

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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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 broke down 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 ngormgeisia’, 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 ‘njiahungbia 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 ngorgeisia’ 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 ngorgeisia’ 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 ngorgeisia’.

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 Sheebien 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 ngomgesia' 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) thralldom, 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 *mehm 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 ngormgeisia' 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 ngormgeisia' 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 left 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

ngorngeisia' — 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. 'Njiahungbia' 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 'njiahungbua ngorngesia' that are similar to what Patrick describes, but this group cannot be viewed as village outlaws. As Lansana noted, 'njiahungbua 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 'rarray 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 'korngesia' 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 ngorngesia' 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 ngorngeisia') 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 interest 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-psyche' history of 'leaf' or 'lasmami' in our cultures? Plural note, here, because there is also a history of 'Big Men and Mercine-Man' connections to remember. So, what does one mean by 'drugs' among the 'lumpen' recruits? How, for example, had the use of 'diamba' ('annabis) 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 ‘mrecine’ (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 ngornesia' very interesting. I suspect that both Patrick and Lansana have much in common in their analyses of the role of the 'njiahungbia gornesia' 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 gornesia'. 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 gornesia', 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 gormgeisia'.

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 ngorgaa'. 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 ngorgaa' 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 ngorgaa' 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 ngorgaa'.

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 'njiahungbia 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 ngornesia'. '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 gorgesia', 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 ngorgesia' 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'/'kongeisia' 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 ngorgesias'. 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 ngorgesias'. 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 ngorgesias' 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 ngorgesia’) 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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