizens' Consultative Conferences, A Multi-Partisan Council, a Trust Fund for the Consolidation of Peace, a Demobilisation and Resettlement Committee, and a National Budget and Debt Committee (Article 3). The Accord accords the Peace Commission tremendous powers in the pursuit of its mandate. For instance, the Commission has the power to organise its work 'in the manner

in which it deems most appropriate' and to make its findings public; it will be provided with an office, 'adequate communication facilities and adequate secretariat support' to carry out its duties; it can make recommendations on measures to help the implementation and development of the provisions of the agreement; it can prepare 'preliminary legislative drafts' that are necessary for the implementation of the agreement; it has the right to inspect 'any activity or site' that is linked to the implementation of the Accord; and no action can be taken by Government or the RUF on any matter relating to the Accord without consulting the Commission. Both the Government and the RUF 'undertake to comply with the conclusions of the Commission' (Article 3).

The proposed Trust Fund will provide funding for the implementation of the Accord (Article 3). Yearly Citizens' Consultative Conferences will be organised to ensure popular participation in the national political process (Article 4). Combatants will be disarmed in designated Assembly Zones, and their demobilisation and reintegration into society will be done 'as soon as practicable' after the disarmament (Article 5). The Government and the Commission, assisted by the 'International Community', are entrusted with the responsibility to look after the welfare of encamped combatants (Article 5). The Demobilisation and Resettlement Committee, whose membership should not exceed seven persons, and which should be established a month after the signing of the Accord, will 'co-ordinate the encampment, disarmament, demobilisation and resettlement of the RUF/SL combatants' (Article 6). Combatants should be in the Assembly Zones — to be identified by the Demobilisation Committee — not later than three months from the signing of the Accord (Article 7).

The International Community will be asked 'to help supervise and monitor the encampment, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes.' A Joint Monitoring Group (JMG), comprising of representatives of the Government and the RUF, will observe the work of these activities at all stages (Article 8). In addition, a Neutral Monitoring Group (NMG) from the International Community, which shall be deployed for an initial period of three months, will be responsible for monitoring breaches of the cease-fire (Article 11). The Peace Commission will, 'as a priority', make recommendations on the restructuring of the military. RUF combatants who wish to enlist in the national army 'can become part of the new unified armed forces within a framework to be discussed and agreed upon by the Commission' (Article 10). The South African mercenary outfit, Executive Outcomes (EO), will be withdrawn 'five weeks after the deployment of the NMG', confined to barracks and supervised by the JMG and NMG (Article 12). Other foreign troops will be repatriated not later than three months after

the deployment of the NMG 'or six months after the signing of the Agreement, which ever is earlier' (Article 12).

The RUF will be allowed to register as a political movement within 30 days of the signing of the Accord (Article 13), and the International Community will be approached to contribute resources to a trust fund that will help the RUF to transform itself into a political party (Article 17). No judicial action will be taken against 'any member of the RUF/SL in respect of anything done by them in pursuit of their objectives as members of that organisation up to the time of the signing of (the) Agreement'. Furthermore, legislative and other measures will be taken to ensure that RUF combatants and political exiles will be able to enjoy their full civil and political rights within the framework of the law (Article 14). The mandate of the existing National Unity and Reconciliation Commission will be expanded to help heal the wounds of the war, and to promote civic education, national unity and reconciliation (Article 15). An Ombudsman will be created to raise the standards of accountability, probity and integrity in the public service (Article 16). There will be a reform of the electoral system to ensure full participation of citizens and their organisations in the political process, as well as the independence and integrity of the National Electoral Commission (NEC). The RUF, the Government and other political parties will nominate people of 'professionalism, integrity and objectivity' to the NEC not later than three months after the signing of the Accord. No member of NEC will be eligible to hold political office in 'any government formed as a result of an election they were mandated to conduct' (Article 18).

The Government and the RUF agree to respect the basic civil and political liberties of all individuals as enshrined in international declarations of the United Nations and the OAU, and the principles and rules of international humanitarian law, and to release all political prisoners and prisoners of war (Articles 19&21). An independent National Commission on Human Rights will be established to promote human rights education, monitor violations and institute legal proceedings where appropriate. It will seek technical and material assistance from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Centre for Human Rights and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (Article 20). The independence of the judiciary will be strengthened, and the existing Judicial and Legal Service Commission will be reconstituted to help defend the independence of the judiciary from both the state and political parties. Representatives from the lay public will be appointed to join judges, other legal officers and civil servants, who already constitute the Legal Commission (Article 24). There will be a review and re-orientation of the Police Force in order to deepen its professionalism and

respect for the rule of law, and to protect it from political, ideological and social pressures. Furthermore, the Police Council will draw its membership from a broad section of society to ensure that it upholds its 'truly civilian and non-partisan character' (Article 25).

In the pursuit of the goals of reconstruction, rehabilitation and development special attention will be given to 'rural and urban poor areas, war victims, disabled persons and other vulnerable groups' (Article 22). The values of grassroots participation, the empowerment of rural communities and the urban poor in productive activities and decision making processes, and the equitable distribution of national resources would inform the socioeconomic policy of the country. In this regard, the agreement lists ten areas where action is needed to improve the quality of life of the population — primary health care for all; affordable and quality housing in rural and poor urban areas; free and compulsory education up to the junior secondary school age; clean drinking water and sanitation; job opportunities, especially for the youth; technical, marketing and credit facilities for agriculture; food security; regulation of environmental degradation and exploitation of natural resources, as well as prohibition of monopolies; provision of roads, transport and communication facilities, energy and rural electrification; and debt relief to allow for funds to be diverted from debt servicing to the tasks of rebuilding the economy and society (Article 26). A broad-based Socioeconomic Forum will be responsible for the elaboration and pursuit of these objectives (Article 27). The Government of Côte d'Ivoire, the UN, the OAU and the Commonwealth will act as 'moral guarantors' to the Accord (Article 28). The annex of the Accord calls for a nationwide sensitisation programme, which will inform the public about the reality of the end of hostilities, the reasons for demobilisation, the opportunities for reintegration of combatants, and the need for reconciliation. This programme will be pursued by both the Government and the RUF.

A Power Sharing Model?

In many ways, the Accord represents a variant of the power sharing model, which has emerged as a standard mechanism for rebuilding sharply polarised societies and those torn by wars, most of which have turned out to be unwinnable and of doubtful ideological pedigree. The power sharing model is informed by two important characteristics. Firstly, the main parties to armed conflicts operate from a position of relative weakness — i.e. after a long period of stalemate in the battlefield warring parties gain sufficient knowledge about the limitations of their respective powers and the futility of continuing with the war. Once this stage is reached, actors are expected to act rationally by choosing the path of peace, which may help them to convert their

weakness into renewed strength and to conserve some of the gains they have made in the war. Secondly, the relative weakness of the actors demands an active role for external facilitators, financiers and guarantors. These should be neutral, firm and effective in helping the actors to convert their weak-weak situations into win-win outcomes (for a related discussion see Adekanye 1997; Horowitz 1985; and Lijphart 1977).

The Abidjan Accord embodies these two characteristics. After five years and eight months of war, and a rapid turn over of governments (four in all), the idea gradually emerged among government circles, particularly those of Maada Bio and Tejan Kabbah, that only a political settlement could end the carnage, allow people to rebuild their lives, and strengthen the resolve of government to get on with the business of development. Despite its 'tough guy' posturing in previous governmental peace overtures, the RUF has also been devastated by the war — it has lost many of its combatants, including some of its top commanders; it is unable to hold on to any territory of significance or popularise its message to the public; it is hated by the vast majority of villagers and urban dwellers for its employment of a savage methodology of exterminating or maiming the very people it seeks to liberate; and, particularly in the last few months before the signing of the Accord, it suffered very serious set-backs in the battlefield from the Kamajoi militia— modern-day traditional hunters and rural-based fighters — who were determined to defend and reclaim their villages and root out all traces of RUF activities from their localities (see Muana, this volume).

As we have seen, the Accord also makes very liberal references to the role of the 'International Community', which is expected to help with funding, monitoring of the agreement and the cease-fire. Given the destructive effects of the war on the country's productive structures and revenue base, and the weakening of its national institutions, the combatants have no alternative but to turn to the International Community for assistance to end the war and rebuild the country. The UNDP, various other UN organisations, the OAU, the Commonwealth, key Western countries, the Red Cross, Nigeria, and indeed, the government of Côte d'Ivoire, have played actively supportive roles. Special emphasis must be given to the efforts of Côte d'Ivoire in facilitating and supervising the whole process. From the time the Red Cross helped to transport the top RUF cadres from the Gola Forests in Sierra Leone in February 1996 and accommodated them in Yamasoukrou, to the signing of the agreement in November 1996, President Konan Bedié and Foreign Minister Amara Essy gave the peace negotiations and the ultimate goal of signing the Accord a top government priority. This exemplary pan-African dedication to duty should be applauded. Their behaviour contrasts sharply

with that of their former president, Houphouet Boigny, who provided support to Charles Taylor, and by extension, the RUF, and made several attempts to thwart the peace initiatives of the West African Peacekeeping Force, ECOMOG, in Liberia (Tarr 1993). International Alert, the London-based conflict resolution NGO, was also instrumental in getting the RUF to adopt the path of peace, although government functionaries in all three regimes of Valentine Strasser, Maada Bio and Tejan Kabba, as well as many ordinary Sierra Leoneans, were highly critical of its objectivity and close relations with the RUF.

Perhaps, it is worth mentioning the view of some private sources in Europe that the politics of the elections for the post of Secretary General of the United Nations fed into the process that led to the signing of the Accord. It should be recalled that Amara Essy was one of the four African candidates that vied for Boutros Gali's job when it became clear that the US was not going to drop its veto on the renewal of Boutros Gali's tenure. The French were keen on having a Francophone person on the job and solidly threw their weight behind Essy. But Essy was not known outside of the Francophone world and Sierra Leone. It was felt that the signing of the Sierra Leone Peace Accord in which Essy was a key player would considerably raise his visibility and boost his chances of getting the UN job. The sources maintain that much carrot and stick was used by both France and Côte d'Ivoire to get Sankoh and his team to sign the Accord. The French media was full of praise for Essy as the only one of the four candidates vying for the UN post who has solved an African problem — the Sierra Leone war. There was reference to TV pictures in which he was shown flying in a helicopter with some of the combatants and other neutral observers into the bush to get the RUF to sell the peace deal to its commanders. Those who are good in investigative journalism and in prying open the French and Ivorian archives may one day tell us what the 'carrot' in the deal contained.

The Abidjan Accord draws from the experiences of a number of other agreements on power sharing, such as the Angolan, El Salvadoran and Cambodian peace agreements (Action for Southern Africa; Boyce 1995; Utting 1994) in such key areas as encampment, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants, as well as in the creation of joint institutions to facilitate the peace process. For instance, the RUF is expected to play major roles in the Peace Commission and its six sub-institutions for managing the peace, in the composition and reform of the National Electoral Commission, in the supervision of the encampment of Executive Outcomes, in the restructuring of the army, and in the shaping of the country's socioeconomic policy. The Accord differs, however, from other well known

power sharing agreements, since the RUF has not been given any post in the government, does not enjoy any representation in parliament, and is not in charge of any local government, district or province. The main reason for this difference is the unique character of Sierra Leone's road to peace. Unlike many previously authoritarian war-torn countries that were forced to establish extensive power sharing arrangements, Sierra Leone had successfully organised multi-party elections in February 1996 without the participation of the RUF. Those elections brought in a new government which was not associated with the causes of the war.

The Abidjan Accord had to take into account the existence of a functioning constitution, and a pluralistic parliament and government, all of which enjoyed wide popular legitimacy. Thus the Accord gives equal authority and treatment to the RUF and the Government on matters relating to war and peace but not to wider issues of politics and governance, where government is expected to have much leverage. The only established national institutions that will be subjected to the rules of power sharing are the military and the National Electoral Commission. In other words, the institutions that represent the commanding heights of politics remain relatively intact. The RUF is simply being asked to play the legal game like everyone else, and to wait for the next elections when it can test its popularity at the polls if it wants to gain access to the dominant political institutions. However, as we shall see later, the Accord has a potential to extend the frontiers of power sharing in major ways, which could change the course of politics in the country. It may also greatly empower the RUF as a legitimate political organisation — something that the RUF itself has failed to do in five and half years of destructive bush war.

The Gains of the RUF

Perhaps, the biggest winners in the Accord are the RUF. Here is a movement which waged brutal war on Sierra Leoneans for more than five years without ever administering a key territory (apart from the brief take-over of Koidu and Pujehun), and whose leaders should (under normal circumstances) be facing a war crimes tribunal, but who are now being given enormous opportunities by a democratically elected government and the international community to redeem themselves as civilised people with a genuine cause to pursue. Indeed, during the last few months leading up to the signing of the Accord, the RUF was in a state of disarray, after losing most of its key military bases, combatants and commanders to the Kamajoi militia. In a recent interview in *Concord Times*, Foday Sankoh himself acknowledged the positive role of the Kamajoi militia in influencing the course of the war.

Indeed, a new hypothesis is making the rounds in Sierra Leone, courtesy of statements from captured RUF commanders and combatants, that some of the Kamajoisia are 'super rebels' — i.e. they were part of the RUF before decamping to the Kamajoi movement. Captured commanders and combatants maintain that this explains why the Kamajoisia have been more effective than the army — i.e. the former know all the hideouts, strategies and tricks of the RUF, and their knowledge of the bush is just as great as, if not better than, that of the RUF. Whether some of the Kamajoisia are former rebels or not, their role in the war has been decisive in changing the balance of power on the ground.

The Accord seeks to rescue the RUF from its position of weakness and isolation. As we have seen, the RUF will not only play major roles in the newly created institutions, the National Electoral Commission, and the proposed new army, it will be immune from all legal charges for its brutalisation of rural people and other obnoxious acts of war; and it will be given funds to set itself up as an effective political party. Given the priority which the Accord has justifiably given to questions of encampment, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration, as well as the overall national emphasis on reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation, one should not rule out the possibility of the RUF emerging as a major player in the political process. Its strategic location in the institutions that will govern the peace process gives it advantages in the allocation of the resources that will be forthcoming to support the peace process and reconstruction plans. Other opposition political parties are bound to envy this privilege, which war and determination to commit atrocities have given to the RUF. Given the embeddedness of corruption in public life, we should not rule out rent-seeking behaviour from some of the actors who will have access to the anticipated peace-building resources despite the rhetoric about accountability, probity and integrity. This has been the experience in all countries that have been swamped with new resources for post-war reconstruction. If this happens, it will constitute an additional source of revenue for combatants to that which exploitation of the forest resources and mining, as well as the looting of the private property of villagers, had provided during the war.

One major drawback to the legitimatisation of the RUF as a serious political force is its image problem. For now, most Sierra Leoneans hold it largely responsible for the horrors of the war. It is going to be very difficult to overcome this image problem. However, it is instructive to note that already the RUF is working on this problem. Its leader, Sankoh, has threatened to take legal action against newspapers that publish 'false reports' about the RUF. It was able to secure a major concession from the

Government in the Yamasoukrou and Abidjan negotiations to be given 'access to the media in order that (it) may be heard and informed', to enjoy the freedom to 'mobilise and demonstrate freely', 'to communicate politically', 'to organise effectively', and 'to set up appropriate infrastructure' (Article 19). With money, organisational entrepreneurship, commitment, time and a possible failure of established political parties to deliver the promised goods to the public, the odds against the RUF could well be surmounted.

It is important to note that the opportunities associated with the re-integration of ex-combatants may encourage ordinary people with no history of association with the war to swell the ranks of the RUF in order to access the peace-building resources. In addition, extra dividends could be derived from the provision in the Accord which grants ex-RUF combatants the opportunity to decide whether they wish to join the new national army or not. Whereas one section of the Accord talks about the down-sizing of the army, no limit has been placed on the number of combatants who will be allowed to join the new army. Given the very high levels of unemployment in the country, one can imagine non-RUF street youth joining an RUF that now enjoys government approval in order to reap some of the benefits of re-integration. It is the responsibility of the government and political parties, as well as civic and community groups to ensure that the RUF does not maximise its potential gains in the Accord. This can be achieved by playing the democratic game fairly, checking state and opposition party excesses, and ensuring that the basic economic and social problems of the poor, especially those of the youth, are concretely addressed.

The Gains of the Government

Government also stands to gain a lot from the Accord. Despite the inability of the RUF to hold on to, and administer, any territory of significance, they did succeed in making large areas of the country inaccessible, and almost paralysed the productive base of the country. Official mining of diamonds, gold, rutile and bauxite, as well as agriculture in the productive areas of the South and East were severely disrupted. Only the bold and the armed could venture into those areas. It is not surprising that the war had to drag on for so long as the RUF and sections of the army competed among themselves to access the resources of the forest. Food production in the fertile area of Kabala and certain parts of Tonkolili District was also undermined. Artisanal fishing and agriculture suffered a serious blow in Bonthe and Moyamba Districts. The net effect has been a sharp drop in government revenues, and the collapse of social services and basic infrastructure. The war also sucked away much of the limited revenue that was still accruing to government as

the size of the army and its various needs and demands expanded, especially during the military regime of the NPRC. The Accord will give the government the opportunity to focus on its very ambitious programme of reconstruction and development, which it unveiled to the public in June, 1996, and which fed into the medium term reconstruction plan that formed the basis for the pledge of US$ 212 million by donors in the Geneva donors' meeting in September of the same year (United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, 1996). It should be obvious that these plans stood no chance of succeeding if the war continued.

It ought to be emphasized that the Accord is likely to boost the government's chances of raising funds from the international community for its reconstruction and development programme. As the war expanded into virtually every sector and region of the country, most bilateral aid agencies, the UN and the international financial institutions became skeptical about the chances of Sierra Leone ever recovering from the war in one piece. Indeed, the country was being used by Western political analysts as an archetypal case of 'the anarchy that is gripping West Africa' (Kaplan 1994). Mention Sierra Leone in donor circles in 1992-95 and you would get a very strange look or obtuse comment about how the situation looked hopeless.

Three major things happened between February 1996 and May 1997. First, Sierra Leone became the only country in recent years that was able to organise relatively free and fair elections in a period of war. Second, it joined the ranks of a few countries in the world which have prevented the military from holding on to power and thwarting the democratic aspirations of the people, when the NPRC government of Maada Bio was forced to heed the verdict of the Bintumani Conference for elections to take place on the scheduled date of February 26, 1996 and to gracefully vacate power when the results produced a clear winner. The alleged shadow NPRC government party, John Karimu's National Unity Party, could only manage about 5 per cent of the popular vote (Kandeh 1996). Third, the rebel movement signed a peace agreement with the elected government. In short, Sierra Leone was able to prove superficial critics like Robert Kaplan and his Afro-pessimist associates and sympathisers wrong. Government and Sierra Leoneans overseas need to vigorously sell these hard won assets to the international community.

Compared to the RUF, which has been given legitimate access to public institutions by the provisions of the Accord, the government as *government* has not gained anything new on the issue of participation in political institutions. Indeed, many of the articles of the agreement do act as a constraint on the power of government to act unilaterally. But RUF

participation in the institutions that will govern the peace process will allow the government to monitor and regulate the behaviour of RUF members much more than it has been able to do before the agreement was signed. In other words, the RUF and government are now locked in a marriage of convenience similar to the unholy alliance between the ANC and the National Party in South Africa. Indeed, when I saw in the English language newspapers in Dhaka, Bangladesh (where I was attending a conference at the time the agreement was signed), pictures of the embrace between President Kabbah and rebel leader Foday Sankoh, my mind went back to the thoughts and feelings I had when Mandela decided to shake the hands of Frederick de Klerk — the latter being a symbol of evil and guardian of the despicable and grossly inhuman system of apartheid.

The government of Sierra Leone should use its enforced marriage with the RUF well. It should drive home the crucial point to the RUF that there is a trade-off between the privilege it has been given in the newly created institutions, including its immunity from war crimes prosecution, and the need to honour the agreement and create lasting peace in the country. As the RUF gets entangled in the kick-backs or dividends of the peace-building process, the government and the public should insist that it should produce tangible peace-yielding results in exchange for its new privileges. There are sufficient provisions in the Accord to enforce this demand. Indeed, the government is on very firm moral ground as a non-participant in the horrors that overwhelmed the countryside. The situation would have been difficult if it were the APC or the NPRC governments that signed the agreement.

New Opportunities for the Public?

If the Accord is implemented to its letter, the public will reap a lot of benefits from the peace process. Incidentally, some of the benefits may arise from the provisions that the RUF insisted upon, which reflect its poorly articulated rhetoric of revolutionary change. As we have already pointed out, the biggest losers in the war have been the public, especially the rural public. They lost their economic assets, homes, farms, loved ones, and parts of their bodies, and have found it difficult to travel freely as they wished. It has been reported that the countless road blocks around the country were removed after the signing of the Accord to allow the people to reclaim their rights of free movement and to drive home the point that the war had ended. Large numbers of displaced people have returned home. The Accord thus offers the public the opportunity to focus on the efforts of rebuilding lives and homes and to recreate disarticulated or deformed markets and productive systems.

Previous efforts to do this without the backing of an agreement had ended in failure as villagers faced fresh attacks from the RUF and disloyal soldiers.

There are also concrete provisions in the agreement which hold promise for the Sierra Leone public. The first is the commitment which the government, through the Accord, has given that the country's electoral system would be reformed, and that the autonomy and integrity of the National Electoral Commission would be strengthened. I have argued in the past that the constitutional system that ushered in the new government and parliament is flawed for socially divided societies. Whereas the electoral system of proportional representation was used to produce a very plural parliament with five parties, the rules governing the presidential elections were such that they could produce only one winner. In a plural society with deep social cleavages, pluralism in both legislative and executive branches of government may be important as a mechanism for minimising violent conflicts. Under this arrangement, all major groups and sections of society would be represented, through the dominant political parties, in both parliament and government as a matter of right rather than as a result of the goodwill of the government in power.

President Kabbah has, of course, played the balancing game well, but having some of the major political parties that draw their support from certain parts of the country exclusively in the opposition is likely to make the next elections another life and death matter. I would suggest that the idea of a run-off election to choose a single leader be changed to allow parties that score a certain percentage of the popular votes in the first and only round of the presidential elections the opportunities to be represented in government. Under this model, the president would be given the authority to discuss appointments with the parties concerned and to dismiss ministers who in his judgement have failed to perform satisfactorily. President Kabbah, as a great conciliator, already practices this model in an informal way with the parliamentary parties that have decided to work with his government. The procedure needs to be institutionalised to give it a much broader scope than what obtains now.

A plural executive system has the advantage of protecting ordinary people from the excesses of politicians. Our post-independence history — African history generally — is littered with politicians without visions of the national interest or commitment to the causes of the poor. Politicians have always used the poor to get into power and to turn that power against the poor when they are in office. Also, given the loss of imagination which political parties have shown in devising workable programmes of governance and development, and given the unquestioned hegemony that the international institutions

currently enjoy in the policy spaces of these countries, it is better to minimise the violence which political parties are likely to inflict on the poor in the competition for power, than to bank on the possibility that these parties will pursue innovative pro-poor policies that will be different from the reigning development orthodoxy and what ruling parties in government are already pursuing.

The truth of the matter is that none of our parties outside of government has the capacity to develop coherent and effective policies that would address the key challenges that confront us today as a nation. The parties in government have been able to work out reasonably coherent development programmes because they are in government — and thus enjoy the services of national bureaucrats and international development agencies — and not because of any superiority they enjoy in the realm of ideas over opposition parties. Minimising the propensity for violence that is embedded in winner-takes-all elections will indeed allow the poor, the disadvantaged and other deprived social groups the space they require to exert pressure on public institutions and to develop themselves 'autonomously' of entrenched vested interests. Poor or rural people should not shed an additional ounce of blood for the privileges of politicians and so-called 'revolutionaries' who are likely to run the new peace-building institutions.

The National Electoral Commission will be at the centre of the debate on the promised electoral reforms. The Accord's affirmation of the need to strengthen the professional integrity and competence of the NEC should be applauded. The decision to bar NEC members from holding political office in a government 'formed as a result of an election they were mandated to conduct' is also very much in order. This provision, which must have been insisted upon by the RUF, is an indictment on the appointment of James Jonah, former NEC Chairman, as our chief envoy in New York with cabinet rank after he had courageously and competently organised the February 1996 elections.[1] Jonah discharged his duties with impeccable honesty and

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1 The second round of the presidential elections produced some rather strange outcomes: the voter-turnout in some districts, such as Pujehun, Bonthe and Kailahun, was much higher than the registered voters. The loser, John Karefa-Smart, lodged an official complaint. This led to an arbitrary reduction of the votes of the winning candidate, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, by the Interim National Electoral Commission to a figure that corresponded to a 100 per cent voter turnout in the affected districts. Karefa-Smart accepted the final results in the interest of peace (United National People's Party 1996; Kandeh 1996).

impartiality and refused to be intimidated by the military boys. He showed exemplary qualities that we have not been accustomed to associating with public officers. However, I have always personally felt that he should not have jumped into bed with the winners, especially as the country was now operating a pluralistic constitution. He should have stayed to consolidate and deepen the professional basis of the organisation — the only public institution that I felt proud to identify with throughout my adult life as a Sierra Leonean.

It is also important to point out potential dangers that may affect the professionalism of NEC if all political parties are asked to nominate members to that body (Article 18). While there is value in having a broad-based professional membership in the NEC to check possible governmental biases, it is important to give NEC officials absolute autonomy in the running of the organisation. In other words, NEC officials should not be accountable to those who nominate them to the organisation. Accountability to outside parties will paralyse the organisation and destroy its professionalism and independence. The only way to get round this problem is to treat the word 'nominate' in the Accord literally. Nominated candidates will then go through rigorous scrutiny by parliament, the press, civic organisations and the public in general. Once a final list is agreed upon, there should be firm rules that would guarantee the autonomy of those who are appointed to work in the organisation. To ensure that the NEC officials themselves do not create an unacceptable institutional oligarchy, they should be mandated to carry out their work in transparent ways. In other words, political parties, the press and civic and community groups should have the right to inspect at any time the books and activities of the NEC, and even to attach individuals of their choice to NEC offices to monitor the activities of the organisation on a full time basis.

A second area in which the Accord is likely to provide opportunities to the public is in the commitments made in Article 26, which deals with socioeconomic development. Indeed, full implementation of the provisions in this article will constitute a solid guarantee against future wars. Most of the issues reflect already existing commitments at the international level, which the government has upheld as a participant in the World Summit meetings that have produced them — the most notable being the Copenhagen Plan of Action on the World Summit for Social Development of 1995. It is useful and refreshing to note that a renewed commitment has been made at the national level by the government to pursue these vital objectives, which are likely to change the quality of life of the poor. The RUF's early vision of radical social change may have contributed to the reaffirmation of these laudable objectives in the Accord. Even though the RUF worked hard to get

the government to include these issues in Article 26 as a condition for signing the Accord, it should not be assumed that they will be the most committed in their implementation. Civic groups, the press and the interested public should ensure that the proposed Socioeconomic Forum has teeth and is not just a talking shop. Work should proceed to flesh out the details of the ten points plan of social development in Article 26, to provide quantitative and qualitative data on the problems to be combated, and to set time frames for implementation of agreed policies. It will help to popularise this section of the agreement if civic groups can float a movement to be called 'The Article 26 Movement for Socioeconomic Development'.

Thirdly, the commitment to restructure the army opens up possibilities to address in very serious ways the security needs and defence structure of the country. The war demonstrated that our modern standing army was incapable of providing the necessary security to the populace when it was most essential for it to do so. Indeed, there were many reports which implicated some of the soldiers in the brutalisation of people in the countryside and in the looting of private property. Some of them also tried to violently disrupt the February 1996 elections. Our women had to force them to retreat through mass demonstrations. The greatest indictment on our military was when a mercenary force, the Executive Outcomes, was brought in by an army leader to boost security. In the end, it was largely the decision of villagers to create a model army along the lines of our traditional defence systems that brought the RUF to its knees. This raises the question of whether the country should simply integrate willing RUF combatants into the army and create a much smaller conventional force, or whether it should raise its sights and go for a more thorough review of our national security system? It is extremely important to draw the appropriate lessons from the spectacular success of the Kamajoi militia. The government and the public should seize the initiative to organise debates, workshops and conferences on the future of Sierra Leone's security system.

Three people on the Leonenet e-mail Discussion Forum, Patrick Muana, Kelfala Kallon, and Saffa Kemokai have done a lot of thinking on this subject and have consistently called for a national security system that respects the local needs of communities (Sulima Web Page). Their views need to be seriously taken up in debates about the restructuring of the army. As a variant of their contributions, I think that it is quite possible to think of a security system without a large standing army. Our traditional defence systems in which able-bodied men (this time including women) are taught basic methods of defence, the 'secrets' of the forest, and community traditions and values, and who could be mobilised at short notice in periods of external

attack, is worth thinking through to see how they could be adapted to modern conditions.

The Kamajoisia militia has been effective because of its attachment to community values and traditions and knowledge of the forests (Muana, this volume). Why don't we start from what has worked and try to see how a professional national force that is built from the ground up could be created, in which all our youth would be exposed to the values of our community institutions, the secrets of our forests, and use of modern weaponry and strategies? With our bitter experience of the war, and the government's proposed plan for decentralisation, the question of devising local defence systems that are linked to wider national structures has undoubtedly become an imperative. The government and the public cannot afford to evade this important issue anymore. A properly functioning security system that enjoys some degree of local accountability will make it extremely difficult to plan or make coups, and will deter small pockets of invaders before a bigger force is mobilised to support them. Indeed, the fact that the war did not overwhelm our major towns is an indication that our war was actually fought with small weapons and small groups of rebels. A well trained local defence group with national backing would have been able to repel the first group of invaders in Bomaru in 1991. In addressing this issue, efforts should, of course, be made to ensure that local defence forces do not become local war machines. Rethinking the concept of standing armies may help to prevent such an occurrence. Given the utter lack of professionalism of the national army and its questionable loyalty, it is absolutely important for Sierra Leone to buy into a regional security system like that of ECOMOG as a medium term programme of stability and defence.

A fourth positive fallout of the Accord is the decision to withdraw the Executive Outcomes from the war. I personally think that the circumstances that led to the EO's invitation into Sierra Leone should have constituted sufficient grounds for an impeachment of the government that took that decision if we were operating a fully democratic system. It is rather painful to think that it was a military regime that took the decision. Why do we pay our soldiers if they cannot defend us? The only time that I found myself absolutely agreeing with the IMF was when it forced the government to reduce the exorbitant fees that the EO was receiving as a result of the defence contract it signed with the NPRC. The reported one and half million dollars a month that the EO was getting could have been used to improve the professional competence and morale of our army. On a rough estimate, each soldier out of an assumed army strength of 10,000 could have received about US$ 150 a month, which is about 150,000 leones — about eight times or so

of what they were being given to sacrifice their lives for the nation. A smaller and better motivated force of 5,000 (already three times the size of the pre-war force) could have received about 300,000 leones for each soldier a month — more than what university professors and top civil servants receive. This package could have acted as an incentive for military discipline and to lure our soldiers away from the temptations of mining and other illicit acts.

The EO soldiers are mercenaries. They were not fighting to save Sierra Leoneans because they loved Sierra Leoneans. They were fighting because of the huge amount of money they were getting and the prospects which military engagement offered them to tap the rich mineral resources of the country. There is even a logical reason why the EO will not be fully committed to peace, since its material interests are absolutely tied up with war. We could very well have seen a situation where the RUF threat is reduced to a level that would have highlighted the EO's contributions, but with some low-intensity level of war allowed to simmer in order to justify the continued relevance of the EO in the maintenance of security. This could have produced a no-win-no-lose situation. In a fragile political situation like the one we have in Sierra Leone, it would have been very difficult to monitor the activities of the EO if it had decided to pursue this strategy. Besides, the history of destabilisation and dirty tricks of this bunch of soldiers in the anti-apartheid struggles in Southern Africa is enough to shock any serious-minded pan-Africanist or nationalist to hear that the EO was brought in to fight wars in West Africa — home to three of Africa's legendary pan-African leaders: Edward Blyden, Kwame Nkrumah and Amilcar Cabral.

Surely, during the debates in Yamasoukrou when the RUF was insisting on the withdrawal of the EO as a condition for signing the Accord, I supported the government's position that it would be an act of folly to heed the RUF demands, given the shaky security situation on the ground. It was also the case that the presence of the EO had changed the security structure of the country, which could only have been altered after a serious review. In other words, given the military mess that had been created by previous governments, and the new strategic reality on the ground, it was logical to accept the presence of the EO as a short-term necessity that one had to put up with irrespective of one's ideals or wishes. Now that the Accord has been signed, the EO should not just be confined to the barracks but should be asked to leave the country within the time frame that has been agreed upon for other foreign troops. Hopefully, clear indications would have emerged by then about the direction of the peace and whether it would be sustainable. Allowing the EO to switch to, or consolidate its activities in, mining or in the

provision of security to mining companies in the country, will only complicate the situation. A country that has been battered by war and humiliated by the dirty tricks of politicians and corrupt business people needs a new morality to uplift itself and move forward. The EO is unlikely to provide that morality.

The fifth potential gain for the public is the Accord's attempt to check unlimited governmental or state power. Even though the blunting of governmental power is restricted only to a few set of institutions, the Accord is likely, indeed, to introduce an innovation in Sierra Leone politics. For instance, the Accord explicitly states that government cannot act independently of the Peace Commission; the government is also obligated to accept the conclusions of the Commission — in other words it does not have the freedom to issue a White Paper in which it could accept or reject some of the conclusions. Furthermore, it has to negotiate with other parties regarding the nomination of individuals to the National Electoral Commission; it must respect the autonomy of the NEC; it should uphold the independence of the judiciary and broaden the membership of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission; it must review the character of the police force to make it truly non-partisan; and it must grant the RUF (and by implication other political parties) free access to government-owned media. In addition, there are a number of provisions like the proposed Socioeconomic Forum, the Multi-Partisan Council, the National Budget and Debt Committee and the Citizens' Consultative Conferences which have the potential to deepen the process of power sharing, and to further open up governmental activities to public scrutiny and accountability. This potential limitation of governmental or state power may constitute a positive force for democracy if the civic public can capitalise on the changes and ensure that they get replicated in other vital areas of public policy and institutions.

Vital Omissions in the Accord

Even though, on balance, the Accord has great potential for fostering a durable peace, there are some vital omissions that are worth considering. First, the failure to provide a time frame for various aspects of the work of the Peace Commission is likely to create problems in the future. As we have noted, the Commission is likely to become one of the powerful institutions in the country. Its role in creating the additional six institutions for the governance of peace, reconstruction and development will greatly empower the two principal signatories to the agreement — the RUF and the Government. If we assume that the political parties that would constitute the government are likely to change through the medium of elections, the Accord

has implicitly given the RUF a kind of permanent veto on the membership and operations of institutions that are likely to influence the course of our politics in the coming years. In other words, the RUF could still lose future elections and remain a key actor in the new institutions. The same cannot be said for the current government and indeed for the opposition political parties. Their influence in some of the institutions will depend upon whether they will be able to win elections and form the government. Of course, some of the proposed organisations are open enough to accommodate other parties, including the civic public — such as the Multi-Partisan Council, the Socioeconomic Forum, the Citizens' Consultative Conferences, the National Budget and Debt Committee, and the NEC. However, the Trust Fund; the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Resettlement Committee; and the potentially powerful Peace Commission remain closed to non-signatories of the Accord. Whereas issues of encampment, disarmament and demobilisation can be implemented within a relatively short space of time, the resettlement or reintegration of combatants to meaningful civil and productive life is likely to require a longer time frame.

Second, the Accord says nothing about the absolutely essential problem of atrocities. Given the high levels of atrocities that this war has produced, this should be seen as a serious omission. Of course, there are a number of provisions in the Accord that call for the protection of human rights and the respect for international humanitarian law. But these, we may assume, will be concerned only with post-Accord violations. What does the government and the RUF expect the general public, especially direct victims of the war, who have been clamouring at the very least for explanations to their suffering, to do as a result of this omission? There is, of course, a National Reconciliation Commission already in existence which, among other things, is expected to look into the claims of individuals who wish to seek redress for public actions that may have violated their constitutional rights and interests. But the Accord does not link the work of this Commission to the question of investigating the atrocities committed in the battlefield. This means that the RUF is not bound to explain anything to anybody about wrongful acts which individuals may feel they have suffered under the organisation's war activities.

Given the fact that Article 14 gives the RUF absolute immunity from any prosecution for its war activities, the Accord should at least have made the effort to balance this provision with the need for a 'truth commission'. The provisions of such a commission would obviously not have sought to punish the RUF for its war crimes because of the problems this may have created in getting the leadership to sign the Accord, but it would have mandated the RUF and other actors to explain to the public the atrocities they have

committed while prosecuting the war. This arrangement would not only have helped to insulate the RUF from possible individual acts of revenge, but innocent victims of the war would at least have been able to face in public those who have violated their bodies and property, and killed or maimed their relations. Such painstaking efforts at establishing the truth about what happened would help to prevent a recurrence of the kinds of atrocities that have shocked our public and the world at large. Our society cannot make progress in the area of human rights if we do not squarely face these atrocities and try to understand why people who claim to be liberating or defending society from oppression and exploitation had to slit the throats of innocent villagers, sever their heads, cut their hands, pluck their eyes off, disembowel pregnant women, abduct and rape women, burn down whole villages and enlist children as young as ten into war.

It is still not late to address these issues, now that the RUF has been converted into a respectable political movement. Its leadership has a responsibility to explain why its commanders and combatants adopted a strategy of systematic terror against rural people if it expects society to give it another chance to pursue its political goals. Revolutionaries should not be afraid of the truth. What is it in the ideology and discourse of the movement that led to such acts of horror? Why did our soldiers adopt the same tactics of terror in the war? Does this have something to do with the drug culture that overwhelmed both sides of the conflict? What role do our cultural conceptions of power, invincibility, punishment, revenge, fear, and defeat play in fostering the atrocities? Representatives of the RUF, our military, villagers, religious leaders, community elders and informed professionals could constitute open forums at various levels of society to address these issues. The output from the deliberations could well feed into the educational programme of the proposed National Commission on Human Rights.

Third, despite the high costs of the war on the bodies, personal security, livelihoods, and assets of women, the Accord, like most other power-sharing agreements around the world, is silent on the rights and interests of women. It is amazing to note that the word 'women' fails to occur in any of the 28 articles and annex of the Accord. The Accord, in other words, is completely gender blind. The potentially powerful Peace Commission does not even have a single woman. Yet, evidence from social psychology and peace research suggests that women have a comparative advantage over men in matters relating to peace. As guardians of the moral economy, and as people who are adept at dealing with centuries-old structures of male domination in various social contexts, they often have much better insights and values to promote the cause of peace than men. Women, to paraphrase the eminent peace

researcher, Johan Galtung (1996), are not 'naturally' disposed or socially conditioned to play with metals. The women's movement, which played a major role in sending the soldiers from State House to the barracks and in the tireless campaign for peace, should seize the initiative to make their presence felt in the peace building institutions and to influence the allocation of the resources that would be made available for reconstruction, resettlement and development.

Fourth, as we have already observed, the Kamajoisia have been very instrumental in checking the activities of the RUF. Yet, it is surprising to note that the Accord makes no reference to them in any of its provisions, including the ones dealing with encampment, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration. To ensure that the Kamajoisia do not create new security problems in rural areas or become storm troopers of local chieftains, or underground armed fronts for the political designs of powerful and ambitious city elites, efforts should be made to encamp them, and to have a proper head count and data on their background. A task force, with strong local participation, should be set up to regulate their activities until a proper national security structure and defence policy is formulated. This could be done along the lines of the proposals in earlier sections of this paper. Those who have played invaluable roles in defending and reclaiming villages are obviously entitled to compensation as part of the peace package. With proper training and reorganisation, they could indeed form a nucleus of the proposed programme for nationally co-ordinated local defence systems.

Fifth, despite the laudable goals of equity, grassroots participation, and anti-poverty thrust of the Accord, no attempt is made to address the problem which the neoliberal paradigm of the World Bank and the IMF is likely to have on the implementation of specific provisions, especially the socioeconomic plan of Article 26. Redressing the wrongs of the war would require massive levels of state and community level intervention, reform of public sector institutions and pragmatic use of market and other value allocating mechanisms. This is likely to question the neoliberal dogma of unfettered markets which the international financial institutions have been associated with in their structural adjustment programmes in Africa and elsewhere. In war-torn Mozambique, sympathetic and influential donor countries, the UN and, to some extent, the World Bank, had to prevail on the IMF in 1996 to relax its very tight targets on monetary and fiscal aggregates, or levels of budget deficits, which would have had very negative effects on the fragile programme of post-war reconstruction and the development of competent and motivated individuals in the public bureaucracy. An independent policy advisory group on the Sierra Leone economy could help to

provide civic groups, government and other political parties with the technical knowledge that would be required to stand up to the IMF and the World Bank in the implementation of Article 26.

The sixth and final point of omission concerns the problems that are likely to arise if there is a deadlock in the Peace Commission. The eight-man team that will run the Commission is equally divided between the Government and the RUF. There is no provision that spells out how to resolve major differences of interpretation of the articles in the Accord if they were to occur, and how to replace members who may be found to be unsuitable for the tasks of the Commission. Indeed, as we have already noted, the Commission enjoys much autonomy in the discharge of its duties. It is to be assumed that the Government or the RUF may change their own nominees in the Commission if they so wish, but neither party, it seems, has the power to change the nominees of the others. What is more, there is no reference to the judicial system as an institution of last resort for resolving acts of misdemeanours or differences that are likely to affect the performance of the Commission. The Commission is expected to consult with both the RUF and the Government at the topmost levels of decision making in carrying out its activities, but there is no guarantee that potentially intractable quarrels in the Commission could be resolved at these political levels. A recalcitrant set of RUF representatives could well make life extremely difficult for the Commission if it chooses to do so. The RUF, the government and the public would have gained a lot from an agreement that links issues of adjudication of differences in the implementation of the Accord to the proposed strategies of strengthening the independence of our judicial system, as articulated in Article 24.

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Appendix I

Peace Agreement Between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL)

The Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL).

Moved by the imperative need for a just and durable peace in Sierra Leone;

Inspired by the equally imperative need for genuine national unity and reconciliation to end the fratricidal war in Sierra Leone;

Committed to promoting popular participation in governance and full respect for human rights and humanitarian laws;

Dedicated to the advancement of democratic development and to the maintenance of a socio-political order free of inequality, nepotism and corruption;

Determined to foster mutual confidence and trust;

Convinced that a sense of common purpose and patriotism is the need of the hour.

Hereby Agree as follows:

Article 1

The armed conflict between the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF/SL is hereby ended with immediate effect. Accordingly, the two sides will ensure that a total cessation of hostilities is observed forthwith.

Article 2

The Government and the RUF/SL undertake that no effort shall be spared to effect the scrupulous respect and implementation of the provisions contained in this Peace Agreement to ensure that the establishment and consolidation of a just peace becomes a priority in Sierra Leone.

Article 3

A national body to be known as the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace shall be established within two weeks of the signing of this Agreement. The Commission shall be a verification mechanism responsible for supervising

and monitoring the implementation of and compliance with all the provisions contained in the Peace Agreement.

The Commission, in fulfilment of this task during the period of consolidating the peace, shall coordinate and facilitate the work of the following bodies which it will proceed to establish:

- Socioeconomic Forum;
- Citizens' Consultative Conferences;
- Multi-partisan Council;
- Trust Fund for the Consolidation of Peace;
- Demobilisation and Resettlement Committee;
- National Budget and Debt Committee.

The Commission shall comprise representatives of the Government and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, drawing on the resources of state and civic institutions as and when necessary.

The Commission shall have the power to recommend the preparation of enabling measures necessary for the implementation and development of the provisions contained in this Peace Agreement. It shall have the power to issue publicly its conclusions. The parties undertake to comply with the conclusions of the Commission.

The Commission shall have the power to prepare preliminary legislative drafts necessary for the implementation and development of the provisions contained in the present Peace Agreement.

The parties undertake to consult the Commission before taking decisions on measures relating to the present Peace Agreement.

The Commission may similarly consult the Parties at the highest level whenever it is appropriate.

The Commission shall have access to and may inspect any activity or site connected with the implementation of the present Peace Agreement.

The Commission shall have full powers to organise its work in the manner in which it deems most appropriate and to appoint any group or sub-committee which it may deem useful in the discharge of its functions.

The Commission shall have its own offices, adequate communication facilities and adequate secretariat support staff.

A Trust Fund for the Consolidation of Peace shall be established to provide funding for the implementation of the present Peace Agreement.

Article 4

Citizens' Consultative Conferences shall be organised once a year, the first of which shall be organised within one hundred and twenty days of the signing of the present Peace Agreement in order to encourage people's participation and to invite recommendations for the formulation of guidelines and their implementation that will ensure truly fair and representative political processes.

Article 5

The disarmament of combatants will be effected upon their entry into the designed Assembly Zones, and demobilisation and reintegration as soon as practicable thereafter.

The upkeep and welfare of the encamped combatants shall be the primary responsibility of the Government of Sierra Leone in conjunction with the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, assisted by the international community.

Article 6

The Parties commit themselves to a well planned national effort on encampment, disarmament, demobilisation and resettlement linked to national development objectives. To that end, a Demobilisation and Resettlement Committee shall be established within a month of the signing of the present Peace Agreement.

The Committee shall coordinate the encampment, disarmament, demobilisation and resettlement of RUF/SL combatants. The Committee shall work in coordination with all the relevant institutions and agencies.

Both Parties shall consult on the nomination of the membership of the Committee which shall not exceed seven persons.

The Committee shall be provided with adequate funding.

Article 7

The Demobilisation and Resettlement Committee shall identify assembly zones and camp areas for RUF/SL combatants where they shall be registered, encamped and disarmed. The movement into the Assembly Zones shall commence within one month of the signing of this Agreement and be

completed as soon as practicable but no later than three months from this date.

Article 8

The Parties shall request the international community to help supervise and monitor the encampment, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes. The Joint Monitoring Group shall have observers at any of these processes.

Article 9

The Commission shall, as a priority, make recommendations on the restructuring and re-orientation of the military as well as its leadership. In this context, members of the RUF/SL who may wish to be part of the country's military can become part of the new unified armed forces within a framework to be discussed and agreed upon by the Commission.

Article 10

The government of Sierra Leone shall ensure the return to barracks of those units of the army not required for normal security duties and the down-sizing of the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone (RSLMF), taking into account the security needs of the country.

Article 11

A Neutral Monitoring Group (NMG) from the international community shall be responsible for monitoring breaches of the cease-fire provided under this Peace Agreement.

Both Parties upon signing this Agreement shall request the international community to provide neutral monitors. Such monitors when deployed shall be in position for an initial period of three months.

The Neutral Monitoring Group shall report any violations of the cease-fire to its headquarters, which shall in turn communicate the same to the headquarters of the Joint Monitoring Group comprising of representatives of the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF based in Freetown.

Article 12

The Executive Outcomes shall be withdrawn five weeks after the deployment of the Neutral Monitoring Group (NMG). As from the date of the deployment

of the Neutral Monitoring Group, the Executive Outcomes shall be confined to barracks under the supervision of the Joint Monitoring Group and the Neutral Monitoring Group. Government shall use all its endeavours, consistent with its treaty obligations, to repatriate other foreign troops no later than three months after the deployment of the Neutral Monitoring Group or six months after the signing of the Peace Agreement, whichever is earlier.

Article 13

The Parties agree that immediately following the signing of the present Peace Agreement, the RUF/SL shall commence to function as a political movement with the rights, privileges and duties provided by law; and that within thirty days, following that, the necessary conditions shall be created to enable the RUF/SL to register as a political movement according to law.

Article 14

To consolidate the peace and promote the cause of national reconciliation, the Government of Sierra Leone shall ensure that no official or judicial action is taken against any member of the RUF/SL in respect of anything done by them in pursuit of their objectives as members of that organisation up to the time of the signing of this Agreement. In addition, legislative and other measures necessary to guarantee former RUF/SL combatants, exiles and other persons, currently outside the country for reasons related to the armed conflict, shall be adopted ensuring the full exercise of their civil and political rights, with a view to their reintegration within a framework of full legality.

Article 15

The mandate and membership of the existing National Unity and Reconciliation Commission shall be expanded in consultation with the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace to enable it to undertake a sustained and effective campaign of civic education aimed at enhancing national unity and reconciliation, taking into account the imperative need to heal the wounds of the conflict.

Article 16

The Parties agree that the standards of accountability, integrity and probity in the public services of Sierra Leone shall be raised. To that end, immediate steps shall be taken to establish the office of Ombudsman to promote the implementation of a professional code of ethics, and the integrity and

patriotism of all public servants. It shall also seek to eradicate all forms of corruption.

Article 17

The Parties shall approach the international community with a view to mobilising resources which will be used to establish a trust fund to enable the RUF/SL to transform itself into a political party.

Article 18

The Parties agree to the principle of reforming the present electoral process in Sierra Leone. There shall, in that regard, be the full participation of citizens and their organisations in formulating electoral reforms.

The independence and integrity of the National Electoral Commission shall be guaranteed to ensure fair and acceptable electoral exercise.

In reconstituting the National Electoral Commission, the President shall consult all political parties and movements including the RUF/SL to determine the membership and terms of reference of that Commission, paying particular attention to the need for a level playing field in the nation's electoral politics.

Both the Government and the RUF/SL shall, together with other political parties, nominate men and women of professionalism, integrity and objectivity to the National Electoral Commission, not later than three months after the signing of the present Peace Agreement.

It is hereby agreed that no member of the National Electoral Commission shall be eligible for appointment to a political office by any government formed as a result of an election they were mandated to conduct.

Article 19

The Parties agree that the basic civil and political liberties which are recognised by the Sierra Leone legal system and are contained in the Declarations and Principles on Human Rights adopted by the UN and OAU, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples's Rights, shall be fully guaranteed and promoted within Sierra Leone society.

These include the right to life and liberty, freedom from torture, the right to a fair trial, freedom of conscience, expression and association, and the right to take part in governance of one's country.

To foster national reconciliation and ensure the full and unrestricted participation of the RUF/SL in the political process, the RUF/SL shall enjoy:

- Freedom of the press and access to media in order that they may be heard and informed.
- Freedom of association, expression, assembly and the right to mobilise and demonstrate freely, and to communicate politically in order that they may organise effectively and set up appropriate infrastructure.

All political prisoners and prisoners of war, if any, shall be released.

Article 20

To monitor compliance with the basic rights guaranteed in the present Peace Agreement, as well as to promote human rights education throughout the various sectors of Sierra Leonean society, including schools, the media, the police and the military, an independent National Commission on Human Rights shall be established.

In pursuance of the above, technical and material assistance may be sought from the UN Special Commission on Human Rights, UN Centre for Human Rights, African Commission on Human and People's Rights and other relevant international organisations.

The National Commission on Human Rights shall have the power to investigate human rights violations and to institute legal proceedings where appropriate.

Further, a consortium of local rights groups shall be encouraged to help monitor human rights observance.

Article 21

The Parties undertake to respect the principles and rules of international humanitarian law.

Article 22

In the pursuit of the reconstruction, rehabilitation and socio-economic development of Sierra Leone as a matter of the utmost priority, special attention shall be given to rural and urban poor areas, war victims, disabled persons and other vulnerable groups. The Government in conjunction with the Committee for Demobilisation and Resettlement shall co-operate with all political parties and movements, including the RUF/SL, to raise resources

internationally for these objectives during the initial phase of the consolidation of peace.

Article 23

The Government shall do all in its power to mobilise resources internally and externally to meet the needs of post-war reconstruction and socio-economic development.

Article 24

The Parties agree that the independence of the Judiciary shall be strengthened in accordance with its role of ensuring the fair and impartial dispensation of justice in a democratic order. The composition of the present Judicial and Legal Service Commission shall be determined so as to ensure the independence of the Judiciary from the other organs of state as well as the political parties. Its membership shall include, in addition to judges and representatives of the legal profession and public services, representatives of other sectors of society not directly connected with the administration of justice.

Article 25

The Police Force shall be strengthened to ensure that the rule of law is upheld throughout Sierra Leone. To that end, the present Police Force shall be vetted. Furthermore, the professional training of the Police Force shall henceforth assure a new orientation, by emphasising professionalism, the importance of human dignity and democratic values and respect and protection of human rights. It shall, further, emphasise that the conduct of members of the Police Force shall be free from all partisan considerations of politics, ideology and social position and that the Police Force shall avoid and combat corruption.

Nominations for the Police Council will come from wider sectors of society prior to their appointment so as to ensure their truly civilian and non-partisan character.

Article 26

It is recognised that there is a socioeconomic dimension to the conflict which must also be addressed in order to consolidate the foundations of the peace. Accordingly, the socio-economic policy of Sierra Leone shall be guided

among other things, by the following principles, taking into account available resources:

- Enhancement of the nation's productive capacity through meaningful grassroots participation in the reconstruction and development of the country;
- The provision of equal opportunities to all Sierra Leoneans especially those in the countryside and the urban poor, with the aim of equitable distribution of the nation's resources thereby empowering them to contribute effectively to decision-making and implementation of policies which affect their lives;
- Improving the quality of life of the people through the provision of, *inter alia*,
  - Primary health care in all villages and towns;
  - Affordable and quality housing, especially in the countryside and poor urban areas;
  - Improved educational services to enable all children of primary and junior-secondary school age to receive free and compulsory schooling as well as provide the opportunity for the youth and all other Sierra Leoneans to receive affordable quality education;
  - Clean drinking water and a sewerage system in every village and town;
  - Provide job opportunities in a systematic and sustainable way for the people, especially the youth;
  - Promote and sustain rural development and support agriculture in terms of technical, credit and marketing facilities;
  - Provide support for production and provision of basic food and nutritional requirement of the people and food security in general;
  - Protect the environment and regulate the exploitation of natural resources in the interest of the people, as well as prohibit monopolies;
  - Provide the required infrastructure such as roads, transport and communications, energy and rural electrification, for improved living conditions, especially of the rural people;
  - Seek to obtain debt relief in order to transfer funds from debt servicing to meet the urgent requirements of rebuilding a war-torn society.

Article 27

A broad-based Socio-Economic forum, in which the RUF/SL shall participate, shall be established with a view to enriching policy formulation and execution in the socio-economic sector.

Article 28

The Government of Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations, the OAU and the Commonwealth shall stand as moral guarantors that this Peace Agreement is implemented with integrity and in good faith by both parties.

Annex to this Agreement:

A nation-wide sensitisation programme for the peace process shall be pursued by the Parties, using all available means of communication to impress upon their combatants and the nation at large:

- the fact that hostilities have ended
- the reasons for demobilisation;
- the opportunities for reintegration of combatants; and
- the need for reconciliation and lasting peace.

Done in Abidjan 30th November 1996.

Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah
President of the Republic
of Sierra Leone

Corporal Foday Saybana Sankoh
Leader of the Revolutionary
United Front (RUF)

Henri Konan Bédié
President of the Republic
of Côte D'Ivoire

Berhanu Dinka
Special Envoy of the United Nations
Secretary-General for Sierra Leone

Adwoa Coleman (Ms)
Representative of the
Organisation of African Unity (OAU)

Moses Anafu (Dr)
Representative of the
Commonwealth Organisation

Appendix II

Economic Community of West African States: Sixth Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers of the Committee of Five on Sierra Leone Conakry, 22-23 October 1997

Communiqué

1. The ECOWAS Ministerial Committee of Five on Sierra Leone held a meeting in Conakry on 22-23 October, 1997.

2. In continuation of the negotiations initiated in Abidjan on 17-18 July, 1997 and 29 and 30 July, 1997, the Committee held discussions with an enlarged delegation of Major Johnny Paul Koroma.

3. The meeting reviewed the situation in Sierra Leone since the break-down of negotiations between the Committee of Five and the representatives of the junta since 30 July 1997. It recalled the ECOWAS decisions concerning the monitoring of the cease-fire, the imposition of sanctions and the embargo, as well as the restoration of peace to Sierra Leone by ECOMOG. It also recalled Resolution 1132 of the United Nations Security Council dated 8 October 1997 placing an embargo on Sierra Leone.

4. The Committee of Five and the junta's delegation agreed to accelerate efforts towards the peaceful resolution of the Sierra Leonean crisis.

5. To this end, the Committee of Five and the representatives of Major Johnny Paul Koroma adopted an ECOWAS peace plan for Sierra Leone and a time-table for its implementation over a six-month period with effect from 23 October, 1997.

6. It is recognised that Corporal Foday Sankoh as a leader of RUF could continue to play an active role and participate in the peace process. In the spirit of the Abidjan Accord and in the context of this Agreement Corporal Foday Sankoh is expected to return to his country to make his contribution to the peace process.

7. The ECOWAS peace plan for Sierra Leone provides for:

   - the reinstatement of the legitimate government of President Tejan Kabbah within a period of six months;
   - the immediate cessation of hostilities;

- cooperation of the junta with ECOMOG in order to peacefully enforce the sanctions;
- disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants;
- the provision of humanitarian assistance;
- return of refugees and displaced persons;
- immunities and guarantees to the leaders of the May 25, 1997 coup d'état;
- modalities for broadening the power base in Sierra Leone.

8. The Committee of Five and the representatives of Major Johnny Paul Koroma agreed to continue negotiations towards effective and prompt implementation of the peace plan.

9. The meeting renewed its appeal to the international community to provide appropriate humanitarian assistance to the refugees and displaced persons and to facilitate their return.

10. The meeting reiterated its appeal to the international community to provide adequate assistance to the neighbouring countries of Sierra Leone which have recorded an increased influx of refugees on their territory.

11. The meeting expressed its appreciation to the UN and the OAU for their cooperation with ECOWAS and appealed to them for material, logistic and financial support to ECOMOG to enable it to carry out the mandate given by the Authority of Heads of State and Government and the United Nations Security Council.

12. The Committee expressed its deep gratitude to His Excellency, General Lansana Conte, President of the Republic of Guinea, Head of State, and to the Government and People of Guinea for the excellent facilities put at their disposal and for the hospitality accorded to all the delegations.

Done at Conakry 23rd , October, 1997.

Appendix III

ECOWAS Six-Month Peace Plan for Sierra Leone
23 October 1997-22 April 1998
(Schedule of Implementation)

Preamble

Pursuant to the ECOWAS mandate to implement proposals for the resolution of the Sierra Leone crisis contained in the Final Communiqué of 26 June, 1997 in Conakry, a seven-point peace plan has been divised for the early return of constitutional governance to Sierra Leone. These are:

1. Cessation of hostilities throughout Sierra Leone
   - With immediate effect
   - Establish monitoring and verification mechanism

   Note: Process to be undertaken by ECOMOG, and the UN military observers. Participation of UN military observers needs the agreement of the UN Security Council.

2. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Combatants: 1 to 31 December, 1997

   Note: ECOWAS Committee of Five Ministerial Assessment visit (20 November, 1997)

3. Commencement of Humanitarian Assistance: 14 November 1997

   Note: ECOMOG to monitor the process

4. Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons

   Commencement date: 1 December, 1997

   UNHCR assisted repatriation and resettlement of refugees and displaced persons

5. Restoration of the constitutional Government and Broadening of the Power Base: Takes effect from 22 May, 1998.

6. Immunities and Guarantees: Takes effect from 22 May, 1998

   Elaboration of ECOWAS Peace Plan

Cessation of Hostilities

It is considered that cessation of hostilities should come into force immediately. However, this will have to be accompanied by a monitoring and verification regime. Leaders of the various combatant units will be expected to disseminate information concerning these measures and ensure compliance with them. These measures will be supervised by ECOMOG, assisted by the UN military observation group. The verification process will continue right up to the termination of the peace plan, i.e. 22 April 1998.

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Combatants

It is considered that a minimum of 30 days would be required to conduct an effective disarmament and demobilisation of combatants. This should take place from 1 to 31 December, 1997. Given the nation-wide dislocation of infrastructure and administration, a simple and uncomplicated procedure is envisaged. Combatants will be directed to report at designated centres in order to be engaged in the disarmament process. ECOMOG will supervise the entire process of disarmament and demobilisation. Where necessary, incentives may have to be provided to encourage the voluntary participation of combatants in all this process.

Humanitarian Assistance

Considering that sanctions/embargoes will be strictly enforced throughout the period of the implementation of the Sierra Leone peace plan, the flows of humanitarian assistance beginning 14 November 1997 will continue to be monitored by ECOMOG and the UN military observers. To this effect, a mechanism will be established by ECOMOG to facilitate the flow of humanitarian assistance. All this will be worked within the context of the UN Security Council Resolution.

Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons

Recognising that refugees, particularly those in neighbouring countries, may wish to voluntarily return following the cessation of hostilities, UNHCR assistance should begin from 1 December, 1997.

Restoration of Constitutional Government and Broadening of the Power Base

The restoration of constitutional order to Sierra Leone is at the heart of the ECOWAS peace plan. Consequently, it is considered necessary that the Government of Tejan Kabbah should be enabled to exercise effective control once he is restored to office on 22 May 1998. Nevertheless, it is recognised

that for an enduring peace to be restored which will enjoy the support of the majority of Sierra Leoneans and the confidence of the subregion, efforts should be made to ensure that an all-inclusive government is evolved. In this regard, the goodwill and assistance of the international community, both financial and material, would be necessary.

The interest of the various parties in Sierra Leone should be suitably accommodated. Accordingly, it is recommended that the new Cabinet should be a cabinet of inclusion.

Furthermore, in order to accommodate the aspirations of their supporters, Board and Senior Civil Service appointments are to reflect broad national character.

All the above power sharing formulas should come into effect 22 May 1998.

It is recognised that Corporal Foday Sankoh as a leader of RUF could continue to play an active role and participate in the peace process.

In the spirit of the Abidjan Accord and in the context of this Agreement , Corporal Foday Sankoy is expected to return to his country to make his contribution to the peace process.

Reintegration of Combatants

All those who disarm as a result of the implementation of the peace process, should be provided with either job training to fit them for alternative employment or given scholarships and grants for further education. Access to education at all levels should be made available to all demobilised persons. Ex-combatants should be provided with assistance to facilitate their re-integration into their communities. We strongly appeal to the UN, OAU, ECOWAS and indeed the international community to render appropriate assistance to achieve this objective.

Donor Appeals for Emergency Humanitarian Assistance for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation

The United Nations and the OAU in cooperation with ECOWAS are requested to launch these appeals as soon as hostilities cease.

Immunities and Guarantees

It is considered essential that unconditional immunities and guarantees from prosecution be extended to all involved in the unfortunate events of 25 May, 1997 with effect from 22 May 1998.

Done at Conakry, the 23rd October 1997

For the Committee of Five of ECOWAS on Sierra Leone
Chief Tom Ikimi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Nigeria
Lamine Kamara, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Guinea

For the Delegation Representing Major Johnny Paul Koromah
Col Abdul Karim Sesay, Secretary General AFRC
Alimamy Pallo Bangura, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Witnesses
For UN
Prof. Ibrahima Fall, Asst. Secretary-General UN

For OAU
Ms. Adwoa Coleman, OAU Representative.

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> It is interesting to note that... the word for "tribe" does not exist in indigenous languages of South Africa (Mafeje 1971:254).

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