In loving memory of our Br
Lt Samuel S. Sandy

War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone

Krijn Peters

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The armed conflict in Sierra Leone and the extreme violence of the main rebel faction – the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – have challenged scholars and members of the international community to come up with explanations. Up to this point, though, conclusions about the nature of the war and the RUF are mainly drawn from accounts of civilian victims or based on interpretations and rationalisations offered by commentators who had access to only one side of the war. The present study addresses this currently incomplete understanding of the conflict by focusing on the direct experiences and interpretations of protagonists, paying special attention to the hitherto neglected, and often underage, cadres of the RUF. The data presented challenge the widely canvassed notion of the Sierra Leone conflict as a war motivated by 'greed, not grievance'. Rather, it points to a rural crisis expressed in terms of unresolved tensions between landowners and marginalised rural youth – an unaddressed crisis of youth that currently manifests itself in many African countries – further reinforced and triggered by a collapsing patrimonial state.

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Advance Praise for *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone*

'This book goes more deeply into an understanding of RUF fighters – their beliefs and their atrocities – than previous studies. It is a very important contribution to our understanding of Sierra Leone and its war.'

– David Keen, The London School of Economics and Political Science

'What are the real motivations and goals of rebels that commit atrocities among those whom they claim to represent? Krijn Peters offers an answer that is as simple as it is profound. Drawing on extraordinary field research in Sierra Leone among former Revolutionary United Front fighters and commanders, Peters finds a deep commitment to an egalitarian millenarian ethos borne of a rejection of a state-sanctioned system of subjugation of young men and women in rural areas. *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone* is among the rare breed of books, essential for scholars and policy analysts, that is sure to make waves for all of the right reasons. It will become a classic for its sober and measured analysis that challenges conventional wisdom and for bringing a critical analysis to bear on the words and actions of members of a violent rebel group.'

– William Reno, Northwestern University

'*War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone* is a startling, behind-the-scenes depiction of Sierra Leone's notorious rebel outfit, the Revolutionary United Front. With compelling clarity and a spotlight on ex-combatant perspectives, Peters challenges readers to set aside easy judgements and take a hard look at thorny wartime realities, including just how a rebel group could be profoundly brutal yet internally coherent. Illuminating links between a predatory prewar society and rationales for predation and misogyny during conflict, Peters leaves the reader with a powerful sense of how and why Sierra Leone's male youth got caught up in war and what the experience did to them. Strongly and thoroughly recommended.'

– Marc Sommers, The Fletcher School, Tufts University

'*War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone* is a work of unique empirical depth and ethnographic knowledge. Peters sheds light on the RUF militia and the role they played during the Sierra Leonean civil war. He illuminates the social logics at play and clarifies the motives behind their constitution, conflict engagement, and conciliation. The book is a crucial contribution to our understanding of one of Africa's most misunderstood and demonized militias.'

– Henrik Vigh, University of Copenhagen

'*War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone* is a welcome addition to the literature on the civil war in this unfortunate land. Not only is this the voice of someone who knows the country and its young people well, but by situating the aetiology of war in terms of a rural crisis as symptomatic of unresolved tensions between landed gerontocracy and déclassé youth, Peters has been able to bring political economy in from the cold, which enabled him to debunk the misguided "greed not grievance" explanation of those intellectually remote from the problems of Sierra Leone. This is invaluable reading for policy makers and all those interested in how a land once described as the "Athens of West Africa" slumped to the poorest of the poor.'

– Tunde Zack-Williams, University of Central Lancashire

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War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone

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site at www.internationalafricaninstitute.org.

To Loes, Linde, and my young son, Tage

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Acknowledgements

My first experience with Sierra Leone dates back to 1996. I was searching for an interesting topic for my MSc thesis, and Paul Richards suggested the possibility of going to Sierra Leone to talk with demobilised child soldiers. The country was relatively stable and moving towards the Abidjan peace accord. James Vincent, a Sierra Leonean with much research experience and widely connected, became my local supervisor. I was fortunate to get out of Sierra Leone just before the military coup in 1997 and had to watch from a distance as the country plunged into full-scale violence again. After a brief visit in 2000, I started to visit the country more regularly from 2001 and onwards for my PhD research, again under the supervision of Paul and with the in-country support of James. Without their help this book would have never been written.

In 1996–7 I studied two ex-child soldier projects and met with many underage ex-combatants. One of the ex-child combatants, A. B. J., became a very close friend and valuable source of information throughout the following years. Building a good rapport with informants was paramount for my research and, as a result, bonds of friendship were sometimes created. These friendships to some extent were constrained by the demands of scientific dissociation. However, I know that I have been genuine in my relationships with the interviewees and I would like to thank all the ex-combatants whom I have interviewed for their trust in me. Obviously, I cannot name them, but I hope that they judge the contents of this book to be helpful in raising mutual understanding and respect in Sierra Leone.

Several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) helped me to make contact with ex-combatants or allowed me to visit their programmes on reintegration and reconstruction. To name the most important ones: ActionAid (whose director Sam Musa generously let me use office space to work on my computer while most of Freetown was suffering from electricity blackouts), American Refugee Committee, Conciliation Resources, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, HOPE–Sierre Leone, Save the Children Fund, War Child, and World Vision. The conclusions reached by this research do not reflect

Abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (military junta of renegade soldiers in power from May 1997 until March 1998)
APC	All People's Congress (political party ruling from 1968 until 1992)
BANBATT	UN Bangladesh peace-keeping battalion
BANSAL	Bangladesh/Sierra Leone Cooperative Farm
CCM	Cooperative Contract Mining
CDF	Civil Defence Forces (general name for the various hunter-based civil militias which took part in the war)
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration
DfID	Department for International Development (of the UK)
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring and Observation Group
EO	Executive Outcomes (mercenary group hired by NPRC and President Kabbah to fight the RUF)
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German NGO)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	internally displaced person
IDU	Internal Defence Unit
IMATT	International Military Advisory and Training Team (UK-dominated team of specialists training the Sierra Leone police and armed forces)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	Intelligence Officer
IP	implementing partner (organisation or training centre implementing one or more reintegration projects as part of DDR)
ISU	Internal Security Unit (later SSD)
IVS	inland valley swamps

KADO	Kalamayrah Agricultural Development Organisation
KPM	Kono Progressive Movement (political party in Kono during the 1950s and 1960s)
LBYC	Lower Bambara Youth Council
Le	Leone, the Sierra Leonean currency
MAP	Mass Awareness and Participation (revolutionary student group in Sierra Leone during the 1980s)
MP	Military Police
NADA	Niawa Agricultural Development Association
NCDDR	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
NDMC	National Diamond Mining Company
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia (rebel movement in Liberia, headed by Charles Taylor and ally of the RUF)
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council (military junta of junior army officers in power from April 1992 until March 1996)
NWO–WOTRO	Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research–Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research
PANAFU	Pan-African Union (revolutionary student group in Sierra Leone during the 1980s)
RADO	Robureh Agricultural Development Organisation
RSLMF	Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (name of the government official forces up to 1998)
RUF	Revolutionary United Front (the main rebel movement in Sierra Leone, fighting from 1991 until 2002)
RUF/SL	Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (official name of the RUF)
SIEROMCO	Sierra Leone Ore and Metal Company
SLA	Sierra Leone Army (general name for the military forces)
SLAF	Sierra Leone Armed Forces (government official forces after 1999)
SLPIM	Sierra Leone People's Independent Movement
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party (political party ruling from 1961 until 1967 and from 1996 up to 2007, despite eight months of exile during the AFRC/RUF reign)
SLST	Sierra Leone Selection Trust

SSD	Special Security Division (previously ISU)
TA	Traditional Authorities
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
ULIMO	United Liberian Movement for Democracy (rebel movement created by Liberian exiles in Sierra Leone opposed to the NPFL and the RUF)
UN	United Nations
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (peace-keeping mission)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone

Introduction

Tongo in a Time of War

On one of the last days of January 1994, the people of the small[1] but important diamond mining town of Tongo, in the eastern part of Sierra Leone, were alarmed by gunshots coming from the outskirts. It did not take long for them to discover that their town was under attack by a rebel movement named the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (henceforth RUF).

Three years before, on 23 March 1991, the RUF entered Sierra Leone across its border with war-torn neighbouring Liberia, seeking to overthrow – as it proclaimed – the one-party All People's Congress (henceforth APC) regime of President Momoh. During the first months of the insurgency the ranks of the rebel forces swelled rapidly through a mixture of voluntary recruitment and forcible induction of predominantly young people – many of whom were under 18 years of age, the widely agreed minimum age to bear arms. Many recruits were young people who had dropped out of school or left their villages to survive on a day-to-day basis in the urban informal sector, or through small-scale illicit mining. The RUF – reinforced by more experienced combatants (Special Forces) from Liberian warlord Charles Taylor's rebel movement in Liberia – soon gained a reputation for cruelty and war crimes, respecting neither the lives nor the property of civilians. An army loyal to the APC government hit back, reinforced by anti-Taylor Liberian fighters, many of whom were from the Armed Forces of Liberia, driven as refugees into Sierra Leone after the collapse of the regime of President Samuel Doe of Liberia in 1990. By the end of 1993 the RUF was considered a spent force, with a few remaining fighters holed up in forested enclaves on the Sierra Leone–Liberia border.

But only a month after its supposed defeat in December 1993, the RUF launched a strong attack on Tongo. It was able to control the town for two days of destruction, looting, killing, and voluntary or forced recruitment.

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[1] The indigenous population of Tongo is not more than a few thousand. Throughout the year, however – but mainly during the low farming season – the town is crowded with miners coming from all over Sierra Leone, increasing its population ten times or more.

Afterwards it retreated and established a new base camp in the village of Peyeima, about 10 kilometres east of Tongo. In line with a new forest-based guerrilla strategy, the movement created hiding places in the surrounding bush, so-called jo-bushes. Here it was safe from the Alpha jets of Nigerian peace keepers operating as part of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring and Observation Group (henceforth ECOMOG) in Liberia, now also deployed to the war in Sierra Leone, and beyond the reach of the Sierra Leonean army operating with heavy ground equipment. Over the next two years Sierra Leone's sixth army battalion covered the Tongo area, allowing some of the displaced civilians to return to continue their mining activities. During this whole period the RUF launched pin-prick attacks on Tongo and its outskirts, often on a weekly basis, but never executed another full-scale attack.

In 1996 the army's position was weakened by the deterioration of its relationship with the Kamajoisia – civil defence forces employing initiated hunters and used by a new government installed after elections in February 1996 as a proxy force against the rebels. Clashes between the two took place in Tongo and other places. To prevent any further conflict the army was ordered by the government to withdraw its battalion, leaving the defence of the mining town to the Kamajoisia and about 75 government special troops belonging to the main army but retrained in counter-insurgency by a South African private security group with links to diamond mining in Sierra Leone, Executive Outcomes (henceforth EO).

A successful military coup against the democratic regime in May 1997 by disgruntled and sidelined army troops resulted in a junta government, into which the RUF was invited on a power-sharing basis. For three months the Kamajoisia were able to prevent the junta forces and rebel collaborators taking control in Tongo, but on 14 August they had to retreat to the nearby Panguma area (headquarters of Lower Bambara chiefdom, the chiefdom in which Tongo is located). By the end of 1997, Chief Hinga Norman, the overt 'leader' of the secretive Kamajoisia, announced a general attack on the renegade soldiers and the RUF, code-named 'Black December'. Five months after their retreat the Kamajoisia recaptured the town and repelled the renegade soldiers from the area in a quick but decisive attack.

It was not to be the last time that Tongo and its diamond fields changed hands. In February–March 1998 the junta forces were driven out of the capital Freetown and other major towns by forces loyal to the elected government, but during the second half of 1998 regrouped junta forces and allied RUF units started a nationwide offensive, characterised by extreme brutality and vengeful atrocities. By the end of that year an ECOMOG battalion withdrew from nearby Kono – another major diamond-mining area to the north – with its equipment and thousands of civilians in its

slipstream, passing through Tongo as it retreated. Civilians residing in Tongo understood the message and started to leave, with rebel forces only 7 kilometres to the north. Early in January 1999 Tongo fell into the hands of the RUF once more. The Kamajoisia took position in Panguma and nearby Giehun, a forested hill overlooking Tongo from the south, on which sat a Kamajoi base camp not unlike the jo-bushes created by the RUF, and fighting continued during the following months.

After the Lomé peace accord between the reinstated democratic government and the army/RUF junta forces was signed in July 1999, displaced civilians started once again to return to Tongo. However, the diamond area was still under the de facto control of the RUF, which extracted several days a week in obligatory labour from every miner. The RUF behaved and considered itself as the 'government' in the territories under its control; disputes and offences were brought to the RUF Military Police if these involved RUF fighters or to the RUF G5 (civil–military liaison) office when civilians were involved.

United Nations (UN) peace-keeping forces replaced ECOMOG in April 2000 and – attempting to force the pace of disarmament agreed under Lomé – found themselves in various confrontations with the RUF. A British military intervention in May 2000 stabilised the situation, and allowed the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (henceforth UNAMSIL) to deploy fully. But it was only at the end of 2001 – after further demobilisation agreements with the RUF, signed in Abuja, Nigeria, in November 2000, had been fulfilled in the rest of country during the following year – that the UN peace-keeping forces entered Tongo and fully established themselves. Tongo, together with the RUF stronghold of Kailahun district was the last place to disarm. It was not until the completion of this process (in the course of 2002) that the government and chiefdom authorities returned.

In seeking to research the war and its aftermath from the neglected perspective of the RUF – one of the aims of the present book – it was clear that Tongo would be a good place to work, despite security concerns. Other studies have focused on ex-combatants disarmed and reintegrated at an earlier period (cf. Peters and Richards 1998a, 1998b; Shepler 2005). Susan Shepler's thesis, based on fieldwork from the period 1999–2001, makes it clear that war is a resource over which many vested interests struggle. This includes peace makers and humanitarian agencies as well as political interests and the armed groups themselves. The plain issues of conflict soon become encrusted in multiplicitous layers of claim and counter-claim, myth and misinterpretation. Shepler shows that not least among the claimants contributing to this post-war fog we should number the ex-combatants themselves. They quickly become adept – she argues – at understanding and reflecting back the needs and perspectives of the agencies assisting them.

The advantage of the focus on Tongo, and neighbouring Kailahun district for the work I report here is that conditions allowed me to work with former fighters of the RUF very soon after they entered the misty world of post-war reconstruction. Even as I worked, many became rather reticent in expressing views, partly because they had begun to sense what adaptations they would need to make to post-conflict Sierra Leone – a rather different place from the one they had envisaged – but also because they feared indictment by the Special Court in Sierra Leone. This fear was strengthened partly through a campaign of misinformation during 2003, apparently mounted by some of their former commanders and government-licensed agents of alluvial diamond mining who offered ex-combatants low-wage work in return for political protection. It would be naïve of course to take what informants say at face value without cross-checking evidence. But what I claim in regard to the material presented in this book is that in many cases it was collected as close to the effective end of the war as possible, and that it tells a significantly different story to those emanating from ex-combatants more deeply embedded within the post-war world.

Three Explanations of the Conflict

From this point onwards I must engage with highly controversial issues. The RUF from the outset was denied what Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once termed, in relation to the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, 'the oxygen of publicity'. The RUF was a by-product of radical student agitation in the 1970s and 1980s. Some of the radical agitators were driven into exile and went to Ghana. From there some tried to recruit supporters in Freetown to join them for insurgency training in the camps in Bengazi, Libya (Abdullah 1997). Others were educated on UN scholarships, and some later went to work for that organisation, or took overseas academic posts, particularly in North America (Richards 2005a). These people were quickly and understandably embarrassed by what their violent step-child – the RUF – had become and chose to deny it a core of rationality – perhaps to protect their own ongoing Pan-Africanist political projects or the interests of the international agencies for which they worked in contributing to a peace process under the rubric of 'African solutions to African problems'.

Buccaneer capitalists, meanwhile, mainly interested in Sierra Leone's rich mining resources, were quick to seize on arguments about a mysterious and mindless rebel movement without legitimate political grievances and interested only in butchery. With help from well-placed allies in the British government a consortium of private security operators and mining companies began to play an increasingly important part in the war in Sierra Leone. The RUF claimed to be fighting government corruption

and wanted accountability for the country's mineral resources. The ex-Marxist radicals and buccaneer capitalists found common cause – the RUF was mindlessly violent and the only language it would understand was peace enforcement. A promising peace negotiation – Abidjan 1996 – was squandered, as EO[2] set about imposing the preferred military solution. It was not in the interest of its mining partners to have their activities scrutinised by a rough-and-ready RUF admitted to politics and power-sharing through a negotiated settlement. This much is apparent from the account of the EO operations in Sierra Leone by a journalist friend of the company, who claims that the former South African Defence Force officers in charge of EO in Sierra Leone did everything in their power to make the elected president – Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah – abandon his peace agreements with the RUF (Hooper 2002).

Future historians may judge that much of the storm of subsequent violence can be traced to these breaches. My focus, however, will be on documenting what RUF cadres say about the war and their part in it, and in trying to establish a critical context to help the reader form sensible judgements about the likely value of this information. I then discuss three broad explanations of the war and will make clear that one of these explanations – war as a result of the collapsing patrimonial state – makes best sense of the material my informants provided. In addition to this model, I will argue that in the case of Sierra Leone state collapse intertwined with and accelerated a crisis in rural areas, where the abuse of customary law by ruling landholding elites had particularly severe consequences for young people.

There can be no doubt that the conflict in Sierra Leone has challenged both scholars and international observers to come up with new explanations. It stands in the literature as one of the prime instances of so-called new war – conflicts that evolve beyond the established explanatory paradigms developed since Clausewitz (1832) in literature mainly focused upon inter-state war. The extreme violence against civilians, the high number of youths and children actively taking part in the conflict, the shifting alliances between the factions, and the unexpected coherence of the RUF during the decade-long conflict are just some of the features that have challenged the more simplistic or confidently announced

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[2] Executive Outcomes (EO) was a South African–led mercenary group hired by the National Provisional Ruling Council – the military government ruling the country from 1992 to early 1996 – and was paid in cash and diamond concessions. EO continued to operate under the Kabbah government, but was sent home after the signing of the November 1996 Abidjan peace accord. It disbanded in 1998. A successor in Sierra Leone – the British company Sandline – became embroiled in controversy over whether or not it broke an international arms embargo, with or without United Kingdom (UK) government agreement, and disbanded in 2004, stating on its website that this was due to lack of support for private security options in 'places like Africa'.

explanations. In every case, the same sets of facts can be – and have been – taken to support opposite interpretations.

In Tongo, for example, the RUF recruited mainly among a social and economic underclass of people such as poorly paid diamond diggers, which might suggest that it tried to address underclass grievances. But the same rebel movement, in targeting the diamond-producing areas of Sierra Leone, also might have been driven mainly by economic incentives. Again, the atrocious behaviour of the RUF and its lack of support among the peasantry – the traditional allies of left-wing guerrillas – might suggest that we are dealing with a movement populated by criminal elements, more drawn to sadism than to ideologically motivated actions. I shall simply summarise in bald terms the three main rival sets of theories for the purpose of establishing the context.

Riley and Sesay state that in explaining the conflict in Sierra Leone, 'there is a basic division between those who blame the central state, its agents and politics, and those who focus upon the rebels, their backers and rural society' (Riley and Sesay 1995: 121). Of the three explanations dominant in Sierra Leonean discourse about the war, summarised here, the first two focus on the rebels and the third focuses on the state.

'New Barbarism',[3] *or 'the Apocalyptic View'*[4]

With the ending of the Cold War the African continent witnessed a proliferation of mainly intra-state conflicts. This was contrary to a general expectation that after the collapse of communism the world would focus on global development, resulting in peace. In search of an explanation, some scholars and journalists reminded us of the old Malthusian theory of overpopulation and/or diminishing natural resources. They argued that what was happening in the 1990s 'at the ends of the earth'[5] was social breakdown caused by the environmental collapse of an overpopulated continent.

Robert Kaplan was perhaps the best-known protagonist of this neo-Malthusian theory. Two of his most influential publications (Kaplan 1994, 1996) take the conflict in Sierra Leone as a key illustration of his argument. Kaplan (1996) describes how the Sierra Leone battlefield is ruled by a pre-modern chaos, not dissimilar to the battlefields of late feudal Europe before the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The concept of a nation state has lost its meaning in Africa, and weak governments no

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[3] A term introduced by Paul Richards.
[4] A term used by Thandika Mkandawire.
[5] Robert D. Kaplan wrote an influential book called *The Ends of the Earth, a Journey at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century* (Kaplan 1996) which starts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ivory Coast.

longer maintain a monopoly on military violence. Kaplan refers to an article by Mark Danner in the *New Yorker* (1993) about a massacre in El Salvador, after which he introduces the idea that many of the intra-state conflicts during and after the Cold War should not be understood in ideological terms. According to Kaplan's somewhat idosyncratic reading, Danner's article 'demonstrates how the killing – not to mention the whole war – bared wells of primitivism for which the local culture itself must also be held accountable' (ibid.: 45, fn.). In another 'observation' Kaplan is clear about the Malthusian roots of this 'primitivism':[6] 'Despite all the wars in Sierra Leone, the population was growing at anywhere from 2.6 percent to 3.9 percent annually – nobody knew exactly. The average woman conceived six children over her adult lifetime. However, while 60 percent of the country was nutrient-rich, tropical rain forest at independence over 30 years ago, only six percent was rain forest now. Disease was out of control' (ibid.: 46). The weaknesses of the Malthusian argument are thoroughly explored in Richards (1996) and will be discussed in Chapter 8. Kaplan served a moment in which the American superpower wished to focus on its internal high-technology revolution ('It's the economy, stupid'). It did not wish or know how to intervene in the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, despite the anxious demands of African-Americans with roots in West Africa.

Greed, Not Grievance

As the war unfolded diamonds became more and more a central concern, both to the RUF and to the so-called peace enforcers (ECOMOG and EO). Analysts began to wonder whether diamonds had always been the main motivation for the conflict. The view is widely held by popular opinion, especially in the capital (for most of the war far from the fighting). Smillie et al. (2000) insist that the crisis in Sierra Leone is a product of a criminal conspiracy seeking to control readily exploitable alluvial diamond resources. The ambassador of Sierra Leone to the UN commented that 'the conflict was not about ideology, tribal or regional differences. It had nothing to do with the so-called problem of marginalised youths, or . . . an uprising by rural poor against the urban elite. The root of the conflict was and remained diamonds' (McIntyre, Aning and Addo 2002: 12).

Paul Collier, an Oxford professor who for a time headed the World Bank's research department, wrote an article in 2001 under the title

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[6] On page 55 he refers explicitly to his Malthusian beliefs: 'Thomas Malthus, the philosopher of demographic doomsday . . . seems to have more to say about what is happening in West Africa.'

'Economic causes of civil conflict and their implications for policy'. He argues that:

Based on empirical patterns globally over the period 1965–99 . . . the risk of civil war has been systematically related to a few economic conditions, such as dependence upon primary commodity exports and low national income. Conversely, and astonishingly, objective measures of social grievance, such as inequality, a lack of democracy, and ethnic and religious divisions, have had no systematic effect on risk. I argue that this is because civil wars occur where rebel organisations are financially viable. (Collier 2001: 143)

Although many rebel leaders state that grievance was the reason to take up arms, he goes on to assert, their 'revealed preference' – what people gradually reveal about their true motivation through their patterns of behaviour – shows that often it is greed, not grievance, that truly explains their motivations. The case of Sierra Leone comes in when Collier gives his ultimate illustration of a rebel movement motivated by greed rather than grievance:

The rebel [RUF] organisation produced the usual litany of grievances, and its very scale suggested it had a widespread support. Sierra Leone is, however, a major exporter of diamonds, and there was considerable evidence that the rebel organisation was involved in this business on a large scale. During peace negotiations the rebel leader [Foday Sankoh] was offered and accepted the vice presidency of the country. This, we might imagine, would be a good basis for addressing rebel grievances. However, the offer was not sufficient to persuade the rebel leader to accept the peace settlement. He had one further demand, which once acceded to, produced a (temporary) settlement. His demand was to be the minister of mining.[7] (Collier 2001: 146)

And to those unconvinced by the economic basis of rebel movements, and persuaded still that injustice and grievances may motivate rebellions, Collier (2001: 153) baldly asserts: '*It is a key task of the rebel organisation to make people realise that they are the victims of injustice* [his emphasis]. The economic theory of rebellion accepts this proposition and makes one simple but reasonable extension: the rebel organisation can inculcate a subjective sense[8] of injustice whether or not this is objectively justified.' Collier's arguments have provoked sharp responses (see, for example, Arnson and Zartman 2005). Although little evidence has been provided that economic factors alone are enough to trigger wars, there is

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[7] Collier is, in fact, slightly carried away by his argument; Sankoh only asked for (and received, as a result of the 1999 Lomé negotiations) the chairmanship of a newly formed national minerals authority. This post had attached to it protocol status equivalent to vice-president.

[8] Note that the rebel leaders act like rationalists and *homo economicus*, in line with the greed model; but, curiously, their followers are apparently not rationalists and can be manipulated (through propaganda) into harbouring subjective feelings of injustice (cf. Mkandawire 2002). There is further discussion of this explanation in Chapter 8.

widespread agreement that durable conflicts are most likely where there are the resources to keep opposed factions in the field. What needs to be noted here, however, is that the evidence in Sierra Leone is highly ambiguous. The war was fought for several years without major diamond income (see also Chapter 8). But to the wider public the conflict in Sierra Leone is cited and regarded, if it is known at all, as one of the best examples of a conflict motivated by greed, not grievance.

State Collapse and a Pent-Up Rebellion of Youth

The Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) presented its 1,500-page final report in 2004, in which it concludes that 'it was years of bad governance, endemic corruption and the denial of basic human rights that created the deplorable conditions that made conflict inevitable' (TRC 2004: 10) and that 'the exploitation of diamonds was not the cause of the conflict in Sierra Leone; rather it was an element that fuelled the conflict' (ibid.: 12).

Reno (1995) describes in detail the rise of a post-independence political system in Sierra Leone, based on patrimonial principles. According to Richards, 'patrimonialism is a systematic scaling up, at the national level, of local ideas about patron–client linkages, shaped (in Sierra Leone) in the days of direct extraction of forest resources, about the duty of the rich and successful to protect, support and promote their followers and friends' (Richards 1996: 34). A key argument about the war in Sierra Leone is that it is a result of the failure of the state to honour its patrimonial promises. Increasing numbers of very poor people fall outside the scope of state social service provision, most notably educational provision, since one end point of much patrimonial redistribution was the payment of school fees (Richards 1996). Young people, socio-economically marginalised, soon proved to be a large reservoir to be tapped by those who wanted to cause mayhem and overthrow the government.

This process of state-driven marginalisation continued during the war. For Riley and Sesay (1995: 125), 'the hardship of IMF/World Bank sponsored structural adjustment since 1992 must surely have contributed to the growth of the RUF and the breakdown of discipline in the Sierra Leone Army (SLA). Simple theft by rebels, disaffected or unpaid soldiers and others has become a way of surviving adjustment'. This – the collapsing state failing to deliver basic entitlements – has led to moves among the very poor to find alternatives to patrimonialism. The RUF – according to Richards (1996) – was a violent and unstable attempt to impose an egalitarian system on Sierra Leone, as an alternative to a failing patrimonialism, and if the rebellion had succeeded would have led to a regime perhaps not incomparable to Cambodia under Pol Pot. Bangura (1997), however, argues that the collapse of the patrimonial state was not

as clear-cut as Richards (1996) and others have argued. Aid appropriations, he suggests, tended to compensate for loss of mineral revenues and poor world market prices (see also Chapter 8).

Defining the Problem and the Solution

The dilemma is clear: events can be used to illustrate certain explanations, but in themselves are rarely sufficient evidence to come to a conclusion about the root causes of the war in Sierra Leone, let alone about the nature of the RUF and the motivations of its cadres, as becomes clear from the previous discussion. When studying the literature about the conflict in Sierra Leone, and in particular about the main protagonist, it becomes clear that there is a bias: conclusions about the nature of the war and the RUF are drawn from accounts of civilians who became its victims, or are based on interpretations and rationalisations offered by the enemies and opponents of the RUF, and often there is no more than a token effort – if there is any effort at all – to include information gathered from the RUF, whether leadership or rank-and-file. Previously, lack of opportunity could be given as the excuse. But it has been possible to talk to the RUF in post-conflict conditions since the last round of demobilisation started (2000–1), and yet there is still a dearth of material.

This book tries to address this gap, by focusing on the direct experiences and interpretations of the protagonists of war, and paying special attention to the hitherto neglected cadres of the RUF. In the light of this new evidence, the value of the above three explanations is reconsidered. War is always hugely complex and controversial, and a careful, balanced assessment of eye-witness evidence is often a casualty of heated propaganda battles. The TRC for Sierra Leone provides a very important body of documentation concerning the war and its context, covering the perspectives of many participants, not least the victims. Even so, it is to be suspected that many ex-combatants held back in their accounts. In addition to the widespread and exaggerated fears of eventual prosecution by the Special Court (cf. Kelsall 2005), the culture of most rural protagonists strongly emphasises the importance of secrecy, as an aspect of social cohesion. It is normative not to speak out of turn or volunteer information unless it is directly demanded.

Debate will continue about how effective the TRC process has been in accounting for the war. Meanwhile, the present book takes a different – low-key, anthropological – approach in which rapport was patiently built with rank-and-file cadres over a long period, using a methodology in which the researcher specifically retraced with participants some actual operations as a stimulus to their memory and test of the accuracy of some of their claims. An illustrative example of this approach was the visit to the

former RUF headquarters, the 'Zogoda', together with some ex-rebels. After a journey of several hours, following insignificant bush paths, we reached the now overgrown former base, abandoned since 1996. Without the guidance of the ex-combatants only half-decayed items such as a car battery and typewriter indicated that there was once human activity here. The former RUF combatants, however, were able to point out the location of the parade ground, the still visible pits which were used as latrines, and where their shelters were located, including the hut of rebel leader Foday Sankoh.[9]

The aim of focusing on those who actively participated in the conflict is primarily ethnographic – the material is intended to aid understanding of how war was experienced by its protagonists. An experiential perspective – it will be argued – is important to attempts to comprehend the war and how to guard against its recurrence. One might assume that it is simple common sense to try and hear from the RUF cadres themselves. And yet during the war, and even now, attempts to secure unbiased accounts from RUF combatants themselves about what they perceived as the root causes of the war and why they took up arms were and are rare. In fact, for a long time little attention has been paid to the experiences and interpretations of combatants in general – whether they were RUF, CDF[10] or SLA[11] fighters.

Apparently, the atrocious character of the war, in combination with an increasingly dominant discourse labelling the conflict as one fought over diamonds, created an environment in which any attempt to listen to and to extend an empathetic – as distinct from sympathetic! – understanding to the perpetrators ran the danger of being dismissed as an attempt to justify inhuman acts. Or, as David Keen states at the beginning of his book on the conflict in Sierra Leone, 'analysing the causes of violence can seem dangerously close to justifying it . . . [but] it is important at least to listen; after that, one may choose to disbelieve' (2005: 4). The purpose of focusing on ex-combatants here is not to 'give the voiceless a voice', but to gain a better understanding of why so many young people proved to be vulnerable to militia conscription in general, and more specifically how

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[9] While walking back from the Zogoda one of the ex-RUF commanders was listening to the BBC 'Focus on Africa' on his portable radio. Sierra Leone was in the news again: ex-RUF leader Foday Sankoh, imprisoned at that time, was taken to an undisclosed location to undergo treatment for his bad health. This news provoked all kinds of conspiracy theories from the former RUF combatants, boiling down to the point that the government had poisoned Sankoh to prevent him from revealing the secrets of war and in particular details of alleged cooperation between the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) (the democratic party of government) and the RUF, when the latter launched its attack on Sierra Leone in 1991. Some Sierra Leoneans are adamant that Sankoh was once a member of the SLPP, and that big men in the party were quietly backing him to overthrow the APC.

[10] CDF: Civil Defence Forces, such as the Kamajoisia mentioned above.

[11] SLA: Sierra Leone Army.

the RUF was able to create an armed movement which did not fall apart for more than a decade. Listening to the voices and analyses of those who participated in the conflict, and asking what they perceived as the root causes of the war and their reasons for taking part in it, is to make a useful contribution to explanations of the war. And even where these analyses and motivations very clearly lack credibility as factual accounts, they still have value in teaching us something about the way rebel leaders and/or rebel group dynamics 'inculcate' Collier's 'subjective sense of injustice'.

Nothing is added to my chances of dealing with an enemy by refusing to study how he or she thinks. This desire to understand the varying ways in which the enemies thought is the leitmotif of the present book. And the methodology is simplicity itself – go there, listen, report, examine critically, and then try to understand. As part of the process of listening I spent many hours revisiting with them the bush paths and battle sites of their war, to make clearer the often confusing stories I had been told, still drenched in the raw emotions of combat. This book is the account of what I heard and learnt on those visits.

Chapter Overview

The case for focusing on those who actively participated in the conflict is presented in Chapter 1. This chapter will offer extensive interview material. Ex-combatants respond to two main questions: (1) 'What did you believe caused the war?' and (2) 'For what reasons did you take up arms?' Perhaps not unexpectedly, it becomes clear that those who voluntarily decided to take up arms give answers to the two questions that often – but not always – overlap. Many fighters, however, and especially in the RUF, were abducted and forced to join the movement, against their will. Those who were abducted often give different answers to the two questions, bringing out the aspect of being forced to take up arms; perhaps surprisingly, however, this is not always so. Some abductees became willing converts to the RUF, arguably a manifestation of what psychologists call Stockholm Syndrome, where hostages bond with the captors – as in the famous case of the heiress Patty Hearst, captured by a Californian urban guerrilla group known as the Symbionese Liberation Army. However, it is striking that both categories – volunteers and forcibly conscripted – more or less state the same causes as being responsible for the outbreak of the war. It is even more remarkable that the causes cited do not differ greatly according to rank (rank-and-file or commander), factional affiliation (CDF, RUF, SLA), ethnic background, or age of ex-combatants. The root causes of the war, according to most of the ex-combatants I interviewed, must be located in the lack of education and jobs, and the failure or unwillingness of a ruling elite – foremost at village level – to help and include, rather than exploit and exclude, the

vulnerable and needy, in particular the young. This neglect resulted in a large reservoir of young people who saw themselves as marginalised and excluded, and who were ready – or saw no other alternative than – to take up arms.

Are these after-the-event rationalisations and self-justifications – or even a case of collective delusion? If so, it will be a challenge to explanation, since former enemies give similar analyses. Alternatively, might these local explanations point to valid factors in feeding the conflict? The book will review evidence concerning the history of rural society, and the role of the state in shaping that history, to determine whether and to what extent such processes of exclusion took place, and whether the combatants sampled in this book can be placed – by background – in the social fraction so formed. This contextual analysis is the main task undertaken in Chapter 2, which examines evidence concerning the social, political and economic exclusion of a segment of rural youth. The political economy of rural Sierra Leone from the colonial period – and from the abolition of domestic servitude in 1928 in particular – is dominated by unresolved tensions between land-holding elites and dislocated peasants or 'strangers'. In this regard Sierra Leone does not differ from a pattern detected by Trevor Getz's analysis of post-slavery rural society in Ghana and Senegal, in which emancipation, under colonial tutelage, was largely controlled by chiefly and merchant elites to their own advantage (Getz 2004).

Children from ex-slave backgrounds lacked secure land, property, and marriage rights at emancipation, and many remained the pawns and clients of a chiefly and gerontocratic rural elite. Those who bucked the trend did so by leaving their chiefdoms of birth, thereby becoming strangers in neighbouring chiefdoms. Many worked as labourers in the alluvial diamond fields, for example, but were subject to violent controls by the sponsors of mining activity, which often received state protection. Their dreams of finding a fortune were just that – dreams – and a circulatory migratory system emerged in which periods spent digging diamonds for a pittance rotated with periods spent farming in the villages. Those who were unwilling to return to chiefly authority floated in the countryside, labouring and engaging at times in petty crime. This was a poverty and marginality that reproduced itself across generations. The children of farm workers and diamond diggers could only hope to escape the background of their parents by securing a better education. A modern state – however poor – is supposed to make basic provision for all citizens on the basis of equality, including basic education, basic health care, and equality before the law. The neo-patrimonial one-party regime in power from 1967 to 1991 in effect hardly provided these basic entitlements outside the capital and main towns, except in parts of the north from which it drew most political support. The border zone with Liberia was a hotbed

of opposition to the regime, and was systematically starved of social services for half a generation or more. Chiefly elites and land owners had some alternatives. They could send their own children to gain schooling in towns. The footloose rural poor, however, lost out entirely. Post-slavery conditions of social dependency and vagrancy reproduced themselves across generations. A rural underclass – ripe for militia recruitment – was born.

Post-war, it is clear that ex-combatants and civilians to a large extent agree about the root causes of the war. As will become clear, these causes are real and an integral part of Sierra Leone's history and society. This is a sufficient basis on which to formulate the main hypothesis of the book: the RUF is to be considered an extremely violent revolt of marginalised young rural Sierra Leoneans, triggered by weaknesses in a collapsing neo-patrimonial one-party state.

Before taking an in-depth look at the evidence the reader may need an overview of the conflict. Chapter 3 tries to provide the necessary detail on the history of the war in Sierra Leone. Some of these events are further illuminated by personal memories and commentary of ex-combatants and civilians interviewed for this book. Many of these comments would be unlikely to make it into an official history of the war, since they are often of a micro-sociological kind, concerned with highly specific and localised grievances. But it is important to have some understanding of this kind of evidence, since in the end it often accounts for violent occurrences at the level of the individual or the small group. A chronology of important events during the war is given in Annex I.

To address the book's main hypothesis, stated previously, knowledge of the war itself is not enough. A good insight into the RUF – its organisation, beliefs, and operations – is also necessary. But here we encounter a problem; the RUF has become a by-word for extreme violence, and was widely shunned. As mentioned, it was denied the 'oxygen of publicity'. It made only a handful of formal submissions concerning its aims and beliefs, and those few statements generally were treated with contempt and ridicule. Thus – apart from its internationally diffused image as a monstrosity – the movement is known, if at all, mainly through the claims and characterisations of those who opposed it. In particular – since for long periods RUF captives were routinely executed rather than interrogated – very little is known about the background and motivations of its fighters and how its camps and the areas under its control were organised during the earlier phases of the war. Chapter 4 aims to address this deficit. Here we look into the world of the RUF: its strategies for bonding its conscripts; the organisation of its base camps; and its laws, rules, and political ideas. It becomes clear that the RUF prevented its abducted fighters from deserting by more than the simple threat of violence. During the phase of bush camps (1994–7) the RUF assumed a

particular form and mentality, and structured its activities according to certain organisational modalities associated with egalitarian principles intended to challenge the post-slavery clientelism dominating the social world beyond the bush camps. Chapter 4 will make clear that the RUF was better organised and more disciplined, and had stricter rules and regulations, than its opponents were prepared to allow. This then poses a challenge – how to explain the atrocious behaviour of movement cadres.

This challenge is taken up in Chapter 5. The chapter opens with a discussion of the three main 'external' reasons – according to former cadres – for RUF atrocities: (1) the role of Charles Taylor's Special Forces in the early days of the war, and their widespread reign of terror; (2) the increasing threat to the RUF and its bush camps by the rising significance of the Kamajoi movement and the rebels' violent reaction to it; and (3) the collaboration with the military junta government from 1997 onwards, and its effects on the ideology and discipline of the RUF. The chapter then looks at a number of 'internal' explanations, aiming to understand why – despite the ideology and the code of conduct with its rules, regulations, and monitoring bodies (all discussed earlier, in Chapter 4) – the RUF cadres so often involved themselves in acts of killing, looting, and raping. It becomes clear from the ex-combatants' accounts that – despite all the laws – something was inherently wrong with the design of the RUF, and that only in a few places, often further away from the frontlines and deep into the safe zones of RUF-controlled territory, did the RUF sometimes function in the manner stipulated in its ideological documents. In short, this chapter aims to explain the atrocious behaviour of the RUF in sociological rather than psychological terms.[12]

According to evidence presented in Chapter 4, one of the policy objectives pursued by the RUF, or some sections of its leadership in the bush, was the necessity to promote agriculture as the nub of rural reform in Sierra Leone. To a degree this was a product of necessity. The movement's forces needed to be fed. But there is evidence that in certain respects some RUF members – both rank-and-file and high-ranking combatants – were sincere in their commitment to agrarian issues. This may come as a complete surprise to those who consider the RUF an urban-based and oriented movement, or to those who believe the RUF was predominantly interested in diamonds. But if indeed it is the case that the majority of RUF combatants hailed from a rural underclass with weak land, property, and marriage rights, this commitment to agrarian issues is less than surprising. The evidence for the movement's commitment

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[12] The 'greed-not-grievance' and the 'new-barbarism' explanations of the conflict and its atrocities are both based on personality traits, respectively the existence of the stop-at-no-point greedy rebel commander and the 'savage within each man' RUF fighter. Even Keen's explanation for the atrocities as disdain for the RUF – as suggested in *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (2005) – is a psychologistic, not a sociological, argument.

to particular kinds of agrarian development is examined in closer detail in Chapter 6. Evidence that agrarian commitments were to a degree sincere, and not just opportunist, can be garnered from a closer study of several groups of RUF ex-combatants who opted to implement agricultural projects in post-war Sierra Leone as part of their Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (henceforth DDR) entitlements. Both the collective organisational set-up of these projects and the fact that the ex-combatants continue to consider these projects as a prolongation of the RUF struggle by other means seem important and telling findings.

Chapter 7 begins with a description of the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration process for ex-combatants in Sierra Leone. Some flaws in the DDR programme are discussed. The general argument is that the Sierra Leonean government in general and the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (henceforth NCDDR) specifically – under which more than 70,000 combatants disarmed and received reintegration support, mainly through skills training and tool kits – failed to acknowledge and address the more general rural crisis for young people in Sierra Leone, and thus also failed the tens of thousands of ex-combatants who fell under NCDDR's responsibility. At issue are land tenure rules and customary laws which continue to determine the marginalisation of poor young rural people. In the absence of recognition of an agrarian crisis affecting young people in rural Sierra Leone, the NCDDR failed to provide sufficient agricultural packages to meet the ex-combatant demand. The programme emphasised, instead, a range of often urban-oriented skills-training packages – notably computer training – but not to a high enough standard to ensure effective employment. Implementing agencies were sometimes weak or corrupt and inappropriate; poorly delivered programmes proliferated. In addition, a specific consequence of the design of the DDR programme was that those who resettled in the more remote rural areas were the most vulnerable to the organisational failures and malpractices of the NCDDR staff. The chapter concludes by outlining an alternative reintegration trajectory, sensitive to agrarian opportunities. One general conclusion is developed. Rather than reintegrating ex-combatants into a failing rural society, a whole new approach, targeting the entire rural youth underclass, is now needed. DDR should be followed by youth-oriented agrarian transformation. The necessity of such a transformation becomes evident following a short follow-up visit to the agricultural project discussed in Chapter 6. Two years down the line, most of the ex-RUF-initiated agricultural projects seem to have found their nemesis in the complex customary rules and traditions around land tenure and labour mobilisation.

In Chapter 8 attention is given specifically to the hypothesis of the RUF as the outcome of a youthful rural underclass going to war. Some basic checks are instituted. In the first place, were the members of the

RUF predominantly young, and did they mainly come from rural areas? One widely accepted argument is that most RUF members were from an urban 'lumpen' background. A carefully managed large-scale quantitative analysis of ex-combatants by background and motivation by Humphreys and Weinstein (2004) challenges the urban lumpen myth. Most RUF cadres were rural in background, and from the poorest classes. Chapter 8 probes this finding further, by considering evidence that the organisational structure of the RUF reflected modalities already existing in rural Sierra Leone among young people, and considers evidence suggesting that it offered specifically to replace the mechanisms of socio-economic and political exclusion experienced by its cadres. This material will make clear why the predominantly marginalised rural young people abducted by the RUF actually found certain elements in its programmes attractive, once inside the movement. This attractiveness was not necessarily objectively rational, and in some respects the movement can be understood as a kind of Cargo Cult, bent on reversing societal disdain. Although I will concede room for disagreement on how to interpret some of the material presented in the previous chapters, what seems beyond doubt is that the isolated bush camps of the RUF offered an alternative society to the conscripts, centred on meritocratic rather than gerontocratic or patrimonial principles, and that the loss of these camps to mercenary-assisted operations by government forces in the run-up to the peace accord plunged the movement into a fatally unstable paranoia. Loss of the camps undermined ideological leaders, and a group of unstable fighters assumed full control. The chapter concludes by reverting to a discussion of the 'greed not grievance' and 'new barbarism' theses, pointing to some of their limitations. Most data presented in this book point instead to a rural crisis created by unresolved tensions between land-holding elites and dislocated peasants or 'strangers'. This crisis was reinforced and triggered by a collapsing patrimonial state, resulting in the exclusion and marginalisation of rural youth.

The Epilogue describes the tensions between a returning land-holding group, engaged in attempts to restore patrimonial rule, and a large group of 'strangers' and young people with distant kinship ties – in this case RUF ex-combatants – who find it difficult to subject themselves to the 'traditional' group. These tensions are played out against the background of Tongo, the mining town described in the preamble, with housing a central concern. In the end the RUF ex-combatants are forced to comply with the restored regime, resuming their positions in a low-waged underclass sweating in the mining pits – where so many found themselves prior to the war and their conscription.

1 Voices from the Battlefield: Ex-Combatants' Views on Root Causes of the War and Their Reasons for Participation

Introduction

If scholars cannot agree about the root causes of the war in Sierra Leone, a different approach may be needed: one that pays more attention to those who experienced the conflict at first hand as combatants. This chapter presents ex-combatants' answers to question about causes of the war and why they took up arms. Ex-combatants tend to be ignored as a potential source, being considered too unreliable, too politicised, too traumatised, or, in the case of ex-child soldiers, just too young. But over the last decade or so various academic studies have appeared in which the agency of young fighters in 'new wars' is taken seriously. It is now recognised that these studies throw considerable light on the dynamics of the conflicts in question (cf. Peters and Richards 1998a, 1998b; Veale 2003; Brett and Specht 2004; Abdullah 2004; Peters 2004).

The format of this chapter is straightforward. A sample of informants is examined by faction (i.e., RUF, government army, and CDF) and their answers to the basic questions 'What caused the war?' and 'Why did you take part' are examined. The key to research of this kind is opportunity. The pattern of the war was complex, and intervals in the fighting over several years (1996, 1997, and 2001) followed by a definitive peace (2002 and onwards) opened up possibilities to work with various groups of demobilised or demobilising fighters. My approach is qualitative and contextual. A major check on information was to develop knowledge of the informant through patiently building rapport. I followed a number of informants over several years (sometimes back and forth between fighting and periods of peace). In one case, one informant made telephone contact with me on a regular basis and sent pictures to me taken with his small camera, something which he continued to do during periods of active combat with Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) RUF units in 1999. The nature of the work precluded a random-sampling approach. It is important, therefore, to note the existence of a major and well-designed quantitative study of ex-combatants passing through the formal demobilisation process (2000–2) by Humphreys and Weinstein (2004). This study samples more than a thousand ex-combatants from

all factions and provides a useful check on some of the conclusions I have drawn from detailed interview work with a much smaller group. My interviews (close to a hundred, including about sixty interviews with ex-RUF fighters and commanders) were conducted in both urban and rural settings, geographically spread over the country. The three major factions, the RUF, the CDF, and the SLA/AFRC (see Chapter 3), are all represented. Furthermore, both male and female ex-fighters were interviewed. Careful attention was paid to the inclusion of ordinary rank-and-file as well as commanders, and of those who were forcibly conscripted as well as those who joined voluntarily.[1] The extracts presented in this chapter are drawn from more extensive interviews with ex-combatants from all factions in the Sierra Leonean conflict (for further discussion of methods used in identifying and interviewing ex-combatants, see Chapter 4).

In the material presented here interviewed ex-combatants are categorised by their factional affiliation, and every interview fragment starts with a brief introduction highlighting key points the interviewee makes. Basic background information about each interviewee is also supplied.

RUF Ex-Combatants

The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF) was the main protagonist of the war in Sierra Leone. Led by Foday Sankoh, the movement entered Sierra Leone from Liberia in March 1991, aiming (so it said) to overthrow the oppressive one-party regime of President Momoh's All People's Congress (APC). It was not until early 2002 that peace returned to the country. By that time the RUF had lost the war, both militarily and by forfeiting any political support it might once have enjoyed. Denying the fact of local support for the RUF was one of the tactics used by the movement's many political opponents. But it seems that there was much more initial sympathy with its cause than these opponents would readily allow. A common – if guarded – reaction among many non-elite Sierra Leoneans, still sometimes expressed today, is that 'but for the needless atrocities committed by the Liberians[2] I too would have joined them willingly'.

The first interviewee is female (a young woman of 23 at the time of the interview in 2001),[3] and she joined the RUF shortly after it entered the country. When the rebels penetrated the eastern part of the country,

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[1] There is an ongoing debate about whether or not under-age combatants could join voluntarily, or whether their conscription was always forced, albeit sometimes in more subtle ways (cf. Brett and Specht 2004; McIntyre 2005; Wessells 2006).

[2] The Special Forces of the RUF were Liberian fighters on loan from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). These forces behaved with particular brutality against the population of eastern Sierra Leone.

[3] See also Peters 2004: 14.

war affected the local economy, and small-scale business activities – a common income-generating activity for many males and females – started to decline. Petty traders, like the mother of the interviewee, saw their income drop. School fees for their children could no longer be afforded. Out of school with nothing else to do, the interviewee became vulnerable to militia conscription. The RUF's agenda of jobs for all and free education became attractive to her and so she decided to join the RUF – voluntarily, as she is keen to stress. In fact, as she tells us, there were about twenty other young people of her village who were also willing recruits to the rebels' ranks.

I am 23 years of age and I was born in Kailahun district. I was born in a village, a big village. But during the war the whole village was burned down. Only a few houses are still there. . . . Before the war I stayed with my mother. My mother was doing business [petty trade] and I helped her sometimes. There was no time to play games. I went to school but I stopped in Form One [the beginning of secondary school]. There was no money left to go to school because the business of my mother was destroyed because of the war. That was the time the war came to Kailahun. At that time the situation became more difficult for us. The RUF came and asked us to join them. Because I was not doing anything and there was no person looking after me I decided to join them and take up arms to fight. . . . I joined the rebels purposely because of the difficulties we were having. We were suffering too much. The RUF was encouraging us to help them in their fight so that later we could enjoy a proper life. . . . There were about twenty young boys and girls in my village, seven girls and thirteen boys, who joined the RUF willingly, without any force. . . . The main reason [the RUF said it was fighting for] was the lack of job facilities and lack of encouragement for the youth.

The next interviewee (interviewed in 2001) is male and older (aged 37), born in Kailahun district. He was in effect a conscript. As with many others in the early days of the war, he did not join the rebels completely voluntarily, but neither was he bluntly forced. He was involved in the illicit mining sector, with a little gang of youths digging for him, while simultaneously working as a taxi-driver. When the rebels entered his area he was 'going up and down with them for some time' before he became fully affiliated to the movement: 'After some time they told me that it was better to join them and I agreed because there was no other alternative.' In this extract he talks, about the reasons the RUF gave for its struggle, and then explains about his and other (younger) recruits' motives in taking up arms.

They [the RUF] told us that they are fighting to overthrow the APC government because they exploited the people and were taking all the money to Europe to build mighty houses or buy luxurious cars and forgetting about the youth. We, the young people, do suffer a lot in this country. Greed and selfishness was another factor which made the rebel war come to Sierra Leone. Nobody was willing to help the young men, especially the politicians have no sympathy for the young men. When the ministers or the paramount chiefs want to pay a visit to any village they ask us to contribute rice and money, instead of bringing development

to the village. That too really inspired us to fight even more. . . . Actually we were fighting for awareness and also to have justice in the country. For example, if I have wrong you I will apologise to you, I will ask you to forgive me and not to go and summon me to go to the chiefs. We fought against bribery and corruption in the country. . . . We [the RUF] were fighting for righteousness and justice. [Q.: So if you were president of Sierra Leone, what would you do to prevent the war starting again?] If I become the president I will make all the youth to be engaged in skill training to avoid [the] idleness that will create confusion or make people commit crimes. If you do that for the youth they will not be any problem in this country. The young men should be encouraged by providing them with jobs. I think that will make the country stable. If I have my tools I will not go round town just being idle. I will survive through my trade.

The following account comes from a RUF commander who joined the movement voluntarily after he heard it explain its agenda. This man, interviewed in 2003 and born in Daru in 1959, attended the Bunumbu Teachers College before working as a teacher in one of the towns in Kailahun district. Bunumbu was a rural training college close to the Liberian border. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) programmes in the 1970s and 1980s encouraged an idealistic, self-reliant approach to village education, somewhat inspired by the ideas of reformers such as Paulo Freire. The college later supplied some of the key ideologues in the RUF. Its contribution to student radicalisation in Sierra Leone has been neglected in debates about the lack of ideological content in the RUF, dominated by Freetown-based radical intellectuals (cf. Rashid 1997). Both at Bunumbu and later in village teaching, the commander experienced at first hand what it meant to have a government (APC) which paid little or no attention to rural education, especially in Kailahun district, seen as a hotbed of anti-APC agitation. About the causes of the war he is clear: lack of support by the elders for the youth.

I went to Pendembu to start my work as a teacher. That was in 1986. But I was not paid in time. In fact, I did not like the teaching because the pay was so poor, if it came at all. . . . That government [the APC government] . . . if you criticised them they just sent these APC youths to you with their 'batons', their sticks. Instead of encouraging you they threatened you. . . . I joined [the RUF] voluntarily. That was on April 15th, 1991. It was when Pendembu was captured by the RUF. Upon entering they explained the causes what made them to fight. They also explained their different laws, like that you were not allowed to steal, rape and travelling without their permission. After a week I joined because their ideology made sense to me. Most of the examples they give about corruption and misbehaviour of the government, well, I was experiencing that myself. I was a victim of that myself. They did not force me to join, it was my own choice. . . . The root cause [of the war] was that the elders ignored the youth, both in the educational field as well as in the social field. The RUF was a youth movement. It was only because we lacked a good propaganda machine that the tide turned against us. The old politicians were our targets.

A last and brief extract (from an interview in 2003) comes from an older RUF conscript, but this time a female, who became an education officer in the RUF. Born in 1958 she first worked for the Ministry of Education and knew about inside corrupt practices of the pre-war government as far as education was concerned.

[Q.: How was the educational system during the APC days?] It was not good. To attend a school you had to pay high school fees. And the teachers were not paid in time. Sometimes it was delayed for many months so they started to strike. During the APC days a poor man did not have any rights. If you go to court as a poor man the rich man will always win. That was what caused the war. Siaka Stevens [Prime-Minister and later President from 1968 to 1985] said that everybody should go back to [the bush] to start brushing [clearing land] rather than going to school.

SLA/AFRC Ex-Combatants

The Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) under APC President Momoh (1985–92) started to fight the RUF when it entered the country in 1991. Junior officers deposed Momoh in a coup in 1992, but continued fighting the RUF. In 1996 a democratic government took control of the country, but, not trusting the loyalty of the army, it side-lined the soldiers. In 1997 the sidelined army staged another successful coup, but this time invited the RUF to share power. The new leaders called themselves the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (henceforth AFRC). The AFRC termed its combined SLA/RUF forces the 'people's army' – a term borrowed from Museveni's Libyan-supported rebellion in Uganda (see also Chapter 8). Driven out of Freetown by Nigerian-led ECOMOG peace enforcers in February/March 1998, most of the army units reverted to government control after the 1999 Lomé peace accords. RUF units remained intact and opposed to the government. The corrupted RSLMF was disbanded in 1998, and a new army was formed from 1999, with international, British-led, training inputs. In general I refer to the government's official forces as the Sierra Leone Army (SLA). Where there is need to refer specifically to the pre-1997 army I term it the RSLMF (its correct acronym) and identify the post-1999 army as the new Sierra Leone Armed Forces (SLAF, the correct post-war acronym).

The first extract comes from an interview in 1997 with an ex-combatant who had served in the army.[4] He is a young man (in fact a former child soldier), first recruited as a RSLMF irregular after losing contact with his family in a RUF raid in the south of the country. He speaks with feeling about the lack of opportunity for young people in the country. Other countries know that children are the future, but here

[4] For the full interview, see Peters and Richards 1998b: 608–16.

there is no respect for the young. Nobody listens to children. The older generation think only 'I was born before you so I know everything, you know nothing'. But this is not right. The world is changing. The children know things their parents have not experienced and do not understand. Nothing has made this more obvious than the war itself, in which combat has opened the eyes of the very young to aspects of human existence of which an older generation of civilians is blissfully or wilfully unaware. (Peters and Richards 1998b).

I'm sixteen years old.... I was born in M. J. in the south of Sierra Leone. [Q.: Who bears the fault of the starting of this war?] Well, I can blame Foday Sankoh, but Momoh is the most [responsible]. Because when the war started, he told the people that the war will stop in ninety days, and he didn't do it.... At that time he [Sankoh] was not so strong and everything would have been finished by now. But [Momoh] was afraid... he didn't give direction to the soldiers, you know. Until the soldiers decided to come to the town... and [then] he ran away. So all this comes from his days. And during his days there was too much person-ality, you know, 'favour-want-person'. If you are fortunate that your relative is a minister, you can do anything you like and nobody will [query] you. [Q.: What do you think about the future of Sierra Leone?] The future of Sierra Leone? I don't really know where the future is going, because it is just somehow bad, now. I have not seen any improvement. Because one thing [is for] sure, we don't respect kids, we don't respect children. In other countries, the top will know that after them the children will be next. But here they don't really know that. They just work in their own interest, and not in the interest of the children, you know. So I don't really know how the future can be good. Because if they are working in the interest of the children and try to make the children good, I think the future will be good. But if they don't care about the children, it means the future is just dropping. So I think Sierra Leone is indigent. Everybody just has to fight for themselves, you know.... They don't listen to children in Sierra Leone... if you want to say something to your father or your mother, they can say 'No, don't say anything to me. I was born before you were, so I know everything'. But that is not really correct. You might be born before me, but I can see something you cannot. They don't realise that in this country. So what they feel like doing when they are bigger... they think that everything that they think about is the best. And we cannot think about something that is good. They don't even count children, to know what children are really about, you know.

The following extract derives from an interview conducted in 2001[5] with a former child soldier who joined the army when he was twelve or thirteen. He first fought under the RSLMF and later became part of the 'people's army', the AFRC/RUF junta forces. The war brought an end to his education and under increasingly difficult circumstances at home he started to affiliate with the soldiers in the nearby barracks, a history that many other under-age irregular recruits would recognise. Now demobilised, he is quite frank that only an opportunity to continue

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[5] See also Peters 2004: 14, 18.

his education will prevent him from joining the army again. Even if he did not want to join, as soon as the war reaches his new place, Kenema, he knows he must join, both due to the pressure of his former army colleagues and to protect himself from possible revenge by the civilians. Civilian revenge – especially against child soldiers – is a major under-explored factor in the dynamics of the Sierra Leone war and was raised by Amnesty International as early as 1992.

I was born in Kailahun district. At Daru, close to the barracks. The village was called K. . . . I am 21 years of age. . . . They [my parents] were farmers. They had a rice farm. But as soon as the war started it became very difficult to make a farm. But we were still trying to make a farm during the war. During 1991 when the war started there was no farming and schooling going on in our part, the Kailahun district. There was no education going on there. That led to our degradation. During 1991 and 1992 we were doing nothing. There was no education but there was fighting everywhere. We were just close to the barracks. You could not escape the fighting. And that led me to be with them [the soldiers], gradually I was getting involved in that. I started being with them, doing work for them. By that time I was a small boy. I was around them getting water for them [the soldiers] and such. That is how the interaction started. You know, at that time it was very difficult to stay with my people, because the life was very hard. So I came to the soldiers and presented myself and made friends with them. The barracks were very close to my place, not even a mile away. . . . [Q.: Would you go back to the soldiers if the situation goes bad again for you?] You mean going back to join them. Well, why not, because presently I am not well cared for. Although she [his foster-mother] is trying [to pay], it is difficult to pay my school fees, because it is becoming too expensive. And because there is nothing else for me to do here. My mother is not here, my brothers are not here. My father is dead. So who can take care of me? . . . Yes, I will go back to them. That is the only thing. I might find another job. But if there is a war situation it is more advantageous to go back to the soldiers because if the soldiers know that you have been with them before, whenever they would come back, they would go to you first. But even more important, if the people hear that you were a member of a group before, they deal with you. People are so illiterate, even after you have left a group they would still consider you as being a rebel. So you have to join them again. So then it would be very hard for them to harm you. You can get rid of them instead of them getting rid of you.

The following young ex-soldier, interviewed in 2001,[6] has a rather similar story: the war halted his education, after which he became involved with the soldiers in the barracks. Resentful about the situation the rebels created, and after clearly indicating that he and the soldiers were fighting against the RUF and not secretly collaborating with them, he neverthe-less expresses his understanding of why so many young people – their education disrupted and without jobs – decided to join the rebel movement. His analysis of the political situation in Sierra Leone also begins

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[6] See also Peters 2004: 15, 20.

to sound familiar: what Sierra Leone is lacking is a good educational system and development. The elders in general, and more specifically the politicians, do not care about the young people. They send their own children to expensive overseas schools but forget about the children of others, without education or prospects.

[Q.: Why did you actually become a soldier?] Well, it is obvious. Before the war we were attending school, right. But as soon as the war entered Sierra Leone everything went berserk, everything was destroyed. . . . There was no education, that made us to join. And the rebels had destroyed everything, that was another reason for us to join. It was only unfortunately that the whole situation went berserk and the soldiers fought together with the rebels [during the days of the AFRC junta], but before that time these guys [the soldiers] were really fighting against the rebels. From the starting point, they suffered a lot. . . . It [Sierra Leone] is suffering because of the lack of technological development. We have all types of resources, but we lack technology. That is because the educational system is very poor, the youths are not encouraged to be educated. If we are educated and used to these different technological aspects, Sierra Leone as a very small country will be improved. . . . I [would] like to see overseas countries if I have the opportunity. But you know, our forefathers did that: for instance, if you see a minister, he will not bank his money here, he will do it in the overseas countries. He will send his children to the overseas countries to be educated. And we do not know why they are doing that. Is it because of the poor situation of the country? . . . We are lacking job facilities here. There are a lot of educated people here, but there are no jobs. . . . They [the elders] are not really encouraging the youth. There is no job facility. You will see educated youths without jobs, just moving around. If at the end of the day that particular person hears about some rebels, he can join them, just to survive. That is why most of these guys decided to join the rebels, because they were not having jobs. Some were educated, but they decided to join the rebels instead of sitting down [to] waste their time. That is why most of the youths joined the rebels. That is the major reason. Because of lack of jobs. . . . Most of them [who joined the RUF] were not forced. Some were forced but most of them were not forced. Some were just saying, let us find these people and join them. Because their major theme was to change the government, and the system. Because that system was a rotten system, that was their major theme. Because the country is lacking job facilities and the government is not trying to encourage the youth, so let us try to remove the system. It is a rotten system.

The final extract in this RSLMF/SLA/AFRC series introduces an ex-soldier, 24 at the time of the interview in 2001,[7] who first joined the army, and later – a year after demobilisation in 1996 – joined the Kamajoisia (CDF) to fight against the AFRC/RUF junta.

At 1991 when my dad passed away I was alone. Nobody said, 'Come, let me help you'. So I decided to join the SLA [RSLMF] at Kenema because there their training base was. . . . By then [being] a young man could be a serious [source of]

[7] See also Peters 2004: 26, 27, 29.

harassment for any young man who was not a soldier. They used to humiliate us and to molest us even up to the point where they killed some of us. So you do not have an alternative other than to join them. And we also wanted to defend our motherland, but in 1994 the RUF overrun us, so here it became a rebel territory. . . . In 1997, when the soldiers overthrew Pa Kabbah [President Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah, elected in 1996] they called upon all the ex-soldiers to join them, but we did not do it because they [had] already mingled with the RUF. They were killing innocent lives and destroyed private properties so I did not join them. So we went into the bush to join the Kamajors. . . . [Q.: What made the war come to Sierra Leone?] It was due to the joblessness. We, the youth were idle by then. The APC government never provided any support for the youth, but instead exploited the country's wealth. They went to Europe to build houses, forgetting about the youth. That is why so many youths joined hands together to fight and overthrow the APC government from power. . . . If the youth is not satisfied, there will be a problem in the future. And it can easily create another new war in Sierra Leone. . . . I will join them [the combatants] to fight if there is no encouragement from the government or any leader who is in power. . . . [Q.: How do the elders consider the youth?] They levy high fines on the youth if you are sent to do a job and you refuse. Up till now the chiefs are pressuring us. They can summon you and no sooner as you appear, they start to fine you making you to pay a lot of money.

CDF/Kamajoisia Ex-Combatants

From the early days of the conflict, specialist hunters – typically one or two such men could be found in larger villages in the more forested parts of the Liberian border region before the war – began to help the army as scouts, a role in which their familiarity with the local terrain was invaluable. The ineffectiveness of an army without counter-insurgency training in protecting civilians and villages from raids by forest-based rebel guerrillas then led traditional hunters to organise themselves for village civil defence from about 1992–3 (cf. Muana 1997), and increasingly in the years following they were deployed beyond their home villages and chiefdoms. These hunters are known in Mende, the main language of the south and east, as *kamajoi* or *kamasoi* (sing.)/*kamajoisia* (pl.), a word generally anglicised for the benefit of foreign journalists, fascinated by the phenomenon, as 'kamajors'. In 1996, the newly elected democratic government, probably with advice from South African counter-insurgency specialists working for EO (cf. Fithen and Richards 2005), began to formalise and expand the various hunter units into the national CDF. One or two hunters per village do not make a national civil defence force. The key development in 1996 was the introduction of mass initiation according to the rites of the hunter craft. Most 'kamajoisia' had probably never shot a large animal in their life. They were mainly village farmers or unemployed urban youth without better prospects who were able to borrow money

to pay for initiation. In other words, the CDF was not a traditional village institution, but a modern militia, using traditional initiation, formed during the war to counter threats from both the RUF and a disloyal government army. The CDF was strongly backed by the SLPP government, even though the president denied any ability to control or command the CDF and its special units, including former RSLMF soldiers loyal to the new regime, trained and supported for counter-insurgency operations by EO. Later, after EO was required to leave Sierra Leone under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and parties to the Abidjan Peace Process, a British private defence contractor, Sandline International, took over from EO and provided training and support to the CDF and special army units. The CDF had the support of the majority of civilians in the south and east of the country, and in some parts of the north, where hybrid units emerged, based on local hunter idioms but sometimes initiated by Mende initiators from the south. From its start in 1992 the 'kamajoi' movement, later the CDF, had been fervently opposed to the RUF.

The first extract[8] from the interview series covering voices of CDF/Kamajoisia ex-combatants provides a most telling political analysis of the war. Here is a young man, eighteen at the time of the interview (1996) who took up combat when he was sixteen because his schooling had been halted by RUF attacks on Kono. He is bitter towards the RUF for disrupting village life and his education. Fallen fighters are not even buried because they are 'the enemy'. And yet he understands the RUF and what they are fighting for with remarkable insight. First he concludes the RUF cadres are, like himself, students or would-be educated youngsters. The letters they leave behind in the villages they attack outline their aims and beliefs, and he also concludes that their bitterness stems from a corrupt patrimonial system that fails to deliver education and jobs except to a favoured few. Yet he is also aware that the movement's major strategic mistake was to import violent methods of destabilisation from Liberia (see Chapters 3 and 5) and target them on the poorest of the poor, instead of aiming directly at the oppressive one-party regime.

The time I started to go to school I was just age five or six. I thank the Almighty, because I was brilliant in school. But then the war approached. But I said when this situation is normal I will go back to school. The reason why I took part in the war was because there was no education in our headquarters. . . . [In the future I will like to be educated.] Because of the too much illiteracy, the way our brothers in Sierra Leone don't know their rights. Because when you are educated, you know your rights. [Q.: What are the reasons this war started and continues?]

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8 For the full interview, see Peters and Richards 1998a: 195–201.

Well, according to my own view, [it started and continues] because when the rebels caught some of our brothers and sisters they took them along with them and told them the reason why they are fighting. Because of the past government, the APC government, the way the government maltreated people. No freedom of speech. When you emphasise on your rights, they take you to court or jail you. And the same bad thing with education. Most of the rebels are students, the majority are students. [Q.: How do you know?] They write on paper that they drop. After an attack, they write a message and drop it. These are the reasons why they are fighting, they say. The government doesn't give any encouragement to people to get land or to go to school. When you come from poor families, but with talent to be educated, there is no financial support. The government doesn't give a helping hand. They are only bothered about themselves. This was the reason this government made the war to come, according to my own view. When the [rebel] people attacked a place, the paper, the document they leave at that place, when you come and read the document, this [gives] the[ir] reason to fight. . . . The other reason is assistance. If Mister A happens to be in the head-office [top position], and you, Mister Z, you don't know him, there is no political influence between you and him. So when you come with your problem to him, he will not assist you. Only if you are the man who [is wanted] by him, whether his son, his brother's son, or his brother's relation or his wife's sister's relation, or his relatives. But for you as a low man, when you come to that person, to that official in that place, he will not give you any assistance. Because he doesn't know you. This made the war to come. [Q.: But are these good reasons to fight?] Yes. But if the rebels had come peacefully, if they hadn't stolen our people, hadn't burnt our villages . . . if they hadn't done anything that harmed us . . . but if they had only gone to the government with blood. . . . If they had come trustfully to the government, come and attended to the government, we sure [would] have been glad. Because, according to their view they are fighting for their rights. That was the reason why the war came, the reason why I was against them. They are fighting for their rights, but during their fight for their rights, they go to the villages. They go to [persons] who don't know anything about the government. They go and kill [them] and steal [their] property. That was the reason why I was against them. But if the rebels [had come] down here [to Freetown] to this people . . . because these are the people who created the war . . . if the rebels would have come to them, plenty of Sierra Leoneans would have supported them. But because they went and [attacked] the poor, that's why I was against them. Because when you consider the rebels the way they think about [them] in the provinces, it is that they are just armed bandits. They are just thieves.

The second CDF ex-combatant presented here was born in a small village in Kenema district, and was 36 years old at the time of the interview (2001). He joined the CDF voluntarily after his village was attacked by the RUF. Fighting since 1995, he is now demobilised and has some clear suggestions about how to get those still under arms (in 2001) out of the bush and disarmed: specifically, make sure NCDDR[9] keeps its

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[9] NCDDR was responsible for executing the DDR programme, designed to assist combatants in their transition from fighter to civilian. The Abidjan peace accord (1996) included a DDR programme for the combatants of the various factions. However, since

promises. He is equally straight about the causes of the war, which he locates in the way the chiefs were maltreating young people and fining them for minor offences. He is quite confident about the future of Sierra Leone, when democracy will make malpractices of this kind impossible. Awareness and democracy, he believes, are among the good changes the war brought to the country.

It was early morning around 6 a.m. The rebels came and attacked the village. So we moved from the village and left all our properties behind, but after some days we returned to the village to find out if the few things we left behind were still there. However, everything was looted and that is the reason why we are struggling up to this point. This happened in 1995. . . . I decided [to join the CDF] out of my own free will. It was because we were tired of running from the rebels so we started to chase them from their territories. Nobody forced me to join the Kamajoi society. . . . [Q. The demobilisation process is going on for some time now but there are still fighters hiding in the bush. What is the best way to get them out and get them to give up their arms?] If they are willing to go out of the bush or not, it is depending on the way the disarmament process is going. For instance, if you say 'Come and disarm and I will give you something' but then you fail to fulfil that promise, I will tell my brothers in the bush not to come. . . . The DDR is very slow and they are not giving what they promised, like the reintegration package for instance. All what they promised they do not do it rapidly. If the process is fast, all the young men holding guns will come out in large numbers. So if the DDR is fulfilling their promises everything would be all right.

The reason for that [the war] was that most of the young men and women were suffering and also our chiefs and some elderly men were doing wrong to our young men and women in this village. If such things are happening in this village some young men will prefer to go and join the RUF, either to take revenge or to protect themselves. That is why some joined the RUF. Some young people joined because of the greed that existed before the war. . . . [A way to change the country for the better is] for instance, if we notice that you as a chief will accept bribes or are doing bad, we will have to kick you out of power because now we have a democratic government and we have to fight for our rights. We cannot run away from any chief any more because this is a democracy; we have to stand up for our right to make sure that it will not be misused again. If you do wrong to us we will take you to the paramount chief or the resident minister or even to the president. . . . If he fails to comply with us, we will go on strike. And if you, as a bad chief, will send us anywhere to brush some land or do some other work, we will refuse. If we refuse once or twice, you may summon us to the highest authority but then we will explain what you have done to us. . . . The good effect of the war is that we will fight for our rights now because we are a democracy now.

The next extract comes from an interviewee who was born in Freetown but who considers a small town in Kenema district as his home.

the accord did not hold, no substantial numbers of fighters disarmed. The Lomé peace accord of 1999 included a new DDR programme under which in the end more than 70,000 combatants disarmed and reintegrated (see Chapter 7).

Twenty-four years of age at the time of the interview in 2001, he joined the CDF in 1998, mainly to escape from constant harassment by the armed factions. On the causes of the war he is clear: lack of employment opportunities for young people diverted some to drug use, after which they left for the bush and joined the RUF. His solution is equally straight-forward: to prevent another war young people should be motivated by education and access to jobs.

There was a lot of pressure in the country, more specifically for the civilians. Whenever you met the RUF, the SLA or the Kamajoisia, they will harass you. That made me to decide to join the Kamajoisia. . . . [I did not join the SLA because] I wanted to defend my motherland and the soldiers have converted themselves to the RUF by then. . . . Well [the reason for the war was that] there were no jobs for the youth and some became drug addicts. So they preferred to go to the bush [to join the rebels]. . . . If they refuse to address the needs of the youth, there will be a tendency for another war. . . . The youth should be given their rights, such as work or the possibility of learning a skill or trade.

The next CDF interviewee[10] was born in Kailahun and was 32 years old when interviewed (2001).[11] What makes his case interesting is that he was forced to run away from his village after he was found guilty by the village chief of what he claims was a minor offence against a customary law. Vagrancy as a result of petty and trumped-up cases seems to be a recurrent feature of the Sierra Leone countryside. It was often these outlaws who proved most vulnerable to RUF conscription. But in this man's case the dice rolled the other way: the RUF launched an attack on his uncle's village where he was taking refuge and he then decided to join the CDF to defend his people. If he had experienced harsh treatment by government soldiers, or had no relative willing to lodge him, he might just as easily have joined the RUF. This interviewee once more locates the cause of the war in the high levels of unemployment for Sierra Leonean youth. In particular he mentions the *dregman dem*[12] and those living away from their families as likely RUF recruits.

Well, my father died a long time ago. After that there was nobody who would be responsible for me and so I left school. My mother was still alive, however, with my little sister. So I stayed with them to take care of them. There was nobody else there for them. That made the war to come; the elders were not really helping us. They cannot help any young person. Even if you have only minor problems, they can exaggerate it, taking it to the district chief – and then you, as a young man, cannot handle the case any more and have to run away. So at some stage there was a case brought to the chief and I was accused. So I ran away and hid.

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[10] See Peters 2004.
[11] See also Peters 2004: 26.
[12] *Dregman dem* [Krio]: people who survive by 'dregging', that is, picking up any kind of irregular work.

I went to my uncle in another village. By then it was the time that the war started. My uncle had a large family. The rebels came and killed my uncle so I had to take care of both families now. The rebels continued to attack the people in the village, innocent people. Then I heard about the Kamajoi society, so I decided to join them, instead of the RUF, so that I would be able to defend my people. I took arms to fight and since that time I have been fighting up to now. But it was the bad government at that time that made so many young men to join the fighting. There were no jobs, even if you were educated, there was no job for you. And some could not finish their education, so they had to work hard first before they were able to go back to school again. So these boys without jobs, we call them *dregman* [pl. *dregman dem*], moving around every day to look out for work, joined the fighting. They joined the RUF. I was in the village doing agriculture. But those who were not doing farmwork joined the RUF. As soon as they heard about the RUF they joined. They think that the farmwork is tedious. This is the specific way so many young people joined the fighting. . . . Some young men joined the RUF because of lack of jobs or because they dropped out of school. If they heard about the RUF, they can join them because if you have a gun you can get money or you can get women. One, two, or even three women. But for the CDF it was different. The CDF was voluntary work. You join it to defend your people. If you feel any sympathy for your people you join the CDF. The CDF cannot force you to join. It was because the RUF was killing innocent people, I joined the CDF.

In these accounts we have heard young Sierra Leoneans complaining frequently about lack of jobs and the way the elders maltreat youths. In this last extract the interviewee once more cites the root causes of the conflict as the lack of jobs, and the greediness and the corruption of a chiefly rural elite, originally empowered under colonial rule – but this time what is striking is that the interviewee is no longer a youth himself. This ex-CDF fighter was born in Kailahun district and was already 50 years old when interviewed in 2001.

I was a farmer. I had a cocoa farm and a coffee farm. But what me made to take up arms was when the rebels came in they started to kill civilians. So I called upon my friends and said that we had to protect ourselves. . . . The war came because of joblessness and greediness. And some [big] people were corrupt, spending money on their girlfriends rather than their employees. There was no honesty. The APC was not honest. . . . The paramount chiefs were not honest because if the APC government is corrupt, the chiefs will get involved in that. . . . The [local] chiefs were also not honest because they did not tell the truth. If there is a case, the one who did wrong and will lose can easily bribe the chief and so becomes the winner. These are some of the grievances which made the war to come. . . . Still the same chiefs and paramount chiefs are in place, but they can be changed if the law is rightly enforced upon them. I will believe in the government for that because I can see the examples. They brought education to this country. . . . The future needs are unity and work. Nobody can convince us then to fight any more. The elders did not take care of the youth. That made the war to come. If you were having it right, they turned it to wrong.

Discussion

These accounts show remarkable similarities, and it is difficult to distinguish between the analyses and motivations of ex-RUF, ex-SLA/AFRC, or ex-CDF/Kamajoisia fighters without prior knowledge of their status. In these extracts all those I interviewed – young or old, persons of relatively high or low rank, and men and women – agree to a large extent about the causes of the war that provided a rationale for participation – namely political corruption and lack of education and jobs. One thing seems clear, therefore: despite belonging to opposing factions, ex-combatants share an understanding of the war and of what motivated fighters to join it (obviously, where revenge is stated as a reason, the fighters in question accuse the opposing faction). Perhaps this shared understanding of the war comes less as a surprise if one takes into account one of the findings of the quantitative study by Humphreys and Weinstein (2004), which abundantly confirms that the fighters of the RUF and CDF were hardly distinguishable in terms of rural background, low access to education, and pre-war poverty (as proxied by housing quality). In other words, the war was in the main fought by the rural poor.

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence is one way of replying to a familiar critique that the criminal 'dregs' of society would invariably want to cover up their activities under a veneer of post-war rationalisation. Collier (2001) makes that point forcefully, backed by Mkandawire (2002). Both question the methodological validity of testimony such as I have given here:

In a situation where individuals commit terrible crimes, the need for rationalisation is enormous, so that one cannot take the ex-post explanations of individuals as evidence of the preferences for the sequence of their reasoning. A retrospective account of what drove them to commit the crimes is likely to be self-serving. And the motives and opportunities for concealing what one did and why are virtually unlimited. (Mkandawire 2002: 186)

How far can we take the testimony of fighters seriously? The various methods used to guard against the danger of *post hoc* rationalisation while collecting data are explained in Chapter 4. But, to start with, it might be interesting to recall some statements in the interview fragments, to question the 'likely to be self-serving' character of retrospective accounts. For instance, the first interviewee – the female ex-RUF combatant – could easily have adapted herself to the 'victim' discourse by stating that she was abducted and subsequently forced to join the RUF, with all of its consequences. Instead she is keen to state that she 'joined the rebels purposely'. And what sort of act of concealment is it for an ex-combatant to state that he 'will go back to them' (the soldiers) if he is not better cared for than he is at the moment, as the SLA/AFRC ex-child combatant states? And of what benefit is it to the ex-CDF fighter to

state that he understands the reasons why the rebels – his enemies who disrupted his highly valued educational career – were fighting and that 'most of the rebels are students, the majority are students'? In short, a critic of Mkandawire's stripe will need to show that the statements whose objectivity he so doubts actually do serve a self-serving purpose.

It is true that there are serious methodological limitations in basing explanations solely on interview material, especially when allowing one-self the freedom to pick out only those anecdotes which underscore a particular perspective. But the analyses put forward in this book try to avoid those errors, by being based on (1) extensive interviews with a wide variety of subjects, both ex-combatants – of all factions and ranks, and voluntary as well as abducted recruits – and civilians;[13] (2) historical analysis of the socio-economic situation of young people in Sierra Leone, to provide an objective context for many of the claims interviewees make; and (3) cross-reference to quantitative data, collected by several research teams.

The next chapter offers a historical analysis of the Sierra Leonean state and rural society, to examine whether claims of exclusion and margin-alisation, so widely asserted by ex-combatants as responsible for their predicament, in fact might be true.

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[13] Throughout this monograph interview extracts with civilians are presented. However, this study focuses predominantly on understanding the armed conflict from the com-batants' perspective, and more specifically the RUF perspective. Hence, the majority of the extracts presented are from interviews conducted among ex-combatants.

2   The Socio-Economic Crisis of Rural Youth

Introduction

The root causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone, as suggested by the ex-combatants presented in the previous chapter, can be divided into two kinds. One group consists of issues playing out on the local level: complaints about a general unwillingness of seniors to help their juniors; the injustice meted out by local courts controlled by corrupt elders and chiefs; and the control these elders exercised over productive and reproductive means, such as land and labour, and the resources necessary for marriage. The other group of causes plays out at the national or state level. Here, the focus is on the state's failure to provide accessible education for all; lack of job opportunities; and desire for a democratic system to replace an unfair and divisive clientelism. Gberie criticises some Western academics, conciliators, and aid agency workers for 'presenting the murderous RUF as something of a misunderstood and misrepresented rural rebellion against the failed "patrimonial" state of Sierra Leone' (2005: 13). But, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it was not only Western observers or aid workers who interpreted the conflict like this; many of the combatants who participated did so too.

This chapter offers a historical analysis to examine whether indeed Sierra Leone was a patrimonial state, and why this system failed to meet the expectations of many of its subjects. Attention is also paid to the social system in rural areas, to test if and how customary courts were manipulated to extract the labour and financial means of a rural underclass. However, to separate the local and national in this way is to some extent artificial. The national (the state or government) and local levels have always interacted, with influences exercised in both directions.

The Making and Collapse of the State in Sierra Leone[1]

Slaves and Ex-Slaves

Rather little is presently known about the early history of Sierra Leone. According to Opala (1996) it can be understood best in terms of waves of in-migration. Linguistic analysis suggests that – of present-day indigenous ethnic groups – the Limba were among the first to enter Sierra Leone, and that the Mande-speaking groups, including the Mende, Loko, Koranko, Yalunka, Susu, Kono, and Vai, were among the later arrivals, entering the region of modern Sierra Leone within the last 600 years (Opala 1996). Before the Portuguese 'discovered' Sierra Leone in 1462, the indigenous people on the coast already had important trade links with the inland people, and through them with the peoples of the early empires of the Western Sudan, Ghana, and Mali (Buah 1986). Trade items included ivory, gold, slaves, and kola nuts.

With the arrival of the Portuguese on the coast a new era started. Long-distance trade routes no longer ran exclusively to and from the Sahel region, but new networks started to develop, first with Europe and later with the newly discovered Americas. The trade in slaves – required as plantation workers in the 'New World' colonies of European powers – quickly became important and lucrative. The Sierra Leone estuary, with its deep channels running inland, offered excellent harbourage for the ships which took in slaves and fresh water for the journey west (Fyfe 1962: 7). In 1518 the Spanish shipped their first batch of slaves directly from West Africa to the Americas and by the end of the seventeenth century nearly 2 million West African slaves had arrived in America and the Caribbean (Buah 1986). However, the peak of the Triangular Trade – sugar, tobacco, rice, and cotton from the Americas to Europe; metal goods, cloth, firearms, and alcohol from Europe to Africa; and slaves from Africa to the Americas – was yet to come. The total number of slaves from West Africa to the New World has provoked controversy. Not counting deaths caused by raiding and collection, the most widely accepted estimate is about 11 million, but some put the figure as high as 15 million–20 million. Christopher Fyfe (1962: 19) puts the annual number of slaves sold from the Sierra Leone area in the eighteenth century at about 3,000. Certainly, the Atlantic trade had a major impact on demography within the region, exacerbating labour shortages in agriculture, for example, and – perhaps more important – having a major impact on the evolution of political institutions. Slaving tended to consolidate the power of chiefs and armed merchants.

In the early nineteenth century several European countries made it illegal for their nationals to own, sell, or buy slaves. However, it was only in 1834 that slavery was abolished in the British West Indies. If this spelt a definitive end for British interests, other countries continued to trade slaves across the Atlantic, meaning that although more than 100,000 slaves were set free by British navy ships operating in West African waters, perhaps a million others reached the Americas and the Caribbean during the first half of the nineteenth century (Buah 1986).[2]

The origins of Sierra Leone as a colony are bound up with the ending of the slave trade. In the 1780s, a group of black former soldiers of the English army in North America and various domestic slaves set free when the courts in Great Britain forbade slavery on British soil petitioned the British government to be allowed to resettle in Africa. They arrived in 1787 on the Sierra Leone peninsula and founded a settlement that was later to become Freetown. Supported by worthies such as Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp, and William Wilberforce, and by the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, more groups of ex-slaves were resettled in this newly created enclave on the Sierra Leone peninsula. In 1792, the Nova Scotians – former slaves who had fought for the British during the American Revolution – joined the colony, and in 1800 the Maroons – escaped slaves living in the mountains of Jamaica – also settled in Sierra Leone. The largest group resettling in Freetown were Recaptives – those taken off slave ships captured by the British Navy after 1807 (Opala 1996). They were Africans from other parts of the continent, captured but not yet institutionalised by slavery. They became the dominant group among the four highly diverse sets of people just mentioned who formed what was to become the Krio community of Freetown and environs.

From Crown Colony to Protectorate

In the year 1808 the settlement for freed slaves on the peninsula of today's Sierra Leone was declared a colony of the British crown. Freetown became the capital. British administrators worked closely with the increasingly educated Krio community, who considered themselves as 'British Africans' and felt superior to the indigenous population. Modern education became the key to African advancement, and a small higher education institution, Fourah Bay College, and several secondary schools flourished in Freetown from the early decades of the nineteenth century. From the middle of the century, wealthier Krio merchant families sent

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[2] For instance, the Galinhas, a coastal strip halfway between Freetown and Monrovia, was boosted as a slave port by the abolition of the British slave trade, since it was far enough away from Freetown and navy patrols were infrequent. A rough estimation gives the total number of slaves exported from this area as around 60,000 between the years 1816 and 1846 (Jones 1983).

their children to Britain for higher education – in medicine and law, for example. This history – linking modern education and social recognition in a colonial world increasingly riven by racism – is important to understanding why state failure in recent times has been seen by many young people as a dereliction of the duty of the state to educate its young talent, and why militia membership is seen by some young people as a kind of alternative modern education, rather than as the 'mindless violence' perceived by outsiders (cf. Kaplan 1996).

In the nineteenth century the Freetown colony expanded into the interior only slowly. The foremost interest of the crown colony administration was trade with the hinterland. Treaties were made with up-country kings[3] to protect the trade routes and to enhance Britain's role as peace maker in local disputes (Opala 1996). As an effect,

Almost unnoticed, the colonial preoccupation with extending influence had begun to restructure indigenous society. Chiefs built their authority with British aid but in a manner that denied colonial rulers direct control. Their positions as mediators for alien rulers, while pursuing their own political objectives and economic opportunities, fundamentally shaped the ways in which colonial administrators were able to exercise and extend British authority. (Reno 1995: 35)

In 1896 the British declared a protectorate over the hinterland (up to the boundaries of present-day Sierra Leone, more or less). This was done for three main reasons: (1) to bypass the Freetown African community and the sometimes opportunistic interior chiefs; (2) to halt a period of about 15 years of interior chaos caused by 'a succession of captains or freebooters whose constant plundering and slave-raiding affected even the coast and the colony [Freetown] borders' (Fenton 1948: 1); and (3) to be able to make claims on territory (in opposition to the French) during Europe's 'Scramble for Africa'. Reaction to a tax introduced in 1896 by the British to support the newly created protectorate and to develop a railway network (see Fyfe 1962: 153) sparked an indigenous rebellion known as the 'Hut Tax War'. Although chiefs were entitled to keep a share of the tax in return for acting as revenue agent, some chiefs refused to participate 'in what they perceived to be the demeaning exercise of tax collection for a higher political authority' (Reno 1995: 37). Fear that the Protectorate Ordinance would extend Freetown law into the interior, and thus deprive the chiefs of their domestic slaves, was also a factor. It took the British two months to suppress the rising. Rebellious chiefs were executed. But the British soon found they lacked the manpower to rule the interior, and sought replacement chiefs. These new chiefs – ruling at the discretion of the British, with certain traditional

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[3] Jones (1983: 13) suggests that the word 'king' is not really appropriate in this context. 'Overlord' would better describe the position of these rulers.

(that is pre-protectorate) prerogatives guaranteed – were to become key players in the economic development of the protectorate, since they were the ones who exercised real authority over the indigenous population – through British-backed chiefdom courts dispensing 'customary' justice, for example.

The British pulled back from a full implementation of Freetown law in the newly created protectorate, arguing – after the chiefly rebellion – that modern (that is British-inspired) institutions were not yet appropriate for a socially primitive terrain; instead, they created a system of 'indirect rule' for the new interior districts. Under this system the powers of the most important chiefs were increased (Keen 2003). For organisational and administrative purposes they divided the protectorate into many small 'chiefdoms', each governed by a 'paramount chief'. In some cases the British broke up the existing large interior kingdoms (Abraham 1975); in other cases they created larger units.[4] These paramount chiefs ruled for life and, after their death, were succeeded by another member of a 'ruling house',[5] approved by a 'tribal authority' comprising local elders. Furthermore, the British imposed a system of native administration involving local officials such as treasury and court clerks (Opala 1996).

Clearly, all these institutions lacked democratic foundations, although there were some checks and balances. Nor were they really fully equivalent to pre-protectorate institutions, in which war could be used to settle some of the worst imbalances and grievances. The theory of indirect rule – as expounded for Nigeria by Lord Lugard, for example – argued that the British were preserving 'natural' and thus effective local institutions. This ignored the fact that the power base of these societies had utterly changed. Where it suited the British they could impose or maintain an autocratic chief. All forms of political competition at local level were henceforth subject to British overlordship. This maintained peace at the expense of institutional adaptation, and thus – as will be argued hereafter – helped to lay the foundations for the later failure of the state in rural areas.[6]

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[4] Adam Jones describes the cases of Kpaka, Peri, Massaquoi, Soro, and Gbema as geographical divisions in precolonial times: 'but that each should have a single "paramount chief" was a twentieth-century innovation, designed primarily to meet the problems of tax collection' (Jones 1983: 13).

[5] One belongs to a ruling house if one is a descendant of the first paramount chief who signed a treaty with the British.

[6] One could argue that the war of 1991 ended only when the British once more imposed a kind of military overlordship in 2000. British soldiers arrived in Sierra Leone in May 2000, at first only to protect the international airport. In August they were engaged in a hostage-freeing operation, after the AFRC splinter group the 'West Side Boys' captured several British intelligence officers. This was considered by the remaining armed factions as a clear indication that any peace-accord violations would provoke British military action.

But, to return to 1900, volunteers for the position of chief, to be supplied by the ruling families, were surprisingly hard to find under newly imposed British rule, and matters only changed, as Fenton (1948) claimed, when the government greatly strengthened the position of chiefs by allowing them the right to elicit labour – in the form of community labour that was little distinguishable in some aspects from domestic slavery – and other support under the Protectorate Native Law Ordinance of 1905. A two-class society was thus formed and institutionalised, its top tier made up of ruling families – in which the children of chiefs were exempted community labour and sent away for schooling instead (Richards et al. 2004a: 3). Bo School, founded in 1906 for children of chiefs, was an institution reproducing some of the features of a classic British 'public' (private boarding) school. The other class, of course, was made up of commoners, upon whom the burdens of unpaid labour for community purposes fell.

Political Parties Emerge

Most of the measures taken by the colonial administration were aimed at increasing profits from trade, a paramount concern that concentrated minds even more acutely after the discovery of diamonds in Sierra Leone.[7] From the first finds in Kono in 1927, the diamond sector struggled with illicit mining and smuggling practices that diverted much-needed revenues away from the colonial administration. Chiefs and paramount chiefs were the de facto controllers of the diamond areas, since the presence in the protectorate of the colonial state was weak at best. According to Gberie (2005: 30): 'Ensuring the cooperation of the chiefs was an enduring concern, and the colonial authorities overlooked serious breaches of the law by the chiefs in the area, including even murder and other forms of what would otherwise be considered crimes, like forced labour.' In addition, illicit diamond-mining activities offered excellent opportunities for unscrupulous state agents to fill their own pockets and set their own agendas. Reno (1995) argues that the control of resources is the foundation of political power and influence in Sierra Leone. Illicit mining activities, and (ironically) the measures taken to combat these practices,[8] contributed in the end to the growth of what Reno calls the

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[7] In 1926 and 1927 a British survey team searched for mineral deposits in Sierra Leone: Platinum was mined on a commercial basis (in the Freetown peninsula) from the late 1920s onwards. Gold mining first started in Tonkolili district in the 1930s, as did chrome mining in the Kenema district and iron ore in the Port Loko district (Alie 1990: 195).

[8] One measure taken to buy the chiefs' cooperation in combating illicit mining was to give them access to government funds. The so-called MADA (Mining Area Development Administration) programme was such an attempt running in the 1950s, but its funds were often abused (Reno 1995; Zack-Williams 1995).

'shadow state' – the construction by rulers of a parallel political authority to manage the diamond sector (and other major national assets) in the wake of the near total decay of formal state institutions (Reno 1995: 1).

Government funds were used to buy not only social order but also electoral support. This became even more important in the period leading up to independence. Two political fronts in the diamond area were to be distinguished: the SLPP, supported by the chiefs of diamond-rich chiefdoms who were backed in turn by the colonial administrators, and the more radical regional Kono party, the Kono Progressive Movement (henceforth KPM), with a support base among labourers and chiefs of chiefdoms with limited or no diamond deposits.

The KPM opposed the SLPP in the 1957 and 1962 local elections and sought a more egalitarian society with no special powers for chiefs. In the 1962 election the KPM allied itself with two other opposition parties under the banner of the Sierra Leone People's Independent Movement (SLPIM). One of these parties was the APC of trade unionist Siaka Probyn Stevens. In 1951 – before independence – Stevens was made Minister of Mines under Chief Minister Margai in the Legislative Council, mainly because of his trade union experience (Gberie 2005: 24).

When Sierra Leone gained independence on 27 April 1961, the SLPP won the first electoral contest. As mentioned, its basis of support was among the chiefs and interior merchant elites, and they were able to build support through the resources at their command. But they failed to win a base of broad popular support among the urban masses and labouring classes in the interior. Sir Milton Margai became the first prime minister of Sierra Leone. When he died in 1964 his younger half-brother, Albert Margai, took over power, but soon people started to grumble that government corruption was increasing. The SLPP also became increasingly a party of Mende-speaking groups in the south and east of the country (Opala 1996).

Six years later, in 1967, a narrow electoral victory for Stevens led to confusion in the country, as SLPP elements clung to power. Successive interventions by certain factions in a divided army finally led, a year later, to the installation of an APC government led by Stevens as prime minister, and later as president after the country became a republic.

The APC ruled Sierra Leone from 1968 until 1992. Under Stevens and his appointed successor, former army chief Joseph Saidu Momoh, the 'shadow state' grew to enormous proportions. A necessary ingredient for this expansion was the diamond industry. Lebanese diamond dealers became increasingly important in this and other businesses. Previously, they had equipped and supported the poorer miners involved in illicit activities and protected them where necessary against the SLPP state and

the security forces of the Sierra Leone Selection Trust, a De Beers[9] sub-sidiary, and thus could mobilise a large support base. But, more import-antly, the Lebanese traders were the ideal partners for 'shadow state' activities, whether under SLPP or APC governance, since long-settled Lebanese were denied political rights, not being allowed to become Sierra Leonean citizens, even though many were born in the country. Paying off politicians and administrators was the best and most common guar-antee for protecting their commercial interests. If this political game was invented by the Lebanese it soon became common currency among any foreign commercial interests in Sierra Leone. Politicians expected to be treated by everyone as they were treated by the Lebanese.

Patrimonial Politics Takes Shape

Soon after Sierra Leone became independent, adopting a Westminster parliamentary model, democratic principles began to erode. The 1967 election has been mentioned previously. The governor general declared Siaka Stevens the rightful winner, but before he could take office a mil-itary coup was staged,[10] only to be followed by another coup a few hours later which brought into power a military government – the Anti-Corruption Revolutionary Council – that ruled for one year (Opala 1996). Stevens was finally handed his – presumed – election victory when another military coup was staged in 1968 by army non-commissioned ranks. According to Keen, by this time Stevens had already changed his populist and 'anti-chief' platform for one based more on ethnicity – often the easiest way to recruit supporters (2005: 15). Stevens was born in Moyamba in the south but claimed Limba ethnic roots and was supported more strongly in the north. It would be hard to say that democracy was 'restored'. Two years after his accession to power the SLPP was the only political opposition party allowed in Sierra Leone. During the 1973 elec-tions opponents of the APC were prevented from casting their vote. When in 1974 a bomb exploded at the house of an APC minister, several oppos-ition leaders were accused and hanged the following year (Valeton 1981).

Siaka Stevens considered political security more important than demo-cratic liberties, and used the informal diamond network to safeguard his political position. Reno (1995: 80) writes that 'compared to colonial or SLPP elite accommodations, the new ruling alliance made unusually heavy demands on state resources to buy collaborator's loyalties'. Richards recognises the political system in Sierra Leone as being based

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[9] The South African–based De Beers diamond company, owned by the Oppenheimer family, has for most of the twentieth century maintained a near monopoly on worldwide diamond extraction and marketing.

[10] Hinga Norman, who later became the leader of the Kamajoisia, was then a captain in the army and was entrusted with the arrest of Stevens.

on patrimonial principles, which involve the redistribution of 'national resources as marks of *personal* favour to followers who respond with loyalty to the leader rather than to the institution the leader represents' (Richards 1996: 34, emphasis in the original). The ultimate leader of the Sierra Leone patrimonial system was the president. The increasingly short duration of ministerial tenure, in combination with frequently publicised corruption investigations threatening sanctions against the disloyal, clearly shows that the president was the gatekeeper of any political career, and that loyalty was the paramount political virtue (Reno 1995).

Stevens's preoccupation with political security and monopoly of the use of state resources seriously affected the building of strong state institutions. Through the 'nationalisation' of the mining industry – the newly created National Diamond Mining Company (NDMC) would now control the mining and selling of diamonds – Stevens increased his control over the mining sector. Chiefs, in exchange for a place on the board of the NDMC or access to NDMC resources, cooperated with the government in attempting to increase the resources from the diamond sector available to elites under State House control. Patrimonial economic politics also played out at the local level, where 'strangers' – that is, (internal) migrant labourers, not Lebanese businessmen – were involved in illicit diamond mining under the protection of the local landowner. Since these local landowners, often the chiefs or paramount chiefs, could always threaten illicit diamond miners with prosecution by state officials, the diamond-landowning class exercised extra informal social control (Reno 2003).

APC Oppression

Stevens reformed the army and the police to ensure loyalty from both forces. Military officers with a Mende background were removed and replaced with northerners – Temnes, Korankos or Yalunkas – the traditional supporters of the APC. In 1971, the army staged a coup led by Brigade Commander John Bangura, a Temne, but it failed. Bangura was arrested and some time after a corporal by the name of Foday Sankoh was also arrested and charged with 'misprision of treason' (failing to report a planned coup attempt) and subsequently tried, found guilty, and imprisoned for seven years (Gberie 2005: 42). After the failed coup, Stevens immediately received support from Guinea in the form of 200 soldiers who served as personal bodyguards. When the Guinean soldiers left in 1973, Stevens asked the Cuban government to help train a special APC militia. The militia – first named the Internal Security Unit (ISU) but later known as the Special Security Division (SSD) – was much feared by the population, who referred to it as 'Siaka Stevens' Dogs'.

In 1977 Sierra Leonean students from Fouray Bay College protested vociferously against the Stevens government. The protests spread to the

city, and many of the mainly unemployed youth in eastern Freetown participated. Stevens hit back hard, making use of his youth wing, which he subsequently armed (Gberie 2005: 44). The demonstrations could not prevent the move towards a one-party state. After a dubious referendum in 1978 – voters were intimidated and molested by ISU personnel – the APC became the only political party allowed in the country. Siaka Stevens was now an autocratic leader subject to few if any democratic checks. To consolidate the one-party state in the interior, Stevens replaced paramount chiefs unenthusiastic about the APC with other more malleable figureheads, not always belonging to a locally recognised ruling house; he thus alienated traditional elite support, especially in the south and east of the country. The widespread use of the notorious ISU forces by the APC to brutalise people and suppress student protests created widespread resentment.

An Economic Tragedy

In 1975 the NDMC output was 731,000 carats.[11] In 1985 it was only 74,000 carats (Reno 1995: 107). At the same time a private[12] diamond economy was created around Stevens. In further attempts to consolidate his political control, Stevens came increasingly to depend on certain Lebanese businessmen. As Opala (1996) remarks, 'in the early 1980s, virtually all of the country's major exports came under the control of a single businessman,[13] an associate of Stevens, as foreign companies pulled out'.

In 1979 the IMF negotiated an economic stabilisation plan, including demands on the Sierra Leone government to limit state spending. This meant in particular reducing civil service expenditure. Stevens was confronted with a dilemma since minor government jobs were an important means of securing loyalty to the state system. Moreover, he also planned to host the Organisation of African Unity conference in 1980. This annual conference – often used as an opportunity for the host country to impress visiting presidents – left Sierra Leone, like other host countries previously, with huge debts and almost useless infrastructure.[14] With total

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[11] Five carats = one gramme.

[12] Before this all diamond mining was in the hands of the state, through the NDMC. Now Stevens allowed private mining operations under the 'Cooperative Contract Mining' (CCM) scheme. Due to high financial administration and registration costs, few if any small-scale miners were able to register under the CCM scheme (Reno 1995).

[13] This was Jamil Sahid Mohamed. Jamil was the son of a Sierra Leonean father of Lebanese descent and an indigenous Sierra Leonean mother from the Mandingo ethnic group.

[14] Neighbouring Liberia constructed a large 'Hotel Africa' and bungalows to host this conference. A special fly-over was constructed to guarantee a smooth journey for the presidential cars from the capital to the hotel. For many years Hotel Africa was in the hands of a Dutch timber dealer, sanctioned by the UN in 2000.

costs amounting to US$200 million, equal to the country's entire foreign-exchange reserves, the government sharply cut its budget for development and social programmes.

Imports of the staple food, rice, rose sharply. The country had a vested interest in declaring itself in food deficit – although, actually, large amounts of locally grown rice were smuggled to Guinea. Food imports allowed the president to buy the loyalty of junior cadres through showing an interest in family welfare. Stevens gave exclusive import authorisation – using foreign exchange raised by diamond-mining operations – to the former state-owned enterprises. In 1984 Sierra Leone imported almost three times as much rice as it did in 1978, and domestic production had dropped more than 30 percent. Stevens required the state to purchase imported rice at the high informal-market rate from these former state-owned enterprises, in which he often had a personal stake, and then distributed subsidised rice directly from the State House to the military, security forces, and police officers. Increasingly, allocation of imported rice replaced the payment of salaries – already delayed for months on average anyway – to civil servants. Politicians, and in particular the ones most loyal to Stevens, received vouchers to buy large quantities (500 bags of 100kg, for example) of rice at a fraction of the market value. By 1986, the subsidised price had dropped as low as one-fortieth of its market value (Reno 1995). The imported bag of white rice became 'political food', and not only for the nearly 40,000 civil servants who received their salary in the form of rice bags. Diamond miners were also provided with cheap imported rice by their sponsors. Many of the sponsors of mining operations, including civil servants and members of the police or armed forces, had easy access to imported rice, while they lacked the knowledge or modalities to make time-consuming purchases of locally produced rice. The rural areas stagnated, where mining profits and the demands of miners for locally produced food might otherwise have been a stimulus to agrarian transformation.

In 1985 Stevens handed over power to Major General Joseph Saidu Momoh. Momoh announced a 'new order' but soon it became clear that government corruption and shadow state practices continued as before. According to Reno 'in real terms, 1985/86 domestic revenue collection stood at 18 percent of 1977/78 figures', and 'officials' own estimates indicate that by the mid-1980s, 70 percent of all exports left the country through non-formal channels' (Reno 1995: 151). In a subsequent analysis he adds that 'at the outset of the war in 1991, social spending was just fifteen per cent of the level a decade previously' (Reno, 2003: 76).

To access IMF loans Momoh agreed to a structural adjustment programme but failed to keep to its provisions. By late 1987 the country was approaching default, and Momoh declared a state of economic emergency. This proved to be the final blow for the country, and electricity blackouts, petrol shortage, and delay in paying civil servants' salaries for

months on end became the harsh reality. The state was – in effect – bankrupt.

The Patrimonial System Collapses

According to Reno, it is evidence of the success and strength of the patrimonial network of Stevens and his successor that 'despite a shockingly rapid economic decline and falling standards of living, the country remained immune from coups or popular uprisings which some outside observers had long predicted' (Reno 1995: 148). However, with (1) the collapse of prices for raw materials on the international market; (2) the decline of another system of patronage, namely aid support from Cold War rivals; and (3) the withdrawal of large foreign companies due to high levels of corruption and depleting deposits of minerals, the financial resources needed to keep the patrimonial state functioning shrank sharply. The patrimonial regime, in order to survive, had to choose between its immediate patrimonial demands – supplying cheap imported rice to its clients like the army and the police – and its longer-term needs for survival, such as providing jobs and educational opportunities for loyal subjects (Richards 1996). According to Bayart (paraphrased in Gberie 2005), in situations where the state has ceased to be the institution providing services for its citizens, its authority has to rely on the strength of its networks, such as the army or police. Gberie rightly observed that, in 1991, 'even these raw "networks" had been effectively downgraded: the police and army had become as corrupt and weak and bankrupt as the ruling elite' (2005: 10). Nevertheless, Momoh, a former commander of the army, did not want to alienate the security forces and run the risk of a coup or uprising. But prioritising his personal short-term security came at a high cost. The educational sector, the health sector, and other social services were now deprived of the extra resources they needed to survive, and the general public – young people in particular – became restive. One end point of much patrimonial redistribution is the payment of school costs and fees. Government employees were less and less able to pay school fees for their own children.

Among other effects of this reduction in patrimonial redistribution were increasing problems in the justice system, where the lowest levels of administration in rural areas became even more underfunded – to the point where village headmen and court chairmen started 'paying themselves' through arbitrary and excessive fines and exactions on young people.[15] Appeals – impossibly expensive for most villagers, in any case – can be made to the magistrate's court and eventually to the High Court.

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[15] The customary laws were documented by Fenton in the 1920s (revised in 1948), but his volume is slender and copies are almost impossible to find in Sierra Leone. For instance, the university Law School library does not possess one.

At the national level, however, appeals are heard in a special section in which a judge is advised by special assessors deemed to be experts in custom (in other words, traditional elders). There was and still is a strong feeling among young people in the villages that elders make up the law to suit their own purposes.

The economic crisis also tightened the budgets of local 'big men', previously sometimes willing to help young people with education or jobs in exchange for political loyalty. Foolishly, President Momoh openly advertised the extent to which political or state patronage was now unavailable to the younger generation. In a speech given in the eastern district of Kailahun he stated education to be a privilege and not a right. 'By 1987, less than 30 percent of children of secondary school age were still in school' (Davies 1996: 13, cited in Keen 2003: 80). Momoh's speech in Kailahun was used by the RUF as one of its justifications to go to war.

The Making and Functioning of Rural Societies in Sierra Leone

Settler Patterns

Buah states that 'the original people of Sierra Leone practised patrilineal kingship, maintained close links with the spirits of their ancestors and were guarded by the rigid rules of religious societies in both their public and private lives' (Buah 1986: 79). This system of rule, however, should not be compared with the systems in place in the kingdoms of Mali or Ghana, or those of medieval Europe. Holsoe (1974) suggests that the traditional territorial unit in Vai territory (the area of what was to become south-eastern Sierra Leone and south-western Liberia) was merely a group of towns linked by kinship and historical ties and ruled by a landowner.

The pattern seems to have been more general throughout much of Sierra Leone. Many towns were established by 'war chiefs'. However, the power and control of war chiefs was never institutionalised because of the religious power of the ancestors represented by the Poro (the secret society for men) and because the spoils of war were divided in such a way that it was hard to accumulate wealth (Jones 1983). New settlements were created in areas which were previously covered by forest.

In most villages, the patrilineal descendants of the putative founder(s) claim prerogatives in respect of land use, decision-making and political representations. Yet the logic of 'clearing' dictates that any latecomer who contributes substantially to a 'foundation' thereby establishes a permanent place (and identity) for his or her descendants in the village. (Fanthorpe 2001: 376)

This 'logic' is in many cases too broad a generalisation and likely to reflect the picture of what local elites like to bring out. This will become clear from the following discussion.

Primitive Accumulation and Domestic Slavery

It was previously mentioned that the transatlantic slave trade caused trade routes into the interior to shift, both in orientation and items traded, and that West African coastal regions, including Sierra Leone, became highly involved in the trade in persons. How was this slave trade organised, and how did it impact on daily life?

Whether the slave *dealers* were whites, mulattoes (mixed race), or Africans,[16] the slaves themselves were acquired by the indigenous population, predominantly chiefs and local big men, through warfare among the different tribes, or though kidnapping in ambushes, known as 'pan-yarring'. There were, however, also legal ways to acquire slaves. The similarities between these practices, up to 1896, and the strategies of elders to manipulate the labour of young people today – as mentioned in interviews with ex-combatants – are striking. Arguably, this is not a coincidence, but the expression of a cultural legacy that persists. Theft or debt were among the offences which, if a fine was not paid, could lead to enslavement. Adultery was another common accusation leading to the enslavement of the accused. According to Jones:

Adultery, whether real of fabricated, was also often punished by enslavement. One chief, having received credit from slave dealers, accused seven of his wives of adultery and threatened to subject them to an ordeal involving hot palm oil: knowing that he did not want old men, they mentioned the most likely young men they could think of. Chiefs encouraged their wives to entangle young men, who might then have to pay 'women damage' of as many as ten slaves.[17] (Jones 1983: 48)

Accusations of adultery were not the only way to acquire slaves. Sometimes the local elite accused someone – often traders – of 'not paying

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[16] In the Sierra Leone region white and mulatto dealers played a dominant role. At the Grain and Ivory Coasts trade was almost exclusively in African (or occasionally mulatto) hands (Jones 1983).

[17] Apparently, the ways to fine or enslave young people during the nineteenth century and before were still so common in the twentieth century that the House of Representatives in Liberia considered it necessary to approve an 'Act to Govern the Devolution of Estates and Establish the Rights of Inheritance for Spouses of Both Statutory and Customary Marriages' as late as 7 October 2003. The Act states, among other provisions, that 'No customary husband shall aid, abet, or create the situation for his customary wife to have illicit sexual intercourse with another man for the sole purpose of collecting damages' [Section 2.7] and 'It is unlawful for any customary person or husband to compel or demand any female of legal age, whether or not she is his customary wife, to 'confess' or call the name of her lover . . . in order to collect damages from the said lover' [Section 2.8].

proper respect' to a certain chief, after which the accused was enslaved or had to pay a fine in the form of one or several slaves (Jones 1983: 48). Witchcraft accusations were also common, and were the privilege of the powerful (Fyfe 1962: 21). Those of lesser stature found it almost impossible to establish their rights through customary law, according to a statement of an eighteenth-century captain (cited in Jones 1983: 48):

Many are sentenced to Slavery, accused of Witchcraft – A King, or great man pretends that he is Witched – He accused a certain party, and consigns them all to slavery, though but one of the family has been accused – NB No Poor Man is suffered to consider himself as [be]witched, so that it is a contrivance of the great to get slaves.

It is clear that those of minor status – youths and strangers – were the most vulnerable to being enslaved through the enforcement of customary law. Although the *Atlantic* slave trade ceased to exist – from the middle of the nineteenth century – this was not the end of slavery. At first people were sold as 'emigrants' to work on the plantations of the Americas now deprived of slaves. 'When scolded [by the British] for providing emigrants, the chiefs living near Galinhas admitted that 'the mode of capture and delivery . . . was exactly the same as [for] slaves' (Jones 1983: 86). But the main provision responsible for the continued existence of slavery was Britain's unwillingness to forbid *domestic* slavery. Rivalries between trading chiefs, particularly in the south-west of the colony, gave rise to the so-called trade wars of the 1880s. According to Fyfe: 'Captives taken in [these trade] wars could now be employed gathering produce for their masters to sell' (1962: 109). Until the British finally banned domestic slavery in Sierra Leone – as late as 11 January 1928, after pressure from the League of Nations – 'strangers' (often refugees from conflict elsewhere in the interior) were sometimes sent by ruling families to staff the remote farming outposts that became the basis for today's smaller and isolated villages. Or as Abraham describes it: 'The open villages farmed to provide food for the war-towns, and in the latter half of the nineteenth century, were manned mostly by captives' (Abraham 1975: 135, citing Siddle 1968). In local custom, the labour of strangers was at the command of those who provided protection over those who lacked local family connections.

Elite Control over Means of Production and Reproduction

A central role in the social system of villages was played by the village seniors. According to Meillassoux (1960) the power of the elders (among the Gouro in central Côte d'Ivoire) is based on three factors: their

knowledge of social processes; their control of marriageable women (that is, their power over the means of reproduction);[18] and their economic status (that is, young people work for the elders). The product of youth labour is handed over to the elders for redistribution, and the authority of the elders is thus, according to Meillassoux, functional to the reproduction of a stable lineage mode of production (1960).[19] It is assumed in Meillassoux's functional analysis that youths eventually become elders, or, as Deluz and Godelier (1967) summarise the argument, 'all that is necessary is for each individual [among the Gouro] to grow old in order to enter the group of elders and to gain the benefits of age' (1967: 86). But Murphy (1980), based on his work in Liberia, argues that: 'This view overlooks the fact that while young men do become old men, not all old men become elders. Even more importantly, while some young men do actually become lineage elders few become powerful elders in the community' (ibid.: 202). Rey (1979) also disagrees with Meillassoux's functionalism, and the rather unproblematic account of the relationship between elders and youth in West African village society upon which it is based. According to Rey, Meillassoux fails to acknowledge the unequal character of the exchange between the youths' labour and the elders' management of marriageable kin. Elders get rich through the labour of the youth as part of the bride price. Moreover, all kinds of services the youth have to carry out for the community also must be considered exploitation of young people's labour, often more for the benefit of the elders and the local elite than for the 'community'. These arrangements, in short, create or sustain a kind of class distinction.

Broad continuities are apparent between the nineteenth-century conditions described by Jones (1983) and Holsoe (1974), for example, and those reported by young rural ex-combatants. Grievances listed by the ex-combatants today suggest that rural Sierra Leone indeed has been characterised by strong and intensifying class cleavages between those recognised by the British as landowners (and thus their allies in colonial indirect rule) and the much greater number of 'strangers' displaced by the internal wars over which colonialism imposed its Pax Britannica. Rey's characterisation seems to accord with local conditions better than

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[18] Meillassoux distinguishes goods of prestige, such as the bride price, which function as gifts. These are in the hands of the elders but do not have any exchange value, according to him.

[19] This was not an uncommon perspective on African societies. According to Abbink: 'The simple fact is that most of Africa's young people are no longer growing up in the relatively well-integrated societies described in rich detail by anthropologists and historians only one or two generations ago. . . . Most of these societies have transformed into impoverished and internally divided wholes, with many of them caught up in violent conflict and marginalisation' (Abbink 2005: 2).

the functionally integrated system of relations between the generations proposed by Meillassoux.

Let us have a closer look at marriage in rural Sierra Leone as an example. Social organisation in rural Sierra Leone is structured around agnatic lineages. Marriage plays a crucial role in maintaining the power of these lineages, since they generally have a strategic character. But two basically different types of strategy should be noted. A wealthy 'stranger' – coming from another chiefdom – may first be 'tied' to the village through marriage with a woman from the ruling family. This can initiate a regularly recurring sequence of cross-cousin marriages, allying the descendants of the chief and the descendants of the powerful stranger. The alliance serves a political function – of power sharing among the two leading families (Murphy and Bledsoe 1987). Notably, this kind of political marriage is practised without bridewealth transactions. But in the other strategic type – that is, a marriage which is not between two elite families – substantial payments are made to the family of the woman, often in kind, in the form of bride service, notably labour on the farm of the girl's father. The bride is in a vulnerable position if the marriage is not satisfactory or the husband dies, because her brothers may not be able to return the bridewealth they have received, and thus are likely to encourage the woman to stay with her husband or his family (Richards et al. 2004a). For young rural women of poor backgrounds an early marriage is the reality, and it is more likely that her husband will be an older man with the resources to pay bridewealth. The young woman often will become a second or third wife in these cases. If she marries a young but poor man he will find himself tied through labour service to his wife's family for many years. Chiefs have at times accepted many girls as wives from poorer families, seeking patronage or preference, and (as noted) then encouraged these girls to find young paramours as a way of increasing the labour power at their disposal through the levying of fines for 'woman damage'.

These days the choice of marriage partner is increasingly left to the young couple, but the young man's family will approach the family of the girl and negotiate. Marriage has an obligatory character. Any young man who remains unmarried will be vulnerable to accusations of woman damage, which was, as noted, a common accusation used during the days of the slave trade to acquire slaves. A young self-demobilised RUF fighter interviewed by James Vincent and Paul Richards in Tongo in 2003 illustrates the predicament:

I am from B. [a village] in Nongowa chiefdom. We have problems with our elders in that village. They force young men to marry their daughters as soon as we harvest our first bunch of palm fruits. If you refuse they cause more problems for you than even being in the bush as a rebel. They charge you to court for smiling at a girl, saying they had offered you a girl and you refused. But the bride

price is not reasonable. You will be required to do all sorts of physical jobs for the bride's family, like brushing and making a farm for the family, offering your energy as labour to build houses for them, and sharing the proceeds of your own labour, harvest or business, three-quarters to them, one quarter for you, or you will lose your wife and be taken to court for breach of contract. What most of us have done is to avoid the scene . . . here [in Tongo] you can get some respite and marry a woman of your choice. In B. marriage is synonymous to slavery. Most of the young men who should contribute to development are forced to leave the village . . . this is one of the reasons why B. has one of the worst roads in Sierra Leone . . . because most of the young men go away. (Richards et al. 2004b: 20)

Young women have little opportunity to escape early marriage and village life, but young men can. They go to the urban areas, or, as likely, to mining areas such as Tongo. As a result they deplete the village of labour that might otherwise be used (at least to some extent) for community purposes, such as repairing feeder roads and small bridges. The children of the village elite are often excused of such demands. Or they may be excused by circumstances – they are away being schooled in an urban centre. This schooling might typically be paid for by a plantation laid through the bride service or fines for woman-damage of young men similar to the one just quoted. This makes the burden of community action even higher for those who stay behind, and thus it is more likely that they too will 'exit' the village. And it also explains why the young man just quoted considers that marriage perpetuates labour exploitation akin to slavery. The resentments of the youthful ex-combatants which centred on lack of educational opportunity are thus not just a matter of lack of provision by the state, but also a seething resentment at a class system through which the schooling of the children of landowners and chiefs is paid for by the sweated labour of young commoners expended in earning the right to reproduce.

Neither Citizens Nor Subjects: The Political Marginalisation of Youth

According to Mamdani (1996), 'a tiny minority of Europeans and West-ernised Africans enjoyed the full prerogatives of citizenship, while the majority of Africans only obtained rights as subjects of tribally defined 'native authorities' (as summarised by Fanthorpe, 2001: 368). Fanthorpe then takes a closer look at this status of subjects and wonders why, if indeed the root of the violence of the RUF has to be looked for in the 'lumpen' background of its fighters (as Abdullah argues), these young people could not 'rediscover moral community in long-established rural enclaves' (Fanthorpe, 2001: 371). His answer is that young Sierra Leoneans are neither citizen nor subject, and that this process of polit-ical and moral exclusion started long before the outbreak of the civil

war, when the 'extreme localisation of criteria of identity and belonging' (ibid.: 372) present in rural areas was confronted with the native administration of the British, resulting in exclusionary tendencies through which people were denied 'de facto citizenship'. British administration thus changed the functional 'logic of clearing' (as Fanthorpe views it) – that is, the process of slow incorporation of new settlers through marriage and community contribution.

Debate will probably continue about the extent to which precolonial rural social formations were sustainably adapted to local agrarian circumstances or represented a process of intensifying class cleavage. The problematic feature of arguments based on the 'lineage mode' as an historical formation, rather than as an 'articulation' under colonialism and development, is that it is so hard to get evidence on whether intergenerational cycles reproduced true to type, or accumulated growing contradictions and material cleavages. But work by Adam Jones (1983) shows that historians can isolate data which suggest that class antagonisms were present prior to the colonial era. However, it is more widely agreed that a process of opposition between land-owning elites and commoners, often of outside origin, became entrenched during the colonial period. It is argued here that this laid the basis for the kinds of violent oppositions surfacing during the civil war. The process of colonial occupation either triggered or consolidated a two-class society: the categories of free people and slaves, in effect, were replaced, from 1928, by the categories of natives and strangers. In a situation in which strangers, in effect, are denied de facto citizenship in their own land, it is not hard to see how large numbers of young people felt themselves to be alienated from the nation-building project:

According to the latest estimates, 55 percent of Sierra Leone's population is under the age of 20. In recent times, the population obliged to attach itself to a rural settlement in order to obtain a tax receipt, a vote, and other privileges of citizenship has often far exceeded that which is actually resident, and economically supportable, at any given time. The young and those of low inherited status inevitably find themselves in attenuating orders of precedence in access to these privileges. Sierra Leone may therefore represent a case in which alarming numbers of people have become neither 'citizen' nor 'subject'. (Fanthorpe 2001: 385)

For some time, the prospect of becoming educated offered young Sierra Leoneans the belief that there was an alternative route to achieving citizen status – through recognition within a meritocracy. Being 'brilliant' at school, as the CDF fighter in Chapter 1 put it, would suffice.[20]

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[20] Formal education has long been highly valued in Sierra Leone. Fourah Bay College, the first university-level institution in West Africa, was founded in Sierra Leone in 1827, as a centre for Bible translation and the training of a local clergy. In the 1870s it became an affiliate of Durham University, mainly helping prepare young Freetown citizens for

However, as a result of the economic crisis of the 1980s this route to global recognition and success – a beacon for many throughout almost the entire history of the country – was finally revealed to be a false hope.[21] With the collapse of rural primary and secondary education in the wake of the IMF 'restructuring', even the lowest rungs on the ladder became inaccessible, and especially to the children of strangers, lacking plantations, and only tentatively in control of their own labour power. Perhaps the last hope was to become a miner, in the pay of one or another of the stop-at-nothing lords of the diamond fields.

Survival Strategies for Marginalised Youth

With the drying up of patrimonial funds, children and youth in the rural areas were among the first to drop out of school. At times the school dropped out of the child – buildings collapsed and were not repaired, or teachers absented themselves, hustling for a living or seeking long unpaid back wages. Out of school, basically three options were left: (1) remain in the village and involve oneself in (semi-subsistence) agriculture and (for a boy) labour indebtedness, or (for a girl) early, and often near-obligatory marriage; (2) leave the village, sometimes temporarily, to try one's luck in the alluvial mining areas, where the boys laboured and the girls would provide sexual or domestic services; or (3) leave for Freetown or another major town and hope to find some kind of unskilled work in the urban informal sector.

Village Life and Farming. Living in a village in Sierra Leone almost equals being a farmer. Those who do other trades, such as the local carpenter, blacksmith, or teacher, are likely also to have farms,[22] especially if the village is small. Most farming in Sierra Leone is of the semi-subsistence type, combined with some cash crop production to raise money for medicines, school fees, or consumer goods.

During the 1980s the agricultural sector was stagnant and remained overwhelmingly subsistence-oriented. This had more to do with mismanagement (failures of top-down agricultural research and development) and political neglect (massive import of rice, little attention to rural infrastructure, and so on.) than with supposed intrinsic agronomic

entry to the professions. Typically the young FBC graduate in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries might aspire to further training in law or medicine in Durham, Edinburgh, or London, family finances permitting. Professional overseas education, economic power, and political influence have long been interconnected in Freetown's Krio community. Sierra Leone has a disproportionate number of professionals serving in international institutions for an African country of its size.

[21] 'Wright (in Skelt 1997: 22) reports that most children dropped out before completing primary school during the eighties' (Keen 2003: 79; see also Wright 1997).

[22] It is not uncommon to find pupils attending school in the morning and working on the teacher's farm in the afternoon.

and environmental limitations. The Green Revolution type of intervention which has been so effective in many parts of Asia in producing more rice per hectare is more problematic in Sierra Leone and more broadly in Africa, since this type of intervention was developed for agronomic situations where labour was relatively abundant, and land scarce. Sierra Leone is characterised by the opposite: a relative abundance of land[23] and a shortage of labour. Mechanised farming is equally limited as it is unsuitable for most land conditions in Sierra Leone. Moreover, poor farmers lack capital or credit to acquire machines, so other ways to overcome labour shortages were found – hence the preoccupation of landholding elites with tying labour through clientelism, bridewealth transactions, or court cases.

There are several organisational arrangements to overcome the seasonal labour bottleneck (mainly during brushing, ploughing, and harvesting) for peasants. These arrangements often take the form of work groups. Of particular interest is the so-called *gboto* (in Mende).

[This group] is organised by an elder who acts as a manager, supervising the work and negotiating hire contracts . . . work closes each day with a session in which punishments are handed out for lateness and laziness. . . . This combination of discipline and music – the group is accompanied by a three-piece drumming band – is said to ensure that a *gboto* will achieve more in one day than any similar group, despite the youthfulness [on average between 10 and 15 years] of the workers. (Richards 1986: 71, 72)

Another type of group is the *kombi*, a general-purpose work group. Although it undertakes much the same work as the above previous group, its origin lies in the non-agricultural purposes served by working together on a farm – for instance, to support a dance society or to fulfil bride service for members. According to Richards,

The group is explicitly egalitarian, laying much stress on 'self help'. This is clearly seen in the attempt to involve as many members as possible in 'official' positions. . . . Shorter working hours (from 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.) is a further manifestation of egalitarianism, the group saying, in effect, 'we can be trusted to do a full day's work without all the hocus pocus needed in the case of *gboto* and *mbele*'. (Richards 1986: 73)

Disputes among members are solved by common agreement, even if this takes much time. Interestingly, a work group can have some aggressive

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[23] On a local scale, land was not always as abundant as is sometimes assumed, owing to increased alienation of land by the diamond-mining sector, and increasing population and soil erosion. According to Keen, 'Land tenure disputes had become endemic in Mendeland, and were usually arbitrated by chiefs. Younger sons typically received the most distant land, or sometimes none at all' (Keen 2003: 79). And Maconachie finds that 'gaining access to wetland sites can be a highly political process that is shaped by an individual's social relationships' (2008: 243). Needless to add, those from weak lineages are unlikely to access the better wetland (inland valley swamp) sites.

element in it, resulting from stiff competition when the group temporarily is divided in two halves.[24]

But what preceded the issue of *how* to organise labour, was *whether* labour was available in the village at all. Shortages of labour became worse after alluvial diamond mining expanded in the 1950s. Many young people migrated to the diamond districts to try their luck, leaving small farming communities bereft of strong young labourers (van der Laan 1965). Ever since, mining has posed a constant threat to rural labour availability. Communities reacted to this by 'tying' the labour of young men through 'forcing' them into early marriage or by means of court cases, as already discussed. But what was intended as a pull factor by the community was experienced by the youth as the opposite – as a factor pushing them out of the villages. Whether pull or push, vulnerability to unfavourable decisions (including court decisions) of their seniors and labour exploitation through community labour demands[25] and bride service have a predictable result – the impossibility of making a decent living out of farming before reaching a more senior status in the village hierarchy. So it is not the activity of farming as such which most young people despise, although it can be backbreaking, but the attached implications for agency.

Mining. Since the discovery of diamonds in Kono in the late 1920s, this sector has attracted large numbers of youthful labourers, mainly of rural origin. Owing to the nature of the deposits (predominantly alluvial), mining here requires little investment – a spade, bucket and sieve will suffice for the simplest kind of river terrace workings – but much labour. During the 1950s the mining population may have been as high as 35,000 in Kono and 75,000 for the whole country (Reno 2003), but the total number of support workers was much larger. Many more young people are engaged in the diamond fields in meeting the demand for services such as entertainment, sex and drugs, cooked food, items of petty trade, and equipment repair.

Part of the labour force is involved in mining on a seasonal basis. Part-time diggers have their farms in the villages, for wet-season subsistence when mining is at low ebb. During the months of absence, farm plots are left under the care of a wife, parent, or sibling. Others, such as those who have dropped out of school, who are unable to find a proper job after

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[24] Later in this book it will be argued that the RUF's organisational structure reflected to some extent the organisation structure of such work groups. RUF cadres from a rural background – a substantial group within the rebel movement – had experience with these work groups.

[25] Ironically, development agencies advocating 'community-driven processes' demand that communities contribute labour to aid projects – with the idea of increasing 'community ownership'. Again, it is often the youths who have to provide this community labour.

completing school, or who are on the run to escape an early marriage or fines they cannot pay, are involved in mining on a longer-term basis. With daily wages as low as two cups of rice, or one cup of rice and the equivalent of US$0.25 a day, they are locked in place with only one way to escape: find a big diamond. But that chance has receded almost to vanishing point, since the best deposits are already overworked or exhausted. Quite often old sites 'washed' (searched) years ago are dug up again in the hope of recovering neglected stones. Living conditions in the larger diamond areas are extremely bad, and poor housing facilities combine with lack of clean drinking water and outbreaks of water-borne diseases – abandoned pits fill up with water during the rain season – malaria, or Lassa fever. As Richards remarks (1996), the alluvial diamond fields are the 'rural slums' of Sierra Leone.

Small-scale alluvial diamond mining in Sierra Leone is either author-ised (when the tributor holds a government licence) or illicit (Zack-Williams 1995). Along the Liberian border, where the war started, a significant amount of mining is illicit, taking place in extensive govern-ment forest reserves. These reserves are largely inaccessible to the motor vehicles of the authorities, making licence checks nearly impossible, and mined by those who are brave enough to take a chance and who have enough labour to headload the gear and supplies to remote spots. Alluvial mining can be organised in several ways (Fithen 1999), but commonly the crew is a group of no more than fifteen young males (about five is probably the norm). They dig for diamonds in shallow pits in alluvial or colluvial deposits, on river terraces or in dry riverbeds. Sometimes pumps are needed, or small dams will be built. The work is organised by the leader of the group – usually a more experienced diamond digger – who is responsible for providing food and medical care for his workers,[26] but who also takes part in the backbreaking work if the site is his only operation.

If a diamond is found, it will be sold to the leader, often at a local and highly disadvantageous price,[27] after which the money is shared equally among the miners. Many miners use their earnings to start their own small-scale mining operations, hiring diggers, and so becoming leaders themselves. But alluvial diamond mining is nothing less than a lottery.[28]

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[26] Sometimes in small-scale mining operations the miners bring their own food and equip-ment. But they can still select a leader among themselves. If the workers consider their leader incapable, they can vote on whether he should be replaced, and subsequently select a new leader from among themselves.

[27] Miners have some idea of realistic prices where the smaller and more common stones (less than 1 carat) are concerned. With a large diamond, miners have little experience in judging a fair price and can be cheated easily. Value increases exponentially rather than lineally with increase in carats and quality.

[28] When the sand is removed and the diamond-rich gravel is brought up, it is divided into three piles. One pile is for the miners, one for the master who provides equipment and

Leaders frequently run out of money and become ordinary diggers once again.

While the work is backbreaking, the pay poor, and living conditions deplorable, many youths at least experience some social freedom in the mining areas (see the RUF ex-combatant's account above). Some create their own communities, rather different from Fanthorpe's 'moral community in long-established rural enclaves'. Reno (1995) observes that even before the war:

Some unemployed youths organise 'alternative societies' in the wooded hills surrounding Kono's diamond-mining area. Named after popular films (e.g. 'Delta Force' or 'Terminator'), societies protect members' illicit activities, raid politicians' private plots, and occasionally sell protection to smaller dealers. (Reno 1995: 126)

Richards (1996) similarly describes pre-war encounters with such an 'alternative society' formed by renegades in the Gola Forest along the Liberian border. Members of these groups aspired to create a new regime, free of the elders' control. Here, they could mine independently of even the 'enterprising chiefs and headmen [who] found that they could extract informal "licence fees" and "fines" from young men in return for protection for their IDM [Illicit Diamond Mining] activities' (Reno 2003: 49). It seems likely that prior knowledge of these kinds of off-limits social alternatives made the RUF comprehensible, as a movement, to rural youths from the Liberian border zone inducted into the movement by force.

Urban Life. A last possibility for those who want or are forced to leave their villages is to go to the urban centres. But Sierra Leonean towns, and the capital of Freetown, lack the advantages of the diamond fields – easy employment opportunities. Finding work and housing in the towns is much more difficult, in particular for those lacking kin or patrons willing to assist. For a lucky few it might be possible to become an apprentice to one of the many skilled craftsmen, although these places generally have to be purchased. In any case, the life of the apprentice is arduous. The apprenticeship system in Sierra Leone is less about learning to become an independent craftsman and more about providing cheap labour for a master. Apprenticeships easily could take six, seven, eight years or more: in fact they will last until the apprentice has been able to accumulate enough money to start his or her own business.

fuel for the pumps that drain the water from the pits, and one for the landowner. The piles are allocated by means of a lottery. In the Kono area the gravel is divided into two piles since mostly the landowner also provides the equipment. According to Fithen (1999), the two-pile system was an adaptation to the uncertainties of war.

The unlucky ones are doomed to survive by their wits and are known, in Krio, as *dregman dem* (see Chapter 1). They involve themselves in all sorts of temporary manual labour such as carrying loads and cleaning markets. Many survive through a network of peers who help in finding employment and acting as a substitute for a family left behind. Others group together in what can be considered street gangs. Leaders – youths already experienced in the *dregman* life – are called *bra* [big brother] while the newcomers are *bol ed* [bald head] and 'greens'. Survival strategies include petty crime (cf. PEA 1989).

Discussion

The general drift of the account above is that the political and economic situation in Sierra Leone deteriorated rapidly before the war. Economic crisis caused a collapse of social services, such as education and medical care, and shrinking economic opportunities, and this collapse was experienced particularly harshly by rural youths. The crisis in collapsed expectations is perhaps as important for youth as any actual deterioration in material conditions; extreme poverty is no new feature in the lives of most young people in rural Sierra Leone. Furthermore, attention has been directed to a village-level social system which distinguished between natives and strangers, with the latter category especially vulnerable to exploitation by rural elites/landlords. Typically, about one third of the total population of a Sierra Leonean village is classed as stranger.[29] Several mechanisms have been discussed that enabled rural land-owning 'big men' to exploit the labour of vulnerable young people, especially those from dependent lineages and impoverished 'stranger' households.

It is important to realise that marriage and land laws make sense not as quasi-property law, but as surrogates for a 'hidden' law of labour management. Getz (2004) showed that in colonial West Africa coastal merchant elites and interior rulers colluded with the British and French to slow down the pace of emancipation. It has been argued above that customary law is, in effect, the legalisation of various states of domestic dependency, amounting at the most extreme to de facto domestic slavery. In the absence of deep agrarian transformation – based on either true institutional reform or agro-technical transformation – the labour of most young people remains exploited under the lineage mode of production.

More specifically for the Sierra Leonean case, one can say that the colonial state devised a Faustian bargain – namely the leveraging of respect from powerful ruling elites for national British-fashion laws to regulate commerce and protect trade, in return for British tolerance of local

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[29] For some detailed statistics on the percentage of 'strangers' in Gola Forest villages, see Richards (1996).

customs preserving the coercive labour privileges of rural elites. In understanding the local customs the British protected, it is crucial to realise the importance of having enough hands to work the land. Bledsoe (1980) suggests the concept of 'wealth in people'. Wealth resides not in having land as such but in having followers to work the land. Customs relating to marriage are key, since food farming in Sierra Leone remains based on gendered cooperation in the near-total absence of animals or machines. The politics of wealth-in-people – amounting to 'ownership' of wives and children – is sustained by customs (especially marriage customs) that are legally binding, and imposed by the customary court system via serious sanctions, including steep fines, forced labour, imprisonment in local lock-ups, stocks, or beatings. The social order this system reproduced was once a real order, however unjust it may have seemed, but as the state got weaker (from Stevens onwards) the administration of justice also weakened, as argued above. The problem with customary justice was thus not only its systematic oppressiveness but also that an incalculable arbitrariness had taken over. These days, there are only two customary law officers to supervise all customary courts in the provinces. One such officer covers both southern and eastern provinces, and he doubles as the government counsel, so supervision is non-existent. Nor are there any records, and those that existed finally disappeared in the war. Many local courts are thus, in effect, unauthorised, and make up the law as they go along. They are money-making ventures for chiefs and other minor local officials whose salaries are no longer paid by the state.

This collapse into arbitrariness implies that marriage systems – the bedrock of rural society – cease to 'compute' in terms of inter-generational 'reciprocity', which has indeed been the case. This computation – remembering debts of social obligation over long periods – is central to the West African forest zone village culture (or at least Meillassoux's version of it). This collapse into arbitrariness happened most in the Liberian border zone (Kailahun and Pujehun). President Stevens was afraid to send his henchmen there to restore order.[30] A feature of the already weakened state power in Sierra Leone in the Stevens era was that sustained attempts at assertion were focused mainly on the diamond districts (Reno 1995), and areas elsewhere were kept quiet by occasional quick bursts of thuggery or patrimonial redistribution, until IMF-induced bankruptcy loomed. In effect, the story of the post-colonial polity is one of a steady decline in the state's power to regulate custom, but this did not imply the kind of freedom anarchists desire. Customary power simply became decentred (that is, localised), while remaining 'the only

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[30] Several truck loads of SSD personnel are reputed to have simply disappeared in the 1977 election in Kailahun, and attempts to stamp State House control over Pujehun district resulted in the Ndogboyosoi conflagration in the 1980s.

game in town'. This generality of localised patrimonialism is the reason why young people do not easily walk away from their villages to escape kangaroo courts and labour obligations. Regularly they try to, but they only get as far as the next village or chiefdom, where they find similar kangaroo courts waiting to ensnare them. By moving, they lose what few localised rights they might have been able to claim under British-reformed indirect rule – their unquestioned lineage-based land rights. Once they are 'off base' they are then dependent on finding themselves a patron (known in Mende as *hotakee*, literally 'stranger-father') to gain land, a wife, and access to local labour-sharing institutions. This system of strangerhood is general throughout the upper West African forests.[31] Incomers need to 'know' the mystical dangers of the land, but even more so they need to belong to labour-sharing groups. Chiefs and lineage elders (as major landowners) take good care to act as patrons of all such groups. The only other option is to subsist as vagrants/fugitives from justice, but even this requires the protection of a different kind of patron-protector – such as a diamond gang master, a criminal boss, or a warlord.

The reality in Sierra Leone is of a set of loosely interlocking patrimonial cones, manifesting as factions within ministries, legal system, army and police, altogether very different from the model of a Weberian state,[32] but a reality rather common in African states (Chabal and Daloz 1999). The system in Sierra Leone is rooted in nineteenth-century realities. Abraham (1978) discusses Mende government and politics under colonial rule and uses the term 'personal-amorphous' precolonial polities to refer to this system. These were non-territorial entities. A chief might simply move his retinue from A to B and begin again. But the international system of states from 1960 forced Sierra Leone to behave externally as if it were a Weberian and territorial state. In many respects, however, it has remained a 'personal-amorphous polity', resisting bureaucratisation – those comprehensive and generalised linkages Weber saw as basic to state instrumental rationality (Collins and Makowsky 1993) – and favouring personal linkages between ruler and ruled. According to Gellner (1977), patrimonialism and personalised dependency work well on the margins, and especially when you take account of situational factors, such as a national comprador elite busily expatriating wealth from diamonds. The political classes in Sierra Leone hardly can be accused of building locally for the future. When the personal-amorphous polity finally broke down, it spewed out a large group of marginalised and excluded young people. These were our future conscripts.

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[31] In Côte d'Ivoire it is known as the *tutorat*.
[32] Customary law is an example of such a quasi-independent patrimonial cone, as discussed earlier in this chapter, where, even on appeal to the High Court, 'bigger' traditional elders review the actions of 'smaller' such elders.

It can be agreed that the two sets of circumstances described in this chapter – collapse of a neo-patrimonial state and marginalisation of the rural poor – are important but not sufficient causes of war. There are 'cases of collapse of putatively patron-clientelistic states that have not led to violence' according to Mkandawire (2002: 185; cf. Bratton and van de Walle 1998). Socio-economic crisis among rural youth is in itself no automatic recipe for war, since there are numerous countries on the African continent where youths have experienced equally harsh socio-economic conditions, without armed conflict resulting. However, it also can be argued that the two sets of circumstances described are particularly pernicious where they interact. In that case a highly explosive mix is created, where rebellion of an extremely destructive nature is a possible outcome. In Sierra Leone, it resulted in a decade-long war, tens of thousands of casualties, and the displacement (internally or to neighbouring countries) of more than half the population.

3   Conflict in Sierra Leone and Recruits to the War

I now turn to an overview of the conflict.[1] Some of these events are further illuminated by the personal memories and commentary of ex-combatants and civilians interviewed for this book. It will become clear that the armed conflict in Sierra Leone was a highly complex affair. It involved a series of armed groups, including the RUF, the army, army renegades and splinter factions, the civil defence forces (Kamajoisia, Kapras, Tamaboros), mercenaries (Gurkhas, EO, Sandline), foreign factions United Liberian Movement for Democracy (ULIMD) or armies (Guinean soldiers), and peace enforcers/keepers (ECOMOG, UNAMSIL, British troops). Regional and international interests (both political and economic) influenced the course of the conflict in overt and covert ways. Three successful coups and a democratic election punctuated more than a decade of struggle. Ceasefires were agreed upon and peace accords signed, only to be violated and broken again. Large parts of the population became displaced, returned, and resettled, but found themselves on the run once more when the war flared up again.

The Beginning

In March 1991 a small group of about a hundred guerrilla fighters entered eastern Sierra Leone from Liberia. For long it has been assumed that, in addition to Sierra Leoneans, the initial insurgents included Liberian fighters – Special Forces who were on loan from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) – and a few mercenaries from Burkina Faso. However, more recent evidence suggests that the first fighters to enter Sierra Leone may not have been Sierra Leoneans at all but predominantly NPFL fighters, who were subsequently "seconded" to Sankoh's forces by Charles Taylor once the RUF established its control over eastern Sierra Leone (cf. Keen 2005).

Before the war some Liberian rebels were trading with the Sierra Leonean army, because by that time Liberia was already in a war. But some of the Sierra Leonean

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[1] A chronology of the war is given in Annex I.

guys cheated the rebels, so these rebels entered Sierra Leone and the conflict started. Of course the RUF all the way planned to attack Sierra Leone, but according to my information they wanted to wait a few months longer. But this incident speeded up the whole thing. (Ex-RUF cadre)

Foday Sankoh, who – as the above account confirms – apparently was about to attack Sierra Leone anyway in the near future, then gathered his men and moved towards the borders of Kailahun and Pujehun districts. The majority of these groups were Sierra Leoneans. These so-called vanguard[2] troops were usually divided into two categories: Sierra Leoneans who had received guerrilla training in Libya in 1987–8 and those who were recruited in Liberia just before the incursion.[3] Some had fighting experience in the war in Liberia and a good number had urban backgrounds, or had previously lived in an urban centre. The guerrilla forces called themselves the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone. The proclaimed aim was to overthrow the president, Major General Joseph Saidu Momoh of the All People's Congress, whose previous leader, President Siaka Stevens, had declared Sierra Leone a one-party state in 1978.

The ranks of the guerrilla forces were swelled rapidly by a mixture of coerced and voluntary recruitment among primary and secondary school pupils in the Sierra Leone–Liberia border region, and school drop-outs working as 'san-san boys' [literally, 'sand-sand'] in small-scale alluvial diamond mining in eastern Sierra Leone.[4] Some joined the RUF because they saw it as a Mende uprising against the Temne-dominated APC party.[5] But, as we have seen in Chapter 1, many other youths considered it a good opportunity to escape from the political, social, and economic

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[2] The name "vanguard" has since then been used among RUF combatants to refer to a person who was among the initial insurgents.

[3] Some ex-RUF informants put it the other way around: the vanguards were Sierra Leoneans living in Liberia who received military training at the Sogoto base in Liberia. The Special Forces were divided in two: those who were Sierra Leoneans and had received guerrilla training in Libya in 1987–8; and those who were Liberian fighters, on loan from Liberian rebel leader and supporter of the RUF, Charles Taylor.

[4] Whether or not the RUF encountered willing recruits among the young people involved in alluvial mining was influenced by the specific nature of the local political economy. According to Reno: 'In areas where chiefs became more dependent on an "official" clandestine economy [often upstream kimberlite concessions] before the war, youth, especially IDM [Illicit Diamond Mining] gangs, were more likely to collaborate with RUF in the 1990s, and outside armed youth gangs (such as army units) also mined with more impunity. Local authorities further down river [with tighter control over IDM gangs] were more successful in channeling youth violence into home guard units to defend communities' (Reno 2003: 52). It is likely that many of the illicit miners in upstream Kono were even more eager to join the RUF as a result of "Operation Clean Sweep" and "Operation Clear All" launched by the army in the middle of 1990, during which as many as 30,000 miners were forced out of the area (Reno 2003: 57).

[5] In the east and south of the country, people were ordered by the RUF to cut palm leaves, the symbol of the Mende-dominated Sierra Leone People's Party, to decorate their villages and towns.

marginalisation they experienced at a national as well as a village level in Sierra Leone.

The Sierra Leonean army was ill-prepared to challenge the incursion. With a total of no more than 3,000 troops, outdated weaponry – one informant jokily commented that 'whenever you had fired ten bullets you had to drop the gun, open your zipper and pee on the gun to make it cool down before you could use it again' – and with most senior officers residing in Freetown, the government forces rapidly lost ground.

The RUF only met its first serious resistance when it tried to take the eastern town of Daru, the home of the army's third battalion. Its failure to do so seemed to be an important turning point for the morale and behaviour of the movement:[6]

The RUF started as a revolutionary force and was supported by the civilians but later, when the advance was blocked, the RUF started to accuse civilians of leaking information, and then they turned against them. The failure to capture Daru resulted in a massacre. (Colonel in the Sierra Leone Army)

Lacking support from Freetown and with insufficient logistical support, frontline army officers realised they were fighting the battle virtually alone, and changed tactics. In response to the threat by the RUF's youthful combatants, army officers at the front started to recruit and train youths as fighters and personal bodyguards, tapping into the same pool of local, patron-less, war-zone youngsters as the RUF (Richards 1996). These young fighters, loyal to their recruiting commander and with no official army number, were referred to as irregulars or 'border guards'.

During the first year of the war the RUF gradually came to control much of the far eastern part of Sierra Leone, and increasingly became a threat to the diamond-mining areas in Kono.

Youth in Power

A new phase in the conflict started in April 1992 when Captain Valentine Strasser became the new head of state after a successful military coup. Allegedly to protest against poor payment and lack of logistical support to fight the rebels, a group of young officers from the east of the country came down to Freetown. President Momoh fled at the first sight of protesting soldiers, and the protesters were more or less given the president's seat. Together with other young soldiers – Strasser was twenty-seven at the time of the coup – mostly from the Daru battalion, he established the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). This removed the RUF's proclaimed reason for fighting – to overthrow the APC government – but also threatened to deprive the RUF of its main source of

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[6] During the attack the notorious RUF commando "Rambo" was killed by a mortar half-way over the Mano River bridge, while advancing towards the military barracks.

recruits, namely marginalised and excluded youths. The NPRC's youthful leaders were successfully recruiting in the capital and provincial towns among unemployed youth, street children, and petty criminals. Having access to this vast reservoir of young people, the NPRC was able to expand the army from a pre-war figure of 3,000–4,000 to a 1993–4 total of around 15,000–20,000 (Fithen and Richards 2005). Many of these new recruits received only limited military training and lacked army discipline. Some of these new-found recruits later became known, to civilians, as 'sobels' – soldiers by day, rebels by night.[7] Up-country, Captain Benjamin-Hirsch had already started recruiting local youths – mainly unemployed or working as miners – in and around the Segbwema area in Kailahun Province for a special force, the 'Airborne Division'. As fighters, they compensated for lack of training with knowledge of the local terrain and the desire for revenge where the rebels had killed family members.

The expanded army succeeded in driving back the RUF, which, by the time of the coup, had been able to take over most of the country's eastern region. The RUF saw its routes of retreat into Liberia blocked by hostile ULIMO[8] forces and decided to withdraw into the Gola Forest on the Liberia–Sierra Leone border at the end of 1993 to regroup, abandoning the small amount of heavy military equipment it possessed. Much speculation has addressed whether or not the NPRC allowed the all-but-defeated RUF to regroup, since it declared a cease-fire at the end of 1993 on the brink of victory:

The first three years the army was fighting for the country but by the end of '93 I was told that there was a one-month cease-fire: whenever a rebel passed we had to let him go. By that time we had just captured Pendembu, Kailahun, Weidu, Koindu, and other places. This operation was called Operation Desert Storm. It was confusing [suspicious]: there was an attack on Nomo Faama chiefdom, the next day there was an attack close to Bunumbu. The next day at Wiema and after that at Tongo. And the rebels were disorganised by that time! Sometimes

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[7] Both Momoh and Strasser rapidly expanded the army by enrolling young and often unemployed people without giving them proper training. Before the war recruitment took place 'within the well-regulated patronage system' of a 'nearly century-old institution' (Gberie 2005: 103). It is however open to debate to what extent the pre-war recruitment practices by the army would have been a sufficient guarantee to rule out misbehaviour of its soldiers. Many soldiers and in particular officers enrolled well before the start of the war – during the days of the 'well-regulated patronage system' – but this did not prevent some of them becoming deeply involved in looting and atrocious activities. In any case, past behaviour (in peacetime) of the army cannot be taken as a guarantee for future behaviour (in time of conflict). Prolonged warfare, with its high level of tension and threats, tends to have a significant impact on even the most highly trained and professional army.

[8] The ULIMO was established in Sierra Leone by political refugees who had fled Charles Taylor's NPFL. It started to assist the Sierra Leonean government forces fighting the RUF (the ally of the NPFL) and later entered Liberia to fight directly Taylor's forces.

army trucks went to the rebel territory. The army people said that if a military man comes out of the war without any benefit, he is not a real military man. The army liked the power and felt that the NPRC was not supporting them properly. The Kamajors collaborated with the army with broken hearts but they had no choice. (Ex-Kamajoi commander)

To add to speculation over covert collaboration between the RUF and the army, shortly after the cease-fire was declared the RUF was able to capture with suspicious ease a large quantity of weapons from the well-equipped – but weakly guarded – military outpost at Nomo Faama, in the home area of NPRC fighter Lieutenant Tom Nyuma. The attack might have been a set-up, or it could have been a genuine RUF attack without the army's prior knowledge, since it was common knowledge that, despite the fact that a war was going on, many of the senior commanders left their posts to go to Freetown during the festival season. Gberie (2000) adds that many of the army rank and file, or volunteers, also abandoned their positions and went to Freetown to watch a major international football tournament, the annual Zone Two soccer festival. This was the moment the RUF struck at Nomo Faama:

We had studied the movement of the soldiers and knew that around Christmas time, when the attack took place, many of the higher-ranking soldiers who were there to protect the place and weapons had left for Freetown for celebrations. That explains how we were able to take these arms. (Ex-RUF commander)

Nevertheless, it remains clear that an end to the war would not have been advantageous to many in the army and the NPRC regime. Peace would have denied some military commanders involved in looting and illegal activities the opportunity to continue, and would definitely have increased the public's demand for democratic elections.

In the second half of 1994, the RUF started a new campaign, no longer limiting itself to the eastern part of the country. Many were surprised by the quick recovery of the RUF and its ability to attack places far from the area it was presumed to control. Again, it was suspected that collaboration with the army was behind this new ability. But a tactical switch may have been of equal or greater importance:

Our success by then [from 1994 onwards] can be fully explained by our change in tactics. We started to fight a guerrilla war which was very successful. Another reason is that we had no other option than to continue fighting. That also gives the people zeal to fight. (Ex-RUF commander)

Jungle camps were established all over the country and fighters used the narrow bush paths to launch quick hit-and-run attacks before disappearing into the forest. After the near defeat at the end of 1993, the RUF leadership held a crucial meeting at Pumpudu in Kailahun to decide on its new strategy. Sankoh and his group, after their retreat through the Gola Forest, held Nomo Faama for a week, set an ambush for Tom

Nyuma (in hot pursuit), and retreated into the Gola Forest, where the cadres built their first *bafa* (shelter) for Sankoh, before establishing the Zogoda, the main RUF camp where Sankoh resided most of the time. His lieutenants – Samuel Bockarie, Issa Sesay, Mohamed Tarawalie, Dennis Mingo, and Morris Kallon – were ordered to set up other forest bases: Camp Burkina[9] at Ngiyema in Kailahun [Tarawalie], Peyeima Camp adjacent to Tongo Fields [Bockarie], Camp Bokor in the Kangari Hills [Kallon], and a camp on the ridge of the Malal Hills in Northern Province [Mingo]. Tarawalie was ordered to leave Camp Burkina to found Camp Bokor and then the Malal Hills base, before becoming commander of the Zogoda.

The RUF now mainly relied on ambushes and hit-and-run attacks. For example, in November 1994 Kabala, a town in the far north of the country, was attacked (again) and two British Voluntary Service Overseas aid workers were captured. Then in January 1995 the rebels attacked Kambia, in the far west of the country (Riley and Sesay 1995). Isolated from society at large, the RUF was further cut off from the vast reservoir of potential youthful conscripts. As a result, it not only changed its military tactics but was also faced with the need to raid villages in search of food, medicines, and, above all, new conscripts.

Meanwhile there was an increasing problem of loyalty in the army: after the 1992 coup many of the officers loyal to the APC were replaced by NPRC loyalists. However, a considerable number of the APC commanders and fighters remained in post, and many of them were sent, as a punishment, to frontline positions. Increasingly these commanders started to involve themselves, together with their own loyalists (youthful irregulars without an army number), in clandestine operations and/or deals with the RUF. A commander might pack his boys off to areas where there were still signs of RUF activity, ostensibly to defend outlying villages but in reality to avail themselves of the rich local pickings of cocoa, coffee, and diamonds (Richards 1996). In short, the line between the army and its opponents became increasingly blurred after the NPRC coup:

I joined in 1990 but left the army in '95 because it became too much mixed up. You meet your brother [fellow soldier] one day and the next day he will be threatening you at a checkpoint. One time I remember that about 500 soldiers from Teko [the barracks near Makeni] went 'missing'.[10] And a lot of the looting was done by the civilians themselves. When an attack took place they all ran away but the first to return took the property of the others and later everybody accused the rebels. (Ex-RSLMF soldier)

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[9] After the sacking of the Zogoda (end of 1996), RUF survivors made their way through the Gola Forest to the safety of Camp Burkina in northern Kailahun.

[10] This actually took place in February 1994. It is possible that they were absorbed by the RUF or built their own RUF-style camp in the Kangari Hills in order to take their 'share' of the rich pickings of the war.
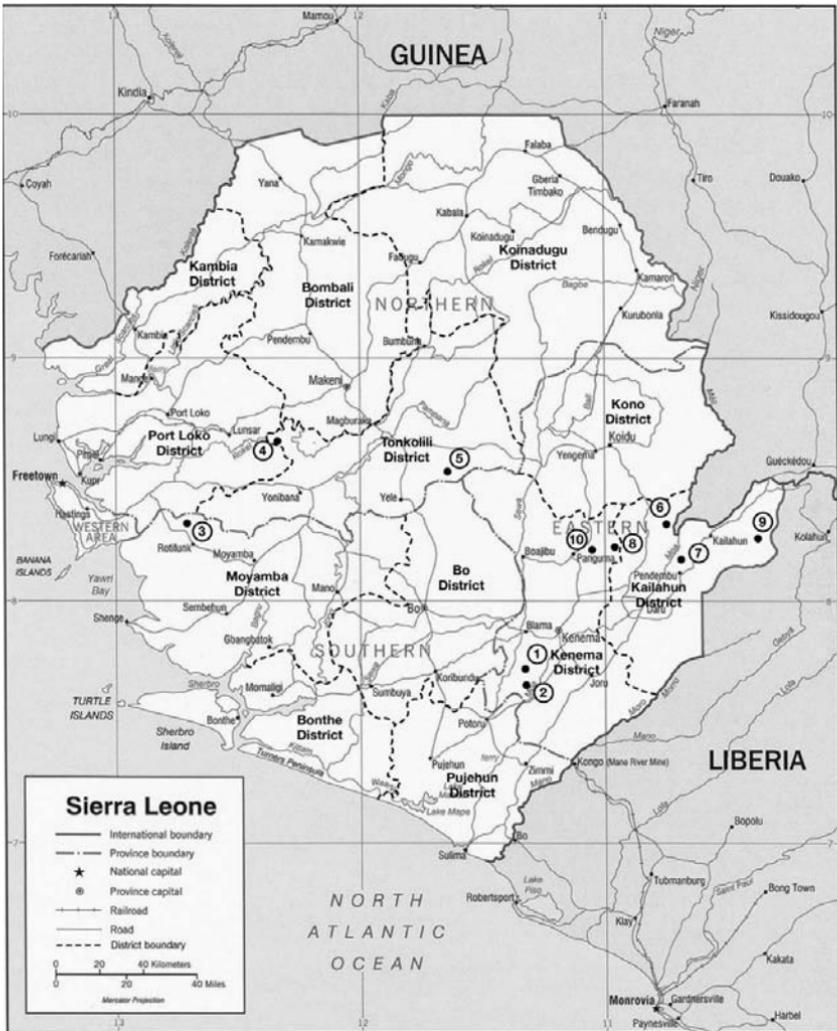
Map 1 Main RUF jungle camps during bush-phase and other places of relevance.
  1. The Zogoda
  2. Camp Lion
  3. Camp ForFor
  4. Malal Hills Camp
  5. Camp Bokor at Kangari Hills
  6. Camp Burkina
  7. Giema Camp
  8. Peyeima Camp
  9. Pumpudu
 10. Tongo Fields

Whether or not there was regular contact and collaboration between the army and the RUF, it was clear by now that a pattern had started to develop. The *modus operandi* was that the army looted the heavy equipment – of little use to the forest-based RUF – either before or after a rebel attack, while the RUF looted the lighter material. Since the RUF was in the habit of informing a village or town of its intention to attack by letter, civilians often fled, followed by soldiers who first loaded any useful items onto their trucks.

The attack on SIEROMCO[11] mines was a set-up. We heard from civilians on the run that the RUF was about to plan an attack on the mines but the army guaranteed SIEROMCO that the rebels would not attack. A few days later the army loaded their heavy equipment on to their trucks, left the town, and went to Bo.[12] We were now without protection and shortly after the rebels attacked. (Former administrator of SIEROMCO mines)

In 1995 the NPRC started to recruit mercenaries to become more effective in combating the RUF. First a mercenary force of ex-Gurkhas was hired, led by an American – Colonel Robert Mackenzie, a Vietnam veteran who had later undergone counter-insurgency training in the Rhodesian Army. During their first major operation they were attacked, with high losses including the death of Mackenzie, and the survivors were withdrawn shortly afterwards:

We were listening to a radio message, to announce promotions. Then we were called out of the base, and then ordered back in. Two jets came to bombard. But we knew the air raid was not the thing, that ground forces would come, so we were ready. They told us they [Gurkhas] are coming. We began to fight seriously. It was not an ambush. . . . There was one white man. He had compass, camera, gun. He was hit, and then killed. We dragged his body back to camp. We saw he had a tattoo on his arm. They cut the arm off, to show the tattoo to identify the person, to prove to the government that he had been killed. We buried Tarawali [RSLMF major, aide-de-camp to NPRC Chairman Valentine Strasser]. After that attack the commanders decided to move the [Malal Hills] camp. After one week the jets came to bombard but we had left the camp site by then. (Ex-RUF combatant, quoted in Peters and Richards 1998a: 206)

The defeated ex-Gurkhas were replaced by the South African private security firm EO. But the bankrupted NPRC government was unable to pay the requested US$15 million for EO's services. However, in exchange for a mining concession reportedly valued at US$30 million (Richards 1996), EOs started to train and support the army and Kamajoi units.

[11] SIEROMCO: Sierra Leone Ore and Metal Company, a subsidiary of Alu-Suisse, was mining bauxite in the Mokanji Hills in the south of the country, and was attacked in mid-January 1995.

[12] Much of the SIEROMCO equipment was later sold by the military in Bo and Freetown. Johnny Paul Koroma – the future leader of the junta government – was probably involved in the attacks on the SIEROMCO mines (Keen 2005; Gberie 2005: 88).

The Kamajoisia

As early as 1991–2, government forces started to make use of local hunters as scouts during their patrols. By the end of 1992 traditional hunters from the northern Koinadugu district, known as Tamaboros, formed a "battalion" to help the NPRC fight the rebels. However, in October 1993 the RUF attacked Kabala, the main base of the Tamaboros, and killed their leaders. In the east of the country, a similar movement had started, with early support for the idea that these scouts should have a more formalised role. Dr Alfa Lavalie, a history lecturer at Fourah Bay College, favoured such a role and allegedly travelled to England to collect funds from the Sierra Leone diaspora to realise his ideas. On 7 December 1993 a Kamajoisia "battalion" was created by the Eastern Region Defence Committee (Gberie 2005: 83).

Lavalie later died at Mano Junction from the effects of a landmine, allegedly planted by the army to kill him. His death did not result in the end of the movement, however, and early in 1994 more than 500 Kamajoi fighters were active in Kenema and Kailahun districts.

April the 5th, 1991 was the beginning of the Kamajors. Then they started to work as hunters, vigilantes, and volunteers for the army. Major Dowei of the army asked the chiefdom authorities to present some local hunters to help them in their fight. Lower Bambara chiefdom [located in Kenema district] presented 515 Kamajors, all with a single-barrel gun.[13] Then the army took us to Pendembu, Daru, and Pujehun because Lower Bambara itself was not under attack. I was the leader of those 515 men. Later Dodo chiefdom did the same. The military did not give us training so we used our bush tactics or copied the army methods. If you as a hunter can go to the bush and kill an animal, what is next? (Ex-Kamajoi commander)

Another key figure in this development – local hunters involving themselves in the war – was Samuel Hinga Norman, a former army captain noted for his role in resisting the election victory of Siaka Stevens in 1968, and later regent chief of Jaiama Bongor chiefdom, Bo district. Norman started to organise local hunters in his chiefdom during 1992–3. Later he was appointed deputy defence minister in the post-1996 democratic government (the president held the defence portfolio) and visible leader of the Kamajoisia and CDF.

During the first two years of the war the local hunters clearly had a supporting role in military operations. But from 1993 onwards, in response to continued RUF attacks and the inadequate protection offered by the

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[13] Five hundred fifteen Kamajoi fighters might be an inflated claim for only one chiefdom.

rapidly expanded but increasingly badly disciplined army, local communities started to organise civil defence groups to take the protection of their villages into their own hands.

In late 1993 and early 1994 the RUF entered Bonthe district in the south of the country. Allegedly, victims of RUF violence prayed at the graveyards of ancient warriors, where esoteric knowledge was revealed to them of how to become invincible. They then initiated others in this knowledge and began to fight against the rebels. Soon these local fighters, protected by charms and magical "bullet-proof" jackets, drove the RUF out of Bonthe district. The NPRC regime took notice and started to make use of fighters such as these, bringing them to other war zones and getting them to initiate more volunteers. The first major initiation drive took place in the displaced camps around Bo, filled mainly with people from Pujehun district in the south. Many of the young Kamajoisia were pupils and students before they joined. Considerable numbers had experienced the disruption of their education by RUF attacks on schools.

This school was open up to 1997. Before the school closed, those who were fed up with school or who were not able to pay the fees sometimes joined [a fighting force]. But after the school closed more joined. Most of the students joined the CDF. . . . But it is because of the war that the youths have realised the value of education, since during the war educated people were better off. (Principal of a secondary school in Kenema)

Obviously, the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps were fertile ground for the recruitment of (young) people to fight against the rebels and reclaim their abandoned land. Since the Kamajoi movement was successful in reclaiming RUF-controlled land, recruitment was strongly supported and stimulated by the village and town chiefs, who were also among the displaced population residing in the camps. Daily disputes and other matters inside the camps were still taken care of by the chiefs and the elders, as would normally be the case in the now disrupted or abandoned villages.

Up to '95 the chief hunter was the leader for the chiefdom. The role of the paramount chief was to make sure that his subjects provided food for the local hunters. Without the paramount chief there would be no local hunters. And it was the army who went to the paramount chief to ask for hunters. The local hunters are loyal to the paramount chief and the chiefdom. The paramount chief gives a green card to the chief hunter for his activities. (Ex-Kamajoi commander)

Drawing their organisational modalities from the guild of specialist hunters known in the south and east as *kamajoisia* (Mende) and in the north as *tamaboros* (Koranko) or *kapras* (Temne), these local defence forces consisted of a leader or initiator, a *kami*, and a small group of apprentices. According to Muana (1997), the Kamajoi movement retained

its guild organisation. Control among the Kamajoisia was very rigid and various codes of conduct were often obeyed, even in the absence of the leader. This is partly due to the strong belief of a Kamajoi that if he – the Kamajoi movement was an almost exclusively male force – were to break the code, he would lose his magical bullet-proof protection and die in combat. So strong was this belief that other Kamajoisia would not come close to the spell-breaker out of fear of also losing their protection. Some of the "laws" stated that it was forbidden to touch a woman or something a woman was touching.[14] Other examples of Kamajoi taboos were stealing, using abusive language, killing innocent civilians, or touching dirty items.

Out of fear for breaking the laws, Kamajors on patrol meeting an abandoned village with food, did not touch it, rather preferring to be hungry than lose their protection. Because food was so scarce during the time the Kamajors were driven back into the bush, 1997–8, it was decided that Kamajors were allowed to take abandoned food, but were not allowed to steal it or carry it away to sell it later. (Ex-CDF administrator)

Other factors may have contributed to the disciplined behaviour of the Kamajoisia. The rebel forces mainly consisted of young men and women (of whom many were under-age), but the Kamajoi movement was much more age-balanced, including both young and older fighters.

Most of the local hunters working for the army were not highly educated but their competence was important. Experience was what mattered so they were mainly older men. No senior post was given to someone below the age of twenty. Those young people do not have a better understanding of things and can just act on their own. But during the time of the Kamajors [after 1995] young educated people were accepted, because the [SLPP] government now supported us and needed people who were able to organise and divide the support given to us and to make reports. Now the younger and educated people moved in, mainly in the administrative positions. But in the battlefront it was still experience that counted. For higher [field] positions it was experience and age that counted. Age brings responsibility. (Ex-Kamajoi commander)

While coming from rural communities like many of the RUF conscripts and army irregulars, most of the younger Kamajoi fighters were not alienated from their villages. They thus differed significantly from the RUF and NPRC recruits in that they still largely accepted the authority of the village or town chief – who played a key role in their recruitment, as we have seen above. Candidates were screened at successive levels by

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[14] According to an ex-Kamajoi fighter he sometimes went months without seeing a woman. This law also resulted in photo opportunities for the international press because when travelling in taxis the Kamajoisia developed the habit of sitting – in full traditional costume – on the roof, to prevent contact with female passengers.

the village chief, the town chief, and the region chief. Finally, they were presented to the paramount chief.

There is an undeniable triangular relationship between the Sierra Leone People's Party, the Kamajoi civil defence force, and traditional authorities on chiefdom level and downwards. The Kamajors are fighting for the return of people to their villages but indirectly they are fighting for the restoration of traditional authorities. The APC had no respect for the chiefdoms, they created new ruling houses which had never signed any treaty with the British. The chiefs were the big minds behind the movement, using these young people for their own ends – their reinstallation. Chiefs sometimes paid the initiation fees. Others borrowed money from Lebanese merchants, paying it back later by starting to dig diamonds. (Ex-CDF administrator)

Still, the combined forces of the army and increasing numbers of Kamajoisia were unable to prevent the RUF from getting close to the capital city in early 1995. This inability was partly due to the fact that cooperation between the army and the Kamajoisia became increasingly unstable. As mentioned, the Kamajoi movement was partly a reaction to the incapability – or sometimes unwillingness – of the army to protect civilians. Now the Kamajoi movement had become increasingly success-ful in protecting civilians and their villages, and started to take the initiat-ive in attacking the RUF. This boosted confidence among the Kamajoisia and the civilians, and both groups openly started to confront soldiers, for instance at checkpoints where soldiers demanded tokens from the passing civilians and Kamajoisia.[15]

New CDF recruits were beneficial to the initiators as they had to contribute five gallons of palm oil and Le30,000 [US$15–30] to be initiated. These youths were used by the initiators to create their own groups of fighters. Hinga Norman, too, used them to pave his way to a higher position. He knew that the Kamajoi bullet-proof did not work. In the beginning only few people could join the Kamajoi movement. But when it became politicalised, when money came in, their numbers grew and they were set up against the soldiers. (Colonel in the SLA)

With the rebel forces unable to take the capital and claim total victory, but strong enough not to be defeated by the combined power of the milit-ary forces and the rapidly expanding Kamajoi militia, peace negotiations were opened between the RUF and government. A provisional ceasefire was agreed in January 1996. In February 1996 the first democratic elec-tions in decades were held. Rebels and sobels tried to disrupt the polls and at least fifty-two people had limbs amputated (Gberie 2005: 95). Captain Julius Maada Bio (installed after a palace coup the previous month) now found himself handing over power to Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah of the SLPP. The SLPP was from its early days the party supported by

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[15] One of the biggest clashes between the SLA and the Kamajoisia took place at Kpetema checkpoint, Kenema, in September 1996; dozens of people died.

the chiefs and much of the Mende population of the south and east. So it was not an incomprehensible move on the part of the newly elected government to sideline the army, on whose loyalty it could not count, and to depend increasingly on the Kamajoi movement for national defence. Meanwhile official policy was to continue the peace negotiations with the RUF.

While these negotiations went ahead, key RUF bases were attacked by Kamajoi militias, supported by mercenaries of the South African-based security-cum-mining company EO.

When Foday Sankoh was about to go for peace talks in Abidjan [leading to the November 1996 peace accord] he told us that he would not return to the Zogoda. He said that there were some politicians who were not genuine about the peace talks and would try to frustrate the whole process. So he advised us to leave the camp [the Zogoda], but we could not believe it. However, he proved to be right. The Kamajors were continuing their operations while there was a cease-fire. Because we had a strict order from the Pa [Sankoh] that we were not allowed to shoot at any soldier, we had to retreat. We could not properly defend the place. (Ex-RUF commander)

I joined the Kamajors in 1996 in Kenema. The day we were going to attack the Zogoda, we moved from Kenema to Blama and afterwards to Gbandawo where we met our first resistance. Many Kamajors were moving together, also from other areas. But we all moved as one group. Not all men had a gun and many, like me, just followed them to see their home area again. Others carried food for them. If you were born in this chiefdom, you had to join the Kamajors, by force. The paramount chief, through taxing the people, paid for your initiation.

It was a joint attack by the Kamajors and soldiers but the Kamajors were in the majority. When we flushed the rebels out of the Zogoda we met many *bafas* [huts] and many properties. According to the chief it was the ICRC [Red Cross] helicopter that brought a looted generator to the Zogoda.[16] Those Kamajors from elsewhere took these properties. We were afraid of those Kamajors because they were carrying real arms. Then those Kamajors forced people to carry the goods away from the Zogoda. They also attacked Camp Lion, which is close to the Zogoda. (Ex-Kamajoi fighter)

The government argued that it was not in control of the Kamajoi movement and was thus unable to stop it breaching the cease-fire. In November 1996 the Abidjan peace accord was signed by the Sierra Leonean government and the RUF/SL. Officially the war was over, but mutual suspicion between the former enemies resulted in neither side disarming or demobilising its fighters to any significant extent, with clashes between the RUF and Kamajoisia still taking place. Perhaps Sankoh was not genuine about the peace process from the start; certainly the destruction of the

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[16] In fact, an ICRC helicopter airlifted Foday Sankoh from the village of Menima close to the Zogoda to attend the Abidjan peace talks.

bush camps would have undermined his faith in a future for the RUF after the war.

> During the time of the Abidjan peace negotiations, some of the RUF politicians wanted peace, like Faya Musa, Philip Palmer, and Deen-Jalloh, but Foday Sankoh wanted to pursue the military solution. (Ex-RUF commander)

In February 1997 Sankoh was arrested and detained in Nigeria on weapons charges. The ideological leadership of the RUF tried to take control over the movement but was arrested by the battlefield commander and deputy leader of the RUF, Sam Bockarie.

> Later they detained him [Sankoh] in Nigeria. So then other people inside the movement wanted to become the new leaders of the RUF. People like Deen-Jalloh, Philip Palmer, Faya Musa, and Dr Barrie. They all stayed in Abidjan. But they should rather have come to us so that we could hold a people's congress.
> But Maskita [Bockarie] never allowed that. When Steven Umah, Abdul Mansarey and Faya James wanted to hold peace negotiations, we set up an ambush. They were reluctant to cross the river from Guinea to our territory in Sierra Leone, but we applauded and praised them so that they really thought we welcomed them. When they came over we had our meeting but we never released them because they were betraying the movement. Maskita told the government that their plans were not going through. That the RUF was still loyal to the Pa. (Ex-RUF commander)

And Another Coup

In May 1997 a third coup was carried out by the army, disgruntled at being sidelined by the government.

> Not to criticise him but during the Kabbah government, nothing went to the soldiers. He and the people were giving the soldiers all types of offending names. And he, the president, was embracing these Kamajors. He was praising them which made the soldiers frustrated. These types of grievances were living among the soldiers which made them to overthrow the government in the end. They [the SLPP politicians] cut down their [the soldiers] normal pay. You had to wait for a month for a bag of rice and if you were entitled to two bags of rice they cut down the quota to one bag of rice. I think that it was announced by Abacha [the late military dictator of Nigeria], when he was still alive: 'Tejan-Kabbah, you are making a mistake, you are decreasing their quota. Do not do that.' But his advice was not listened to. There were so many people around him [Kabbah] giving different advice.[17] (Ex-child soldier, NPRC/AFRC)

Most of the demobilised (child) combatants joined their former comrades and reenlisted. After a week of plunder, murder – around 200

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[17] For instance, the IMF pressured for a reduction in security spending once the Abidjan peace accord was signed (30 November 1996).

civilians were killed – and raping, the new regime, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) was installed. It was headed by Major Johnny Paul Koroma, a soldier with a sobel record, who was freed from Pademba Road Prison by the mutinying soldiers. The AFRC almost immediately invited the RUF to join the military junta.

On that day [the day of the coup] there was a joined attack of the CDF and SLA on Giehun. Then we heard on 'Focus on Africa' of the BBC that a coup had taken place and that new leaders invited us to join. At first we could not believe it, but we monitored the VHF frequency of the army, so we understood that it was really true. Then a radio message from the military headquarters in Freetown came saying that Johnny Paul [Koroma] wanted to talk to us. So we established direct radio contact between Johnny Paul and Sam Bockarie. J. P. stated that he would stop the attack and that we just had to monitor this frequency. Later he let us listen to a radio cassette with the voice of Foday Sankoh saying that we must join with the military and that we had to accept JP as our leader. So later we decided to meet each other at Pendembu, but we were all afraid of each other. (Ex-RUF commander)

After they had overthrown the government, they called upon the rebels to come. All of us were living together in the barracks. We called upon them and they came out from the bush. . . . Ah, they were suffering. When they came from the bush their physical appearance was really rough, let me tell you that. It was only after they came out of the bush that they started to change. They were just like bush-animals, when they came from the bush, they were like animals. . . . Their condition was really changed. Even the dresses [clothes] they were having were not in a normal condition. (Ex-child soldier, NPRC/AFRC)

For more than eight months the AFRC and the RUF were in control of Freetown. Up-country, other major towns also were controlled by the RUF/AFRC junta. Meanwhile the Kamajoi movement, now referred to as the CDF – an attempt by the SLPP government to downplay the Mende-dominated character of the militia – led the resistance against the junta forces in the rural areas. But whereas before the Kamajoi movement was known for its discipline and correct behaviour, it now started to face a serious erosion of authority and order. The main initiators of the movement, previously residing in the towns of Bo and Kenema, from where they supervised the processing of new recruits, were forced to leave their bases. As a result, the intake, screening, and actual initiation process became increasingly ad hoc and opportunistic, with few of its former checks and balances. Other Kamajoi fighters, suddenly in enemy territory after the switch of the army, changed sides as well, sometimes willingly, at other times as a result of pressure by the RUF.

The RUF just put an ultimatum: if the Kamajors would not surrender they would burn down the whole town. So the paramount chief asked the Kamajors

to surrender. The Kamajoi leader even became the second-in-command here in Makali under RUF control. (Makali town speaker)[18]

Some of the minor Kamajoi fighters themselves started to recruit new fighters and initiated them, quite often as a money-making practice, since the new recruits had to pay the initiator, usually a sum equivalent to US$16–20 (IRIN 1999). The Kamajoisia had lost their major (although problematic) ally, the army, and were forced to compensate for this with new, hastily recruited manpower.

In February 1998 the West African peace-keeping force ECOMOG,[19] together with Kamajoi fighters and a few hundred loyal government soldiers, launched a successful attack aimed at driving the junta out of the capital. But before the attack the majority of the RUF troops had left Freetown for their up-country bases, well stocked with arms as a result of their collaboration with the AFRC.

The Kabbah government that had been elected in 1996 resumed power in Freetown in March 1998. Although some 5,000 AFRC troops had surrendered, many AFRC soldiers and most RUF units did not, retreating instead to areas where the civil defence movement was at its weakest. The RUF mainly headed for the eastern part of the country, but a considerable group of junta soldiers, under the command of former NPRC commander Solomon Musa, retreated to the north and made Kabala their base. Contrary to claims by the newly installed government that the rebels were now on their last legs, they started to regroup and expand. Major towns were taken over by the RUF – including Koidu where ECOMOG troops were apparently too busy mining for diamonds to notice RUF movements – and by the end of 1998 rebels, but predominantly AFRC fighters, had infiltrated the capital. On 6 January 1999 a damaging battle for Freetown started.[20] More than two weeks of street fighting resulted in 5,000–6,000 people being killed, and countless others mutilated by cutlass blows; hundreds of houses were destroyed. When the AFRC and the RUF were pushed back into the hinterland, many civilians were

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[18] A "speaker" or town crier is second in command after the chief.

[19] ECOMOG was dominated by Nigerian contingents and already had troops in Sierra Leone before the war started. President Momoh of the APC had offered ECOMOG Sierra Leone's International Airport to base Alpha jets bombarding Charles Taylor's NPFL in Liberia. One reason for Taylor's support for the RUF against Momoh's government was 'to let them taste the bitterness of war' and punish them for supporting ECOMOG.

[20] There is evidence that the Sierra Leone government and the ECOMOG command knew about the planned attack on Freetown weeks in advance, but felt that only such an attack would draw sufficient international attention to trigger aid and military support from the UN (Gberie 2005: 126, fn.). Clearly, the systematic advance towards the capital by the AFRC/RUF in the weeks before 6 January left little room for the suggestion that there was no threat. Even when the AFRC/RUF entered the Freetown peninsula, the government, ECOMOG, and the UN Observer Mission denied that the rebels were able to pose a real threat to the capital.

forced to join them in their retreat – to carry loads and/or as new recruits. Again it became clear that a military victory was not possible for either side.

Towards Final Peace

The international community pressed the rather reluctant Kabbah government for a negotiated peace, and made UN intervention more or less conditional on it. A new round of peace negotiations started in May 1999 in the Togolese capital, Lomé. After two months of talks a peace accord was signed offering the rebels a blanket amnesty, the RUF leader Foday Sankoh a status equal to that of vice-president, and the deployment of a UN peace-keeping force to Sierra Leone, authorised by Security Council Resolution 1270 on 22 October 1999. Disarmament and demobilisation then commenced, as outlined in the peace accord, but progress was painfully slow. In December, the RUF's second-in-command, Sam 'Maskita' Bockarie, unwilling to disarm, fled to Liberia with a group of die-hard fighters.

The movement started to split after the Lomé peace accord. Morris Kallon and Gibril Massaquoi informed the Pa that Maskita, who had a Kissi/Mende background, wanted to take over the movement. They said that Sam Bockarie wanted the power. So that is the reason why they started to attack Maskita. . . . When Foday Sankoh was in Freetown he gave all military power to his second man Sam Bockarie, saying that he himself was now a politician and not a fighter anymore. By that time I was in K, as a brigade commander. Then Foday Sankoh gave out the message that we had to disarm but I felt that was an order only to be given by Bockarie because it concerned military matters and Sankoh clearly stated that Bockarie was in charge of military matters. Maskita was reluctant to disarm, wondering what would become of us after the war, having fought for more than ten years. (Ex-RUF commander)

I was operating the radio that day [the day Sankoh was released]. When Sankoh came over the radio we connected the radio to a speaker, so that everybody could hear him. Everybody was happy: 'the war don don, the pappy don cam' [the war is over, the father (Foday Sankoh) has come]. But later there were serious arguments between Sam Bockarie and Foday Sankoh. Sankoh said: 'I am free' but Bockarie said: 'You are in the hands of the enemy.' Sankoh said that he could not come down to Kailahun because if he did that the people would say that he would be planning another war. (Ex-RUF signals officer)

In May 2000, after UNAMSIL announced that it would deploy its troops in the RUF-held, diamond-rich Kono area, and after a dispute between UN military observers and RUF commanders over the return of disarmed combatants to the RUF, the RUF seized about 500 newly arrived Zambian UN peacekeepers,[21] who were kept hostage close to Makali, Tonkolili district, and in Kuiva, Kailahun district.

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[21] At the end of 1999 hundreds of Kenyan peace-keeping troops were attacked and disarmed by the RUF, and their weapons and ammunition seized (Gberie 2005: 162).

The RUF manoeuvred from their Makeni base towards Freetown and it seemed that Sankoh was planning to take over the government. Protests by a demonstration-cum-mob of civilian men and women in front of Sankoh's residence on 7 May 2000 led to gunshots resulting in several deaths in the crowd, and the subsequent flight of the former rebel leader. He was captured a few days later in the Freetown peninsula mountains. With Sankoh in custody and tensions rising, the UN expanded its peace-keeping force from 9,250 to 13,000 and later to about 17,500, thus becoming the largest UN mission in the world at the time.[22] RUF commander Issa Sesay took over command. Meanwhile special commando forces from the British army showed their readiness to fight in a hostage-freeing operation in September 2000 against a splinter group of the former AFRC called the West Side Boys.[23] To prevent the prospect of annihilation, the RUF had few options other than to continue the disarmament process. After the signing of another cease-fire (the Abuja accords) on 10 November 2000, the DDR process finally commenced in May 2001. But it was not before the end of 2001 that disarmament started in RUF strongholds such as Kailahun, Kono, and Kenema districts. President Kabbah declared the end of the war in January 2002. This was followed shortly afterwards by general elections, which this time brought a clear victory for the SLPP.

[22] The UN mission was not only large but also expensive: costs have been estimated at US$700 million annually.

[23] The hostages were intelligence officers of the British and Sierra Leonean armies.

4   The World of the RUF

Introduction

Former fighters of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – the main protagonists of the war in Sierra Leone – have hardly been heard to date. During the war (1991–2002) interviews were conducted with demobilised combatants of other factions (cf. Peters and Richards 1998a; 1998b) but it proved nearly impossible to talk with RUF fighters. Only a few managed to escape. One or two were then accessed (see one such interview in Peters and Richards 1998a). But most prisoners were killed by the army or the pro-government Civil Defence Forces (CDF), or were extremely difficult to trace. When the war was declared over in January 2002 access to all parts of the country and to all groups opened up. It was then possible to make a purposive selection of various categories of ex-RUF combatants – including low and high ranks, volunteers and conscripts, and combatants with the RUF from the beginning and those who came in only at the end.[1] This chapter presents material from interviews conducted with former RUF combatants. The purpose is twofold: to offer an account of how the RUF guerrilla campaign was organised, operated, and developed, and to find ways to explain the data in question.

Most of the material presented in the following two chapter was collected during fieldwork undertaken in three periods – November–December 2001 (see also Peters 2004), November 2002–October 2003, and November–December 2006.[2] Interviews were conducted in districts with a heavy RUF presence during the war, namely Kenema, Kailahun, Bombali, and Tonkolili. Specific locations will not be revealed, but these

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[1] The majority of the interviewees were male ex-combatants. For more accounts of female ex-combatants and abductees, see Chris Coulter (2009).

[2] The first two periods of fieldwork collection were part of my PhD research. The last fieldwork period, November–December 2006, was part of the preparation of an expert witness report on the RUF, requested by the Sesay defence team of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. I applied the normal rigid scientific standards to data collection processes for this report – objectivity, independency, triangulation. No material (except a copy of a fighter's 'Ideology Book', see below) provided by the Sesay Defence team has been used in this book, and all the interviews were conducted by myself, without help or support from the Defence team. The Defence team has not called upon me as a witness.

included (remote) villages, small and larger towns, and mining areas. Nor will identities be revealed because I undertook to guarantee anonymity. However, to help the reader distinguish different voices I have labelled the different informants by letter – Commander A, Child Combatant B, and so on.[3] RUF material is contextualised by accounts from ex-combatants of opposing factions and from civilians who lived under RUF control during the war, although the main focus remains on the experiences of former RUF fighters.

Informants were located through various means. Agencies facilitating the reintegration process of ex-combatants were sometimes willing to bring me into contact with former RUF combatants who had participated in their programmes. Others were introduced to me by ex-RUF combatants with whom I had already built up rapport. Moreover, after some months I started to notice the little signs indicating that someone might have had a RUF past, for instance in terms of the language he or she used.[4] This enabled me to identify some informants in public places, among the taxi-motorbike riders or in palm-wine bars, for instance.

As pointed out in Chapter 1, testimony-based evidence of former fighters is subject to recurrent scepticism (cf. Mkandawire 2002). But there are several ways to meet or overcome the objection that such material serves only the purpose of exculpation, and to ensure that responses are as frank as possible. The most important ways I used in my research were:

- to build up good rapport, often over a lengthy period;
- to minimise the investigation of the most sensitive topics, such as asking about instances of killings or rape the informant might be involved in, to reduce incentives to fabrication;
- to use internal triangulation, by interviewing ex-combatants of different ranks (high and low) or incorporated through different recruitment strategies (voluntary or forced);
- to judge the frankness of an informant by his/her willingness to accept objective facts about the war (if someone denied that the RUF ever carried out atrocities, for example, I would take this as a warning to treat the information with scepticism);
- to not interview informants (with one exception) who had realistic reasons to fear prosecution by the Special Court;
- to offer the assurance of complete anonymity;

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[3] A distinction is made between different ranks/duties among the RUF. The persons interviewed in each category have been given a letter to distinguish them from each other. Since these interviews are part of a 'bank' (see Annex II) containing interviews with about 60 former RUF combatants, not all 'letters' come forward here.

[4] Those RUF fighters who had received ideological training still used terms such as 'the masses', 'liberation', or, when referring to the RUF, 'the movement'.

- to cover given topics in multiple ways, including repeated interviewing, and visit sites of operations with informants (for example, the site of the former Zogoda, former RUF farm sites, and ambush sites) to verify or revisit accounts already provided (for example, concerning camps and their destruction).

The interview material is ordered by themes and sub-themes. In this chapter, strategies of bonding, the world of the RUF bushcamps, and the movement's rules and regulations are discussed. In Chapter 5 we look at explanations for RUF's deadly malfunctionings and atrocities. Interpretation of the material is left mainly to Chapter 8.

During most of the period covered by fieldwork, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Special Court were active in Sierra Leone. This definitely affected, in a negative manner, the willingness of ex-combatants, and in particular RUF ex-combatants, to talk about the war and their role in it. Clearly, for most, the preferred strategy was to keep a low profile, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority ought to have had nothing to fear from these institutions. The TRC was a voluntary rather than a judicial process, and the Special Court was mandated only to try the fifteen or so people with greatest responsibility for the war.[5] Unfortunately, a great deal of misinformation about the Special Court was channelled towards former RUF cadres, some of it apparently emanating from 'patrons' offering protection in return for cheap labour in diamond pits (Richards et al. 2004b).

Interestingly, once the ex-combatants had gotten to know me, and found out that I was aware of some details of their past, it turned out that most former RUF cadres were actually eager to tell their side of the story, concerning the movement and their experience of the war.

Strategies of Bonding

Conscription

Recruitment is essential to any guerrilla force at war. In general the literature makes a distinction between *forced recruitment* and *voluntary recruitment*. Sometimes *coerced recruitment* is added to the list, to take account of more subtle forms of forced recruitment, such as peer or family pressure (cf. McConnan and Uppard 2001).

The RUF was widely reported at the time as a movement that filled its ranks mainly by means of forced conscription. But it has increasingly become clear that it enjoyed a hitherto unreported degree of initial

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[5] While the last period of fieldwork was related to the Special Court, by this time informants had no reason to fear prosecution, since a new round of indictments would have been highly unlikely, because of earlier delays and rising cost implications.

popular support, in particular in the eastern part of the country (see also Chapter 1). And while this support quickly eroded among the general populace, the movement continued to attract volunteers among the most marginalised groups in Sierra Leone. As pointed out before, the districts of Kailahun and Pujehun, historically hotbeds of opposition to the APC regime, and subsequently deprived of government support, proved to be relatively fruitful recruiting grounds for the RUF, with its message of social change and the need to overthrow the APC regime. This civilian chief describes the situation:

In the beginning the people in Kailahun and Pujehun joined [the RUF] willingly, to dislodge the APC. Furthermore, the RUF had this social agenda which made sense to the people. That time they sensitised the people and often came unarmed to them. . . . The RUF did not come with the 'face of war' but with promises of jobs and such. They registered the youths and took down the names of their parents. They came with looted items from Liberia and redistributed these in the community to promote conscription. Soon the army considered everybody from Kailahun or Pujehun as a rebel.

An ex-fighter then recalls the early mode of operation of the RUF in these terms:

At first teams were going around to sensitise[6] the communities, explaining about the reasons why the RUF was fighting. (RUF fighter I)

Facing a small and weak Sierra Leonean army, mainly restricted to a few garrison towns, the RUF was able to move freely among isolated border towns and villages to explain the reasons why it was fighting. Those who considered the analysis and justification valid were free to join. Young women, as well as men, volunteered:

I was born in Daru and I am presently 40 years of age. Before the war I went to school, but I stopped in class three. My father died so I dropped out of school. I married and went to Kono and from there to Pendembu [in Kailahun district]. I was there when the war came. We hid in the bush for a few hours. Then we came out because people said that the rebels did not do anything. The rebels explained their purpose, their reason for fighting. Some of us joined voluntarily; there was no enforcement. (Female fighter F)

But agreeing with the political analysis of the RUF is one thing.[7] Actually joining the RUF and taking up arms was something else, as the

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[6] The war influenced daily language in Sierra Leone, and words such as 'sensitise' and 'logistics', used by NGOs, or military terminology such as 'deploy' or 'pull out' have been mainstreamed into ordinary conversational usage.

[7] Few Sierra Leoneans would not have agreed with the RUF's proclaimed aims – to overthrow the oppressive APC regime, improve education and health facilities, and combat corruption.

RUF quickly found out. The following informant – an ex-fighter – explains:

> It is just very difficult to find volunteers to take up arms. It is natural for people if they hear a gunshot, to start running. So after we captured an area we made the people to come out of the bush and we explained our ideology, which made some young people to join voluntarily. Sometimes they were even encouraged by their parents. That was to protect themselves or the village. This – making people to join voluntarily – was something the Liberians [Special Forces] failed to do. (RUF commander K)

This informant – interestingly – reflects on the reactions of civilians. He acknowledges that the fact that some parents 'even encouraged' their offspring to join might have had more to do with the physical protection they could thereby obtain than with political conviction. The contradictory formulation 'making people to join voluntarily' hints at an emerging difference between how the RUF perceived the recruitment process and how the conscripts perceived it. This bias will be explored in more detail below.

Once the government army started to organise and expand, its threat to the RUF increased. Subsequently, the opportunities for the RUF to proclaim its agenda in the villages and towns, and thus to attract volunteers, diminished. An alternative method to cope with this pressure, but still get the movement's message across, was to drop letters in villages explaining the RUF's purpose in fighting, in the hope that those interested might still join (see Chapter 1).

Quick expansion of the territory under its control during the first few months of the rebellion was followed by steady retreat into the recesses of the border zone. By the end of 1993 the movement was faced with being dislodged entirely. With loss of territory, the RUF became increasingly isolated and cut off from the wider society. It survived by retreat into forest reserves, but during the second 'jungle' phase (1994) of its campaign, any area directly controlled by the movement was extremely limited, with little access to potential recruits. It now was almost solely dependent on a strategy of capturing civilians, bringing them to a 'jungle' base, explaining the RUF ideology, and then inducting those captives into the fighting ranks. This new situation is explained by the following fighter:

> We got our manpower mainly via capturing people. It was not easy for civilians in the government territory to get accurate information about the RUF and its aims and objectives, so they were not likely to join out of free will. But once we captured them we started to sensitise them and people started to join the movement because of the ideology and because they were not harassed any more. (RUF commander C)

So while a considerable number of early conscripts joined the RUF voluntarily, an increasingly large percentage of the later intake were seized.[8] What is already apparent from the previous two statements, and is reinforced by testimony below, is that what abductees and outsiders considered forced recruitment is not necessarily considered as such by the abductor. The RUF saw itself as having a legitimate political message to impart: conditions were so bad that armed insurgency was a justified option. It further reasoned that because its enemy denied it opportunities to articulate this message it had the right to use force to assemble an audience. This is a paradox faced by any group using violence to pursue a political campaign (not excluding those fighting for democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan). But what makes the RUF case remarkable is that somehow the movement managed successfully to convey to (at least some) forced conscripts that their capture was an act of rescue:

In many cases the civilians wanted to come with us. You know, if we occupy a village or town, some people manage to flee, others stay behind. After we leave that town, the civilians who stayed behind at the first stage now want to come with us, because they are afraid that if the other civilians return with the soldiers or the Kamajors, they will be accused of [being] rebel collaborators, so they might be killed.[9] But yes, forced recruitment took place. I myself was forcibly recruited in '93. Or let me say, I was captured by them and then, looking upon my situation and the past situation, I judged it better to join. You know, if it is a revolution you have to force the people. You know what they are saying; you even have to force people to go to heaven. (RUF commander F)

Some of the civilians who stayed in the RUF camps decided to join the movement as combatants. Some prisoners of war also decided to join after we explained our ideology. Then, if we attacked a village or town, we assembled some civilians who had to carry the captured items to the base. These we cannot release afterwards because of security reasons. So they join us to go to the base and receive training there. . . . It was not by force. We captured the civilians and then later we started to sensitise them and after that they joined us. But if you do not want to join us

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[8] Induction into a movement by means of capture is not something new to Sierra Leone. The 'secret societies' – *Poro* for men and *Sande* for women – operate according to similar principles. Dorjahn (1961: 37), referring to the Temne Poro, describes the different routes of initiation into the Poro society: '*Kabangkalo*, in which those to be initiated are seized together publicly and taken to the bush where they may be kept several years, [and] *amporo dif*, which is begun in secret and where the boys are seized one by one and taken to the bush'. The point is that forging commitment through capture was already a societal template long before the war.

[9] Similary, Outram (1997: 361), writing on Liberia, refers to a report by the Catholic Church of Maryland County, 1994, when noting that 'A report of an NPFL attack on Pleebo, Maryland County, in October 1994, held by the LPC [Liberia Peace Council, one of the armed factions], states that after taking the town the NPFL murdered civilians, targeting church and medical personnel and any persons suspected of aiding or supporting the LPC, often merely on the grounds that they had remained in the town while it was under LPC control.'

you will stay with the RUF as a civilian. What helped us was that the people were afraid to go back to the SLA-controlled area. (RUF commander C)

The above statements bring forward two interesting issues. First, the RUF used, and probably also manipulated, the fear of the population concerning likely retaliation by soldiers and Kamajoisia, to recruit manpower. Second, in the eyes of the loyal RUF cadres, it was not a crime to abduct people, nor was it surprising to the RUF that the abductees experienced it as forcible recruitment; they were not yet 'sensitised' and therefore did not see that the RUF was fighting a righteous cause. Besides captured civilians, a considerable number of soldiers were also held at the various RUF bases. Foday Sankoh, himself a former soldier, gave the order not to kill them because he was convinced that one day these soldiers would understand the rightness of the cause the RUF was fighting for and would join the movement (Peters and Richards 1998a: 206).

So the RUF considered the capture[10] of people as being for their own betterment, because by such means they were removed from the dangerous war front and protected against the revenge of government soldiers, or later the *kamajoi* civil defence forces. Once safe in RUF territory, civilians could then choose, according to the informants, between becoming a fighter or remaining a civilian in RUF territory. For many young people this was not much of a choice, since the civilians often lived a life of great hardship and de facto slavery[11] (they worked constantly, could not leave, and were paid no wages). There is no need to doubt that the informants just quoted actually believed that, once the movement explained itself, captives would see its value, and become committed to join the fighting forces or work willingly for the movement as civilians. Needless to say, the captives, at least in the period immediately following capture, considered their predicament differently.

The exact extent to which the RUF was able to forge commitment among its captives is difficult to determine. However, the fact that the RUF remained a more or less unified movement, rather than splintering early on, and the continuing loyalty of a considerable number of the cadres towards the RUF and the RUFP[12] in the post-war period may be taken as measures of its success in creating durable bonds. This raises the question of the means by which this commitment among cadres was achieved. Some candidate mechanisms will now be examined.

[10] The word 'capture' does not necessarily have to have a negative connotation, associating it with violence or enslavement. In fact, one of the four groups which made up the original Krio community in the Freetown settlement was the so-called Recaptives.

[11] Later in this chapter I show that the living conditions of civilians within RUF territory varied from extremely bad to fairly reasonable.

[12] Following the Lomé peace accord, the RUF turned itself into a political party: the RUF Party.

Loyalty through Punishment and Rewards

The majority of RUF conscripts were recruited and stayed with the movement against their will – or so their accounts seem to imply. Therefore one immediately doubts the social coherence of such a group, and its effectiveness in carrying out fighting and other cooperative activities. This point troubled and may have misled many analysts, not least international advisors to the democratic government in 1996 – who assumed the RUF was little better than a rabble, and would easily be demoralised by a few incisive raids organised by international security contractors (Hooper 2002).

Every rebel movement with high numbers of abductees must find ways to increase group coherence and prevent desertion. It will have to try to maintain the loyalty of loyal conscripts, turn potentially unwilling or disloyal conscripts into loyal fighters, and, at minimum, make sure that those of doubtful loyalty follow orders and do not run away. There are several ways to achieve this. One is to steer behaviour through practices of punishment and reward. Punishment, often of a retributive nature, applied whenever a law is broken or an order not followed, is a common way to compel obedience. Accounts of ex-fighters as well as civilian abductees (cf. TRC 2004, Volume 2, Chapter 2: 'Findings') show that the RUF made use of extremely violent punishments to 'discipline' (the term used by the ex-cadres) both civilians and fighters. Even Foday Sankoh, the leader, was not completely above scrutiny, as becomes clear from the following two accounts:

I remember one time during the morning parade that, when the Pa [Sankoh] asked if anybody had something to say, a small boy stepped forward and asked permission to speak. So the Pa gave the permission. The small boy accused the Pa of forgetting about the Small Boys Unit because whenever the food was prepared, the Small Boys Unit was the last to get. And were they not also true to the revolution and fighting for it, the boy said. So the Pa admitted that he was wrong and from that time the Small Boys Unit was treated equally. . . . Another example was when the commanders complained to the Pa that he was always dealing with any problem personally.[13] Why should he not let a problem be handled by the commander in whose group the problem occurred in the first place? They were the commanders nevertheless. So from that time, whenever there was a problem you should go first to your commander and let him try to solve it. (RUF commander E)

Foday Sankoh was never punished but he was advised. For example, during the struggle he liked to have different women, stating that it was wartime and not normal time. But he was counselled by his commanders not to do that and so he left it. (RUF signals officer B)

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[13] The patrimonial way *par excellence*.

There is, however, a limitation concerning the use of sanction or punishment. Authority (to use power) erodes when it is used excessively. Moreover, excessive punishment provides greater incentives for evasion or escape. Few groups can be held together by threat and fear alone. And yet the RUF did not suffer any significant breakaways until the very end of the war. So we should suspect that more than discipline and punishment held it together. This introduces the topic of reward structures within the RUF.

Rewarding behaviour in line with the ideology and demands of the RUF is likely to have been as effective in assuring the obedience of the fighters as punishment. Two straightforward ways to reward someone are with power or goods. Many RUF conscripts, whether forcibly or voluntarily conscripted, belonged to the most marginalised groups in society – rural youths with limited perspectives, many with an experience of having been driven out of their villages by the autocratic rule of elders. The RUF offered them a gun, and through that the power to command people, including the very elders who had sometimes humiliated them in the first place. This role reversal[14] is likely to have been an attractive element in the reward package offered by the RUF to many of the younger recruits. Another incentive was the supposed opportunity for fighters to take whatever they wanted when fighting. But, as with punishments, so the excessive use of rewards has its dangers. Effectiveness will be undermined if, for example, looting affects military competence and functional order.

A closer consideration of these two positive incentives is thus required. Again, informants suggest that the position was more complex than many commentators – arguing on the basis of assumed behavioural universals, such as emphasis on respect – imply. Indeed, it is true that when carrying a weapon a fighter had power over unarmed people. Informants insist, however, that this was subject to quite strict internal constraints, both in the form of the movement's rules and regulations, and also through orders imposed by seniors in the movement. For example, ex-combatants state that – even at the war front – it was unlikely that a fighter would be allowed to do, or take, whatever he or she wanted, unless a specific go-ahead was given:

Raping was not allowed. Some who did were fired [executed]. If they catch you in the battlefront raping, they will bring you to court. Another rule was that loot should be handed over to the commander.[15] Stealing was also not allowed. (RUF fighter B)

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[14] On this role reversal, see also Keen (2005).

[15] Humphreys and Weinstein state that, having interviewed more than 1,000 ex-combatants from all factions and regions of Sierra Leone; 'Overall, 50 percent of respondents said that valuable goods were sent out of the unit or kept by the commander. RUF combatants reported in larger numbers (over 70 percent) that valuable goods were shared with the

It was not allowed, for instance, to have more than 20,000 Leones [at the time about US$20] in your pocket. Every time a commander will meet you with more money, it will be a problem for you. They made this law because they know that as soon you have money, you will get different ideas and different intentions. (RUF clerk A)

Informants may be stating ideals, but there is no reason to suppose that these remarks are fantasy. Repeated remarks by informants are backed up by other sources, such as a code of conduct and its use in training cadres, and evidence from captive civilians that RUF laws were applied. Some of the movement's excesses – such as the increasing and apparently random harassment of civilians in the later stages of the war – may be better explained as cadres taking a draconian law into their own hands as the movement became organisationally degraded under pressure from international private security. So, it is not unreasonable to conclude that a definite system of punishments and rewards was applied, and had the effect of increasing loyalty among already loyal fighters and deterring freelance activity by disloyal fighters and civilians, to some extent, and especially in the earlier stages of the conflict. However, other aspects also contributed to the loyalty of the fighters.

Loyalty through Isolation

Away from their families, the company of comrades-in-arms became to some extent a family substitute for the young and sometimes ultra-young fighters. In particular during the bush-camp period (1994–7) of the RUF, the movement was to a large extent isolated from the world beyond the camps. And this outside world represented death and suffering – mainly inflicted by RUF cadres themselves, in what was to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. For a long time, desertion was not even an option for many of those willing to escape from the RUF. If one was ready to give up one's 'new family' and dared to cross no-man's land to go to a place that in the minds of the abductees did not function any more, one was likely to be killed by enemy soldiers as a rebel infiltrator.[16] And to make it even harder for those who wanted to escape, the letters 'RUF' were at times

commander, kept by the commander, or sent out of the unit' (2004: 27). This is very different from the picture of wild, anarchic criminal behaviour painted (or assumed) by many commentators. It also suggests that the RUF had regulations in place to guarantee more egalitarian principles of (re)distribution: looted/valuable goods were either shared or were kept by the commander or sent out of the unit. In each of these three scenarios all RUF fighters had more or less the same. Accounts of former RUF combatants reflecting on the bush phase of the 'revolution' do not suggest that where items were confiscated by commanders, these could be used for private ends.

[16] A central argument in Keen's book on the conflict in Sierra Leone (2005) is that the nature of the counter-insurgency 'added fuel to the fire of rebellion almost from the outset of the war' (2005: 2).

branded or carved[17] on the skin of those who tried to escape once, but failed. According to combatants from all sides the ruthless treatment of rebel suspects by the army during the first years of the war was a key factor in assisting the RUF to cope with the threat of desertion among their ranks:

It was in 1993 that the rebels captured my brother. Then the soldiers came to our village. They accused my father that he had given his son to the rebels. To punish him for that they killed him. That was the reason for me to join the rebels. At that time, if you only were giving water to the rebels, the soldiers would kill you.[18] (RUF female fighter E)

There was no cooperation between the SLA [Sierra Leone Army] and the RUF until the junta period [1997].[19] Everybody coming from RUF territory was a suspect. (Colonel in the Sierra Leone Army)

The counter-insurgency of [i.e. by] the Sierra Leone Army was quite ruthless,[20] straight from the beginning, [and this] made those RUF fighters and civilians forcibly conscripted and who were looking out for an opportunity to escape to hesitate about their escape plans. If summary execution was waiting after a successful desertion attempt, it was probably a better deal to stay in the movement and adapt to it as good as possible. (CDF administrator)

And the merciless attitude of the soldiers was not the only threat for those who had escaped successfully. Even upon reaching the home area, escapees were far from safe:

The reason for their [the RUF conscripts] loyalty was that when you are away from your brothers or family during the war for a long time, they will consider you as their enemy, especially if the people hear that you are rebel. No sooner you come to your home town they will kill you. So that was why we from the RUF stayed together to continue fighting till we were getting peace. (RUF commander B)

[17] Skin scarification is a common practice in the secret societies. It is also a reminder of practices under slavery.

[18] Extrajudicial killing by soldiers of rebel suspects was reported as common in the early stages of the war (Amnesty International 1992; 1995).

[19] This contradicts widely believed 'stories' about extensive cooperation between RUF and army units in the earlier stages of the war. It is relevant to note that both parties claim that there was no cooperation. Large sections of the army increasingly behaved more like bandits than disciplined soldiers (see also Keen 2005), and their lawless behaviour clearly played into the hands of the RUF, without even the need for covert cooperation. Conversely, it still seems likely that some military commanders, in particular those with an APC background, who were sent to the frontline as a kind of punishment by the NPRC, had a vested interest in linking up with RUF commanders who, as a result, were able to fight their enemy (the NPRC) from the inside (see also Keen 2003).

[20] Not only the Sierra Leonean Army was ruthless – ULIMO forces were equally harsh with rebels and rebel suspects. Gberie (2005: 65) witnessed 'freshly severed human heads impaled on wooden posts' which ULIMO fighters admitted to have put there, claiming that these were 'captured rebels'.

[After I had escaped from the RUF, an army] lieutenant stopped a vehicle and sent me down to Port Loko. There I sent a message to my mother. People came from . . . to collect me. But one military man stopped me, stripped me naked and said I was a rebel spy, threatening to kill me. Once you have become a 'bush creature' people run away from you. (RUF abductee A) (Peters and Richards 1998a: 207)

Many young people in rural areas along the Liberian border, in particular, descend from client or slave families still regarded with some disdain by the freeborn ('children of chiefs').[21] The attitudes of civilian communities to members of this extensive rural underclass played a considerable role in the creation of a large pool of socio-economically excluded and marginalised youths easily recruited by the fighting forces in general, and by the RUF in particular. Rural social attitudes not only sustained a high mental barrier in the minds of those willing to escape, but this turned into a real barrier for any who eventually escaped to return to their communities of birth. Their very vulnerability to abduction by the RUF – where the respectable fled at the first sign of trouble – served only to confirm a low-born status. Richards (1996) reports one paramount chief in Pujehun district protecting a group of young teenage RUF escapees in 1992, for fear that they would be killed by local lynch mobs. If the attitudes of the army and the communities towards rebel or suspected rebel deserters had been less hostile and deadly, it seems beyond doubt that many more RUF fighters would have sought to desert.

Loyalty to the Leader

During the war, the international press characterised the RUF leader Foday Sankoh as quixotic and unstable, if not actually mad. How could his movement be taken seriously, it was reasoned, when it was led by a lunatic? Was Foday Sankoh dangerously deranged, or (as many of his loyalists report) a rational, skilful, and even charismatic rebel leader? Many of the early and youthful recruits – in particular – considered him a father; his popular name was 'Pappy' or 'the Pa'. Sankoh remained the undisputed leader of the movement, despite long periods of absence, when he was detained in Nigeria (from February 1997) and imprisoned for treason in Sierra Leone from June 1998 to May 1999.[22] But it is important to note that even while he was with the RUF in the bush, many

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[21] Grace (1977) reports that up to half the populations of some border chiefdoms were slaves immediately prior to emancipation in 1928.

[22] Imprisonment was less undermining of Sankoh's leadership than those who had detained him probably had hoped. In prison, without communication, Sankoh could not make any wrong or tactically disastrous decisions, while at the same he was perceived by his followers as sacrificing to the cause. The risks of adding to the authority of charismatic, non-executive, sectarian leaders through detention are noted by Richards (1998).

RUF conscripts never set eyes on him. For much of the period of the 'jungle' campaign 1994–6 – he resided at the RUF forest headquarters, the Zogoda, from where, every morning, he announced instructions and promotions to the other camps by means of captured Single Side Band (SSB) radio sets.

Every morning all the camps were contacted by the radio from the main base. The Pa greeted everybody and asked if there were any irregularities. Then he gave new orders. (RUF commander E)

Foday Sankoh was a good leader. If you are able to control 10,000 men you are good. He ate together with his boys and respected also the smaller boys. He encouraged the youth. He did not say: 'I was born before you', or 'You do not know how to approach me', if he did not want to hear the truth. (RUF commander G)

These two remarks suggest that to denizens of other more distant camps he must have come over as a disembodied, even an all-knowing and mystical presence, while those who lived with him encountered him as an approachable egalitarian. The loyalty engendered by both sets of circumstances among RUF conscripts towards Foday Sankoh has certainly been underestimated by outside observers. In particular, it is important to take account of how he must have come over – as a new kind of leader – to many conscripts, recruited while still minors, from a culture in which it is demanded that children and youth pay unquestioning respect to seniors. Although many conscripts recount their bad experiences with elders, Foday Sankoh was, according to the statements of these conscripts, a different kind of person, charismatic but approachable, and always willing to listen to even the smallest RUF fighter, if his/her ideas were good:

It [the reason to stay with the RUF for more than ten years] was because of the ideology Foday Sankoh gave to us. That was what made most of us to stay to the end. The way he talks to groups, to children, old people, and women. He was like a father. He talked with everybody. Civilians from faraway could record their complaints on a tape and these tapes were brought to the Zogoda where he listened to it, so he knew what was happening. . . . Whenever Foday Sankoh visited people, he sent away his bodyguards and put himself at the same level as the civilians, so that they were not afraid. . . . One day Foday Sankoh came and asked us about the treatment and training. He was the one who gave us the zeal to fight by explaining about the corruption in the country. So we all saw that it was correct. (RUF signals officer B)

Better-educated RUF supporters also fell under the influence of Sankoh's highly charismatic personality. Pallo Bangura, the RUFP's presidential candidate in the 2002 elections, gives the following description of the RUF's leader in an interview with Lansana Gberie (2005: 195):

People always underestimated him [Foday Sankoh], but it was clear to me, and I should think to everyone else who knew him, that Sankoh was a man of great

charisma. The thing was that he understood the politics of patrimonialism far more than those in power at the moment. He grew up in it. President Kabbah is a bureaucrat, Western-trained and with a mentality steeped in the workings of the UN. . . . He [Kabbah] simply does not understand, as Sankoh did, that in impoverished African societies, where state-provided social services are almost non-existing, the leader ensures loyalty and support by giving out, by appearing to share what he possesses. This Sankoh understood very well. He showed great generosity with his personal wealth to visitors and supporters, and there were a lot of people who preferred his down-to-earth style to Kabbah's aloof and bureaucratic attitude.

What is especially interesting about this statement is that it proposes that the man who accused the APC of patrimonial and nepotistic politics was adept at using patrimonial tactics himself to create loyal followers. In short, this was not an attempted egalitarian social revolution, as some have claimed (for example, Richards 1996), but an attempt to reinstate a better, more functional, fairer, patrimonialism.[23]

   This research has uncovered no evidence that, within the movement, his followers had doubts about his rationality. But some definitely had doubts about his motivation. A final word on the topic can be left with one fighter. According to this source, it served Sankoh's leadership needs to encourage young and often only partially educated people:

Most commanders came from poor backgrounds and the movement upgraded them. Foday Sankoh promoted the semi-literate because these were more loyal to him and were less likely to take over the movement. He did not like the educated ones. (RUF fighter I)

Loyalty through Socialisation

Whether someone joined the RUF voluntarily or via abduction, once part of the movement there was no way out. Desertion was a danger to group coherence and could be life-threatening to the ones staying behind, should the defector reveal the movement's location to the enemy. The only option in many cases was to adapt to the situation:

Well, we [the interviewee and her female friend] were both conscripted in 1991 by force. You know, if you escaped and met the soldiers, they would kill you. So you join just to be with the movement. But the movement was okay because we survived. (RUF female fighter D)

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[23] What is not clear, however, is whether this is a version of the RUF programme that Sankoh himself would have endorsed. Bangura was only a late recruit to the RUF cause, and some cadres subsequently accused him of insincerity and opportunism. Sankoh's own views, and any opportunity to articulate them, were silenced by his death in the custody of the Special Court in 2003, while awaiting trial. The RUF leader was fated to enjoy only the briefest presence on the platform he so craved to proclaim his political views, and speculation about his state of mind, and his motivation, will doubtless continue.

Two possibilities were open, which at times were left (to some extent) to the person to choose; one could remain a civilian or become a RUF fighter:

Those who were forcibly conscripted were well guarded, but after some time they changed and were willing to stay with the RUF because of the food and loot that was available in the camps. To become a loyal fighter they will encourage you by giving you a high position and they will convince you of the good cause they are fighting for. (RUF clerk A)

We have different ways to test if you [as an abductee] are genuine [and allowed to become a fighter]. And besides, the RUF was not only about fighters. We had carpenters, teachers, nurses, and doctors, etc. So maybe you are not fit for the fighting but there are other things to do. (RUF commander F)

It was not abduction but adoption what we did with the displaced [those seized on the war fronts] persons. But it happened with force. We kept the adopted civilians in a big house for observation for about two or three weeks. In the morning and evening we explained the RUF ideology and why we were fighting. In the meantime, if relatives of those kept identified themselves, those adopted people would be going with them. Then, those without any relatives were distributed among the G5 commanders. If a civilian indicates that he or she wants to be a fighter, perhaps because the person is seeing combatants coming back from the front with items, I can send them to the IO [Intelligence Officer] or the IDU [Internal Defence Unit]. So it is voluntarily that a person becomes a fighter. (RUF commander I)

The proclaimed principles of the RUF, and its meritocratic and a-gerontocratic system, stood in contrast with life outside the camps, and were not at all unattractive to many marginalised youths. The movement made attempts to win over all abductees considered likely to be valuable to the movement:

To liberate a person is one thing, but to liberate his mind is more difficult. In our revolution we liberated the person first. Then we brought the person to our controlled area where we were safe. Then the PRO, that is the Public Relations Officer, starts to talk with the person and tries to win his mind. (RUF commander E)

The extent to which RUF combatants were fully socialised by the movement – as still apparent, even after demobilisation – can be glimpsed in the following statement of an ex-SLA soldier, reflecting his own experience of having been demobilised, and then rejoining the army a second time:

The RUF ex-combatants are still moving around in tight groups. Your commander is the best person to keep a secret after all. Underneath the civilian mask there is still the 'Wolf' [slang for the rebels]. They left the job but not the structure. With the Kamajors it is different; they are the civilians. Ex-SLA soldiers think back about the army whenever they meet a fellow soldier; then there is this

friendship [even though] at the same time they have contact with the civilians. But the rebels can say: 'Do not bother about him, he is just a civilian.' They still look down on civilians.

Meritocratic Principles

Previously, there was some discussion of the rules supposed to guide RUF combatants. According to ex-fighters the RUF had stringent rules on drug use, looting, and raping. A Code of Conduct had to be learnt by heart,[24] and a people's court would try violators.[25] Any property obtained at the war front had to be handed over to the RUF 'government', and fighters were only allowed to possess a small sum of money (see previous section). The simplicity and transparency of these rules was in stark contrast to the sometimes diffuse and complex customary law found in the villages from which the RUF seized its recruits. Village authorities were considered to be highly manipulative in their implementation of local (and largely undocumented) customary laws, and this was seen as a means to disadvantage young people of underclass backgrounds (see also Chapter 2).

Another fundamental difference between the world of the RUF and the wider society was that the latter was based on a patrimonialism that often quickly turned to partiality and nepotism. Many conscripts were from a labouring class that was a product of incomplete emancipation from domestic slavery during the colonial period, and a permanent fixture during the second half of the twentieth century, at the very end of the patrimonial chain of customary redistribution. In the RUF, by contrast, promotion took place mainly based on merit. To a large extent performance at the war front determined seniority in the movement. This may have appealed to underclass elements because it was in principle a fairer system, based on effort and merit, but it also resulted in a movement preoccupied with military success, at the expense of regard for civic values:

Promotion was given according to your performance in the front; if you captured a lot you were promoted. (RUF signals unit B)

Well, it is not so much through your educational qualifications whether you become a commander or not. It depends on the way you fight. Some people are hard hearted, they do not fear any attack or even to kill someone. Some people know how to organise a situation in the frontline. Some other people know how to

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[24] Asked to state the code, RUF commander E recalled them as follows: '(1) Thou shall not take the liberty of women. Which means that you are not allowed to have forced sex or rape a woman. (2) Thou shall not loot. (3) Thou shall not take a needle or thread of the masses. (4) Pay for everything you damage. (5) Thou shall not destroy crops. The rest I forgot . . . oh, wait: (6) Anything you borrow you must return it'.

[25] Summary execution was allowed to frontline commanders where a fighter refused to obey orders.

arrange things and talk to people. Those were the different ways to get promotion. I was very strong in the frontline and I do not fear anybody, so that was how I gained the commander title. (RUF commander A)

This made it possible for under-age fighters to hold relatively high positions in the movement:

The RUF promotes by ability, so some have really joined. . . . Small boys can be promoted above you. Some were my juniors at school. A small boy can order you, 'Fuck you, go get water for me.' He is your superior. (RUF fighter A) (Peters and Richards 1998a: 205)

But the system allowed for the re-emergence of patrimonialism, as young commanders themselves formed quasi-domestic groups that became family substitutes to rank-and-file child fighters. There is something poignant about the following statement, when it is realised that both demobilised commander and protégée have now come back under the wing of the older fighter's mother:

I demobilised together with my commander. He was a nice commander. But he could punish me if I had no permission to go out. Now I am living with my commander and his mother, [but] they are no family of mine. The mother of the commander is responsible for him. She is also in Kenema. My commander is 18 years of age. (RUF child combatant E, age 16 years)

While the movement in its daily functioning never fully rid itself of patrimonial tendencies, it definitely tried to incorporate egalitarian and meritocratic principles. There are several characteristics of the RUF, even as a military organisation, which speak against the idea that it was ever fully ordered as a conventional military hierarchy. For instance, until 1993 there were only two categories – or ranks – of fighters: Vanguards and Junior Commandos. The few titles given out were specifically related to assignments and operations. Egalitarian and meritocratic principles coexisted uneasily with the patrimonial principle of age or birth order as determinants of seniority. After 1993 ranks were introduced but a so-called first-come, first-served principle remained the most important identifier up to 1997. It also remained official policy that 'old soldiers' (those recruited during the first three years of the war) and Vanguards did not need to take orders from those who were superior in rank but new to the movement. These veterans only needed to take orders straight from the Leader. In addition to this, assignment was superior to rank. A commander assigned to be the commander of a specific area did not have to take orders from a higher rank; in the area the superior in rank was still the subordinate of the assigned commander. These contradictions were apparent in Foday Sankoh himself, who was known as the Leader, but was always referred to as Corporal Foday Sankoh (a junior army rank) or Pappy (a family diminutive).

It was when the RUF joined with the AFRC that movement ranks started to both erode and inflate. According to an ex-combatant:

At some stage people started to give ranks to themselves. Those who joined later took real pride in their ranks and positions. (RUF commander K)

From this discussion it becomes clear that in the end, a mix of isolation, explanation, indoctrination, reward, and punishment induced RUF conscripts to adapt to a complex situation, and that this adaptation generated durable social commitments within the movement. It was much less of a rabble than its opponents imagined it to be, and the attempts by the government army and later by external private security interests to bring it to heel through violence and demoralisation were significantly unsuccessful. Indeed, these attempts appear to have played a significant part in shaping the movement and strengthening its resolve. In addition, the meritocratic system of the RUF offered opportunities to the often marginalised conscripts it tended to induct, that they would never have experienced had they remained civilians. Thus it is not entirely paradoxical that the movement generated strong loyalties among some of its recruits. That the world then recoiled in horror from an insurgency it could not comprehend only served to increase the movement's isolation. The RUF became a world of its own, determined to survive by whatever means.

The Interior World of the RUF

The Bush Camps

As a result of near defeat at the end of 1993, the RUF retreated into the Gola Forest and changed its military tactics from a conventional type of guerrilla warfare (based on controlling territory) into a forest insurgency based on ambush tactics and pin-prick raids, intended to sow confusion and undermine enemy morale:

After the period in the Gola Forest the RUF started to move out of this forest and established other bases. But this time it decided to continue making the bases in the bush, rather than in the village. The bush was like a safe haven to the RUF. (RUF clerk A)

The movement started to build a string of forest base camps (see Chapter 3) in difficult and inaccessible terrain. What did these camps look like? The RUF clerk A, after being asked if he ever visited the Zogoda, elaborates on his first visit to the RUF's main camp in the Kambui South Forest Reserve:

Yes, I went there in 1995. The place is big but you will not see it from the air, thinking that it is just bush, seeing only trees and rocks. The houses in the camps have plastic or zinc roofs but these are covered with grass so that you cannot see it

from air. Before you reach the camp you have to cross seven or eight checkpoints. The checkpoints are manned with both big men and small children. The security is very tight. The guards will interrogate you and if you answer wrongly they will kill straight away. They have radio sets, so they check with the commanders in the camp and with the commanders outside if you were indeed ordered to come to the camp. It is not a camp where people go in and out all the time; only few people will enter the camp. . . . The people in the camp are heavily armed, but the atmosphere was relaxed. But as for the rest it is just like a village, some people are cooking, others are dancing or just talking. Well, it is not completely like a village, because all the looted goods are in the camp. And it was cleaner than in a village. So we had generators running all the time and we could watch television. There were medical facilities. We had captured a good doctor from the Rutile area. There were also medicines. These were brought by civilian traders, although they could not enter the camp, so they had to leave items behind at the checkpoint. There was a lot of trading going on with the civilians. All the food and medical care was free of charge. There was a church and a mosque in the Zogoda and everybody either had to go to one or the other, compulsorily. There was also a school in the camp. We had some teachers teaching there, but not all of the children went to school. I think about 30 percent of the children who were in the camp went there. It was mainly the children of the commanders and such. . . . They were teaching the same things that they were learning in ordinary schools, but they also learned about the RUF ideology and the reasons why the RUF was fighting. (RUF clerk A)

Several interesting issues are raised. The extremely tight security measures to prevent both the infiltration of enemies and the desertion of RUF fighters are noteworthy. That there was regular trade between civilian territory and RUF camps, but traders were not allowed to go inside the camp, is also a detail of note. Another interesting issue brought up is the free medical care. A dispenser captured in 1991 tells us more about the medical system of the RUF:

I was captured in Kailahun. During the wartime, in the beginning, I was the only senior medical person in the movement, from 1991. . . . There was no way to cross over to the government side, even if you wanted to do so. The government would kill you. . . . They [the RUF] explained the cause they were fighting for and I was convinced. The RUF never paid me for my work. But they provided free drugs to me so that I could treat the people free of charge. And they gave me food to live from. . . . Whenever we ran out of drugs I told them, so that they could look out for new drugs. (RUF dispenser)

Many interviewees refer to the existence of schools in the RUF camps and indicate that the RUF tried to run schools in the areas under their control:[26]

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[26] The RUF's 'Footpaths to Democracy' reads: 'The way to end exploitation and oppression, economic and social injustice, ignorance, backwardness and superstition is to make education available to all – both the young and old, male and female, and also the disabled. We need to create a new educational system that is more purposeful, dynamic and relevant, which will take into consideration the demands of the present scientific

There was no difference in the curriculum. But our schools were often located in the bush, we called it 'jo-bush' to protect them from the bomber jet [Nigerian Air Force Alpha Jets]. . . . We got it [the school material] from everywhere. I remember one time the RUF bought a lot of materials in Nigeria. The RUF government did not pay the teachers, but they gave them food and salt. I made sure that in the area [Kailahun district] where I was responsible for education, it was compulsory. We also introduced adult education. (RUF educational officer)

There [in the camp] was a hospital, a church, a mosque and a school. There were teachers, doctors, and Imams. They were all there. (RUF fighter B)

There was an adult literacy school and primary and secondary schools. All free of charge. And there was a hospital and a church, the 'Jungle United Christian Church' and a mosque. (RUF commander F)

I have been to five different camps. One of them had a school. The rebels were convincing civilian teachers to teach in the camp. All the school materials were free. (RUF child combatant D)

Not all camps had schools; it seems likely that schools were found only in the main camps and areas (such as the northern part of Kailahun district) under the control of the RUF for a long time. And not all children or adults attended. But where there were schools, the pupils were not required to pay school fees, nor did they have to pay for the – presumably very limited – school materials.[27] These are points of some significance, as evidence concerning the way the RUF saw itself contesting the breakdown of wider rural society, in which the poor were increasingly excluded from education through failure of government to pay teachers in more isolated regions.

What did life inside the camps look like for the conscripts?

We woke up around six in the morning and by 6.30 everybody should be ready for the morning parade. During the parade, the Pa [Foday Sankoh] would address us if there were any problems in general. After that he would discuss the individual problems. At 7.30 you could go for washing up till 8.00. Then it was time to do the duty to which you were appointed. [We got the water for drinking and washing] from the little stream that was running here. Before anybody was allowed to touch the water in the morning we all had to kneel down alongside the stream to gather the fallen leaves and sticks out of the water, so that the water would be pure. . . . It was centralised cooking. There was one meal every day. (RUF commander F)

Normally, the people woke up around six o'clock. First they all went for prayers. After that they gathered at the parade ground. There we exercised, the ideology

and technological world and value of research, critical thinking and creativity' (RUF 1995: 12).

[27] Humphreys and Weinstein (2004: 26) state that: 'For many RUF members, the prospects of future educational opportunities – in some cases scholarships abroad – were prominent enticements [to join]. Indeed, even though the survey did not list education as one of the possible responses to this question, 10 percent of respondents – including 17 percent of RUF respondents – indicated that promises of education was a prominent incentive.'

of the RUF was explained, and we were given advice. We were told that we had to keep a close watch on the civilians in the camp. That we should make a report of any strange person moving around. And that whenever problems occurred we should report it to the commander. After that we were assigned to different tasks. Some had to prepare food and others had to take a patrol around. But there was a lot of time to listen to the radio, like the BBC World Service, or read a magazine. Some watched a video – these Nigerian films. . . . The commanders would discuss it [when there was a negative report about the RUF on the radio] and most times said that it was not correct or only half of the truth.[28] (RUF clerk A)

Most camps were located in inaccessible terrain, well away from roads. Because of the danger of attacks by Nigerian jet bombers, and later the hired Bulgarian Mi-24 helicopter gunship of EO (for details of which see Hooper 2002), the camps were located deep inside areas of tropical rain forest or thick (closed canopy) bush. The villages closest to the camps were emptied, but civilians remained in the next outermost circle of villages, and here some RUF cadres were stationed:

Every time a town was captured we gathered the people and made them select two persons among themselves who were then appointed as administrators [town commanders] for that specific town. That was the G5 office. . . . Whenever we captured a place most of the civilians were driven away because the more civilians were in the occupied area the more there was danger of enemy infiltration. (RUF commander C)

We had contact with the civilians in the surrounding villages, where also some of our fighters were based. If there was any suspicious movement the civilians had to come to report to us. In case of a problem – if we had to move our camp – the civilians sometimes asked us if they could join us. Because they were afraid of the CDF and SLA if they were caught residing in a former rebel territory. . . . In every village there was a G5 commander who had to inform the headquarters whenever a civilian had run away. But the civilians in the surrounding villages did not know the exact location of the [forest] base. If a civilian who stayed in the base would run away – which we could find out during the morning roll-call – everybody had to leave the camp so that we could lay an ambush for the soldiers. The soldiers would find the base deserted, but on the way back we would attack them. (RUF commander E)

The bush-camp phase proved to be a pivotal period in the movement's history. Isolated from the wider society, the movement was consolidated – it became a kind of secular sect. Bonds of commitment and loyalty were forged in the militarised camps, rather than in the RUF's liberated civilian zones, resulting in a new and durable solidarity, largely among conscripts and based on meritocratic principles of seniority, egalitarian principles of

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[28] Lansana Gberie (2005: 65) interviewed some civilians in October 1991 from the recently recaptured town of Pujehun. They stated that during the RUF occupation it was pro-hibited to listen to radios and receive news from the outside world. This is perhaps comparable with the Khmer Rouge's obsession with isolating the country.

redistribution, and the unifying factors of a common danger and shared fate.

The 'Green Revolution'

It is interesting to speculate what the RUF might have become if it had succeeded in surviving its enemies' stratagems and overcoming some of its obvious internal contradictions. Had it seized national power in 1991–2, or again in 1996, would it perhaps have plunged Sierra Leone into a Cambodian style regime starting from Year Zero? Similarities of sectarian strangeness and paranoid fear of civilian betrayal seem to be common to both movements, and may have been a factor in motivating some at least of the many grievous atrocities committed.[29] And both movements believed in the reformative powers of an enforced return to agriculture:

Before 1995 the RUF used a green flag as their symbol. The green flag was a symbol for the Green Revolution. We called it the Green Revolution because we thought agriculture so central to the revolution. It was about the trees and the leaves.[30] I myself had a big rice farm in M. [where interviewee was based] during the time of the revolution. (RUF commander F)

An agrarian orientation is perhaps not unexpected in the RUF, given the predominant rural background of the majority of its cadres, including some of those who took a lead in shaping the movement ideologically while it was in the bush:

I joined the revolution in 1991 because of the backwardness of Kailahun and because of the oppression. We heard that a revolution was coming for the total liberation. That time, when you left Form 5 [secondary school] the only thing you could do was to take up a [farm] cutlass. [But] The plantation was not enough to support education [up to] university level. In particular because of this polygamy. The RUF said that the problem was that we had the land but that we did not utilise it. But some guys who joined later spoiled the movement. But the ones

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[29] Considering the RUF as a violent upsurge of youth against patrimonial and geronto-cratic rule, as here argued, resonates with one interpretation of the societal revolution attempted by the Khmer Rouge. François Ponchaud remarks, referring to the relation-ship between youths and elders in pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, that 'grandparents, parents, and elders exercised real authority over younger members of society' (Pon-chaud 1989: 162). Under the Pol Pot regime this changed: 'While in the past, parents played a decisive role in choosing spouses for their children, now individuals made their own choices subject to the approval of Angkar' [the Khmer Rouge core organisation] (ibid.: 166). He concludes that the Khmer Rouge revolution was '. . . the rising up of the youth against the elders and the ancestors' (ibid.: 152).

[30] The majority of farmers in Sierra Leone depend on semi-subsistence agriculture. Oil palm, cocoa and coffee are the most common cash crops. Food security depends largely on rice, cassava, and sweet potato. Two of the most common dishes in Sierra Leone are rice with cassava leaf or rice with sweet potato leaf.

who joined in 1991–2 were good. But we, we organised the youths in the villages in groups, and let them make community farms. (RUF fighter D)

Perhaps the clearest indications of this agrarian orientation are to be found in an evident preoccupation with organising collectivist food production:

[A] central point of the revolution was the great attention on the importance of rice farming in Sierra Leone. The RUF promoted rice farming, even in the frontline. It always looked out for seed rice to take it along. This rice was given to the civilians who were living in RUF territory. They had to make this 'state farm' or more accurately put 'town farm' on which they had to work besides the work on their own farms. It was a cooperative which was meant to supply for whoever needed it. . . . We took this idea about group action from the Green Book but we adapted it to the Sierra Leone case. The Green Book is a valuable document for Africa. Democracy is not good for Africa because of the poverty. Democracy in Africa is blunt capitalism. What Africans need is socialism. I have read the Green Book. To rise above poverty we need socialism because the backbone of socialism is agriculture and more specifically it is group action.[31] (RUF commander C)

About 70 percent of the population in Sierra Leone depends on semi-subsistence farming. Government policies subsidised imported rice to satisfy urban and mining populations and severely undercut domestic production. According to Richards, 'the bag of imported white rice is, *par excellence*, both the symbol of political patronage (a sign that the government "cares" for its employees and populace at large) and also the means by which sponsors in the diamond mining business supply their diggers in the forest. [Furthermore, the APC] government, through a monopoly marketing board,[32] maintained price controls for the purchase of the main cash export crops, coffee and cocoa' (Richards 1996: 123). In its basic document (RUF/SL 1989) – an item drafted with inputs from students at Fourah Bay College and rural-based Njala University College – the RUF states that:

Cash crops production in itself does not help in the anti-neo-colonial struggle for genuine independence. This is because the crops go to feed the industries of Europe and North America. In turn, we buy finished products at incredibly high

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[31] Another strong point of comparison between the RUF and the Khmer Rouge might be the idea of agrarian labour as a way of reforming a corrupted and recalcitrant population.

[32] Mkandawire (2002: 195) describes the attitudes of African governments as characterised by ambiguity, 'as evidenced by the taxation of peasants, on the one hand, and provision of subsidised inputs and welfare services, on the other'. However, 'Abraham and Sesay (1993) estimate that the price of rice to producers (farmers in Sierra Leone) declined in real terms by 67 percent over the period 1976–87, making a mockery of formal agricultural development initiatives in the food-crop sector' (Richards 1996: 51, fn.), although, according to Gberie, the marketing board provided rural communities with some cash, a level of infrastructural development, and at least some visible state presence (Gberie 2005: 33).

cost. In the end we produce what we don't consume and consume what we don't produce.

At first, according to ex-combatants, the movement itself as a whole was not too much concerned about implementing its ideas about agriculture.[33] It hoped for a quick military victory, after which it anticipated turning to its political programme. But this victory did not materialise. Instead, the RUF saw itself increasingly surrounded by enemy forces and in the end driven back to the far tip of Kailahun district. Informants report that food was a serious problem in the first two years of 'the struggle'. According to this ex-G5 officer:

Farming was central because it was so important to have food. The idea behind the whole struggle was to get the 'throne' and then implement our agricultural agenda. By the end of 1993 there was a ceasefire announced, because the soldiers expected that [the] last RUF [troops] would come out if there was no more fighting. However, at that period there was enough food in the stores because it was straight after the harvest season. Later in '94 we experienced serious hunger and it was by the end of '94 that we decided to involve ourselves in agriculture: all the jungle bases and the towns under our control had farms. In the Kailahun area, right up to Pendembu, we started farming in 1995. (RUF commander H)

After 1993, when the RUF changed its military tactics from semi-conventional to forest-based insurgency, it also changed its tactics to obtain food.[34] Cut off from its direct supporter, the NPFL in Liberia, due to the presence of ULIMO forces in the Liberian borderland, the RUF's struggle became predominantly focused on self-reliance:

[The RUF's struggle] was all based on self reliance and the fighters were indoctrinated with the strategies to acquire that self reliance. (RUF commander M)

There seems little doubt that the RUF could have taken care of its food needs through raids on villages – and humanitarian convoys – and by exchanging looted items for food, had it so wished, since this was exactly how most factions in Liberia operated.[35] This is in fact a normal pattern

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[33] In any case, Junior Commandos – recruited predominately in rural Kailahun and Pujehun between 1991 and 1993 – were likely to have much more interest in agriculture than the more urban-oriented Vanguards. It was during the bush phase that the role and influence of the Junior Commandos became much stronger.

[34] To this extent Abdullah is right to detect some ad hoc elements in the RUF strategy (Abdullah 1997: 71). But to consider these only as 'populist rhetoric' and 'designed as survival tactics to win support from the very public it terrorises' (ibid.: 71) is an interpretation challenged by the evidence brought forward in this book.

[35] Outram (1997: 364) has argued that the Liberian armed factions operated on a 'warlord' system, predatory in regard to its environment and governed by a logic of short-run exploitation. One reason for such a system could be that few of the Liberian warlords were able to secure a base area for a prolonged period of time. The RUF, in zones around its bush camps, and in particular in Kailahun, secured an area under its control for several years and had a better opportunity to implement more sustainable food supplies.

for warlords in Africa (Keen 1994). While the RUF did carry out such raids, increasingly it started to take charge of its own food production, and this seems a significant departure best explained by an ideological orientation. Perhaps the RUF considered complete dependence on acquiring food through force unjustifiable in terms of its political message, or it believed that it would render the movement vulnerable to security threats. What is clear is that involvement in agriculture production sets it apart from Mancur Olson's (1997) 'roving bandits'[36] or its erstwhile partner in Liberia, the NPFL, as described by Outram (1997).

Access to food was essential for the RUF's endurance: rice was needed to feed fighters and thus to sustain the movement. Whoever had access to food was able to control the fighters:

Whenever we captured an area, we had to become self-reliant. If an officer wants to control his fighters, he needs to feed his men. That is what Foday Sankoh stressed all the time. We made all types of farms and everybody had to participate in it. If you want to call yourself an authority, you must be able to produce food. During the war both combatants and civilians were under your control and both [groups] worked on the farm. (RUF commander F)

While the above might reflect nothing more than practical considerations – food production, as a means to control fighters – it is also worth pointing out that it is a direct translation of the RUF's rather simplistic, but straightforward political analysis concerning the responsibilities which come with leadership (to provide for one's subjects) and the role it envisages for citizens in relation to leaders (everybody, whether fighter or civilian, has to participate). And these ideas can be seen, in turn, as the RUF's answer to the exclusionary pre-war policies of a patrimonial state no longer able to fulfil its promises to its subjects, and as a critique of elite-favoured practices in rural communities through which the burden of 'community' labour fell unduly on the shoulders of the poor and members of 'client' lineages.

So, whether unable or unwilling to acquire its food needs solely by looting, the movement started to put its ideas about agriculture into practice. The jungle camps brought some level of security over a longer period, despite the increasing threat posed by the of international private-security backed civil defence forces, and thus provided for

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[36] Mkandawire refers to Mancur Olson's work when he makes a distinction between 'roving' and 'stationary' bandits. 'Stationary bandits are dependent on the prosperity of the communities that they inhabit, and will therefore adopt measures that facilitate such prosperity, such as ensuring that law and order and productive activities are maintained and expanded. . . . Roving bandits, in contrast, are constantly on the move, extracting resources through robbery, taxation and pillaging as they move to the scene of the next confrontation' (Mkandawire 2002: 199).

the first time the possibility to experiment with ideas about agricultural production.[37]

The exact mode of operation differed from area to area and also changed over the years. But it seems that every bush camp of the RUF had at least one rice farm close by to provide food:

Every base got its own [rice] swamp. In a circle of about five miles around the base no civilians were living. Beyond that civilians were living in villages under the control of combatants. There were the [rice] swamps located where both the civilians and the combatants worked. (RUF fighter D)

The accounts suggest a compulsory 'socialist' or 'communal' orientation in the way the RUF organised its farming. While individual farms were allowed, the RUF stressed communal farming. This may have been a reflection of a collectivist ethic generated by the shared predicament of a forest-enclaved rebel movement. But it also replaced a situation in which members of free-born lineages constituted a land-owning class with a structure in which everybody had a clear stake and a potential share of benefits, whenever the activity functioned according to the design:

In 1993/'94 there were no seedlings. It was because of the hunger in that period that agriculture became so paramount. It was from the end of '95 that we had sufficient seedlings and we started to divide it among everybody. People returned it to us without any interest. Rice was produced on a rotational basis. At first there was only group farming, but after '95 there was also individual farming. This took place up to '97/'98. Whenever you, as a combatant, were assigned to a specific area, you and your group had to make your own farm. Civilian strangers were fed by the civilians, combatant strangers were fed by the combatants. (RUF commander I)

This extract introduces us to the way the RUF organised farming in territories under its control, but beyond the immediate confines of the jungle camps. From early 1994 until the AFRC coup in May 1997, the RUF was mainly based in these camps, apart from some limited control over towns and villages in Kailahun district. When the RUF started its collaboration with the AFRC it did not abandon the idea of the jungle camps, since these camps provided good cover from Nigerian bomber-jets and helicopter gunships, but increasingly it spread out to control larger areas, including some notable urban centres in the north and east. Although pushed back by the ECOMOG intervention in 1998, the movement quickly regained control over these areas from the second half of 1998, which it maintained until the general demobilisation implemented during 2001. During these later years of the war the RUF was, in fact,

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[37] During this period the movement's so-called Minister of Agriculture was a former student at Njala, Faya Musa, a known radical during his time as a student. Rusticated for exam failure, he ended up as an agricultural instructor in a Kailahun secondary school, when he joined the RUF. He was prominent in the Abidjan peace negotiations.

more or less completely in control of a cigar-shaped band of territory stretching from Kailahun district on the Liberian border to Bombali district in the north-west of country. This area included the major diamond areas of Kono and Tongo (see Map 1 in Chapter 3).

Farming in the 'Liberated Zones'

Areas outside the RUF camps, but controlled by the RUF, were referred to by the movement as the 'liberated zones'. Some of these had been under RUF control for several years without changing sides or experiencing much fighting. Here the RUF perceived itself as the legitimate government. The following sections deal with how the RUF organised these areas, and with daily life for RUF civilians and fighters. They mainly describe the organisation of the 'liberated zones' from the second half of the conflict (1997 onwards), and I start here with a discussion of food production issues (sections follow on mining and education/health care).

After the extremely violent attack on the country's capital by AFRC and RUF forces on 6 January 1999 was beaten off by ECOMOG troops, fighting slowly reduced and negotiations started. These eventually culminated in the signing of the Lomé peace accord in July 1999. Between 6 January 1999 and the end of the war in early 2002, the RUF was the de facto government of a significant part of Sierra Leone. Perhaps more than the bush-camp phase, this period gives some indication of how the RUF might have run Sierra Leone, had it been the victorious party in the conflict.

Ex-fighters indicated that it was a policy of the RUF to encourage rice farming around its jungle bases and in Kailahun. After January 1999, and in control of a larger territory, including several towns, it still continued to force its fighters to involve themselves in farming:

When I was with the RUF I made a big [rice] swamp. They gave the order that every fighter from the rank of colonel and up must make a swamp and a [vegetable] garden. The fighters should work on it. Civilians only worked on it as a temporary punishment. (RSLMF/RUF commander A)

During my time with the RUF we had to make rice swamps. But we, the fighters, and the civilians had separated swamps. If you had a friend among the civilians he might help you, but you could not force him. (RUF fighter I)

According to these accounts, fighters and civilians had separate farms. However, in other cases fighters and civilians had to work together on the same farm:

When the RUF got control over M. in 1998, it was F. who was the commander here. The RUF made a committee[38] farm here. Both the civilians and the

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[38] More often referred to as a 'community' farm.

combatants had to work on the farm. It was two times a week for the civilians here in M. and two times a month for the civilians in the surrounding villages. This decision was taken by the entire community, including the elders. . . . There was one [community farm before the war] but this one, the one during the revolution, was bigger and produced more, because more attention was paid to it.[39] Combatants must go there every day, doing the same work as the civilians. The commander also worked on the farm. The RUF put more effort in agriculture than the APC regime. The RUF was not involved in gold mining, but in agriculture. Goma Gon is a village close by where people mine the gold. 'Where is our gold, where is our diamond?' [paraphrase of a line from the RUF anthem] you have to give account for that at some time. . . . Its [the RUF community farm's] aim was to produce seeds for the farmers who could then start their own farms. The people who took farming seriously received husk rice from this farm. And some of it was used to eat. There were many different varieties, both swamp and upland rice. (RUF fighter H)

Some accounts clearly state that civilians could not be forced to work on the communal farms:

I joined the rebels in 1992 when I was captured while being in Kailahun, the place where my mother was born. While in the RUF we made different types of farms: rice, yam, and swamp. We even made farms right inside Kailahun town. It was both the combatants and the civilians who made these farms. There is a big common farm which was aimed to promote the unity among us. We are going there two times a week. The civilians however cannot be forced to go there because they already have their swamps. Combatants too can have their own private farms. The produce of the communal farm is for the betterment of the whole community, and in particular for those who are in need. The chief who has been appointed by the RUF regulated the food distribution. The food was used for visitors, for special occasions and for people in need. The husk rice was bought from the civilians. (RUF fighter F)

But other accounts suggest that civilians inside RUF territory had to make their labour available to the RUF for one or two days a week, mainly for the purpose of working on the 'government' farms. This was compulsory, on order of the RUF and executed by the G5 (see further discussion) through the civilian town commander:

If people do not want to make farms, we just imposed it on them, because you need food. Impose is not the same as force. You impose something to make sure they turn up. It is like community labour. There was little difference between this kind of imposing and the one used before and after the war. But because we had guns, but no money or jails, people felt it as being forced. (RUF commander C)

At best, a very fine line separates 'imposing' from 'using force', but once the RUF established control over a region it considered itself the

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[39] This informant refers to a Chinese rice irrigation project which produced well when the Chinese engineers were present and maintained the equipment and irrigation channels. After their departure the irrigated rice swamp fell into decay.

legitimate authority and in charge (hence the reference to itself as the 'government') and felt it had the right to impose these demands on the civilians.

The design of the RUF's communal projects was little if at all different from the many previous 'group agriculture' wetland development projects the country had experienced when the World Bank became active in integrated rural development in the 1970s (Johnny, Karimu, and Richards 1981). But the main point here is that the RUF attempted to introduce a framework, while it could have got by on looting, or just taxing individual farmers, while leaving the farmers to their own devices. These alternatives would have saved the RUF cadres the problems of setting up and trying to direct an entire system of agricultural production:

The role of the [RUF] agricultural officers and the committee was to sensitise the people on the need for agriculture and to organise the villages for private and communal farms and to grow the seedlings. The produce of the community farms was used to support the wounded fighters. (RUF commander M)

Seed rice was obtained in various ways – from the frontline through looting, in exchange for looted properties at the border, bought from villagers (within RUF territory), or produced on the RUF's own farms and stored in its seedbanks for later redistribution:

Missions at the front can take between three days up to several months. There were two types of missions: the food finding mission when we attacked villages, and the arms finding mission when we attacked the army. (RUF commander G)

The RUF produced part of its own food. The seeds were obtained by attacking towns or through trading at the Guinea border. (RUF commander H)

In Pendembu, seeds for one's farm must be obtained by oneself. But for the government farms, it was the RUF which provided seeds. (Civilian in Upper Bambara Chiefdom)

This last comment comes from a civilian living in Pendembu when the RUF was firmly in control of this place. Civilians living in frontline areas, although under the control of the RUF, were much more vulnerable to harassment, and rarely could count on RUF support. The following civilian comment, from an adjacent area, at a later period, indicates that the so-called RUF seedbanks, intended to provide seeds without payment of interest to farmers, were not available in his area:

The rebels did not provide us with seedlings. We got it from other civilians, through exchanging these. (Civilian in Mandu Chiefdom)

But a further account – from a civilian living deeper inside RUF territory during the war – does take notice of the seedbanks. It also raises another aspect of the RUF system that was of potential interest to many (young)

farmers, and in particular to those with weak land rights (that is, strangers or members of client lineages) in pre-war communities:

In G. we laid [made] upland [rice] farms. All the landowners had fled, so it was all common land now. We were farming for ourselves and there was a community farm. For the community farm, the seed rice was provided by the RUF. There was a government store, and the seed rice in there was given to the farmers for their own individual farms, but they did not provide us with food for work when we worked on the community farm. We had to work one day a week on the community farm. The produce from our own farms was for us to keep. If you sell it at the Guinea border, you have to give some commission to the RUF. (Civilian in Upper Bambara Chiefdom)

By driving out the elders controlling a large part of the land and confiscating this land for 'community' farming activities, the RUF in effect implemented its own rough-and-ready land-reform agenda, comparable to some of the activities of veteran squatters in Zimbabwe (Sadomba 2008). As in Zimbabwe, this must have been a feature of RUF 'reform' attractive to a rural underclass lacking secure land entitlements. That agrarian grievances may have played a part in the war in Sierra Leone is something missed by most commentators. We have seen that many young people, in the districts of Sierra Leone from which the war came, belong, in fact, to a semi-vagrant underclass of descendants of former slaves, now often found living as 'strangers' attached to land- and plantation-owning patrons. Members of this class of 'strangers' access land only at the patrons' whim. Some lack the basic means to become peasant planters in their own right, and are vulnerable to loss even of their labour through traditional bride-service requirements and fines for infringements of a customary code of respect, despite (allegedly) abundant supplies of land in many areas.

In short, although the RUF's involvement in and promotion of agriculture was something with which it started to involve itself only after 1993, the specific way it did so indicates that more was at stake than a purely ad hoc attempt to ensure its survival. Its actions in relation to collective agriculture and land redistribution are sufficiently coherent as to suggest some sense of a political analysis encompassing agrarian questions, and a rudimentary grasp of what it might take to develop fairer outcomes for the most marginal elements in rural society:

Private farming has existed for decades now and we are still not able to feed the nation. The collective farming idea is from the time of the revolution. Everybody above 18 years of age should make his or her own farm. That was in the safe areas, away from the frontline. As soon as an area was liberated, farming started. We had both private and collective farms in every village in Kailahun. The revolutionary element was that before the people were making farms for the chiefs and now they were making farms for the whole community. (RUF commander J)

Many of the early recruits, in particular, had a rural background, but lacked opportunity to farm under conditions profitable to them. Many of these first recruits were still young at the time of conscription, probably contributing labour to the farms of their parents or local elites, perhaps prior to drifting away from their villages. Successive governments before the war not only raided the agricultural sector to raise government revenue to support non-agricultural, urban ventures, but left in place customary structures highly unfavourable to young people from underclass backgrounds.

Did anything change when the war ended? British aid was targeted on rehabilitating the traditional chieftaincy system, oblivious to arguments that land and labour issues had fed the revolt. Despite the government's professed target of attaining national food security before the election year, 2007, many communities in Sierra Leone went without any government support for the agricultural sector (the dominant livelihood in rural Sierra Leone, supporting 70–80 percent of the population). Support received after the war, such as agricultural tools and seeds, was mainly handed out by the large non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector. The post-war SLPP government was distinctly unwilling to reform the aspects of customary law affecting exploitation of the labour of young people:

During the war there was no help; it was only after the war that Africare [an NGO] came with some seeds. But nothing from the government whatsoever, no tools, no food for work, nothing. At present, the lack of labour power is the main problem; the youth do not work for nothing anymore. (Civilian in Mandu chiefdom)

In general we can conclude that, although food supply was, of course, a logistical necessity for a guerrilla force, there is evidence in the statements just reviewed that lifts these agricultural initiatives above the level of mere logistical opportunism. The first is the repeated emphasis on the extensive involvement of RUF fighters in actual food production, as an aspect of leadership. If this is delusory it seems to have been a delusion shared by many if not all of the combatants interviewed. They talk a highly coordinated opportunism, if opportunism it is. The second aspect of note is the cogency of the arguments made in favour of recognising an agrarian crisis of youth in Sierra Leone. This is not a factor that has been much discussed in the literature, and is only now surfacing as a thread linking conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire.[40] Why choose a discourse which barely as yet makes sense to a wider audience? It is at least worth reflecting that the RUF's recognition of an

[40] See, for example, a set of studies on West African rural youth, edited by Jean-Pierre Chauveau (2005), in the journal *Afrique contemporaine*.

agrarian youth crisis is broadly correct, even if its means for dealing with it are to be deplored.

Mining under the RUF

The conflict in Sierra Leone has not become internationally prominent as a war fought over land rights and opportunities to farm. It has become known as a conflict over diamonds, with the RUF – in its collaboration with the AFRC – portrayed as a joint criminal enterprise (in the terminology of the Special Court's prosecution),[41] mainly interested in getting its hands on this precious mineral. Indeed, most ex-RUF informants indicate that the RUF did become heavily involved in diamond mining during the later stages of the conflict. But they are equally firm in denying that diamond mining took place on any significant scale during the first half of the conflict.

It was only from '97 that some started to get involved in diamonds and in '98 it was still small, only a bit of mining started. We had a mining unit, established in '96. They were based in Payeima [close to the Tongo mining fields]. But they were driven out after the Kangari [Hills] attack. Then Sam Bockarie let them prospect the area around Giema, close to Koindu, in '97. During the '98 attacks by ECOMOG, there was still only little mining taking place. But in '99 it was well organised and we had food for [mining] work [schemes]. (RUF commander L)

Nevertheless, diamonds were a currency of the conflict (on both sides), and the RUF did have stocks of diamonds during the first half of the conflict. It is important to recognise, however, that not all the diamonds which ended up in the hands of the RUF were also *mined* by RUF fighters. Some RUF fighters suggested that, during the first half of the conflict, RUF diamonds were mainly confiscated at checkpoints or looted, rather than mined by the RUF. Others conceded that some RUF mining activity took place during the first years, but strictly to support movement activity. This is not evidence easily squared with claims that the lure of diamonds caused the war:

Some in the RUF were mining, this started from early on in the conflict. A commander could send a group to start mining. He was giving the orders; you cannot do it just by yourself. This could be in a small or a big site. Both the civilians and the combatants were mining. The diamonds were not for the individual miners. (RUF fighter I)

Limited mining activity during the first years to an extent may reflect practical reasons; the RUF did not control the main mining areas in Tongo and Kono, despite a short occupation of the Kono fields at the

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[41] 13 May 2004, Consolidated Indictment, paragraph 36.

end of 1992. Then, during the RUF bush-camp phase there was lim-
ited opportunity to mine without becoming vulnerable to EO-backed
CDF attacks. But perhaps limited involvement in mining also reflec-
ted RUF ideology, which was particularly strongly implemented during
this phase.

Nevertheless it is likely that a good percentage of RUF members had
an interest in diamond mining. Or, to put it the other way around, it is
unlikely that among 20,000+ cadres (5,000–10,000 cadres during the
first half of the war) there was nobody with an interest in diamonds.
Here, one should remember that some of the main RUF recruiting areas
were the diamond fields.[42] In these areas young people often lived and
worked under deplorable conditions as diamond diggers, prior to their
conscription. The evidence seems to suggest that the RUF found some
especially willing recruits among this category of footloose labourers. In
Abdullah et al. (1997) it is argued that the so-called 'san-san boys' were
one of the three groups making up the RUF. This argument is confirmed
in the following extracts, which also remind us that becoming a *san-san*
boy was often the result of economic hardship, not criminal inclination,
as often ascribed to diamond-pit labourers:

Diamonds were not the main reason of the war but it was in the minds of some:
because so many joined because of economic difficulties, in particular the rank
and file and junior commandos. This also contributed to the fact that orders
from above were not always followed. This caused some of the attacks taking
place without the consent of the leaders. (CDF commander)

[My father] was a primary school teacher in Kono. But he left the teaching job
because of the low salary. Then he started doing trade, in medicines. But he
was also a clerk for the SLPP party in our place. I remember that during the
elections in the late '80s, some of the youthful APC supporters came to my
father's compound to harass him, eat all our food and search the house. . . . He
ran to the bush and had to go to different towns because he was not feeling safe
anymore. He left us, his children, alone in the house. By the time I was going to
Form One [of secondary school] I had to leave school because of lack of funds
for fees, that was in 1992. . . . [So] I started helping with digging for diamonds,
to get my school fees. If you are lucky you get good money. I helped the actual
miners with all kind of supportive tasks. (RUF fighter B)

Miners in licensed operations, but even more in illicit ones, operated
in tightly disciplined platoon groups, even before the war. Some were
absorbed as a whole group by the RUF, for example during the attack
on Kono in 1992. It is quite possible that these miners-turned-fighters

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[42] The diamond areas are geographically much more extensive than the main diamond
centres such as Sefadu in Kono district and Tongo in Kenema district. Alluvial diamond
mining takes place over large parts of Kailahun, Pujehun, Kenema, Kono, and Bo
districts.

looked for an opportunity to continue to mine when they could, either on a commander's orders, or on their own account, away from the main bases and during lulls in the fighting.

The interviewee above, who became involved in mining activities to raise funds to pay his school fees, explained how his small illicit mining band operated prior to conscription. Note the egalitarian structure of the band, the focus on working together as a group, and the importance of sharing a 'common mind'. Both characteristics seem to have fed into the RUF's cooperative mentality, a link first proposed by Fithen (1999) and confirmed in this extract:

[Q: How exactly was the mining group organised?] It was a group of six to ten men. They are all doing the same work. The manager is only there when the washing of the gravel starts. The diamonds are taken by the manager to the supporter who pays for the equipment and the food. The supporter buys the diamonds from the manager and then he makes business with the licence holder. The manager gives the money [for the labourers] to the leader of the group who divides the money equally.

[Q: So is the leader different from the rest of the group?] The leader is the same. He can work as hard as the other ones. He divides the goods, the rice and the cigarettes. And he resolves quarrels when they arise. The leader divides everything equally but if the others agree he sometimes takes a little bit more.

[Q: Did the supporter also pay you a salary?] You only get money when you find a diamond. Otherwise you get rice two times a day.

[Q: Does the diamond work not make you greedy and selfish?] Diamond mining encourages unity. It is only by working together as a group that you find a good diamond. You have to have a common mind, working in the same pit the whole day. If there is confusion [discord] among you it will not work.

[Q: So then the leader steps in?] Problems are solved by the leader but he cannot give orders just like that. The leader is selected by the group or by the master. If he is not favoured any more by the miners, they can start to complain to the master. (RUF fighter B)

When the RUF started to collaborate with the renegade soldiers in 1997, access to diamond mining increased – and consequently so did its role as a motivation for the war. Interestingly, this period has been labelled by many RUF ex-combatants as the start of the erosion of the movement's ideology (see the following chapter). But even during the Junta period there were some practical limitations on the extent to which the RUF could involve itself in diamond mining. Those who see a greed-driven conspiracy between soldiers and rebels as a motor of the war assume coordination, but in fact collaboration between the AFRC and the RUF was never as smooth as these commentators assume. For a start the two factions controlled the relevant areas at separate times. Kono – and to some extent Tongo – were mainly under the control of the AFRC. The CDF units were also present in Tongo Fields. But after the

6 January 1999 attack on Freetown this changed, and the RUF became more heavily involved in diamond mining, as claimed by this ex-RUF Signals Officer:

It was only when Issa Sesay took over [in 2000] that serious diamond mining started. (Signals officer B)

When the signing of the Lomé peace accord in July 1999 approached, and particularly in the period immediately afterwards, the RUF behaved like an occupying, if not to say victorious, force in the areas under its control, which included the main diamond centres. It now considered itself the legitimate government of these territories, and organised diamond mining more systematically to raise 'state' revenues for civilians and combatants, though its capacity for this kind of more formal administration was strictly limited.[43] The civilians it ruled now had to work for the putative regime, as a duty in lieu of taxation.

The RUF made rules about the way these 'state' mining activities had to be executed, but the rules changed over time rather capriciously, varying according to place and commander in charge. The variations mainly concerned the number of days people had to work for the RUF 'government' and the way any diamond profits were shared, as becomes clear from the following account:

When the gravel was extracted it was divided into three piles, one for the labourer, one for the RUF government and one for the supporter, the person who paid for the equipment and the food of the workers. But because Issa [Sesay] was the main supporter as well as representing the government, he collected two piles of gravel. . . . Only those two piles which belonged to the movement were surrounded with high security. The third pile can be washed and checked by the labourers without RUF security watching them. Any diamonds that they find in their own pile, the civilians can keep for themselves and sell it to the RUF. (RUF commander D)[44]

The following account was offered by a civilian chief originating in the Tongo area, describing more or less the same area and period, but a different (if short-lived) way in which the RUF tried to regulate mining using licences:

It was from '98 that the RUF was in control of Tongo and Kono, right up to the end of the war. I came here in 2000. The arrangement in place at that time was one pile [of gravel] for the RUF and one pile for yourself, but you had to arrange the expenditures yourself. If a big diamond was found in the RUF pile they could

[43] Under the Lomé Accord, Sankoh became the Chairman of the Strategic Mineral Reserves and was effectively the governmental authority in relation to the organisation of mining. As a result of this all the mining proceeds (whether in government- or RUF-controlled areas) were supposed to be fed into government reserves.

[44] For more detail on the pile system and its transformation under wartime conditions see Fithen (1999).

confiscate your pile as well because they then expected something in there. But if they did not find a good diamond they leave your pile untouched.

They introduced these mining licences: first it was the green card for Le 10,000 and some months later they made it a yellow card, which could be bought for Le 20,000. These cards were valid for one month for you to register as a miner. Part of the money was used to compensate the landowner. They had a special Task Force that they sent around to check for the cards and if you did not have one, you would get a harsh punishment. But in general, every RUF could just check you. Later in 2000 they banned the card system and introduced two days of labour for the RUF and three days for yourself.

A third account, by an ex-RUF clerk, also suggests a system based on days rather than piles:

They [the RUF] forced the civilians to mine. It was a 24 hours a day mining. During the night they used lights. A shift of labour groups took place every four hours. Or it depended on the commander if the people worked for four or eight hours. Especially during the washing the people liked to work more because of the opportunity to steal diamonds. In Tongo it was five days for the RUF and during the weekend two days for yourself. And if you found a big diamond during these two days and did not hide it, the RUF could still confiscate it. They just did not bother about the small diamonds.

In 1999 and the year after the system changed to three days for the RUF and four days for yourself because the civilians were grumbling too much. (RUF clerk A)

This informant refers to mining operations going on 24 hours per day. It is not entirely clear who was behind such an operation. It might have been an intensive but limited RUF mining operation intended to raise urgent cash in areas only temporarily under control, before the movement became involved in mining on a more widespread scale in 1998–9. Or, equally possibly, it refers to an AFRC or joint AFRC/RUF mining operation, since the junta soldiers had at the time better access to large generators and other heavy equipment, and were mining extensively in both the Tongo and Kono areas. But this description of RUF mining activity in Tongo has been confirmed by the other informants. Interestingly, this interviewee suggests that those washing the gravel were rather keen on doing it, despite the risks related to stealing diamonds. Equally remarkable is the comment that while RUF personnel could behave unscrupulously, and just simply confiscate big stones if they wanted to, the movement nevertheless was apparently sensitive to the persistent complaints of the civilian population, once again suggesting more political organisation than for what is generally given credit.[45]

The following extract also emphasises the ambiguity surrounding a number of reports on RUF diamond activity in wartime conditions, this

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[45] See the following discussion for a more detailed account of the criticisms and complaints of civilians in the Tongo area.

time showing that the RUF did not always implement similar standards in territories under its control. As already noted, much could depend on the specific commander in charge, and this should be of little surprise since the RUF was governed largely according to a set of principles and codes (its ideology), with only a little help from newly created (and thus very immature) civil-military branches (see below). Pre-war institutions in most cases were dismissed as corrupt or supportive of the enemy, and the movement never really developed anything approaching a civil administration. This is a reflection of the fact that the RUF was in control only for a very short time – and was still at war – and so there was very little scope for capacity or institution building, and much was left to the good – or bad – will of the commanders.[46] The following remark is from a RUF commander who was at some stage in charge of the mining operations in Kono and Tongo:

The living conditions in the mining areas were bad. Sometimes there was a strike and we had to put the people under pressure. (RUF commander D)

What exactly was entailed by 'putting the people under pressure' becomes clear from the next – rather long – extract from the civilian chief we have already heard from:

At first the commanders respected their own laws, but soon they started their own operations, using forced labour. Normally, if civilians saw these RUF people they tried to run away. But at the same time new people arrived from government-controlled areas because of the lack of economic opportunities in these areas. Some then still went back or more or less escaped. At some stage there was a big kimberlite operation where the RUF forcibly gathered civilians to work for one week, but after that week many escaped. Then the senior commanders gathered all Junior Commandos and fighters to start mining. So it came to a time that the junior RUF were hiding from the senior. Later the UN came in and said that they had to stop because it was slavery with flogging and undressing people.

[The following day the interviewee elaborated a bit more on these forced mining practices.] 'Peleto' [name of RUF commander] was made Minister of Mining for the RUF on advice of Issa [Sesay] after he [Peleto] presented a 90 carat diamond to the movement. When Peleto took over, everything changed for the bad here in Tongo. [Before] under Banya [a former SLA commander] it was slightly better. There was never a good relationship between these two. Peleto carried the diamonds to Issa in Kono, but he did not brief him about how the mining operations in Tongo were carried out. Apparently Issa sent Peleto to Tongo to have him out of Kono. In 2000/1, while the first UN battalion was

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[46] Post-war, much attention (and money) has been dedicated to strengthening institutional capacity in Sierra Leone, with the aim of restoring law, order, and security. While aware of the shortcomings of existing institutions (such as nepotism, corruption, and lack of democratic principles) international donors considered it better to rebuild pre-war institutions to safeguard the peace, than to attempt to build new ones, since this is often a difficult and long-term process. For a detailed discussion of post-war decentralisation and chieftaincy policies, see Jackson (2007).

trying to prevent civilian mishandling, Issa sent Moris Kallon to Tongo to sort out the situation because there were so many complaints from civilians about the behaviour of Peleto. All community members complained to Kallon in the presence of Peleto. So he was then ordered not to use civilians anymore, so it was from here that Peleto started to arrest junior and senior RUF fighters and force them to mine. This caused the junior ones to hide in the bush.

The account emphasises a recurrent dilemma for the RUF. Abuses and atrocities by fighters and commanders – looting, forcing civilians to labour or carry loads, and even the burning of houses or amputation of civilians' limbs (to inflict fear and control and provoke population movements) – were effective in imposing the movement's will in the absence of any functioning institutions. But at the same time it was contrary to the RUF's own rules, and both discredited its ideological claims and structurally undermined the little support or sympathy it may have built up among civilians.

Gberie (2005: 184) states that 'the RUF maintained special armed mining units which supervised mining operations, employing mainly captives and illicit freelance miners. The miners worked in conditions of servitude – indeed often at gunpoint. Laggard captives and those caught stealing were shot'. This implies a more consistent policy and greater degree of organisation – across the RUF territories and across time – than was perhaps the case. While there is strong evidence that the RUF did exploit civilian labour and used armed force, the evidence presented here has suggested a more complex picture, with repeated, and varying attempts, to regulate the mining sector in its areas of control through combinations of rules, regulations, negotiations, and strong-arm coercion resulting in more of a patchwork than the 'seven days a week slave-labour practices' perceived by some as being the RUF default approach.

Set aside the worst cases of extremely exploitative practices, and the picture appears to be one in which civilian miners in RUF-controlled mining areas had to work for the RUF 'government' either a certain number of days (between two and five) per week, or hand over a certain amount of the gravel (one or two piles).[47] If this was indeed the case, these practices would not have been significantly more exploitative than those in place before and after the war, when only one out of the three piles was claimed by diggers (one out of two in some parts of the Kono area). The reason why the RUF was able to run a mining scheme not significantly more exploitative than mining operations before the war was that the movement took the place of the landowners, whether these were mining companies or chiefs. As with farming land, the RUF by accident or deliberately introduced a major change in land policy.

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[47] Bangura also notes this specific 5–2 days arrangement (2000: 572).

Estimates for the actual diamond income of the RUF are extremely difficult to confirm, and hence vary widely. From the way the mining in the RUF territory operated, it is clear that not all diamonds found in RUF territory actually benefited the movement. Those found by civilians while undertaking their own operations were, with the exception of large stones, private property. But of perhaps even greater significance is the fact that prices paid for diamonds found in RUF territory were substantially lower than those paid for stones in government-controlled areas. Diamond-buying agents active in RUF territory, such as the Lebanese and the Senegalese, had to cross a frontline and multiple checkpoints when coming and going, increasing the risk of something happening to them or their diamonds.[48] This reduced the price paid for the stones. Furthermore, because of this risk, there were fewer diamond-buying agencies operating in the area, compared to in peacetime. A semi-monopoly by buying agents again deflated prices paid to the RUF:

When civilians found a diamond they could sell it to a businessman in Tongo. These were registered with the RUF, paying a Le100,000 registration fee. These businessmen were maybe the friends or family members of the RUF commanders and travelled from Kenema, Bo, and Freetown to Tongo. . . . When you registered yourself the brigade commander will put your name in a book and give you a pass, to pass the checkpoints. They used taxis and hid the cash in their trousers. These business people had also CDF passes and gave a little bit of money to the SLA soldiers and RUF fighters at the checkpoints as a 'morale booster'. If you travel from Kenema to Tongo, you will as a businessman probably spend something like Le50,000, if you give something at all the checkpoints. Then at the last checkpoint before Tongo you have to pay for the load you are carrying, if you have one, to the RUF immigration officers.

[Q: Were these businesspeople Lebanese?] No, they were mainly Fulas, Mandingos and Maraka, transporting the diamonds to Guinea and Mali. But the price of the diamonds was low because it was illegal. (RUF clerk A)

In addition, items needed to pursue large-scale kimberlite mining, such as caterpillars, spare parts and diesel, were more expensive in RUF-controlled areas, making this type of mining less profitable.

The diamonds were sold by the RUF in Sierra Leone to the Lebanese and the Senegalese. The price they paid us was really low because of the risks these businessmen took, crossing two frontlines. I remember that one time I had to sell a 20-carat stone for about US$20,000. And all the items, like diesel, needed for mining in the RUF territory were expensive because of the risks. So the mining was not so profitable. (RUF commander L)

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[48] The UN-agreed boycott of the Taylor regime from 2000 and onwards, which included diamonds, made smuggling to Liberia less lucrative, since prices for 'Liberian' diamonds dropped.

In conclusion, there is little doubt that diamonds eventually moved to centre-stage of RUF practices and strategic thinking, and became a major incentive to continue to fight and to control areas. By the final stages of the conflict diamonds had corrupted the minds of all except perhaps for the most ideologically committed movement cadres. Fighters and commanders realised that without the war, and RUF occupation, there would be an end to the diamond mining and its related income. Diamonds did not cause the war, but became a key factor in the war's continuation. The cadres were caught in a bind, since diamonds undermined the political struggle, but had the promise to transform the lives of the cadres. One thoughtful informant provides a suitable epitaph on what threatened to become an endless struggle:

In the end most of the commanders did not profit from the war because they did not know how to invest the money they had during the war. That's why they had an interest in keeping the war going. (RUF fighter I)

Free Education and Health Care

Whether or not the RUF organised diamond mining in its territories under control in a way rather similar to pre-war APC practices – which were in many cases highly exploitative of the young rural labouring classes – should be a point of further investigation. Current accounts tend to remain stylised because a lot remains at stake in debates about the governance of diamond mining in Sierra Leone. To portray the RUF as 'greedy criminals' or 'terrorists without any ideology' is directly linked to the assumption that the movement was somehow uniquely unscrupulous and extremely exploitative in its mining activities. This hides the fact that similar practices preceded the RUF, and continue today under different 'ownership'. What can be said with some confidence is that if the RUF sought to reform the diamond sector – and it did make such claims – then it was distinctly ineffective in breaking with the past.

But in other areas a somewhat more sympathetic picture can be painted of what the movement originally set out to achieve, even though many observers will prefer to dismiss this picture as insignificant or false. Before, we have heard RUF ex-combatants explaining that some of the jungle camps – in particular those which were located in relatively safe areas – provided free basic and adult education and free health care. This is in line with the RUF's proclaimed principles, which argued that education and medical care should be free for all and that no one, including those in the most remote areas, should be excluded from them. The material deserves an airing, since it offers a different perspective than those evident in external accounts.

Apparently, schools in RUF territory were established (or re-opened) for the first time in 1995:

There was free medical treatment in the movement. And from '95 schools opened in the Kailahun area. These were free of charge. (RUF fighter M)

In Buedu [northern Kailahun district] the first school was opened in '95. It was both for children and adults. In the Zogoda we had a school but that one was only for adults. (RUF commander I)

By 1995, most northern parts of Kailahun district, and the 'panhandle' between Kailahun town and Buedu on the Liberian border especially, were sufficiently stable and firmly controlled for the RUF to start implementing some of its ideas about societal change. The establishment of adult schools may reflect the desire of many of the illiterate cadres to have some education themselves, or to have it for their family and relatives. A G5 commander explains how these schools were run:

We have schools free of charge and the teachers are volunteers, but this only happened in our 'peaceful grounds', not in the war-zone. The food of the community farm or any other food we got was divided among our different ministries, including teachers and nurses. In this way they were still paid. (RUF commander C)

This gives a general idea of where and how the RUF organised education. This is confirmed by a civilian who lived in the Koindu area (close to the Liberian and Guinea borders) from 1994 up to the signing of the Lomé peace accord. This informant also commented on the issue of free medical care:

The medicines we needed were provided freely by the RUF nurses. And if there were insufficient medicines available you could take your own produce and exchange it at the Guinea border. There was also free primary education, but no secondary education was taking place. The teachers were not paid but the pupils gave rice to the teacher. The school material was coming from Guinea, again by means of exchange. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Later, after Lomé, this civilian moved back to his native area of Pendembu, a strong area for RUF support, though closer to the frontline:

Here in Pendembu there were free medicines, but not too much. There was also free primary education.

The rice given to the teacher was the only payment children had to make, whenever teachers were not paid out of the RUF food stocks. For each pupil this was one cup of rice per week. The following statement comes from the account of the civilian living in a village close to Pendembu,

and describes the situation there from 1998 onwards, when he returned from Kailahun:

There were no medicines so we treated ourselves with the native ones [herbs]. But there was a school and it was free education. The teachers were not paid. Six of my grandchildren were in that school. There was no harassment taking place at all. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Three other civilians, who lived in the RUF safe areas (but the first one very close to the frontline) recall their experiences with education and health care. Not all had equally good experiences, and the 'universal' provision of free medicines and education was never something straightforward, since commodities were often scarce:

During the war we used the native medicines, but so did the fighters. I was not aware of any drugs, so if the rebels looted drugs, they kept it for themselves and for the civilians [they favoured]. Because of these disadvantages you have as a civilian, many youths decided to join the rebels [as fighters]. (Civilian in Mandu chiefdom)

Then there was free education, free primary education here in the village. All schools were free. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Those with relatives among the rebels were getting access to free medication. Schools started to operate after the signing of the Lomé [peace accord] and these were run by the rebels. These were free of charge, which was something good of the rebels. The teachers were getting one cup of rice a week from each pupil, as an incentive. They also provided books and pens for free. The schools were in Pendembu, but not all the children went there. But those who went belonged to both the fighters and civilians. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

After the signing of the Lomé peace accord there are indications that the number of schools run by the RUF increased. This might have been a belated strategy to win the hearts and minds of the people; alternatively, it might suggest that by this stage the RUF had better opportunities to implement its political agenda, since the cadres were now less occupied with fighting.

The RUF did not establish schools in every place, or renovate demolished schools – some burnt down by its fighters in the first place – and equally there is considerable variation in the dates on which schools were opened. The same is true of the medical care provided by the RUF – it was not everywhere and not always functional, and even where it did function it must have been at a rather basic level.

But if there is a general line observable in the testimonies, it is that the further one moves away from the RUF safe areas or 'liberated' zones and towards the war front, the worse the situation became with regard to free education and medical care. A similar pattern has been observed in

relation to farming in RUF territory, with increasing exploitation of civilian labour and less evidence to suggest that the movement's agricultural policies were followed. The following extracts are all from civilians who lived close to what was for a long time the war front, in various villages in Mandu chiefdom:

There were no medicines, only the native medicines. The medicines they captured, they keep it for themselves and their families. And there were no schools here during the RUF occupation.

There was no school operating in our area during the war. If you got sick they did not give you anything.

The civilians were not provided with medicines if they got sick, so we had to look for native medicines ourselves. However, if you are under the care of a commander who has some looted medicines, he can share it with you.

The following comment from a civilian illustrates the difference between the areas close to the frontlines and those deep inside RUF territory:

During the war I moved away from K [a village close to the war front] because the harassment was too much. I went to another RUF territory, deeper into the RUF territory, where the harassment was much less. There I presented myself to the town commander, who was a relative of mine. (Civilian in Mandu chiefdom)

Harassment may have been less, deeper inside RUF territory, but this was by no means a guarantee that one would always encounter the services the RUF advocated. The next comment comes from a civilian moved by the RUF to the border town of Giema, deep inside its territory, because his original place was at one time too close to the frontline. In his new area there was little in the way of education:

There was no primary school, not even an Arabic school, in the area. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

But he notes that medical care worked:

The medication was free and there [in Giema], there were doctors.

And it seems that this was not just an isolated case of receiving free medical care:

Whenever they captured medicines, the rebels gave it to the dispenser who then treated everybody free of costs. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Less surprisingly, the movement also provided free medical care to its fighters:

Because I was a nurse before the war, in Peyeima base they made me a nurse as well. In the base there were both civilians and fighters. . . . The medicines were free, whenever these were there. These were captured in the war front. It was only once that we received outside assistance. It was free for both the fighters

and the civilians. But there was no school in the base. . . . After I left Cuba Base I went to Giema and again did nursing. There was free medication, but again no school. (Female fighter G)

The plausibility of this particular account is strengthened by the differentiation between the statement about health and medicine. It would be odd for a cadre trying to 'sell' the movement falsely to claim a medical service was provided, while frankly admitting that schooling was not.

Few international humanitarian NGOs worked in the rebel-held areas. It is again reassuring, in terms of the trustworthiness of the accounts reported here, that RUF cadres correctly acknowledge this assistance, provided despite opposition from the UN and Kabbah government. One commander claimed that 'there was free medication over the whole RUF area', but then added:

In 1998 ACF, MSF and the [IC]RC helped us. (RUF commander I)

A female fighter added some detail:

ICRC provided medicines, bulgar, [corn-soya] 'blended', pot, blanket, rubber bucket, soap and oil. And MSF provided medicines. But if medicines were captured, these were handed over to the command. Both civilians and fighters were treated, free of charge (Female fighter F)

Despite such support the amount of medicines the RUF had available must have been limited at best. Civilians were not always treated, but neither were fighters, because of the lack of medicines. With limited resources, it seems likelier that fighters were treated first, before civilians, and that civilians with good connections with commanders were able to access the limited amount of medicines, as the following interview extracts suggests:

There were only a few medicines, but if you had a friend among the movement and there were medicines available, you could get them. (Civilian in Bombali Shebora chiefdom)

Medication was scarce, so civilians were able to access it only if they were recommended by a fighter. But then it was free of charge. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Those who were closer to them got free medication, but some of us did not. There was no school. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Free education and medical care were part of the RUF's ideology, which might be described as being based on a simple long-term vision of social services-oriented socialism. There is enough evidence here to suggest that the movement did make some attempts to implement this vision, and that these efforts continued into the more chaotic final period of the war. But implementation was far from perfect – with reoccurring resonances of patrimonial principles – and was vestigial or non-existent

in areas where actual fighting overwhelmed all other considerations. In these circumstances, the movement had little more to draw upon, in governing practical and day-to-day activities, than its codes of conduct. In several of the previous sections the existence of such sets of rules has been either explicitly stated or implied. Closer examination of these rules, and their efficacy, is now appropriate.

Rules and Regulations in the RUF

The RUF's Ideology: 'Drastic Fundamental Change'?

Did the RUF have any political aims – an ideology and agenda – or was it a lumpen organisation with only criminal intentions? This question has caused heated debate among writers on the war. The dominant view was, and remains, that the RUF was little more than a criminal conspiracy. But as already noted, politicians in Sierra Leone, and their allies in the international community, have striven to deny the movement voice or credibility, for clear political reasons of their own. Academic researchers have paid considerable attention to the war, but have been slow to enquire into the movement itself. Thus there is some intrinsic interest in listening to accounts from within the movement about what its cadres believed they were fighting for. Any such material needs, eventually, to be placed in a fuller context as new data come to light. But it makes little sense to cavil at the few accounts so far to attempt to make sense of the movement through contact with its cadres, when critics have little to offer in terms of better data of their own.[49]

Many RUF ex-combatants, and in particular those who joined the movement early, as vanguards or Junior Commandos between 1991 and 1993, believed, and still believe,[50] in what they deem to be the ideals and principles of the RUF. In reporting these notions it should not be presumed that I consider them well-founded, or that I consider the movement justified in the actions it took. The only claim to be made here is that these beliefs are sincerely, and not cynically, held – and that the

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[49] For instance, this is a basic objection to Mkandawire's (2002) attempted critique of Keen (1998) and Richards (1996; 1998); if he has better information, he should present it.

[50] During the 2002 general elections the RUFP received just under 2 percent of the votes. A small number in one respect, but it still represents thousands of votes. If indeed the elections were fair, as international observers stated, many of these votes must have been cast by true believers in the RUFP, most likely the Junior Commandos. During many hours of interviewing and days spent together with ex-RUF commanders and fighters (who had no *political* reason to defend the RUF since they were not holding any political or public position) their continued belief in the RUF and in the genuineness of its intentions impressed me. In mid-2003 an ex-commander wore his RUFP t-shirt when we visited a public space in Blama, a small town which had been CDF territory since 1996.

critique the RUF offered of aspects of pre-war Sierra Leonean society was more than a fantasy. It is a bitter irony of the situation that many impoverished Sierra Leoneans agree with the RUF analysis, if not with the methods the rebels deployed (cf. the interview with the young civil defence fighter in Chapter 1). Pre-war Sierra Leone was characterised by political oppression, a collapsing patrimonial system of rule, nepotism and corruption, continuing economic decline, a breakdown in the functioning of the educational and health sectors, and a general neglect of the countryside[51] in favour of urban centres. Sierra Leone needed major reform of its institutions and values, but the armed revolution of the RUF mainly brought an end to the suffering of the people by killing them. A young town chief in the diamond-rich area of Tongo, quoted earlier, summarises the situation thus:

The RUF had a political agenda and they were definitely not after the diamonds. But their problem was that they had already scarred everybody before they were able to explain their agenda to the people.

So what were the political ideas and ideology of the RUF according to its fighters and commanders?

They [the RUF fighters] started to explain to us about their ideology about the land, the peace, unity and justice. The RUF really believed in themselves, that they were there to whip out the rotten system, which was the government. (RUF fighter B)

They [the RUF fighters] fought for free education, free medical supplies, free transportation, and justice. In the camp the medical treatment was free, even for those who were not going to the frontline, because they can still contribute to the movement. (RUF child combatant D)

[T]here were other books that were influential on the movement, like the Green Book of Muammar Gaddafi and another book about the guerrilla war in Nicaragua. On these books we based our ideology. The ideology of the RUF was based on socialism: the government of the people by the people. If the RUF would have succeeded there would have been a people's court and the judge would not be there because of qualification but because of his experience.[52] . . . In the RUF-controlled area everything was exposed to the people. The land was free for the people, there was free education and we made communal labour compulsory

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[51] Many of the houses in RUF territory had graffiti criticising APC, NPRC or SLPP politics. For example, one wall of a house in Mandu chiefdom declared: 'The politicians have separated the land into two parts but we are born citizens of our country. We will fight to the last.'

[52] Formal qualification is no guarantee of expertise in a country where the educational system is riddled with corruption and nepotism. According to an assessment by Sierra Leonean public officials, the Ministries of Education and Agriculture are among the country's public institutions with the highest levels of irregularities/misappropriation of funds. See: <http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/206582/sl_natwkshp_fr.pdf> (accessed 26 July 2010).

to make sure the civilians were to make farms. We only took food for ourselves and a few personal belongings. Agriculture is important. If you are able to feed your people you are the richest nation on earth. (RUF commander C)

Cadres regularly emphasised that the RUF tried to live according to its principles of justice, aiming to implement the agenda of free access to land and free medical and educational services. Influenced by the Green Book[53] and other radical writings,[54] the movement espoused a simple populist revolutionary agenda, principally focused on land, education, health, and an end to corruption. Almost all cadres who joined during the first three years of the war received ideological training and learned about the need for an armed revolution:

You know what a revolution is? It is drastic fundamental change. There are two types of revolutions. The armed revolution and the non-armed revolution. If the government does not realise what the problems and needs of the masses are, when the upper class oppress the lower class, then it is time for a revolution. And if the government only understands the language of arms then only an armed revolution can change the situation. (RUF commander F)

Three youthful ex-government soldiers who first fought against the RUF and later collaborated with junta forces offered some interesting comments on the ideology of the RUF, especially compelling since they came from an enemy perspective:

They were fighting for free education, free medical facilities, etc. Free opportunities were not something being possible in this nation because of the corrupt politicians. . . . I will believe the rebels more than the government, because they make these points about free education and free medical facilities. . . . If the rebels are in power there will be free education and free medical facilities. (RSLMF child combatant A)

According to them [the RUF], because at that [time] we made friends with [them] and interviewed them, the reason that made them to fight against the government of Sierra Leone, is due to the situation of the country. Things were not going on normal[ly] and not as it was expected to happen. They said that the government was not doing its job. They talked about changes that were needed in certain areas, like for instance the educational area. The education was very poor. That made them to fight against the government. (RSLMF child combatant B)

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[53] One of my key informants – who received training in Benghazi himself – showed me a copy of a set of conference proceedings – 'Power and authority: collected readings on the second anniversary of the Green Book' (issued in Benghazi, 1982) – which he had carried with him like a sacred text or talisman during his RUF years in the bush. He showed little evidence of having read the turgid academic papers it mainly contained, including an offering by a Sierra Leone student radical.

[54] Another cadre presented a copy of a biography of Kim Il Sung which he carried with him while in the bush. This, however, had been studied. In fact the informant had marked relevant passages concerning the guerrilla struggle against the Japanese, for their obvious relevance to the position of the RUF.

We are having problems in Sierra Leone. That is why so many joined the rebels. [But] the main reason why these guys did not succeed was because of this excessive killing. That is the reason. But these guys should have succeeded. There were these arrogant guys, those British guys [Sandline? perhaps EO?], that made some of them to kill innocent people, but if they were not there. You know, some of the educated people were in favour of the rebels, those who were not having jobs. But it is because of that killing that they did not succeed. You are attending school and at the end of the day you do not have a job. That means you are just wasting time and money. (RSLMF former child combatant C)

Although some evidence has been presented to indicate that the RUF had a political agenda, it is clear that its practical attempts to transform society foundered, and both civilians and combatants bore the brunt of the violence. The ex-combatants cite several reasons for this failure. Much depended on the phase of the war: in the first and second phases, ideology was emphasised, and atrocities seem to have taken place less frequently than in the post-Abidjan accord phases.[55] Much depended on the specific area-commander in charge. Some were committed to the movement, but others clearly harboured private agendas, and the RUF did not filter out this latter group. According to some RUF informants matters in fact were worse than this statement implies. By promoting on the basis of military success – perhaps because of the movement's belief in meritocracy – the RUF ended up promoting some commanders with pathological leanings and prepared to undertake killing without compunction. After EO and the CDF scattered the forest camps in 1996, trapping the civilian War Council in Abidjan, increasingly larger sections of the movement fell – operationally – under the sway of these unscrupulous commanders.

The RUF produced little in the way of publicly accessible manifestos or documents. The 1989 'Basic Document' and the 1995 'Footpaths to Democracy'[56] are the only two of their kind. While these documents were intended to communicate the RUF's agenda to the outside world, the RUF document most relevant to – and most often used by – RUF members was the so-called Ideology Book. These 'books' were handwritten manuscripts, copied by senior ranks and ideology trainers during ideology classes and containing sections about how society was organised, and should be organised according to the RUF, together with sections

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[55] Cf. Physicians for Human Rights (2002).

[56] The authenticity of 'Footpaths to Democracy' has been doubted. Indeed it was probably ghost-written by two Ghanaians working on contract to the UK-based conflict resolution agency International Alert, using material supplied by the RUF leadership, and then carried back to the bush in Sierra Leone. But this should not be a reason to dismiss it. Finnström (2005: 218) argues, in relation to the manifestos of the Lord Resistance Army in Uganda, that 'authenticity is not about where a piece of paper has been written, but rather where it is disseminated and discussed, and where its meaning is mediated and reformulated'.

about the movement's structure. In these 'books'[57] the RUF outlined its motives, its aims and objectives, and its political and military ideology. It also included sections about the military and administrative structure of the movement.

It started with the RUF anthem, followed by the Code of Conduct and General Orders. The Code of Conduct included eight points:

1. To obey all orders in your actions
2. To speak politely to all officers, commandos or the masses
3. Do not take liberty over women or with women
4. Thou shall not take a piece[?] or thread or needle from the masses
5. Thou shall not destroy crops
6. Pay for anything that you damaged
7. Do not ill-treat captives
8. Pay for anything that you take.

These had to be learned by heart by the fighters and commanders. Many of the ex-fighters can still recite these codes, or at least some of them. In addition there were the eleven General Orders, which were:

1. To take charge of this post and all government properties in view
2. To work my post in a military manner and always keeping on the alert and observing everything that takes place within sight or hearing
3. To report all violations of orders that I am instructed to reinforce
4. To repeat all calls from the guard post and [those of] more distance from the house than my own
5. To quit my post only when I am properly released
6. To receive, obey and pass on to the sentinel who releases me [of] all orders from the commanding officer, officer and non-commission officer of the guard only
7. To talk to no one except on the line of duties
8. To give alarm in case of fire or disorder
9. To report to the Corporal of the guard all orders not covered by my instruction
10. To salute all officers, colours, and standard not in cases [?]
11. To be especially watchful at night during the time of challenges and to challenge all persons far or near my guardpost and to allow no one to pass through without proper authorities or documents.

Both the Code and the General Orders originated from the time the RUF prepared its 'revolution' while in Liberia, and were formulated by the senior command. These were later passed on to the Junior Commandos and the ordinary rank-and-file fighters. As mentioned, many of the ex-combatants still remember the different rules and regulations, although

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[57] A copy of one of these 'books' is in the possession of this author. It is the only item cited here that was obtained through the Sesay Defence team. The authenticity of the 'ideology book' has been confirmed by an independent authority.

often they mix – in their recall – items from the Code, the General Orders and other regulations and rules.

The RUF made several laws; One, no thieving, upon [threat of] the capital punishment; Two, you should not provide wrong information; Three, no raping; Four, no threatening of civilians and you were not allowed to take anything; Five, no innocent killing in the warfront, again upon capital punishment. Then any money above the Le20,000 should be given to the government, the same for drugs, diamonds and arms. Because there was no money we used the 'bata' [barter, exchange in kind] system. Food was for yourself and the balance for the government. And another law was that one should not eat a mortal man. Then you should not commit adultery with another combatant's wife or with a civilian's wife. It was the MPs [Military Police] who enforced the law. . . . We were not supposed to kill soldiers if we could [prevent it], because they could provide us with valuable information. And like I said before, raping was not allowed, but some can do it and will not be caught. (RUF fighter M)

While several of the ex-RUF cadres still have these 'Ideology Books' and other RUF documents, many others burned these at the end of the war, afraid to be associated with the RUF during a post-war period dominated by the TRC and Special Court.

Military and Ideology Training in the RUF

The Code of Conduct and the General Orders had to be followed by all fighters, both commanders and rank-and-file. The General Orders were specifically related to RUF combatants and were of little relevance to RUF civilians, who consequently were excluded from learning these. There is no evidence that certain categories of RUF fighters were exempted from these codes or orders. As has been shown, according to the accounts of some ex-RUF fighters, even Foday Sankoh was in this respect not above the law.

But despite the fact that all RUF fighters and commanders were supposed to receive ideology training, not all fighters received training – and thus the ideology element – to the same extent. There were variations in both the duration and the quality of the training. A well-informed ex-RUF commander stated, upon being asked how many RUF fighters received the ideology training:

I reckon that of the 20,000 RUF only 5,000 were trained in the ideology. (RUF commander C)

Obviously, this is something extremely difficult to estimate, even for someone quite high in the RUF hierarchy, as this informant was. As mentioned, ideology training was part of the overall training, and it therefore seems rather unlikely that as many as three out of every four fighters did

not receive any ideology training. Possibly, the comment reflects a rather widespread feeling – dominant among those ex-RUF combatants who joined the movement during the first few years – that those who joined later, during the Junta period or after, were not as fully and enduringly exposed to RUF ideology as the early conscripts. Early conscripts were trained in the RUF's ideology at a time in which it still had a stronger vision of the new Sierra Leonean society, and when it was not yet 'contaminated' by the corrupting AFRC mentality, or so these early recruits argue.

Without doubt the ideology training was more rigorous and all-embracing during the first years of the war. Within the isolated bush-camp environment it also must have had a greater impact on the RUF conscripts. Later on, in particular when huge numbers of new recruits were taken in, the length of the training declined. According to the following ex-combatant:

The ideology training was the same for everybody. And those who were already trained were sometimes sent for advanced training. That was done by batch of about 40 men, during 1994 and up to the end of 1996. The advance training normally took between 2 weeks, up to one month. You were trained in the physical aspects, the discipline and the ideology. But not everyone went. And those who joined later got limited ideology training. (RUF commander L)

Those educated in the RUF ideology by the Vanguards – who themselves received their training in Libya or were trained in the ideology in Liberia by those who had acquired their own ideological training in Libya – were likely to have received the most elaborate political instruction. According to this (female) ex-fighter:

I got about one and a half months of training, here in Pendembu. That was both military and ideology training. They trained me in the Code of Conduct and the civilian/fighter relationship. That is that you have to respect the civilians. From the time the ideology became central, things improved, there was no harassment of civilians going on. Some fighters still did it but they were court-martialled or sent to the frontline, the ambush [zone]. If you are involved in raping they can send you to Kailahun, to the brigade headquarter's prison, or they shoot you. The monitoring system also worked in the frontline as long as the MPs [Military Police, discussed hereafter] and IDUs [Internal Defence Unit, discussed hereafter] see it, of course. Atrocities happened whenever there is fighting going on, but not all was done by the rebels. (Female fighter H)

This interviewee raises the important issue of monitoring the behaviour of fighters. To have a Code of Conduct and Standing or General Orders is one thing, but obviously there should be some mechanism in place to check upon the implementation of these principles, rules and regulations. These will be discussed next.

Mechanisms in the RUF to Monitor the Behaviour of its Fighters and Civilians

The RUF created a number of branches to keep law and order in its territory and to monitor the behaviour of its fighters. These were supposed to operate both in the so-called liberated areas or peaceful ground and on the frontlines. The names of these branches followed an internationally recognised typology, probably reflecting Sankoh's military background. There was a Military Police (MP) branch, an Internal Defence Unit (IDU), an Intelligence Officers (IO) branch, a G5[58] branch dealing with civilian–military affairs and the Praetorian-styled 'Black Guards'. All branches were supposed to report through a chain of command, again likely to reflect the military background of Sankoh, although several informants indicated that Sankoh preferred to bypass the chain and deal with issues personally, which reflects a more patrimonial style of leading.

The Black Guards took orders from and directly reported to 'the Leader', Foday Sankoh. They were considered his 'eyes and ears', according to several informants, and were present in every base, having access to radio communication devices at all times.

The G5 dealt with cases among civilians, and between civilians and fighters, in RUF territory. Whenever there was a fighter involved, the G5 also would involve the specific commander of that fighter. The G5 functioned according to a hierarchical structure, with an overall G5 commander,[59] a G5 district commander, a G5 chiefdom commander, a G5 sectional commander and – at the lowest level – a G5 town commander. Some of those who became G5 personnel were ordered to the task by the RUF; others had chosen to work for the G5 branch themselves, while still others had been recommended by civilians in RUF area. The most important prerequisite was the ability to read and write, since G5 commanders had to write monthly and annual reports. These were carried to the Headquarters or sent by SSB radio, to which G5 personnel had access. According to a former G5 commander:

G5 cases included, for instance, when a soldier wanted the wife of a civilian. We can encourage that fighter to forget about it or we let the wife choose between the civilian and the soldier. If the wife chooses the civilian and the fighter still harasses the people, we can take him to a different site. Another task was that if the war front was coming too close to the peaceful grounds, we have to organise the civilians and evacuate the area. The G5 will explain the RUF's ideology, the

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[58] G5 normally refers to an Assistant or Deputy Chief of Staff, dealing with civil or public affairs within the army.

[59] Ibrahim Deen-Jalloh, an abducted lecturer from Bunumbu Teacher's College and RUF sympathiser, was the first G5 overall commander. After Sankoh left for Abidjan, a Liberian called Prince Taylor took over this role.

self-reliant character of the struggle, and the rules, to the civilians. Some of the punishments we gave were to walk around naked with only your underpants on or to be send to the RUF farm. (RUF commander I)

The main task of the Military Police (MP) was to monitor the behaviour of the fighters and solve issues between fighters. In addition, the MP was also charged with collecting those fighters who had to go to the war front, but were unwilling. Some fighters might have been afraid to go, or were not particularly looking forward to facing the hardship of the frontline or ambush sites, but others had bad intentions, as this ex-combatant notes:

Some of them [the combatants] want to stay behind [in RUF territory] to harass civilians. (RUF fighter L)

According to this source, unwilling fighters would be jailed until a sufficient number of them were gathered, after which they would again be sent to the war front.

One of the most important branches was the so-called Internal Defence Unit (IDU). It was mandated to investigate issues arising in the battalions and served as a link between the G5 office and the other operational units. It is unclear if the Intelligence Officer (IO) branch belonged to the IDU or was a separate unit. If indeed separate, its mandate overlapped to a large extent with that of the IDU.

While there were variations through time and by location, it was the policy of the RUF that on every (official) mission of the RUF, whether concerned with food finding, an offensive ambush, or a large-scale attack, intelligence personnel accompanied the fighters. The intelligence personnel were supposed to monitor and report – in oral and written form – the behaviour of the fighters, and to gather any information of relevance to the movement. According to an ex-IDU commander:

On average, if there were, like, 150 men going on a mission, 20 of them were Intelligence Officers. (RUF commander H)

These IOs mainly belonging to the IDU and MP branches. On missions where it was likely that civilians would be encountered, G5s accompanied the fighters. Attacks of a high strategic importance to the RUF were often also accompanied by the Black Guards, although their role is likely to have been reduced somewhat with the departure of Foday Sankoh for the Abidjan peace negotiations.

The power and mandate of the intelligence personnel was not unlimited, as they had no direct executive powers at the frontline. According to this former G5 officer:

The IDUs and the other intelligence personnel were mainly there [on the frontline] to observe the behaviour of the fighters. But it is the commander who decides

over both fighters and civilians in the frontline. In the rear there is a whole structure, like a government. The G2 is to [keep] surveillance [over] the behaviour of the commanders. If there is a gap between the G2 report and the commander's report, there is an issue to be resolved. And the Black Guards and the Signals Units were considered with high respect because they can speak directly[60] with the Leader, so they are favoured by the others. (RUF commander M)

Intelligence personnel accompanying fighters on these missions were sometimes doing this under cover, which becomes clear from the following statement:

Whenever a platoon is going on patrol or a mission, like a food-searching mission, they get strict orders what they can do and what they are not allowed to do. Every small group has one, two or sometimes even three Intelligence Officers among them. But the others in the group do not know who is the IO. Even the IO himself might not know about another IO in the group. It is the task [of the IOs] to make a report of everything that happens during the mission. So sometimes they excuse themselves, saying that they are going to make toilet in the bush, and then they quickly write down a report. If the platoon commander does not follow the orders, these IOs will report him to the main commander. Then he will get a punishment. (RUF commander E)

To what extent this policy of anonymity was always followed is unclear. It might perhaps reflect what was supposed to happen, rather than what was actually done at all times. In any case, it must have been difficult to keep one's role secret at batch or platoon level on missions, where most combatants knew each other well. Conversely, there is some indication that the intelligence personnel were reasonably effective in monitoring the behaviour of the fighters during ambushes and on the frontline, and in reporting any misbehaviour. This is suggested by the unpopularity of the intelligence personnel among some of the rank-and-file and their commanders:

Sometimes these [Intelligence] officers do not make their presence known out of fear to be shot in the back by the rank-and-file. And there are some wicked commanders who do not want to see IDU personnel. (RUF commander H)

There seems to be sufficient evidence to conclude that the RUF had a considerable intelligence apparatus in place to check on and control the behaviour of both its fighters and the civilians in its territory. Some explanations of why these branches still failed to prevent frontline atrocities by RUF fighters and harassment of RUF civilians in the 'liberated areas' will be discussed later. But let us first look into the punishments handed out in the RUF for breaking its rules and regulations, and how these were decided upon.

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[60] Through their SSB radio sets to which they had constant access.

The 'People's Court': Punishment in the RUF

Punishments for not obeying the rules and regulations of the RUF were often harsh, but at the same time not always considered unfair by the combatants, according to their accounts. A former child soldier who collaborated with the RUF after the AFRC entered its alliance with the rebels commented:

If you were found guilty of stealing you were killed. No rebel was above the law. . . . In fact, they had stronger laws than the government. (RSLMF former child combatant A)

Two characteristics seem to have contributed to the perception of some degree of fairness in the harsh rules and punishments, namely the retributive character of most of the punishments and the simplicity and transparency of the juridical process in the RUF. Retributive punishments are most common in small-scale and face-to-face societies with limited institutionalisation,[61] and the RUF can be seen as such a society. The RUF's so-called 50–50 system is perhaps the clearest example of its philosophy of retributive punishment. This system stipulated that the effect of the offence committed dictated the nature of the punishment to be given to the offender. For example, if a fighter shot someone in the foot during a quarrel, he or she would later, if found guilty, also be shot in the foot.

If you are court-martialled you will get the same kind of punishment, as what you did to the person; it is 50–50. It does not matter whether you are a fighter or a civilian. And if you are a bad commander they will replace you. (Female fighter H)

Other means of punishment used by the RUF included a number of beatings, a period of hard labour on one of the RUF farms, sitting in a hole filled with water for 72 hours, being sent to the RUF prison in Kailahun, being sent to the frontline for a number of days, or being degraded in rank. Degradation as a punishment does have a more restitutive nature, and became more feasible after the RUF introduced a more detailed system of ranks (and became a more complex and graded group – in other words, when the fighting force underwent institutional elaboration).

The punishment of being sent to the frontline will be discussed in more detail below, since it is one of the factors helping us to understand

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[61] In small-scale societies there is often a low division of labour. Members therefore have more common experiences and tend to share many ideas. According to Durkheim (1964) (see Chapter 8), this generates a strong collective conscience which acts as the social 'glue' to keep the group together. The group acts with severe retributive punishments to anyone not acting in accordance with the rules and moral expectations of the group. This is because any violation of these rules is a violation of the principles of the whole group, and thus – potentially – undermines the collective conscience, making it a threat to the group's coherence.

why the RUF committed so many atrocities. Here it is sufficient to raise attention concerning the ambiguous nature of this punishment. Laying an ambush or being in a frontline position could indeed be considered as a punishment, since it involved considerable self-discipline. No one was allowed to talk loudly or make a noise, nor was it permitted to smoke cigarettes or sometimes even to make a fire to cook. And, in addition, there was of course a real risk of being shot in action. But at the same time it was a place where monitoring the behaviour of fighters was more difficult, despite the presence of intelligence personnel, and as a result more opportunities existed to harass, loot, rape, or commit atrocities.

In addition to the punishment received, fighters and commanders violating the rules were often sent to a different unit and area, to remove them from the area where they had committed their crimes, and thus to limit the contact between fighters and commanders who might have backed them in their harassments, abuses, or atrocities. But it was rare or unprecedented for fighters or commanders to be dismissed from the fighting forces completely, because of the RUF's constant need for manpower:

If you as a soldier misbehave you will be sent to the rear to work on the RUF farm or to the frontline and onwards to the ambush area. Sometimes you have to stay for one month in the ambush site; there is no talking or smoking there, but food will be provided three times a day. But normally we do not dismiss people because we need the manpower. On the other hand, if you still misbehave, you can be executed. (RUF commander H)

While clearly the RUF wished to maintain sufficient manpower throughout the conflict, the need – sometimes even the obsession – to keep every recruit in play, however unsuitable, mainly related to the jungle-base phase (1994–7) when to a large extent the RUF was cut off from opportunities for wider recruitment. Later on, access to new recruits was less of an issue; Arthy (2003), for instance, describes the case when the RUF captured Makeni and was confronted with more young people willing to join the movement than it could actually absorb.

The fact that if a combatant repeatedly misbehaved he or she was more likely to be executed than dismissed from the fighting force clearly reflected a security concern. There was a constant fear that RUF fighters, aware of the ins-and-outs of the movement, might give information to the enemy, if dismissed. This fitted into a wider, almost paranoid, obsession of the RUF with secrecy, something also related to the need to retain its coherence.

An indication of this paranoia crops up in this comment by the Tongo chief from whom we heard earlier:

At some stage during the war, if the RUF would see you [as a civilian] with salt or tobacco, they took it as an indication that you had contact with the government troops. Because this was the only way to get it [salt or tobacco].

The other factor which led RUF fighters to believe that punishments were fair – to some extent at least – was the simplicity and transparency of the judicial process. Here it is important to remember that many RUF recruits belonged to the marginalised underclass of rural society. As pointed out previously, many had experienced at first hand the implications of a customary legal system biased heavily against young people of such backgrounds. Recruits would typically see village authorities as highly manipulative in their implementation of a largely undocumented customary code. Sweeteners and clientelism played as important a role in the local court system as facts and impartiality. Accounts suggest that, in contrast, the RUF operated a clear and limited set of rules, with few or no exceptions. The judicial process was basic, not to say crude: if a fighter was accused of violating the rules or of disobeying a command, an investigation was executed by MPs or the IDU, and was reported to the High Command. If the accused was deemed guilty by the High Command on the basis of the report, a punishment was decided upon by a 'people's court'[62] comprising all RUF personnel present, though one might doubt that such courts were always constituted to judge upon punishments, given the military and other practical pressures with which the movement had to contend:

They [the RUF] make a difference between the punishments of low-ranking and high-ranking fighters. If you do something wrong, the Military Police will investigate the matter and if guilty they will refer you to the commander. Then he will put you to a 'people's court'. You will get a defender appointed. If you are guilty, in the morning you will be brought in front of the muster parade. All the fighters then decide upon your punishment: to be 500 times flogged, to be sent for three months of labour on the [rice] swamp, to spend some time in the training base to learn again about the ideology, etc. The difference between the low-ranking and the high-ranking [cadres] is that the low-ranking will not be sent back to his former base but to a different area. The high-ranking [cadre], however, will get a more severe punishment, because he should know better. He is then demoted from colonel to sergeant, for instance. (RUF commander E)

Minor cases were decided by the Joint Security apparatus, which included the MP, the IDU, the Military Intelligent Branch, and the G5, according to the following account:

We had judges and juries, which was the people's court. But decisions for minor cases were taken by the Joint Security. (RUF commander C)

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[62] A 'people's court' or 'people's tribunal' reflects Green Book influences. These terms were also popular among the Mass Awareness and Participation student movement during the 1980s. According to Abdullah (1997: 55): 'A "people's tribunal" adjudicated between students; it served as a check on anti-social behaviour. It was a popular union government based on an imaginary "people's power".'

On the frontline, however, the commander in charge had the right to take the immediate decisions he or she deemed necessary. Here, with regard to the functioning of the RUF rules and regulations, we again encounter a difference between how the RUF operated in the 'liberated areas' and in areas with an active frontline. It has been hinted here that at least part of the explanation why the RUF committed atrocities on such a wide scale relates to these circumstances. The next chapter will look into this in more detail and will discuss other reasons why the RUF committed atrocities on such a large scale. As with this chapter, the account will be constructed largely through the explanations offered by the former fighters themselves.

5   Malfunctions and Atrocities

Introduction

In Chapter 4 I presented evidence to suggest that the world of the RUF was more organised than has hitherto been recognised. The movement had a political programme, and made attempts to implement it. These attempts continued into the chaotic latter stages of the war. I pointed out, in particular, that the movement had a set of rules and regulations and a guiding ideology which it sought to instil in its fighters during their training period, and a rather elaborate intelligence apparatus mandated to monitor and correct their behaviour. How then did it go so horribly wrong? Why were so many civilians harassed, raped, subjected to amputation, and killed, and so much property looted or burned – when the movement's original aim had been to reform the country?

No one should try to deny that the RUF committed serious atrocities during its decade-long struggle. When Foday Sankoh returned to Sierra Leone in March 1999, he himself apologised for these grievous 'errors'.[1] There has been a misleading tendency, however, to attribute all the atrocities that took place during the war to the RUF. Keen (2005: 267) has argued that the RUF was not only a movement but also an environment useful to various actors who undertook violent outrages while at the same time putting the blame on the RUF.

There are several more conventional explanations for the movement losing its way, but these all leave questions unanswered. The dominant perspective has been to view the RUF as little more than a criminal cartel (Collier 2001; Smillie et al. 2000). But how can we explain the emergence of this criminal cartel before its engagement with diamonds, and why were its members drawn to organised crime in the first place? Others view the RUF fighters as urban 'lumpens', prone to violence because of their culture (Abdullah 1997). But why was this 'lumpen' culture so violent in the first place? Others still consider the RUF as a proxy force fighting for, and controlled by, Charles Taylor (Gberie 2005). But

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[1] See, for example, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/1999/10/991003-leone.htm (accessed 15 August 2008).

why and how did it continue fighting during several years when logistical support by Taylor was limited?

As already noted, many of these conclusions were reached without access to those who committed the atrocities, and must be considered one-sided, even where they are not conspicuously partisan. This chapter will discuss the atrocity-prone behaviour of RUF cadres and commanders and will look for explanations, but the approach is different to that of previous studies, since it is based on extensive access to RUF participants in the war, and will seek to understand what went wrong by beginning with the perspectives of the fighters themselves. To meet the objections of critics of the use of perpetrator 'testimony' (for example, Mkandawire 2002) I will assess this evidence in terms of, for instance, the ability of informants directly involved in some of these events to reflect on the whole situation and to exercise self-criticism. As stated, my aim throughout is to put this material on record, as contributing to a more rounded perspective, not to offer a justification for the movement, and the war crimes it undoubtedly committed.

The Erosion of RUF Ideology

Studying the RUF, and its malpractices, one notes that the level of atrocity and harassment of civilians by the RUF was not the same throughout the war. Several periods can be distinguished when the level of atrocities increased, while equally there were periods when abuses and atrocity abated. Acts of harassment and atrocity also varied by type across time and space. According to RUF ex-fighters, this reflected specific developments, both external to and within the RUF. Interviewees who were fighters for the RUF bring forward a range of explanations for these variations, pointing to characteristics such as training, the extent of the civil defence threat, and ideological erosion. All levels – commanders and rank-and-file fighters – concur in making clear distinctions, when assessing what went wrong, between different phases in the conflict. Four phases are generally distinguished. We begin with some material indicating, for each phase, the movement's own reading of what went wrong, and why it did so.

Phase I (1991–3)

At first they [the fighters] really tried to do the good thing, giving supplies to civilians and trying to protect them. Later they became bad. The movement changed because they did not promote people because they were educated but because they were ruthless in the fighting. Foday Sankoh was not well educated and he promoted all these illiterate persons such as Maskita and General Sesay. You know, the illiterate people do not like educated people because they feel that the literate people can work on their minds, can spin it. . . . These small boys were not able to plan in a right way. . . . During the first years of the war the real RUF

still believed in the good cause. They did not like this indiscriminate killing of people, unlike the Burkina Faso rebels.[2] But most of the RUF fighters joined because of the opportunity of looting and because they did not want to work hard. The leaders however made these rules to stop this uncontrolled looting and whenever you break this law you were sent to the firing squad. They also gathered all the materials looted, just to prevent that the junior boys and men would start to think about something else instead of the revolution. (RUF clerk A)

We expected the war to be quick. Compare Sierra Leone to Liberia. Sierra Leone is smaller. But it was the Special Forces from Liberia who sabotaged the war straight from the beginning. These Liberians sold us to the enemy and committed atrocities. In 1992, going on to 1993, the Special Forces left, driven out by the RUF. (RUF commander G)

There were many Liberians among them, coming from Gio [Nimba County, north-eastern Liberia]. You can hear from their accent that they are Liberians and not Sierra Leoneans. These Liberians were brutal and were not like the Sierra Leoneans. They taught the captives bad things. If it would have been only Sierra Leoneans that entered the country, it would have been better. (RUF child combatant G)

Phase II (1994)

The civilians played a double role. They were going to the RUF and from there to the SLA and then to the CDF. So that is how the RUF became suspicious. Many civilians used the factions for taking revenge on each other for old quarrels and grudges. So the enemy of the RUF was not only the CDF or the SLA, but the whole society. Many of the earlier atrocities of the RUF can be explained by this double role of the civilians. And the RUF motto as far as justice was concerned is: 'When you do bad, we kill you, and when we have killed you, you will never do bad again.' (RUF clerk A)

There were many laws [in the RUF]. It was not allowed to gossip for instance. On raping there was the death penalty.... And there were more rules such as not eating the rations of another man, no stealing, no adultery, no harassment of civilians.... But during operations there was more freedom. Fighters were allowed to rape and loot if they had no orders saying the contrary. But inside the territory strict rules were active. (RUF Military Police A)

The amputations started in 1996–7. It was difficult even for someone in the movement to ask questions about this because they would immediately accuse you of turning against them; why else would you ask these questions.[3] (RUF Military Police A)

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[2] As mentioned earlier (Chapter 3), among the initial insurgents there were, besides Sierra Leoneans, some Liberian Special Forces and a few fighters from Burkina Faso.

[3] This also is confirmed by witnesses interviewed by the NGO Human Rights Watch, who 'reported that [when] individual combatants did object and try to halt the abuses, those objecting were often met with death threats from their fellow rebels' (HRW 1999, quoted in Gberie 2005: 130).

Phase III (1997–8)

You know, there is the town ideology and the bush ideology. The [government] soldiers have the town ideology; that is that they are used to money, all different kind of items and enjoying themselves at the beach or at the various clubs. But the bush ideology of the RUF is quite different. We are not exposed to all these different items. We do not have a club or a beach. We do not even have money, because money can corrupt the mind. As soon as someone promises you money you start to think differently. So because of these two different ideologies it was not easy to work together with the AFRC. Some of the civilians who supported us were not happy to see us working together with the AFRC. They said that we had to go back to the bush and continue the struggle. . . . It turned out bad for the movement that we had joined the AFRC. All our rules and regulations were just eroding during the AFRC time, and later they stabbed us in the back.[4] (RUF commander E)

Phase IV (1998–2001)

The ones who joined the RUF later on do not have the RUF ideology. These [ones] are not interested in farming [as an aspect of an ideological agenda]. We call them 'Junta II'[5] because they joined after the junta period. These RUF combatants were not disciplined and were causing us a real 'headache'. We feel that they betrayed and sabotaged the movement. (RUF commander C)

In the beginning the revolution knew the way but after the removal of Foday Sankoh the commanders sabotaged the whole thing. From 'Footpaths to Democracy' [RUF/SL 1995] we learned a lot. Everything was implemented. But the problem was that the young commanders just wanted to grab, not share. And later on there was also no transparency or communication. It was only the top commanders who got the insight. It was a time when 'children' started to take over the movement and misused the funds and forgot about the civilians. But the Pa [Foday Sankoh] gave to the last civilian. He was not greedy. The whole revolution went down because of ignorance and illiteracy. The fighters could not agree to choose an educated person as their new leader after Foday Sankoh left. Foday Sankoh did not like to kill somebody. (RUF educational officer)

In 1989 I joined the SLA. In the beginning there was no cooperation between the RUF and the SLA. It was only from the AFRC days and onwards. . . . [Later in 1998] Every SLA fighter then had to go to the RUF base in Bunumbu, headed by Basa [name of commander], for two weeks of advance training. There we were taught in the RUF's ideology, but also in obstacle crossing, fire fight and the command structure. In the morning the ideology classes took place and in the afternoon we got the other training. Because as a punishment people were beaten, while under training, this did not make the AFRC fighters loyal to the RUF. And because the relationship was not cordial the AFRC later split into the West Side

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[4] This interviewee probably refers to the surrender of about 5,000 AFRC troops to ECOMOG forces after they were repelled from Freetown in 1998, or to Johnny Paul Koroma's statement in 2000 that he now fully supported President Kabbah.

[5] 'Junta II' is also used to refer to a specific unit under the control of Dennis Mingo, and included many under-age fighters.

Boys. Because the AFRC did not easily take an order from a RUF, they made a new command structure where every RUF commander had a deputy coming from the AFRC, or vice versa. But still the AFRC [soldier] only take orders from another AFRC. (AFRC commander A)

In summary, these accounts suggest that after a bad start, partly due to presence of brutal Liberian and Burkina mercenaries, the RUF was never able to regain the confidence of the rural people. In its second phase the movement became alienated from society, which it increasingly (and correctly) considered as supportive of the civil defence militias. In the third phase the RUF tasted power – and the corruptions of power – but as a junior partner[6] in the Junta. This in effect removed any shreds of ideological legitimacy in the eyes of rural civilians, since it then became largely dependent upon an ally made up of army officers and civilian collaborators essentially loyal to the former APC regime, the RUF's sworn enemy. In its fourth and final phase the movement became increasingly fractious, perhaps even fatalistic, and eventually collapsed under internal power struggles and corruption.

External Factors

These readings of the changing character of the RUF by its former fighters bring forward three major *external* reasons for patterns of uncontrolled violence and atrocity committed by the RUF. These are (1) the role of the (mainly Liberian) Special Forces in the RUF; (2) the increasing threat posed by the civil defence militia to RUF 'safe grounds' (including the bush camps); and (3) RUF collaboration with the AFRC. These factors will be discussed in more detail in the next section. The *internal* reasons for uncontrolled violence and atrocity will be discussed in the later sections of this chapter.

The Liberian Special Forces (1991–2)

The date 23 March 1991 is usually cited as when the RUF entered Sierra Leone and thus the date of the beginning of the war. It is also generally accepted that among the first RUF troops to enter Sierra Leone there were some Liberian NPFL fighters supplied by Charles Taylor, and some mercenaries from Burkina Faso (Richards 1996; Gberie 2005). But prior to the March incursions there had been several months in which cross-border attacks by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) took place, mainly for looting, and this fed speculation in Freetown that the

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[6] Gberie (2005: 102) argues that the AFRC was the junior partner to the RUF. However, the RUF kept its headquarters, its de facto leader Sam Bockarie, and the majority of its fighters up-country.

March 1991 attack was yet another temporary NPFL incursion (Gberie 2005: 59). Some confusion was added because earlier that year Foday Sankoh had announced on the BBC World Service for Africa that he had given President Momoh 90 days to step down, but 23 March was less than three weeks after the announcement. Soon after this particular incursion, Sankoh nevertheless announced it as the start of the RUF's struggle, again by calling on the BBC. However, according to a former Liberian fighter trained in Libya and attached to the RUF from the time of the incursion to the end of the war, the units entering Sierra Leone during these first few days were solely made up of NPFL fighters. Sankoh was then forced to speed up the entry of the real RUF into Sierra Leone. This may explain Sankoh breaking his own proclaimed deadline for Momoh.

The RUF was small and the NPFL was big, so Gaddafi told all of us that we had to work together, starting with Liberia, because it had a free corridor from the Ivory Coast. After that Sierra Leone would be next. It was the 'Liberation of Africa Movement'. All this happened between 1987 up to 1989. From the 2nd of December 1989 they [i.e. Libyan-trained guerrillas destined for both the RUF and NPFL] started to leave; from Libya to Burkina Faso and then to the Ivory Coast. Then on the 24th of December they entered Liberia. . . . The group that entered Sierra Leone in March [23rd] was not the RUF, but a part of the NPFL, based in Vaahun. They usually [i.e. regularly] brought looted property to the Sierra Leonean soldiers in Bomaru for business purposes. One time, a dispute arose and the NPFL started to enter; it [i.e. the leader of the group] was Erikson Baileah. They continued their attack. So then the international media announced it. Charles Taylor heard of it and informed Foday Sankoh, saying that he must go now and do his operation. So on the 28th of March, the first batch moved to Pujehun and the second batch entered Koindu. The third batch went to Vaahun. On the 29th everybody started to move and on the 1st of April the real RUF entered. But this RUF was heavily supported by NPFL fighters. (RUF commander E)

So, according to this account, NPFL elements were not only present among the RUF, outnumbering Sierra Leonean RUF fighters, but were also operating independently in Sierra Leone for a week before the RUF, with Sankoh as its spokesman, began its campaign. If correct, this is an indication of the dominant role played by the RUF's Libyan-trained Liberian allies in the incursion, and in the RUF in general, at this initial period. This dominance is further emphasised by the creation of the so-called Top 20 and Top 40, as clarified by the same interviewee:

The Special Forces were the NPFL fighters. The idea was that after the capture of the Daru barracks they would return. But when we reached Pendembu, they [the NPFL forces] decided to stay. The RUF said that they should align with RUF's ideology, but they refused. They established the so-called 'Top 20' and started to kill the vanguards and the junior commandos. Later they established a 'Top 40'; that was in June '92. So a report was sent to Charles Taylor and he

sent Gon Gonbo to retrieve all Liberian men who were around. That happened between February 1992 and April 1992, by order of [on threat of?] execution. Those willing to return did so, but some hid in the bush. Then the RUF organised the so-called 'Top Final', to drive them out by force. So from July '92, the RUF stood on its own. (RUF commander E)

The heavy (and initially overbearing) presence of Liberian Special Forces confronted the Sierra Leonean RUF with a dilemma. On the one hand these experienced, well-armed forces offered significant military support to the less experienced fighters of the RUF, who were never more than a tiny insurgency group during the first months. Liberian forces in Sierra Leone knew how to use forced conscription to quickly increase the number of fighters:

In the beginning there was forced conscription whenever you were young. At that time many Liberian fighters entered Sierra Leone. But the Liberians left during '92/'93. They were forced out of the country by the RUF. That was because of the ideology; they told us it was different from the one we implemented. (RUF commander K)

On the other hand, the behaviour of the NPFL forces towards the local civilians and Sierra Leonean RUF fighters was of serious concern to the Sierra Leonean RUF, undermining its command structure (only taking orders from Taylor, if orders were taken at all) and by their cruelty destroying any possible support from civilians. These two points are illustrated by the following accounts from several RUF ex-fighters from the Pendembu area:

When the rebels entered Pendembu, they called upon us and told us not to be afraid. But after one week the Gio [Liberian fighters from the Gio tribe] started to kill some of us, accusing us of thieving. So we went back to the bush and only after six months we returned to a nearby village. But then they captured one of us and forced him to tell them where the others were, because they needed manpower. Therefore I had to surrender and was brought to the Pendembu Secondary School Training Ground. It was the Gios who captured us. We got training and we became bodyguards. Later Foday Sankoh came and sent the Gios back to Liberia; that was in April '92. Then we started to fight on our own, in a better way. But it was only in '93 that all the Liberians were pushed back. The Gios were already amputating people. But it was not only Liberians from the Gio tribe; they were from different tribes. The Gio took us as slaves. (RUF fighter M)

I was there [in Pendembu] when the war came. We hid in the bush for a few hours. Then we came out because people said that the rebels did not do anything. The rebels explained their purpose, their reason for fighting. Some of us joined voluntarily; there was no enforcement. . . . But after four months we all hid in the bush because of the misbehaviour of the Gio men. The Sierra Leonean fighters tried to stop them but the Gio got [had] more power. In February '92 the Gio killed my husband, accusing him of having diamonds. But in that same month Foday Sankoh started to drive out the Liberians. He said that from now on

the Sierra Leonean boys have to fight the war, rather than Gios [who were] killing innocent people. So then peace returned [in this area] and there was no harassment of civilians any more. (Female fighter F)

The war came to Pendembu in the morning. We hid in the bush and escaped to Koindu. Those who came to us talked to us in a good manner, these were Liberians. But the second group which entered Koindu, again Liberians, behaved badly. Because of the misbehaviour of the Gio men, I decided to join to protect myself. (Female fighter H)

Misbehaviour by the Taylor Special Forces is also confirmed in accounts by civilians:

The Gio were the worse. They were beating us and they practised cannibalism. I witnessed that myself that they were eating a part of the body, but mainly the heart.[7] The Gio left completely in '93. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

The first combatants, those Liberians and Burkinabes harassed us, but later, when those left, our own brothers did not harass us any more. The Liberians and Burkinabes used force to make us do things, but later when the civilian town commander was in place, there was no force used any more but he [the town commander] gave orders. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

According to these accounts, Liberian forces unwilling to align themselves with the RUF command were ordered to leave (between February and April 1992) and those who refused to go back – and remained unwilling to subordinate themselves to RUF command – were then hunted down by the RUF. This took several months and it is unlikely that these renegade Liberians were overcome finally much before the end of 1992. This perhaps accounts for a widespread belief that Liberian forces supported the RUF well into 1993. Conversely, a good number of Liberians remained with the RUF, and some obtained a high rank, because they were among the first to join (one example is Isaac Mongo):

Guys like B. M., B. D. and A. D. [all high-ranking former commanders] are from Liberia, from a village called G., in Bong country. They are Kpelle.[8] The Gio behaved badly and were driven out but those Liberians not belonging to the Gio group could stay. B. M. and B. D. are considered vanguards and became brigade commanders because of that. The vanguards were the ones who introduced the war, so they are considered as strong fighters. (Female fighter H)

Clearly, the Liberian Special Forces did not consider themselves to be under the command of the Sierra Leonean leaders of the RUF. The RUF actively pursued these Special Forces to make sure they left the

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[7] On Liberian beliefs concerning the operations of 'heart men' see Moran (2008).

[8] This is significant information. The Kpelle are a group in north-west Liberia, adjacent to Sierra Leone. The Gio came from the north-east of Liberia, and shared less in common – culturally, linguistically, and historically – with the Mende and Kissi fighters forming the bulk of the RUF rank and file at this stage of the war.

country.[9] It is highly unlikely that Sierra Leonean RUF fighters did not engage in atrocities during these first years of the war, but the previous accounts suggest that the Liberian Special Forces had a particularly bad record in this regard. This is perhaps not surprising, since they had been brutalised (and perhaps traumatised) by more than a year of heavy fighting in Liberia. But the fact remains that the aggressive behaviour of, in particular, the Liberian Special Forces towards civilians caused the RUF to lose much initial and potential support among a local population deeply alienated from Freetown by years of APC misrule. The Liberians entrenched an unenviable reputation for the RUF as an exceptionally brutal and ill-disciplined force, and this persisted after it had driven out the Liberian Special Forces, despite efforts to moderate the harm it caused to local communities. The misbehaviour of RUF fighters and the incapacity (or unwillingness) of the army to fight the feared and despised rebels of the RUF began to give rise to community self-defence by militia groups initially based on the expertise of local hunters. These developments quickly gained the widespread support of the civilian population, and had a major impact on the way the RUF started to consider civilians, as we will see next.

The Rise of Hunter-Based Civil Defence (1994–5)

Support for the army by local hunters dated back to the first days of the conflict (see also Chapter 3). During this period these so-called special hunters were recruited by the army in a supportive role, as scouts and trackers, using their detailed knowledge of the local terrain to guide battle groups safely. Special hunters are found among all groups in Sierra Leone. They often claim a Mande origin, and are initiates of a craft guild. Initiators endow members with special powers to track animals safely and effectively. Even at an early stage of the war, according to Muana (1997), some initiators began to think in terms of a wider self-defence movement capable of recovering land and plantations controlled by rebels.

The real threat to the RUF posed by this hunter militia began during the second phase of the war, in 1995. This was the year in which the military government hired the South African security company, Executive Outcomes (EO), to help protect mining sites and stem the threat posed by RUF raids from secure forest camps. EO drew on experience gained in organising local auxiliaries as counter insurgency forces in Rhodesia,

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[9] When I did research on the reintegration of ex-child soldiers in Liberia in 2000, a Sierra Leonean ex-child soldier who first joined the RUF and later fought with the NPFL recalled his experiences with Foday Sankoh, early on in the conflict. He remembered Sankoh addressing his forces, which included many Liberian fighters at that stage, 'begging' them not to involve themselves in atrocities towards civilians.

Mozambique, and Angola (cf. Cilliers 1985). They appear to have envisaged the possibility of turning local groups of shotgun-wielding hunters into a national counter-insurgency force capable of hunting the RUF in the forest.[10]

Once the Kabbah regime was in power, EO became active in training and arming the first couple of thousand or so recruits to what eventually (in 1998) became the national Civil Defence Forces (CDF). The first 1,000 or so graduated in July 1996 in Bo, in an event at Bo Town Hall presided over by a former army officer, Chief Samuel Hinga Norman, who served as the new government's de facto minister of defence.[11] There was no constitutional provision for such a militia, so a polite fiction was observed that the CDF was a spontaneous grassroots movement beyond the control of the presidency. Many of its fighters were fully armed with semi-automatic rifles and grenade launchers, as evident in demobilisation statistics at the end of the war (Richards et al. 2004b).

The reason why civil defence fighters – even when using single-barrel shotguns, nets, and knives, as they did over a considerable period – became a formidable threat to the RUF had to do with a significant change in the way the RUF fought. After its retreat into the Gola Forest at the end of 1993 the RUF became a forest-based guerrilla force, with jungle bases in inaccessible terrain and using hit-and-run attacks or ambushes as its main fighting tactics. In the jungle camps the RUF was beyond the reach of government soldiers, mainly operating with heavy, and thus road-bound, equipment. The Sierra Leonean army was trained and supported by the Nigerians, and the Nigerian army is primarily an artillery force, supported by some air power. In their grassed-over tenements in thick forest, the RUF was invisible from the air and beyond the range of howitzers. But the rebels were not safe from civil defence units, operating with light weapons and superior knowledge of the bush paths, and convinced of their invulnerability in the bush. Increasingly, the RUF bush camps were attacked by CDF fighters, supported by EO from the air. This onslaught culminated in the sacking of the RUF main

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[10] One paramount chief with a large and effective force of hunter auxiliaries by the end of the war told Richards (2005b) that the idea to form such a force had come from 'Branch Energy, the mining company'. Branch Energy – now Koidu Holdings – acquired a major kimberlite concession in Sierra Leone in 1995, and retained the services of EO for its mine security operations. Its policy adviser at the time was a (recently retired) officer of British overseas secret intelligence, also active in supporting the democratic transition that brought the Kabbah government to power at the beginning of 1996. It seems reasonable to suppose that plans to support a new democratic government by turning local civil defence into a national auxiliary capable of stemming the threat posed by RUF forest camps would have received British endorsement, given international alarm that RUF success would be a victory for the Libyan leader's Movement for the Liberation of Africa, as referred to by an RUF informant above.

[11] President Kabbah held the substantive defence portfolio. Norman, as his deputy, ran the ministry.

camp, the Zogoda, just a few weeks before the signing of the Abidjan peace accord.[12]

> We were driven back to the jungle [by the end of 1993], which was our worst period. You know, in a revolutionary war you are cut off of all civilian life, to some extent. But now the real guerrilla war started. We did not have any food or supplies and were solely relying on ambushes. We built our houses with zinc, deep in the forest. . . . The CDF was tribalistic and it committed more atrocities. In [the attack on] the Zogoda we lost so much manpower. You know, January 6 [1999] was our revenge. The CDF did not make any prisoners of war, the RUF never hung tyres around people's neck[13] and set them on fire. The CDF practised cannibalism, eating human beings. The CDF also amputated people, and beheaded them. (RUF commander C)

> We had an annual congress which was the War Council. In the preparation for Abidjan [peace negotiations] Foday Sankoh gathered everybody to know if we were all interested in peace. He warned us for the kamajoisia [CDF], that they would destroy the RUF under the guise of the unilateral ceasefire. Later the [ICRC] helicopter picked him up in Menima Koya. During the attack on the Zogoda and other bases, we lost a lot of equipment and for some time command and control. (RUF commander E)

But the bush camps of the RUF were more than safe places for the fighters. They also formed the experimental sites where the movement tried to put into practice its ideological agenda. Here it organised its small alternative society, emphasising an egalitarian social agenda. In some cases it even implemented (as we have seen) ideas about free educational and medical facilities. The camps were supposed to represent a better – and for many conscripts the only – place in Sierra Leone to live securely, since they were well aware that defection and attempted reintegration in government territory would draw suspicious and hostile reactions from both government soldiers and civilians. The attacks on and destruction of these camps by the Kamajoisia – with the loss of the movement's surrounding 'liberated zones' – caused further paranoia among the RUF fighters, in addition to the practical implications (in terms of loss of

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[12] On 23 April 1996 Sankoh and Kabbah signed a Joint Communiqué (which included a cease-fire agreement) in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, in the presence of that country's president. The cease-fire remained in force up to the moment the 1996 peace accord was signed. Hence, the attacks on the RUF bases were breaches of the cease-fire agreement (which was also breached on several occasions by elements within the RUF). There is a graphic account of the Zogoda operation in the appendix (on Sierra Leone) to Hooper's (2002) book about EO. Jim Hooper, an American journalist close to the South African officers running EO, is guarded about the chronology of this attack, but elsewhere explicit in his claim that it was Colonel Pine Pienaar of EO and the Nigerian commander of the ECOMOG peace-keeping forces who persuaded a reluctant president to break his cease-fire agreements.

[13] Most illustrative of this was the 'necklacing' of a rebel suspect before the Law Courts in Freetown in the days leading up to the 6 January 1999 attack.

livelihood, access to information, and disruption of routines). In short, the CDF attacked the RUF where it assumed it was safe:

We had created a border around our camps where there were no civilians. But the Kamajors bypassed this dead zone and they even bypassed our bases to go to the 'p.c. grounds' [the peaceful grounds]. Then they attacked the civilians who were staying with the RUF. They burned the houses down and amputated civilians. After that the Kamajors told their government that they had killed rebels.[14] (RUF commander G)

This account confirms the capacity of the CDF not only to attack RUF bases directly, but also to attack what the RUF considered as the 'liberated zones' in its project to create a new society. In the second phase of the war, these were mainly some areas in Kailahun, but during the latter part of the conflict the RUF's 'liberated zones' became much larger.

Punishing civilians for their real or supposed support for either (or later any) of the factions quickly became an established feature of the war: RUF fighters attacked civilians in government-controlled areas; CDF fighters and government soldiers attacked civilians in, or coming from, RUF territory. The CDF was a movement supported by the majority of the civilians, but it also was based among the civilians. Soon the RUF considered all civilians outside their own areas as CDF supporters, and thus a potential threat. To scare off the civilians or discourage them from supporting CDF units, the RUF used terror tactics. The purpose of terrorism is demoralisation, so the specific forms adopted were atrocities that 'spoke' to important local social and cultural concerns. One set of such concerns focuses on the integrity of the body. Clothing and the skin protect more than just vulnerable organs; to Sierra Leonean villagers they are also protection for the soul (Ferme 2001). Mutilating living individuals sent a signal to warn an entire society. RUF fighters are almost matter-of-fact in commenting on the intended functionality of these terrible war crimes:

If a specific area caused a threat to the RUF area or a base, the commander can decide to make the area 'fearful' by amputating some people. It is a strategy and it started around '95/'96. (RUF fighter I)

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[14] Later this commander argued as follows: 'amputations were carried out by cutlasses and the Kamajors are the ones who carry cutlasses [machetes], not we, the RUF'. This amounts to a claim that the CDF was among the first to use the tactic. RUF amputations are, however, an undeniable fact, nor do these informants seek to deny them. But this is not to say that other factions did not amputate. The AFRC engaged in the atrocity on a large scale during 1998–9. Civilians in rebel territory were considered rebel supporters by the CDF and were targeted in this way. Who first started the practice seems impossible to decide. Indeed, it may have precedents in punishments against runaway slaves in the nineteenth century. It seems to have made an early appearance in the war. Richards (2005b: 399) was told by one RUF woman leader that she joined the movement when the army maimed, and then killed, her husband as a rebel suspect in 1991.

The destruction of houses and properties happened due to the war. Nobody will destroy a house intentionally during normal times. So it is the war that made us to do so. . . . The reason for the amputations was that some civilians are wicked [conniving with the enemy]. If we are on a patrol and meet you in a Kamajor zone, we can ask you to go with us and we will then amputate you. That was the only reason why we amputated people. (RUF commander A)

This seems to offer at least a partial explanation of why RUF fighters started to subject civilians to amputation. At issue, according to the ex-combatants, was the threat posed by the effective counter-insurgency operations[15] of the civilian-supported CDF, and the lack of surrender options with which the movement was then presented:

The Kamajoisia did not capture civilians in the RUF territory; they just killed them. They did not make POWs [Prisoners of War] because they have their society [arrangements and rules]. (RUF commander H)[16]

When all is said, the targeting of civilians for violence, as punishment for alleged political sympathies, began with the RUF in Kailahun and Pujehun in the earliest days of the war. Often, the victims were the real or supposed supporters, or representatives, of the APC regime. If a civilian was accused of being a 'Momoh soldier' he was liable to be killed, or at the very least severely beaten. These were not necessarily indiscriminate killings, since many of those who joined the RUF in these areas originated in these communities, and would have been well aware of who was and who was not a supporter of the Momoh regime. In other cases, villagers (and local recruits) settled local grudges by 'pointing' (falsely accusing) neighbours, rivals, or rich local traders to the incoming fighters, who only later became aware that they had been manipulated in using their punitive violence 'unjustly'. But with the increasing threat to the RUF caused by the CDF, and widespread support from the civilian population for the militia, it appears that all civilians became a target in the eyes of the RUF. From the advent of the Kabbah government in 1996 it appeared that the entire country had become 'Kamajor supporters'. In short, the rise of the CDF without doubt accelerated the RUF's descent into a fatal and deadly state of paranoia.

The AFRC (1997–9)

A third issue brought up by RUF combatants, in their reading of what went wrong with the RUF and how harassment and atrocities are to be

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[15] Gberie, too, sees method in the violence of the RUF: 'the RUF always resorted to utterly repugnant acts of violence when it faced serious resistance or defeat' (2005: 135).

[16] This leaves aside the possible contribution of EO, whose role remains unexamined. Eye-witnesses have alleged the dumping of prisoners from helicopters over the Gola Forest, but evidence has not been forthcoming.

explained, was its collaboration with the AFRC during the third and fourth phases of the war.

Some fighters recall the moment when the RUF was called out of the bush by the new Junta in 1997:

We were happy when the AFRC called upon us because we were happy to leave the bush. (RUF fighter M)

However, the collaboration soon had a considerable negative impact on the fighters' belief in RUF ideology and the Code of Conduct, as the following account of an ex-RUF combatant makes clear:

The movement fought against corruption; it was part of its agenda. At first, up to 1997, it was practised to a good extent. But when the movement was exposed to all different kind of goods and this city life, when we joined with the AFRC, the corruption increased. Imagine, if even your own parents never owned a car, and suddenly you can have one. . . . So they [some of the RUF commanders] talked one thing, but did the other. (RUF fighter I)

Before the RUF joined the junta, it had specific interests in certain items of loot, such as medicines and weapons and ammunition, which were of direct use to the movement, and transportable to its jungle bases. Cars, zinc, and furniture were of much less use, except where a unit was close to the border, where such items could be traded. In contrast, the army had much more scope to transport and sell these items, and thus much more interest in acquiring them in the combat zone. There was a ready urban market for such items (cf. Keen 2005) and some were apparently exported (Monrovia wags had already decided that ECOMOG stood for 'Every Car Or Moveable Object Gone'). The junta experience will have tended to favour the latter 'model', and the testimony of the former RUF cadres appears to reflect awareness of the point:

The AFRC were with the civilians before so they knew exactly who to harass and get money from. (RUF commander C)

It was the AFRC that was involved in a lot of looting. (RUF fighter M)

While the RUF in the bush was able to limit the possessions of its fighters – items and cash beyond a person's direct needs had to be handed over to the movement – it now found this policy increasingly difficult to implement. Many of its own commanders now started to develop or acted upon a long-time interest in these items as well. This is underlined by the following statement from another ex-combatant:

From '97, when we joined with the AFRC, the infighting in the RUF started. Because then we saw what officers were entitled to, so everybody wanted to be a commander, and they did not take orders any more. Some commanders did not take orders from Sam Bockarie any more. Later Superman [Dennis Mingo] was uncontrollable because he was with SAJ [Solomon Musa, one of the 1992

coup leaders, turned junta rebel] and SAJ did not take orders from JPK [Johnny Paul Koroma, the junta leader]. From then on commanders did their own thing. Sam Bockarie's, and later Issa Sesay's, command did not work in the axis where Superman was in control. If you wanted to go your own way, like Superman did, what you needed was manpower and logistics. (RUF commander E)

Clearly the collaboration with the AFRC – and subsequently the RUF's access to towns and the capital city – not only emptied the minds of the fighters and commanders of much ideological commitment generated in the bush, but also undermined the movement's organisational coherence. Access to goods, according to the previous account, became a major motivation to achieve senior status (officer rank). To do that, one had to build one's own power base. Manpower and logistics were essential in this. Collaboration with the AFRC offered access to the logistics, such as weapons and ammunition. Intake of new recruits, voluntarily or forced, provided the other half of this power base. Time for proper military training and teaching the RUF's ideology easily fell victim to these increasingly rapid and individually organised recruitment drives.[17] In addition, the RUF collaborated with a faction with little or any interest in political ideology of any kind at all:

The erosion of the ideology started when we joined with the AFRC because they were not trained in any ideology. This was particularly the case towards the end. (RUF commander C)

So, according to the RUF ex-combatants, (1) the lack of ideology training for new RUF recruits and AFRC soldiers in general, (2) being exposed to goods previously not available in the jungle, and (3) opportunity to stay in the urban centres, taken together, served to corrupt the minds of many fighters and commanders in the RUF:

It was from 1997, when the RUF joined the AFRC, that the erosion of the command structure started. This was because the AFRC had a steady supply of food and privileges, which made the RUF commanders become greedy. From 2000, more and more commanders just started to do their own thing, because they wanted to become rich before the end of the war. (RUF commander H)

One class of 'goods' the RUF could access with comparative ease was diamonds. Government forces always had a strong presence in the mining areas, to safeguard this important source of income for the government against rebel attacks. With the AFRC coup, these areas, together with the major towns in Sierra Leone, suddenly changed sides. The RUF, invited by the AFRC, could start mining here without serious threat – or, as this ex-fighter simply states:

The RUF's interest in diamonds started with the AFRC. (RUF commander K)

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[17] Not too dissimilar to the way CDF recruitment practices became both rapid processes and individual, money-making events, from 1997 onwards.

Other ex-RUF fighters take a slightly more nuanced, or informed, view of the impact of the AFRC mentality on RUF ideology. In the following excerpt, an ex-fighter suggests that there was always some tension between those more interested in the ideological or political aspects of the movement and those more focused on military issues. The collaboration with the AFRC gave opportunities to those who from the outset had been more drawn to military aspects:

There was a political wing in the RUF. The G5 was part of that. Deen-Jalloh, Faya Musa, S. Y. B. Rogers were all part of the political wing, but the military wing was on top. The whole movement had politics at its foundation, but it needed the military to carry out the action because there was no political tolerance [under APC rule]. The problem was that when the armed struggle started the military wing became dominant. And then of course you have the situation that you cannot politicise people if they are not in your area. . . . Most of the commanders did not really absorb the ideology. But the [military] leaders supported the political wing because they knew that at some stage their own part would be over. They only feared to end up in prison or being marginalised. (RUF commander J)

Another result of this increasing inability to maintain rules was increased drug use among RUF fighters and commanders. During the jungle phase, drug use in the bush camps was severely punished, according to the fighters, although they also indicate that these rules were often violated. However, these strict rules on drug use changed when the RUF started working together with the AFRC:

In the beginning there was no drug use in the RUF, or if you want to use it, you had to hide in the bush away from the camp. But when we started to mix up with the soldiers during the junta time, the drug use started to increase. (RUF fighter M)

Drugs were used to survive the harsh conditions in the frontline, but it also made the fighters to misbehave. (RUF fighter I)

Possibly the image of RUF fighters as chronic drug abusers was exploited deliberately by the movement as a terror tactic. In Sierra Leone those who use drugs are regarded as troublemakers, and people try to avoid them. It is clear that whether or not RUF combatants were under the influence of drugs during an attack, the civilian population was highly afraid of the image of 'drug-crazed' attackers. But an ordinary villager, who had lived in RUF territory for several years, was openly sceptical about whether it was the drugs that made the rebels behave so badly:

Just because they had these guns they became wicked. It was not because of the drugs.

There was a major rise in atrocities committed in the third and the early part of the fourth phase of the war, the periods during which the RUF collaborated with the AFRC (Physicians for Human Rights 2002). To attribute all of these atrocities to the RUF seems doubtful. It

already has been suggested that many parties used the RUF as a cover
for vendettas, reprisals, and criminal acts, while escaping the blame. By
this stage of the war civilians labelled all fighters behaving badly as rebels,
but with little or no discrimination as to whether they were RUF, AFRC,
or splinter groups from either faction. One civilian from the Makeni area
put it this way:

Here the soldiers were more involved in amputations than the RUF. And they
also committed more [of other kinds of] atrocities. But for us, the civilians, they
all look the same. (Civilian in Bombali Shebora chiefdom)

Amputations were widely considered a 'trademark' of the RUF, but
there is doubt (as mentioned above) as to whether the fighters from
the movement initiated the practice. Conceivably, it was initiated by the
Liberian Special Forces. Abdullah (2004), on the other hand, offers an
account of a SLA soldier who refers to soldiers amputating rebels at the
beginning of the war. Whether the RUF began to employ the practice in
retaliation or not, it is however fairly clear that its fighters deployed this
particular atrocity on their own account well before the movement began
its collaboration with the AFRC.

Taking a closer look at the issue of amputations, it becomes clear that
the nature of the amputations changed over the course of the war, and this
might indicate a change in objectives of the perpetrators. Early incidents
by the RUF were predominately amputations of fingers and/or thumbs.
Later on, amputations of the arms up to the elbow or shoulder became
more common. A former RUF fighter reflects on the reasons behind the
early amputations:

The amputations by the RUF that took place before '97 were the so-called 'one
love' [amputations] cutting off fingers, leaving the thumb. This was because
'one love' was the NPRC slogan. So some of the wicked RUF commanders did
that and then sent the amputated civilians away to tell the NPRC. (RUF com-
mander E)

But other RUF fighters (and some civilians as well) pin the blame for
the stark increase in the number of amputations from 1997 on the junta
collaboration:

These atrocities really started when we joined with the AFRC. The amputations
were done by them. (RUF commander H)

The RUF did not cut hands from the beginning. It started with the AFRC, it
was mainly the AFRC. (Civilian in Bombali Shebora chiefdom)

Such acts have been dismissed too easily as 'irrational' or 'barbaric'
violence. Such characterisations may assuage emotions, but hardly serve
as explanations. There is a school of thought that argues that even to

search for explanation somehow 'dignifies' conduct that ought to be unthinkable. An opposing viewpoint, however, argues that to understand the rationale is to take a step towards prevention, since it may be incumbent on all actors in war zones – including peace keepers – to avoid contributing to conditions in which such actions flourish. The al-Qaida atrocities in the United States in 2001 have focused some useful analytical attention on the ways in which acts of terror actually work, as a weapon of war, to inflict fear, to induce panic, and to create conditions to control or punish populations. There is also a better understanding that terrorism is often resorted to because it swings the pendulum of deterrence in favour of poorly resourced insurgent movements. In effect, it is used because it is cheap. The RUF was a poorly equipped movement, and when threatened by a much better-equipped enemy began to discover the effectiveness of terror tactics. What it did not count upon, however, was that it would become so widely known for certain atrocities that other factions could inflict the same atrocities with impunity. It certainly is worth asking the question whether excessive stigmatisation of the RUF then contributed to a more general climate in which war-related cruelty flourished.

Acts of atrocity do say something about the perpetrator's state of mind – or the state of mind of the group, where collective acts are concerned. Amputations of fingers in the first half of the conflict – and in particular in the 1996 elections in which the RUF did not take part – have been interpreted as the movement's efforts to protest its marginalisation from a process strongly backed by international forces arrayed against its Libyan sponsor. Later, the even more extreme acts, such as full limb amputations, may have reflected a growing mood of fatalism among the fighters and a collapse into a-social hysteria. Somewhat similarly, though drawing inspiration from psychological literature, Keen (2005) has suggested that in the case of renegade government soldiers, the trigger for terrorism was the humiliation of fighters by a population and government that did not support or trust them. Gberie, too, distinguishes between different types of amputations, stating that 'These atrocities of an earlier, less ecstatic nature were, in that sense, terribly rational; compared to them, the 1999 attacks, more desperate and more random, appear neurotic, not to say frenetic' (2005: 137).

But a key question remains: In what kind of context is it possible for young people, often from apparently highly traditional and cohesive rural communities, to commit such atrocities, and to direct such attacks against people from backgrounds so close to their own underprivileged circumstances? To attempt an answer to that question, we need to pay attention to explanations rooted within the internal development of the RUF itself.

Internal Factors

In the foregoing discussion, I have examined some of the reasons given by movement members, and others who knew the movement well, for the further descent into atrocities and other war crimes by a significant part of the RUF. The factors adduced so far have been mainly external: the misbehaviour of Liberian Special Forces, the increased threat posed by the CDF indirectly triggering RUF paranoia against civilians, and finally the corrupting influence of a new ally, the AFRC. These factors should not, in any sense, be considered excuses for the actions of the RUF. Sankoh could have sent the Special Forces packing as soon as they began to misbehave (although admittedly it is doubtful if the Sierra Leonean RUF was strong enough at the time to do that). The killing of civilians suspected of supporting the CDF is a war crime, even if the other side was equally guilty of killing suspected civilian supporters of the RUF. And the RUF might have worked harder to resist what it claimed to be the corrupting influences of the AFRC – for example, by avoiding the obvious danger of allowing large numbers of cadres to flock into Freetown and other towns – if it was really genuine about and determined to pursue its political project. Clearly, these were all areas of failure for which its leadership must accept a substantial portion of the blame.

But even if the RUF had been able to succeed in these areas, it would still have been prone to dysfunctionality, leading to uncontrolled behaviour by its cadres, due to intrinsic organisational flaws. Here, more than anywhere else, the comments and reflections of ex-RUF fighters are crucial to the argument. Who else would have the detailed knowledge, and experience, of the way the RUF functioned internally, apart from those who had been members for many years?

Failing Reporting Mechanisms

In Chapter 4 I outlined the rules, regulations, and ideology of the RUF, according to the way these were reported and internalised by its former members. Many of these rules were specifically designed to regulate the behaviour of the fighters and their commanders. There were also various intelligence branches in the RUF, mandated to check upon the behaviour of fighters, and if necessary to punish those who violated the rules. An obvious question, therefore, is why atrocities could still happen, if indeed the RUF had clear rules and regulations, an ideology aiming to free the people of Sierra Leone from oppression, and multiple branches to monitor the behaviour of the fighters and their field commanders.

To some, the RUF had the character of a criminal brotherhood. Mafia-like organisations often have elaborate initiation procedures and rigidly

enforced codes. Intra-Mafia violence is often the expression of this inner process of regulation at work. But we have doubted whether this model fits the RUF, since it had no clear criminal economic rationale at the outset. Moreover, if the RUF had only criminal intentions, a number of its internal provisions – notably the emphasis on an egalitarian ideology – would have been gratuitous,[18] so the criminal explanation is rather easily dismissed. But if we consider the RUF (or at least a part of it) as a movement genuinely motivated by an ideology of popular empowerment, there must be internal reasons why it failed to prevent atrocities that stood in direct contradiction to that ideology. One initial thought is that the monitoring system was simply inadequate to the task. Let us listen rather carefully, then, to some of the explanations that the ex-fighters give for the shortcomings of monitoring in the RUF:

The highest-ranking commander in an area could do more or less whatever he liked to do. There are the IDUs liaising between the civilians and the combatants. And there are the Black Guards directly reporting to the Leader. But sometimes the Black Guards, and the commander involved in looting or so, can make a deal and no report is carried by the Black Guards to the Leader. Other violations of the RUF Code of Conduct however are much more likely to be reported. (RUF fighter I)

This indeed seems to have been one of the most important reasons why offences went unpunished. Whenever a fighter and an intelligence person made a deal, there was little chance of offences being reported.[19] Clearly, when it involved looted items, the intelligence operative might have a clear advantage in not reporting the matter, in order to claim a share. But with other failings, such as atrocities, there was no material interest to influence the intelligence operative person, so why not report it? 'Favouritism' stemming from the leadership itself (an aspect of the clientelism that the movement claimed to be fighting, but in fact failed to root out among its own members) seems to have been the key:

Some of the fighters harassed the civilians. Action was taken by the G5 to punish these fighters but sometimes this was not done because of favouritism. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

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[18] If the RUF were a criminal organisation covering up its intentions by ideological rhetoric – Collier's (2001) explanation of why most 'rebel' movements resort to grievance claims – it clearly was overdone to the point where both rank-and-file and commanders in the RUF began to believe in it.

[19] This weak spot in the RUF system was clearly recognised by the leadership, and partly overcome by the assignment of multiple intelligence officers to a mission, each unaware of the other's assignment (see Chapter 4).

On a mission people go sometimes against the orders and commit atrocities. Sometimes they are punished for that, but sometimes they are pardoned because of this favouritism. Sometimes it is just not discovered. Favouritism can [also] decide the kind of punishment you get; if you contribute to the movement, you become favoured. Like Peleto, he was illiterate but he became a Colonel because he was loyal. And the outcome of his actions [enforcing civilians and RUF rank-and-file to dig for diamonds] was in the interest of the leaders. (RUF fighter I)

Many of the RUF fighters were victims of a collapsed patrimonial system prior to the date of their conscription, and while the RUF claimed to be fighting against that kind of system, it never completely freed itself from patrimonial relationships. Partly this can be explained in terms of a lack of analytical grasp of what, exactly, were the problems it attempted to address in institutional terms. There was too much focus on redistribution of jobs and wealth, and not enough on why patrimonialism flourishes in impoverished African rural conditions. As a result the movement tended, under pressure, to fall back on inherited ways of doing things.

Sankoh consciously modelled himself on warlord leaders of the past, and too much was dependent on his charisma, and not enough on creating organic links to the wider society. This would have required a different kind of struggle – engagement with the complex processes associated with an urban division of labour, for example, as attempted by some ex-combatants after the war (Peters 2007b) – rather than reliance on force of arms in rural enclaves, since guerrilla insurgency tends to reinforce the mechanical solidarity of the armed band, upon which patron–client relations tend to become rather readily grafted.

It is also important to note that many of the junior intelligence personnel stayed with the fighters in forward positions over a considerable period of time, making it more likely that this officer would be enfolded within the camaraderie of the local fighting group:

You had two types of ambushes; the defence ambush which was laid in the buffer zone. There would be no intelligence personnel with those ambushes because anyone who would be falling in these ambushes would be the enemy anyhow. And there was the offensive ambush. Here there was intelligence personnel among the fighters. If one squad of 15 men was making an offensive ambush, there would be like one IDU and one MP among them. But these were junior IDUs or MPs only. These IDUs and MPs were staying with the ordinary fighters in the ambush. (RUF commander L)

Other factors have been mentioned before, such as the fear that prevented some intelligence officers reporting matters because of the risk of revenge by the fighters, or the plain fact that monitors could not be everywhere in the battlefield at once – so that there was plenty of scope, in the confusion of a hard-fought operation, for atrocities to be committed

unnoticed. Fighters also covered up their actions, as an ex-IDU officer explains:

Every mission must carry information back whether or not a particular village is (re)populated. If so, the commander confiscates all material and should hand these over to High Command. During attacks individual fighters can enter houses and misbehave, rape for instance. But if an intelligence officer finds out, he will report it. Or if the girl is later taken to the camp and if she reports that she has been raped, the specific fighter will be punished. So it can happen that some fighters kill their victims just to prevent any future troubles. (RUF commander H)

In short, it is clear that – despite the strict rules, monitoring branches, and harsh punishments for those breaking the rules – there were several ways in which fighters or commanders breaking the rules and committing atrocities could cover up their actions.

Atrocities taking place at the war front were not the only abuses to go unreported. Violation of movement rules and regulations also might escape notice in the RUF-controlled areas. For instance, civilians in RUF territory did not always complain to one of the authorities – the civilian town commander, the RUF commander, or one of the intelligence branches – if they were harassed, mainly because they feared the fighters. Or, as one civilian put it:

The rank-and-file threatened us that if we told the town commander [that we were harassed by them] they would beat us. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Another interviewee offers a similar explanation of why cases in which junior fighters harassed civilians did not always reach the senior levels:

If the rebels did bad we complained to the commander, who will beat them or put them in jail. But we do not complain all the time, because these bad rebels can hide from their commanders, and later can shoot you. The harassment is on their own initiative and if the commander finds the specific person, he will be punished. (Civilian in Mandu chiefdom)

The following account, by another civilian, offers the same reason, but adds two important factors influencing the levels of harassment, namely the background of the fighters (in this case Liberian) and the commander's abilities to instil discipline:

One time I carried a complaint straight to the overall commander, bypassing the town commander. And the commander punished the fighters responsible for it. But in general we were afraid of the fighters so I complained only once in a while. But we never complained about the behaviour of the Gios because they could kill you straightaway. But we complained about the Sierra Leonean fighters. However, they did not harass the civilians too much because the overall commander was very strict, assuring that no civilians were harassed. In general the Sierra Leonean commanders were better than the Gios. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Bodyguards

There was another feature of RUF organisation that contributed to the possibility of atrocities going unreported and hence unpunished. Commanders were entitled to have a certain number of bodyguards, who were in principle under the command structure, like any other fighter, but in reality were often treated by the commander in question as a private 'mini-force'. Two ex-combatants explained the situation:

Junior commandos have their own bodyguards and they can send these to get him [the junior commander] anything. This loot may be shared later on with the higher commander, to make sure the higher commander does not report the junior commander to the authorities. Generally rice and drugs had to be handed over, as these materials were useful to support other units. Obviously, some commanders tried to keep these and were reluctant to share it. (RUF fighter I)

The bodyguards are there to assist the commanders, and although they should take orders from any senior, they sometimes only listen to their own commanders. (RUF commander C)

The problem with these 'private forces' of bodyguards was recognised by the RUF and in 1999 a so-called Forces Routine Order was issued, intended to reduce the number of bodyguards assigned to each commander.

But, as mentioned, from the second half of the war onwards, an increasing number of RUF commanders started to pursue their own agendas, achieving this semi-autonomous position by gathering manpower and weapons. This whole shift is summarised in the following account:

What caused these atrocities was that some of these commanders gathered these small boys, these bodyguards, around them, so that they looked powerful. These boys behaved bad and looted, and were backed up by their commanders. And if these commanders had sufficient weapons they did not even respect the IOs or the IDUs or MPs. There were even some junior IOs who connived with these bad commanders. If all the rules of the RUF were respected by the fighters and commanders in the frontline, the civilians would have joined voluntarily. There were commanders who captured civilians in the frontline and did not send them to the rear, but abused them. And the same with arms and ammunition. These were also kept by these wicked commanders. (RUF commander M)

Manpower was always an obsession for the RUF, because voluntary conscription was not sufficient to maintain adequate numbers of fighting units. Local commanders looking for ways to increase their power base accepted fighters more or less without regard for their background or history. An IDU officer explained:

If fighters from a specific unit cannot work with the unit commander, they can go to another commander. If so, they are 'Absent Without Leave'. The reason why this was accepted by the new commander was because of the need for

manpower. But sometimes these 'AWoLs' were traced and brought back to their own commander. (RUF commander H)

These absorbed fighters were likely to become bodyguards of the commander, often located in a position close to the frontline. Escaping conviction for an offence by moving away from the area is also confirmed by a civilian:

If a rebel seriously misbehaves towards a civilian, the civilian can carry a report to the town commander who will punish the rebel. However, before that happens the rebel might try to escape. Sometimes the rebel gets his punishment, but more often he will escape before that happens. (Civilian in Mandu chiefdom)

However, rebels on the run from their authorities faced a problem of how to travel in RUF territory, without being in possession of the obligatory travel pass. Furthermore, there were few places to go, since crossing the frontline to SLPP government territory could result in summary execution by the government forces or CDF militias.

Few if any recruits were dismissed because of their behaviour or background. Driven by the need for manpower, the RUF depended mainly on its ideological training and monitoring branches to prevent excesses, but the key point is that these means alone were not enough. The very process of monitoring served to set up an unwelcome division within the movement, whereby those with better educational backgrounds ended up monitoring the action, and the less educated were assigned to undertake it. After training, recruits were drafted into the various corps that made up the movement's fighting strength: those able to read and write were likely to end up with one of the intelligence branches, while illiterate cadres were more likely to become fighters. Effectiveness in fighting then led to promotion – so the commanders, who eventually ran the movement, being favoured by Sankoh as more loyal, were those most willing to take risks, including either committing or turning a blind eye to abuses. At this point the movement's ideal – probably fully internalised only by those who could read and write – proved insufficient to regulate practices, and a decline into exuberant, but non-strategic, use of violence accelerated.

Most of the literate people end up with the intelligence units, because here you have to be able to write reports. The illiterate end up fighting in the war front. (RUF commander H)

Some of the ex-intelligence personnel explicitly link reasons for the atrocities with the fact that so many of the RUF fighters were illiterate:

It was because of the RUF's constant need for manpower that they started to take these illiterate people. These misbehaved straight from the beginning. (RUF commander C)

This is also a common explanation among civilians, although being an 'illiterate person' does not necessarily in these accounts have the narrow meaning of not being able to read and write. In many cases, illiteracy refers also to a lack of responsibility, and being unable to foresee the implications of certain actions. Many of the fighters were simply too immature for the tasks that the movement imposed upon them.

Native and Non-Native Rebels

Yet another feature of the RUF's mode of operation and organisation contributed to the likelihood that combatants would commit atrocities. New recruits were taken to the various training bases and, after completing their training, often assigned to an area away from where they lived at the moment of conscription, since recruitment or abduction often took place in areas where the RUF was not in full control. In addition, it was probably a deliberate strategy of the RUF to break kinship and other local ties, so catalysing the socialisation process and making the possibility of flight by a conscript in the early days as hard as possible. Many attempting to flee would simply lose their way in the forest (for an account of the privations of one who did make it, see Peters and Richards 1998a). However, the deployment of RUF fighters in areas where they lacked local family or ethnic ties seems to have increased the risk of their behaving harshly towards local civilians. Furthermore, civilians in areas which changed hands several times were more likely to experience harassment and atrocities, since the competing fighting factions considered civilians in newly captured areas as potential collaborators or supporters of the enemy:

Those rebels who came from this area were moved to another area, to different locations, and here rebels from different areas were based. Every day there was harassment going on; the rebels forced us to harvest and carry our produce to the Kailahun area. (Civilian in Mandu chiefdom)

This village is on a junction of roads, so different groups of rebels passed here. These rebels of other places can force us to carry loads for them or do some work for them. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

There can be a problem when the boys from the war front come to the rear, because they do not have a connection with the civilians in the rear. So they can start to harass them, taking their food. But if you do bad as a soldier here [at the rear], you are sent to the war front. (RUF commander I)

It is highly unlikely that all RUF fighters were involved in frequent atrocities and killings. This becomes evident from, for instance, the total number of casualties in the conflict. Although direct casualties in a war are extremely difficult to determine, a study by Bijleveld and Hoex (2008a) suggests that the most conservative number in the Sierra Leonean conflict

should be put at around 26,000[20] (the number of people estimated to have lost their lives as an indirect result of the war is put at around half a million). According to NCDDR (2004), 72,490 combatants demobilised in total, of whom 24,352 were RUF fighters. Even if one assumes that all the killings were done by the RUF, and none by the SLA, AFRC, CDF, ULIMO, ECOMOG, and EO forces, RUF fighters would have each killed one person (civilians and combatants) in the decade-long conflict (or one and a half persons if we use 34,000 as the number of direct casualties).

But there is good reason to suspect that among the nearly 25,000 RUF combatants who passed through DDR, many were not actual fighters, but so called camp followers: RUF civilians, family, friends, and others. It is probably closer to reality if we take 8,000–9,000 as the average number of RUF forces engaged during the 11 years of the war, for a movement that had an estimated 3,000–5,000 fighters in 1996 (Richards et al. 1997) and 20,000 plus fighters at demobilisation in 2001. This would triple the number of people killed by each fighter, again assuming that all direct casualties in the war were the responsibility of the RUF. To this we have to add other atrocities committed by RUF fighters. For instance, it is estimated that 2,000–3,000 people suffered amputation at the hands of both RUF and AFRC forces, of whom more than half are estimated to have died from their wounds (Gberie 2005: 199). Some notorious fighters accounted for a sizeable proportion of the killing, taking part in massacres responsible for the deaths or mutilations of tens or even hundreds, pushing the average for the rest down further. The overall conclusion must be that many fighters had little or no direct involvement in actual killing, and that fewer still engaged in signature atrocities such as the amputations for which the movement became internationally infamous.

Another indication that RUF fighters were involved in committing atrocities is that a good number of ex-fighters, based during the war in a specific area, decided to settle locally after the war. With some there is the chance that this is because they misbehaved in a different place, but their reputation in the current location must be more satisfactory, since if they had behaved badly civilians and local authorities could make life very hard for them in a post-war setting, or even explore taking revenge. An ex-G5 commander describes why he has settled in his duty station:

It is because of my behaviour during the war, which was correct and with respect for the civilians, that I have no fear to live here after the war. People know me

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[20] In a more elaborate paper Bijleveld and Hoex (2008b) put the number of direct casualties between 26,000 and 34,000, based on a wider variety of sources such as the TRC reports and reports provided by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

and know what I did during the war, but they treat me nicely because I treated them nicely during the war. (RUF commander I)

On the other hand, being native to the area of deployment did not necessarily guarantee correct behaviour, as the following civilian account makes clear:

Eighty-five percent of the destruction in Makeni was done by the Makeni youths themselves, who in the majority joined voluntarily. These Junta II [boys] were more wicked than the original rebels. (Civilian in Bombali Shebora chiefdom)

Here we see another factor at work, already noted: that the RUF was used as cover to settle local scores, or as a cover for dastardly acts committed with impunity. In the following, rather revealing statement of another civilian, it is clear that it was not only the armed factions that made use of this 'RUF environment':

It was not only the rebels that thieved. We, the civilians, also stole during and after attacks. Who knew where the farmers hid their rice? Only the other farmers knew the hiding places. It was not the Burkinabes or the Liberians who destroyed our country, we did it. (Civilian in Bombali Shebora chiefdom)

Unpunished Ruthlessness

RUF laws in bush camps were strict – some interviewees state that even the smoking of cigarettes was not allowed at one stage – and this some-times seemed too much for those who joined the movement without complete conviction in its proclaimed agenda. Whenever Foday Sankoh was not around,[21] and more particularly when these fighters were at the war front, they frequently engaged in practices forbidden in the bush camps:

Well, for the boys that can go at the frontline, if they kill innocent people, when the commander come in [sic] he has to bring in his report, so if you are caught, and you killed a civilian, or burned them up in a house, you will be killed. But some of those boys, when they have done these acts, they will not go back in the combat camp. They will prefer to stay at the frontline just fighting. Of course, they know that when they will be judged, and be killed . . . so they will never turn back to the rear. They are always at the front fighting. (Female clerk, BBC World Service radio interview by Tom Porteous, 1998, transcribed in Richards 2005a)

Some who did bad continued to stay in the frontline. Normally, after 72 hours the people who are laying in an ambush are replaced by the next shift. But some did not want to go back to the base so they said: 'lef mi bo, a go te iya' [leave me alone, friend, I will remain here]. So they never came back. Only if you were

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[21] Abdullah also recognises the importance of the leader staying with his fighters by starting his article on the origins of the RUF (Abdullah 1997: 45) with a quote from Museveni: 'With my presence in the camp, however, we were able to suppress most of their [the rank and file] negative tendencies and attitudes.'

able to capture a large amount of weapons or goods the commanders in the base will forgive you. They will not punish you but will still talk to you [to warn you]. (RUF signals officer B)

So the operational system of the RUF resulted in some of its most ruthless fighters remaining for longer periods at the frontline, where supervision was more difficult. This could certainly account for major differences between RUF accounts of the movement, and insistence by non-RUF commentators that the reality was anarchic violence. But informants were insistent that these 'wicked fighters' at the frontline never completely broke away from the movement to create their own splinter factions. How welcome they were back in their base camp might have depended on who controlled the camp in question. Some of the forward and more vulnerable camps (such as Malal Hills, Kangari Hills and Camp For-for [4–4) may have had more use for 'wicked fighters' in times of great, per- haps referring to the distance (in miles) between the camp and Freetown] difficulty (for example, when under threat from Executive Outcomes air raids or CDF attacks). This might then account for the perception among civilians in the major centres of population that the RUF was a move- ment totally out of control. But fighters insist that control among the platoons going on a mission was strong and that potential breakaways had nowhere to go:

All platoons, however, always return to the base, even if they did something wrong. Up to 1998 I never heard of small groups of RUF fighters just roaming around. There was a strict control on this. But from 1997 when we joined the AFRC all things became freer [less controlled]. (RUF commander E)

While on the one hand the RUF system promoted ruthless but effective fighters, on the other hand it had a range of systems in place to encourage public endorsement of fighters' behaviour. For example:

Promotions were given on the basis of achievement in the war front. The system might be wrong in the way that ends were more important than the means, but if you were going against the code of conduct you will be punished. During the attack on Tongola [Tongo], I was given a camera by Foday Sankoh to photograph the doings of the fighters.[22] (RUF commander C)

And while promotions of fighters and commanders were based on their success at the war front, promotions of intelligence personnel might be linked to the number of cases they brought up of fighters and com- manders committing atrocities or refusing to send looted items to head- quarters.

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[22] As unlikely as this may sound, Foday Sankoh had his own little photographic shop in Segbwema, Kenema district, prior to the war.

Meritocracy and Age

The RUF claimed to be fighting against the partiality of a patrimonial system in Sierra Leone which had failed many of the movement's recruits. Sankoh complained that in Sierra Leone 'those who had jobs had no qualifications and those with qualifications had no jobs' (Richards 2005b). The implication is that the movement favoured meritocracy, not patronage. The one area in which the RUF was clearly able to introduce a system based on meritocratic principles – likely to have some attraction to those with limited chances to rise up the patrimonial ladder of preference – was success in frontline or ambush missions. The easiest way for fighters in the RUF to get promoted was by results achieved in combat. It was a two-edged sword, since it rewarded success and not the means of achieving it. Clearly, this system was fundamentally flawed as an incentive structure, since it encouraged recklessness and not commitment to the movement's principles. A fighter explains the RUF's system thus:

Your effort is measured by whether or not you are successful in your mission. If you are sent on a food-finding mission and you bring back 20 bags, but harassed civilians, it is still considered better than if you bring back only 10 bags but leave the civilians at peace. (RUF fighter I)

A system in which promotion was based on success in the frontline by whatever means clearly favoured young and reckless combatants. Many will have gambled and paid with their lives. But those who succeeded in taking the greatest risks were rewarded with respect and advancement. No longer was it necessary to have the right contacts, or to be of a respectable age to rise on the social ladder, and RUF cadres began to view the conventional village value structure with even greater disdain. The chance to escape the toils of gerontocracy must have been an attractive feature to young people, and the movement advanced the interests of the very young at a rate that perhaps even Sankoh himself could not fully control. Any analysis of the RUF must take into account this element of age. Although difficult to ascertain ages with any accuracy, it seems likely that at least two-thirds of the RUF membership was under the age of 25. This is the impression gained from unpublished film footage – shot by International Alert negotiator, Addai-Seboh – of the crowd addressed by Foday Sankoh in 1995 upon the release of the international hostages.[23] Many explain the atrocities committed by RUF fighters as a product of extreme youthfulness, in a movement lacking sufficient elders to offer wise counsel based on experience. A fighter from the opposing CDF certainly saw his enemy in these terms:

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[23] Humphreys and Weinstein (2004: 20) state that: '42 percent of RUF combatants described themselves as students – this fits with the younger age profile of RUF fighters'.

The atrocities of the RUF took place because they had these very young commanders. Like this guy 'Peleto', he was a minister among the RUF, but he was neither responsible nor mature. If there was any maturity in the RUF, the war would not have taken so long or would have created so much destruction. You are not a mature person if someone tells you the truth and you know it is the truth but still you do another thing. (CDF commander)

Even some former RUF cadres take this line:

You know, Issa [Sesay] was immature. . . . If you are mature you have a certain way of solving problems in a responsible way and you have a certain way of talking to people. And the man was not educated. (RUF commander E)

This last comment also certainly reflects a feeling among several ex-commanders that Issa 'sold out' the movement when he became the overall commander at the end of the war.

Children and youth made good and loyal combatants, not least because they were able to adapt more easily to the world of the RUF: the bush camps. The ultra-young abductees were incompletely socialised by the surrounding society, and so presented the RUF with something more akin to a blank slate in terms of ideology and community values. The older, but still youthful conscripts sometimes found it harder to adapt to the bush life of the RUF. But many were already familiar with living in environments such as rural mining or lumber camps, where traditional authorities were distant, and youthful peers their main reference group. According to informants, loyalty was also forthcoming because the RUF had an agenda that was relevant to young people, including – most notably – its attempts (and promises) to provide jobs and free education. And because the RUF was a military meritocracy it offered young and marginalised people perhaps their only chance to become 'someone in life'. Traditional gerontocratic and patriarchal principles were despised:[24]

The specific plan of the RUF was to kill the old generation and bring up a whole new generation of young people under the doctrine of the RUF. Everybody above a certain age, from 40 and above, seemed [a] suspect, and was among the prime targets of RUF actions. The old generation was held responsible for the bad situation of Sierra Leone before the war. The old generation was politically corrupt, or so the RUF believed. Presently, the youths are taken more seriously and we, the older generation, have to share the power with them. If not, another group of rebels will stand up. (Civilian in Lower Bambara chiefdom)

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[24] So the previous statement of the commander who was abducted, but then judged the RUF agenda relevant to his own situation, is probably not a unique case. Humphreys and Weinstein (2004: 25) find that: '87 percent of RUF combatants reported being abducted into the faction and only 9 percent suggest that they joined because they supported the group's political goals'. But, even so, 'Combatants from the RUF saw themselves fighting corruption, expressing dissatisfaction with the government, and seeking an end to autocratic rule. CDF fighters, on the other hand, reported fighting to defend their communities and to bring peace to Sierra Leone' (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 26).

During the war the young people did not have any respect for the elders. The moment they hold a gun they do not have respect any more. But fortunately this has changed again. This change was because of the effort by the [Kabbah] government and us. (Village elders in Mandu chiefdom)

Liberated Areas and Frontlines

I have already commented that the level of atrocities committed by RUF fighters fluctuated over time. It also varied according to location. I shall show, in relation to food production, that the ability of the RUF to monitor the behaviour of its fighters and commanders – and prevent harassment of civilians – improved the further one moved away from the frontlines and into the RUF's 'liberated areas'. Deep inside RUF territory civilians were considerably less harassed, not least because many considered themselves supporters of the movement. A civilian explains:

I went to Koindu in 1994 and stayed there up to Lomé [peace accord, 1999]. There the G5 instructed us to organise ourselves in groups so that we could work on a rotational basis on our own private farms. And some of the work on your farm was on an individual basis. Then there was one day in the week that we had to work on the government farm. The harvest was for the commander. So the other six days were for yourself, and we did not have to pay taxes. Sometimes it was impossible to farm because of the kamajoi threat. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

One day of labour for the RUF plus the absence of any other taxes seems a reasonable demand of the de facto government, in particular in relation to its attempts to provide free education and medical care, as indicated by several interviewees. Another civilian confirms the allocation of labour to peasant and regime:

During the war we had individual farms and rebel farms. We had to work on the rebel farms about five times a month. The seed rice was provided by the fighters during the war. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Other accounts speak about taxes levied, or a small amount of interest levied on seed rice (borrowing one bushel of rice, while returning 1.5 bushels). Another civilian offered this comment on obligatory farm work for the RUF:

The rebels had their own farm, about four miles away. They took people from here to work there, after informing the town commander. They did not provide any food for work. The RUF farm was divided by portions and every village in the surrounding area was responsible for one portion. You had to go there once a week. If there was a lot of work to do, around harvesting time, all the people will go, but if there was not too much work, the rebels would select the people. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

There is little doubt that the RUF sometimes appropriated the food of civilians in its territory to feed fighters and that it forced civilians to work on 'government farms', but the previous accounts do not suggest any extreme harassment or very strong system of exploitation, or at least not to the levels sometimes implied by commentators who have argued that RUF food production equalled civilian slave labour (Abdullah and Muana 1997: 188). For instance, the following description provided by a civilian who first lived in Koindu and later moved to Pendembu pictures a relatively benign system in which labour contributions to the government were matched by educational and medical benefits:

In Koindu the movement of people was restricted by passes, but in Pendembu it was not restricted. . . . We worked two times a week at the government [RUF] farm in Pendembu, and sometimes received food for work. Here in Pendembu there were free medicines, but not too much. There was also free primary education. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

The purpose of this section, however, is not to elaborate upon the food production system in place in the RUF territories, but to explain the harassment of civilians that took place. The following accounts show that however well organised the production of food in the 'liberated areas' might have been, things did not turn out well for civilians nearer to the frontline:

During the wartime we worked on our farms but the rebels could come any time to take our produce. So we hid it inside drums which we covered with leaves in the thick bush. And when we worked on their farms, they never gave us food. They got the seed rice for the community farms from our own farms. The work for them was not on fixed days but just randomly. If you refused they will beat you. (Civilian in Mandu chiefdom)

Sometimes the RUF tortured us to make us confess where we hid the food. (Civilian in Mandu chiefdom)

Both civilians quoted here come from a village close to the actual war front and more specifically one that was under the control of a commander called 'Manawa' during the last years of the war, who had a particular bad record. Close to the war front, in contrast to the more secured main jungle bases, farming by fighters, let alone by civilians, was limited, as the following fighter explains:

The [farming] system worked at its best from '94 and onwards. We also farmed around the jungle bases [during the jungle phase]. The criterion to start farming was security: if it was too close to the war front, there was no farming. (RUF commander J)

Frontline bases in the RUF depended heavily on food-finding missions and ambushes, executed by civilians under RUF control or by fighters,

where ambushes were involved. As we have seen before, small-scale missions were an ideal setting for those fighters or commanders who did not want to live by the RUF's rules.

More generally, the proximity of the war front – with its increased threat and tension, and higher fighter-to-civilian ratio – made confrontations, misunderstandings, panics, and excesses much more likely to happen than deeper inside the more stable RUF territory. Another civilian from the same small village close to the frontline explains:

Some people stayed here during the war. Some of the rebels were from this place. We made farms for them and we had our own farms that time. But the rebels could come and steal the produce from us. On average there were about 30 rebels in this village at any given time. (Civilian in Mandu chiefdom)

This number of fighters in a village of about 150 people (about 20 houses) was indeed a high concentration, and clearly this fact must have dominated the village's life at that time.

In short, its ideology and rules and regulations notwithstanding, the RUF operated, in practice, along two different lines. The first was in the 'liberated' and stable areas, where food production was relatively well organised with elements under the control of the G5. Some features, such as RUF seed banks operating with no or limited interest, community farms, and labour groups all reflected or coincided with RUF ideology:

The life in the combat zone was different from the life in the rear. In the rear nobody was forced to work on private farms of the fighters or carry loads for a private person; everything was for the betterment of the movement. But the work on the community farm or the carrying of loads for the movement was obligatory, that is you are forced to do it. (RUF commander M)

But closer to the front, this system of food production was not functional, and whenever frontline positions did not receive food support from the rear, some of the smaller bases were left to find their own food:

In Kailahun, behind the Moa [river], there were no food-finding missions, because the people were producing it themselves. But in the frontlines, food-finding missions were necessary. (RUF commander H)

Despite attempts of the leadership to deal with this issue, and provide the frontline bases with food, it was clear that this did not always happen, or not to a sufficient degree:

During the war there was farming in the safe areas. There were community farms in Kailahun and Pujehun. Foday Sankoh organised the civilian elders to involve civilians in farming, so that they could feed the frontline. It was both combatants and civilians who worked on these farms. (RUF commander K)

Here, the RUF ran into similar constraints as those experienced by the CDF; while at the beginning civilians were forthcoming in contributing

food to the CDF, later on – with rising numbers of fighters and the production of sufficient food even to sustain the farmer and his/her family becoming ever more difficult in a chaotic environment – the capacity and willingness of civilians to provide food for the CDF eroded. Fighters from the RUF, who considered themselves freedom fighters for the people, and CDF fighters, who considered themselves the protectors of the civilians, both felt that, due to their sacrifices, they were entitled to civilian support in the form of food. But civilians on both sides were increasingly reluctant to fund a militia that increasingly seemed self-serving, and to increase its numbers without any end to the conflict in sight.

In conclusion, we can see a clear distinction between the way the 'liberated areas' were organised and the extent to which systems functioned to prevent the harassment of civilians in these cases, and the limited way in which these systems worked in areas closer to the frontline.

Deep inside RUF territory, civilians had more opportunities and time to build relationships with the commanders and fighters present. Relationships with commanders – having a person of authority who could protect you and speak on your behalf – were a crucial factor in preventing harassment. Therefore civilians in the RUF territory tried to establish good relations with the local commander, often by helping him (or her) on his farm. This could be beneficial to them in several ways:

It was because the civilians in the RUF territory were given salt and tobacco by the commanders under whose charge they were, that they helped the commander on the farm. So that was on a voluntary basis; only the work on the community farm was compulsory, with a minimum of one day a week. (RUF commander C)

The CO [Commanding Officer] of B. really liked this place because he was getting food from here, so he prevented any harm to the village. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

The people [in Makeni] were happy to give it [rice] to the RUF because they knew that Issa [Sesay] was a Temne and that there would be no burning [of houses] taking place. (RUF fighter J)

As with following the rules, whether this worked varied from commander to commander, or from fighter to fighter. Some fighters behaved well, others did not. Some commanders protected civilians against harassment by fighters, others did not:

During the wartime we made our own farms but the rebels sometimes came and harvested. We then complained to the commander, but he will only advise [talk to, not punish] his boys, so they still could come to harass you. Therefore we had to hide the rice in drums in the bush. But there were different commanders who behaved differently. Some really talked for the civilians and did not accept any maltreatment of civilians by their fighters. If they still did it, they were punished. (Civilian in Upper Bambara chiefdom)

Terror as Performance: How the RUF Prepared for Battle

Terror committed by armed factions is seldom just violence for the sake of it, but can have many functions. War and terror are also matters of performance where people *make* power by using violence and terror as expressive resources (Richards 1996; 2005b). Performance is a cost-effective way for a guerrilla movement to compensate for its lack of weapons and manpower. Illustrative examples were, for instance, the attacks on important towns such as Bo and Kenema, where RUF fighters carried painted wooden guns. CDF fighters tell the difference between RUF and AFRC fighters by the number of bullets they fire during an attack: renegade soldiers shoot one at a time, but RUF fighters shoot heavily, not because they have so many bullets, but to frighten the enemy and give them the impression that there are many rebels taking part in the attack. That this fierce reputation also could work to the RUF's disadvantage is explained by the following comment of a town chief:

The problem with the RUF was that they felt that they should be fierce, otherwise people would not join them. That is why they felt they were legitimised to use force. But people will join you when they are convinced about the right cause of your fight; look at the Kamajors, for example.

Acts of purported cannibalism were highly effective in frightening local populations and the enemy. But whether such acts are in fact real is a complex issue. Dressing up in women's clothes, wearing wigs or bras, or not wearing any clothes at all (cf. a group of Liberian fighters known as the 'butt naked brigade', because of their preferred lack of any battledress whatsoever) are all examples of wonder- or fear-inducing performance. To what extent this expresses a genuine belief in mystical powers, as Ellis (1999) argues, is debated elsewhere (cf. Hoffman 2005; Richards 2000). Clearly, many CDF fighters seemed to be completely convinced by the magical powers obtained through initiation. But the following three statements by ex-RUF cadres suggest their movement was made of more sceptical metal:

You know, the RUF already used magic in 1991. But then we decided to abandon it the same year. You know why? Because we had too many casualties in the front-line. So we called upon these 'kamos' [Islamic ritual specialists], who so-called initiated us, to get this bulletproof, to put their best protection on themselves. After that we shot [at] them. All but two of them died. So we abandoned it. We are mathematicians, we need to have proof. (RUF commander C)

It was by the end of '93 that he [Foday Sankoh] started to teach us more about the guerrilla tactics. The hit and run operations. He taught us how you could scare the enemy, even if you did not have a weapon. He also said that we should dress up in a fearful way so to intimidate the enemy. You know, we were not fighting with any special powers or magic. We were realistic. We even learned

how to spit fire with kerosene, to scare and intimidate people when it was dark. (RUF signals officer B)

We also had our native protection [to boost our morale when going into battle], given by a particular person, the herbalist. . . . But by the time Sankoh was in Zogoda[25] in 1995 he condemned the thing. He condemned all superstition. At that time everything changed. (RUF commander E)

So it may be that the RUF was a 'realistic' force rejecting magic as a way to build confidence among its fighters and to boost the group. Magical protection is obtained though rites, and according to Durkheim (Collins and Makowsky 1993) rites strengthen groups.[26] The following accounts describe RUF rituals to prepare for battle, in which repetitive, dance-like action, assisted by alcohol, takes the group out of itself and on to a different plane:

We start with dressing up [when preparing for the battle]. We put out our trousers in our boots, put on a red T-shirt and put red pieces of cloth around the head. Some of us use charcoal to blacken their face. The whole night before the attack we are singing and dancing and drinking. We use our own voice, not an amplifier set. . . . [We sing songs] Like G.I. Morale. [Interviewee sings the song]. We also sing the RUF anthem. That one is the last one that we sing before we go to the battlefront. The dancing we do is like parading, but not like the official parade. We dance outside. . . . [As far as the drinking goes] The Pega-pack[27] is on the table. While you are dancing you can just take it. There is also poyo and omole. That one, the people in the movement [the RUF] make it themselves with water, sugar and yeast. We mix it and then let it stand for 21 days. We boil it in a big drum that is connected to another drum through a pipe. . . . Some people can smoke marihuana. But you have to do it secretly because if they see you they will arrest you. Alcohol is not a problem however, also not if you are about to go to the battlefront. So you move in the night time. At that time the morale is very high.

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[25] According to this former commander, 'Zogoda' means (in Krio) 'zo go dai' – any Zo (traditional healer) who enters the camp, will die.

[26] Rites to obtain magical power are not the only rites available to boost confidence and strengthen the group. Durkheim proposes 'effervescence', to account for group-induced passions. He defines this as 'the stimulating and invigorating effect on society' apparent in an 'assembly that becomes worked up', in which 'we become capable of feelings and conduct of which we are incapable when left to our individual resources' (Durkheim 1995 [1912]: 211–12), adding that 'effervescence' is as liable to generate 'bloody terror' as 'selfless heroism' (ibid.: 218). Durkheim's point is that collective effervescence entrains emotions and focuses them on common ends. This seems to be within the capacity of all humans, and precedes the meanings, or collective representations, it later sustains. In the specific case of what Durkheim terms the piacular rite – rites that punish a group to placate the spirit of a departed person – Durkheim suggests that the content of belief is purely epiphenomenal. Effervescence and emotional focusing can be generated through acting together, and acting repeatedly. The magic is, as it were, merely an add-on that helps explain the effect. Not all rites need magic or God. Sometimes it is enough to behave in a deliberate, coordinated, repetitive manner.

[27] Pega-pack is the (brand) name for small quantities (20cc or 30cc) of liquor purveyed in a plastic bag.

The commander comes to you to make promises of promotion, if the mission is successful. He can promise to give some goods or cash. (RUF commander E)

[A]fter the prayers, they have to pick in these boys from the strike force to go at the front there, after the prayer, but when they go, really they are out of control, now, you see . . . because when they go they see these wines, this marihuana . . . so they got out of control, and even at times they won't obey their commanders. (Female clerk, interview by Tom Porteous, *c*.1998, transcription in Richards 2005a)

A rather strange turn of phrase by a civilian who lived under RUF control for most of the war, seems to confirm the previous description:

The rebels just lived like human beings but when they were going to fight they dressed like animals. Then they wore special clothes and shoes to be able to walk in the bush. They used the gunpowder as morale booster [swallowing it], but not much of any other drug. Only marihuana was available most times and the gunpowder [before the battle].

Conclusion

According to Gberie, the violence of the RUF was a product of (1) its composition, (2) its mercenary (that is, Liberian) character, and (3) a culture of impunity, where committing atrocities went unpunished (2005: 147). This chapter has given both internal and external explanations for why the RUF behaved in such a violent way. These explanations, as with much of the material presented in this book, is based on the accounts of those who were part of the movement, and in all likelihood participated in its violence, but also on the observations of those who saw the movement at close quarters. The picture painted is different from Gberie's. It has been argued that the composition of the forces may explain some of the violence, but not because they were 'lumpens, with criminal intentions', as Gberie argues, but because many of the RUF conscripts were marginalised and socially excluded young people with extremely limited chances to make a decent livelihood. Kept at the bottom of a rural clientelistic social order, these young and sometimes humiliated people quickly turned against those who held them in subjection. Everyone not considered a loyal supporter of the RUF became an enemy of a naively populist, and quasi-millenarian social project.

Gberie also claims that 'the RUF's own efforts were essentially a sub-warlord system [to that of Taylor]' (Gberie 2005: 152). Clearly, the RUF was supported by Taylor throughout the conflict – although in varying degrees – and clearly diamonds became more and more important to keep the conflict(s) going and fill the pockets of top leaders on all sides. But the data are strong enough to bring into doubt the idea that the RUF was no more than a proxy army to serve the Liberian warlord-turned-president's political plans.

It also now can be suggested, on the basis of evidence offered in this and the previous chapter, that it is wrong to claim that 'there was simply no mechanism that could hold [the RUF] to account for their crimes' (Gberie 2005: 154). It has been established that the RUF had in place several mechanisms to monitor the behaviour of its cadres and commanders, and to punish those who went against its rules. No more than a handful of top commanders were above the law, and they exercised this freedom only towards the end when discredited commanders broke away from the RUF to prevent punishment or demotion. So the fact that atrocities and violations went unpunished is not the result of the lack of a system to hold fighters back, but of the ineffectiveness of the system the RUF had created. The issue is not the inherent criminality of the RUF but its failure to develop an effective institutional order capable of both motivating and regulating the energies of the marginalised young people it recruited.

6   Cultivating Peace: RUF Ex-Combatants' Involvement in Post-War Agricultural Projects

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have tried to make the case that to better understand the outbreak of the war in Sierra Leone in general, and the emergence of the RUF in particular, it is important not to overlook the rural factor. It was argued that the socio-economic and political situation prevalent in pre-war rural Sierra Leone bred a large group of disaffected young people who provided the RUF with ready recruits. It has been suggested by more than a few ex-RUF fighters and commanders that part of the aim of the movement was to restructure the rural economy, so that its fruits would be enjoyed in a more equal way. That this aim went terribly wrong in many cases, resulting in forced labour practices and high levels of abuse, is probably clear to even the most loyal RUF supporter. But this does not necessarily make the cadres' belief in the need for these reforms less genuine. To really test the durability of their belief in rural transformation – or 'Green Revolution', as one interviewee described it (see Chapter 4) – we should look at the post-war activities of these former fighters. Do they carry their struggle forwards, now that the armed phase of the revolution is over? This question will be examined in this chapter, which looks into several post-war disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) projects, executed by former RUF fighters. But before I start it might be of relevance to explain briefly how I came upon these projects.

At the end of 2001 I paid a one-month visit to Sierra Leone to prepare for a longer period of fieldwork planned for the following years. My initial research plans were to build on the research I had done during the war on demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers in and around Free-town (cf. Peters and Richards 1998a; 1998b), but to move away from the over-researched and media-exposed capital. I decided to go to Kenema, the provincial capital of the east, and close to the former RUF strong-holds of Kailahun, Kenema, and Kono districts. In fact the former RUF headquarters, the Zogoda, was only about 30 kilometres from Kenema, along bush tracks through the Kambui South forest reserve. While talk-ing to and interviewing ex-combatants in Kenema I again became aware

that information about and understanding of the RUF remained very limited – and, in particular, that information based on the accounts of those who had fought and lived with the movement was in short supply. A year later I returned to Kenema with the specific aim of focusing on the war and post-war reintegration experiences of RUF fighters, and used the provincial town as a base for fieldtrips further east. One of my fieldwork locations became the diamond-mining area of Tongo, second in importance to the Kono fields as a centre of alluvial and kimberlite mining. I was hardly oblivious to the relationship between the RUF and diamonds – although, as this book argues, this relationship is more complex than the 'greed-not-grievance' thesis has suggested. Not only were there large numbers of ex-RUF fighters in Tongo (since it was under the control of the RUF up to final disarmament), but it was also the site of a major project by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ),[1] which was active as an implementing partner for the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR). NCDDR was in charge of the demobilisation and reintegration process for more than 70,000 combatants in Sierra Leone (NCDDR 2004). At the UNAMSIL (UN military mission) office in Kenema I was advised to make contact with the informal spokesman of the ex-combatants, a former RUF colonel.

During my first visit to Tongo the GTZ staff explained their programme and the ex-combatants' spokesman introduced me to the other ex-combatants and the skills they were learning. He himself had chosen agriculture, which was offered by GTZ as a nine-month training course. During several long conversations he explained the central role agriculture played in the RUF. Did the RUF really have a special affinity for agriculture, I wondered, and, if so, why did the RUF fight so fiercely to control diamond fields such as Tongo? Was this just a personal enthusiasm on the part of one former RUF colonel?

Of the thirty-six persons who attended the agricultural classes of the GTZ project seventeen were civilians. The remaining nineteen were ex-combatants of whom thirteen were ex-RUF and six ex-CDF. The total number of ex-combatants in the centre was fifty-seven (eighteen ex-RUF and thirty-nine ex-CDF). The numbers were small, but they showed a clear trend: 72 percent of RUF ex-combatants opted for agriculture, against 15 percent of the CDF ex-combatants. According to standard accounts, the RUF were urbanised 'lumpens' or footloose diamond-mining tributors, while CDF fighters were the loyalist village boys, still rooted in the rural economy. In other words, the statistics contradicted what I expected to find. Was it a reflection of the colonel's charisma, or

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[1] GTZ is an international cooperation enterprise, federally owned by the German government.

did it reflect a style of thinking rooted in a structure of command and belief still in place?

A few weeks later I conducted an interview with an ex-RUF fighter (who, as a matter of fact, had chosen building construction as part of his DDR-supported training) on the veranda of my house in Kenema. Suddenly he pointed to a person who was passing on the street. 'This', he said, 'is a high-ranking RUF colonel. I will try to introduce him to you.' We were introduced, and agreed to meet again at his location, in the nearby small town of Blama. A few days later I visited him. Although not originating from the area, he had settled in Blama, on the road to Bo, after the war, together with a few former comrades. He and his group of friends ran a cooperative agricultural project as a local implementing partner (IP) for NCDDR.

Some time later my PhD supervisor advised me to spend some time in the northern part of the country. He suggested Magburaka; I might be interested to visit a former brigade commander of the RUF, a man who had been very young when he joined the RUF. Still young, the veteran was residing at Robol Junction, near Magburaka, and had founded and implemented a DDR-funded project. Again, this turned out to be a large cooperative farm.

I also spent some days in the nearby town of Makeni, where the ex-commander based in Blama (who had travelled with me to Makeni, to help me make contact with other RUF ex-combatants) introduced me to some more of his former comrades. Again, many of these RUF ex-combatants had joined and helped to run cooperative agricultural projects. A pattern seemed apparent.

This chapter follows five communal agricultural projects spearheaded by former RUF combatants. Although the actual practices are for the most part standard for community-based agricultural development, a subject with a long and dubious history in Sierra Leone, the ex-combatants continue to insist that their involvement is a prolongation of the RUF's agenda on rural development. Doubters are likely to argue that this is self-justificatory opportunism. Opportunist rhetoric during the war is followed (so they will argue) by opportunist practice afterwards. But some may sense some ring of sincerity in these claims.

The Projects

In this section I describe in more detail some of the agricultural projects, implemented as part of the reintegration support under the DDR programme. First, I provide some necessary background information about the DDR programme in Sierra Leone.

DDR has a long history in Sierra Leone. In June 1993 the NPRC announced that it would demobilise the 1,000 or so boys under the age

of fifteen who were reported to have enlisted (Gberie 2005: 77). Nevertheless, it was only in mid-1994 that UNICEF and the Catholic Mission were allowed to disarm, demobilise, and reintegrate these child soldiers. The first DDR programme to include all warring factions and fighters was designed as part of the 1996 Abidjan peace accord. Few demobilised, however, unsure about whether or not the peace would hold. On a more practical level, most combatants possessed very limited skills on which to base a peacetime livelihood and thus preferred the security of life in the army, according to Bob Kandeh and John Pemagbi (quoted in Gberie 2005: 104), commissioned to provide a profile report of the army. Therefore it was of little surprise that of those who did demobilise, many reenlisted again when fighting recommenced in early 1997. While DDR opportunities remained open during subsequent years, virtually no combatants took them up, with the exception of nearly 3,000 mainly military junta soldiers who disarmed after the overthrow of their 'government' in March 1998. The 1999 Lomé peace accord stipulated a new commitment to disarmament and demobilisation. But again demobilisation was slow (Peters 2007a). In the period between the signing of the Lomé accord and the hostage-taking crisis and subsequent reimprisonment of Foday Sankoh in May 2000, a total number of between 17,000 and 19,000 ex-combatants disarmed (Assessment Report 2000), although UNAMSIL announced that it had disarmed more than 24,000 fighters. Perhaps more important, less than 11,000 weapons had been turned in (Gberie 2005: 165).

The following year, between May 2000 and May 2001, the process was clearly in a stalemate; only 2,628 fighters disarmed. It was not until after the signing of the last cease-fire in the Abuja accords of 10 November 2000 that the DDR process finally got underway, and the bulk of the fighters disarmed. Between May 2001 and January 2002 a total of 42,551 fighters disarmed and demobilised under the DDR programme (Richards et al. 2004b), making the total number of disarmed combatants 72,390, with 42,000 weapons and 1.2 million rounds of ammunition handed in.

The final numbers, broken down into factions, were as follows:

	NCDDR Totals	
	Frequency	Percent
SLA/AFRC	8,427	11.6
RUF	24,352	33.6
CDF	37,377	51.6
Others	2,234	3.1
Total	**72,390**	**99.9**

Source: NCDDR (2004)

After disarmament and demobilisation, ex-combatants were entitled to reintegration support, where appropriate offered by NCDDR's IPs, which could be existing (or newly created) training centres,[2] local NGOs, or international NGOs. In short, ex-combatants could choose one of the following options: (1) reenlist in the new Sierra Leone Army (an option only open to a limited number of ex-combatants); (2) go back to school and continue their education (and have their school fees paid); (3) learn a trade (such as carpentry, tailoring, or mechanics) as part of a six- or nine-month vocational training package; (4) go for the – often on-off – 'farming' option, receiving agricultural inputs and implements; or (5) participate in public works, such as road-clearing projects, and receive 'food for work'.[3]

Of these options learning a trade proved to be the most popular; more than 50 percent of the ex-combatants opted for this package. The 'going back to school' option was chosen by 20 percent, and 15 percent preferred the 'agricultural' package (NCDDR 2004).

It is clear that the preferences of the ex-combatants do not reflect the occupational division in Sierra Leone: 70 percent of the population depends on semi-subsistence farming in Sierra Leone, while only 15 percent preferred a farming-related reintegration package. A considerable percentage of those who opted for agriculture went for the on-off package (in particular older ex-CDF fighters who had access to farming land in their villages). Group-organised agricultural projects may have been started and/or implemented relatively more by those who were interested in farming, but did not have strong individual land claims (for example, many of the ex-RUF combatants). Let us now look at the five projects.

GTZ Tongo

The GTZ agricultural project in Tongo is a remarkable one. As mentioned, the relatively high number of ex-RUF combatants taking agricultural training in Tongo (72 percent of the RUF ex-combatants against 15 percent of the CDF ex-combatants) was one of my first indications that the involvement of ex-RUF combatants 'made a point'. These former rebels announced a commitment to agriculture, right in the middle of an activity (diamond mining) which was supposedly the main motivation for the RUF criminal conspiracy (Smillie et al. 2000).

A closer look at the specific location of the project made the commitment of the participants even more apparent. First, the location. Using

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[2] Training centres could range between vocational skills centres with hundreds of ex-fighters to small-scale craftman's workshops, which could only provide training for a handful of ex-combatants.

[3] For a detailed discussion of the DDR programme in Sierra Leone, see Peters 2007a.

land in Tongo Fields for agriculture is like buying land in the centre of
Frankfurt or London to start a dairy farm. Tongo is synonymous with dia-
monds, and every single plot of land has been dug over, time and again.
The landscape is as full of craters as the moon. It is hard for a stranger to
imagine what 'diamond fever' can do: houses are sometimes dug up and
have collapsed as a result of untamed mining activities. Roads have been
undermined. Farms and longstanding tree-crop plantations can be des-
troyed overnight – despite the distraught owner's prayers or pleas – once
a single stone comes to light. If there is something like a collective mind
(Douglas 1987) the collective mind in Tongo is, without a doubt, focused
on diamonds. To start an agricultural project and to find a landowner[4]
in Tongo who is willing to provide land for such a project requires strong
determination and a mindset structured in ways other than the one that
dominates locally.

Second, farming in such a location as the Tongo diamond fields is not
without major difficulties related to fertility and soil quality. Farming in
Sierra Leone is mainly of a slash-and-burn character with varying years
of fallow (generally between two and eight years). As with many tropical
soils only the top soil is fertile. Farming in swamps also is practised in
most areas, often as a supplement to upland slash-and-burn, but needs
careful levelling of the soil to prevent too much or too little water for rice
seedlings. The piece of land allocated to the ex-combatants of the GTZ
agricultural group had been mined for diamonds several times over. As a
result the fertile top layer was mixed completely with the deeper and less
fertile soils and the whole plot was pock-marked with both pits and piles
(each of several metres depth or height).[5] Before any farming could take
place the whole plot had to be levelled, manually, and then a system of
irrigation channels had to be dug.

The ex-combatant spokesman stated:

The land we are working on is belonging to the Kpalima section in Tongo. It
is called the Cry Water swamp, or nicknamed 'Kaka' [toilet] swamp.[6] Its size
is 1.6 hectares. We are also negotiating to operate the old masanki[7] farm of the
Methodist Mission, seventeen acres in size. In January 2003 we started to prepare
an upland farm but soon we turned wholly to the swamp. There are eighteen

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[4] In this case the land was provided by a town chief, quoted before, who was not in
office before the war. The man is a young chief known by the community for his good
relationship with youths and ex-combatants, and open to their problems and struggles.

[5] Exactly such a landscape is described in RUF's 'Footpaths to Democracy': 'The land has
been despoiled and irresponsible and corrupt mining magnates leave the villagers only
with the gift of pits and craters that breed mosquitoes, malaria, and cholera. Farmlands
are destroyed in the insatiable quest for diamonds and gold' (RUF 1995: 7).

[6] People had used the area around this swamp as an outdoor toilet.

[7] Masanki: improved type of palm for high-yield oil and kernel production. The oil is less
favoured, locally, than the 'red' oil from semi-wild trees. Masanki is a former plantation
on the old railway line close to Freetown.

ex-combatants working on this agricultural project, nine men and seven female ex-combatants who have registered, and two ex-combatants who have not been officially registered as such.

The enormous amount of labour needed for the project during the first year, in which time there could be no yield, meant that the farming group needed some external start-up help:

If we do not receive any assistance in the future this agricultural group will fall apart. The very least we need is two more months of food for work, after that we will have our first harvest. Then we can continue because we have the land for another two years.

The interesting and promising aspect of this agricultural project is the fact that the participants turn (mine-damaged) waste land into agricultural land. In other words, they reclaim land which otherwise will not be put to agricultural use. This offers them an interesting negotiating position with landowners/farmers. Rather than renting land at a high interest or with labour obligations to the landlord, interest and labour obligations can be much lower or none at all. After three or five years of use by the farming gang the landowner will receive the plot of land back, but now in good shape for future agricultural activities.

The RUF influence, besides the enormous dedication it takes to make a farm in this area, and in these conditions, becomes clear in the following statement by the ex-combatant spokesman for the group:

Presently, the real RUF ex-combatants are interested in farming. That will bring a better thing to Sierra Leone. You know, I was a [Bunumbu-trained] teacher by profession before the war but now I am doing this vocation[al] training course on agriculture. I want to set up a poultry [farm]. During the time of the revolution the people who worked on the farms had at least one meal a day. Foday Sankoh stated that agriculture should be the backbone of the country. It is important to start it all at the grassroots level: organise the villages in group formations. Alone you cannot reach [attain] anything, only in a group you can produce.

NADA Blama

In general, demobilised ex-combatants could choose from two options if they were interested in agriculture. One option was to receive an individual entitlement and take this to one's preferred location, most likely the village of one's birth, to start farming again. As mentioned, this option was often chosen by (older) CDF ex-combatants, who were farmers already before the war, had access to land, and wanted to resume. Another possibility was to opt for one of the agricultural training courses/projects executed by NCDDR's implementing partners, such as the GTZ project described above. Both international NGOs and local organisations could register themselves as Implementing Partners (IPs).

An example of the second kind – a local organisation formed to serve as an IP – is the Niawa Agricultural Development Association (NADA). Its history, according to one of the initiators, is as follows.

In January 2002 a group of RUF commanders in the Makeni area disarmed. They all received Le30,000 (approximately US$15) on the spot and a further Le300,000 one week later, as part of the DDR's Transitional Safety Allowance provision. The commanders opted for agriculture right away, rather than choosing the skills training package with monthly allowances over a six-month period. As a result, they were each entitled to a number of agricultural implements to kickstart their activities.[8]

In May 2002 the group met again to discuss the possibilities of setting up an agricultural project to channel their own DDR support and bring benefits to the community. At that time it was a strategy of NCDDR to allow top RUF commanders to apply for DDR funds to implement projects of their own devising.[9] In November 2002 the NADA project was created under the supervision of Augustine Gbao,[10] the RUF's head of security. His family owned land in the south-eastern part of the country around Blama, Small Bo chiefdom, and was prepared to welcome the group.

According to one of the project initiators:

The aim of the project is to bring ex-combatants and community people together. If your behaviour is okay, the community loves you and the community will accept you. . . . All ex-combatants in Small Bo chiefdom can do their training with

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[8] Implements were as follows:
   42 empty bags
   6 bags of rice (clean 50 kg) given at intervals
   1 bag of husk (seed) rice (50 kg)
   1 bag of fertilizer (50 kg, 15–15-15 NPK)
   1 cutlass, 1 big hoe, 1 small hoe, 1 brushing knife, 1 harvesting knife.
   60 cups of groundnut seed.

[9] According to a DDR official in Makeni, 'NCDDR first wanted to target the senior officers in the RUF, as they wanted them to cooperate with DDR. A considerable number of the lower ranks had already disarmed but still many remained under arms because the senior ranks did not give the go-ahead yet. If these senior ranks were enabled to initiate projects, there would be no need for them to return home with empty hands. So there was a general feeling that if for instance [Colonel] Gbao, the general security officer of the RUF, would go back to his own area and leave Makeni, the peace would be really serious. Gbao's return [home] would be a strong signal to the other fighters. So they designed the NADA project in accordance with the DDR standards. But one of the problems was that as a result of the desire to get Gbao back to his place of origin, the NADA project was registered in the north while implemented in the east'.

[10] The *deelambstbericht*, Maart [March] 2004, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands (a document identifying senior RUF personnel with a view to blocking any asylum applications) reads: 'Gbao, Augustine – alias Destiny. He was one of the RUF Vanguards. In 1998 and 1999 he was a Lt. Colonel and from 2000 to 2002 he was a Colonel. He was during this period in charge of security with the RUF and was referred to as Head of Security, Security Commander, Chief of Security and Chief Security Officer of the RUF amongst others' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). Gbao was later indicted and found guilty by the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

NADA after they have been verified [with NCDDR]. They can come to Blama or base themselves in one of the villages while they are undergoing training. Most have family around, so lodging will not be a big problem. Presently there are 57 ex-combatants in the project: 9 of them were former RUF and 48 were former CDF.[11]

The initial duration of the project was six months. Seed rice, maize, groundnuts, and tools were divided among the ex-combatants and the community people. The communities involved donated swampland. Fourteen villages with a total population of about 5,000 people were approached by the project. According to another founder of the project:

To these villages seed rice has been provided. They return the equivalent of the seedlings to us after the harvest so that we are able to continue the project. There is a demonstration site of 20 acres. The family of Augustine Gbao owns this site. He was the son of the owner. But every village is having its own plot. Before a village joins there is a village meeting with the chiefs and elders. If they like it they can register and access an area.

The project did not aim to make profits. The farmers participating in it were obliged to return the same amount of seedlings they had been lent to keep the project going, but without interest. One of the initiators elaborates on this aspect – which is in fact a standard modality for community farming projects in Sierra Leone – and it is here that the RUF influence becomes clearer (in the language):

This agricultural project was chosen because agriculture will bring a lot of development. We should not only import food but we should be self sufficient or exporting. Agriculture is the backbone of our society.

In fact, this rhetoric has a long history in Sierra Leone, but it has been less frequently heard in the last few years, under the influence of neo-liberal reforms. The self-sufficiency/agrarian populist tone of the phrase about 'backbone of society' was quite common from national politicians in the 1960s and 1970s (when the APC under Stevens flirted with a socialist agenda) but is today only rarely voiced in such explicit terms by young people, except those with a RUF background.

Another former RUF commander explained more about the actual farming in this area:

Swamp rice is not labour-intensive. On the other hand, the advantage of upland rice is that you can mix it with vegetables.[12] The swamp however has not been used during the war. Normally, five men can brush half an acre in one day if the

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[11] Blama was and remains a CDF stronghold.

[12] Swamp rice is labour-intensive, but if planted in a well-maintained swamp (that is, one that has been well levelled and provided with good working irrigation and drainage canals) labour is reduced obviously. Upland rice farming is an almost year-round activity (in particular if mixed with cash crops) and the clearing (brushing) of land left fallow for several years is labour-intensive.

area has been used every year, but if it has been abandoned for such a long time five men need two days. We only work with ROK 3.[13] This variety is what we want to spread to get hunger out of Sierra Leone.

ROK 3 is a versatile, medium-duration rice, adaptable to both upland and swamp conditions. It was released about 1971 by Rokupr Rice Research Station, based on pure-line selection work by Gbey Sama Banya. It is by origin a farmer selection from Kailahun, but has, in fact, spread far and wide throughout rural Sierra Leone. The informant is in fact uttering a formulaic statement, probably picked up by movement leaders (like Faya Musa) from the general developmental rhetoric of the 1970s. Building a crusade for farmer empowerment around ROK 3 suggests that the RUF is as out of touch as might be expected from a movement that spent more than ten years fighting in the bush. Humanitarian agencies have long since carried the variety to all areas. Dogged repetition of yesterday's development rhetoric seems only to confirm that the informant is repeating an 'old' belief in the RUF, and not making some opportunistic appeal reflecting current trends.[14]

Our informant continues:

The brushing by the community people is organised by the elders. They use their own tools. At the demonstration site there is food for work, paid from our budget. The harvest will be used to expand the site up to 150 acres. At the community sites the community itself is responsible. For every 5 acres, 3 bushels are provided, which equals 1.5 bags. After the harvesting 3 bushels are returned and the balance is for the community, divided by the committee. However, the communities are not always able to return the full loan straight, so they can do it the next cycle. But we will monitor you to make sure that you plant the seed rice and not eat it.

Again, this has been standard for community-oriented agricultural development practice in Sierra Leone for many years. What is striking about the informant's account hereafter, however, is that it envisages expansion on a regional, indeed national, scale – implying the creation of a national farm-oriented social movement. This is rather specifically in keeping with the RUF's sense of fighting a national struggle, linking all areas.

Small Bo is the first area where we started this project but next year we want to go to Pendembu, setting it up as a cooperation. In the north the people believe in agriculture so there is not too much hunger, but here in the east there is not

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[13] ROK 3 is a rice variety that takes 4 months to mature, or 3 months plus 21 days in the nursery, if used in a swamp.

[14] One might be surprised at how quickly certain trends reach supposedly cut-off areas. In 2000 I interviewed a chief of an offroad village in Liberia, about 250 kilometres away from the capital, Monrovia. Making assumptions about the reason of my visit, he explained to me that many children in his village suffered from 'post-traumatic stress disorder'.

too much interest in it. They have interest in these minerals [diamonds]. That is what we realised during our revolution.

That the lack of interest was not only limited to the 'people of the east' but also present in the ranks of this small group of senior ex-RUF officers was soon to be discovered. The Sierra Leone Special Court indicted 'the chairman', as the former fighters refer to him. After the arrest of Augustine Gbao some irregularities came to the surface. The total cost of the project had been put at Le90 million, according to the project proposal. Le29 million had already been provided by the NCDDR. The first imbursement took place at the start of the project, but according to the other members of the steering committee Gbao treated this money as his own private affair. After his arrest it was found out that no progress reports had been sent to NCDDR. It was then calculated that he must have used half of the money solely for his own purposes. Before the committee could take further actions, the financial manager took the balance of the money and ran away to Freetown. The steering committee could do little else than inform the police and the paramount chief about the matter:

NCDDR advised us to move to the second phase of the project to prove that the project was worth continuing sponsoring. Now the committee members have the right to check the books and discuss on how we should use the money. Now it is a division of labour. After the arrest of Gbao we felt that it would be better to distribute all the items we had in store before people started to claim it, saying that it was government property anyway. The family of Gbao claimed the land back but we already have the first harvest, which is in our storehouse. And we have an agreement to work on the land for several years.

After the arrest of the chairman a new set-up was required. The former secretary-general of the project has now become the new coordinator or chairman. There is a board of eleven executives, four ex-RUF and seven ex-CDF.[15] Every village involved elects four persons to form a local board: the chairman of the local youths, a woman from the 'women's wing' (RUF terminology), an elder, and the chief, who also acts as the chairman. When plans are made by the board of executives these go to the committee boards, after which the plans come back to the executive. Then the final plans are implemented on the village level.

In October 2003 the project was still struggling. One of the executives and original initiators comments on the limited success of the association:

NADA is not really working here in Blama because they treat us as strangers. It is difficult to mobilise labour. That is different in the north of the country where everybody knows us. If no other NGO will support us, we will collect the loans we have given out to the communities – these were signed contracts – and then

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[15] These CDF members were taken in when the project came to Blama.

hold a meeting to decide on the future. Likely F. will go to M. where he had been a commander during the war or to Makeni and I will go to Kono or Pendembu from where I originate, and where we shall continue NADA. We do not want our boys to waste time in the [diamond] pits, [so] let us try to bring a better thing to them.

Striking in this account is the determination – despite the obvious problems encountered – to continue with collective farming as an anti-dote to diamond mining, seen as an unstable or unprofitable source of employment for rural youth in which they 'waste time'. The difficulties encountered by the group are typical for this kind of cooperative venture in Sierra Leonean conditions. Powerful and privileged leaders raise loans for a collective venture, but cheat on the deal, to the bitter frustration of rank-and-file. Further limitations, as referred to by the informant, have to do with the specific organisational set-up of farming in Sierra Leone. Although collective mobilisation of labour is common, the farm itself generally belongs to a household, or even a smaller unit, in which men and women have separate plots of land, and keep their income separate. Collective farming initiatives, as forcibly introduced by the RUF during the war, are likely to fail in peacetime, in particular when headed by 'strangers' (as here, in the aftermath of Gbao's arrest). But the desire to start again in other, more receptive regions, and a focal concern on preventing 'our boys to waste time in the [diamond] pits' seem consistent with what informants in Chapter 4 told us about the simple, populist, agrarian agenda of the RUF.

NADA seems a bit of a shambles. Clearly, the NCDDR had an interest in 'inducing' key RUF commanders to quit their safe haven of Makeni, and it also seems likely that Augustine Gbao jumped at this as a chance to raise capital for his own use. Court proceedings suggest that he can be classed as one of those ambitious battlefront survivors who took over the movement in the aftermath of the collapse of the Abidjan peace. But that financial irregularity and his departure to the jurisdiction of the court has not been followed by a general scramble for crumbs and the entire instant collapse of the scheme seems rather striking evidence that it appealed directly to beliefs the movement had already forged. NADA cannot be dismissed – despite its similarity to many similarly dubious cooperative agricultural development ventures in Sierra Leone – as solely an opportunist post-war flash-in-the-pan.

BANSAL Robol Junction

Where NADA may be rated a failure, even if still showing some evid-ence of real agrarian commitment, the following example can be con-sidered more of a success – or at least during the first few post-war

years. BANSAL, the Bangladesh/Sierra Leone Cooperative Farm, is located in the centre of the country, close to Magburaka. It was established in August 2001. The UN Bangladesh peace-keeping battalion (BAN-BATT) was the initial sponsor[16] and kept up a commitment for several years after disarmament. According to the leader and founder of the project – a former RUF commander in control of the Magburaka area at the time of disarmament – the relationship between him and BANBATT pre-dated actual disarmament:

During the peace process I worked with them [BANBATT] in a smooth way. I accompanied them on their trips so we built up a relationship.[17]

Furthermore, NCDDR and a Department for International Development (DfID)-funded community rehabilitation scheme sponsored 69 ex-combatants who received their agricultural training at BANSAL, and in 2003 thirteen sponsored ex-combatants remained under training.

According to the founder, the original plan was to cultivate about 20 acres. Presently there are 30 acres under cultivation at two different sites: a large plot of rice in boliland (seasonally flooded land underneath the main north-west–south-east escarpment crossing Sierra Leone) and a plot of free-draining upland at Robol Junction (on the Kono–Makeni highway) where the project office is located. On this last plot several different crops have been planted – both annual crops, such as groundnuts and cassava, and long-term crops such as pineapple and mango trees. Two further sites are planned around Makali in Tane chiefdom. The land is leased for a period of 25 years, for Le100,000 (approximately US$50) annually. This was negotiated with the communities, with the assistance of the local paramount chief. Fifteen villages are involved in the project. According to the coordinator:

These villages are convinced of the need for food production. The villagers come by turns and are informed on the spot what to do. If there is an urgent job or a lot of work to do the project manager will write a letter to inform the village chiefs. The workers will receive 'food for work'. . . . A part of the production will be used to put it into a seed bank. This is important because the communities do not have enough seedlings. Every village is told to create sub-community farms to which the seedlings are provided by the project. Later they have to give the seedlings back with a small interest.

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[16] Every UN battalion had a budget to sponsor and support small projects or help in the reconstruction of community structures. For example, many mosques were built with the help of UN battalions (in particular battalions from Bangladesh and Pakistan).

[17] According to Richards et al. (2004b: 43), who also interviewed this ex-commander: 'In the bush with the RUF he [this commander] had already learnt about Professor Younis, micro-credit and the Grameen Bank [in Bangladesh], and the significance of self-help cooperative farms.'

The aim of the project, according to the coordinator, is as follows:

[To] involve ex-combatants and community people in the production of food. This is the immediate need of the people. And because of the farm, they [the sponsors] were also prepared to finance a school and vocational centre. . . . The staff of the project is working on a voluntary basis, living here on the project ground so that we can tackle the problems arising straightaway. It is a grassroots project and not directed from Freetown or above. During the revolution [the war] we also were involved in farming on a voluntary basis.

His prior preoccupation with agriculture during the time of the war becomes clear from the rest of his comments:

During the time of the revolution I went to Guinea and the Ivory Coast and there I studied agriculture for about two years. That was during the time of the '96 peace accord. The Green Revolution will always be a central line or theme in my life. Agriculture is considered as a starting up and fallback capital. . . . Practical knowledge is so important. The community people do have this knowledge but they do not modernise. Furthermore, there are two agronomists working with us and we can ask the Ministry of Agriculture to assist us, although if you do not pay them they will not come regularly. Our most urgent needs are a drying floor and a storehouse. After that the project wants to involve itself in livestock.

To some extent the BANSAL project faces the same problems as NADA – it depends heavily on the commitment of the surrounding communities, while the farmers in these areas are likely to be more interested in developing their own farms. What made the BANSAL project a success, nevertheless, at least while subsidies lasted, was the fact that the communities did not particularly dislike the founder, who was also the commander in control of this area during the war. Villagers stated that, unlike a psychopathic predecessor, his attitude towards the civilians living under control of the RUF was reasonable. Villagers could take problems to him, and at times obtain solutions or redress. He was in the process of building a rudimentary administrative structure based on more than fear and the power of the gun.

The project founder had been trained in the RUF ideology unit, and acknowledged the influence of Ibrahim Deen-Jalloh, a former Bunumbu College lecturer. The unit, he explained, had taught from revolutionary texts including Sandinista and Cuban material and the teachings of Kim Il Sung, but a major influence had been learning about the post-1973 war reconstruction of Bangladesh, and understanding that this was a key moment for that country's agrarian transformation. He conceded that only a minority of commanders had gone through ideology training.[18]

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[18] The ideology unit had collapsed after the RUF camps were scattered by the CDF and EO in 1996, and the Abidjan peace process foundered. Deen-Jalloh was trapped in Abidjan and never went back to the bush.

The new commanders in control of the movement were often patholo-gically violent and ruled civilians through fear. When he took over in the Magburaka area he could see the war was coming to an end, and that this would be the moment to apply what the movement's ideologues had taught, using the Bangladesh example. He decided to seize the moment of recovery after the war to bring about agrarian change, focusing on many of the RUF cadres, who (he realised) were becoming, in large numbers, an exploited and unstable labour force in the diamond fields.

RADO Makeni

RADO, the Robureh Agricultural Development Organisation, is a community-based organisation with about 300 members and operates in twelve different villages (including the village of Robureh) in Bom-bali Shebora chiefdom, close to Makeni. The project was already act-ive before the war but ceased to operate during the conflict. In May 2002, with HOPE Sierra Leone (an NGO founded by Sierra Leonean John Bangura, which received support from the Danish-Sierra Leonean Friendship Organisation) as its main sponsor, RADO resumed business. Again, many of the activists were ex-RUF commanders and fighters.

The support from HOPE focuses on ex-combatants, to whom it provided fifty cutlasses, fifty hoes, and ten bushels of ROK 3 (men-tioned above) and ten bushels of ROK 5 (a five-months rice variety). It also provided cash to pay for 'food for work'. Food for work prevents mortgaging of the future rice harvest (a prime reason for slipping into a vicious cycle of indebtedness and poverty), and thus helps the pro-ject to expand faster. Out of the 300 members, about 75, including 15 females, are ex-combatants. All except two (from the CDF) belonged to the RUF.[19] According to one of the directors of RADO:

Right now the ideology is still in me and I continue to preach it to the people. Under Foday Sankoh, Sam Bockarie and Issa Sesay the ideology was implemen-ted. It was only because of the AFRC that there came cracks in the ideology. I never favoured the war but the ideology was good. The fight was never for the power. And now the people can witness our ideology; while we do our farming, we preach to the people. (RUF commander K)

Among 225 civilians there are about 200 females. It seems that joining this project offers considerable potential advantage, especially to local women.

[19] This extremely unequal balance between RUF and CDF members can be explained to some extent by the fact that Makeni was the RUF capital during the last phase of the war. Many CDF fighters changed sides during the RUF occupation. It remains a remarkable imbalance.

Again, in many ways this is typical of the 'group agriculture' projects the area has experienced since the World Bank became active in integrated rural development in the 1970s. But what is striking, in addition to the fact that there is a largish group of RUF ex-combatants at the heart of things, is that several hundred local women have joined. Many have already experienced some of the frustrations associated with corrupt management of similar schemes. The standard account of the RUF neither predicts that so many ex-combatants might be oriented towards agriculture, nor that so many women would join such a project of their own free will. Seemingly, they are either utterly desperate, or have some expectation that things might be different this time.

Most of the 75 ex-combatants who take part in the project were trained in different skills – such as carpentry, masonry, and even computer skills – as part of their reintegration process.[20] But, even with this training, not a single one had been able to find a job with enough income on which to survive. So they had turned to agriculture, which was for some already a preferred choice. As one ex-RUF combatant explains:

Agriculture was not offered as part of the reintegration support in Kono,[21] but many of the ex-combatants preferred that one.

Another ex-combatant states:

In this way [taking part in RADO] we build up our confidence in ourselves and we are not idle. We have to hold ourselves responsible for our success or our failure. With limited financial support agriculture is the only vocation open to us. But if we could choose again we would choose the agriculture straightaway.

The context of this last remark is interesting. Because the NCDDR was not – or not sufficiently in light of the demand – offering agriculture in Kono, the ex-combatants had missed out on crucial inputs they would have received had they been able to choose agriculture straightaway. Instead, they had to search for alternative funding for the project. Again, this is evidence supportive of the notion that RUF cadres are actively searching for agricultural opportunities. Explaining his motivation in embarking on agriculture, another ex-RUF fighter reasoned thus:

Foday Sankoh told us that after the war we should embark on agriculture for five years at least. And we were all involved in farming during the war.

[20] The ex-combatants stated that agriculture at the time of disarmament was not offered as a reintegration opportunity, because, according to the NCDDR, the agency did not have the expertise and financial means to offer it (!), despite the emphasis on agriculture in much earlier demobilisation planning (cf. Richards et al. 1997).

[21] Kono is the main diamond district of Sierra Leone. I have been unable to confirm whether or not the agricultural package was available at the relevant time. Many of the combatants who disarmed in Kono district involved themselves in diamond mining in one of the many pits, but another group, unwilling to do so, found their way to Makeni and engaged themselves in agriculture, like the members of RADO.

Even if the 'revolution' had failed, some of its precepts could still be followed.

Presently the project cultivates about twenty acres of swamp and upland. Because the project involves so many civilians it has not been difficult to obtain land from the community. The project made the main contributor of land the chairman of the organisation. The land is given to the project for five years without costs. Because the land was still cultivated up to recent times – only recently the previous users had started working on a new piece of land – it did not take a lot of time to prepare it for production. According to one of the ex-RUF programme organisers:

Wednesday and Saturday are the working days when most of the members can be found here. Normally it is from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., but if there is no food available the members will only work for a few hours. Still they consider it a duty to the organisation and to the nation to improve the food situation in Sierra Leone for the masses.[22]

Based on previous experiences with farming, the group expects to harvest ten bushels of rice for every one bushel planted (reasonable for the low-fertility soils of the boliland zone around Makeni, without fertiliser). Part of the harvest will be used as husk rice in the following year in neighbouring villages. However, one of the participants explains that:

To really improve this farming project a tractor is needed which normally ploughs about 12 acres in one day. If the ploughing is done by manual labour it will result in a considerable number of medical cases [due to the stress associated with trying to cut into and turn over the hard, compacted boliland soils]. Furthermore, if the area will be used in the dry season for vegetables a waterpump is needed to pump up the water from the nearby river. A drying floor and a storehouse will make the project fully equipped.

A feature of this case is the failure of the NCDDR to provide agricultural packages for ex-combatants willing to choose farming, and the remarkable statement of an ex-combatant that the motivation to get involved in farming after the war stemmed from their deceased leader:[23] Foday Sankoh told them to do so.

KADO Makeni

The Kalamayrah Agricultural Development Organisation in Makeni (KADO) is a project with 598 members, of whom 40 are ex-combatants (including one female). It originated as a NCDDR-sponsored project.

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[22] Note the 'revolutionary' language some of these ex-RUF fighters still use, almost as if by second nature.

[23] Sankoh died in the custody of the Special Court in August 2003.

Presently, nine ex-combatants and nine civilians receive support (respect-ively from NCDDR and a DfID-funded agency) in the form of training. The civilians, like the ex-combatants, receive a monthly allowance of one (50 kg) bag of rice and will receive the graduation package of two bushels (*c*. 50 kg) of husk rice and some vegetable seeds.

HOPE Sierra Leone caters for an additional fifty people and has provided its standard package of fifty cutlasses, fifty hoes, ten bushels of ROK 3, ten bushels of ROK 5, and 'food for work'. The project is active in three villages producing rice and vegetables. According to the Makeni director of HOPE:

The ex-combatants are more serious about agriculture than the civilians because for this first group it is often the only means of survival. What we provide is in the first year tools, seeds and food for work. In the second year [we give] only food for work. From the third year on the project should be self-reliant. We provide ROK 3 and some local varieties. If the knowledge is not available we provide workshops to the members. Fortunately there are no problems between the ex-combatants and the civilians in the projects we sponsor.

According to one of the instigators of KADO:

In February 2002 the training programme started. The training includes prac-tical and theory. Practical is about 80 percent of the total training, and classroom theory, given by an extension officer trained in general agriculture at Njala [Uni-versity College] takes about 20 percent. This extension officer is financed by DfID.

Most 'students' have previous experience in farming and some stated that they had some theoretical knowledge of agriculture as well.

Through the interaction and the involvement of the community, the project has been able to obtain the land on which it operates. As men-tioned, in this part of the country land is abundant (especially the boli-lands, though they are difficult to cultivate). The project experienced a setback when, due to the delay in supply of inputs, there was a need for mechanical ploughing (or extensive food for work) to plant rice seedlings in time. So it had to hire a tractor for eight hours of ploughing. The costs were Le30,000/hour plus, according to one member: 'the entertainment of the tractor operators, which include cigarettes, palm wine, and a meal'.

A closer look at the composition of members reveals that about 75 percent of ex-combatants receiving training are ex-RUF, and all those who are not (yet) receiving training were former RUF fighters. According to the staff of the project there are multiple reasons for this: the RUF was in control of this area during the latter part of the conflict, and most SLA/AFRC fighters chose to go back to the army. Moreover, most CDF fighters actually changed sides, and joined the RUF when the latter took

over control in the north. In fact, many CDF fighters failed to qualify for DDR support because they had only single-barrel shot guns.[24]

According to one of the founders of the project (a middle-aged man from Kailahun who joined the RUF in 1991):

Most of us [project founders] are ex-RUF, and come from the east of the country. For now, we do not want to go back there, [but we will go] only if we are able to carry this project to our home areas, so that we do not arrive with empty hands.

He goes on to explain about the struggle of the RUF and its preoccupation with agriculture:

When you look at the struggle of the movement it has not been for nothing. In the Western world they say it was a senseless war but the sense that came out of it is the community mind. But the people only want to talk about the negative aspects. The RUF agenda was that any development could only be successful if you can feed the people. Therefore the communal agriculture was promoted because people must live on a communal level and not on an individual level. . . . It was the policy of the RUF to promote farming. Agriculture makes the people self-sufficient and independent from the government. A self-reliance struggle breeds a self-reliance feeding programme.

Discussion

In Chapter 4 I explained how the RUF was organised and what it thought it was fighting for – as understood by movement loyalists, by those who were abducted and remained reluctantly, and even in some cases by those who fought against it. In this way we learned something of the internal workings of the rebel movement: its strategies of bonding conscripts, the daily running of its bush camps, the ideology it proclaimed, and its ideas about food production – both as a core issue for movement survival and as a theme with wider implications for understanding an agrarian crisis of youth in Sierra Leone. The material has been supplied by a wide variety of informants including volunteers and conscripts, higher ranks and rank-and-file, actual fighters and civilian supporters. This variety of backgrounds brings out different aspects of the RUF (for instance, only commanders probably knew much about the highest organisational layer of the movement). But there are few if any openly inconsistent statements. When due allowance is made for who is likely to have known what, the statements, taken together, make for a coherent account. It is this internal coherence that provides a check on fabricated stories. Fabricated or fantastical items would draw attention to themselves as outliers from an overall pattern (or, if all was fantasy, perhaps there would be no line at all).

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[24] RUF combatants used more modern weapons. DDR made it a condition that fighters had to hand in a weapon to validate their combatant status (see Peters 2007a).

But circumstances gave us another, and rather different opportunity to trace RUF belief to its roots – namely, the chance to follow demobilising cadres after the war, and to study the extent to which they maintained their motivations and beliefs. To test the genuineness of cadres' beliefs, studying their behaviour during the conflict, while still part of the movement, might not be the best approach. Change in society, addressing deep underlying difficulties – revolutionary armies are often among the first to acknowledge this point – normally takes place after the armed phase of the revolution, rather than during its first violent phase, when the revolutionaries have to divert all their attention to fighting. It would thus be better to see how the cadres, who raised their voices high about the movement's socialist-inspired ideas, act now. Do they in any way continue to believe in – and aim to implement – what they claimed as the agenda of the RUF while they were fighting? If elements of revolutionary belief and action do survive, this would be all the more remarkable, since the RUF did not succeed in establishing its control over Sierra Leone. Consequently, one could not claim that any RUF-inspired activity was compelled by a powerful ruling hierarchy; it could only come from the ex-cadres themselves and from their intrinsic motivations. Either they are the victims of durable cognitive delusions, or the overall social climate continues to sustain their beliefs and aspirations. Either way, there is some explaining to do.

One approach might have been to find out to what extent former RUF combatants act according to the Code of Conduct of the RUF (thou shall not kill, rape, loot, and so on). But there are many other factors influencing present-day behaviour, not least the awe-inspiring threat of action by the Special Court during the first post-war years. Moreover, Sierra Leone's laws and values do not openly diverge from the movement's rules of conduct, thus making it difficult to detect specific RUF influences on individual belief and behaviour. But some elements of the RUF ideology were oriented towards societal change, rather than steering personal behaviour. In fact, three aspects of the RUF's ideology might lend themselves to the kind of test we have in mind, concerning whether at least some cadres continue to pursue the movement's agenda post-war. This would not necessarily have to be a majority of former cadres. It is well known that religions continue to order entire societies where a silent majority follows the lead set by a much smaller percentage who claim to be true believers (also known as ideologues). The test we have to meet ought not to be more severe than this, since critics of the RUF position have asserted rather bluntly that 'the RUF is a bandit organisation *totally bereft* of revolutionary credentials or a social agenda' (Dokubo 2000:1, my emphasis). All we need to find, therefore, is *some* former RUF members who claim the movement had an ideology and continue to manifest commitment to it in some shape or form.

Chapter 4 set out what the RUF claimed as its simple, populist doctrine of revolutionary liberation. It wanted – and to some extent struggled to put into practice, even in desperate, war-induced conditions – genuinely free education, free medical care, and collective farming. If indeed RUF ex-combatants believed in the rightness of their movement's agenda, we should expect to see at least some former combatants interested in running schools and clinics free of charge, and creating collective farms where the produce would benefit a wider community. Whether such practices could be sustained economically is a different issue. But for many years now the entire post-war economy runs on donor support. If and where former RUF cadres capture some small part of that support – not an easy task, because donors more or less universally accept the argument that the RUF had no redeeming features – we would expect to see some attempt to implement RUF ideals.

But we can probably rule out action in the fields of education and health care. These are the domain of the government and NGOs, and, having defeated the RUF, the government would hardly be likely to hand its former enemy the kind of legitimacy it seeks to reserve for itself as the ultimate provider of education and health. In any case it would be difficult to run schools or clinics privately, and yet free of charge, since there would be no income for essential books, stationery or drugs.[25] The most obvious area where we might expect action would be in farming. Creating farms which in some way reflect RUF ideas about agricultural reform – such as collective organisation, free access to seedlings, and in general treating food production as central – is a less daunting task for ex-combatant cadres, since revenue needed for new inputs could be raised from the activity itself. Land – at least for food farming – is generally available to those who seek to work it, provided the user is prepared to beg for it from the landholding elite, even at the risk of some vulnerability to exploitation.

In this chapter we have seen that in post-war Sierra Leone some RUF ex-combatants continue to be involved in farming projects, and that they do organise this activity in a collective way. The fact that ex-combatants are involved in farming as such is obviously not sufficient in a country where the majority of the population is farming. Therefore we also had to look quite closely at the degree of collectivisation, since labour cooperation is a basic condition of production in Sierra Leonean food crop agriculture.

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[25] Interestingly, the RUF educational officer, cited in Chapter 4, claims she has been instrumental in transforming RUF bush schools into non-formal education schools (under a UNICEF initiative) after the war. These schools are located at least five miles away from any formal school, and are taught by teachers from the community. The community pays the teachers in kind, and is also responsible for the construction of the school building.

The evidence that comes out of these case histories is that a small but significant group of RUF ex-fighters, specifically those who were recruited or joined during the first years of the conflict, and underwent ideological training, have indeed gone into farming, and that they try and organise it in ways that are collectivised above and beyond the norms of village labour cooperation. Furthermore, the ex-combatants themselves are explicit that their set-up directly reflects the agenda of RUF concerning the importance of farming and food security. They consider their involvement in post-war agriculture to be a prolongation and implementation of ideas gained in the RUF about rural development, and reflecting the need for a 'community mind'. Communal labour is related to not-for-profit farming activity. The RUF here reflects a rather wider aspect of rural thinking – the poor depend on each other for security, but the very institutions of that security (for example communal labour) are the ones that are undermined both by the corrupt manipulations of elites and by market forces. In that regard there is something backward-looking and nostalgic about the RUFs' agrarian critique, a feature frequently found in other agrarian populist uprisings (cf. Vigh 2006).

Unfortunately, NCDDR does not have, or is unwilling to release, figures on how ex-combatant choices for a particular DDR package are divided among the various factions. So it is difficult to say to what extent a wider sample of ex-RUF combatants are indeed relatively more likely to choose agriculture. There is reason to suspect that – in part – the picture painted here is somewhat artificial. Ex-RUF fighters in agriculture are likely to be outnumbered in absolute terms by ex-CDF fighters, of whom many already were involved in farming before the war, and chose the individual farming package to kickstart their activities again. But there is a better test than looking at absolute numbers. If agriculture was indeed part of the ideological agenda of the RUF, then those conscripted early on in the conflict (up to 1997) would be more likely to have picked this up, and it should have been sufficiently strong among this group to survive into a post-war world in which the movement had fallen apart as an armed faction. The material examined above – reliant once again on the testimony of the ex-RUF fighters themselves – may claim to have shown that the existence and efficacy of the RUF's ideological commitment to agriculture passes this test.

Many early recruits had a rural background, but never had the opportunity to farm under conditions profitable to them. Many of these first recruits were still young at the time of conscription, probably contributing to the farms of their parents or local elites through their labour, perhaps prior to drifting away from, or being hounded out of, their villages. Early recruitment seems to be the common thread connecting all the voices reported in this chapter. It seems clear that Foday Sankoh and some of his colleagues in the leadership of the RUF had a stronger

ideological programme than has so far been credited. This programme seems to relate, in particular, to ideas that circulated in the milieu of Bunumbu College, in Kailahun, a major centre of RUF support up until the end of the war. The data presented in this chapter seem strong enough – taken together – to sustain a conclusion that at least some of the early recruited cadres were shaped in important ways by their ideological training – and that this training – combined with their rural backgrounds – fixed their thinking upon a simple populist and widely shared agrarian agenda for reform that has survived the war, despite all the discouragements. In the institutional style of thinking favoured by the RUF, it is agriculture, and not diamonds, that remains the base.

7   Footpaths to Reintegration?
Agrarian Solutions for the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants

A Crisis Denied[1]

It seems rather paradoxical that a rag-tag rebel army with a handful of semi-intellectuals had been aware of the socio-political and economic situation of young people from weak families in isolated and run-down rural areas – and subsequently formulated an ideology which attracted (or convinced) significant numbers of supporters – while, after all the country had been through, the post-war (SLPP) government of Sierra Leone seemingly remained unaware of the dire situation of its rural youth. Conversely, the lack of measures by the government to address a major cause of the outbreak of the conflict can suggest only that Freetown was indeed unaware – or in denial – of the problem.

A central policy of the government, straight after the war, was to decentralise power by rebuilding and restrengthening the powers and authority of the paramount chiefs (chieftaincy elections in December 2002 were a part of this). How and to what extent this will guarantee a more democratic and inclusive representation of all rural Sierra Leoneans is yet unclear. Before the war paramount chiefs were elected by a college of Traditional Authorities (TA), each representing 20 taxpayers. According to Richards et al. (2004a: 24), 'It is a moot point whether tax records ever bore much relation to reality, and quite how these taxpayer representatives are selected or replaced seems rather vague. TAs are local elders, and represent, in effect, the interest of local land-owning lineages'. How local institutions are maintained, and what kind of democratic checks and balances are put in place to safeguard their functioning, will be of crucial importance in determining whether or not this crisis of rural youth will find a ready resolution, without reversion to further violence.

But the failure is not the government's alone. NCDDR, equally, missed an opportunity to act constructively in relation to this crisis. The reintegration package, part of the DDR programme, offered the former

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[1] This and the following section have appeared before in slightly different versions in Peters 2007a 'Reintegration support for young combatants: a right or a privilege?'. This article discusses in detail the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration process in Sierra Leone and its shortcomings.

combatants a range of options such as going back to school, undertaking vocational training, or receiving agricultural implements or training. However, the final choices of the ex-combatants contradict Sierra Leone's occupational division. About 70 percent of the population in Sierra Leone is in some way or another dependent on semi-subsistence agriculture for its livelihood. But, as we have seen, only about 15 percent of the ex-combatants opted for agriculture under the DDR support programme.

Various reasons can be given to explain this low number of ex-combatants opting for agriculture. One is that young ex-combatants might have little interest in work that is often backbreaking and perhaps associated with primitive living conditions in isolated rural settings. Used to a quite different lifestyle while still under arms, many of the ex-combatants found the idea of involving themselves in agriculture and rural life unattractive. Other reasons have more to do with the design of the DDR programme: the agricultural package was less attractive to ex-combatants than the vocational training package, as the latter came with a monthly allowance and a toolkit after graduation. The agriculture package was more often a one-off package without monetary elements. Furthermore, and amazingly in an agricultural country, the option of agriculture was not always offered by NCDDR's implementing partners.

It is necessary to explore this deficit a bit more closely. Politics and corruption are part of the answer. According to Richards, 'The political economy of Sierra Leone is dominated by two contrasts – between the capital Freetown and the more isolated rural districts, and between the mining sector of the economy (the country's main source of foreign exchange) and the stagnant semi-subsistence agricultural sector to which many young Sierra Leoneans return when urban life and mining employment fail' (1996: 48). Many urban-based elites, including politicians, have mining concessions and thus a vested interest in an abundant flow of young Sierra Leoneans willing to sell their labour for low wages in the diamond mines. Rural and/or agricultural development is not in their interest, since a free and successful peasantry would doubtless reduce the supply of cheap labour, and start to demand political recognition. In short, it serves key interests well enough if the countryside remains poor and needy.

NCDDR chose IPs ready to promise to turn uneducated young fighters into carpenters, tailors, car mechanics, and even computer technicians in a matter of months. That this is an unrealistic ambition is obvious to all. One explanation (made openly by some of those planning DDR) is that 'fancy' skills served as a temporary diversion from the arts of war (in effect an admission that skills training was never supposed to make good a longer-term deficit in training, but only to keep these angry young people occupied long enough for their militia organisations to lose command

and control). But an even more negative interpretation, in line with the earlier observation, also seems possible. Had young people moved into pig farming, poultry rearing, and oil palm cultivation on a large scale – as many wanted to (cf. Peters 2007a) – they would no longer be tied to annual semi-subsistence agriculture, and thus become unavailable to work periodically as cheap labour in the numerous alluvial diamond pits from which many in the political classes in Sierra Leone derive their wealth. In short, over-ambitious skills training may have been set up to fail, in order to guarantee the reproduction of the cheap labour economy upon which the country's mining sector, dominated by merchant capital, depends (cf. Zack-Williams 1995). As this hypothesis predicts, only a limited number of ex-combatants who went through vocational skills training as part of the DDR package were able to find employment in their newly achieved trade (the example of RADO given above is perhaps most illustrative here). Demand is not infinite, especially in a country with an economy running at such a low post-war ebb. Ex-combatants were competing with people who had already properly mastered the skill before the war and who did not suffer from a bad reputation. Many of those who could not find any work have soon, it appears, drifted back to the mining centres where only their labour was marketable. They have come full circle to the kind of rough semi-destitution from which they were plucked by the RUF.

A further set of reasons for the lack of interest among suppliers in agriculture relates to the rather limited possibilities for diversion of resources in one-off package delivery. Whether or not a consignment of oil-palm seedlings has been delivered in good condition is rather easy to verify (not least by the recipients). Possibilities for 'creative budgeting' are much greater in ongoing training programmes based on monthly allowances. A former CDF administrator who then became an implementing partner frankly explains:

There are different ways in which [some of] the staff of NCDDR is corrupt. From my own experiences at district level I can tell that whenever you write and budget a project for NCDDR, 20 or 30 percent has to given back to them 'under the table' before they can approve your request. This seems to be the only demand if you want to qualify for NCDDR money, which results in unqualified and inexperienced people running projects for ex-combatants just because they were ready to bribe the staff. Even if the person is qualified, how can the project be good if so much money is already lost before the project even starts? [This is] money which cannot be used to buy tools or teaching material. Another way is that they finance projects which are set up by themselves, through a proxy [for example, a relative], so that in the end they will benefit from [projects they fund].

Many ex-combatants from rural areas would have preferred to receive an agricultural package and/or training, but were forced by intermediaries to opt for another package which could be more easily 'drained'.

Another aspect of the design of the DDR programme also worked against ex-combatants from rural areas. Because the commencement of the vocational training was often delayed by many months, most ex-combatants decided to return to their villages or to the mining sites, soon after demobilisation, and wait for the call to start their training, rather than hanging around idle in the (expensive) towns where these vocational projects were predominantly located. However, in many cases the call did not come – or if it came, announced on the radio, it was heard too late. Moreover, there are many cases of ex-combatants travelling to town after an NCDDR announcement that the new candidates had been shortlisted, only to find their name not on the list. After two or three expensive, time-consuming, but useless journeys, the ex-combatant is likely to forget about 'the whole show'. Benefits can then easily be set aside by unscrupulous staff.

So the DDR programme in Sierra Leone did not make the agricultural option as attractive as its skills-training options. It did not even offer the agricultural option in many cases, and failed to serve many ex-combatants living in the more remote villages. The most kind-hearted conclusion one can draw from this is that those designing and implementing the project knew rather too little about the realities of rural Sierra Leone, and the rural young people who fought the war.

Making Agricultural Packages Central

Two sectors in the Sierra Leonean economy are capable of absorbing large numbers of predominantly young ex-combatants with limited or no educational qualifications, namely the agricultural and mining sectors. If NCDDR had done its sums (perhaps it did, if the previous cynical hypothesis holds any validity!) it would have come to a similar conclusion from the outset. To offer 'mining' as a DDR training package, similar to the vocational training packages, would have been rather hollow, since the 'skill' of mining boils down to being able to dig and wash gravel for ten hours under the burning sun. Alternatively, NCDDR could have offered a financial and mining equipment package, in a way that allowed the ex-combatants to become small-scale contractors themselves, employing several miners. But it is unlikely that NCDDR would feel comfortable in creating or sustaining potential 'micro-militias', apart from the likely resistance of the political classes with vested interests in the diamond sector, which prefer ex-combatants and ordinary youths as labourers rather than competitors. So, given the economic and political climate, the only sector capable of offering realistic openings (under the conditions hereafter discussed) for many if not most of 70,000+ ex-combatants in search of new and more peaceful livelihoods is agriculture.

Demand is not a problem, since the country's food production remains way below what the national population consumes. At the moment Sierra Leone's food demands are fulfilled by a combination of local food production, food brought into the country as part post-war support, and food bought on supposedly open markets, but in fact highly subsidised by Europe and North America. The majority of Sierra Leoneans still survives on one or two meals a day.

It is often assumed that ex-combatants have little interest in agriculture, but is this really true?[2] This book has argued that the dislike of rural youth is not focused on agriculture as such, but on their vulnerability, in village conditions, to exploitation by local elites and gerontocrats. Arthy (2003) had already worked out that the DDR agricultural package was much less attractive than the skills-training packages. Furthermore, many ex-combatants indicate that they would have preferred agriculture, but it was simply not among the options. That in the end many of the ex-combatants, trained in vocational skills as part of the DDR programme, have to fall back on agriculture (or mining) due to their inability to find a job using their newly acquired skills is a clear indication that the agricultural sector ought to have absorbed many more ex-combatants than the 15 percent who did end up with the agricultural package. As a result, many of the ex-combatants who are now involving themselves in agricultural activities do so without the implements and tools[3] that would have been at their disposal had they been able to receive help under the DDR programme. There are some lessons here for future direction of work with unemployed youth in Sierra Leone.

The Need for Agricultural Training Projects

Many of the older CDF ex-combatants have taken their agricultural implements and tools and returned quietly to their villages or communities to start or resume farming. With long years of farming experience, this group perhaps feels it needs no agricultural training. But the armed factions in the conflict in Sierra Leone were made up largely of young people. As a result of time spent under arms they tend to have lost

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[2] Many ex-combatants would rate the opportunity to become a motor mechanic or driver among their most preferred choices. However, research on the reintegration process of ex-child combatants in Liberia (Peters with Laws 2003) indicates that ex-child soldiers who had been exposed to farming during their time in an Interim Care Centre, awaiting Family Tracing, were more involved in agriculture after they were reunited than their counterparts who did not spend time in such a centre. It seems that if these ex-combatants learn about the value of (and the money one can make by) farming, they will be interested in agriculture.

[3] The basic tools needed for involving oneself in upland rice (and mixed cropping) farming a cutlass, an axe, and a hoe. Swamp-rice production requires in addition a shovel, a spade, and a pick axe.

agricultural experience, with the exception of RUF cadres who believed that they ought to farm as well as fight, and some of the early CDF fighters who combined part-time fighting with part-time farming. Agricultural-skills training thus seems to be required. Basic skills are needed, but it also could be a unique opportunity to introduce new skills and new crops. The agricultural project in Tongo is an example of this, in focusing on how to turn mined-over wasteland into arable land again. The project in Blama focused on introducing varieties with certain advantages. The project in Robol shows how a farm can be run both as a cooperative and as a commercial enterprise. In all these examples the projects are used as vehicles for agricultural extension among young people, but do not suffer from the common weakness of formal extension services, where contact is limited to one or two visits a year. Instead, knowledge formation is a continuous and active process of shared learning. This makes it closer to the model of the farmer field schools, pioneered by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Individual and Collective Farming Opportunities

Older ex-combatants who were farmers before and have their own plots of land will easily return to these pre-war activities and continue on an individualistic or household basis. Collective farming, or at least the implementation of certain farming tasks (such as ploughing, weeding, and harvesting) as part of a group, is common in Sierra Leone. In partic-ular rural youth organise themselves as 'labour gangs' to perform these tasks, sometimes on a rotational basis, and sometimes they hire them-selves out to third parties as a group (see Chapter 2). Labour gangs can be more innovative, as exemplified by the Tongo group. The gang structure also lends itself to various mobile agro-processing or marketing activit-ies – such as contract ploughing with a power tiller or cassava grating.

So there is scope for the individualistic farmer as well as for ex-combatants who prefer to remain together as a group. The group solid-arities created during the war do not have to be only destructive, and thus a focus for *de*mobilisation. They also could be *re*mobilised, but dir-ected towards new peaceful, group-based activities. Group action always runs the risk of the 'free riders' phenomenon, but where there are bonds of trust and loyalty (created during the war among those who remain brothers or sisters in arms) this may be minimised.

Access to Land and Labour

Access to land, again, is hardly a problem for the older ex-combatants who were already involved in agriculture before the war. Many have

established land rights but they probably need to hire extra labour to put back in use war-abandoned plantations. If cash is part of the agriculture package the landowner can hire people to clean the farms and plantations. Some ex-combatant groups are already selling services as highly motivated youth labour gangs to meet this kind of need.

But many of the younger ex-combatants do not have ready access to land. Often, they feel unable to return home, until they have something to show and the war – contrary to the assumptions of the greed-not-grievance model – left many poorer than the day they began. They need to acquire land wherever they now find themselves, but run into potential obstacles of a rather opaque traditional system, in which contracts to rent land for a fixed period are not well understood and local courts are not oriented to enforcing contractual agreements. To overcome this limitation the Tongo project used waste land, which was easier to negotiate from the landowners. Indeed, the landowner has an active interest in 'losing' the land for a few years until it is fully rehabilitated. There is no need to ask a high percentage of the harvest in such cases. Another way to overcome the problem of land acquisition is shown by the BANSAL group, which uses the land around its administrative centre in a rather intensive way.

In the Tongo case the labour needed is fully provided by the ex-combatants and the limited number of civilian war-affected youth profiting from agricultural training. BANSAL and the NADA project involve the communities to a much larger extent, both for land and labour. Whether this works over time was unclear to both organisations at the start. Even so, the project was only able to mobilise community inputs in exchange for food for work, and thus depended on inputs from outside sponsors. In the end free community labour can only be mobilised by the traditional authorities. Others have to buy it for food or cash. Individual farmers will in the end focus most of their time on their own farms and community activities never come for free (without the kind of coercion that has so alienated marginal rural young people already). There is an unresolved contradiction in RUF enthusiasm for 'community labour', since – without the threat of violence – it typically depends on a return to the world of deference to elders from which the movement tried to break away. The undue reverence in which the young cadres still hold the late Foday Sankoh (their 'pappy') indicates that there are no easy answers to the question of what lies beyond patrimonialism.

The further impacts of these vital issues of access to land and labour on agriculturally oriented reintegration projects became even clearer during a brief follow-up I did about three years afterwards, towards the end of 2006. To start with the NADA project, the indictment and imprisonment of Augustine Gbao by the Special Court left NADA without any family

link to the community in which it was located and on which its success depended so much. As a result the project ceased to operate and the core members drifted away. One of the founders of the project, who moved to the Makeni area, summarises the project's developments after my last visit in 2003:

As soon as Gbao was arrested, the family started to lay claims on the land and confiscated the power-saw [which was provided by NCDDR to raise immediate cash for the project]. At one time I travelled to the Special Court and explained it to Gbao. He wrote a letter ordering his family's cooperation. I showed the letter to the paramount chief, but he said that the letter was written under pressure so he did not consider it truthful. Later I was arrested and spent more than a month in prison. Then I was advised to leave the area. The Gbao family confiscated everything and did not respect the word of their son, saying that he was in prison so that he was bad.

The Tongo project also ceased to operate. After three years the contract between the Tongo/GTZ project and the community which provided the land came to an end. Although the project made a plea to the community to be allowed to continue with its farming activities, this was not granted. Apparently some dispute started between the various neighbouring communities over who was the legitimate owner of the land, now that the wasteland was turned into valuable agricultural fields. The RUF's spokesman/leader of the project explained that since the project was required to hand over a part of the harvest to the community after the third year, the remaining portion proved too small to start another farming cycle, and as a result the group split up. The spokesman remained in the community, however, and became a primary school teacher – with agricultural science among the subjects he taught. The second-in-command became a 'master farmer' in the area. Although it failed to endure, it seems that the Tongo project set an example for farming in Tongo. According to the town chief of the area:

There is a sharp increase in farming in and around Tongo. We have expanded the community farm and it now includes the old Masanki farm [see Chapter 6, note 7] as well. We are also building a rice store of which the framework already is in place.

BANSAL – perhaps the most promising project – has clearly failed to live up to that promise. Lack of interest by the directors in the success of the project and increasing corruption – made possible, according to some project members, by poor monitoring on the part of the donors – resulted in the 'confiscation' of the project land by individual farmers. The community, which was not paid for months for its work, then refused to provide any more labour. According to one of the ex-RUF combatants

who still had a groundnut farm on the project's ground (apparently, some members started to use the project ground for their own private farms):

UNFPA [United Nations Population Fund] should really do proper monitoring and evaluating. It was G . . . [civil representative for the project] who corrupted B . . . [leader and founder of the project]. Because he [G . . .] is a big man. You know what they say: 'If one fish is rotten, the whole basket will become rotten.' This community project . . . everyone just wants to eat before the others.

KADO, near Makeni, continues to operate, however, and has nearly 200 acres under rice cultivation. Its success can be explained by a combination of commitment by its members and continuing (although limited) external support. However, it is clear from the accounts of the project's director that KADO struggles with the same issues around community versus private farming:

In 2004 a tractor was hired from our own produce, but the community turned up too late to scatter the heaps and did not fully cooperate, even while they were paid in advance. It is likely that they were [only] involved in their own farms. This year the harvest will be fine because we have donor support; they are paying Le2,000 [per labourer per day] as cash for labour and there is tractor subsidised by the government. But the project is still far from being sustainable; NCDDR was far too optimistic. But with sufficient support the project will achieve sustainability. The people are just not used to collective farming and if the government only supports individual master farmers. . . .

Finally, the other Makeni-based agricultural project, RADO, was busy preparing for the next farming cycle, after losing its present year over a dispute between the organisation and the landowners. According to one of the RADO's directors:

RADO is still existing but this year we have not planted anything, but we have done so the year before. We are also in preparation for January 2007. The problem with this year was a land issue: the landowners said that HOPE Sierra Leone should compensate them [in advance], but that was not the initial arrangement. We have about 300 members and 17 landowners. Initially it was arranged that after the harvest, not before, a part would be given to the landowners.

Drawing up the balance sheet three or four years after these projects started, one must conclude that only one – arguably two – of the five projects is/are still functioning, and that even the success stories cannot remain afloat without external support: sustainability is still a long way off. Access to land and the ability to mobilise community labour are clearly the biggest factors in explaining this poor record. Large agricultural projects, in which whole communities participate, seem to remain for the time being utopian ideas of the ideologues of an armed egalitarian

movement, and are doomed to founder amid the complex realities of unwritten land entitlements agreements and a traditional – custom-based – system of control over labour mobilisation. And yet, while a focus on individualistic farming looks like an easier way to increase agrarian opportunities, we have to think about that large group of young people with only weak land entitlements at best – who under the traditional system would end up farming for their parents or in-laws, or end up selling their labour in mining fields. Most of the ex-combatants in Sierra Leone fall into this category.

Towards a New Approach to Agricultural Training

In post-war countries like Sierra Leone, reintegration programmes need to promote a strong agriculture package; only the agricultural sector provides opportunities for ex-combatants in large numbers. If it is argued that agriculture is not attractive to many ex-combatants, long-term unemployment is even less attractive. Instead DDR programmes should explore the different avenues to making agriculture more attractive. This will require some creative thinking.

It is clear from the kind of analysis undertaken above that three kinds of agricultural package should have been offered to the ex-combatants in Sierra Leone:

1. A considerable number of the ex-combatants were involved in agricultural activities before the war and are likely and willing to continue after the war. The package, delivered in accordance with the farming season, that would be most useful to them includes farming tools and seeds, of good quality, adapted to local conditions, and preferably purchased on the local market. It should also include financial means, or food, to cover the first pre-harvest period to prevent farmers falling into debt before they have taken off. Furthermore, it should include extra financial means – or a system of tokens to hire labour groups – to enable the farmer to hire extra labour to clean farmland and plantations overgrown after years of fallow due to war.

2. For those ex-combatants with only a limited knowledge of farming and/or with limited access to land, the agricultural package should be organised as a project, set up along cooperative lines. It indeed might be an agricultural settlement. In this way the ex-combatants can profit from each other's knowledge and from outside experts such as an experienced villager or extension officer who can target a large audience with advice. Again, tools and seeds must be provided, as well as financial means or extra food to cover the period before the first harvest. Money to hire labour is not needed since in this case it is the ex-combatants who provide the labour. Careful attention should be paid to the question of land acquisition. Specific terms must be

negotiated that are profitable to the landowner/community[4] and the ex-combatants (cf. the Tongo case). Farming communities will additionally benefit when provisions are made in the project design for the introduction of simple farm-level innovations (such as new crop types or new cultivation methods), extended both to settling ex-combatants and to villagers. Apart from agreements about leasing land, it is unrealistic to expect assistance from war-affected communities. 'Free' community labour, that is labour in which non-volunteers are sanctioned by fines, must be avoided.

3. A third useful package might centre on agricultural trades and support tasks. The examples of encouraging ex-combatants to form gangs to itinerate around villages offering mechanised ploughing or cassava or rice milling services comes to mind.[5] Self-integrating ex-combatants from the Biafran civil war became much involved in this kind of activity (there was no formal DDR). It made use of platoon loyalties, and built on war-induced experiences humping heavy equipment around the bush – only this time for peaceful, money-making, purposes (Richards, personal communication). Some former cadres also got involved in simple forms of rural transportation, using home-made wheelbarrows and two-wheeled carts to bring produce to local markets.[6] In Sierra Leone, groups of CDF ex-combatants have formed labour gangs to undertake agricultural rehabilitation contracts: brushing plantations, levelling swamps, and rehabilitating the feeder roads so necessary for the marketing of local produce, on contract to NGOs

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[4] Or to the government. In Sierra Leone some sizeable palm oil plantations (the Liberian counterpart would be the rubber plantations) are owned by the government, often after a private company has handed it over before or during the war. During the war most of these plantations have been neglected and as a result have become overgrown. Harvesting on a pre-war scale will be possible only after labour-intensive brushing. It might be worth exploring the opportunity to rent out parts of these plantations to gangs of young ex-combatants. At the moment individuals can buy permits from local government representatives allowing them to harvest palm kernels for a certain number of days.

[5] Or the rehabilitation of inland valley swamps (IVS), which is a key strategy of the post-war government(s) for achieving food security. Maconachie (2008) refers to a 2002 report, prepared for the Sierra Leone government by the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the African Development Bank, which suggests prioritising for rehabilitation 15,000 ha of IVS, out of a total of around 600,000 ha in Sierra Leone. According to Dingle (1984) (in Maconachie 2008: 249) it needs about 170 to 200 man-days per acre to turn a 'virgin' swamp (or one overgrown during the war) into an 'improved' swamp, which would take the average farmer at least three years, alongside his normal farming activities. A system where the farmer is given a token which can later be exchanged to hire labour – through food for work for instance – of the ex-combatant gang (perhaps reinforced with the labour of local youth) could make the swamp ready for production in a matter of two or three weeks. Since IVS improvement is not as straightforward as it might look – the ground has to be levelled and irrigation channels have to be dug – these gangs will acquire both useful and specific skills.

[6] On the rapid increase in the number of motorbike taxis, which are used for transporting both passengers and agricultural produce, see Peters 2007b.

and even UNAMSIL. Demand eventually will come from the communities themselves – although straight after the war communities have little capacity to pay for such activities from their own resources. Contracts can be drawn up in such a way that they are conducive towards stabilising the groups, and encouraging them to settle down – for example, they can stipulate more than one season or activity at a time.

Although it is an obvious point, it nevertheless needs to be emphasised: farming is mainly an activity which takes place in the rural areas.[7] We have seen above that the socio-economic and political situation in the rural areas drove many young people to affiliate themselves with an armed faction. It would be naïve to assume that these ex-combatants will simply return to their villages and involve themselves in agriculture without further ado. It is clear that fundamental changes are needed in the rural socio-economic and political field,[8] at the same time as ex-combatants receive training and agricultural packages. Otherwise, the thrust of the analysis in this book suggests the attempted reintegration of ex-combatants will at best be a failure, and at worst trigger new conflict. So it is important to realise that the design of DDR packages must address the vulnerability of rural youth to political manipulation. Packages 2 and 3 make youth less vulnerable to the political hegemony of elders only by introducing a more market-oriented set of production relations. An essential aspect will be the development of local legal systems capable of responding to the law of contract. But for those with a stake in the local system, as members of land-owning families (the situation of many CDF ex-combatants) Package 1 is likely to be the preferred choice. But even for these people the war has made many question traditional values. The British placed a lot of emphasis in the immediate post-war phase in Sierra Leone on reintroducing a customary system of governance, held together by paramount chiefs. But already many young people brought up under the traditional system want to see change.

A good starting place would be to revisit a major exercise in deliberative democracy carried out in 1999–2000: the series of nearly 70 local consultations held by the Governance Reform Secretariat to determine what reforms would be needed to resettle chiefs and their subjects. One point that comes out in these documents, held in the Governance Reform

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[7] However, the importance of farming or vegetable gardening in urban areas should not be underestimated in developing countries.

[8] At the same time, macroeconomic measures should be taken to make agricultural production attractive. For instance, high export taxes on agricultural produce seriously reduce the incentive for farmers to produce cash crops. These taxes have been reduced or abolished in Sierra Leone, but many informal 'relics' of practices from the days of the marketing boards remain (roadblock 'taxes' imposed by the security services, and similar measures).

Secretariat offices in Freetown, is the extent to which youth and women were no longer prepared to be subjects, but felt that their actions and suffering in the war had already entitled them to be considered citizens. Full citizenship rights (and the protection of these rights) may be the key to sustainable peace and rural development, and to the successful rural reintegration of the rebellious cadres and the rural underclass of village labourers more generally.

8   Conclusion: The RUF as a Rural Underclass Project

Introduction

This chapter aims to answer three questions.

1. The first is: How far can we assume the RUF was a product of a pre-determined culture of violence – an intrinsic African barbarism, or violence inherent in the street culture of an urban underclass? The question was first posed by the American journalist Robert Kaplan, but further espoused (in the street culture variant) by a group of Sierra Leonean (diaspora) intellectuals.
2. A second question is: Was the RUF (secretly?) mainly motivated by greed, not grievance – that is, by attempts to control the rich diamond fields of eastern and southern Sierra Leone? But RUF cadres cited in this book – and some fighters opposed to the RUF – deny diamonds were a major motivation for rebellion. If this is indeed so, we have to answer a derivative question: why did the RUF focus so much attention (latterly) on attempts to control these lucrative diamond areas?
3. The third and final question is about the RUF as a social organisation: Why did a movement like the RUF increase in numbers so quickly, and how, despite its violent recruitment methods, was it able to retain the attention of a significant proportion of the rural youth it recruited? We will try to assess the merits of the argument that the rapid growth of the RUF was somehow connected to the collapse of a system of patrimonial rule previously ensuring inter-generational social reproduction.

Before proceeding further, it may be helpful to take stock of what has been presented so far. The first chapter introduced readers to those who have taken part in the conflict, the ex-combatants. Belonging to different factions, of different ranks, and recruited in different ways, they all tend, nevertheless, to give rather similar explanations of the causes of the war: lack of education and employment opportunities due to corrupt practices at state level; and the exploitation of young people by a gerontocratic rural elite. Although it is already remarkable that ex-combatants of different factions come forward with the same causes,

this might be after-the-event justification (supposedly common to ex-combatants as a group, according to Mkandawire), or a reflection of a dominant post-war discourse on the causes of the war.

To test the ex-combatants' explanations, therefore, the second chapter undertook a historical analysis of the processes of state and community formation in Sierra Leone. It became clear from this historical review that many issues to which ex-combatants draw attention are indeed an objective part of the historical record. In particular, government in Sierra Leone has long been notorious for corruption, nepotism, patrimonialism, and lack of democracy, with a clear negative impact on poorer young people. The second part of the chapter showed that young people were not only affected by lack of education and economic opportunities but that, in particular, they faced a second kind of jeopardy – vulnerability to exploitation by local seniors, through elders' control over customary courts, land, agricultural labour, and allocation of marriage partners.

Chapter 3 offered an overview of the war. If one thing stands out, it must be the resilience of the RUF. Once complicating factors, such as acts of disloyalty and banditry by dissident army units, are stripped away, the movement's remarkable coherence during the years of war suggests it was more than a loose coalition of bandits and opportunists. This resistance to many attempts to divide or destroy it is, to some extent, indirect testimony to the existence of some set of beliefs, ideas, or practices holding the movement firm, thus pouring doubt, already, on anarchic 'new barbarism' and opportunistic 'greed-not-grievance' theories.

The heart of the book is represented by the next two chapters. In Chapter 4 I explained the world and ideas of the RUF. In the first part, on 'strategies of bonding', it was shown that the RUF made use of more ways to recruit and include new members than mere blunt force. There is thus need for an adequate social theory to take account of the processes through which recruits were bonded to the wider group. The second part of this chapter described the operational side of the bush camps of the RUF and its 'liberated' territories. Here we glimpsed a daily world of social practices, and we again have need for a social theory adequate to account for the specific organisational evolution experienced by the RUF while isolated in the bush. Attention was paid to the discourse and practices of the RUF of free education and health care, mining, and agriculture. It is important to ask why a guerrilla movement like the RUF apparently put effort into promoting farming in the territories under its control, when it might more easily have concentrated on raiding relief supplies? Was farming popular propaganda, a logistical necessity, or (as the ex-combatants claim) a definite part of RUF ideology? In the third part of Chapter 4 the RUF's ideology and political agenda were described, according to the accounts of the ex-combatants. It is clear that this ideology was no sophisticated intellectual analysis of historical and

present-day Sierra Leone. It had all the marks of a homespun political philosophy, born of the everyday frustrations of the marginalised. So the question then becomes: How exactly did these ideas arise, and to whom and why did they appeal? Equally important, the mechanisms in place to monitor the behaviour of the fighters and any breaches of the movement's rules were described.

Chapter 5 looked at reasons why – despite all the rules and regulations (and branches to monitor these) – the RUF fighters and commanders committed so many atrocities. The chapter is split into two sets of explanations for the issue at stake. The first set of explanations looked at 'external' developments (the early deployment of Liberian Special Forces, the increasing threat posed by the Kamajoisia, and, finally, the collaboration with the AFRC) and the way these impacted on the behaviour of the RUF. The second half of the chapter looked at internal explanations for the high level of atrocities committed by RUF cadres.

Chapter 6 visited a handful of post-war reintegration projects, initiated and implemented by (predominantly) ex-RUF combatants. These projects all focused on agriculture and it was claimed by the ex-combatants that they were realising – now in peacetime – the ideas which were considered central to the RUF ideology and its vision of post-war Sierra Leone. The cooperative principle within the projects was noted.

Finally, Chapter 7 made a case for diversified agrarian-oriented reintegration packages for ex-combatants. Acknowledging the existence of a rural crisis – something which both the government of Sierra Leone and the commission in charge of DDR to a large extent failed to do – several approaches were discussed to overcome young people's limitations with regard to access to land and control over their own labour. Reform and creative new opportunities within the rural sector might be of key importance to sustainable peace in Sierra Leone.

The present chapter now attempts to address its three set questions. If they can be answered satisfactorily we will then reach a point where a new explanation will become apparent. And indeed, the chapter will, in the end, claim that the RUF rebellion was both a symptom of, and an attempted answer to, the socio-economic crisis of rural youth which has been the main theme of this book.

Was the RUF a Product of 'Lumpen' Culture, and Was It 'Mindlessly Violent'?

Radical Youth Culture in Sierra Leone

To understand the conflict in Sierra Leone one needs to analyse the origins of the RUF. Ibrahim Abdullah has supplied much insightful

material on the movement's origins in his article 'Bush path to destruction: the origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)' (Abdullah 1997). Treating the RUF mainly as a military movement dominated by its ultra-youthful elements, he locates its origins in the youth culture of Sierra Leone.[1]

Organised youth militancy in Sierra Leone dates back to the 1930s, and the Youth League, inaugurated by I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson, a well-known revolutionary Marxist Pan-Africanist who briefly attended Moscow University. Within a year of its formation the League had a membership of more than 30,000 people, with members in almost all provincial towns. In the 1938 city council elections the League swept the polls (Alie 1990: 178–9). Then the British detained Wallace-Johnson and his colleagues for security reasons during the Second World War (Gberie 2005: 23). According to Abdullah, the demise of the Youth League in 1939 closed formal avenues for radical youth political agitation, although the tradition remained alive underground. 'This youth culture, which became visible in the post-1945 period, had its genealogy in the so-called "rarray-boy" culture' (Abdullah 1997: 50). The Krio Dictionary claims '*rare*' (pronounced 'rarray' and often written so) derives from the mispronunciation of the English word 'rare' by eighteenth-century Savoyard entertainers advertising their shows on the streets of London, though in local usage in Sierra Leone it tends to assimilate more to the notion of 'runaway' (fugitive/deserter, vagrant, street youth). Getz (2004) points out that the educated coastal elites remained dependent on domestic slave labour into the early colonial period, and were constantly wary of vagrancy as an assault on their economic position. But according to Abdullah's theoretical position, culture causes behaviour, and 'rarray culture' causes violence: 'It is a male-specific oppositional sub-culture which easily lends itself to violence' (Abdullah 1997: 50).[2]

During the 1970s increasing numbers of middle-class youths started to visit the regular haunts of the 'rarray-boys', the *pote* (a gathering place for the unemployed, often a centre for marijuana dealing and smoking). The visitors included university students from Fourah Bay College, perched on the hill immediately overlooking the working-class districts of East Freetown. Radical students found a willing ear for their political ideas among the working-class denizens of the *potes*. But there

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[1] Theoretically, then, Abdullah aligns himself with a dominant North American anthropological discourse in which culture is seen as having independent causative power, opposed to a more British/European analytical perspective in which culture is considered epiphenomenal – that is, a product, not a cause, of certain kinds of social organisation (see, for example, Kuper 1999).

[2] In fact '*rare*' is not male–specific; the epithet is as likely to be applied to a young woman, in which case the vagrancy implies a life of sexual freedom or prostitution. Either way, it is a term of morality, not analysis.

were also student groups which deliberately distanced themselves from the violent and drug-based culture of the *potes,* Abdullah claims. These more serious-minded student activist groups were strongly influenced by Pan-Africanism and Gaddafi's *Green Book.*

The radical students – represented by revolutionary student groups, such as the Green Book Study Group, the Socialist Club, and the Pan-African Union (PANAFU) – were united in a Mass Awareness and Participation (MAP) movement. While Alie Kabba was the student's union president at Fourah Bay College, relations between the radical students and the College administration deteriorated. According to Dokubo, echoing Abdullah: 'the new union leadership was no longer reactive: imbued with a growing sense of power of youth as political force, it was prepared to seize the initiative' (Dokubo 2000: 4–5). Forty-one students accused of links with Libya were expelled from the college and some, including Alie Kabba, were detained for some months in 1985. Afterwards Kabba went into exile in Ghana,[3] after being instructed to do so by an official of the People's Bureau (the name for the Libyan embassy). Steps towards the making of a more informal youth opposition ended at this point, and the numerous study groups and revolutionary cells took over. But the Libyans continued to rely on Alie Kabba to shape a revolutionary project in Sierra Leone, and approached him to deliver recruits for military training. One difficulty, however, was that (according to Abdullah), Alie Kabba had little credibility with Fourah Bay College students.

The Libya and Liberia Connections

PANAFU then debated two important issues: whether or not the *pote* types should be recruited for the revolution; and the call for recruits by the former student leader in exile. The majority decided against both issues, and those in favour – among them some of the key figures of the later RUF – were eventually expelled from the movement. According to Abdullah (1997: 63): 'For once PANAFU had rejected the idea of participating as an organisation, the project became an individual enterprise: any man (no attempt was made to recruit women) who felt the urge [could] acquire insurgency training in the service of the "revolution". This inevitably opened the way for the recruitment of "lumpens".' 'Lumpens' is Abdullah's alternative term for *rare.*

In 1987 and 1988 not more than fifty Sierra Leoneans travelled to Libya to receive guerrilla training in Benghazi. Foday Saybana Sankoh (original name Alfred Foday Sankoh), the future leader of the RUF, was among this group. Once a corporal in the RSLMF, and trained

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[3] Jerry Rawlings, Ghana's military leader at the time, enjoyed Libyan support.

by the British army as a signals technician,[4] he was jailed in 1971 for earlier involvement in a coup plot[5] against Siaka Stevens. Released from jail after seven years, he worked in both Bo and the diamond areas of the Sierra Leone/Liberian border as a photographer, and at one stage belonged to a Green Book study club, mainly frequented by secondary school pupils, in Bo. Apparently, Sankoh was recruited into the group by Ebeyemi Reader,[6] but got his political education from Dr Bangura – a secondary school teacher in Bo but trained at the Sorbonne in Paris (Gberie 2005: 47).

After time in the so-called al-Mathabh al-Thauriya al–Alamiya World Revolutionary Headquarters, close to Benghazi, three figures – Foday Sankoh, and his much younger revolutionary colleagues Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray – returned to Freetown, but later decided to leave the capital to look for recruits for their armed revolution in the provinces. It was on one of these trips up-country, according to Abdullah, that they met with figures from the rebel National Patriotic Front of Liberia,[7] resulting in a deal between Charles Taylor's NPFL and the RUF; Foday Sankoh and his group would help Taylor in Liberia, after which he would help the RUF launch its revolution in Sierra Leone (Abdullah 1997). According to Gberie, the Taylor factor is crucial for understanding the RUF's war: '[which] was driven not by local command and ideas and sensitivities – although there was a carefully-choreographed attempt to create this impression – but by outsiders, principally Charles Taylor of Liberia' (2005: 15, fn.).[8] Previously, Taylor had helped Blaise Compaore to overthrow Burkina Faso's President Thomas Sankara: a crucial development since it guaranteed Taylor support for his own adventures by a foreign government.

And so in March 1991 a small group of fighters crossed the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone, into the eastern district of Kailahun.

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[4] Coincidentally, like Saloth Sahr, alias Pol Pot.

[5] He shared his cell (or at least the same block for political prisoners) with Samuel Hinga Norman, the future leader of the Kamajoisia, who was held in detention for his anti-APC activism (Norman, then a captain in the army, tried to block the coming to power of Siaka Stevens after the 1967 election). According to Gberie (2005: 85) there is little doubt that Sankoh and Norman also met in Liberia before the war, since both were staying there at various times.

[6] A middle-aged ex-RUF fighter met Sankoh in Bo: 'I was in Bo from 1980 onwards with a Revolutionary Study Group, studying Marxism and Leninism. I met Sankoh in 1980[s?]' (RUF commander J).

[7] According to Gberie Taylor and Sankoh met in Freetown in 1989, when Taylor was in the capital to seek Momoh's approval for using Sierra Leone as a base to launch his insurgency (2005: 54).

[8] This monograph does not question the idea that Taylor had a clear interest and role in the RUF, but challenges the idea that local command and ideas and sensitivities were nothing more than a choreographed attempt.

Bush Paths to Destruction?

Abdullah considers the RUF to be a project that was never suppor-ted by radical left-wing intellectuals, but run by a leadership willing to risk recruitment of 'lumpen' elements. This doomed the 'revolution-ary' project to fail, and Sierra Leone tasted the bitterness of lumpen violence, motivated not by ideology but by the greed and personal agen-das of uneducated commanders. His line is more or less endorsed by other West African intellectuals. These include Yusuf Bangura (1997), Ishmail Rashid (1997), Charles Dokubo (2000), and Jimmy Kandeh (2001). What these authors all have in common is that they consider the RUF to be a movement dominated by urbanised lumpen elements. Consequently, they deny the RUF any ideology whatsoever, and dismiss any claims made in that direction as thinly disguised ad hoc propaganda. Furthermore, according to these authors, the key to understanding the widespread atrocities committed by the RUF cadres lies in the lumpen background and culture of the majority of cadres.

It is worth examining more closely what these authors say about these three themes: 'lumpens', ideology, and atrocities.

A Lumpen Movement

Let us look first at Abdullah's definition of 'rarray boys' on which he bases his 'lumpen' definition: 'Mostly unlettered, they were predom-inantly second generation residents in the city. . . . They are known for their anti-social behaviour: drugs (marijuana), petty theft, and violence' (Abdullah 1997: 51). With the involvement of lumpens, the revolutionary project was destined to fail, and nothing other than terror could come out of it. The argument is (as noted) cultural-determinist in form. Vagrants are by culture violent: recruit vagrants and violence results. Or as Dokubo (2000: 14) puts it: 'Perhaps because of its "lumpen" social base and its lack of an emancipatory programme to garner support from other social groups, it has largely remained a bandit organisation solely driven by the survivalist needs of its predominantly uneducated and alienated battle commanders.' Drawing on the work of Mao and Cabral, both Abdullah and Dokubo argue that the RUF was never by intention a revolution-ary movement, because both these iconic leaders cautioned against the recruitment of 'lumpens' in revolutionary organisations. Dokubo (2000: 3) states that 'during the Momoh years . . . the continued and dramatic growth in the number of unemployed and disaffected youth' led to the result that 'they drifted from the countryside, either to Freetown and other urban centres, or to the diamond fields of Kono. In either case, they became socialised into a culture of violence, drugs and criminality'. Gberie too describes the composition of the RUF as being 'made up of

young men, already with criminal tendencies, mostly recruited in Liberia and in the illicit diamond mining forests of eastern and southern Sierra Leone' (2005: 103).

Lack of Ideology

An important critique of the RUF by the authors discussed above is that the RUF lacked any ideology whatsoever, to guide its fighters and to prevent needless violence and atrocities.[9] Without students or intellectual support, and led by a cashiered corporal, disgruntled economic refugees, and a hijacked group of semi-intellectuals (including a doctor and a training college lecturer) 'the RUF is a bandit organisation totally bereft of revolutionary credentials or a social agenda' (Dokubo 2000: 1).

Part of the critique of the RUF's lack of ideology derives from the fact that the RUF only produced one booklet outlining its case: 'Foot-paths to Democracy: Towards a New Sierra Leone, Vol. I'. The volume was edited (some would say ghost-written) by the London-based con-flict resolution group International Alert (with inputs from two Ghanai-ans, Akyaba Addai-Seboh and Napoleon Abdulai) and brought back for approval to Foday Sankoh in the RUF main base, the Zogoda. Much of it derives from 'The Basic Document of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL): The Second Liberation of Africa', an item originally drafted as a PANAFU call for a Popular Democratic Front (PDF), and subsequently redrafted and edited by Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray (the two RUF vanguards previously mentioned) to reflect the armed phase of the 'revolution' (Abdullah 1997).

According to Abdullah, the lack of ideology was covered up by some actions which should be interpreted as no more than populist propa-ganda. 'Actions such as the redistribution of "food, drugs, clothes and shoes from 'liberated' government sources" (as mentioned in Richards 1996) . . . should be seen as populist propaganda rather than influences from the Green Book' (Abdullah 1997: 71). Quite how Abdullah pro-poses to distinguish populist propaganda and Green Book influences is unclear. Dokubo (2000: 6), echoing Abdullah, states that 'if there was/is any ideology, it evolved on an ad hoc basis as a result of their

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[9] It is a heroic assumption to conclude that an ideology is a guarantee against atrocity or mass civilian deaths at the hands of insurgent or revolutionary movements. History shows us rather the opposite: the stronger the ideology, the more victims. The rural-autarkic ideology of the Khmer Rouge movement in Cambodia caused the deaths of more than one third of the population. Mao's Cultural Revolution cost millions of lives. The mother of all revolutions, the 1789 French Revolution (birth of French rationalism) was soaked in blood, and it soon started to 'eat its own men'. It is possible that the problem with the RUF, as with the movements mentioned here, might be not its lack of ideology (and intellectuals), but that the cadres were blinded by *too much* ideology.

experiences in the bush'. Presumably an evolved ideology lacks all-important authority.

The Widespread Violence

We now turn to the theme of RUF violence and its targets. Dokubo, like Abdullah, questions why the violence against civilians continued after the departure of the Liberian Special Forces, if indeed, as the RUF claimed in 'Footpaths to Democracy', this violence was mainly executed by the Liberians. Their claim is that Sierra Leonean RUF fighters also committed atrocities against civilians right from the outset, as would be expected from 'lumpens' under arms. 'An explanation for the continued violence and mutilation of innocent civilians has to be sought in the composition of the movement, its lack of discipline, its indiscriminate use of drugs (of all sorts), and the absence of a concrete programme besides vague populist formulations about foreigners and rural development' (Abdullah 1997: 72). As already indicated this is cultural determinism; it is in the culture of lumpens to be violent, the movement recruited lumpens, thus it was very violent. But without definite evidence either that the movement did in fact largely comprise of lumpens, or that the alleged lack of ideology is indeed the case, the argument seems circular. Furthermore, the case of the Khmer Rouge should warn us that ideologies can take very strange forms and result in manic violence, irrespective of whether the leadership, like Pol Pot [Saloth Sar], is Paris-educated. There can be no doubt that the RUF became very violent indeed. But the forms of its violence suggest something more (see hereafter) than the casual or convenient killing associated with bandit organisations.

Some Criticism of the Lumpen Hypothesis

Lumpens as a Moral Verdict

To many, it seems that Abdullah and colleagues have a strong argument, backed by historical realities: (1) the extreme violence of the RUF is beyond denial; (2) claims that ideology guided the RUF seem hollow, taking the lack of education of the leadership into account; and (3) the origins of the RUF do indeed seem to lead back to a *pote*-based, drug-taking, and criminal (if accidentally radicalised) youth culture – which, when abandoned by intellectuals and the left-wing student group, possibly resulted in an accidental and infectious spread of the idea of rebellion to a wider underclass.

It is important to realise that the lumpen element is central to Abdullah's and his colleagues' argument in normative ways: both the violence of the RUF and the movement's lack of ideology are considered

logical outcomes of lumpen-ness and thus do not need further empirical study or analysis. Social science since its beginnings has struggled against this kind of normativeness. We are entitled to ask, on empirical grounds, whether the lumpen argument is sufficient to explain the RUF as a social phenomenon. In the debate between Abdullah and some of the authors above (Abdullah et al. 1997), published in *Africa Development*, the debaters involve themselves in a lengthy discussion about which category of young people joined the RUF. Were these 'ray-rayman dem', 'san-san boys', '*njiahungbia ngorgesia* [disconnected village youth]', 'lumpens', 'savis man', 'bonga rarray man' or 'kabudu'? No one seems to have recognised that these are all folk, and not analytical, categories. However important they are as folk terms, they hide political judgements. If it is stated that the RUF was partly made up from 'socially disconnected village youth ("*njiahungbia ngorgesia*"), who are *contemptuous* [my emphasis] of rural authority and institutions, and who, therefore, saw the war as an opportunity to settle local scores' (Abdullah et al. 1997: 172), and if we then subsequently take this contemptuous nature as a matter of fact, the debate simply reproduces the local political status quo. Here, we argue that rural authority and institutions have been instrumental in creating feelings of contempt among rural youths which in the end lead to their social disconnection from the village, but that this then has to be understood in terms of the institutional development of Sierra Leone under British indirect rule, and its subsequent post-colonial transmutations.

Let us look again at Abdullah's definition of lumpens: 'Mostly unlettered, they were predominantly second generation residents in the city. . . . They are known for their anti-social behaviour: drugs (marijuana), petty theft, and violence' (Abdullah 1997: 51). They are often unemployed and unemployable (Abdullah 1997; Abdullah et al. 1997; Rashid 1997). In other words, lumpens are deviants, 'known [by whom?] for their anti-social behaviour', and therefore to be shunned by all right-thinking persons. But this is not the language of social science. It was Durkheim who pointed out that crime, like suicide, is found in every form of society, and also that what counts as crime differs from society to society, according to its form – in other words, deviancy is normal, but what counts as normal can only be known through empirical investigation. Thus we need to get beyond 'lumpens' and 'lumpen violence' as terms of moral abuse. To be unemployed is not a crime, and rarely a choice. The large numbers of unemployed youths in Sierra Leone tell us more about the macroeconomic situation of the country than about the moral defect of unwillingness to involve oneself in paid labour. To be unemployable says more about the failures in the educational and vocational system in Sierra Leone, and is no proof, without further investigation, of a lack of interest in educational or vocational

training. What other options were open to large groups of youths, with little economic prospect in their villages, than to leave for either urban or mining centres and survive by their wits? What other economy is able to absorb them other than the informal economy – certainly not the small formal economy, in which jobs are the carefully guarded gold bullion of patrimonialism. MacGaffey (1992) has shown that the so-called informal trade in almost all African countries is considerably larger than formal trade. So McIntyre, Aning, and Addo (2002) conclude that 'to criminalise what sustains most African economies in the drive to prove a specific point is disturbing' (ibid.: 15, fn.).

Ishmail Rashid is another author who favours the lumpen argument. He uses it 'primarily, in its crude Marxist sense, to represent that stratum of the society that cannot fully employ or sell its labour because of capitalist transformation, restructuring or retrenchment (Marx and Engels 1955: 20–1)' (Rashid 1997: 22–3). But McIntyre, Aning, and Addo (2002: 12) doubt if this definition applies to the Sierra Leonean case and argue that it was not capitalist transformation that took place in Sierra Leone but 'a confused economic re-engineering process in which corruption had become a hallmark of national politics'. As a consequence, 'those workers who were retrenched ... were in fact honest, hardworking people who formed the working class strata of Sierra Leone society' (ibid.: 12).

Second-Generation City Lumpens or Rural Drop-Outs?

But in addition to falling into the trap of offering moral judgements in place of evidence, Abdullah makes an analytical mistake when he extrapolates the urban lumpen origin of the RUF to what increasingly became in the field a provincial and rural movement. Abdullah considers the RUF to be a project planned, initiated, and put into practice by a group of people with urban underclass backgrounds, and thus to be infected with the cultural drives of the urban street milieu. According to him, key players[10] were recruited among the clients of *potes* in eastern Freetown. But the information gathered for this book, in relation to early recruited cadres, does not back his point. Neither Alie Kabba nor Foday Sankoh were part of the urban working class. Sankoh hailed from a ruling family in Magburaka. The leader of the BANSAL agricultural project (discussed in Chapter 6) is the well-educated son of a political dissident from Pujehun district driven into Liberia by the oppression of Siaka Stevens. His 'bush mother', a former leader in the RUF women's wing, was once an administrative officer at Bunumbu. The BANSAL

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[10] According to Abdullah (1997: 65, fn.), 'The number of Sierra Leoneans who went to Libya between 1987/88 were not more than fifty. Alie Kabba said about two dozen went'.

second-in-command is the first son of a northern Paramount Chief. The leader of the Tongo land recovery group (also discussed in Chapter 6) was trained in community development at Bunumbu College.

There were some urban underclass elements. But by Abdullah's own admission a good number of those who were originally recruited from the *potes* for guerrilla training in Libya during the late 1980s 'decided to forget about the experience [the revolution]' (Abdullah 1997: 65) after their return to Sierra Leone. An implication is that they lacked zeal. Continuing their urban life, to second-generation migrants, may have seemed more appealing than several years of struggle in parts of the country they hardly knew. According to Abdullah (1997: 62), Foday Sankoh – future leader of the RUF – left for Libya in August 1987 with a group of recruits from Freetown *and* – the point should be emphasised – *the provinces*. So it seems unlikely that more than a handful of the group around Sankoh, who would become the senior RUF cadre (vanguards), were *urban* recruits (and from the *potes*). Two of the original leading triumvirate – Sankoh,[11] Kanu,[12] and Mansaray[13] – were (by background) from up-country districts, and not unfamiliar with rural issues. Again, Abdullah concedes that after their return to Sierra Leone from their training period in Libya, they decided that: 'they should *leave Freetown and settle in the provinces*' (my emphasis) (1997: 66). Later in his article, Abdullah then argues that 'the bulk of the current RUF battlefront commanders are lumpens from the *rural* [my emphasis] south-east' (1997: 70). Abdullah et al. (1997: 206) distinguish three groups of marginal or socially disconnected youth making up the main combatants in the RUF, namely: (1) urban marginals, (2) socially disconnected village youth, and (3) illicit miners.

The issue is clear. The RUF was from the outset much more than a group of disaffected urbanites, and much more than a bunch of street criminals. It may be relevant to take account of the interaction of university-student radicals and *pote* idlers, if indeed unemployment is to be assessed in moralistic terms, as Abdullah seems to want to insist, when discussing the origin of the conspiracy that led to the RUF taking to the field. But from the moment the Bengazi-trained radicals returned to Sierra Leone and subsequently decided to leave the capital for the provinces in 1988, the future leadership of the RUF largely turned its

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[11] Sankoh, after his release from jail, spent several years working as a photographer based in Segbwema, a road-junction town in Kailahun district, close to Pendembu and Bunumbu, which were major focuses of RUF activity from 1991. Even at the end of the war informants in Segbwema told Paul Richards (personal communication) that most of the off-road settlements as far as Bunumbu and beyond were solidly RUF terrain (cf. Richards et al. 2004b).

[12] Abu Kanu was a graduate of the rural Njala University College.

[13] Rashid Mansaray was 'an activist from Freetown east end, who had left the country in 1986 to join the MPLA in the fight against UNITA in Angola' (Abdullah 1997: 62).

back on the urban areas. As a result the majority of the vanguards were recruited in the small provincial towns. The thousands of RUF fighters recruited during the first three years of the war – the *wosus* – who formed the essential backbone of the movement, were picked up in rural backwaters, or semi-urban mining areas in Kailahun, Pujehun and Kono – areas Richards terms 'rural slums' (Richards 2005b), and were almost exclusively rural in background and orientation. These became the RUF's most loyal fighters. The few semi-intellectual types (Faya Musa, for example) who joined or were forcibly taken up by the movement, were before their conscription active in the provinces, and often had radical credentials or rural service-oriented commitments, such that the movement sensed an affinity and sought them out. The most notable example is I. H. Deen-Jalloh,[14] a lecturer at a teacher's college in Bunumbu, a village in rural Kailahun, where teacher training emphasised radical self-reliance as part of the curriculum.

It seems that Abdullah and colleagues have overestimated the urban factor in the RUF and missed out the rural factor. They assume that the RUF's position *vis-à-vis* the peasantry was, from the outset, oppositional. Most well-founded Marxist/Leninist or Maoist revolutionary projects, executed by left-wing intellectuals, would consider the peasantry (where the working class is undeveloped) as their ally, and go all out to win them over (they presume). It is self-evident to our authors that the RUF did not do so, and thus was not a genuine revolutionary movement. Thandika Mkandawire, following this theoretical line, offers a generalisation linked to the RUF case. He believes that: 'The African rural setting is generally deeply inimical to liberation war, because peasants enjoy direct control over their own land, and surplus expropriation takes place through the market, rather than through an exploitative landlord class' (Mkandawire 2002: 181). Although it is worth distinguishing between different categories of peasants as far as control over land is concerned, the point is that the African rural setting is not only inhabited by landowning peasants, but increasingly by numbers of young people who lack the basic modalities even to be peasants. Marginalised by 'customary' institutional exactions, first begun under colonial rule and maintained by rural elites ever since, they became a class of 'strangers' and vagrants, neither citizen nor subject (cf. Fanthorpe 2001). The happy land-owning peasants of Mkandawire's analysis are a myth, as far as young rural people in rural Sierra Leone are concerned. They cannot even mobilise their own labour to work the allegedly abundant land, since this would be vulnerable to extraction from them by marriage payments and court fines for

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[14] Deen Jalloh was at one stage designated the head of the RUF's Internal Defence Unit (that is, in charge of RUF internal security), but the head of BANSAL reports he was also one of the main figures in charge of ideological training.

infringements of a traditional code of behaviour regulated by elders. They are the victims of a lineage mode of production articulated with trading capital, as Dupré and Rey (1973) have so cogently argued. Thus it was not 'a serious urban malaise', as Mkandawire (2002: 208) supposes, that stoked the RUF rebellion, but the grievances of a real rural underclass of village labourers.

Abdullah and colleagues fail to hear the grievances of the rural labouring classes upon which the RUF built its insurgency because they pay no critical attention to the analysis of failing rural institutions (not least the institution of so-called customary law). Instead it looks as if they are only willing to recognise a revolutionary project when it is to be executed by a radical, but intellectual and university-based, leadership. Once it became clear that the various radical student clubs had backed off, leaving the revolution to be pursued by other, less-educated people lacking theoretical training, these authors dismissed the project as an insurgency without any agenda and in the control of lumpen elements. No further attempts were made to enquire from young people, living in villages, small towns, and mining camps, who were to form the backbone of the RUF, whether they had reasons to rebel. No attempts were made to review the RUF, its violence, and its own purported ideology, in terms of these more provincial and rural grievances.[15]

The Creation and Collapse of an Armed Egalitarian Meritocracy

From the moment the three-man leadership – Sankoh, Kanu, and Mansaray – left Freetown in 1988 after their return from Benghazi, the RUF began to take shape as a rural rather than an urban movement. Its cadres were young people, often socio-economically marginalised:

Because I was not doing anything and there was no person looking after me I decided to join them and take up arms to fight....I joined the rebels purposely because of the difficulties we were having. (Female ex-RUF combatant, see Chapter 1)

In more than a few cases they were driven away from their villages where their labour was exploited by a gerontocratic cultural system:

You will be required to do all sorts of physical jobs for the bride's family, like brushing and making a farm for the family, offering your energy as labour to build houses for them, and sharing the proceeds of your own labour . . . or you

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[15] What perhaps contributed to this urban-biased view of the RUF was the fact that Abdullah and colleagues based their analysis mainly on accounts of people *who did not join* the movement, such as members of left-wing study groups opting not to support the call for guerrilla training in Bengazi. This may have biased their understanding of the political dynamic from which the RUF drew its momentum.

will lose your wife and be taken to court for breach of contract. . . . In B. marriage is synonymous to slavery. (Ex-RUF combatant, see Chapter 2)

These youths clearly felt betrayed both by local rural elites and the state: 'The root cause [of the war] was that the elders ignored the youth, both in educational field as well as in the social field. The RUF was a youth movement' (ex-RUF commander, see Chapter 1) – and many felt some desire for vengeance against the established society. This was indeed a potentially destructive force, if mobilised without any strong guidance or vision:

As soon as you start to arm people and you do not have stringent rules and laws they will turn into bandits. In particular with the uneducated people. And about 75 percent of the movement [the RUF] was uneducated. (RUF commander C)

However, the RUF demanded strict discipline and provided guidance:

If you were found guilty of stealing you were killed. No rebel was above the law. . . . In fact, they had stronger laws than the government. (RSLMF former child combatant A, see Chapter 4)

It had a clear (if simple-minded) ideology (free education and medical care for all, collective farming, a people's court, a system of promotion based on merits, and so on). This egalitarian and meritocratic agenda inspired many recruits: 'The RUF promotes by ability, so some have really joined' (RUF fighter A, see Chapter 4). Moreover, marginalised youths – denied marriage partners, land, citizenship, or even the fruits of their own labour in their home villages – were attracted by an organisational system stressing the interests (and rights) of the group (the collective) above those of the individual: 'Alone you cannot reach [attain] anything, only in a group you can produce' (ex-RUF commander C, see Chapter 7). Many of the cadres considered themselves (or explained that they should consider themselves as) victims of a hierarchical system that had become increasingly unfair (run according to patrimonial, authoritarian, and gerontocratic principles) and which was slowly degrading into competitive individualism:

After a week I joined because their ideology made sense to me. Most of the examples they give about corruption and misbehaviour of the government, well, I was experiencing that myself. I was a victim of that myself. (Ex-RUF commander C, see Chapter 1)

The marginalised cadres had experienced firsthand that they had nothing to expect from the established society (ruled by rural elites or patrimonial politicians), nor was there scope to progress by their own efforts in a country where markets were controlled to a large extent by a closed Lebanese community.

The initial strict discipline and ideology of the RUF was able to tame to some extent the potential destructive powers of its cadres in its bush camps and areas under control:

The leaders however made these rules to stop this uncontrolled looting [of its fighters] and whenever you break this law you were sent to the firing squad. (RUF clerk A, see Chapter 5)

But it struggled to control effectively its cadres on missions in unfriendly territory, or allowed the fighters to misbehave:

Some who did bad continued to stay in the frontline. (RUF signals officer B, see Chapter 5)

But during operations there was more freedom. Fighters were allowed to rape and loot if they had no orders saying the contrary. (RUF Military Police A, see Chapter 5)

Brutal behaviour towards the civilians was increasingly allowed, and perhaps even encouraged by the leadership, at least partly in reaction to the rise of the Kamajoisia and the counter-insurgency skills they developed as a result of support from South African and British private security companies linked to diamond mining. The RUF considered the civil defence fighters and the civilians, who supported them, as a unity, making the civilians, in the eyes of the RUF, a legitimate target:

So the enemy of the RUF was not only the CDF or the SLA, but the whole society. Many of the earlier atrocities of the RUF can be explained by this double role of the civilians. (RUF clerk A, see Chapter 5)

As a result the RUF became increasingly cut off from rural society – a society in any case divided against itself, in which the natural allies of the movement were rural underclass youth – during its bush phase (1994–7). The peace negotiations culminating in the Abidjan peace accord (30 November 1996) did not result in lasting peace, but did remove the RUF ideological leadership and undermined their role (including that of Sankoh). The government attitude in peace negotiations was to separate the leadership from the rank-and-file, it being assumed that the movement in the bush would then wither and die (this was sometimes termed 'cutting off the head of the snake'). But it was a dangerous game, because the movement foresaw the possibility, and was prepared:

I remember Sankoh saying the following: 'I lead today, but I am not ruling. Tomorrow I am not with you, so you must unite and love each other.' (RUF commander E)

However, the violence of the field commanders did eventually erode the movement from within, at great cost to civilians: 'But when Masquita started to kill people, the intellectuals in the movement shied away' (RUF

commander E). Many of the RUF base camps and 'peaceful grounds' came under attack by CDF fighters, EO mercenaries, and Nigerian Alpha Jets in the run-up to the signing of the peace accord, and this further destabilised the movement, and probably contributed to later horrific violence – 'In [the 1996 attack on] the Zogoda we lost so much man-power. You know, January 6 was our revenge' (RUF commander C, see Chapter 5). The RUF's 'new society' came under attack and was des-troyed. The outcome of what had been – in the eyes of the RUF recruits – a painstakingly slow process of convincing them of the possibility of a new society was now blown to pieces. As a result the cadres lost the belief in an ideology the leadership had tried to embed in them while realising at the same time that there would be no return to the old society which had expelled them:

No sooner you come to your hometown they will kill you. So that was why we from the RUF stayed together to continue fighting till we were getting peace. (RUF commander B, see Chapter 4)

Once egalitarians and meritocrats, movement cadres became fatalists in the face of the brutality of hardened battlefront commanders handed out to friend and foe. As fatalists, under the control of the military wing, a new kind of destructive potential was about to be fully unleashed.

The power sharing after the May 1997 military coup brought the RUF together with a military junta who felt equally betrayed by the civilian population (for giving the CDF, rather than the RSLMF, the credit for fighting the RUF). But any attempt to re-ignite the RUF's principles among its cadres failed to communicate itself to the disgruntled army veterans:

You know, there is the town ideology and the bush ideology. . . . It turned out bad for the movement that we had joined the AFRC. All our rules and regulations were just eroding during the AFRC time and later they stabbed us in the back. (RUF commander E, see Chapter 5)

Expelled from Freetown and other towns by ECOMOG and the CDF in early 1998, the RUF and AFRC were nowhere close to complete extinction, as EO had promised, but both groups realised they had few options. Court-martials and public execution by firing squad of sur-rendered AFRC senior officers, including a senior woman officer, Major Kula Samba, in charge of the army widows and orphans fund, together with a death sentence on Foday Sankoh for treason, had sent a very clear signal that continued fighting was the only option, and that it would in any case be more profitable either to gain diamonds, now the main cur-rency of the conflict, or to secure a stronger card at any future negotiating table. The chaotic and bloody battle for Freetown that began on 6 Janu-ary 1999 was the clearest sign from the RUF that Sierra Leone would

only experience peace through negotiation and never through military victory, and that it wanted to enter these negotiations with Sankoh as its undisputed leader.

A Neo-Durkheimian Process

The making and breaking of the RUF and the behaviour of its cadres fits well with patterns predicted by neo-Durkheimian cultural theory as developed by Mary Douglas and others,[16] focused on how social solidarities are created and what can happen if they fall apart.

According to Emile Durkheim, society based on Rousseau's 'social contract' – that is, a rational agreement – cannot exist because agreements between people are only possible if they trust each other enough to make any such agreement. It is only after society has been established that contracts are possible. Therefore there must be some source of 'pre-contractual solidarity', according to Durkheim. This solidarity is created by a shared emotional feeling, which Durkheim refers to as the 'collective conscience' (Collins and Makowsky 1993). If we regard the RUF as a society in Durkheimian terms, then it is clear that there was an emotional feeling shared by the cadres, but that it was a negative one: resentment over exploitation by a gerontocratic rural elite, or even their exclusion from their villages for challenging the authority of elders, or the widespread tort of 'woman damage', or over a wider failure of the state to invest in the education of the younger, non-elite, non-urban generation.

According to Douglas's reworking of central elements in Durkheimian theory, once a group has become collectively bonded there are only a limited number of ways in which it can manage the constraints and regulations imposed by group commitments. Douglas (1993) distinguishes four distinctive patterns, or systems of claims, which can produce a potentially stable cultural type: the hierarchy, the sectarian or egalitarian culture, competitive individualism, and the culture of the isolate (sometimes also referred to as a fatalist culture). Notice, in contradistinction to the approach to culture as a causal entity, that Douglas's approach envisages culture as the outcome, not the cause, of bonding. Moral rules are devices for prolonging states of commitment, not the means whereby the bonding is first achieved. The circumstances creating an initial sense of group identity tend to be catastrophic events or moments of great collective excitement, such as occur in ritual events (Durkheim's key example was the French Revolution). The hierarchical village system had excluded many youngsters, or at best they were pinned down on the lowest rungs of the social-political ladder. In the small rural towns and mining areas they

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[16] On neo-Durkheimian theory see, for instance, Douglas (1993), Douglas and Ney (1998) and Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky (1990).

discovered that the patrimonially organised political economy of Sierra Leone offered rather little scope for competitive individualism. A Mende proverb says 'no one stands by themselves – everyone is behind someone' [is a client, that is, of someone higher up the social order]. However, the RUF hit upon an organisational modality that offered something different, and worked well in terms of a guerrilla campaign, where combat was often a matter of small group coordination and enterprise (in ambushes, for example): namely meritocratic egalitarianism. Induction into the movement provided the shocking, life-changing experience through which an initial sense of bonding was achieved. Thereafter the movement reproduced itself through the moral order of egalitarian accountability.

The modality was not entirely new. In Chapter 2 we have seen that youths in villages organised themselves in egalitarian labour gangs to tackle problems of labour shortage and meet the need for cash. Those away from their village, by choice or by force, and involved in mining, worked in small groups with a flat command structure, often shared tasks and rewards on an egalitarian basis, and sometimes created whole new bush-based settlements with little or no specialist division of labour. Youth gangs or networks in urban centres also frequently evoked egalitarian principles. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the nuances of these youth-oriented moral modalities, except to note the repeated desire of cadres, post-war, for farming schemes based on notions of equal burdens and simple shares (see Chapter 6).

With the rise of the RUF young people already on the margins of society, but used to sharing burdens to survive, found themselves violently catapulted into a social space where familiar egalitarian notions of labour sharing took on a new and almost millenarian political significance (Richards 2005a). They were fighting a war for a new Sierra Leone, to be based on unconditional loyalty, strict discipline, and a vision of a better world based on sharing and redistribution, or so they believed. Beyond the shock of capture, a new world of positive shared emotions opened up that served to prevent cadres slipping towards the only other untried cultural type – social accountabilities associated with fatalism and despair.

The RUF bush camps, as the crystallisation of these new collective feelings, were the evidence that the rebel project was not an impossible endeavour, even if the RUF project (like so many revolutionary projects) came at high costs for all who were not part of it. The relative ease with which the movement embedded a vision of a new and better moral order among its cadres, even though many were captured and forced to join, seems to have reflected the isolated location of the camps and low division of labour present in the rebel movement. According to Durkheim the basis of collective conscience is the division of labour; small-scale societies (like the RUF) tend to have only rudimentary division of labour. Everybody does more or less the same things, being a farmer, fisher,

herder (or in our case combatant). Members have common experiences, and share many ideas in common. This generates a strong collective conscience, but also harsh penalties for those who do not act in accordance with the dictates of the collective conscience. They will be the object of severe (retributive) punishment, since any violation is an attack on the principles of the whole group, and thus a threat to its coherence. The individual is integrated (in Durkheim's term) 'mechanically'.

However, at the interface (the frontline) between the RUF and the outside world, fighters were again reminded of their marginal and exclusionary status, and acted extremely violently towards a society that had, in many cases, rejected them. With the increasing role of the Kamajoisia, who had detailed knowledge of what the RUF considered 'safe ground', the 'comforting bosom of our mother earth – the forest' (RUF/SL 1995), the RUF's new world came under attack. This culminated in the sacking of several bush camps, including the Zogoda, towards the end of 1996 and in early 1997. The remaining cadres – without Foday Sankoh and abandoned by an ideological wing uneasy about rejoining the movement during peace negotiations, because of the rise to power of brutal battlefield commanders – lost their moral compass. Unable to return to the wider society, many drifted into the remaining state the Douglas scheme identifies – they became isolates and fatalists.

In short, the history of the RUF resulted in a complete circuit of the grid-group space; the cadres were excluded from the hierarchical and gerontocratic village society, denied access to a market society based on competitive individualism, experimented with a sectarian scheme for social cohesion, but were hounded and bombed (during the run-up to the 1996 peace accord) further into a violence-drenched fatalism. From 1997 the mood of many cadres appears to have come dangerously close to assuming they would soon die, but that they would destroy their enemy first.

Clearly the RUF represented what may be labelled as an extreme case of mechanical group integration: its isolation in the bush clearly strengthened and fostered group solidarity, while its shift to a dangerous fatalist mode happened at a time when the movement also had increasing access to military firepower. But a neo-Durkheimian approach to the study of armed groups in other conflicts still can result in interesting insights. Most armed groups – with the possible exception of the most ad hoc mercenary-based organisation – will undergo basic group formation processes and as a result solidarities are created. Such solidarities are not captured by 'rational choice' conflict explanations, of which the 'greed-not-grievance' thesis is just one derivation. But, as we have seen in the case of the RUF, these social processes do play an important role in influencing how a movement acts and reacts to both internal and external challenges. For West African armed movements (and perhaps for

contemporary sub-Saharan armed movements in general) it is important to recognise that a pre-contractual solidarity based on the shared emotional feeling among combatants – evoked by their socio-economic and political marginalisation – is a feeling experienced across the region by young people. Many African states are confronted with a whole generation of young people who are resentful and feel let down or exploited by both the state and the more traditional institutions. Argenti (2007: 29), for instance, recognises a double marginalisation of youth in the Cameroonian Grassfields: one by the 'traditional' authorities of the chiefdom and one by the national authorities (for failing to provide education and employment opportunities). Opposition has always been unscrupulously oppressed by the Cameroonian state and continuous exploitation of subordinates in the lineage by local rulers has created large numbers of vagrants, or what Argenti (2007: 49) calls a 'floating population'. Henrik Vigh (2006) refers to this marginalised state of present-day youth in Africa – characterised by the inability of young people to gain a sustainable income, marry and have children, and thus become an adult – as a 'social moratorium'. For Guinea-Bissau he observes that:

The fact that youth in Bissau has become a social moratorium is thus related to economic hardship and a generationally asymmetric control over access to resources, which has greatly reduced their space of possibilities. It is caused by two decades of scarcity combined with a system of resource distribution that, to a large degree, is structured along a generational variable. (2006: 96)

A so-called 'crisis of youth' is nowadays postulated all over sub-Saharan Africa. Poor economic development paired with the emergence of a demographic youth bulge, within a national context of patrimonial organised political systems plagued by corruption, and a rural context where traditional and gerontocratic systems of organisation are still very much the daily reality, have cornered young people in Africa and have led to their increasing socio-political and economic marginalisation. However, here it is important to remember that, according to the neo-Durkheimian approach, the sentiments caused by this marginalisation can act as the social glue for group formation, not necessarily leading to involvement in destructive activities. There are numerous examples of projects across the continent that have enabled marginalised youth to engage themselves in constructive, group-based livelihood activities.

Going back to Africa's armed movements, once collectively bonded, a neo-Durkheimian approach argues that there are only a limited number of potentially stable cultures that can be produced. While military organisations are often associated with strict hierarchies, many African rebel organisations do seem to be organised much more along sectarian or egalitarian lines. The inhospitable terrain in which these groups operate, the limited logistical means available to facilitate large troop movements,

lack of communications, and the tactics of ambushes and hit-and-run attacks – a common military strategy of poorly resourced rebel movements – are factors which probably make egalitarian or cell-structured rebel groups even more effective. Within these more sectarian or egalitarian organised armed groups, the movement's leader often has a somewhat unusual role or position: he is held in unquestionably high regard by his fighters (followers) and is the first among equals. His presence is felt constantly, even when he is not around. Joseph Kony of the LRA is a case in point, or the late leader of UNITA, about whom Le Billon writes that 'the status of Savimbi as "all seeing" among many of the rank and file . . . long instilled fear and a culture of strict discipline within the ranks and the population' (2005: 122). The removal of Foday Sankoh (through imprisonment) only made him a kind of modern-day martyr in the eyes of the RUF cadres, rather than provoking the collapse of the RUF.[17] The sectarian modalities also may explain claims by rebel movements that their rebellion is a freedom struggle to bring about a better future for all, while simultaneously killing and committing atrocities against those whom they claim to redeem: sectarian movements often foster the well-known precept that all those who are not with the movement are (potentially) against it. Even war-affected civilians struggle with this discrepancy between claims and actions. Interviewing war-affected youth in northern Uganda, Finnström recorded the following response with regard to a question about the amnesty offered to the LRA:

To me, this amnesty, even if the president accepted it coactively, does not apply to rebels. Amnesty only applies to gangsters, robbers, or those kinds of bandits. But to a rebel who has a constitutional right to liberate this country – because these [rebels] call themselves liberators, they want to liberate the country – they don't see that they have done anything wrong. (2006: 217)

A neo-Durkheimian approach can also help to make the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programme more successful, since it recognises the social capital built up among armed units. Normally, the disarmament component is aimed at removing the physical capacity of combatants to inflict harm, by collecting arms and ammunition which are then stored or destroyed, while the demobilisation component aims to remove the organisational capacity of combatants to inflict harm by 'breaking up' the command structure, turning armed groups and units into separate individuals who can then (supposedly) be reintegrated into society. While this approach serves the country's short-term security, it can undermine long-term reintegration prospects for ex-combatants and subsequently has a long-term security risk. By breaking up units who may

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[17] But death of the leader probably does undermine the group cohesion: when Savimbi was killed by government soldiers on 22 February 2002 UNITA soon entered peace negotiations and abandoned its armed struggle.

have worked together for several years, have lived together under difficult circumstances, and between whom bonds based on trust, comradeship, and a shared ordeal have emerged, any social capital that has been built up will be lost. Rather, demobilisation should aim to be more 'tailor-made' – breaking up certain units (for instance where exploitative relations have been involved) while providing opportunities for more genuine (peer-based) units whose social capital then can be used for more peaceful and constructive purposes.

In short, a neo-Durkheimian approach enables one to study armed groups as what they are: groups, rather than a collection of individuals. It is a truly sociological approach to studying a social phenomenon: armed conflict.

Discussion: Answering the Three Key Questions

At the start of this chapter three key questions were raised, based on material and data presented earlier. The chapter proceeded by reviewing debate about the origins and character of the RUF, and explored an alternative explanation, linked to the neo-Durkheimian model earlier advocated by Richards (1996; 2005a). This has provided a basis on which to attempt answering the three questions posed at the outset.

Lumpen Neo-Barbarians – Did Uncouth Cultures Cause War?

Does culture drive violence? Abdullah's variant on the cultural determin-ist hypothesis – the lumpen thesis – has already been extensively examined and found deficient. But an earlier version of Abdullah's argument – about the excesses of lumpen or ghetto youth – was expounded by the influential American journalist, Robert Kaplan. His approach has been dubbed the 'new barbarism'. According to Mkandawire, the typical move of the culturalist explanation is to suggest 'that there is some-thing fundamentally wrong with . . . culture – and that senseless violence is an undisavowable excrescence of [African] culture' (2002: 183). And indeed, whenever an outsider does not understand the social, political, and economic dimensions of a conflict it is liable to be labelled 'chaotic' or 'senseless'. Abraham (1975), for instance, identifies a reaction by colonial administrators to the nineteenth-century wars in Mendeland comparable to the way Kaplan approaches the RUF war a century later.

Richards (1996), in criticising Kaplan's line, shows that the 'new bar-barism' thesis is fundamentally flawed, reflecting a certain view dominant among global urban elites at that time. He argues that:

The horrifying acts of brutality against defenceless civilians . . . cannot in any way be taken to prove a reversion to some kind of essential African savagery. Ter-ror is *supposed* to unsettle its victims. . . . [T]hey [these brutal acts] are devilishly

well-calculated. . . . Kaplan's view, endorsing a view widespread among capital city elites and in diplomatic circles at the time of his visit . . . that the rebel movement had been destroyed and the violence was exclusively the work of bandits and military splinter groups, is now known to be incorrect. (Richards 1996: xvi)

Above, it has been suggested that the extreme violence of the RUF cadres – including the cutting off of children's hands[18] – can at least partly be explained as a reaction to the increasingly effective threat posed by the mercenary-backed Civil Defence Forces.[19] If the RUF was largely made up of young people only weakly incorporated in rural society, the violence can be read as the most marginalised group increasingly turning against the very society which had first excluded them, in particular once that society had begun to sponsor the main threat to the RUF's existence. Furthermore, the RUF operated according to a system where, unintentionally, those who behaved the worst could remain in a position to continue to do so, at the frontline, and sometimes even secure promotion for military success, if their mission was so judged. This last aspect fitted a wider development, where the power in the RUF shifted increasingly from the ideological to the military wing, for both internal and external reasons. The key to the RUF collapse into extreme violence, therefore, is how the movement developed, and how others reacted to it. No culture is *inherently* barbaric, or violence-prone.

Greed, Not Grievance – Was It All about Diamonds?

As stated previously it is unlikely that among the 20,000 or so RUF cadres, there was nobody with an interest in diamonds. In the diamond regions young people lived and worked under hard conditions right up to the time of their conscription. In particular where it concerned official mining sites (as opposite to the illicit operations) little financial benefit was in the end going to those who did the hard labour, since government licences had to be obtained and landowners had to be paid. Young people involved in mining proved to be willing recruits, and many decided to travel and made contact with the rebel movement in order to join it. As pointed out in Chapter 4, legal, and to a larger extent illicit mining groups operating in quasi-platoon structures even before the war were absorbed

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[18] The RUF military policeman quoted in Chapter 5 (RUF Military Police A), claims that the amputations started in 1996/7. This is not fully in accord with the facts (some definitely occurred before and in particular in the run-up to the election, in late 1995/early 1996, though how many of these incidents are to be attributed to army renegades is unclear). However, it is possible that RUF Military Police A was referring to the epidemic of later 'senseless' amputations. Earlier amputations clearly had a kind of political message, while later on they increasingly resembled acts of destructive fatalists who considered the whole of society as their enemy.

[19] A similar argument is made by Gberie (2005: 14–15), based on interviews with senior RUF commanders.

by the RUF, sometimes as whole groups. Before the RUF started its collaboration with the AFRC, mining by individual RUF fighters or commanders probably happened in some locations and on people's own initiative. But RUF mining clearly increased significantly from May 1997 onwards. Still, during the Junta period Kono was controlled by AFRC commander Gullit, and Tongo was under Junta control for no more than three months during this period.

Nevertheless, towards the end of the conflict, the focus on mining increased further. This is no surprise, since mining is the main livelihood strategy for more than 120,000 people in Sierra Leone. In addition to this, some of my informants suggested that when it looked as if a cease-fire and peace accord were in the offing, there was a fear – shared by some commanders – of coming out of the war without any benefit. And, if they left the war empty-handed, both fighters and commanders knew that they would find it difficult to negotiate acceptance back into their communities. Informants claim that, partly because of this fear, some of the local commanders in diamond-rich areas started to mine on their own initiative, or at least tried to keep some of the diamonds they were expected to hand over to the senior commanders. Within the RUF mining structure which was now up and running, some commanders were likely to have started operations on their own account – a practice not entirely new to the industry – increasing the possibility of forced and excessively forced labour. Apparently, some commanders became so obsessed by diamonds at this stage that they even started to force junior RUF fighters to mine at gunpoint (see Chapter 4).

For some, diamonds and the war in Sierra Leone are inseparable. According to David Keen (2003: 67), problems in the diamond sector in Sierra Leone (1) provided an incentive for violence, as shown by the great interest of the various faction fighters in illicit mining activities; (2) funded the violence, since (for instance) the RUF used the diamonds to buy weapons; (3) fuelled the war, as a result of frustration over unequal benefits from the diamond sector; and (4) undermined legitimate government, since tax revenues were so low, and diamonds so easy to smuggle. But does this make greed the cause of the conflict in Sierra Leone? One question is whether it is 'greed' or 'grievance' when the have-nots want a 'piece of the cake' in a context where, for decades, the benefits of natural resources had ended up in the hands of just a privileged few. Or, as Keen puts it: 'It is not unlikely that greed (and the willingness to use violence to acquire resources) is itself the result of grievances' (Keen 2003: 69).

Mkandawire brings two points of criticism to bear on the greed explanation, criticising Collier and Hoeffler's (1999) 'looting model of rebellion', which claims that rebels start off as ordinary robbers,[20] who attain

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[20] Reno states that 'Natural resources and close connections to criminal rackets do not automatically generate predation, even if they offer incentives for some individuals to

the status of rebels by the sheer impact of economies of scale, when he states that: 'no known rebel movement in Africa possesses these features of a crime syndicate that has grown into a rebel movement simply by the logic of economies of scale. And, in any case, the model definitely does not relate to Angola and Sierra Leone, which the authors cite explicitly' (Mkandawire 2002: 187). Second, he states that although the Collier and Hoeffler (2001) study 'merely addresses issues of the probability of war and the correlation of such a probability with a number of political and economic factors, the political reading has been that we are actually dealing with causes, leading to the conflation of a causal explanation of war with enabling conditions' (Mkandawire 2002: 188).

It is clear that no war can be fought without resources, but this does not make every war fought a war over resources. As Abdullah (1997: 74) puts it: 'Lacking an alternative source of arms (the Soviet Union is no more), [the RUF] had to depend on exploiting the resources available in its area of operations to pursue its "revolution".' If greed was indeed the only or dominant motive of the RUF, the large diamond fields would have been the first and only target. However, during the first half of the war, the RUF attacked diamond areas, but was never in control of them for any substantial period of time.[21] Furthermore, the geographical location of its forest camps and the targets of its military actions refute the suggestion that the movement was only interested in controlling the country's diamond-producing areas. The RUF's (initial) concentration in the east and south of the country probably had more to do with the relationship between the RUF and Charles Taylor's neighbouring 'Greater Liberia' from where it launched its 'revolution', and the fact that

try to provoke war' (Reno 2003: 46). Reno gives the examples of Dagestan and Ingush republics, which share the broad geopolitical situation of their neighbour Chechnya, but are much more stable. He also brings up the example of 'Afghanistan's Taliban regime [that] cut opium production by 96 percent between 2000 and 2001, foregoing an estimated income of 100 million dollars' (Reno 2003: 47). Clearly, preference is given (in this last example) to a religious and ideological programme over purely economic interests.

[21] This changed in the second half of the conflict (particularly during 1999 and afterwards) when the RUF controlled and mined heavily in Tongo and Kono. But even during this time one should not overestimate the total value of these 'blood diamonds': 'Expert assessments reckon the alluvial diamond economy of Sierra Leone to have been worth about $70 million per year in 1999–2000 (OTI 2000). To put this figure in perspective, this is about half the value of the normal annual subsistence rice crop. . . . It is estimated that the RUF may have been able, at maximum, to control between $20 and $50 million of the total amount (OTI 2000), though another estimate (UN Experts 2000) claims the range is $25–125 million. The true figure is more likely to be at the lower end of the two suggested ranges (or even lower), since the movement did not get good prices for its stones' (Richards 2002). In addition, illicit mining and the smuggling of diamonds was not an exclusively RUF practice, nor was it limited to periods of war. In 1970, official diamond export was over 2 million carats; in 1988 this figure dropped to only 48,000 carats (Gberie 2005: 32). This drop mainly was due to smuggling, in particular to Liberia. According to Sesay (1993), quoted in Keen (2005: 22), 95 percent of Sierra Leonean diamond production was smuggled out of the country by the late 1980s.

in this (Mende-speaking) part of the country there was more opposition that could be mobilised against the APC government. The RUF leadership, having lived in up-country Sierra Leone, knew that the alluvial diamond pits were the places to go to recruit their cadres, since these were the places where many of the marginalised and excluded youth ended up. Many miners, according to the political-economic analysis of the RUF, were willing and likely to join and become loyal fighters. Another reason for the RUF's attempts to frustrate the government-controlled diamond sector was that the government's war effort heavily depended on revenues from diamond sales, making these areas an obvious military target for any insurgent group.

Scholars favouring the greed-not-grievance explanation question why, if indeed the marginalisation of young people is an important cause of conflict, we do not see more wars in other African countries with similar marginalised youthful populations. A valid counter-argument would be to point out that these other peaceful countries have *not yet* collapsed into wars fostered by disgruntled youths. Who knows what the future may bring? Some wonder whether Nigeria (with an all-but-declared youth insurgency in parts of the oil-rich Niger Delta) has not already become such a case. The spread of war to formerly stable and apparently prosperous, but mineral-poor, Côte d'Ivoire (involving some fighters already associated with conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia) seems an equally ominous development (Chauveau 2005). One might also cite the examples of persistent war in mineral-poor northern Uganda, or the stirrings of potential youth insurgency in Kenya modelled on memories of the Mau Mau insurrection. A second way to deal with the argument is to bounce the ball back and ask why, if alluvial diamonds are such a surefire path to war, did Sierra Leone not face a war much earlier? Diamonds were discovered in the late 1920s, and serious mining activity began in the 1930s. Greed is not a new phenomenon in Sierra Leonean society. The explanation lacks something. War can be continued by economic means, but does not simply break out because economic conditions are right. War is a social project, and needs to be organised by a group driven by a vision, however strange. The Durkheimian approach seems, intrinsically, a sounder basis for analysis than the econometrics of Collier and his colleagues.

Yet we should not underestimate the real significance of the greed-not-grievance argument. Intellectual explanations sometimes fit an urgent need, even when not well supported by facts. In the present case, the international community calculated correctly that it could reduce or end war in the Sierra Leone and the region by stemming the flow of diamonds, which all agree were essential to weapon purchases. The greed-not-grievance thesis helped build the coalition at the UN and elsewhere needed to take this action. War was squeezed out of the system in

Sierra Leone, even if (frustratingly) it then broke out in Côte d'Ivoire,[22] beyond the reach of diamond sanctions. This suggests it is possible to end wars temporarily, even without addressing causes. Yet evidence reviewed earlier suggests that bitterness still haunts the minds of many socially excluded rural youths in Sierra Leone. Acting as if the greed-not-grievance hypothesis were true buys time, but may not provide a durable solution.[23]

Rapid Expansion of the RUF – An Inverse of the Rapidly Collapsing Patrimonial State?

A third option was put forward in the introduction to this book, namely that the war and the rapid growth of the RUF should be considered an inverse of the collapse of a state regulated by neo-patrimonial politics. Patrimonialism turns juniors into clients. It is a way of making specific, particularistic promises to the younger generation. As a sticker popular in Sierra Leone has it – 'After you, na me'. The system lasts only so long as young people can believe their turn will come, eventually. Contraction in a patrimonial system is felt first at the margins – notably, among the already weak rural families with a background in domestic slavery. Ex-combatants hint at this as a cause of their dissatisfaction (see Chapter 1), when talking about lack of opportunity, spreading despair, and exploitation by the very elders who (historically) would have been their source of assistance. The historical analysis of Chapter 2 suggested an objective basis for this despair, in the very ham-fisted way the economy and social service provision were handled, especially under the Momoh regime.

Bangura (1997) argues that patrimonial arrangements were only one aspect in creating the conditions of the war. Other factors were also instrumental, such as the systematic centralisation of power and the destruction of all forms of civic opposition under the APC government, its neglect of development in rural areas, and the selective use of state violence (Bangura 1997: 135). Indeed, it is unlikely that the conflict in Sierra Leone, any more than other contemporary armed conflicts in Africa, has been the result of a single cause (although some of Bangura's factors are closely associated with a patrimonial state). Mkandawire criticises the idea of the collapse of neo-patrimonialism as the cause of conflict: 'While this analysis captures some of the African political reality, it cannot explain the cases of collapse of putatively patron-clientelistic

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[22] Liberian and Sierra Leonean combatants are fighting in the conflict in the Ivory Coast (HRW 2005). Presumably among these are many who missed out on the reintegration support in the DDR process.

[23] In many cases the use of the greed-not-grievance explanation is preferred as an international peace-enforcement strategy because it suggests some very practical interventions: economic boycotts, travel bans, freezing of bank accounts, and so on.

states that have not led to violence' (Mkandawire, 2002: 185). Again, this risks the 'not yet' riposte. The historical analysis in Chapter 2 brought to light the collapse of the patrimonial system affecting the educational and job prospects of young people. This proved especially damaging in a country built for so long on promises of education as a key to social advancement. The chapter also revealed a socio-economic and political crisis of young people resulting from the exploitative tendencies of a rural elite. The manipulation of so-called customary law, sanctioned by the British, allows elders to extract youth labour, and undermines individualism (that is, attempts by youths to meet their own needs) in the absence of sponsorship. The picture fits a wider pattern. The war zone in West Africa is found in the Upper Guinean forest, a region bracketed by Senegal and Ghana. Getz (2004), as mentioned, shows that the price of colonial expansion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in these two countries was to allow local coastal and interior elites to slow down the pace of emancipation. If prolongation of a social order based on domestic slavery created a persistent legacy in Senegal and Ghana, the argument probably applies even more so in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where domestic slavery was not abolished in law until c. 1930. Many of the practices 'codified' in customary law are still recognisably related to the exploitation of the labour of youths under domestic slavery. Patrimonialism was the institutional form through which youth emancipation was slowly achieved. Its collapse, at a point of economic crisis in the 1980s, provided the lethal combustible mix on which the fire lit by the RUF raged.

A collapsing patrimonial system, in combination with a crisis of rural youth of the kind encountered in Sierra Leone, is perhaps sufficient to explain the emergence of a rebel movement that had some success in attracting young people. But it cannot fully explain the RUF's character. To gain more insight into this, Durkheimian theory was invoked. A Durkheimian approach addresses the fundamental 'stuff' of which societies are made. Such an analysis seems necessary to better understand why and how the RUF stayed together as a movement, despite so many cadres being abducted, and why and how it developed from a more egalitarian movement to an increasingly fatalistic one. It has been shown that RUF cadres shared a similar, but essentially negative 'collective conscience', on which basis the RUF sought to build a more positive view of a new, more transparent, and fairer society. This was clearly attractive to those who considered themselves victims of the old order, at the bottom of the social and economic pile. Hierarchical and individualistic modes of social accountability offered few chances for rural marginalised youth to progress, while at the same time farm labourers and diamond diggers were well aware of egalitarian values emerging from the experience of cooperative labour. But when the construction of this egalitarian society

was undermined both by internal developments and by external attack, it collapsed and the cadres slipped – under the brutal control of their battlefront commanders – into fatalism.

Even then, however, the collapse was never complete. Some elements of the RUF vision persisted, and were put into practice on a limited scale, in better administered districts (where ideologically motivated commanders came to the fore). In parts of Kailahun and Tonkolili districts some schools were opened, a people's court still functioned, and members were mobilised for farming activities. The RUF's interest in farming can be explained partly by the necessity to have access to food. But the material presented in this book suggests that more than simple necessity was involved. RUF cadres came predominantly from rural areas, which in many cases they were forced to leave, having dropped out of school or being threatened by fines levied by a local court, and ended up in mining areas and associated small towns. They knew the difficulties of surviving on the margins in the diamond areas or towns. Many longed to return to their villages of birth, but only if they could aspire to social independence – and be recognised as 'somebody'. For this they needed to guarantee they could make a reasonable living without running the danger of being exploited and harassed by a rural elite. They viewed, and some continue to view successful farming as a key to that independence. They also know that it was, and remains, a key to their longer-term social rehabilitation. The evidence reviewed in this book supports the hypothesis that the RUF was both the result of a socio-economic crisis experienced by rural youth and their attempted answer to that crisis. Durable peace in Sierra Leone depends on a continued post-war search for an answer to the rural/agrarian crisis of youth.

We now know that the majority of the RUF were Mende speakers and that most of the RUF volunteers came from Kailahun and Pujehun districts, where the legacy of domestic slavery persisted longest, both in terms of duration and the numbers involved in domestic dependency. The language of slave revolt was something the RUF (whether cynically or not) sought to revive. RUF violence against the rural population in these districts was high. The movement thought that it could secure some local support by advocating an end to the extraction of the labour of youths by chiefs. In doing so, it doubtless created a tyranny of egalitarian labour sharing, and broke a bottleneck of shortage of marriage partners if only through seizing young women and enrolling them against their will. There is no attempt here to justify a political programme that owes more to the logic of the Cargo Cult than Athenian democracy, except perhaps to point out that the Athenians never did see that their civilised human values ought to be applicable also to their slaves. The point is only to direct attention to how the movement thought and organised, in order

to address the issue of preventing future misdirection of response. This may require the wider society to address a social pathology Durkheim (1964 [1893]) terms the 'forced division of labour', in order that a more just and inclusive set of social values might thrive (cf. Rawls 2003). After emancipation, older freed slaves settled into low-status semi-subsistence rice farming. Their children were often dependent on the patronage of the one-time slave owners to gain a foothold on the lower rungs of the educational ladder. From the early 1950s many of these young people with weak family support moved off into the alluvial diamond mining sector. The children and grandchildren of former slaves exchanged a fixed agrarian poverty for a new kind of poverty consequent upon their freedom to move – the lottery of diamond mining. It is clear that this particular cycle of injustice and violence, rooted in incomplete emancipation, needs to be addressed before it causes another cycle of violence and atrocity.

Epilogue

Let us return again to Tongo, from where we started our journey. If, after Kono, Tongo is the main diamond-producing area in Sierra Leone, there is little to indicate that millions of dollars' worth of diamonds have come out of the ground – even when due allowance is made for structures destroyed during the war. Tongo was and continues to look like a rural slum.

Nevertheless, Tongo is a world apart from the rural villages in Sierra Leone. It has always been a much more dynamic and ethnically diverse community, with a steady influx of young people coming to the fields on a temporary basis from all parts of the country. Whereas in post-war Sierra Leone the natives of villages struggle, but can hardly refuse, to resume relations with kinsfolk who joined armed factions, in Tongo the native community struggles to accept a much larger group of strangers: former combatants who were based in Tongo during the war, and those who have arrived after disarmament from other locations. Whereas in the villages it is cultural norms – you cannot refuse your kinsman – that play the dominant role in reintegration, in Tongo it is the demand for labour that forces the native community, involved in mining either directly, as landowners, or indirectly as traders and shopkeepers, to accept 'strangers', problematic backgrounds notwithstanding.

The young men mining in Tongo on a seasonal basis are likely to have farms in other parts of the country, which they can temporarily leave in the hands of family members during the low season. But those young men who are based in Tongo on a more permanent basis are somewhat stuck. They do not own land, nor do they acquire much if any real skill, although some pits use pumps and some diggers gain experience in basic maintenance, which can be put to use in other activities such as mechanised cassava grating or generator maintenance. The ex-combatants in Tongo form a special sub-category of doubly stuck young people: they cannot easily go back home, if they want to, since it will be hard to gain reacceptance arriving empty-handed after so many years of absence. In any case, many dare not go home, or at least not during the first few years after the war, for they are afraid of retribution for the atrocities they may have committed. Only those who have profited fully from DDR

support stand a chance of leaving the diamond fields behind. Those who have only partly profited, or not at all, are likely to remain in a diamond area, or, if informally disarmed in another part of the country, will drift towards a place like Tongo. Diamond areas offer the advantage of social anonymity in a multicultural throng, as well as the remote chance of making a big find. To the landowners and diamond-mining operators a large labour force of young people is at hand, who have no other option than to work for minimal wages.

The following statement of a local chief (and landowner) in Tongo shows the pragmatism of the native community in regard to reabsorbing ex-combatants:

What is most important to the reintegration of ex-combatants is that they submit to the authorities and thus that they are in compliance with the law and order. Like normally, if a stranger comes to the town there must be a person responsible for him. Regret is less important than compliance.[1] Traditional rituals of giving forgiveness only took place in Tongo on a very limited scale.

In other words, the issue of whether or not ex-combatants feel remorse for any atrocities committed is secondary to their willingness to comply with law and order now. It is hardly necessary to add that much of this 'law and order' is not about human rights, fairness, and justice, but about the administration of the partly privatised security procedures regulating diamond-mining activities under the restored democratic government. Rather ironically, in view of this statement, the only ritual of forgiveness that I actually witnessed in Sierra Leone took place in Tongo, but was related to diamond mining: a mining gang leader had started washing the gravel in the absence of the landowner, who thus could not see whether or not there had been any diamonds in the gravel. The gang leader had to crawl on the floor to the various elders and family members, who then touched him on the shoulder as a sign of forgiveness.

During the latter part of the war, mining was in the hands of AFRC Junta forces and the RUF. The situation is now as before the war, with state authorities in charge, although few if any of the larger diamond-buying agents have returned to Tongo in the first few years after the war. Most locally dug diamonds leave for Kenema the same day, where dozens of Lebanese and 'Maraka' (Senegambian) diamond buyers and dealers live. No time is wasted, and soon a motorbike taxi will have been chartered to run the rough road between Tongo and Kenema carrying any passenger with diamonds to sell.

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[1] Kelsall concludes about the TRC hearings at Magburaka, Tonkolili district, that 'though largely unsuccessful in generating full confessions from perpetrators', . . . 'The perpetrators' very attendance at the hearings registered their partial subordination to the community, their compliance with its norms, their willingness to submit to its judgements' (Kelsall 2005: 386).

Since the discovery of diamonds in Sierra Leone areas like Tongo have acted as magnets to jobless young people seeking their fortune. Much diamond mining has been relatively small-scale but labour-intensive artisanal mining of alluvial deposits. But in Tongo (and Kono) more capital-intensive and mechanised kimberlite mining also has taken place.[2] Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST), a De Beers subsidiary and, later, a joint venture linking De Beers and the state, used industrial techniques, both to mine alluvium and also to exploit kimberlite, though never on a major scale. SLST built an industrial plant to wash gravel and also constructed a labour camp in Tongo. Industrial mining operations ceased even before the war. But the labour camp became a central focus in post-war tensions between RUF ex-combatants and civilians.

Up until disarmament, the RUF was in charge of the area and forced the civilians to mine for them, although on better terms during the last years of the war. When I started fieldwork in Tongo (2002) the concentration of ex-RUF combatants was extremely high there, especially relative to the small total population of the town. Moreover, most of these RUF ex-combatants lived together in 'Labour Camp', where the control and supervision of the traditional authorities were only limited. The major concern of the authorities was that ex-RUF fighters, absorbed within the New Sierra Leonean Army, and thus re-equipped with new arms, regularly came to visit their former comrades. Furthermore, according to some Tongo indigenes, the RUF ex-combatants in Labour Camp sometimes made trips to Liberia and returned with looted items. This inspired others to go as well. The fear among the community was that one day they might return with weapons and start another war.

Labour Camp comprises houses built by the diamond-mining company active in Tongo before the war. With the termination of the concession, the land and constructions upon it were handed over to the community, as part of the contract.[3] The houses thus belong to the community. Moreover, whereas many locals from Tongo saw their houses destroyed by the RUF during the war and live in temporary structures, the houses in Labour Camp survived the war reasonably well. Not only have the RUF ex-combatants thus been living there illegally, and without paying rent on community property, but they also have been living in the best houses at a time when the need for housing has been particularly pressing. Until recently, the inhabitants of Labour Camp were also mining illegally – that is, without the permission of the legal landowners – in

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[2] Kimberlite is the hard rock in which diamonds were formed, and requires some kind of mechanical mining, often involving following the kimberlite pipes deep underground.

[3] There is a local joke to the effect that the international mining company had a mining contract guaranteeing it access to the land for 100 years. However, since it mined 24 hours instead of 8 hours a day, after 33 years the local authorities came to tell the company that its contract had expired.

a nearby plot named 'Pump Station'. This issue seems, however, to have been resolved. The miners have accepted the rights of the landowners and pay the necessary amount of gravel to them in exchange for the right to mine.

Up to 2002 the other major diamond centre in Sierra Leone, Kono, was faced with a similar situation: RUF ex-combatants were mining illegally for diamonds and occupying the dwellings of local people who had started to return after the end of the war. The indigenes of the Kono diamond fields then drove away these former rebels in a violent action (the 'Konomokwie'), reclaiming their pre-war possession and rights. This kind of communitarian violence has been avoided in Tongo, although there were voices from within the chiefdom, and more specifically the ranks of the former Civil Defence Forces, calling for a violent solution. During the elections in spring 2002, former RUF combatants wore RUFP shirts and sang RUF songs loudly. This pushed a tense situation to the brink.

Deadlines for the self-removal of the ex-rebels had long passed. Youth organisations in the Tongo area seem to have become fed up with the slow process of UN mediation, which was not able to resolve the problem, although meetings were held among the different stakeholders on an almost daily basis. Frustrated local youths were backed up by ex-CDF militia fighters and chiefdom authorities: it would seem to be a violent and dangerous mix. According to the president of the Lower Bambara Youth Council (LBYC):

When the LBYC was established, Labour Camp was completely occupied by the RUF: 54 houses. They agreed to hand over five houses after our first meeting, that was in February 2002. This was a meeting between the ex-combatants, the LBYC, the chiefdom authorities and the community people. No UN or police was there. A second batch of 24 houses was given to the chiefdom authorities in July 2002. That time there was some resistance and they asked for more time. Then in May 2003, the twelve remaining houses were given up. Presently, all the houses belong to the chiefdom authorities. We did not want to use violence although we had more strength than them. We have many youths and are backed by the CDF. We are highly recognised and working closely together with the traditional authorities.

The LBYC, which runs an office in one of the houses handed over by the RUF ex-combatants, does not seem to be making unreasonable claims, but it is clear that behind its demands is the influence of the local authorities, attempting to reassert control over all aspects of diamond mining.[4]

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[4] According to an officer of the UN military mission, based in Tongo, these youth organisations are vehicles of the local authorities:

There is too much power of the local authorities and too little of the government. The local authorities are in favour of the CDF and not the RUF. And the Youth Council is nothing more than a vehicle of

The other side of the story is articulated by a group of ex-combatants residing in Labour Camp, interviewed just before the last houses were handed over:

One of the largest problems we have is the housing. We already handed over 24 out of the 52 houses and later we gave another 14. But still the community asks for more. Our problem is that we do not mind to give up the houses if we had the money to rent another place. Our disarmament allowance has already been spent. It is difficult for us to go back to our place of birth because we cannot carry anything [financial means, household items, and so on to our family there. The first day they will feed you but the next day they will rely on you saying that you have come from Tongo so you must have money. But if we had money we would set up a business here in town. We would not go back to our villages, only once in a while. In Tongo there is enough work in the mining. Even people from the [nearby] villages come to Tongo to mine and only involve themselves in agriculture on a seasonal basis. You know, reintegration of ex-combatants in the community has taken place but only for those of the CDF, not of the RUF.

In the end, however, all the RUF ex-combatants withdrew from Labour Camp, in effect bringing the dispute to a peaceful end, though to their detriment – thus potentially fuelling a view that the promises of reintegration offered in Abuja have not been fulfilled (clearly the concern of the UN peace-keeping officer).

The RUF ex-combatants who lived in Labour Camp have been forced to look for other housing. It is likely that they have found places in Tongo itself, sharing rented rooms with others. This is similar to what many of the other youthful ex-combatants and war-affected youth were already doing. The indigenous community has relaxed; Labour Camp is no longer perceived as a security threat, while at the same time a segment of the cheap labour force has been forced to part with even more of its meagre wages to local interests, in order to rent housing, or land for building a rough hut, from the Tongo indigenes. Whether a low-waged underclass with knowledge of military tactics and memories of military mobilisation is, indeed, a security problem resolved, or a resentful faction biding its time, remains to be seen.

the local authorities. The RUF has been quite cooperative, involving themselves in communal labour. But the local authorities do not want to see that and only want them out of the place.

Annex I: A Chronology*

1991

- 23 March, RUF enters Sierra Leone at Bomaru, Kailahun district
- A second group enters Sierra Leone a few days later at Bo Waterside, Pujehun district
- 27 March, 300 RUF fighters capture the town of Buedu, Kailahun district
- April, supported by 1,200 Nigerian and 300 Guinean forces, the RSLMF still fails to contain the insurgents
- April, Guinean troops successfully defend the bridge at Daru
- April, anti-Taylor Liberians in Sierra Leone form ULIMO to fight the RUF and advance to the mining and timber areas of eastern Sierra Leone. One contingent bases itself afterwards at Mattru-on-the-Rails, near Bo
- June/July, the RUF controls a fifth of the country in southern and eastern SL
- July/August, a small Nigerian detachment is deployed to protect the bridge over the Sewa River, at Gondama, south of Bo
- August, President Momoh revises constitution to reintroduce a multi-party system, backed by 60 percent of voters in a referendum
- October, Captain Prince Benjamin-Hirsch murdered by fellow soldiers
- Late 1991, ULIMO forces enter Liberia from Sierra Leone, and directly engage with Taylor's NPFL

1992

- March, according to the RUF, the Liberian special forces are sent back to Liberia
- 29 April, successful military coup by young officers from Daru
- April, RUF announces a unilateral cease-fire through the BBC World Service
- May, Strasser offers amnesty to the RUF fighters in return for unconditional surrender

* Information in this chronology is partly based on Conciliation Resources (2000).

- May, NPRC declares a state of emergency
- May, RUF calls a halt to ambushes and proposes peace negotiations, but the NPRC does not respond. Several key RUF figures are killed by the army and peace plans are off the agenda
- May, the RUF claims all Liberian Special Forces have left their side of the border
- May, according to the RUF, NPRC representatives travel to Nigeria and Ghana seeking military aid
- An American Red Cross worker is taken hostage by the RUF
- October, RUF enters Kono but is pushed out of Koidu within two weeks
- November 1992 to January 1993: RUF controls Kono's diamond-mining areas
- 29 December, the execution of nine suspected coup plotters and seventeen other prisoners by the NPRC, makes the UK government cut £4m in aid

1993

- July, Chairman Strasser dismisses NPRC vice-chairman Solomon A. J. Musa, who is replaced by Lt. Julius Maada Bio. Musa is granted asylum in the UK
- October, Strasser announces that elections will be held by the end of 1995
- October, RUF attack on Kabala and Tamaboro leaders, Daembaso Samure and Marie Keita murdered. Tamaboros disband
- Late 1993, RSLMF recapture Pendembu, Kailahun town, and Koindu
- December, RUF retreat into the Gola Forest

1994

- January, NPRC starts massive recruitment of youths in Freetown, army doubles in size to 6,000, later 15,000
- January, NPRC declares 'total war', but the RUF is executing lightning raids on the centre and north of the country
- February, 400 disgruntled troops – loyal to the executed Major Yayah Kanu – from Teko Barracks in Makeni abscond and head east
- March, Irish priest (Fr. MacAlester) and Dutch medical missionary family (the Krijns) are killed in a RUF ambush – facilitated by NPRC soldiers – at Panguma
- April, ambushes on the Kenema–Bo and Makali–Masingbi highway increase
- June, RUF – allegedly aided by renegade soldiers – attacks Telu, administrative centre of Hinga Norman's chiefdom

- October, an estimated 40 percent of new army recruits have defected and misbehave. Evidence of collusion with the RUF in attacks on civilians grows
- November, two UK volunteer aid workers taken hostage by the RUF in Kabala. Sankoh unsuccessfully demands recognition of the RUF and weapons in return for their release
- RUF controls hills close to Freetown peninsula (Camp Four-Four, or Forfor, close to Bauya)
- 23 December, RUF attacks road junction at Mile 91 (from Camp Four-Four)
- 24 December, RUF attacks Kenema
- 27 December, RUF attacks Bo
- The camp of the Italian company resurfacing Bo-Taiama road, ten miles north-west of Bo, is destroyed by the RUF

1995

- January, government-sanctioned peace initiative is undertaken by local leaders in southern Pujehun but is unsuccessful. The RUF accuses the government of insincerity
- January, the rutile mines at Mobimbi and bauxite mines at Mokanji in the south are attacked by the RUF, leading to their closure with more hostages taken. Active collaboration of the army – deployed under the command of Major Johnny Paul Koroma – is suspected
- 24 January, RUF attacks Kambia town, seizing weapons and new conscripts
- February–April, NPRC employs Gurkha mercenaries but these are ambushed by RUF and withdrawn (their American commander, Mackenzie, is killed c. 24 February)
- March–July, after intervention by International Alert (an NGO) and the support of Ghanaian NPFL publicist Addai-Sebo, a number of hostages are released to the ICRC, after a 17-day march through the bush to the Guinea border
- South African Executive Outcomes (EO) mercenaries are hired for cash and diamond concessions
- May, EO deploys in Freetown and starts first operation, reaching Masingbi on the same day, accompanied by Tom Nyuma, reaching Yengema the next day
- EO clears the RUF from hills near Freetown, retakes the rutile and bauxite mines and secures Kono diamond fields in the following months
- August, due to civilian, national and international pressure, NPRC reschedules elections for February, 1996 and pursues a negotiated settlement with RUF
- September, the RUF is prepared for new peace negotiations

- October, a RUF advance around Serabu is halted by RSLMF troops and EO claims to have dislodged the Malal Hills camps and Camp Lion, after which small groups of RUF fighters surrender. RUF atrocities, in particular between Bo and Moyamba, increase
- 13 November: RUF's Isatu Kallon and James Massallay are arrested in Guinea and brought to Freetown (and interrogated by EO), attempting to make their way to Abidjan for preliminary negotiations
- RUF's Agnes Jalloh, Philip Palmer, Faya Musa, and Dr Mohamed Barrie reach Abidjan for peace negotiations and meet with three London-based Sierra Leoneans: Ambrose Ganda, Omrie Golley, and Oluniyi Robin-Coker
- December, EO captures Kono mining area from RUF

1996

- 16 January, in a palace coup Strasser is replaced by Maada Bio
- Foday Sankoh is airlifted to the Ivory Coast by the ICRC to meet Bio
- A temporary cease-fire is agreed upon and both parties want peace before elections (since only then can the RUF take part in the electoral process), but Bio (under national and international pressure) then agrees for elections to be held on 26 February
- Despite the boycott of the RUF and some army segments, elections are held and after a run-off vote Kabbah is sworn in on 29 March. He establishes a multi-party, multi-ethnic cabinet and continues peace negotiations with the RUF initiated by the NPRC
- April, a 'permanent' ceasefire is agreed upon but is never effective
- EO suggests implementing a weekly war council including EO, President Kabbah and senior commanders from the three ECOMOG contingents. EO and a Nigerian general persuade Kabbah to 'neutralise' the RUF headquarters and its senior people. Kabbah authorises this operation
- Five days after the start of the attack on the Zogoda by EO and Kamajoiia, Sankoh requests a cease-fire
- EO and the Nigerian general warn Kabbah that the RUF will not hold to the cease-fire
- Large numbers of soldiers are returned to the barracks while the government increasingly depends on Kamajoisia under the guidance of Deputy Minister of Defence, Hinga Norman
- Early May, three joint commissions start working on peace details
- 15 May, Ivoirian foreign minister reports that RUF has agreed to renounce the armed struggle
- September/October, Kamajoisia and EO attack several RUF camps, in the Kambui Hills, Soro-Gbema chiefdom, and the Gola Forest, and surround Bokor camp in the Kangari Hills
- October, a vague coup attempt is unsuccessful and key players are arrested

- November, Sankoh visits several camps by helicopter to discuss draft peace deal
- 30 November, signing of the Abidjan peace accord. This accord includes a cessation of hostilities, conversion of RUF into a political party, a general amnesty, DDR for the combatants, downsizing of the army and withdrawal of EO
- December, breaking of cease-fire by all sides
- RUF war council members Ibrahim Deen Jalloh, his wife Agnes Jalloh, and Faya Musa move to Freetown to prepare for the fuller incorporation of the RUF in the government
- Number of clashes between Kamajoisia and soldiers increase, apparently for control of diamonds and other resources

1997

- February, EO withdraws from Sierra Leone
- February, Sankoh is arrested in Nigeria on weapons charges. RUF figures (Philip Palmer and Faya Musa) claim they have taken over the leadership, and indicate that the peace process will continue, but they are arrested by Sankoh-loyalist Sam "Maskita" Bockarie. RUF attacks intensify as a reaction to Sankoh's capture
- Army starts an open revolt against the Kabbah government as a reaction to increased government support for civilian militias, including the planned downsizing of the army from 15,000 to 6,000 troops and the shipment and purchase of 5,000 automatic rifles intended for use by the Kamajoisia
- March, International Alert (at the request of the UN) attempts to intervene between the UN and the RUF after their relationship has broken down
- May, major clash between Kamajoisia and army in Kenema resulting in more than 100 deaths
- 25 May, the military stages another successful coup and AFRC takes over, inviting the RUF to join. Sankoh, still in jail, accepts
- Major Johnny Paul Koroma becomes the new AFRC leader and suspends the constitution and bans all political parties. The absent Sankoh becomes the vice-chairman of the Junta and AFRC and RUF forces merge into a People's Army
- June, Nigerian and Guinean troops remain in position, shelling Freetown while civil defence units harass Junta forces upcountry
- June, Junta releases 300 Nigerian ECOMOG fighters
- June, Moyamba attacked by AFRC/RUF resulting in about 100 deaths
- July, Junta calls for a national conference and new 'truly democratic' elections
- August, ECOWAS imposes sanctions on the Junta

- 18 August, the National Union of Sierra Leone Students protest against the Junta. The demonstration is crushed and at least three students are killed
- 23 October, Junta representatives and Nigerian and Guinean foreign ministers for ECOWAS sign the six-month Conakry peace plan, including the restoration of the constitutional government, effective from 22 April 1998
- Skirmishes continue between ECOMOG and Junta forces. CDF launch a campaign, 'Black December', to immobilize Junta activities in the provinces

1998

- January, Nigeria has reinforced its troops in Sierra Leone to around 10,000
- February, ordered by General Sani Abacha, Nigerian forces, together with CDF units, launch an offensive against the AFRC and RUF alliance, which is forced out of Freetown and several provincial towns and retreats to the north and east of the country
- March, Kabbah returns to Freetown
- Sankoh returns to Freetown in custody
- July, UN Security Council agrees to send a military observer group to Sierra Leone
- 17 October, twenty-four soldiers are executed by the government for their part in the coup and (in a separate treason trial) Sankoh is sentenced to death. This triggers more violence in the north and east of the country and regrouped Junta forces push towards Freetown
- Mid-December, rebels capture Koidu town, killing hundreds of Nigerian soldiers and capturing significant amounts of weapons and ammunition
- December, rebels are within 50 kilometres of Freetown
- ECOMOG flies in reinforcements, with around 15,000 troops now on the ground
- Bockarie demands the 'immediate and unconditional release' of Sankoh and peace through dialogue
- December, ex-NPRC and ex-AFRC commander S. A. J. Musa is killed by an explosion

1999

- 6 January, attack on Freetown. AFRC and RUF control east and centre of the town but after one week and 5,000 deaths and numerous atrocities, they have to retreat. Sankoh remains a prisoner
- By the end of January, West African leaders push for a negotiated settlement. Both Nigeria's military ruler Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar

and incoming (February 1999) Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, hope to have all Nigerian troops out of the country by March

- Late February, UN SGSR (Secretary-General's Special Representative) in Sierra Leone, Francis Okelo, meets with RUF representatives in Abidjan. This leads to preliminary talks in Lomé where Sankoh is now allowed to stay
- 25 May, detailed peace negotiations start after the promise of the release of Sankoh and a cease-fire
- 7 July, a peace agreement is signed including power sharing, a blanket amnesty, and the establishment of a TRC. The UN attaches a disclaimer saying that the amnesty does not apply to international crimes against humanity
- October, UN expands its troops to 6,000, including 3,000 former Nigerian ECOMOG troops, 2,000 troops from India, and 1,000 troops from Guinea
- 22 October, UNAMSIL is authorised by Security Council Resolution 1270.
- November, Kenyan troops arrive and become part of UNAMSIL
- Implementation of peace accord is painfully slow, with limited access to RUF-controlled areas and non-implementation of DDR
- Mid-December, Sam Bockarie flees to Liberia

2000

- 10 February, Sierra Leone Parliament passes an Act for the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with a US$6.5m budget (US$10m was requested for the work)
- May, peacekeepers and observers are seized by the RUF in Makeni in a dispute over the return of disarmed fighters, leading to the capture of about 500 peacekeepers within days
- 7 May, protests led by women in front of Sankoh's residence in Freetown result in 19 people killed. Sankoh flees to the hills above Freetown, but is captured
- May, a thousand British troops, initially based to protect the airport, are now deployed to protect Freetown and evacuate non-Sierra Leoneans, (mainly Westerners)
- RUF troops attack the British Parachute Regiment's Pathfinder Platoon near the International Airport but are beaten into retreat.
- Koroma calls on current and former soldiers to join with CDF units to fight the RUF
- UN Secretary-General recommends immediate reinforcement of the peace keepers from 9,250 to 13,000, and starts to deploy more aggressive tactics to deal with the RUF and enforce demobilisation

- 6 June, Kabbah writes to the UN Secretary-General to request assistance in creating a Special Court
- June, Liberian President Charles Taylor uses his influence to secure the release of hostages
- 15, 16 June, in a hostage-freeing operation, the UN frees Indian UNAMSIL troops held captive in the Kailahun area
- 14 August, an agreement between the UN and the Government of Sierra Leone pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1315 calls for a Special Court to prosecute war criminals
- 10 September, British forces free hostages taken by the West Side Boys, killing 26 of them
- September up to early 2001, RUF attacks Guinean border towns. Later defeated by Guinean troops
- 10 November: signing of Abuja peace accords
- End of 2000 UNAMSIL has deployed 17,500 troops

2001

- Early 2001, Donsos attack RUF positions in Kono diamond areas
- May 2001–January 2002: a total of 42,551 fighters demobilise
- June, Pakistani UNAMSIL troops deploy in Kono, but RUF mining continues

2002

- 18 January: Joint Declaration of End of War
- May 2002: presidential elections won by SLPP candidate, Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah. RUF political party receives only 2.3 percent of vote
- May, Johnny Paul Koroma elected to Parliament in General Elections

2003

- June, Special Court releases indictment for Charles Taylor who was attending peace talks in Ghana. Ghanaian government allows Taylor to fly back to Liberia
- 30 July, Sankoh dies in custody
- August, Taylor is offered asylum in Nigeria

Annex II: Overview: Interviewed Ex-RUF Combatants

Male/Female Age	Date of Interview m=multiple interviews	District of Origin/Date of Conscription/Type of Conscription; (voluntary=v, coerced=c, forced=f)	Rank
M 14	1996	Bo +/ − 1994f	Child soldier (A)
M 20	1996	1995f	Fighter (A)
M young	1996	1995f	Abductee (A)
M middle-aged	1996	1995f	Abductee (B)
F 23	2001	Kailahun +/ − 1995v	Female fighter (A)
F 20	2001	Kenema 1998c	Female fighter (B)
F 41	1998		Female clerk (A)
M 37	2001	1991c	Commander (A)
M <30	2001	Kailahun 1991v	Commander (B)
M	2001	Kailahun 1994v	Child soldier RSLMF (A)
M 14	2001		Child soldier (B)
M 15	2001	Kono 1993f	Child soldier (C)
M 17	2001	Bo 1995f	Child soldier (D)
M 16	2001	Kenema 1994f	Child soldier (E)
M 11	2001	Kono +/ − 1999f	Child soldier (F)
M middle-aged	2003m	Moyamba 1992f	Clerk (A)
M 25	2003	Pujehun +/ − 1997f	Fighter (B)
M 44	2003m– 2006m	Kailahun 1991v	Commander (C)

Male/Female Age	Date of Interview m=multiple interviews	District of Origin/Date of Conscription/Type of Conscription; (voluntary=v, coerced=c, forced=f)	Rank
M 33	2003m	Kailahun 1991c	Commander (D)
M young	2003	Kailahun 1997f	Signals Officer (A)
M 33	2003	Western Area 1997f	Military Police (A)
M 33	2003m–2006	Liberia v	Commander (E)
M middle-aged	2003m	1993f	Commander (F)
M 56	2003	Bo 1991f	Dispenser
F 45	2003	Kailahun 1999?v	Educational Officer
M 33	2003m	Pujehun 1991c	Signals Officer (B)
F 29	2003	Pujehun 1991f	Female fighter (C)
F young	2003	Pujehun 1991f	Female fighter (D)
M 18	2003	Kailahun 1991f	Child soldier (F)
M 19	2003	Kailahun 1991f	Child soldier (G)
M 29	2003	Kenema 1994v	Fighter AFRC (A)
M 40	2003–2006	Tonkolili 1992v	Commander RSLMF/RUF (A)
M 36	2003	Bo 1994v	Fighter (C)
M 43	2003	Kailahun 1991v	Fighter (D)
M 35	2003	Kambia 1996v	Fighter (E)
M 28	2003	Kenema 1992f	Fighter (F)
M 39	2003	Kailahun 1991f	Commander (F)
M young	2003		Fighter (G)
M 24	2003	Tonkolili 1998f	Fighter (H)
M young	2003	Pujehun? 1991v	Commander (G)
F young		1993v	Female fighter (E)
M 21	2001	Kailahun 1993	Child soldier RSLMF (B)

Male/Female Age	Date of Interview m=multiple interviews	District of Origin/Date of Conscription/Type of Conscription; (voluntary=v, coerced=c, forced=f)	Rank
M young	2001	Kailahun 1993	Child soldier RSLMF (C)
M 25	2006m	Bo 1993c	Fighter (I)
M middle-aged	2006m	Eastern Province 1991–92v	Commander (H)
M young	2006	Kailahun c	Fighter (J)
M young	2006	Eastern Province	Fighter (K)
M 28	2006	Kailahun 1991c	Fighter (L)
F 40	2006	Kailahun 1991v	Female fighter (F)
F 35	2006	Kailahun 1991c	Female fighter (G)
M middle-aged	2006	Kailahun 1991v	Fighter (M)
M young	2006	Eastern Province 1991–92	Commander (I)
F young	2006	Kailahun 1991c	Female fighter (H)
M middle-aged	2006	Northern Province 1996f	Fighter (N)
M middle-aged	2006	Kailahun 1991–92 v	Commander (J)
M young	2006	Eastern Province	Commander (K)
M middle-aged	2006	Northern Province 1991c	Commander (L)
M middle-aged	2006		Commander (M)

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