

Footpaths to Reintegration

Armed Conflict, Youth and the Rural Crisis in
Sierra Leone

Promotor:

Prof. dr. P. Richards
Hoogleraar Technologie en Agrarische Ontwikkeling
Wageningen Universiteit

Co-promotor:

Dr. ir. C.E.P. Jansen
Universitair docent, leerstoelgroep Technologie en Agrarische Ontwikkeling
Wageningen Universiteit

Promotiecommissie:

Prof. dr. J. Abbink
Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam

Prof. dr. ir. G.E. Frerks
Wageningen Universiteit

Dr. T. Kelsall
University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Prof. dr. A.B. Zack-Williams
University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK

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Footpaths to Reintegration

Armed Conflict, Youth and the Rural Crisis in Sierra Leone

Krijn Peters

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Cover illustration: RUF fighters showing their weapons (photographer unknown)

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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) |
| 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 |
| IMATT | International Military Advisory and Training Team (UK-dominated team of specialists training the Sierra Leone police and armed forces) |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| IP | Implementing Partner (organisation or training centre implementing one or more reintegration projects as part of DDR) |
| KPM | Kono Progressive Movement (political party in Kono during the 1950s and 1960s) |
| NCDDR | National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| 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) |
| PANAFU | Pan-African Union (revolutionary student group in Sierra Leone during the 1980s) |
| 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) |
| SLA | Sierra Leone Army (general name for the military forces) |
| SLAF | Sierra Leone Armed Forces (government official forces after 1999) |
| SLPP | Sierra Leone People's Party (political party ruling from 1961 until 1968 and from 1996 up to present (despite 8 months of exile during the AFRC/RUF reign) |
| 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 (Peacekeeping mission) |
| UNOMSIL | United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone |

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Introduction

Tongo in time of war

On one of the last days of January 1994, the people of the small¹ 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 23rd March 1991, the RUF² entered Sierra Leone from the 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 rebel forces increased rapidly through a mixture of voluntary recruitment and forcible induction of predominately young people, many of whom were, in fact, under 18 years of age, the internationally agreed minimum age to bear arms. The intake included in particular young people who had dropped out of school or who had 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 Charles Taylor's rebel movement in Liberia - soon gained a reputation for cruelty and war crimes, respecting neither the lives nor 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. 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/Liberian border.

But only a month after its supposed defeat in December 1993, the RUF launched a large attack on Tongo. The RUF was able to control Tongo for two days; two days of destruction, looting, killing and voluntary and forced recruitment. 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 air attacks from the Alpha jets of Nigerian peace keepers operating as part of the Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring 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 on an often weekly basis, but never executed a full scale attack.

In 1996 the relationship between the army and the Kamajors - a civil defence force employing initiated hunters and used by a new government installed after elections in February 1996 as a proxy force against the rebels - deteriorated. 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 from Tongo, leaving the defence of the mining town to the Kamajors and about 75 government special troops belonging to the main army but

¹ The indigeous population of Tongo is not more than a few thousand. However, the town is throughout the year - but mainly during the low farming season - crowded with miners coming from all over Sierra Leone, easily increasing the town's population ten times or more.

² In 1995 the RUF published it aims in a booklet *Footpaths to Democracy. Towards a New Sierra Leone*. The title of this thesis alludes to the title of this publication.

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 Kamajors were able to prevent the junta forces and rebel collaborators taking control in Tongo, but on the 14th of 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 Kamajors, announced a general attack on the renegade soldiers and the RUF, code-named “Black December”. So five months after their retreat the Kamajors recaptured the town and repelled the renegade soldiers from the area in a quick but decisive attack.

It was however not 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 Kamajors took position in Panguma and nearby Giehun, a forested hill overlooking Tongo from the south, on which sat a Kamajor 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 made it obligatory for every miner to work two days a week for the RUF. The RUF behaved and considered itself as the “government” in the territories under its control; disputes and offenses 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.

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. A British military intervention in May 2000 stabilised the situation, and allowed the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (henceforth UNAMSIL) to fully deploy. But it was only by the end of 2001 (after further demobilization agreements with the RUF, signed in Abuja, Nigeria in November 2000, had been fulfilled in the rest of country during 2001) that the United Nations peacekeeping forces entered Tongo and established themselves. Tongo, together with the RUF stronghold of Kailahun district, was the last place where disarmament took place. It was not until disarmament was completed (later in 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 thesis - it was clear that Tongo would be a good place to work, despite security concerns. Other studies have been done of ex-combatants disarmed and reintegrated at an earlier period (cf. Peters & Richards 1998a, 1998b, Shepler 2005). As the thesis of Susan Shepler, based on field work from the period 1999-2001, makes clear, 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 multiplex 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 here report is that conditions allowed me to work with former fighters of the RUF very soon after they entered the multiplex and 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 much different place from what they had intended it to be, but also because of their fear of indictment by the Special Court on War Crimes in Sierra Leone. Their fear was strengthened partly through a campaign of misinformation during 2003 apparently mounted by government-licensed agents of alluvial diamond mining offering ex-combatants low-wage work in return for political protection. It would of course be naïve to take what informants say at face value without cross-checking evidence. But what I claim in regard to the material presented in this thesis 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 the stories emanating from ex-combatants more deeply embedded within the post-war world.

--- PICTURE ---

Three explanations of the conflict

From this point onwards I must engage with highly controversial issues. The RUF was from the outset denied what the British Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher, in relation to the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, termed “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 here some of the exiles tried to recruit extra followers from Freetown to join them in their insurgency training in the camps in Bengazi, Libya (Abdullah 1997). Others were educated on UN scholarships, and some later went to work for that organization, 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, 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 Executive Outcomes³ 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 Executive Outcomes operations in Sierra Leone by a journalist friend of the company, who claims 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 affecting young people through abuse of customary law by ruling landholding elites.

There can be no doubt that the conflict in Sierra Leone has challenged both scholars and international observers to come up with new explanations. The conflict stands in the literature

³ 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 Abidjan Peace accord signed on November 1996. 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 web site that this was due to lack of support for private security options in “places like Africa”.

as one of the prime instances of so-called “new war”, i.e. 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 explanations. In every case, the same sets of facts can be - and have been - taken to support opposite interpretations. As we see from the above case of Togo 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 being keen to attack the diamond producing areas of Sierra Leone, might also have been driven mainly by economic incentives⁴. The atrocious behaviour of the RUF, and its lack of support among the peasantry, the traditional allies of left-wing guerrillas, might suggest we are dealing with movement populated by criminal elements, more drawn to sadism than to ideologically motivated actions. I will simply summarise in bald terms the three main and 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 & Sesay 1995:121). Of the three explanations about the conflict dominant in the Sierra Leonean discourse about the war, summarised below, the first two focus on the rebels and the third focuses on the state.

1) New Barbarism⁵, or “the apocalyptic view”⁶

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”⁷ 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 longer maintain a monopoly on military violence. Kaplan refers to an article of 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. The appalling violence is better understood as a reversion to ‘underlying primitivisms that are part of these cultures’. In another “observation” Kaplan is clear about the Malthusian roots of this primitivism⁸: ‘Despite all the

⁴ Whether or not the RUF was mainly interested in economic gain, the desire for profit obviously motivated Executive Outcomes

⁵ A term introduced by Paul Richards.

⁶ A term used by Thandika Mkandawire.

⁷ Robert D. Kaplan wrote an influential book called *The ends of the earth, a journey at the dawn of the 21st century* (Kaplan 1996) which starts in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast. The Kaplan 1996 book I refer to in this thesis is the Dutch translation of it. Unfortunately I have not been able to get my hands on the original English version.

⁸ On page 68 he claims explicitly that Thomas Malthus, ‘the philosopher of demographic doom thinking’ would explain much about what is happening in West Africa right now.

fighting that has been going on, the population of Sierra Leone increased with a percentage of 2.6 to 3.9 annually. (...) Before independence, more than 30 years ago, 60% of the country was covered by food-rich rainforest, now it is only 6 percent.’ (Kaplan, 1996:59, *my translation*). The weaknesses of the Malthusian argument are thoroughly explored in Richards (1996) and will be discussed in chapter 6. Kaplan served a moment in which the American super power 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.

2) 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 Executive Outcomes). 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), for example, 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 marginalized youths, or (...) an uprising by rural poor against the urban elite. The root of the conflict was and remained diamonds.’ (McIntyre, Aning & Addo, 2002:12).

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

He continues to argue that, although many rebel leaders state that grievance was the reason to take up arms, 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, not 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. (Collier 2001:146).

Collier is, in fact, carried away by his argument; Sankoh only ever asked for (and received, as a result of the Lome negotiations 1999) the chairmanship of a newly formed national minerals authority (demanded by the RUF to ensure transparency in mining deals by the government). This post had attached to it protocol status equivalent to vice-president. But to those unconvinced by the economic basis of rebel movements, and persuaded still that injustice and grievances are a motivator to rebellions, Collier (2001:153) baldly asserts: *'It is the 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 sense⁹ of injustice whether or not this is objectively justified.' Collier's arguments have provoked sharp responses. Although little evidence has been provided that economic factors are alone enough to trigger wars there is 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 6). 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.

3) State collapse and a pent up rebellion of youth

The Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Commission recently (2004) presented its 1,500 pages final report 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', (TRC, 2004:12).

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 marginalized, 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. Riley and Sesay (1995:125) state: 'However, 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 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.

⁹ 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 sensible to subjective feelings of injustice (cf. Makandawire 2002). There is further discussion of this and the New Barbarism explanation in chapter 6.

Bangura (1997), however, argues that the collapse of the patrimonial state was not so clear cut as Richards (1996) or others have argued. Aid appropriations, he suggests, tended to compensate loss of mineral revenues and poor world market prices (see also chapter 6).

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 above. 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 rationalizations offered by the enemies and opponents of the RUF¹⁰. Even a book (Abdullah 2004) reflecting the latest views of Sierra Leone diaspora exiles on the war – described by its publisher rather boldly as the first serious study of the war – fails to make much more than a token effort 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 for at least five years, and yet there is still a dearth of material. Accordingly, this thesis tries to address this gap, by focusing on the direct experiences and interpretations of the protagonists of war, with special attention paid to the hitherto neglected cadres of the RUF. With this newly achieved knowledge 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 recently concluded Truth and Reconciliation 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 for War Crimes (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 thesis 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 re-traced 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 bushpaths, 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.¹¹ The aim of focusing on those who actively participated in the conflict is

¹⁰ For instance on the accounts of the Sierra Leonean radical intellectuals who refused to support the RUF in its early days. Abdullah (1997) uses these sources.

¹¹ 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 on 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 kind of conspiracy theories from the side of the former RUF combatants boiling down to the point that the

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 may assume that it is simple common sense to try and hear from the RUF cadres themselves. And yet during the war, and even now, very little room has been given 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. In fact, little attention has been paid to experiences and interpretations of combatants in general, whether they were RUF, CDF¹² or SLA¹³ 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 where any attempt to listen to and to extend empathetic - as distinct from sympathetic! - understanding to the perpetrators ran the danger of being dismissed as an attempt to justify inhuman acts. 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 the RUF was able to create an armed movement which did not fall apart over 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 *leitmotiv* of the present thesis. And the methodology is simplicity itself – go there, listen, report, examine critically, and then try to understand. Some years ago Richards (1986) argued that to understand farmers in Africa it was best to listen in a context that made most sense – i.e. in farm fields while farming. I have adapted the same simple approach to the study of young warriors (many of whom were farmers by background) in Sierra Leone. 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 thesis 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 if asked to those who voluntarily decided to take up arms, the answers to the two questions often overlap, but not always. 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 having become willing converts to the RUF, arguably a

government had poisoned Sankoh to prevent him revealing the secrets of war and in particular details of alleged cooperation between the SLPP (today 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.

¹² CDF: Civil Defence Force

¹³ SLA: Sierra Leone Army

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 the Californian urban guerrilla group, the Symbionese Liberation Army.¹⁴ 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. All the more remarkable is it that the causes brought forward 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 the ex-combatants, 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 marginalized and excluded, and who were ready - or saw no other alternative than - to take up arms.

Are these *after the event* rationalisations, self-justifications or 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 thesis 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 thesis can be placed - by background - in the social fraction so formed. This contextual analysis is the main task undertaken in the following chapter ([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 - 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 recent 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 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 in the villages farming. 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

¹⁴ The Symbionese Liberation Army, a radical Left and Black power movement, 'made their first move on 6 November 1973 when they murdered Oakland, California superintendent of schools Dr. Marcus Foster. They characterized Dr. Foster's plan to introduce identification cards into Oakland schools as "fascist." Ironically, Dr. Foster had opposed the use of identification cards in his schools, and his plan was a watered down version of similar plans that had been proposed by others. Dr. Foster, who was black, was popular on the left and in the black community, and his murder was considered a counterproductive, pointless action by just about everybody; thus, they garnered no support, just media attention.' www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbionese_Liberation_Army

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 foot-loose 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 the Sierra Leone's history and society. This is enough of a basis to formulate the main hypothesis of the thesis: *the RUF is to be considered an extremely violent revolt of marginalized 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 thesis. 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 above hypothesis, knowledge about the war itself is not enough. A good insight into the RUF – its organization, 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 were generally treated with contempt and ridicule, in particular by some Sierra Leonean scholars. Thus – apart from its internationally diffused image as a monstrosity – the movement is known, if at all, mainly through the claims and characterizations 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 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 to desert by more than only the threat of violence. During the phase of bush-camps (1994-1997) 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. The evidence serves both to confirm and to modify to some extent the broad theory-guided speculations about the movement developed by Richards (1996). 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 to explain the atrocious behaviour of movement cadres, especially from 1996 when the movement did not take part in the democratic political process as a result of the policy “elections before peace”, as the UN and other agencies struggled to control the Abidjan peace process. (This challenge is taken up in chapter 6.)

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. Some of this was a product of necessity. The

movement's forces needed to be fed. But there is evidence that in some 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 predominately interested in diamonds. But if indeed it is the case that the majority of RUF combatants hailed from a rural under-class with weak land, property and marriage rights, this commitment to agrarian issues is less than surprising. The evidence for the movement's commitment to particular kinds of agrarian development will be examined in closer detail in chapter 5. 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 implemented 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. A degree of success, four years after the fighting ended – in a country littered with the wreckage of failed agricultural development projects – gives some cause to re-think the nature of the movement, before it exploded into chaotic violence after the rather controversial failure of the Abidjan peace process.

In chapter 6 attention is paid 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 predominately young, and did they mainly come from rural areas? One widely accepted argument is that the RUF was mainly from an urban “lumpen” background. A recent study - 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. The present chapter probes this finding further, by considering evidence that the organisational structure of the RUF reflected organisational 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 marginalized rural young people abducted by the RUF actually found 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 Cult¹⁵, bent on reversing societal disdain. Although I will concede room for disagreement on how to interpret some of the material presented in the chapter, 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 breach of cease-fire agreements¹⁶ plunged the movement into a fatally unstable paranoia. Loss of the camps undermined ideological leaders, and a group of unstable fighters assumed 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 thesis point instead to a rural crisis created by unresolved tensions between land-holding elites and dislocated peasants or “strangers”. This

¹⁵ ‘The cargo cult is founded on a familiar, and popular, bit of fallacious reasoning: *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. The residents of Papua, Yaliwan, Vanuatu and other places noticed that when the colonial occupiers built wharves and airstrips, the wharves and airstrips were soon visited by ships and airplanes which delivered cargos of goods. They concluded that the ships and airplanes arrived as a consequence of the building of the wharves and airstrips, so they built their own wharves and airstrips in the expectation of receiving their own cargoes.’ (John FitzGerald 1996)

¹⁶ Which is not to suggest that the RUF did not violate the cease-fire. A number of incidents during this period have to be attributed to the RUF.

crisis was reinforced and triggered by a collapsing patrimonial state, resulting in the exclusion and marginalisation of rural youth.

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 Committee 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, and poorly delivered programmes proliferated. In addition, due to the specific design of the DDR programme, those who resettled in the more remote rural areas were the most vulnerable to organisational failures and malpractices of the NCDDR staff. The chapter concludes by outlining an alternative reintegration trajectory, sensitive to agrarian opportunities, and perhaps relevant to the even greater challenge of ex-combatant demobilization in neighbouring Liberia. One general conclusion is developed - that rather than re-integrate 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.

Chapter 8 describes three reintegration trajectories to illustrate how ex-combatants - and youth in general - struggle with the same issues that led to their initial marginalisation and exclusion. The first case study, that of two villages in rural Sierra Leone, describes the relationship between elders and youth after resettlement. It becomes clear that some kind of "youth emancipation" seems to have taken place and elders cannot rely on their "customary" authority to exploit youths as before the war. Where it concerns resettling ex-combatants, as is the case in the second village, this youth emancipation - or better, "wartime generated values" - has/have developed to such an extent that it is sometimes beyond the capacity of either the more traditional villagers or the ex-combatants to overcome this friction. The second case study describes the tensions between a returning landholding group and its 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. The last case considers some, at least, partial answer to the problem of lack of jobs and the undue control over labour exercised by patrimonial elders. It describes an interesting urban economic niche for those ex-combatants who were unwilling to return to their rural communities. Some make their living by riding a motorbike as a local taxi. What makes this development so interesting - besides the fact that it is a new development - is that the bike riders have organised themselves in a union drawing some of its organisational set-up from the modalities of the abandoned armed factions. All the cases described show the diversity and complexity of the reintegration process. Whether reintegration of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone is a success or a failure will depend not on specific programmes but on whether the general conditions making poor young rural people (girls, as well as boys) vulnerable to militia recruitment can be reversed.

Chapter 1

Voices from the battlefield: ex-combatant views on root causes of the war and their reasons for participation

The ex-combatants

If scholars cannot agree about the root causes of the war in Sierra Leone, a different approach is to pay more attention to those who experienced the conflict at first hand as combatants. This chapter presents ex-combatant 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 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 & Richards, 1998a,b; Veale, 2003; Brett & Specht, 2004; Abdullah 2004; Peters, 2004).

The format of this chapter is straightforward. A sample of informants is examined by faction (RUF, government army and civil defence forces) and their answers to the basic questions “what caused the war?” and “why did you take part” are examined. The key to this kind of work is opportunity. The pattern of war is 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 knowledge of the informant through patiently built 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 so during periods of active combat with 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 demobilization process 2000-2002, by Humphreys & Weinstein (2004). This study samples over 1000 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 (60 in all) 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 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 those who were forcibly conscripted as well as those who joined voluntarily. 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 the peace returned to the country. By that time the RUF had lost the war, both militarily, and forfeited any political support it might once have enjoyed. Denying the fact of local support was one of the tactics used by the RUF's many political opponents. But it seems that there was much more initial sympathy with the movement 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 Liberians¹⁷ 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), and she was one who joined the RUF shortly after it entered the country. When the rebels penetrated the eastern part of the country, war affected the local economy and small scale business activities - a common income generating activity for many males and females - started to decline. So petty traders, like the mother of 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 20 other young people of her village who also decided to join the rebels' ranks voluntarily.

- *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 20 young boys and girls in my village. Seven girls and 13 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. These were the reasons why the RUF were fighting. (Peters 2004)*

The next interviewee (interviewed in 2001) is an older male (aged 37), born in Kailahun district. He is in effect a conscript. As with many others from the early days of the war, he joined the rebels not completely voluntarily, but neither was he completely forced. He was working in the illicit mining sector, with his own 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 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 tells about the reasons the RUF gave for its struggle, and then explains about his and other younger people's 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*

¹⁷ The Special Forces of the RUF were Liberian fighter 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.

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 RUF voluntarily after he heard the RUF explain its agenda. This commander, interviewed in 2003 and born in Daru in 1959, attended the Bunumbu Teachers College, and then worked as a teacher in one of the towns in Kailahun district. Bunumbu was a rural training college close to the Liberian border. UNESCO programmes in the 1970s and 80s encouraged an idealistic, self-reliant approach to village education, somewhat inspired by the ideas of reformers such as Paolo 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, Richards 2001). Both at Bunumbu and later in village teaching he 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 criticized 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 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 [the country's President] said that everybody should go back to [the bush] to start brushing rather than going to school.*

SLA/AFRC ex-combatants

The Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) under APC President Momoh started to fight the RUF when it entered the country in 1991. Junior officers staged a coup in 1992 and deposed Momoh, but continued fighting the RUF. In 1996 a democratic government took control of the country, but not trusting the loyalty of the army, it sidelined the soldiers. In 1997 the sidelined army staged another successful coup but this time invited the RUF to share the 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, via the Libyan-supported RUF (see also chapter 6). 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 formed from 1999, with international, British-led, training inputs. In general I refer to the government official forces as 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 belonging to the army. 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. Asked about who was most to blame for the war, he blames Foday Sankoh (leader of the rebels against whom he fought) less than APC ex-president Momoh, since Momoh could have ended the war in its early stages, when Sankoh was still weak. But he was scared and indecisive, giving no clear direction to his troops, and the crisis snowballed. Does Sierra Leone have a future now? Somehow he doubts it. This is because the authorities pay no attention to the children. Other countries know that children are the future, but here 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. Nowhere is 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 & 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 personality, 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 (Peters & Richards 1998b).

The following extract derives from an interview conducted in 2001 with a former child soldier who joined the army at the age 12 or 13. 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 due to the increasingly difficult circumstances at home he started to affiliate with the soldiers in the nearby barracks, a history not unfamiliar to many other early under-age irregular recruits. Now demobilised he is quite frank that only an opportunity to continue his education will prevent him from not 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 possibility of revenge by the civilians. Civilian revenge – especially against child soldiers - is a major under-explored factor in the dynamics of the Sierra Leone war. The issue was first raised by Amnesty International (1992) and is discussed by Richards (1996).

- *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, 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? [Q.: Are you saying that if you drop out of school, you might go back to the soldiers?] 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, has a more or less similar story: the war caused his education to stop 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 nevertheless expresses his understanding of why so many young people, with disrupted education and without jobs, decided to join the rebel movement. His analysis of the political situation in Sierra Leone also begins to sound familiar; what Sierra Leone is lacking is a good educational system and technical 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 majority of the young people.

- [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. (Peters 2004)*

The final extract in this RSLMF/SLA/AFRC series is with a 24-year old ex-soldier 24, at the time of the interview in 2001, who first joined the army, and later – a year after demobilisation in 1996 - joined the Kamajors (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 a young man could be a serious 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 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 send 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. (Peters 2004)*

CDF/Kamajor ex-combatants

Specialist hunters, typically found one or two to a larger village in the more forested parts of the Liberian border region before the war, and familiar with local terrain, began to help the army as scouts from the early days of the war. Due to the ineffectiveness of an army without counter-insurgency training in protecting civilians and villages from raids by forest-based rebel guerrillas, traditional hunters started to organise themselves for village civil defence, from c. 1992-3 (cf. Muana 1997) and were in the years following increasingly deployed beyond their village and chiefdom of birth. 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 Executive Outcomes (cf. Fithen & Richards 2005), began to formalise and expand the various hunter units into a national Civil Defence Force (CDF). One or two hunters per village does 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 “kamajors” 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 is 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 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 Executive Outcomes. Later, after EO was required to leave Sierra Leone by 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 kamajor movement, later the CDF, had been fervently opposed to the RUF.

The first extract from the interview series covering voices of Civil Defence Forces/Kamajor 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 against 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, from the letters they leave behind in the villages they attack outlining their aims and beliefs, and 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 destabilization from Liberia (see chapter 3) 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?] 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 emphasize 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 [wishes?] 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 [in a trusting way?] to the government, come and attended to the government [changed it?], 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. (Peters & Richards 1998a:200)

The second CDF ex-combatant presented here was born in a small village in Kenema district, being 36 years of age 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 NCDDR¹⁸ keeps its 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 where all these kind of malpractices will not be possible anymore because of democracy. Awareness and democracy, he believes, are among the good changes the war brought to the country.

- *It was early morning around 6 am. 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 Kamajor society. (...) 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 anymore 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*

¹⁸ DDR: Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration. The 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 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. In chapter 7 these programmes are discussed in more detail.

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 born in Freetown but he considers a small town in Kenema district as his hometown. Now 24 years of age (upon interview in 2001) he joined the CDF in 1998, foremost among his reasons being to escape from the continued harassment of the armed factions. On the causes of the war he is clear: lack of employment opportunities for young people made some starting to use drugs, after which they left for the bush and joined the RUF. His solution is equally straightforward: to prevent another war the young people should be encouraged by education and jobs.

- *There was a lot of pressure in the country, more specifically for the civilians. Whenever you met the RUF, the SLA or the Kamajors, they will harass you. That made me to decide to join the Kamajors. (...) [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 reasons 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. (...) 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 was born in Kailahun and was 32 years old when interviewed (2001). 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. Vagrants from petty and trumped up cases seem to be a recurrent feature of the Sierra Leone countryside. It was often these outlaws who proved most vulnerable to RUF conscription. But the dice turned 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. One can imagine that if he had experienced harsh treatment by government soldiers, or had no relative willing to lodge him, he might just as well have joined the RUF. This interviewee once more locates the cause of the war as high levels of unemployment for Sierra Leonean youth. In particular he mentions the *dregmen dem*¹⁹ and those living away from their families as being among those more likely to join the RUF.

- *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 anymore 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. 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 Kamajor 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*

¹⁹ Dregmen dem [Krio]: people who survive by "dregging", that is picking up any kind of irregular work.

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. (Peters 2004)

In the above 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 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 anymore. 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

The above accounts show remarkable similarities, and it is difficult to distinguish between the analyses and motivations of ex-RUF, ex-SLA/AFRC or ex-CDF/Kamajor fighters without prior knowledge of their status. In these extracts young or old, persons of relatively high or low rank, and men and women all agree to a large extent upon the same causes of the war, and reasons for participation, namely political corruption and lack of education and jobs. One thing that seems clear, therefore, is that despite belonging to opposing factions, ex-combatants share a similar understanding of the war and the motivation of all fighters in joining (obviously, where revenge is stated as a reason to join, the fighters in question accuse the opposite 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 & 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 rationalization. Collier (2001) makes the point forcefully, backed by Mkandawire (2002). Both question the methodological validity of testimony such as that given above:

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? In chapter 4, where much interview material of RUF ex-combatants is presented, several methods are used to guard against the danger of post-hoc rationalization. But as a “starter” it might be interesting to recall some statements in the above interviews fragments, to question the “likely self-serving” character of retrospective accounts. For instance, the first interviewee – the female ex-RUF combatant – could have easily adapted herself to the “victim” discourse by stating that she was abducted and subsequently forced to join the RUF with all 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 stated. And what is the benefit 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 s/he so doubts actually do serve a self-serving purpose.

It is true that one encounters serious methodological constraints when basing explanations solely on interview material, especially when allowing oneself the freedom to pick out only those anecdotes which underscore a particular perspective. But the analyses put forward in this thesis try to avoid those errors, both by being based on 1) extensive interviews with a wide variety of subjects, both ex-combatants and civilians; 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 some historical analysis of the Sierra Leonean state and rural society, to examine whether claims of exclusion and marginalization, so widely asserted by ex-combatants as responsible for their predicament might in fact be true.

Chapter 2:

The socio-economic crisis of rural youth

Humphreys & Weinstein (2004) make clear that a majority of ex-combatants in the Sierra Leone civil war (more than 80 per cent) were from a rural background. This is seemingly at variance with the urban “lumpen” thesis of Abdullah (1997) and others, which states that the RUF rebellion was implemented by a group of people with urban underclass backgrounds. The root causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone suggested by rural ex-combatants can be divided into two kinds. One group of reasons 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 reasons plays out at 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.

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

Slaves and ex-slaves

Rather little is yet known about the early history of Sierra Leone. According to Opala (1996) this early history can be best understood 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 six hundred years (Opala 1996). Before the Portuguese “discovered” Sierra Leone in 1462 the indigenous people on the coast of Sierra Leone 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. Among this trade with the Europeans, the trade in slaves - as plantation workers - quickly became important and lucrative. 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 15-20 million. Either way, the Atlantic trade had a major impact on demography within the region, exacerbating labour shortages in agriculture, for example, and perhaps more importantly, having a major impact on the evolution of political institutions. Slaving did not lend itself to the kinds of political development associated with free trade in Europe, but rather tended to consolidate the power of chiefs and armed merchants.

In the early 19th 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.²⁰ If this spelt a definitive end for British interests, other countries continued to trade slaves across the Atlantic, meaning that although over a hundred thousand 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 early-mid 19th century²¹ (Buah 1986).

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 re-settle in Africa. They arrived in 1787 on the Sierra Leone peninsula, and founded a settlement that was later to become Freetown. Supported by people such as Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce, and the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, more groups of ex-slaves were re-settled in this newly created settlement 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 groups resettling in Freetown were Recaptives, i.e. those taken off slave ships captured by the British Navy after 1807 (Opala 1986). The recaptives 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 a 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 together 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-mid 19th century. From mid-century, wealthier Krio merchant families sent their children to Britain for higher education, in, for example, medicine and law. 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 the "mindless violence" perceived by outsiders (cf. Kaplan 1996).

The Freetown colony only slowly expanded into the interior in the 19th century. The foremost interest of the Crown Colony's administration was with trade with the hinterland.

²⁰ In the Dutch West Indies and Suriname slavery was abolished as late as 1863.

²¹ 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 year 1816 and 1846 (Jones 1983).

Treaties were made with up-country kings²² to protect the trade routes and to enhance Britain's role as peacemaker in local disputes (Opala 1986). 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 multiple 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". As a reaction to a tax introduced in 1896 by the British to support the newly created protectorate and to develop a railway network, an indigenous rebellion started known as the "Hut Tax War". Although chiefs were entitled to keep a share of the tax in turn of their role 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 before the rebellion was suppressed. 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 pleasure of the British, with certain traditional (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, e.g. through British-backed chieftom courts dispensing "customary" justice.

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, and created instead 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 some cases they created larger units²³. These paramount chiefs ruled for life and, after their death, were succeeded by another member of a "ruling house"²⁴, 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 foundation, although there were 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

²² Jones (1983:13) suggests that the word "king" is not really appropriate in this context. "Overlord" would better describe the position of these rulers.

²³ 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)

²⁴ One belongs to a ruling house if a descendent of the first paramount chief who signed a treaty with the British.

Rule - as expounded by Lord Lugard, for Nigeria, 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 over-lordship. This maintained peace at the expense of institutional adaptation, and thus helped lay the foundations for the later failure of the state in rural areas²⁵.

But to return to 1900, volunteers for the position of chief, to be supplied by the ruling families, were hard to find under newly imposed British rule, and matters only changed, as Fenton (1948) claims, when the government greatly strengthened the position of chiefs by allowing them *the right to labour*, i.e. community labour, little distinguishable in some aspects from domestic slavery, and other support in the Protectorate Native Law Ordinance of 1905. A *two-class society* was thus formed and institutionalised, made up of ruling families - in which children of chiefs were exempted community labour, and sent away for schooling instead (Richards *et al.* 2004a:3) notably to Bo School, founded in 1906 for children of chiefs, an institution reproducing some of the features of a classic British private boarding school - and 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, and this became an even more paramount concern after the discovery of diamonds in Sierra Leone. From the first finds in Kono, in 1927, the diamond sector struggled with illicit mining and smuggling practices, thus denying the colonial administration much needed revenues. Illicit diamond-mining activities offered excellent opportunities for unscrupulous state agents to fill their own pockets and set their own agenda. According to Reno (1995) the control of resources is the foundation of political power and influence in Sierra Leone. Illicit mining activities and (ironically) the measures taken²⁶ to combat these practices contributed in the end to the growth of what Reno calls the “Shadow State”: i.e. 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 not only used to buy social order but also to buy electoral support (Reno 1995). This became even more important in the period leading up to independence. Two political fronts in the diamond area can be distinguished: the Sierra Leone People’s Party (henceforth SLPP) supported by the chiefs of diamond rich chiefdoms who were supported 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 no or limited diamond deposits. Sierra Leone gained independence on April 27th 1961. The SLPP won electoral power. 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 the power but soon people started to grumble that government corruption was increasing. The SLPP also became

²⁵ One could argue that the war of 1991 only ended when the British once more imposed a kind of military over-lordship 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 splintergroup “the West Side Boys” captured several British intelligence officers. This was considered a strong signal by the remaining armed factions that any peace accord violations would provoke British military action.

²⁶ One measurement 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 1950’s (Reno 1995, Zack-Williams 1995)

increasingly a party of Mende-speaking groups in the south and east of the country (Opala 1996).

The local Kono Progressive Movement stood opposed to the SLPP in the 1957 and 1962 local elections and sought a more egalitarian society with no special powers for chiefs (Reno 1995) and, contrary to the SLPP, was able to win the support of the masses. In the 1962 election the KPM allied itself with two other opposition parties under the name of Sierra Leone Peoples Independent Movement (SLPIM). One of these parties was the All People's Congress (APC) of trade unionist Siaka Probyn Stevens. A narrow electoral victory for Stevens in 1967 led to confusion in the country, as SLPP elements clung to power. Samuel Hinga Norman, then a young army officer, but later leader of the Kamajor movement, played a key role in trying to deny Stevens victory. 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 a shift to Republican status. 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, increasingly important in this and other businesses, became the ideal partners of the APC. Before, they already 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 Beers²⁷ subsidiary, and as such could raise a large support base. But more importantly, 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 guarantee 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.²⁸ Politicians expected to be treated by everyone as they were treated by the Lebanese.

Patrimonial politics take shape

Soon after Sierra Leone became independent, adopting a Westminster parliamentary model, democratic principles began to erode. The 1967 election has been mentioned above. The Governor General declared Siaka Stevens the rightful winner but before he could take office a military coup was staged, only to be followed by another coup a few hours later which brought into power a military government 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. With Stevens, born in Moyamba in the South but claiming Limba ethnic roots and supported more abundantly in the North, and (as a former labour organisation leader) among unionised labour, 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 elections opponents of the APC were prevented from casting their vote. When in 1974 a bomb exploded at a house of an APC minister several opposition leaders were accused, and hanged the following year (Valeton 1981).

Siaka Stevens considered political security much more important than democratic liberties, and used the informal diamond network to safeguard his political position. Reno (1995:80)

²⁷ The South African based De Beers diamond company, owned by the Oppenheimer family, has for most of the 20th century maintained a near monopoly on worldwide diamond winning and marketing.

²⁸ According to a town chief in the diamond rich Tongo area: *'The mining was better during the APC days. If you had the right connections nobody would bother you. But the APC regime was very bad as far as education was concerned and oppressed the people.'*

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 refers to this system of government as patrimonialism, a system involving 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). 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’ preoccupation with his political security and preventing any competitor using 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 (Reno 1995). Patrimonial economic politics also played out at the local level, where “strangers” - that is 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. Stevens immediately received support from Guinea in the form of 200 soldiers who served as personal bodyguards. After the Guinean soldiers left in 1973, Stevens asked the Cuban government to help train a special APC militia. This militia was named the Internal Security Unit (ISU) and was much feared by the population.

In 1977 Sierra Leonean students protested intensely against Siaka Stevens’ government, but could not prevent the move towards a one party state. After a dubious referendum in 1978, 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 chiefs, not always belonging to a locally-recognised ruling house, thus alienating traditional elite support, especially in the south and east of the country. The widespread use of the notorious ISU forces (later Special Security Department, SSD) by the APC to brutalise people and suppress student protests created widespread resentment.

An economic tragedy

In 1975 the NDMC output was 731,000 carats²⁹. In 1985 it was only 74,000 carats (Reno 1995:107). At the same time a private³⁰ diamond economy was created around Stevens. In

²⁹ 5 carats make one gramme.

³⁰ Before diamond mining was in the hands of the state, through the NDMC. Now Stevens allowed private mining operations under the “Cooperative Contract Mining” (CCM). Due to high financial administration and register costs few if any small scale miners were able to register under the CCM scheme (Reno:1995).

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 [Afro-Lebanese] businessman, an associate of Stevens, as foreign companies pulled out.’

In 1979 the IMF negotiated an economic stabilization plan, including demands on the Sierra Leone government to limit state spending. This meant in particular reducing civil service expenditure. Minor government jobs were an important means of securing loyalty to the state system. However, Siaka Stevens also planned to host the Organisation of African Unity conference in 1980. This yearly conference – an opportunity for the host country to impress visiting presidents - left Sierra Leone, as with other host countries previously, with huge debts, and almost useless infrastructure.³¹ With total 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 loyalty of junior cadres through showing an interest in family welfare. Stevens gave exclusive import authorization to the former state-owned enterprises, in which Stevens often had a share, and in 1984 Sierra Leone imported almost three times as much rice as it did in 1978. Domestic production dropped more than 30%. Stevens made the government purchase imported rice at the high informal-market rate from former state-owned enterprises. These enterprises, in which Stevens had a big hand, bought cheap imported rice with foreign exchange raised by diamond-mining operations (Reno 1995). He then distributed subsidized rice directly from 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 - of civil servants. Politicians, and in particular the ones most loyal to Stevens, received vouchers to buy large quantities (500 bags of 100kg) of rice at a fraction of the market value. By 1986, the subsidized price had dropped as low as one-fortieth of 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, and 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 the 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 that ‘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), a figure which refutes Bangura’s criticisms of Richards’ arguments about patrimonial failure (Bangura 1997, Richards 1996).

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

³¹ Neighbouring Liberia constructed a large hotel “Hotel Africa” and bungalows to host this conference. A special fly-over was constructed to guarantee the smooth journey for the presidential cars from the capital to the hotel. For many years Hotel Africa was in the hands of a Dutch arms and timber dealer, sanctioned by the United Nations in 2000.

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 the success and strength of the patrimonial network of Stevens and his successor become clear by the fact 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, viz. aid support from Cold War rivals and 3) the withdrawal of large foreign companies due to high levels of corruption and depleted 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 subject (Richards 1996). Obviously, Momoh, a former commander of the army, did not want to upset the security forces and run the risk of a coup or uprising. But his choice to prioritise 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 (Richards 1996). Government employees were less and less able to pay school-fees for their own children.

Among other effects of the reduction in patrimonial redistribution were increasing problems in the justice system, where the lowest levels of administration in rural areas became more than usually strapped for cash, resulting in village headman and court chairmen "paying themselves" through arbitrary and excessive fines and exactions on young people (Richards 2005b). The customary laws were documented by Fenton in the 1920s (revised 1948), but his volume is slender and copies almost impossible to find in Sierra Leone. For instance, the university Law School library does not possess one. Appeals - impossibly expensive for most villagers, in any case - can be made to the magistrate's court and eventually to the High Court. At 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 (i.e. by traditional elders). There 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 thirty per cent 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 practiced 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 great medieval 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 an imaginary generalization, however, and reflects the picture of what local elites like to bring out. That the "logic of clearing" was not always going to be followed is made clearer below.

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 Africans³², the slaves themselves were acquired by the indigenous population, predominately chiefs and local big men, through warfare among the different tribes, or through kidnapping in ambushes, known as panyarring. There were, however, also legal ways to acquire slaves. The similarities between the legal ways to acquire slaves, up to 1896, and the strategies of elders to manipulate the labour of young people today, as mentioned by the interviewed young ex-combatants are striking (and arguably not coincidental, but an element in a cultural orientation still very much alive). 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 or 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 (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 proper respect" to a certain chief after

³² 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).

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, as becomes clear from the following example. Those of lesser stature found it nearly impossible to get their right through customary law, according to a statement of an 18th 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 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 19th 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. Until the British finally banned domestic slavery in Sierra Leone - as late as January 1st 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. In local custom, the labour of strangers was at the command of those who provided protection over those who lacked local family connections (Richards *et al.* 2004a). Or as Abraham, based on Siddle (1968), 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).

Elite control over means of production and reproduction

A central role in the social system of villages was taken by the village seniors. According to Meillassoux (1960) the power of the elders (among the Gouro in central Cote d’Ivoire) is based on three factors - their knowledge of social processes, their control of marriageable women³³ (i.e. power over the means of *reproduction* rather than over means of production), and on economic principles (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).³⁴ Assumed in Meillassoux’s functional analysis is that youths eventually become elders, or as Deluz & Godelier (1967) put it: ‘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’ (Murphy, 1980:202). Rey (1979) also

³³ 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.

³⁴ This was not an uncommon perspective on African societies. According to Abbink, in an excellent overview and introduction to the book “Vanguard or Vandals. Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa” (2005): ‘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)

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 are forced to carry out for elders, such as community labour, must also be considered exploitation of young people's labour for the benefit of the elders, sustaining a kind of class distinction.

Continuities apparent in the 19th century conditions described by e.g. Jones (1983) and Holsoe (1974) and conditions reported by young rural ex-combatants as among their grievances today suggest that, indeed, rural Sierra Leone is characterised by strong and intensifying class cleavages between those recognised by the British as land-owners, 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 characterization seems to accord with local conditions better than 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 are generally have a strategic character. But two basically different strategies should be distinguished. A wealthy "stranger" - coming from another chiefdom - may be first "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 descendents of the chief and the descendents of the powerful stranger. The alliance serves a political function - of power sharing among the two leading families (Murphy & Bledsoe 1987). Notably, this kind of political marriage is practised without bride-wealth transactions. But in the other cases 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 bride wealth 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 reality³⁵; and it is more likely that her husband will be an older man with the resources to pay bride wealth and that the young woman will become a second or third wife. 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*

³⁵ Richards *et al.* (2004c) show that the average age is as low as 15.5 years.

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 the young men go away. (Richards et al. 2004a:6)

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 for community purposes, such as repairing feeder roads and small bridges. The children of the village elite are often excused such demands. Or at times they are excused by circumstances – they are away being schooled in one or other of the urban centres. 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 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 RUF 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 land owners 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 marginalization of youth

According to Mamdani (1996) (summarised by Fanthorpe): ‘a tiny minority of Europeans and Westernized Africans enjoyed the full prerogatives of citizenship, while the majority of Africans only obtained rights as subjects of tribally defined ‘native authorities’ (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 [Ibrahim] 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 political and moral exclusion started long before the outbreak of the civil war, when the ‘extreme localization of criteria of identity and belonging’ (Fanthorpe 2001:372) 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), i.e. the process of slow incorporation of new settlers through marriage and community contribution. Reno, referring to Dorjahn & Fyfe (1962), is somewhat more forthright in seeing marginality in the pre-colonial setting, as well as being a product of British intervention:

The discovery of alluvial diamonds occurred in a colonial context that distinguished between recently arrived immigrants and “natives” of chiefdoms. Colonial ordinances accentuated the precarious elements of the customary social standing of settlers, forcing them into a more vulnerable and permanent “stranger” category, which reinforced their need to seek protection from a local strongman. Previously, land use

rights theoretically were subject to review each year by local chiefs and headmen, but strangers often married into local lineages and reduced their patron's power over them. (Reno, 2003:48/49)

Debate will probably continue about the extent to which pre-colonial rural social formations were sustainably adapted to local agrarian circumstances, or represented a process of intensifying class cleavage³⁶. However, there is less argument that a process of opposition between land-owning elites and commoners, often of outside origin, became entrenched during the colonial period, and 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 were substituted, from 1928, by the categories of natives and strangers. In a situation in which strangers are, in effect, denied 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 populations obliged to attach itself to 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 prospects of becoming educated offered young Sierra Leoneans the belief that there was an alternative route to achieve a citizen status – through the promises of meritocracy. Being “brilliant” at school, as one CDF volunteer put it, would suffice.³⁷ However, as a result of the economic crisis of the 1980s this route to global recognition and success – a beacon for many for almost the entire history of the country – was finally revealed to be a false hope.³⁸ 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 most 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 other of the stop-at-nothing lords of the diamond fields.

³⁶ The disadvantage of those interested in “lineage modes” as an historical formation, rather than as an “articulation” under colonialism and development is that it is so hard to get evidence on whether inter-generational 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.

³⁷ Formal education has long been highly valued in Sierra Leone. Fourah Bay College, the first university-level institution in Western 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 in England, mainly helping prepare young Freetown citizens for 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.

³⁸ ‘Wright (in Skelt, 1997:22) reports that most children dropped out before completing primary school.’ (Keen, 2003:79).

Survival strategies for marginalized youth

With the drying up of patrimonial funds, the 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, three options were left: 1) remain in the village and involve oneself in (semi-subsistence) agriculture and (for a boy) labour indebtedness, and (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, and hope to find some kind of unskilled work in the urban informal sector.

1) 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 having farms,³⁹ especially if the village is small. Most farming in Sierra Leone is of semi-subsistence type, combined with some cash-crop production to raise some money for medicines, school fees or consumer goods.

During the 1980's 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, etc.) than it had to do with supposed intrinsic agronomic 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 these type of interventions were developed for agronomic situations where labour was relatively abundant,⁴⁰ and land scarce. Sierra Leone is characterised by the opposite position (Richards 1986). Mechanised farming is equally limited as it is unsuitable for most land conditions in Sierra Leone, and very poor farmers lack capital or credit to acquire machines, so other ways to overcome labour shortages were found.⁴¹

There are several points during the farming year when the farm household is unable to cope on its own. Non-household labour is most important in the case of brushing, ploughing and harvesting. These activities require either casual hired labour, or more commonly, the assistance of a work group (Richards, 1986:69).

There are several organisational arrangements to overcome the seasonal labour bottleneck for peasants. Richards (1986:70) distinguished four types of work groups among the Mende:

- *Tee*⁴² is the simplest kind of labour group. It is an informal arrangement among neighbours or kin to join together to work on the farms of members according to a rota.

³⁹ It is not uncommon to find pupils attending school in the morning and working on the teacher's farm in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ On a local scale, land was not always as abundant as is sometimes assumed, due 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).

⁴¹ Hence, the preoccupation of landholding elites to tie labour through clientelism, bride-wealth transactions or court cases.

⁴² The names are in Mende.

- *Bembe* is a special purpose work group. It is a co-operative in which the members agree to work together for a fixed number of days. Members in need of money may decide to sell one or more of their turns for cash to the highest bidder. In addition, it is common for members of a *bembe* to agree that they will work a set number of days for general hire.
- *Gbɔtɔ*: this is a special type of *bembe* for youths from about 10 to 15 years old, reflecting elders' control over the labour of dependents. Each member is nominated to the group by the head of his household.
- *Mbele*: is a work party organised specifically to harvest rice. Women work alongside men in a *mbele*. The earnings are divided equally among the members.

So there are several arrangements made around the need of labour. Of particular interests is the *Gbɔtɔ*. '[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 *Gbɔtɔ* will achieve more in one day than any similar group, despite the youthfulness of the workers' (Richards 1986:71,72).

Another type of group is the *kɔmbi*, a general purpose work group. Although much of the work it is doing is the same as the above groups, 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. '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 *Gbɔtɔ* 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 element in it, resulting from stiff competition when the group temporarily is divided in two halves.

What precedes the issue of *how* to organise labour, was *if* labour was available in the village at all. Shortages of labour became worse after alluvial diamond mining expanded in 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 – i.e. 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 demands⁴³ and bride service, results in the impossibility of making a decent living out of farming without 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 is backbreaking, but the attached implications for agency.

⁴³ Ironically, development agencies working through "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.

2) Mining

Since the discovery of diamonds in Kono in the late 1920s, this sector has attracted large numbers of youthful labourers, mainly of a rural origin. Due to the specific nature of the deposits (predominately alluvial), mining 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 total number of support workers is 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 repairing of equipment (Richards 1996).

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 months of absence, farm plots are left under the care of a wife (if married), parent or sibling. Others, e.g. those who have dropped out of school, who are unable to find a proper job after completing school, or who are on the run to escape an early marriage or unpayable fines, are involved in mining on a more long-term basis. With daily wages presently as low as two cups of rice, or one cup of rice and 500 Leones (about US \$0.25), a day, they are locked in place with only one way to escape - find a big diamond. Chances have become increasingly small since the best deposits are already over-worked or exhausted. Quite often old sites already "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-born diseases⁴⁴, malaria or Lassa fever. As termed by Richards (1996), the alluvial diamond fields are the *rural slums* of Sierra Leone.

Small-scale alluvial diamond mining in Sierra Leone is either authorised (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, because it takes place in extensive government forest reserves, for which no licence can be granted (Richards 1996). These reserves are largely inaccessible to the (motor-borne) authorities and mined by those brave enough to take a chance, and with enough labour to head-load 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 (less than five is probably the most common size). They dig for diamonds in shallow pits in alluvial or colluvial deposits, on river terraces or in dried up 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 needs for his workers⁴⁵ but who also takes part in the backbreaking work if it is his only operation. If a diamond is found, it will be sold to the leader, often at a local and highly disadvantageous price,⁴⁶ after which the money is shared equally among the miners. Many miners use their earnings to start small-scale mining operations themselves, hiring diggers, and so becoming leaders themselves. But

⁴⁴ During the rainy-season the abandoned pits fill up with water.

⁴⁵ Sometimes in small-scale mining operations the miners bring their own food and equipment. 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.

⁴⁶ Miners have some idea of realistic prices where it concerns the smaller and more common stones (less than 1 carat). With a large diamond, miners have little experience in judging a fair price and can easily be cheated. Value increases exponentially rather than lineally with increase in carats and quality.

alluvial diamond mining is nothing less than a lottery.⁴⁷ 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 ex-combatant's account above). Some create their own communities, rather different from the imaginary "moral community in long-established rural enclaves" of which Fanthorpe writes. Reno (1995) observes that even before the war:

Some unemployed youths organize "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. Dropped out of school or driven out of their communities by fines impossible to pay, members of these groups aspired to create a new regime, free of elder's control. Here, they could mine independently of even the 'enterprising chiefs and headmen [who] found that they could extract informal "license fees" and "fines" from young men in return for protection for their IDM⁴⁸ 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.

3) 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 – i.e. 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 could easily 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 hers own business.

The unlucky ones are doomed to survive by their wits and are known, in Krio, as *dregman* [*dregman dem*, pl.]. 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).

⁴⁷ 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 fuel for the pumps that drain the water from the pits, and one pile is 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 provide the equipment. According to Fithen (1999) the two-pile system was an adaptation to the uncertainties of war.

⁴⁸ IDM: Illicit Diamond Mining

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. 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), as mentioned, has shown that for colonial coastal West Africa coastal merchant elites and interior rulers colluded with the British and French to slow down the pace of emancipation. Above it has been argued that customary law is, in effect, the legalization 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 by powerful ruling elites for national laws to British standards (to regulate commerce and protect trade) in return for British tolerance of local customs preserving the coercive labour privileges of rural elites. In understanding the local customs the British protected it is central 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 (cf. Richards 1986). The politics of wealth-in-people, i.e. "ownership" of wives and children, is sustained by customs (foremost 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, etc. 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 has been argued above. The problem with customary justice today is less its systematic features than that an incalculable arbitrariness has taken over. Today, there are only two customary law officers to supervise all customary courts in the provinces. One such officer covers both Southern and Eastern Province, 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 - as bedrock for 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). When the Mende tailor, Kisimi Kamara, invented a writing system, in Pujehun District around 1920,

one of its major local usages was to keep records of bride service and bride wealth transactions. When Richards asked a young man in Potoru in 2003 what he thought would keep the war from returning he answered "the return of *kikaku*" - the local writing system (Richards, pers. comm.). This collapse into arbitrariness happened most in the Liberian border zone (Kailahun and Pujehun). President Stevens was afraid to send his thugs there to restore order.⁴⁹ A feature of the already weakened state power in Sierra Leone in the Stevens era was that sustained attempts at assertion were mainly focused 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 steady decline in state power to regulate custom, but this did not imply the kind of freedom anarchists desire. Customary power simply became decentred (i.e. localised), while remaining "the only game in town". This generality of localised patrimonialism is the answer to why young people do not easily walk away from their village to escape kangaroo courts and labour obligations. Regularly they try to, but 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, i.e. 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*, lit. "stranger-father") to gain land, marriage partner, and access to local labour sharing institutions.⁵⁰ This system of strangerhood is general throughout the upper West African forests.⁵¹ 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 to the model of a Weberian state.⁵² The system is rooted in 19th century realities. Abraham (1978) discusses Mende government and politics under colonial rule and uses the term "personal-amorphous" pre-colonial 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 was a Weberian (territorial) state. It has however remained in many respects a "personal-amorphous polity", resisting bureaucratisation, i.e. the comprehensive and generalised linkages Weber saw as basic to state instrumental rationality (Collins & Makowsky 1993) and favouring personal linkages between ruler and ruled. According to Gellner (1978), 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 can hardly be accused of building locally for the future. When the personal-amorphous polity finally breaks down, it spews out a large group of marginalized and excluded young people; these are our future conscripts.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ For some detailed statistics on the percentage of "strangers" in Gola Forest villages, see Richards (1996).

⁵¹ In Cote d'Ivoire it is known as the *tutorat*.

⁵² Customary law is an example of such a quasi-independent patrimonial cone: cases can be taken on appeal from chiefdom courts to magistrates courts up to the high court, but through a separate section, in which advisors to the judge are not lawyers but "specialists in customary law". In other words, bigger traditional elders review the actions of smaller such elders - thus there is no single system comprising the law-of-the-land.

It can be agreed that the two sets of circumstances described in this chapter – collapse of a neo-patrimonial state and marginalization of the rural poor - are among 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 & van de Walle 1998). Socio-economic crisis among rural youths 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 can also 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 deaths,⁵³ and the displacement (internally or to neighbouring countries) of over half the population.

⁵³ It is extremely difficult to estimate the number of casualties in the Sierra Leonean conflict. Much depends on the system of counting: does one only count direct casualties, in other words those who have been killed by the violence or does one also count those who have died as a result of the indirect impact of the violence, due to hunger or the lack of medical care?

Chapter 3

Conflict in Sierra Leone and recruits to the war

An overview⁵⁴

The beginning

In March 1991 a small group of about a hundred guerrilla fighters entered eastern Sierra Leone from Liberia. The majority of the group were Sierra Leoneans. This vanguardⁱ can be divided into two; Sierra Leoneans who had received guerrilla training in Libya in 1987/88 and those who were recruited in Liberia just before the incursion. Some had fighting experience in the war in Liberia (Abdullah 1997) and a good number had urban backgrounds, or had previously lived in an urban centre.

Besides Sierra Leoneans, the initial insurgents included some Liberian fighters, Special Forces who were on loan from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) (a) and a few mercenaries from Burkina Faso. The guerrilla forces called themselves the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone. The proclaimed aim was to overthrow President, Major General [retd.], Joseph Saidu Momoh of the All People's Congress, whose previous leader and president, Siaka Stevens, had declared Sierra Leone a one-party state in 1978.

The ranks of the guerrilla forces swelled rapidly due to 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" in small-scale alluvial diamond mining in eastern Sierra Leoneⁱⁱ. Some joined the RUF because they saw it as a Mende uprisingⁱⁱⁱ against the Temne-dominated APC party. But as we have seen in chapter 1, many other youths considered it a good opportunity to escape from the political, social and economic marginalisation of youth at a

Stories

Notes

(a) It is possible that the first fighter to enter Sierra Leone was not a Sierra Leonean at all but an under-age Liberian commander, named Nixon Gaye, with his fellow Liberians, posted to Sankoh's forces by Charles Taylor, perhaps glad to be rid of the psychotic Gaye (see Richards 2005b).

The following interview fragment with a RUF cadre hints at this alternative history: *'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 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.'*

(b) According to an informant; *'whenever you had fired 10 bullets you had to drop the gun, open your zipper and pee on the gun to cool it down before you could use it again.'*

(c) A Colonel in the Sierra Leone Army stated that the failed attempt to take Daru and the bridge over the Moa (in the course of which the notorious RUF commando "Rambo" was killed) was a turning point in the behaviour of the RUF: *'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.'*

⁵⁴ A chronology of the war is given in Annex I.

national as well as a village level in Sierra Leone (eg. Peters & Richards 1998a/b, Peters 2004).

The Sierra Leonean army was ill-prepared to challenge the incursion. With a total of no more than 3,000 troops and out-dated weaponry (b), with most senior officers residing in Freetown, the government forces lost ground rapidly. The RUF only met its first serious resistance when it tried to take the eastern town of Daru (c), the home of the 3rd army battalion. Lacking support from Freetown and with insufficient logistics, front-line army officers realized 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 about 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 27 at the time of the coup – mostly from 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

(d) A Kamajor commander, who supported the army in fighting the rebels from its early stages, reflects on this specific period: *'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 ceasefire: 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: 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 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.'

(e) An ex-RUF commander, asked about this particular attack, denies any set up. *'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 there to protect the place and weapons, had left for Freetown for celebrations. That explains how we were able to take these arms.'* According to Lansana Gberie (2000) many of the army rank and file, or volunteers, also abandoned their positions and went to Freetown to watch a major football tournament.

(f) An RUF commander argues that the successful recovery of the RUF after 1993 had nothing to do with secret support from the army but reflected the RUF's change in tactics: *'Our success by then 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 give the people zeal to fight.'*

its main source of recruits, namely marginalized 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 1993-94 total of around 15,000-20,000 (Fithen & Richards 2005). Many of these new recruits received only limited military training and lacked the army discipline. Some of these newfound recruits later became known, to civilians, as *sobel*s – soldiers by day, rebels by night.

However, 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^{iv} forces and decided to withdraw into the Gola Forest on the Liberian/Sierra Leonean border at the end of 1993 to regroup, abandoning the small amount of heavy military equipment it possessed. Much speculation has gone into whether or not the NPRC allowed the nearly defeated RUF to regroup, since it declared a cease-fire by the end of 1993 on the brink of victory (d). Shortly after the RUF was able to capture suspiciously easily a large quantity of weapons at Nomo Faama (e), a strong base of NPRC hard fighter Lt. Tom Nyuma. Some argued that an end to the war would not be advantageous to the NPRC regime. Peace would have denied some military commanders involved in looting and illegal activities the opportunity to continue, and would definitely increase pressure for democratic elections.

From the second half of 1994, the RUF started a new campaign, no longer limiting itself to the eastern part of the country (f). Jungle camps were established (g) all over the country and fighters used the narrow bush paths to launch quick hit-and-run attacks before disappearing into the forest. For example, in November 1994, Kabala, a town in the far North of the country was attacked and two British Voluntary Service

(g) According to an ex-RUF informant 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, viz. Camp Burkina at Ngiyema in Kailahun [Tarawalie], Peyeima Camp adjacent to Tongo Field [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. After the sacking of the Zogoda, RUF survivors made their way through the Gola Forest to the safety of Camp Burkina in northern Kailahun.

(h) The extent to which the role of the army became increasingly blurred from 1994 and onwards, is illustrated by the following statements: *'I joined in 1990 but left the army in '95 because it became too much mixed up. You meet your brother 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"^{xii}. 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).

Another statement was given by a former administrator of SIEROMCO mines (SIEROMCO: Sierra Leone Ore and Metal Company, a subsidiary of Alu-Suisse, mining bauxite in the Mokañji Hills in the South of the country, and attacked in mid-January 1995): *'The attack on SIEROMCO Mines was*

Overseas aid workers were captured. In January 1995 the town of Kambia was attacked, in the far West of the country (Riley & Sesay 1995). Isolated from society at large, the RUF was further cut off from the vast reservoir of potential youthful conscripts. The RUF 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 army officers loyal to the APC were replaced by NPRC loyalists. However, a considerable part remained in function, of which many 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 deals with the RUF. A possible way for a commander to operate was to pack his boys off to areas where there were still signs of RUF activity, ostensibly to defend outlying villages but in reality to fend for themselves from the rich local pickings of cocoa, coffee and diamonds (h) (Richards 1996).

In 1995 the NPRC started to recruit mercenaries to become more effective in combating the RUF. First a mercenary force of ex-Ghurkhas led by an American Vietnam-veteran, later trained in counter-insurgency in the Rhodesian Army [Col. Robert Mackenzie] was hired. During their first major operation they were attacked, with high losses, including the death of Mackenzie (i) and the survivors were withdrawn shortly afterwards and replaced by South-African private security firm Executive Outcomes (Peters & Richards 1998a). In exchange for mining concession reported to be valued at US\$ 30 million (Richards 1996) Executive Outcomes started to train and support the army and Kamajor units.

The Kamajors

As early as 1991/92, government forces started to make use of local game-hunters as scouts during their patrols (j). But already

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. We were now without protection and shortly after the rebels attacked.'

(i) A RUF ex-combatant recalls a confrontation with government-hired mercenaries at about that time: *'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.'* (Peters & Richards 1998a:206)

(j) According to a Kamajor leader who was present from the beginning: *'April the 5th 1991 was the beginning of the Kamajors. Then they started to work as hunters, vigilantes and volunteers for the army. Major Doweï of the army asked the chieftdom authorities to present some local hunters to help them in their fight. Lower Bambara Chieftdom presented 515 Kamajors, all with a single barrel gun. 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 Chieftdom did the same. The military did not give us training so we used our bush tactics*

during the first year there were voices raised that the role of these scouts should be more formalised. Dr. Alfa Lavalie, a history lecturer at Fourah Bay, was in favour of such a more formalised role and allegedly travelled to England to collect funds among the Sierra Leone diaspora to realise his ideas. Lavalie later died at Mano junction from the effects of a landmine, allegedly planted by the army to kill him. Another key figure in the development of the 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 around 1992/93. Later he was appointed deputy defence minister in the post-1996 democratic government (the president held the defence portfolio) and visible leader of the Kamajors and Civil Defence Force.

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

In late 1993/early 1994 the RUF entered Bonthe District in the South of the country. Alleged victims of RUF violence prayed at the graveyards of ancient warriors where the esoteric knowledge was revealed to them of how to become invincible. These “enlightened” people started to initiate others in this secret knowledge, in fact establishing a society, and started to fight against the rebels. Soon these local fighters, protected by charms and “bullet-proof” jackets, drove the RUF out of Bonthe district. The NPRC regime took notice of this and started to make use of these and other such fighters, bringing them to other places for fighting and getting them to initiate more volunteers. The first major initiation shift took place in

or copied the army methods. If you as a hunter can go to the bush and kill an animal, what is next!?’

(k) Many of the young Kamajors were pupils and students before they joined. Considerable numbers had seen their education disrupted due to RUF attacks on schools. The principal of a secondary school in Kenema refers to an almost direct link between the closure of schools and the recruitment of young Kamajors: *‘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. 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.’

(l) An ex-Kamajor leader explains the link between the (Paramount) Chief and the initiator: *‘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.’*

(m) *‘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 ‘95] young educated people were accepted, because the 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*

the displaced camps around Bo, filled mainly with people from Pujehun District in the south. Obviously, these were fertile grounds for the recruitment of (young) people (**k**) to fight against the rebels and claim their abandoned land back. Particularly for this last reason, recruitment was strongly supported and stimulated by the chiefs, who were also among the displaced population residing in the camps. Daily matters inside the camps were still taken care of by the chiefs and the elders, as would normally be the case in the villages.

Drawing its organizational modalities from the guild of specialist hunters known in the south and east as *kamajoi* (Mende) and in the north as *tamaboro* (Koranko) or *kapra* (Temne), these local defence forces consisted of a leader or initiator, a *kami*, and a small group of apprentices (**l**). According to Muana (1997), the Kamajor movement retained its guild organization. Control among the Kamajors was very rigid and the various codes of conduct were often obeyed, even in absence of the leader. This is partly due to the strong belief of a Kamajor that if he would break the code, he would lose his magical bullet-proof protection and subsequently die in combat. So strong was this belief that other Kamajors 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^v. Furthermore it was forbidden to steal, use abusive language, kill innocent civilians or touch dirty items.

Other factors also contributed to the disciplined behaviour of the Kamajors. The rebel forces mainly consisted of young men and women (of which many were under-age), but the Kamajor movement was much more age balanced, including both young and older fighters (**m**). And although coming from rural communities like many of the RUF conscripts and army irregulars, most of the younger Kamajor fighters were not alienated from their villages and differed greatly from the RUF and NPRC recruits in that they were still largely under the control

in, mainly in the administrative positions. But in the battlefield it was still experience that counted. For higher [field] positions it was experience and age that counted. Age brings responsibility.’ (former Kamajor commander)

(**n**) Indeed, to consider the Kamajor movement as a completely spontaneous uprising against the RUF without any political agenda, is not correct. According to a former CDF administrator: *‘There is an undeniable triangular relationship between the Sierra Leone People’s Party, the Kamajor 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 re-installation. Chiefs sometimes paid the initiation fees. Others borrowed money from Lebanese merchants, paying it back later by starting to dig diamonds.’*

(**o**) A long serving army officer reflects on the deteriorating collaboration between the CDF and the army: *‘New CDF recruits were beneficial to the initiators as they had to contribute 5 gallons of palm-oil and Le 30.000 [30 to 15 US\$] 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 Kamajor bullet-proof did not work. In the beginning only few people could join the Kamajor movement. But when it became politicalised, when money came in, their numbers grew and they were set up against the soldiers.’*

(**p**) A former RUF commander recalls the situation when the government breached the ceasefire: *‘When Foday Sankoh was about to go for peace talks in Abidjan, he told us that he would not return to the Zogoda. He said*

of the village or town chief who played a key role in their recruitment (n). Candidates were screened at village level by the village chief, later taken to the town chief and region chief. In the end they were presented to the Paramount Chief.

Still, the combined forces of the army and increasing numbers of Kamajors were not able to prevent the RUF from getting close to the capital city, Freetown, in early 1995. This inability was partly due to the fact that the cooperation between the army and the Kamajors became increasingly problematic. As mentioned, the Kamajor movement was partly a reaction to incapability or sometimes unwillingness of the army to protect civilians. Now, the Kamajor movement became increasingly successful in protecting civilians and their villages, and increasingly went on the offensive. This in effect boosted confidence among the Kamajors and the civilians and they started to openly confront soldiers, for instance at checkpoints where soldiers demanded tokens from the passing civilians. One of the biggest clashes between the SLA and the Kamajors took place at Kenema in September 1996, at Kpetema checkpoint, with tens of deaths (o).

Not able to take the capital and claim total victory, but strong enough not to be defeated by the combined power of the military forces and the rapidly expanding Kamajor militia, peace negotiations between the RUF and government were started. A provisional ceasefire was agreed upon in January 1996. In February 1996 the first democratic elections in decades were held and Captain Julius Maada Bio (who was installed after a palace coup the previous month) saw himself handing over power to Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). The SLPP was from its early days the party supported by 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, whose loyalty was uncertain, and to depend increasingly on the Kamajor movement for national defence. Meanwhile the

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, but we could not believe it.

However, he proved to be right. The Kamajors were continuing their operations while there was a ceasefire. Because we had a strict order from the Pa that we were not allowed to shoot at any soldier, we had to retreat. We could not properly defend the place.'

A young villager (of nearby Sendumei) took part in this attack as a Kamajor: *'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 bafa's [huts] and many properties. According to the chief it was the ICRC [Red Cross] helicopter that brought a looted generator to the Zogoda^{xiii}. 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.'

(q) A former RUF commander: *'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.*

government's policy was to continue peace negotiations with the RUF.

While the 1996 peace negotiations continued, key RUF bases were attacked by Kamajor militias, with the support of mercenaries of the South African-based security-cum-mining company Executive Outcomes (p). The government argued that it was not in control of the Kamajor movement and thus unable to stop it breaching the cease fire. In November 1996 the Abidjan Peace Accord was signed between the Sierra Leonean government and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone. Officially the war was over but mutual suspicion between the former enemies resulted in neither of them disarming or demobilizing their fighters to any significant extent^{vi}. In February 1997 Sankoh was arrested and detained in Nigeria on weapon charges. The ideological leadership of the RUF tried to take control over the movement but was arrested by the battle field commander and deputy leader of the RUF, Sam Bockarie (q).

And another coup

In May 1997 a third coup took place by the army, disgruntled at being sidelined by the government (r). Most of the demobilized (child) combatants joined their former comrades and re-enlisted. The new regime, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) headed by Major Johnny-Paul Koroma, invited the RUF to join the military junta (s). For more than eight months the AFRC and the RUF were in control of Freetown and some major towns in Sierra Leone. Meanwhile the Kamajor movement, now referred to as the Civil Defence Force, in an attempt by government to deflect from the Mende-dominated character of the militia, led the resistance against the junta forces from the rural areas. However, it started to face serious problems with authority and order^{vii}. The main initiators of the movement, previously residing in the towns of Bo and Kenema, and supervising the initiation process of new recruits, were forced to leave their bases. As a result, the intake, screening and actual initiation

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.'

(r) An ex-child combatant who joined under the NPRC and later fought with the AFRC explains what, according to him and his colleagues, were the reasons for the coup: *'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 cut down their 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, 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 giving different advice.'*^{xiv}

(s) The two following accounts are from an ex-RUF commander and an ex-child soldier of the NPRC. They both recall the moment when the RUF and the army met and started their collaboration: *'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*

process became increasingly ad hoc, with most of its former checks and balances dislocated (t). Some of the minor Kamajors 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 Kamajors also had lost their major, but sometimes problematic, ally, the army. So they were forced quickly to compensate for this with new, hastily recruited, manpower. In February 1998 the West-African peacekeeping force ECOMOG,^{viii} together with Kamajor fighters and a few hundred loyal government soldiers, launched a successful attack aimed at driving the junta out of the capital.

The 1996 elected Kabbah government resumed power in Freetown in March 1998. Although some 5,000 AFRC troops had surrendered, many AFRC soldiers, and most RUF units, did not, and retreated to areas where the civil-defence movement was at its weakest. Contrary to claims by the newly installed government that the rebels were now on their last legs, the RUF started to regroup and expand. Major towns were taken over by the RUF and, by the end of 1998, AFRC and rebel fighters had infiltrated the capital. On January 6, 1999 a damaging battle for Freetown started. More than two weeks of street fighting resulted in 5,000-6,000 people being killed, countless others being mutilated by cutlass blows and hundreds of houses being destroyed. The AFRC and the RUF were pushed back into the hinterland and many civilians were forced to join them, retreating to carry loads, and/or joining as new recruits. Again it became clear that a military victory was not possible for either side.

Towards final peace

New 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

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).

An ex-soldier tells the story from the army side: *'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.'*

(t) Not only the authority of the Kamajor leaders deteriorated, but also their commitment and loyalty. The following statement by the Speaker (the chief's second in command) in the village of Makali shows not only how the RUF ranks swelled rapidly towards 1999 but also puts the supposed loyalty of the CDF fighters in perspective: *'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 Kamajor leader even became the second-in-command here in Makali under RUF control.'*

(u) A high ranking ex-RUF commander tells about the split between Sankoh and Bockarie: *'The movement started to split after the Lomé peace-accord. Morris Kallon and Gibril Massaquoi informed the Pa that Maskita,*

a UN peacekeeping force to Sierra Leone. Disarmament and demobilization, as outlined in the peace accord, started to take shape, but painfully slowly. The RUF's second-in-command, Sam 'Maskita' Bockarie, unwilling to disarm (u), fled to Liberia with a group of die-hard fighters (v). After a dispute between UN military observers and RUF commanders over the return of disarmed combatants to the RUF, the RUF seized about 500 UN peacekeepers^{ix}. Protests by demonstration-cum-mob of civilian men and women in front of Sankoh's residence in May 2000 led to gunshots, deaths in the crowd, and the subsequent flight of the former rebel leader, before his capture a few days later. With Sankoh in custody and tensions rising, the UN expanded its peacekeeping force from 9,250 to 13,000 and later to about 17,500, thus becoming the largest^x UN mission in the world. RUF commander Issa Sesay took over command. Meanwhile special commando forces from the British army showed their readiness to fight in a hostage-freeing^{xi} operation in September 2000 against a splinter group of the former AFRC called the West Side Boys. To prevent the prospect of annihilation, the RUF had few options other than to continue the disarmament process.

After the signing of another ceasefire (the Abuja accords) on 10 November 2000, the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process finally commenced in May 2001. But it was only at the end of 2001 that disarmament started in RUF strongholds such as Kailahun, Kono and Kenema Districts. President Kabbah declared the war at an end in January 2002. This was followed shortly afterwards by general elections which this time brought a clear victory for the SLPP. The reintegration process of ex-combatants into civilian life continued (having just started over the northern formerly rebel-controlled parts of the country). The reintegration process, as commissioned by the National Commission on DDR, finished by the end of December 2003.

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.'

(v) A communications officer of the RUF who was handling radio communications between Sankoh and Bockarie recalls their conversations: *'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.'*^{xv}

ⁱ The name “vanguard” has since then been used among RUF combatants to refer to a person who was among the initial insurgents.

ⁱⁱ ‘In areas where chiefs became more dependent on an “official” clandestine economy [often upstream kimberlite concessions] before the war, youth, especially IDM 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 channelling youth violence into home guard units to defend communities’ (Reno, 2003:52). Many illicit miners in upstream Kono were perhaps even more eager to join the RUF since ‘In mid 1990, the army launched Operation Clean Sweep, and the Operation Clear All, forcing as many as 30,000 miners out of the area’ (Reno, 2003:57).

ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

^{iv} The United Liberian Movement for Democracy (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 Taylor’s forces directly.

^v According to an ex-Kamajor fighter it sometimes took him months without seeing a woman. This law also resulted in nice photo opportunities for the international press because the Kamajors developed the habit of sitting - in full tradition costume - on the roof of taxi’s to prevent contact with female passengers.

^{vi} Several RUF units continued to attack civilians in searching for food. ‘For their part, RUF fighters had been attacked by Kamajors, even after the Abidjan agreement’ (Keen, 2003:85).

^{vii} Later on, some of the laws were relaxed, because it limited the effectiveness of some of the operations, according to a CDF administrator: ‘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, 1997/98 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.’

^{viii} ECOMOG: Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group. ECOMOG, dominated by Nigerian contingents, 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 to support the RUF was “to let them taste the bitterness of war” and punish Momoh for supporting ECOMOG.

^{ix} These were held hostage close to Makali, Tonkolili district and Kuiva, Kailahun district.

^x The UN mission was not only large but also expensive: costs have been estimated at US\$ 3-4 billion (Arthy 2003).

^{xi} The hostages were intelligence officers of the British and Sierra Leonean army.

^{xii} 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 (Richards 1996).

^{xiii} An ICRC helicopter airlifted Foday Sankoh from the village of Menima close to the Zogoda to attend the Abidjan peace-talks.

^{xiv} The IMF pressured for a reduction in security spending once the Abidjan peace was signed (November 30th 1996).

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Chapter 4

The world of the RUF

About the interview material

Former fighters of the Revolutionary United Front – 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 & 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 & Richards 1998a). But most prisoners were killed by the army or the pro-government Civil Defence Forces.⁵⁵ 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 - low and high ranks, volunteers and conscripts, combatants with the RUF from the beginning and those who came in only at the end, etc. Hereafter, interview material conducted among former RUF combatants is presented.⁵⁶ The purpose is twofold: to contribute to a general understanding of how the RUF guerrilla was organised, operated and developed. A second objective is to find ways to explain these data.

Most data presented in this chapter were collected during fieldwork undertaken in two periods - November/December 2001 (see also Peters 2004) and November 2002 to October 2003. Interviews were conducted in districts with a heavy RUF presence during the war, namely Kenema, Kailahun, Bombali and Tonkolili districts. Specific locations will not be revealed, but these included (remote) villages, small and larger towns and mining areas. Nor will identities be revealed, for obvious reasons (I undertook to guarantee anonymity). However, to help the reader distinguish different voices I have labelled the different informants by letter, e.g. Commander A, Child Combatant B, etc. The sample presented in this chapter comprises six RUF commanders, four rank-and-file RUF fighters (including two females), three RUF child combatants, two RUF clerks (including one female), two RUF signals officers, one RUF dispenser, one RUF educational officer (a female), one RUF

⁵⁵ Paul Richards and colleagues were able briefly to interview a number of RUF prisoners held in Bo and Kenema in 1996, as part of a World Bank-funded study preparing for demobilization to follow the Abidjan peace, but the report (Richards *et al.* 1997) was buried, probably because it contradicted estimates of RUF strength offered by Executive Outcomes as part of their justification for seeking to attack the RUF under guise of peace negotiations. Richards was told categorically by government ministers that “there would be no peace process with the RUF”, since security advice “from international sources” indicated the military solution (cf. Hooper 2002) was the only safe way to end the war (Paul Richards, personal com.).

⁵⁶ Mkandawire (2002:186) argues against any explanation based on testimonies by individuals engaged in war, as used by Keen (1998) and Richards (1995, 1998). He asserts ‘Often conclusion is reached without any attempt at process tracing to determine if the participants in the rebellion made choices in the manner depicted by the model. In absence of such evidence, anecdotes and stylised facts are often marshalled to clinch the argument. Methodologically, this is not satisfactory. First, for every anecdote pointing in one direction, another can be found pointing in the opposite direction. Which anecdotes one deems credible will ultimately depend on one’s predisposition. Second, one needs to know in advance the independent evidence of the preferences of the individuals in question. (...) A retrospective account of what drove them to commit the crimes is likely to be self-serving.’ Below I will describe some ways to meet or overcome these objections. Incidentally, Mkandawire offers his own rather strong model of rebel war in contemporary Africa without (apparently) applying his own methodological strictures to the data set he employs.

military police, one RUF abductee/civilian and three AFRC/RUF child combatants⁵⁷. RUF material is contextualised by accounts from ex-combatants of opposing factions and from civilians who lived under RUF control during the war.

Informants were located by various means. Agencies facilitating the reintegration process of ex-combatants were sometimes willing to bring me into contact with former RUF combatants who 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.⁵⁸ This enabled me to identify some informants in public places, among the taxi-motorbike riders or in palmwine bars, for instance.

I tried in several ways to get frank responses to my questions. The most important ways were:

- to build up good rapport, often over a lengthy period
- minimising the investigation of more sensitive topics, such as asking about killings or rape cases the informant was involved in, to reduce incentives to fabrication
- using internal triangulation, by interviewing ex-combatants of different ranks (high and low) or incorporated through different recruitment strategies (voluntary or forced)
- judging the frankness of an informant by his/hers willingness to accept objective facts about the war, (e.g. 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)
- not interviewing informants with realistic reasons to fear prosecution by the Special Court
- offering the assurance of complete anonymity
- to cover given topics in multiple ways, including repeat interviewing, and visiting sites of operations with informants (e.g. the site of the former Zogoda, to verify or revisit accounts already provided concerning camps and their destruction).

The interview material is ordered by themes and sub-themes. I use three main thematic headings: 1) strategies of bonding, 2) the world of the RUF bush camps and 3) the political agenda of the RUF. Interpretation of the material is left mainly to the next chapter.

During my fieldwork the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 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 nothing to fear from these institutions - the TRC was voluntary rather than a judicial process, and the Special Court was mandated only to try the 25 or so people with greatest responsibility for the war. Once they knew me well enough, and that I was aware of their past, most of former RUF cadres actually proved eager to tell their side of the story about the RUF and the war.

⁵⁷ 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 45 former RUF combatants, not all “letters” come forward here.

⁵⁸ Those RUF fighters who had received ideological training still used words as “the masses”, “liberation” or when referring to the RUF; “the movement”.

Strategies of bonding

Conscription

Recruitment of new manpower is essential to any guerrilla force at war. In general the literature makes a distinction between *forced recruitment* and *voluntarily recruitment*. Sometimes *coerced recruitment* is added to the list, to take account of more subtle forms of forced recruitment: peer or family pressure. But what becomes clear from statements below is that what the outsider or abductee considers forced recruitment is not necessarily considered to be so by the abductor.⁵⁹ Perhaps even more remarkably, the RUF somehow managed successfully to convey to 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.⁶⁰ 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 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. Firstly, the RUF used, and probably also manipulated, the fear of the population concerning likely retaliation by soldiers and Kamajors to recruit manpower. Secondly, 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 their eyes were not yet opened. Considerable numbers of captured soldiers were 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 & Richards, 1998a: 206).

Loyalty through punishment and rewards

The majority of RUF conscripts, however, were recruited and stayed with the movement against their will – or so the accounts seem to imply. So one immediately has to question the

⁵⁹ In Sierra Leone, with its histories of enslavement (see Jones 1983), colonial forced labour and enforced membership of secret societies, abduction may seem little different from other forms of conscription (Richards 2002a).

⁶⁰ 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, an armed faction], 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.'

social coherence of such a group, and its effectiveness in carrying out cooperative activities, such as fighting.

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 who remain disloyal follow orders and do not run away.⁶¹ There are several ways to achieve this. One is to steer behaviour through practices of punishment and reward. Punishment, often of a retributive nature, whenever a law is broken or not followed, is a common way to compel obedience. Accounts of ex-fighters, as well as civilian abductees, show that the RUF made use of violent punishments.⁶² And it is clear that it was not only the civilians under RUF control who were subject to these punishments. RUF fighters were also punished - or “disciplined”, as some refer to it. This discipline often took the form of being judged by commanders or peers via a “people’s court”:⁶³

- *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 ‘people’s court’. You will get a defender appointed. If you are guilty, in the morning you will be brought in front of the mass parade. All the fighters then decide upon your punishment: to be 500 times flogged, to be sent for three months of labour on the 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). [interview conducted at the former Zogoda jungle camp]*
- *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 (AFRC child combatant A).*

Even Foday Sankoh, the RUF’s leader, was not completely above the law:

- *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. 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*

⁶¹ The RUF acknowledged this problem: ‘We have learnt the value of treating captives and prisoners of war with utmost civility. Our ranks keep swelling daily. We have no need to conscript by force. Forced conscription is an inferior method which tends to pose security risk in the long run. Those forcibly conscripted, when they manage to escape, lead enemy troops back to locations they are familiar with. Experience and honesty have been our best teacher.’ (RUF 1995:4). Again, the bias of the abductor in perceiving what is voluntary and what is forced recruitment becomes clear.

⁶² See also Aukje ter Horst (2005)

⁶³ 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’.’

him try to solve it (RUF commander E). [interview conducted at the former Zogoda jungle camp]

- *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 like that and so he left it* (RUF signals officer B).

There is, however, a paradox concerning the use of punishment. Authority (to use power) starts to erode when it is used excessively. Moreover, the more punishment is used the less likely it becomes that subjects will become or stay loyal, and they have all the more reason to look for an opportunity to escape. Few groups can be held together by threat and fear alone. The RUF did not see 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 would have been as effective in assuring the obedience of the fighters as punishment. Two straightforward ways to reward someone is with power or goods. Many RUF conscripts, whether forcibly or voluntarily conscripted, belonged to the most marginalized groups in society – viz. rural youths with limited perspectives, not seldom driven out of their village by the autocratic rule of elders. The RUF offered them a gun, and through that, the power to command people, including the local elders who had sometimes humiliated them in the first place. Another attractive incentive was the supposed opportunity to take whatever they wanted when fighting. But similar to excessive use of punishments, excessive use of rewards is also not without danger. Its effectiveness as a means to get people to do what is ordered will erode the more it is used.

A closer consideration of these two positive incentives is required. Indeed, when carrying a weapon a fighter had power over non-armed people, but according to informants, this power was regulated and limited by rules and regulations, and by orders from seniors. Ex-combatants stated that - even at the warfront - it was unlikely that a fighter could 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 battlefield raping, they will bring you to court. Another rule was that loot should be handed over to the commander.*⁶⁴ *Stealing was also not allowed* (RUF fighter B).
- *It was not allowed, for instance, to have more than 20,000 Leones [at the time about \$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).

The system of punishments and rewards may have increased loyalty among already loyal fighters and made the disloyal fighters and civilians under control think twice. 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

⁶⁴ Humphreys & Weinstein state that, having interviewed over 1,000 ex-combatants from all factions and regions of Sierra Leone; ‘Overall, 50% 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%) that valuable goods were shared with the 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.

period (1994-1997) 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 long, 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 anymore, one was likely to be killed by enemy soldiers as a rebel infiltrator. According to combatants from all sides the ruthless treatment of rebel suspects by the army during the first years of the war helped the RUF to prevent 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*⁶⁵ (RUF Female fighter E).
- *There was no cooperation between the SLA and the RUF until the junta period [1997]*⁶⁶. *Everybody coming from RUF territory was a suspect* (Colonel in the Sierra Leonean Army).
- *The counter-insurgency of the Sierra Leone army was quite ruthless, 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 well as possible* (CDF administrator).

To make it even harder for those who wanted to escape the letters "RUF" were branded⁶⁷ on the skin of anybody who tried to escape once, but failed. 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 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).
- *[After having 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 & Richards 1998a:207).

The attitudes of communities played a considerable role in the creation of a large pool of socio-economically excluded and marginalized youths who were easily recruited by the fighting forces in general, and by the RUF in particular. But these attitudes also sustained a high mental barrier in the minds of those willing to escape, and a real barrier for those who eventually succeeded in escaping and returned to their communities of birth. If the attitudes of

⁶⁵ Extrajudicial killing by soldiers of rebel suspects was reported as common in the early stages of the war (Amnesty International, 1992; 1995).

⁶⁶ 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. On the other hand, it still seems likely that particular military commanders with an APC background, sent to the frontline as a kind of punishment by the NPRC, had a vested interest to link up with RUF commanders, who were able to fight their enemy (the NPRC) from the inside (see also Keen 2003).

⁶⁷ Skin scarification is a common practice in the secret societies. It is also a reminder of practices under slavery.

the army and the communities towards rebel or suspected rebel deserters had been less hostile and deadly, beyond doubt many more RUF fighters would have deserted.

Loyalty to the leader

Was Foday Sankoh a dangerously mad person or a rational and skilful 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, even during long periods of absence when he was imprisoned in Nigeria and later on in Freetown.⁶⁸ But while he was with the RUF in the bush, it is also true that many RUF conscripts never set eyes on him. Most times during 1994-95 he was residing at the RUF forest headquarters, the “Zogoda”, from where, every morning he announced instructions and promotions to the other camps by captured 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).*
- *At 7 am we opened the transmission and we closed at 12 pm. We sent information around about the situation in the country. We used the Codan SSB type of radio set. Every base had such a radio and there were always two operators and their securities. Also if a group went on a patrol they took a set with them. So there was communication going on in the frontline. You had to send information about the success or failure of every operation. (...) We had about 50 to 100 different frequencies. The code words were changed every month. The new code words were written on a paper which had to be collected by the operator or his securities by foot at the assembly place.(...) If your own sets breaks down, you had to walk to the nearest set to announce it on the radio. You say that your call sign has broken down. As long as it was not in the air yet all the messages had to be carried by paper.⁶⁹ (RUF signals officer A)*
- *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).*

The loyalty of the RUF conscripts towards Foday Sankoh has been underestimated by outside observers. Many conscripts were recruited while still minors and it is part of Sierra Leonean culture that children and youth pay respect to seniors. Although many conscripts had bad experiences with elders, Foday Sankoh was, according to the statements of these conscripts, a highly charismatic person willing to listen to even the smallest RUF fighter:

- *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*

⁶⁸ Imprisonment was less undermining of Sankoh’s leadership as those who locked him up probably had hoped. In prison, without communication, Sankoh could not take any wrong or tactically disastrous decisions while at the same he was probably perceived by his followers as performing a great sacrifice.

⁶⁹ According to Hooper, Executive Outcomes’ radio operators were not impressed by the RUF security measures. An EO intelligence officer states that Sankoh would: ‘cackle for hours on the air. Their childish word codes were easily unravelled, and they helped us by maintaining a punctual radio schedule, coming on the air at 0700, 1300 and 1600. Despite numerous hidings resulting from their poor comsec [communications security], they never learned and persisted in their daily sessions of verbal diarrhoea.’ (Hooper, 2002:234)

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).

Loyalty through socialisation

Whether someone joined the RUF voluntarily or via abduction, once part of the movement there was no way out of it. Desertion was a danger to group coherence as well as life-threatening to the ones staying behind. The only option left 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).*

Two possibilities were open, and to some extent left to the person to choose; one could remain a RUF 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).*

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 these marginalized youths. The movement made attempts to win over all abductees who were considered 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).*

So it seems clear that it was, in the end, a mix of isolation, explanation or perhaps indoctrination, reward and punishment which induced RUF conscripts to adapt to the situation.

To what extent RUF combatants were fully socialised by the movement, and to what extent this is still apparent, even after demobilisation, becomes apparent in the following statement of an ex-SLA soldier:

- *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. But 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.*

The world of the RUF bush camps

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 warfare (based on controlling territory) into a forest guerrilla insurgency, based on ambush tactics, and pin-prick raids intended to sow confusion and undermine 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 above elaborates on his first visit to the “Zogoda”, the main camp of the RUF 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% 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 its own fighters are noteworthy. Trading went on between civilian territory and the RUF camps, but traders were not allowed to go inside the camp. Another interesting issue brought up is the free medical care. A dispenser captured in 1991 tells his story, and 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. (...) [But] 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 A).

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 control⁷⁰:

- *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 A).*
- *There 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). [interview conducted at the former Zogoda jungle camp]*
- *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 under the control of the RUF for a long time. And even where there were schools, 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 - likely limited - school materials.⁷¹ These are points of some significance, as evidence concerning the way the RUF saw itself contesting the breakdown of wider society – a society in which the poor were increasingly excluded from education.

Let us move deeper inside the RUF camps. 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. [The water for drinking and washing, we got] 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*

⁷⁰ ‘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 and technological world and value of research, critical thinking and creativity.’ (RUF 1995:12).

⁷¹ Humphreys & Weinstein (2004:26) state that: ‘For many RUF members, the prospects of future educational opportunities – in some cases scholarships abroad – were prominent enticements. Indeed, even though the survey did not list education as one of the possible responses to this question, 10% of respondents – including 17% of RUF respondents – indicated that promises of education was a prominent incentive.’

cooking. There was one meal every day (RUF commander F). [interview conducted at the former Zogoda jungle camp]

- *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 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 (RUF clerk A).*

Most camps were located in inaccessible terrain, well away from motorable roads. Because of the danger of attacks by Nigerian jet bombers and later the hired Bulgarian Mi-24 helicopter gunship of Executive Outcomes, 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). [interview conducted in a village on the track to the former Zogoda jungle camp]*
- *We had created a border around our camps where there were no civilians. But the Kamajors by-passed this dead-zone and they even by-passed 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.⁷² (RUF commander G)*

⁷² Later this commander argued as follows: *amputations were carried out by cutlassess and the Kamajors are the ones who carry cutlasses (= machetes), not we, the RUF.* RUF amputations are an undeniable fact. However, this is not to say that other factions did not amputate. The AFRC amputated on a large scale during '98 and '99. Civilians living in rebel territory were considered rebel supporters by the Kamajors and were subsequently targeted. Nor do we really know who first started the practice (indeed it may have precedents in punishments

Meritocratic principles

We have already seen above (see section on “loyalty through punishment and rewards”) examples of the rules that were supposed to guide RUF combatants. Some RUF combatants have already hinted why rules were not always followed. Let us now have a closer look at these rules, and what opportunities existed to evade them.

According to ex-fighters the RUF had stringent laws and rules on drug use, looting and raping. There was a Code of Conduct which had to be learnt by heart,⁷³ and there was a people’s court to try violators.⁷⁴ Moreover, any property obtained in the war front had to be handed over to the RUF “government”, and fighters were not allowed to possess money above Le 20,000 (approximately \$US10-20, depending on date). The simplicity and transparency of these rules is in stark contrast to the sometimes diffuse and complex rules and regulations in the villages. Village authorities were considered to be highly manipulative in their implementation of local (and largely undocumented) customary laws, and this was how they disadvantaged young people (see also chapter 2). The straightforwardness of life inside the RUF – and clear rules about what was allowed and what was not – must have seemed quite attractive to some rural young people alienated from rural institutions.

Another fundamental difference between the world of the RUF and the wider society was that the latter was rife with patrimonial partiality and nepotism. Many conscripts – as rural youngsters from the commoner class – found themselves at the end of the patrimonial chain. In the RUF promotion took place on merit; performance at the warfront determined seniority in the movement. However, although in principle a fairer system, it resulted in a movement preoccupied with the military success, at the expense of regard for civic merits:

- *Promotion was given according to your performance in the front; if you captured a lot you were promoted (RUF signal 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 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).*

So it was 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 & Richards, 1998a:205).*
- *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).*

against run-away slaves in the 19th century). Richards (2005b:399) was told by one RUF woman leader that she joined the movement when the army amputated her husband as a rebel suspect in 1991.

⁷³ RUF commander E summed up the codes as follows; ‘I) Thou shall not take the liberty of women. Which means that you are not allowed to have forced sex or rape a woman. II) Thou shall not loot. III) Thou shall not take a needle or thread of the masses. IV) Pay for everything you damage. V) Thou shall not destroy crops. The rest I forgot..... oh wait. VI) Anything you borrow you must return it.’

⁷⁴ In the frontline the commander was allowed to summarily execute someone who did not follow a command.

The strict laws in the camps – some interviewees state that even the smoking of cigarettes was not allowed at some stage, perhaps for security reasons – seemed just too much for those who did not join the movement out of complete conviction in its proclaimed agenda. Whenever Foday Sankoh was not around,⁷⁵ and more particularly when they were at the warfront, away from the base, fighters frequently involved themselves in things that were forbidden in the bush camps. According to a female clerk of the movement:

- *Well, for the boys that can go at the front line, 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 front line 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 A) (radio interview by 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 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 signal officer B).

And so the operational system of the RUF resulted in some of its most ruthless fighters remaining for longer periods at the frontline unsupervised. This could certainly account for the major differences between RUF accounts of the movement, and insistence by non-RUF commentators that the reality was anarchic violence, even leaving aside vested political interests on the government side in denying the movement coherence. 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 base camp might depend on who controlled the camp in question. Some of the forward and more vulnerable camps (e.g. Malal Hills, Kangari Hills and Camp For-for [4-4?]) may have had more use for “wicked fighters” in times of great difficulty (e.g. when under threat from Executive Outcomes or Kamajors). This might account for the perception among civilians in the major centres of population that the RUF was a movement 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:

- *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 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. All platoons, however, always return to the base, even if they did something wrong. Up to '98 I never heard of small groups of RUF fighters just roaming around. There was a strict control on*

⁷⁵ Abdullah also recognises the importance of the leader staying with his fighters by starting his article on the origins of the RUF (Abdullah 1997) 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.’

this. But from '97 when we joined the AFRC all things became freer [i.e. less controlled] (RUF commander E).

Age

A system of promotion based on success in the frontline favoured young combatants. No longer was it necessary to be educated, to have the right contacts, or to be of a respectable age to rise on the social ladder. This was an attractive feature to young people in Sierra Leone. Any analysis of the RUF must take into account the element of age. Although difficult to ascertain ages with any accuracy, it seems reasonable to suggest that at least two-thirds of the RUF cadres was below the age of 25. Unpublished film footage - shot by International Alert negotiator, Addai-Seboh - of the crowd addressed by Foday Sankoh in 1995 at the moment of release of the international hostages suggests that a majority of the combatants in training were below 18.⁷⁶ Many explain the atrocities committed by the RUF as a product of its youthful composition:

- *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 know it is the truth but still you do another thing (CDF commander).*

Also some former RUF cadres follow 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).*

It might be suspected that - rather than betraying the post-war ambience, in which (with strong British and UN support for the Kabbah government) patrimonial business-as-normal had already resumed, with emphasis on age and educational level as key determinants of social rank (cf. Richards 1996) – this last comment reflects a feeling present among several ex-commanders that Issa “sold out” the movement when he came to command the RUF.

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, so the RUF could work on them more as a blank slate. The older, but still youthful conscripts, found it sometimes 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. According to informants, loyalty was also forthcoming because the RUF had an agenda that was relevant to young people, including most notably its attempts to provide free education and jobs. And because the RUF was a (military) meritocracy it offered young and marginalized people perhaps their only chance to become “someone in life”. Traditional gerontocratic and patriarchal principles were despised.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Humphreys & Weinstein (2004:20) state that: ‘42% of RUF combatants described themselves as students – this fits with the younger age profile of RUF fighters.’

⁷⁷ 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 & Weinstein (2004:25) find that: ‘87% of RUF combatants reported being abducted into the faction and only 9% 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 & Weinstein 2004:26).

- *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 suspect, and were 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 Tongo).*
- *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 anymore. But fortunately this has changed again. This change was because of the effort by the [Kabbah] government and us (Village elders in Mandu Chiefdom).*

Terror

Terror committed by armed factions is seldom just violence for the sake of it. Revolutionary terror has many functions (Thornton 1964). War and terror are also matters of performance where people make power by using violence and terror as expressive resources (Richards 1996:xxii, 2005b, 2006a). Performance is a cost-effective way for a guerrilla movement to compensate the 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 could also 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.*

Possibly the image of the RUF fighters as severe drug users might have also been exploited purposely by the RUF 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 these "drug-users". An ordinary villager, who had lived in RUF territory for several years, is sceptical about the question 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.*

Acts of purported cannibalism were highly effective in frightening local populations and the enemy. Whether such acts are in fact real is a complex issue (cf. Richards 2000). Dressing up in women's cloths, wearing wigs or bras, or not wearing any cloths at all (cf. a group of Liberian fighters known as the "butt naked brigade", because of their preferred [lack of] any battle dress 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, must be debated elsewhere (cf. Hoffman 2005, Richards 2000). Clearly, many Kamajor 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 frontline. So we called upon these “kamo’s”, 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 Zogoda⁷⁸ in '95 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 was obtained through rites, and according to Durkheim (Collins & Malowsky 1993) rites strengthen groups. But rites to obtain magical power are not the only rites possible to boost confidence and strengthen the group. Durkheim proposes, viz. “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], p. 211-212), adding that “effervescence” is as liable to generate “bloody terror” as “selfless heroism” (p. 218).⁷⁸ Durkheim’s point is that collective effervescence entrains emotions and focuses on common ends. This seems to be within the capacity of all humans, and precedes the meanings, that is collective representations, it later sustains. In the specific case of what Durkheim terms the piacular rite (cf. Richards 2006a) – i.e. 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. The following account of a RUF commander describes the “effervescence” generated in an RUF ritual to prepare for battle, where 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 battlefield. The dancing we do is like parading, but not like the official parade. We dance outside. (...) [As far as the drinking] The Pega-pack⁷⁹ 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*

⁷⁸ According to this former commander “Zogoda” means (in Krio) “zo go dai” i.e. any Zo (traditional healer) will die.

⁷⁹ Pega-pack is the (brand) name for small quantities (20cc or 30cc) of liquor, contained in a plastic bag.

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 battlefield. So you move in the night time. At that time the morale is very high. 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).

- *...after 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 A) (Interview by 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 above description:

The rebels just lived like human beings but when they were going to fight they dressed like animals. Then they wore special cloths 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].

The RUF ideology and political agenda

“Drastic fundamental change”

Did the RUF have any political intentions - an ideology and agenda - or was it a lumpen organization with only criminal motivation? This question has caused heated debate (see below). The dominant view is that the RUF was little more than a criminal conspiracy. But as already noted, politicians in Sierra Leone, and allies in the international community, have striven to deny the movement voice or credibility, for fairly clear political reasons of their own. Academic researchers have paid 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. However much these accounts need, eventually, to be placed in a fuller, critical context it makes little sense to cavil at the few accounts that have attempted to make sense of the movement through contact with its cadres without attempting to come up with better data. This is a basic objection to Mkandawire's (2002) attempted critique of Keen (1998) and Richards (1995, 1998); if he has better information he should present it.

Many RUF ex-combatants, and in particular ones who joined the movement early, as vanguards or junior commanders between 1991 and 1993, believed, and still believe⁸⁰ in what they deem to be the ideals and principles of the RUF. In reporting these notions it should not be presumed I consider them well-founded. The only claim to be made here is that these beliefs are sincerely, and not cynically, held. No presumption is to be made that I consider the movement justified in the actions it took. However, an attempt will be made to show that the

⁸⁰ During the 2002 general elections the RUF received just under 2% of the votes. A small number in one respect, but it still represents tens of 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 RUF, most likely the junior commanders. During many hours of interviewing and days spent together with ex-RUF commanders (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 its genuine intentions impressed me. An illustrative example of this was that during the middle of 2003 an ex-commander wore his RUF T-shirt while 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 phantasy. It is a bitter irony of the situation that many impoverished Sierra Leoneans agree with this analysis, if not with rebel methods (cf. the interview with the young Kamajor in Chapter 1). Pre-war Sierra Leone was characterized by political oppression, a collapsing patrimonial system of rule, nepotism and corruption, plus continuing economic decline, a breakdown in the functioning of the educational and health sectors, and a general neglect of the countryside⁸¹ in favour of urban centres. Sierra Leone much needed a 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 before, summarises 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 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 rank-and-file fighter B).*
- *They 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 soldier D).*
- *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. (...) And there were other books that were influential on the movement, like the Green Book of Muammar Ghaddafi 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.⁸² (...) 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 to make sure the civilians were to make farms.⁸³ 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

⁸¹ Many of the houses in the RUF territory had graffiti, criticizing APC, NPRC or SLPP politics. For example, on a house in A., Mandu chiefdom, it was written "*the politicians have separated the land into two parts but we are born citizens of our country. We will fight to the last.*"

⁸² Formal qualification is no guarantee of expertise in a country where the educational system is riddled with corruption and nepotism. A public opinion survey carried out with British funding after the war found that the Ministries of Education and Agriculture were widely perceived as among the most corrupt institutions in the country.

⁸³ There are some strong points of comparison between the RUF and the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, both in regard to ideas about agrarian labour as a way of reforming a corrupted and recalcitrant population, and in the paranoid fear of civilian betrayal that lay behind grievous atrocities (a paranoia perhaps triggered by the threat of being bombed into oblivion in the forest).

services. Influenced by the Green Book⁸⁴ and other radical writings⁸⁵ 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:

- *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 gave some interesting comments on the ideology of the RUF, especially persuasive for coming 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 (AFRC 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 (AFRC child combatant B).*
- *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 (AFRC child combatant C).*

Although some evidence has been presented indicating that the RUF had a political agenda, it is clear that if, indeed the RUF wanted to change society, it failed hopelessly, and both civilians and combatants bore the brunt. The ex-combatants cite several reasons for this failure. Much depended on the phases of the war; in the first and second phase ideology in the RUF was emphasised, and atrocities were at a significantly lower level,⁸⁶ compared to post-Abidjan accord phases (cf. Richards 2006a). Much depended on the specific area-commander

⁸⁴ One of my key-informants showed me a copy of a set of conference proceedings *Power and Authority: collected readings on the second anniversary of the Green Book* (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.

⁸⁵ 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. This copy was also shown on another occasion to Richards, who also comments on these markings (Richards 2005b).

⁸⁶ Cf. PHR (2003).

in charge. Some were committed to the movement, but others clearly harboured private agendas, and the RUF did not put into place a system to filter out this latter group. According to some RUF informants it was in fact worse than this statement implies; by promoting on military success – according to a belief in meritocracy - the RUF ended up promoting the commanders with pathological leanings and prepared to undertake killing without compunction. After Executive Outcomes and the CDF scattered the forest camps in 1996, trapping the civilian War Council in Abidjan, the movement fell – operationally – into the hands of these reckless killers.

The erosion of its ideology

This interpretation is supported by some of the explanations ex-RUF fighters themselves give for the increasingly widespread atrocities committed by the movement. It is important, in assessing the information they supply (in order to meet the objections of e.g. Mkandawire [2002]), to note that the comments betoken ability to reflect on the whole situation and to exercise self-criticism. All ranks (both commanders and ordinary fighters), in fact, seem to make clear distinctions between different phases of the conflict in assessing what went wrong.

Phase I (1991/93):

- *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 Sesay⁸⁷. 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, like the Burkina Faso rebels⁸⁸ liked. 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 which were 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.⁸⁹ 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*

⁸⁷ This specific promotion policy of Foday Sankoh likely had major consequences. Foday Sankoh worked hard to become the undisputed leader of the RUF, controlling both its military and ideological wings, and considered non-educated people a lesser threat to his position, as this cadre states. However, Sankoh did not imagine himself to be separated from the movement which happened when he was imprisoned from 1997 till mid '99 and again from 2000 until his death. As a result of Sankoh's promotion politics, a battlefield commander, Sam Bokarie became the new leader and not someone with more ideological or political inclination. Note that in Liberia the opposite happened with Taylor's NPFL; here the NPFL's battlefield commander, Prince Johnson, left the NPFL, to create the Independent NPFL, leaving Taylor the political and military leader of his rebel group, a situation not dissimilar to what finally happened in December 1999 with the breakaway of Bockarie from the RUF.

⁸⁸ As mentioned (chapter 3), among the initial insurgents there were, besides Sierra Leoneans, some Liberian Special Forces and a few Burkinabe rebels.

⁸⁹ Charles Taylor's NPFL was able to control 95% of Liberia's territory in just a few months time after it launched its insurgency. That this played a role as an example to the RUF is confirmed by several ex-RUF commanders. A town chief with good contacts among the RUF also brings forward this point: *When the RUF entered Sierra Leone they were supported by Burkinabe and Liberian fighters and they were the ones who focused so much on a military victory. Their idea was to conquer the whole country in six months. After that they would gain the full support of the people anyway, so it was not a problem to force some people now.*

92, going on to 93, 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 (1994/96):

- *We were driven back to the jungle, 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.⁹⁰ 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 was our revenge.⁹¹ The CDF did not make any prisoners of war, the RUF never hung tyres around peoples' neck [at least one rebel suspect was lynched by "necklassing" before the Law Courts in Freetown in the days leading up to the January 6th attack] and set them on fire. The CDF practised cannibalism, eating human beings. The CDF also amputated people, and beheaded them (RUF commander C).*
- *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 active⁹² (RUF military police A).*
- *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).*

Phase III (1997/98):

- *The amputations started in 96-97. 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 (RUF Military Police A).*
- *You know, there is the town ideology and the bush ideology. The 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*

⁹⁰ Up to the end of 1993 the RUF was organised more as an army to control terrain than as a guerrilla force. And as an occupying army it was less interested in, and found it less necessary to build up relations with local populations. This sealed the fate of the RUF, perhaps even only a few months after the beginning of its incursion, since it then retreated into the forest without having won hearts and minds.

⁹¹ January 6, 1999, the first and only attack on Freetown, during which massive destruction took place and up to 5000-6000 people died.

⁹² The outer world - territory beyond RUF lines - in which raping and looting was allowed seemed to have served as a kind of emergency valve to let the steam off which was built up by the rigid rules and regulations in the inner world; the camp or villages under movement control (cf. Richards 1996/98 – Postscript).

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 (RUF commander E).

The phrase “some of the civilians who supported us...said that we had to go back to the bush” is perhaps worthy of special note. The issue of which civilians - including among the international diaspora – might have actually supported the RUF is today a taboo topic. Certainly, there seems to have been real civilian popular support in parts of Kailahun and Pujehun Districts from the earliest days of the war. Both are heartlands of the Sierra Leone People’s Party, the present government. President Momoh believed – in April 1991 – that he was fighting an SLPP-inspired uprising by the Mende people of the south and east. One reason he might have thought this is that although Sankoh came from the north (from Tonkolili District) he was, in fact, in the 1960s, known for his links to groups opposed to Siaka Stevens and the APC, and is said by some to have held membership in the SLPP at that time.

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” 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 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 (educational officer A).*

After a bad start the RUF was never able to regain the confidence of the rural people. In its second phase the movement became alienated from society, while in the third phase it tasted power - and the corruptions of power - but as a junior partner in the Junta. This in effect removed its last shreds of legitimacy, since it then became largely dependent upon an ally made 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 schizophrenic, and eventually fell victim to internal power struggles and corruption.

The agrarian agenda of the RUF

It is worth asking 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 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 in both movements have already been remarked.⁹³ Belief in the reformative powers of an enforced return to agriculture seems to have been common to both groups. 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. Perhaps the clearest indications of this agrarian orientation are to be found in an evident preoccupation with organizing collectivist food production:

- *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.⁹⁴ I myself had a big rice farm in M. [where he was based] during the time of the revolution (RUF commander F).*

About 70% 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,⁹⁵ 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) – in fact drafted with inputs from students at Fourah Bay College and Njala, the latter being the country's agricultural university - 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 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. It hoped for a quick military victory, after which it would have sufficient time to carry out its political programme. But this

⁹³ And there are more similarities between the Khmer Rouge and the RUF. In his article about the Khmer Rouge, François Ponchaud (1989) remarks, referring to the relationship between youths and elders in Cambodia, that 'grandparents, parents, and elders exercised real authority over younger members of society' (Ponchaud 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] (Ponchaud 1989:166). He concludes that the Khmer Rouge revolution was '... the rising up of the youth against the elders and the ancestors' (Ponchaud 1989:152).

⁹⁴ 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.

⁹⁵ 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 per cent over the period 1976-87, making a mockery of formal agricultural development initiatives in the food-crop sector.' (Richards, 1996:51fn)

did not happen. 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. After 1993, when the RUF changed its military tactics from semi-conventional to forest guerrilla warfare, it also changed its tactics to obtain food.⁹⁶ After 1993 the movement needed to put its ideas about agriculture into practice since it was, in its bush-camps, isolated from the wider society. But it was also for the first time in a position to experiment with such ideas, since the isolated camps brought security over a longer period, but also posed acute challenges concerning food security for fighters and RUF civilians alike.⁹⁷ During this period the movement's so-called Minister of Agriculture was a former student at Njala, Fayia 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.

Were these agrarian ideas opportunistic or not? According to one RUF commander, trained as a community development worker/teacher at Bunumbu Teachers' College before the war, and a volunteer in the movement in 1991:

- [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 (RUF Commander C).*

The exact mode of operation differed from area to area and also changed over the years, because of changing circumstance. 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).*

Another fighter, based in a different area, confirms this:

- *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 rank-and-file fighter I).*

⁹⁶ 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' (Abdullah, 1997:71) is challenged in this thesis.

⁹⁷ 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 (2000:199)

It was a policy of the RUF to encourage rice 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 (AFRC commander A).*
- *When the RUF got control over M. in 1998, it was F. who was the commander here. The RUF made a committee⁹⁸ farm here. Both the civilians and the combatants had to work on the farm. It was 2 times a week for the civilians here in M. and 2 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. 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?" you have to give account for that at sometime. (...) Its [the RUF community farm] 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 speak about voluntary participation of civilians, and others state that it was compulsory:

- *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).*

The seed rice was obtained in various ways; it was either obtained in the frontline by looting, in exchange for looted properties at the border, or bought from the villagers, or produced on the RUF's own farms:

- *Missions at the front can take between 3 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).*

Clearly, rice was needed to feed fighters and 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*

⁹⁸ More often referred to as "community" farm.

both combatants and civilians were under your control and both [groups] worked on the farm (RUF commander F).

A last statement brings out some of the problems of rural youths, such as limitations in accessing farmland, and the shortage of resources for education of large number of (half-) brothers and sisters in polygamous households. The claim made is that the RUF recognised these difficulties, and thought in terms of agrarian strategies to address them:

- *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 utilize it. But some guys who joined later spoiled the movement. But the ones who joined in 91/92 were good. But we, we organized the youths in the villages in groups, and let them make community farms* (RUF fighter D).

Food supply was, of course, a logistical necessity for a guerrilla force. But there is evidence in the statements just reviewed of two aspects that lifts them 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 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 Cote d'Ivoire (see for example a set of studies on West African rural youth in the journal *Afrique Contemporaine*, edited by Jean-Pierre Chauveau [2005]). Why choose a discourse which barely as yet makes sense to a wider audience? Just possibly, it could actually be what the ideologues in the RUF believed, and that their recognition of an agrarian youth crisis is broadly correct.

There seems little doubt the RUF could have taken care of much of its food needs through raids on villages - and humanitarian convoys - and by exchanging looted items for food, as did most factions in Liberia.⁹⁹ This is the normal pattern for war-lords in Africa (Keen 1994). Perhaps, therefore, we ought to take RUF talk of rural reform and an ideology of food as the base more seriously than the movement's detractors would allow.

⁹⁹ Outram (1997:364) has argued that the Liberian armed factions operated on a "warlord" system, which is predatory in regard to its environment and interested in short-run exploitation. The main reason for such a system was that none of the Liberian warlords was 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.

Chapter 5

Cultivating peace: RUF ex-combatants' involvement in post-war agricultural projects

Introduction

The previous chapter painted a picture of how the RUF was organised and for what it thought it was fighting, both as understood by movement loyalists and 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; volunteers and conscripts, higher ranks and rank-and-file, actual fighters and civilian supporters, etc. 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).

Circumstances gave us another, and rather different opportunity to trace RUF belief to its roots – namely, the chance to follow de-mobilizing 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 – and revolutionary armies are often among the first to acknowledge the 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 presently. 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, and as a result, one could not claim that any RUF inspired activity was extorted by a powerful ruling hierarchy, but came 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 Moral Code of Conduct of the RUF (thou shall not kill, rape, loot, etc.). But there are many other factors influencing present-day behaviour, not least the awe-inspiring threat of action by the Special Court. And 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 (i.e. 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 has made clear 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 to run schools and clinics free of charge, and create collective farms where the produce would benefit a wider community. Whether such practices could be sustained economically is a different issue. But currently 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 healthcare. These are the domain of the government and NGO’s, and having recently 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, stationary or drugs.¹⁰⁰ 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 farms, 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 the landholding elite, even at the risk of some vulnerability to exploitation.

So do we find in post-war Sierra Leone RUF ex-combatants in farming projects, and do they 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. We also probably need to look quite closely at the degree of collectivisation, since labour cooperation is a basic condition of production in Sierra Leonean food crop agriculture (Richards 1986). The evidence in this chapter is that a small but significant group of RUF ex-fighters, specifically those who claim an ideological background, 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

¹⁰⁰ I do know of one educational example, however. 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 have as characteristic that they are located at least five miles away from any formal school, and by the fact that teachers are from the community and paid in kind by the community, which is also responsible for the construction of the school building (see also Van der Heide 2004). Bunumbu College (in Kailahun) – a hotbed of RUF activism – was the site for an innovative pre-war teacher training programme funded by UNICEF and drawing on the “pedagogy of the oppressed” of Paolo Freire. It specifically trained teachers for isolated rural schools, showing how teachers could improvise lesson materials from forest resources. Richards (2001) is the only source I have so far been able to locate to comment on the relevance of the Bunumbu connection in understanding the RUF.

food security. The chapter looks at several such projects, but first I will briefly explain how I located them.

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. At that time I decided to go to Kenema, the provincial capital of the East, and close to the former RUF strongholds of Kailahun, Pujehun and Kono. In fact the former RUF headquarters “the Zogoda” was only about 30 km from Kenema, along bush tracks through the Kambui South forest reserve. A year later I returned to Kenema and used it as a base for the various trips further east. One of the fieldwork locations became the diamond mining area of Tongo, second in importance to the Kono fields for alluvial mining. Not only were there large numbers of ex-RUF fighters (since it was under the control of the RUF up to the final disarmament) but there was also a large International NGO, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), active as an Implementing Partner for the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR) (more on this in chapter 7). 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 9 months 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 the diamond fields such as Tongo, or was it just a personal enthusiasm on the part of this one former RUF colonel?

Of the 36 persons who attended the agricultural classes of the GTZ project 17 were civilians. The remaining 19 were ex-combatants of which 13 were ex-RUF and 6 ex-CDF. The total number of ex-combatants in the centre was 57 (18 ex-RUF and 39 ex-CDF). The numbers are small, but they show a clear trend: 72% of RUF ex-combatants opted for agriculture, against 15% of the CDF ex-combatants. According to standard accounts, the RUF are urbanised “lumpens” and CDF fighters the loyalist village boys, still rooted in the rural economy. The statistic contradicted what I expected to find. Was it a reflection of the colonel’s charisma, or 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 had chosen building construction as part of his DDR support) 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 born in the far east of the country, he had settled in Blama, on the road to Bo, after the war, together with a few former comrades. This group of friends ran a cooperative agricultural project as a local IP for DDR.

Some time later my promoter 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, since he had been very young when he joined the RUF. This young man was residing at Robol Junction, near Magburaka, and had founded and implemented a DDR funded project; again it was a large cooperative farm.

I also spent some days in the nearby town of Makeni, where the ex-commander based in Blama (and 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.

Outsiders hinted that RUF fighters were “backward”, and could only manage to involve themselves in something as simple as farming. I knew farming is far from simple in Sierra Leone (Richards 1986). The cadres themselves told me a different story – farming was part of their belief system.

The projects

In this section I describe in more detail some of these agricultural projects, implemented as part of the reintegration support under the DDR programme. All projects are similar, in that they have been started and/or implemented by predominately ex-RUF combatants.

1) 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% of the RUF ex-combatants against 15% 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 land in Tongo Field for agriculture is like buying land in the centre of Frankfurt or London to start a dairy farm. Tongo is synonymous with diamonds, and every single plot of land has been dug over, time and time 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 have collapsed and are sometimes dug up by untamed mining activities. Roads have been literally undermined. Farms and longstanding tree-crop plantations can be destroyed overnight – despite the distraught owner’s prayers or pleas - once a single stone comes to light (Richards 1996). 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 landowner¹⁰¹ 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 locally dominates.

Secondly, 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 2 to 8 years). As with many tropical soils only the top soil is fertile. Farming in swamps is also 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).¹⁰² Before any farming could take place the whole plot had to be levelled, manually, and then a system of irrigation channels dug.

¹⁰¹ 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.

¹⁰² ‘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)

The ex-combatant spokesman stated: *The land we are working on is belonging to the Paliema [Kpalima] section in Tongo. It is called the Cry Water swamp, or nicknamed “Kaka” [toilet] swamp¹⁰³. Its size is 1.6 hectares. We are also negotiating to operate the old mosanki¹⁰⁴ farm of the Methodist Mission, 17 acres in size. In January 2003 we started to prepare an upland farm but soon we turned wholly to the swamp. There are 18 ex-combatants working on this agricultural project, 9 men and 7 female ex-combatants who have registered, and two ex-combatants who have not been officially registered as such.*

Due to the enormous amount of labour needed for the project during the first year, in which time there could be no yield, 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 3 or 5 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 grass-root level: organise the villages in group formations. Alone you cannot reach [attain] anything, only in a group you can produce.*

2) NADA Blama

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, likely the village of birth, to start farming again. This option was often chosen by (older) CDF ex-combatants, who were farmers already before the war 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 NGO's and local organisations could register themselves as an IP. An example of the second kind – a local organisation formed to serve as an Implementing Partner - is the Niawa Agricultural Development Association (NADA). Its history is as follows.

On January the 23rd, 2002 a group of RUF commanders in the Makeni area disarmed. They all received Le 30,000 (approximately 15 US\$) on the spot and a further Le 300,000 one week later, as part of the DDR's Transitional Safety Allowance. The commanders opted for agriculture right away, rather than choosing the skills training package with monthly allowances over a 6 months period. As a result they were each entitled to:

- 42 empty bags

¹⁰³ People used to make their toilet around this swamp.

¹⁰⁴ Mosanki [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.

- 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.

In May 2002 this group met in Makeni 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.¹⁰⁵ In November 2002 the NADA project was created under the supervision of Augustine Gbao,¹⁰⁶ the RUF's head of security. His family owned land in the south-eastern part of the country around Blama, Small Bo Chiefdom, and the family 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 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.*¹⁰⁷

The initial duration of the project was 6 months. Seed rice, maize, groundnuts and tools were divided among the ex-combatants and the community people. The communities involved donated swamp-land. Fourteen villages with a total population of about 5000 people were approached by the project. According to one of the founders of the project: *To these villages seed rice has been provided. They return an equivalent of the seedlings to us after the harvest so 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 the project 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 Leonean society, but it has been less frequently heard in the last 20

¹⁰⁵ 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 [Col.] 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.*

¹⁰⁶ 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.' Gbao was later indicted by the Special Court.

¹⁰⁷ Blama was and remains a CDF stronghold.

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 70s (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 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.*¹⁰⁸ *The swamp however has not been used during the war. Normally, 5 men can brush half an acre in one day if the area has been used every year, but if it has been abandoned for such a long time 5 men need two days. We only work with ROK 3.*¹⁰⁹ *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 (e.g. Fayia 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 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.¹¹⁰

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 is standard for community-oriented agricultural development practice in Sierra Leone for many years. What is striking about the informant’s account, 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 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 Le 90 million, according to the project proposal. Le 29 million had already

¹⁰⁸ 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 obviously reduced. 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.

¹⁰⁹ ROK 3 is a 4 months rice variety, or 3 months plus 21 days in the nursery, if used in a swamp.

¹¹⁰ One might be surprised how quick certain trends reach supposed 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”.

been provided by 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. And 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, 4 ex-RUF and 7 ex-CDF.¹¹¹ Every village involved elects 4 persons to form a local board; one chairman of youth, one woman from the *women's wing* (RUF terminology), one elder and one 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 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 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 to continue with collective farming as an antidote to diamond mining, seen as an unstable or unprofitable source of employment for rural youth - where they "waste time" - despite the obvious problems encountered. In fact the difficulties 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 mobilization of labour is common (see the section about different labour groups in chapter 2) 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 peace-time, 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, 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 might one day

¹¹¹ These CDF members were taken in when the project came to Blama.

establish whether he can be classed as one of those ambitious battle-front 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 evidence of real agrarian commitment, the following example can be considered more of a success.¹¹² BANSAL, the Bangladesh/Sierra Leone Cooperative Farm, is located in the centre of the country, close to Magburaka. It was established on the 24th of August 2001. The United Nations Bangladesh peacekeeping battalion (BANBATT) was the initial sponsor¹¹³ 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 [the UN BAN-battalion] in a smooth way. I accompanied them on their trips so we built up a relationship.*¹¹⁴ Furthermore NCDDR and a DFID funded community rehabilitation scheme sponsored 69 ex-combatants who received their agricultural training at BANSAL, and in 2003 13 sponsored ex-combatants remain 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 NW-SE 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 Le 100,000 (approximately 50 US\$) annually. This was negotiated with the communities, with the assistance of the local Paramount Chief.

In total 15 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.*

The aim of the project, according to the coordinator, is to: *involve ex-combatants and community people in the production of food. This is the immediate need of the people. And*

¹¹² However, it seems that the project was facing difficulties by mid 2005, at the difficult transition from sponsored to self-sustaining operation. The coordinator, put forward as an “example” by some UN bodies of smooth cooperation between former commanders and UN bodies was able to acquire funds from UN sources to further his education in Freetown, and became increasingly involved in other UN development projects. As a result less attention was paid by him to his agricultural project. (Kelsall, pers. comm.)

¹¹³ Every UN battalion had a budget to sponsor and support small projects or help in the reconstruction of community structures. Many mosques were built with the help of UN battalions (in particular battalions from Bangladesh and Pakistan).

¹¹⁴ According to Richards *et al* (2004:43), 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.”

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 grass-root project and not directed from Freetown or above. During the revolution [the war] we also were involved in farming on a voluntary basis.

His preoccupation with agriculture already 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-agreement. 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 modernize. 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.*

The BANSAL project faces to some extent the same problems as NADA - it heavily depends 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.

Richards interviewed this commander and members of his group on three occasions, from 2002 to 2005 (see Richards *et al.* 2004b, Humphreys & Richards 2005 - the interview materials are likely to be published, Richards, pers. comm.). 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 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. When the BANBATT arrived (he told Richards) 'it was like a dream come true...I had never realised I would be talking to people from a country we had read about in our training.' His own father had been driven out of Pujehun District by politics under the APC, and he had undertaken his own secondary schooling in Liberia. He conceded that only a minority of commanders had gone through ideology training - the unit had collapsed after the RUF camps were scattered by the CDF and Executive Outcomes 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 pathologically 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. In late 2004 the group had hired a Njala trained extensionist, who had been part of the movement, and planned to appoint an experienced administrator who had once been a leader of the RUF women's wing - but by mid-2005 had run into funding constraints. When visited by Humphreys & Richards in January 2005 the project was busy re-typing relevant paragraphs from RUF (1995). When asked why they did not make more explicit use of this document (*Footpaths to Democracy*) it

was explained that RUF disarmament was complete, and that *Footpaths* had been one of their ideological weapons in the bush. To keep to the spirit of their peace agreement they had to abandon the text as a whole, and produce something different. But the sections on agriculture they regarded as still being valid.

RADO Makeni

RADO, the Robureh Agricultural Development Organisation is a Community Based Organisation with about 300 members and operating in 12 different villages (including the village of Robureh) in Bombali Seborá chiefdom, close to Makeni. The project was already active before the war but ceased to operate during the conflict. On May the 15th 2002, with HOPE Sierra Leone (a NGO) as its main sponsor, the organisation resumed business. Again, many of the activists were ex-RUF commanders.

The support from HOPE focuses on ex-combatants, to whom it provided 50 cutlasses, 50 hoes and 10 bushels of ROK 3 (as mentioned, a 3-month, plus 21 days nursery rice variety) and 10 bushels of ROK 5 (a 5 months rice variety). It also provided cash to pay for “food for work”. This food-for-work prevents mortgaging of the future rice harvest (a prime reason for slipping into a vicious cycle of indebtedness and poverty, cf. Richards [1986]), and thus helps the project to expand faster. Out of the 300 members about 75 are ex-combatants. Nearly all of these (73) belonged to the RUF, including 15 females (2 were from the CDF).¹¹⁵ Among 225 civilians there are about 200 females. It seems that joining this project offers considerable potential advantage, especially to local women.

Again, there is nothing different from the many previous “group agriculture” projects the area has experienced since the World Bank became active in integrated rural development in the 1970s (Johnny, Karimu & Richards 1981). 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 this time be different.

Most of the 75 ex-combatants who take part in the project were trained in different skills as part of their reintegration process, such as carpentry, masonry, and even computer skills.¹¹⁶ But not a single one had been able to find a job with this training, 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,¹¹⁷ 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 straight away.* The context of this last remark is interesting. Because NCDDR was not offering agriculture in Kono (a diamond area)

¹¹⁵ 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 after the RUF occupation. Still it is a remarkable imbalance.

¹¹⁶ The ex-combatants stated that agriculture was at the time of disarmament 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 demobilization planning (cf. Richards *et al.* 1997). A similar situation is currently unfolding in Liberia, though UNDP has begun to address the deficit (Richards, pers. comm.)

¹¹⁷ 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.

they had missed out on crucial inputs they would have received had they been able to choose agriculture straight away. Instead, they had 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 to embark on agriculture, another ex-RUF fighter reasoned thus: *Foday Sankoh told us that after the war we should embark on agriculture for 5 years at least. And we were all involved in farming during the war.* Even if the revolution had failed, some of its precepts could still be followed.

Presently the project cultivates about 20 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 5 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: *Wednesday and Saturday are the working days when most of the members can be found here. Normally it is from 8 am to 4 pm, 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,*¹¹⁸ as one of the ex-RUF programme organisers put it.

Based on previous experiences with farming the group expects to harvest 10 bushels of rice for every one bushel planted (reasonable for the low-fertility soils of the boliland zone around Makeni, without fertilizer). Part of the harvest will be used as husk rice in the following year in neighbouring villages. [But] *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,* one of the participants explains.

A feature of this case is the failure of 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;¹¹⁹ Foday Sankoh told them to do so.

KADA Makeni

The Kalamayrah Agricultural Development Association in Makeni (KADA) is a project with 598 members, of which there are 40 ex-combatants (including one female). It originated as a NCDDR sponsored project. Presently, nine ex-combatants and nine civilians receive support from respectively 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 50 people and has provided its standard package of 50 cutlasses, 50 hoes and 10 bushels of ROK 3 and 10 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 the NGO: *the ex-combatants are more serious about agriculture than the civilians because for this first group it is often the only mean 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*

¹¹⁸ Note the revolutionary language some of these ex-RUF fighters still use, as almost second nature.

¹¹⁹ Sankoh died in the custody of the Special Court in August 2003.

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 the project: In February 2002 the training programme started. The training includes practical and theory. Practical is about 80% of the total training, and classroom theory, given by an extension officer trained in general agriculture at Njala [University College], takes about 20%. 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 mentioned, in this part of the country land is abundant (especially the difficult to cultivate bolilands). 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 Le 30,000/hour plus *the entertainment of the tractor operators, which include cigarettes, palmwine and a meal.*

A closer look at the composition of members reveals the following statistics: about 75% 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 this can be explained in the following way: 1) the RUF was in control of this area during the latter part of the conflict and 2) most of SLA/AFRC fighters chose to go back to the army. Moreover 3) most CDF fighters actually changed sides, and joined the RUF when the latter took over the control in the north. Many CDF fighters failed to qualify for DDR support because they had only single barrel shot guns.¹²⁰

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] only if we are able to carry this project to our home-areas [we will go], so that we do not arrive with empty hands. He continues to explain about the struggle of the “movement” (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.¹²¹ 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. He adds: 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

There are two clear issues that come out of the above case histories: the first is that not a few RUF ex-combatants 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.

¹²⁰ RUF combatants used more modern weapons

¹²¹ In his book *Fighting for the Rainforest* (1996) Paul Richards discusses what young Sierra Leoneans describe as the ‘educative’ impact of the first Rambo film “First Blood”. This film tells the story of John Rambo, a Vietnam war veteran who is unfairly maltreated and driven away by local community leaders, upon whom he then revenges himself, using his wits and survival strategies. ‘The result of social exclusion, the film seems to say, is unconstrained violence. That violence is cathartic, since it serves to wake up society at large to the neglected cleverness of youth.’ (Richards, 1996:58).

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 (e.g. 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. The other interesting aspect is that it seems that the shakers-and-movers of the current crop of post-war agricultural projects tend to be those ex-combatants who were recruited or joined during the first years of the conflict, and underwent ideological training.

Unfortunately NCDDR does not have, or is unwilling to release, figures on how ex-combatant's choices for a particular DDR package are divided among the various factions. So it is difficult to say to what extent ex-RUF combatants are indeed relatively more likely to choose for agriculture over a wider sample. There is reason to suspect that – in part – the picture painted above is somewhat artefactual. Ex-RUF fighters in agriculture are likely to be outnumbered in absolute terms by ex-CDF fighters, of whom many were already involved in farming before the war, and chose the individual farming package to kick-start their activities again. But a better test than absolute numbers might be that if agriculture was indeed part of the ideological agenda of the RUF then, on the testimony of the ex-RUF fighters themselves, those conscripted early on in the conflict (up to 1997) are more likely to have picked up an agrarian agenda, and that this might be sufficiently strong to survive into a post-war world in which the movement had fallen apart as an armed faction. This is, indeed, the claim made in relation to the material examined above.

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 (Richards 2001). 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 discouragements. In the institutional style of thinking favoured by the RUF, it is agriculture, and not diamonds, that remains the base.

Chapter 6:

Three questions about the war: the RUF as a rural underclass project?

Introduction

The present chapter aims to answer three questions. 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 enthusiastically espoused (in a street culture variant) by a group of radical diaspora intellectuals. A second question is *whether the RUF was (secretly?) mainly motivated by “greed, not grievance”, i.e. by attempts to control the rich diamond fields of eastern and southern Sierra Leone.* Diamonds may have been the major pre-occupation of the RUF’s internationally well-connected enemies, who saw the rebel movement as a spoke in the wheel of their own large-scale mining plans, so it is not hard to see why outsiders allege diamonds to be the major motivation of both parties to the war. RUF cadres cited in this thesis - and some fighters opposed to the RUF - deny diamonds were a major motivation for rebellion. So then we have to answer a derivative question - *why did the RUF focus so much attention, latterly, on attempts to control these lucrative diamond areas?* The third question concerns *why did a movement like the RUF increase in numbers so quickly, and how, despite its violent recruitment methods, was it able to hold 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 of this thesis 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, viz. *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 common to ex-combatants as a group, or a reflection of a dominant post-war discourse on the causes of the war.

To test ex-combatant explanations, therefore, the second chapter undertook an historical analysis of the processes of state and community formation in Sierra Leone. It becomes 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 clear negative impact on poorer young people.* The second part of the chapter brought out 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 three 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 already, 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 thesis is chapter four where we take a look into the world and ideas of the RUF. In the first part, on “strategies of bonding”, it is shown that the RUF made use of more ways to recruit and include new members than only 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 describes the operational side of the bush camps of the RUF. Here we glimpse a daily world of social practices, and we again have need of a social theory adequate to *account for the specific organisational evolution experienced by the RUF while isolated in the bush*. In the third part of chapter four the RUF’s ideology and political agenda are described, according to the accounts of the ex-combatants. It is clear that this ideology is no sophisticated intellectual analysis of the historical and present-day Sierra Leone. It has all the marks of a home-spun political philosophy, born of the everyday frustrations of the marginalized. So the question then becomes how exactly did these ideas arise, and to whom and why did they appeal? In the last part of this chapter we took a specific look at RUF discourse and practices concerning agriculture. *Why did 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* (apparently the norm for African guerrillas, cf. Keen [1994])? Was farming popular propaganda, a logistical necessity, or (as the ex-combatants claim) a definite part of RUF ideology?

Chapter five proceeds to subject these claims to a test of sincerity, by asking what some of the more committed - and often early recruited - movement ideologues did after the war. The 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. Where some may sense the ring of sincerity in these claims, doubters will continue to argue that this is self-justificatory opportunism. Opportunist rhetoric during the war is followed (so they will argue) by opportunist practice afterwards.

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. The chapter will, in the end, claim that *the RUF rebellion was both symptom of, and attempted answer to, a socio-economic crisis of rural youth*.

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 Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone. An early Green Book activist, and tireless Pan-Africanist political campaigner, 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. Theoretically, then, he aligns himself with a dominant North American anthropological discourse in which culture is seen as having independent causative power, and opposed to another analyst of the war (Richards, 1996) who builds on the

British/European analytical perspective of e.g. Kuper (1999), in which culture is considered epiphenomenal (a product, not a cause, of certain kinds of social organization).

Organised youth militancy in Sierra Leone dates back to the 1930s according to Abdullah (1997), and the Youth League, inaugurated by I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson, a well-known revolutionary (Marxist) Pan-Africanist. 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 throughout the years. ‘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* derives from the mispronunciation of the English word “rare” (i.e. unusual) by 18th 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 “run-away” (i.e. 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. Abdullah seems oblivious to this ironic possibility. Culture causes behaviour, according to his theoretical position, and “rarray culture” causes violence. ‘It is a male-specific oppositional sub-culture which easily lends itself to violence’ (Abdullah 1997:50).¹²²

During the 1970s increasing numbers of middle-class youths started to visit the regular abode 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 (Abdullah’s account is largely Freetown-centric). Radical students found a willing ear for their political ideas among the working class denizens of the *potes*. But there were also student groups which deliberately distanced themselves from the violent and drug-based culture of the *potes*, or so Abdullah claims.¹²³ These more serious-minded student activist groups - over which Abdullah himself exercised influence in the 1970s - 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 Kabbah was the student’s union president at Fourah Bay College, relations between the radical students and the College administration deteriorated. According to Dokubo¹²⁴ ‘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,¹²⁵ 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 (Abdullah 1997). But the Libyans (according to Abdullah) continued to rely on Alie Kabba to shape a revolutionary project in Sierra Leone, and approached him to deliver recruits for military training. Abdullah claims that Alie Kabba – apparently a rival for his own leadership of the student Pan Africanist movement - had little credibility with Fourah Bay College students (Abdullah 1997).

¹²² 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.

¹²³ Others would suggest that some students found it more convenient and safer to smoke and plot revolution in quieter locations, such as the patch of forest behind the College preserved as a botanical garden.

¹²⁴ Dokubo repeatedly echoes Abdullah (1997) without acknowledging him.

¹²⁵ Jerry Rawlings, Ghana’s military leader, enjoyed Libyan support.

The Libya and Liberia connections

PANAFU then debated over two important issues: whether or not the *pote* types should be recruited for the revolution and over 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 by the British army as a signals technician,¹²⁶ he was jailed in 1971 for earlier involvement in a coup plot¹²⁷ against Siaka Stevens. Released from jail after seven years, he worked in both Bo and the diamond areas of the Liberian border as a photographer, and at one stage belonged to a Green Book study club, mainly frequented by school children, in Bo. After time in 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, 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).

And so, in March 1991 a small group of fighters crossed the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone, into the eastern district of Kailahun. About ten days later another group entered Sierra Leone from Liberia in the southern district of Pujehun. The insurgents identified themselves as freedom fighters of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL). Among these initial insurgents there were the so-called vanguards; all were Sierra Leonean, but some had trained as guerrillas in Libya and some were recruited in Liberia. The balance of the group was made up of Liberian Special Forces on loan from Taylor.¹²⁸

We will return to the question of RUF violence, but here it is sufficient to note that Abdullah, as a major advocate of the notion that the RUF was a "lumpen" movement, grounds his argument on a kind of class analysis - an opposition between the educated "middle classes" (the natural leaders of the radical movement in Sierra Leone) and the rough culture of the streets. Sankoh and his co-conspirators apparently lacked the right kind of educational background to run a revolution. Since street culture is inherently violent (according to Abdullah) recruiting vagrants into the RUF guaranteed that the revolution would be chaotically rather than purposefully violent. RUF violence was "mindless" not because it was unthought, but because it was the product of uneducated minds.

¹²⁶ Coincidentally, like Saloth Sahr, alias Pol Pot.

¹²⁷ He shared his cell (or at least the same block for political prisoners) with Samuel Hinga Norman, the future leader of the Kamajors, 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).

¹²⁸ Some ex-RUF informants put it the other way around; the vanguards were Sierra Leoneans living in Liberia who received military training in Sogoto base in Liberia. The Special Forces were divided in two; those who were Sierra Leoneans and had received guerrilla training in Libya in 1987/88 and those who were Liberian fighters, on loan from Liberian rebel leader and supporter of the RUF, Charles Taylor.

Bush Paths to destruction?

Abdullah considers the Revolutionary United Front to be a project which was never supported by radical left-wing intellectuals, run by a leadership willing to risk recruitment of ‘lumpen’ elements.¹²⁹ This doomed the “revolutionary” project to fail, and Sierra Leone tasted the bitterness of lumpen violence, motivated not by ideology but by the greed and personal agendas of uneducated commanders. His line is more or less endorsed by other West African intellectuals, perhaps uneasy about challenges “from below” to their own positions. 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 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.

1) A lumpen movement

Let us look to Abdullah’s definition of “rarray boys” on which he bases his “lumpen” definition: ‘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). With the involvement of lumpens, the revolutionary project was doomed 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), echoing Abdullah, 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 predominately uneducated and alienated battle commanders.’ Referring to the work of Mao and Cabral it is argued by both Abdullah and Dokubo that the RUF was never by intention a revolutionary movement, because both Mao and Cabral 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 socialized into a culture of violence, drugs and criminality.’

2) Lack of ideology

An important critique of the RUF by authors of Abdullah’s persuasion is that it lacked any ideology whatsoever, to guide its fighters and prevent needless violence and atrocities¹³⁰. Without students or intellectual support, and led by a cashiered corporal, disgruntled economic refugees, and a hi-jacked group of semi-intellectuals (including a doctor and a

¹²⁹ Abdullah seemingly has his own (perhaps understandable) axe to grind for the way the RUF hijacked Green Book and Pan African ideas.

¹³⁰ 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 seems that the problem with the RUF might be not its lack of intellectuals and ideology, but that these intellectuals were blinded by *too much* ideology.

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 on lack of ideology of the RUF derives from the fact that the RUF only produced one booklet outlining its case: *Footpaths to Democracy: Towards a New Sierra Leone, Vol. I*. The volume was edited (some would say ghost-written) by a London-based conflict resolution group International Alert (with inputs from two Ghanaians, 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 [two RUF vanguards] to reflect the armed phase of the “revolution” (Abdullah 1997).

According to Abdullah (1997) the lack of ideology was covered up by some actions which should be interpreted as no more than populist propaganda. ‘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 proposes 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 experiences in the bush.’ Presumably an evolved ideology lacks all-important authority.

3) *The widespread violence*

We now return 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 Special Forces. 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 that either the movement did in fact largely comprise lumpens, or clear proof 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 Parisian 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 organizations. The denials of cited West African radical intellectuals seem too vehement, and fail to address a central feature of RUF violence, that it seems to be intended to make a political point.

Some criticism of the lumpen hypothesis

Lumpens as a moral verdict

To many, it seems that Abdullah and colleagues have a strong argument, underlined by facts and historical events; 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 po-based, drug-taking and criminally (if accidentally radicalised) youth culture – which, when abandoned by intellectuals and left-wing student group, possibly resulted in an accidental and infectious spread of the idea of rebellion to a wider under-class population.

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.¹³¹ Social science has – since its beginnings – struggled against this kind of normativeness. We are entitled to ask, on empirical grounds, whether the lumpen argument is correct and sufficient to explain the RUF as a social phenomenon.

We should 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 unemployable¹³² (Abdullah 1997, Abdullah *et al.* 1997, Rashid 1997). This is the language of the outraged householder. Lumpens are deviants; 'known [by whom?] for their anti-social behaviour', and therefore to be shunned by all right-thinking persons. But it is not (since Durkheim) 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, i.e. 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* youth in Sierra Leone tell us more about the macro-economic situation of the country than it says anything meaningful 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 and or mining centres and survive by their wits? And 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 & Addo

¹³¹ 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 what category of young people joined the RUF. Were these "ray-rayman dem", "san-san boys", "*njiahungbia ngorgesie* (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 as folk terms are, they hide political judgements. If it is stated that the RUF was partly made up from 'socially disconnected village youth (*njiahungbia ngorgesie*)', 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. Evidence from the ground is needed to sustain this argument.

¹³² Ishmail Rashid is another author who favours the lumpen argument. He uses it: 'primarily, in its crude Marxist sense, to represent that strata of the society that cannot fully employ or sell its labour because of capitalist transformation, restructuring or retrenchment. (Marx and Engels 1955:20-21)' (Rashid 1997 :22-23). McIntyre, Aning & 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' (McIntyre, Aning & Addo 2002:12).

(2002) conclude that ‘to criminalise what sustains most African economies in the drive to prove a specific point is disturbing.’ (McIntyre, Aning & Addo 2002:15fn).

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. Ibrahim Abdullah considers the RUF to be a project planned, initiated, and put in 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 players¹³³ were recruited among the clients of potes (marihuana and palmwine bars) in Eastern Freetown. But the information gathered by the present thesis, in relation to early recruited cadres, does not back his point. Neither Alie Kabba or Foday Sankoh were urban working class. Sankoh hailed from a ruling family in Magburaka. The leader of the BANSAL agricultural project (discussed in the previous chapter) is the well-educated child of a political dissident from Pujehun Districts driven into Liberia by the oppression of Siaka Stevens. His “bush mother”, and a former leader in the RUF women’s wing, was once an administrative officer at Bunumbu. The BANSAL second-in-command is the first son of a northern Paramount Chief. The leader of the Tongo land recovery group 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 originally recruited from the potes for guerrilla training in Libya during the late 1980s ‘*decided to forget about the experience [the revolution]*’ (my emphasis) (Abdullah, 1997:65) after their return to Sierra Leone. An implication is that they lacked the 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 provinces* (my emphasis). So it seems unlikely that more than a handful of the group around Sankoh of what was to become the senior RUF cadre (vanguards) were *urban* recruits (and from the potes). Two of the original leading triumvirate - Sankoh¹³⁴, Kanu¹³⁵ and Mansaray¹³⁶ - 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) (Abdullah 1997:66). Later in the paper Abdullah suddenly shifts his ground (and gives up his urban argument) when he states that: ‘the bulk of the current RUF battle front commanders are lumpens from the *rural* (my emphasis) south-east.’ (Abdullah 1997:70). Abdullah *et al.* (1997:206) distinguishes 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

¹³³ According to Abdullah (1997:65fn): ‘The number of Sierra Leoneans who went to Libya between 1987/88 were not more than fifty. Alie Kabba [expelled student leader] said about two dozen went.’

¹³⁴ 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, major focuses of RUF activity from 1991. Even at the end of the war informants in Segbwema told Paul Richards (pers. comm.) that most of the off road settlements as far as Bunumbu and beyond were solidly RUF terrain (cf. Richards *et al.* 2004b).

¹³⁵ Abu Kanu was a graduate of the rural Njala University College.

¹³⁶ 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)

origin of the conspiracy that led to 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 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, i.e. 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 (e.g. Fayia Musa) 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 (i.e. the movement sensed an affinity and sought them out). The most notable example is I.H. Deen-Jalloh,¹³⁷ a lecturer at rural teacher’s college at Bunumbu, a village in rural Kailahun, where teacher training emphasised radical self-reliance as part of the curriculum. Abdullah, Rashid and others ignore the Bunumbu connection in writing off the RUF as a bunch of thugs.

It seems that Abdullah and colleagues have overestimated the urban factor in the RUF¹³⁸ 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 its 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 no genuine revolutionary movement. Thandika Mkandawire, following this theoretical line without much reference to facts, 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 land-owning 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 become 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 with low educations in rural Sierra Leone are concerned. They cannot even mobilise their own labour to work the allegedly abundant land, since this is extracted from them by marriage payments and court fines for infringements of a traditional code of behaviour regulated by elders. They are victims of a lineage mode of production articulate with trading capital, as Dupré & Rey (1972) have so cogently argued. Thus it was not ‘a serious urban malaise’, as Mkandawire (2002:208), misled by Abdullah *et al.*, 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 like 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 backed off, and the revolution was still pursued by other, less educated

¹³⁷ Deen Jalloh was at one stage designated the head of the RUF’s Internal Defence Unit (i.e. in charge of RUF internal security), but the head of BANSAL reports he was also was one of the main figures in charge of ideological training.

¹³⁸ Mkandawire (2002) generalises his analysis to other contemporary African rebel movements.

people lacking theoretical training, these authors dismiss the project as an insurgency without any agenda and in the control of lumpen elements. No further attempts are 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. And no attempts are made to review the RUF, its violence, and its own purported ideology, in terms of these more provincial and rural grievances.¹³⁹

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 marginalized - *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) - not seldom 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 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% of the movement [the RUF] was uneducated* (RUF commander C).

However, the RUF, during its first years, 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* (AFRC child combatant A, see chapter 4) - and 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, etc.). 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, marginalized 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 anything, only in a group you can produce* (ex-RUF commander C, see chapter 5). 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) - *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 4) - and which was slowly degrading into competitive

¹³⁹ What perhaps contributed to this urban-biased view of the RUF was the fact that Abdullah and colleagues base their analysis 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 seems to have seriously biased their understanding of the political dynamic from which the RUF drew its momentum.

individualism. The marginalized cadres had experienced first hand that they had nothing to expect from the established society (ruled by rural elites or patrimonial politicians) nor was there scope to progress by one's own efforts in a country where markets were controlled to a large extent by a closed Lebanese community.

While the initial strict discipline and ideology of the RUF was able to tame to a large 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 4), it struggled to control effectively its cadres on missions in unfriendly territory - *Some who did bad continued to stay in the frontline* (RUF signal officer B, see chapter 4), or allowed the fighters misbehave - *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). Brutal behaviour towards the civilians was increasingly allowed, and perhaps even encouraged by the leadership, in reaction to the rise of the Kamajors 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 4). 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 (1994-1997). The peace-negotiations culminating in the Abidjan Peace accord (30th November 1996) did not result in lasting peace, but did remove the RUF ideological leadership and undermined their role (including 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, even if 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-agreement, and this further destabilised the movement, and laid the foundations for later horrific violence - *In [the attack on] the Zogoda [1996] we lost so much manpower. You know, January 6 was our revenge* (RUF commander C, see chapter 4). The RUF's “new society” came under attack and was destroyed. The outcome of what had been a painstakingly slow process of convincing the RUF cadres 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 – *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 battlefield commanders handed out to friend and foe. And 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 '97 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 4).

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 on surrendered 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 that continued fighting was the only option, and that it would in any case be more profitable, either to gain diamonds, now the main currency of the conflict, or to secure a stronger card at any future negotiating table. January 6, 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

As Richards has argued (e.g. Richards 1999) the making and breaking of the RUF and the behaviour of its cadres fits well patterns predicted by neo-Durkheimian cultural theory as developed by Mary Douglas and others,¹⁴⁰ focused on how social solidarities are created and what can happen if they fall apart.

According to Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) society based on Rousseau's "social contract", i.e. 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 "precontractual solidarity", according to Durkheim. This solidarity is created by a shared emotional feeling, which Durkheim refers to as the "collective conscience" (Collins & Malowsky 1993). If we regard the RUF as a society in Durkheimian terms then it is clear there was an emotional feeling shared by the cadres, but it was a negative one - resentment at exploitation by a gerontocratic rural elite, or even their exclusion from their villages, e.g. for challenging the authority of elders, or the widespread tort of "woman damage" (i.e. taking a woman without making proper payments), and over a wider failure of the state to invest in the education of the younger non-elite, non-urban generation.

According to Mary 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, that 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 fatalist cultural type). Notice, in contra-distinction to the approach to culture as a causal entity, espoused by Abdullah, in his arguments about "lumpens", Douglas' 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

¹⁴⁰ On neo-Durkheimian theory see, for instance, Douglas (1993), Douglas & Ney (1998) and Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky (1990).

and mining areas they 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” [i.e. is a client 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 (e.g. in ambushes) - 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 (see chapter 2). There is no space 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.

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. 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 relatively 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; if someone does not act in accordance with the dictates of the collective conscience he or she 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 Kamajors, who had detailed knowledge of what the RUF considered “safe ground”, i.e. 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 bushcamps, including the Zogoda, towards the end of 1996, and early in 1997. The remaining cadres, without Foday Sankoh and abandoned by an ideological wing uneasy about rejoining the movement from peace negotiations, because of the rise to power of brutal battle field 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.

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 (under the cover of a peace process) 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.

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, 1999, cf. Fithen & Richards 2005). This provides a basis to attempt answers to 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 determinist hypothesis – the lumpen thesis – has already been extensively examined and found deficient. But he and fellow Sierra Leonean Diaspora exiles are not the only ones to have favoured the idea that cultures have intrinsic properties, and exercise independent determinative effect upon human actions. 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 "new barbarism". Whenever an outsider does not understand the social, political and economic dimensions of a conflict it is liable to be labeled "chaotic" or "senseless". Abraham (1975) 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. The typical move of the culturalist explanation is to suggest 'that there is something fundamentally wrong with...culture – and that senseless violence is an undisavowable excrescence of [African] culture.' (Mkandawire 2002:183).

Richards (1996), in criticising Kaplan's line, shows that the "New Barbarism" thesis is fundamentally flawed, reflecting a certain view dominant among global urban elites at that time. He argues that:

there is no run-away environmental crisis in Sierra Leone. Young people caught up in the dispute specifically point to political failures as a cause of the war, and deny the relevance of Malthusian factors. [Furthermore] 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. Terror is *supposed* to unsettle its victims. (...) ... they [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 hands of children¹⁴¹ – is best accounted for as a reaction to the increasingly effective threat posed by a mercenary-backed Civil Defence Force. Granted the RUF was largely made up of young people only weakly – that is being marginalised and exploited - incorporated in rural society the violence can be read as the most marginalized in rural society turning against the very society which had first excluded them, 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 to secure promotion for military success, if, atrocities aside, their mission was judged a success. 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?

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 have-nots want a piece of the cake in a context where for decades, the benefits of natural resources ended up in the hands of just a few privileged ones. 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 forward 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,¹⁴² who attain the status of rebels driven by 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). And secondly he states that although the Collier & Hoeffler (2001) study ‘merely addresses issues of the probability of war and the

¹⁴¹ Bangura criticise Richards on this point: ‘The cutting-off of hands to prevent adult villagers from voting may be a rational RUF strategy, as Richards insists [though in fact it was what those doing it at the time were reported as claiming] but one would have to stretch rationality to its limits to explain the logic behind the decision to subject to the same treatment 9 and 10-year-olds who do not vote.’ (Bangura, 1997:123). The RUF military police, quoted in chapter 4, claims that the amputations started in 96/97. This is not fully in accord with the facts (some definitely occurred in the run-up to the election, i.e. in late 1995/early 1996, though how many of these incidents are to be attributed to army renegades is unclear). However, it is possible he refers to the epidemic of later “senseless” amputations. Earlier amputations clearly had a more political message, while later on they increasingly resembled acts of destructive fatalists who considered the whole of society as their enemy.

¹⁴² 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 try to provoke war.’ (Reno, 2003:46). Reno gives the examples of Dagestan and Ingush Republics which share a similar situation as compared to 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 dollar’ (Reno, 2003:47). Clearly, preference is given (in this last example) to a religious and ideological programme over purely economic interests.

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, 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 for any substantial period of time.¹⁴³ Furthermore, the geographical location of most of its forest camps and the targets of its military actions refute any suggestion that the movement was primarily interested in controlling the country's diamond-producing areas. The RUF's concentration in east and south of the country probably had more to do with the relationship between the RUF and Charles Taylor's neighbouring "Greater Liberia", and the fact that in this (Mende-speaking) part of the country there was more opposition to be mobilised against the APC government. And the RUF leadership, having lived in upcountry 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 marginalized and excluded youth ended-up. Many miners should, according to the political-economic analysis of the RUF, be 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 marginalized 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, Cote d'Ivoire (involving some fighters already associated with conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia) seems an equally ominous development (Chauveau 2005). One could continue with 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 sure fire way path to war, Sierra Leone did 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, as Richards (2005c) argues, a social project, and needs to be organised by a group driven by a vision, however

¹⁴³ 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 2002b).

strange. The Durkheimian approach seems, intrinsically, a more sound basis for analysis than the econometrics of Collier and colleagues.

Yet we should not underestimate the true 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 weapons 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 Cote d'Ivoire, beyond the reach of diamond sanctions. This suggests it is possible to end wars temporarily, even without addressing causes. And 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 was true buys time, but may not provide a durable solution.¹⁴⁴

Rapid expansion of the RUF – an inverse of the rapidly collapsing patrimonial state?

A third option was put forward in the preface of this thesis, 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 the already weak rural families with a background in domestic slavery. Ex-combatants hint at this as a cause of their dissatisfaction (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 was 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 and its neglect of development in rural areas and the selective use of state violence (Bangura 1997:135). And Mkandawire criticises the idea of (the collapse of) neo-patrimonialism as the cause of conflict stating that: ‘While this analysis captures some of the African political reality, it cannot explain the cases of collapse of putatively patron-clientelistic states that have not led to violence.’ (Mkandawire, 2002:185). 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 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 (i.e. attempts by youths to meet their own 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 19th and early 20th century 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

¹⁴⁴ The use of greed-not-grievance was functional to international peace-enforcement strategy because it suggests some very practical interventions; economic boycotts, travel bans, freezing of bank accounts, etc.

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 (Getz shows) 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 for rural youth of the kind encountered in Sierra Leone, is perhaps sufficient to explain the emergence of a rebel movement widely joined by 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 better to 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 (i.e. meritocratic) 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 from cooperative labour. But when this egalitarian society under construction was undermined both by internal developments and external attack it collapsed, and the cadres slipped - under the brutal control of their battlefield commanders - into fatalism.

Even at that, 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 partly explained by the necessity to have access to food. But the material presented in this thesis suggests that more than simple necessity was involved. RUF cadres came predominately 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 – to 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 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 thesis – gathered first hand from RUF cadres who fought the war – supports the hypothesis that the RUF was both the result of a socio-economic crisis experienced by rural youths and their attempted answer to that crisis. Durable peace in Sierra Leone depends on a continued post-war search for an answer to the agrarian crisis of youth. In the final two chapters of the thesis we shall examine how much the demobilization and reintegration process has contributed to that objective.

Conclusion

We now know that the majority of the RUF were Mende speakers and most of the RUF volunteers came from Kailahun and Pujehun districts, where, as Richards (2005d) points out, the legacy of domestic slavery persisted longest, both in terms of duration and numbers involved in domestic dependency. The language of slave revolt was something the RUF

(whether cynically or not) sought to revive (Richards 2005b). RUF violence against the rural population in these districts was high. The movement thought – whether calculating well or badly – 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 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 (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 settle into low-status semi-subsistence rice farming. Their children were often dependent on the patronage of the one-time slave owners to gain 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 grand-children 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 (Richards 2006a). It is clear that this particular cycle of injustice and violence rooted in incomplete emancipation (cf. Getz 2004) needs to be addressed before it causes another cycle of violence and atrocity.

Chapter 7

The reintegration of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)

Early attempts

Under-age combatants – or “child soldiers” (the term is problematic, since most were in fact young teenagers) – were among the first fighters in the Sierra Leonean conflict to be disarmed, even before the official disarmament and demobilisation programme started in 1996. In 1993 the NPRC, in search of international acceptability and pressured by the international community, accepted that no young person should bear arms below the age of 18, and began to demobilise its under-age combatants. But only a small percentage of the total number of such combatants actually demobilised during the next few years. Many remained in frontline positions, where humanitarian agencies – for good reasons - did not dare or were not allowed to go.¹⁴⁵ And while the RUF was the faction with the highest numbers of under eighteens among its ranks, only a handful demobilised during these years.

The Abidjan Peace accord, signed in November 1996 ‘called for the immediate cessation of all fighting, proclaimed an amnesty for RUF members, and the transformation of the RUF into a political movement. It stipulated the withdrawal of EO [Executive Outcomes] within five weeks and regional forces within three months.’ (Gberie 2000:24). It also provided for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of the combatants from the various factions. A study by Richards *et al.* (1997) was commissioned to plan for the reintegration of non-army combatants. Army demobilization was handled by the army itself. Ex-RUF combatants were to be encamped as part of the DDR process; the national army was to be reduced in size to under half its former strength.

It is now clear that the parties signing the accord were not fully committed to the peace. Demobilisation took place but on a very limited basis. If the arrest of rebel leader Foday Sankoh in Nigeria in February 1997 on grounds of carrying a weapon was not the final blow to the peace accord, the military coup in May 1997 ended both the accord and its DDR provisions. The few demobilised combatants, including many of the ex-child combatants, rapidly re-enlisted.¹⁴⁶

After the fall of the military junta in 1998 about 5000 AFRC soldiers surrendered to the Kabbah government. Nearly 3,000 then took part in a DDR programme and were based in so-called “reorientation camps”. As part of their pre-discharge orientation they received classes in civic education, basic adult literacy, reconciliation and psychosocial counselling. Upon

¹⁴⁵ A demobilised child combatant explains: *All the boys, all the child-soldiers* [were taken for demobilisation]. *But the only thing, some of them were at the front. So they got not any chance to take them, you see. But the few of us that were around, they assembled us and brought us* [here]. (Peters & Richards 1998b:606) This ex-child combatant, interviewed in 1996, resided at the demobilisation site near Grafton. This centre was in the hands of the military and run by (RSLMF) Major Kula Samba. She was publicly executed by the Kabbah government in 1998, after court martial with no right of appeal, on the grounds of collaboration with the enemy (supporting the AFRC). The execution was widely protested by the international community.

¹⁴⁶ An ex-child combatant who demobilised in 1996 explains what happened to the other ex-child soldiers in the Children Affected by War Programme during the 1997 coup: *That day everybody joined. Everybody, except the very little ones. Most of the boys joined. (...) The problem was that the commanders who were our bosses might want to take revenge on us if we did not join. So we had to at least pretend that we were with them.*

discharge, they were given the local equivalent of US\$ 300, divided into two tranches (IRIN 1999).

The majority of RUF combatants never surrendered. After a countrywide pushback by ECOMOG troops during mid-1998, after which the Kabbah regime was re-installed, the RUF regained ground during the second half of '98, and in January 1999 a combined force of RUF and AFRC die-hard troops launched an attack on Freetown. The force was repelled after two weeks, but in the following months the international community started to pressurise the Kabbah government to resolve the conflict peacefully. A key factor was the return of Nigeria to civilian rule. The incoming president (Olusegun Obasanjo) made it clear that in order to bring the Nigerian army back under democratic control, and to stop the kind of money-making ventures associated with peace keeping in Sierra Leone, he was determined to bring his troops (the largest single contingent in ECOMOG) home. Negotiation between the Kabbah government and the RUF culminated in the signing of the Lomé peace accord, July 1999.

Disarmament and demobilisation under Lomé

The DDR process after Lomé was painfully slow to get under way, and several times changed its organisational set-up. Insiders speak of major struggles by different vested interests to control the process, which was seen as vital to national politics after the war. In July 1998, the Government of Sierra Leone had already established a special committee to implement and supervise the DDR process: the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR). This committee worked directly under the President. A working target figure of 33,000 ex-combatants was adopted, but soon acknowledged to be far too low (the final number of demobilised CDF ex-fighters alone reached almost 40,000). At the start, two demobilisation sites were created - one at Lungi (close to the International Airport) and one at Port Loko (as near as teams could get to the RUF capital Makeni). Disarmed CDF fighters were not encamped, but ex-RUF and ex-AFRC fighters were. Originally it was planned that these fighters would stay in camp for three months, but this was later brought down to one month and finally to two weeks, despite major criticisms by some agencies that this was too short a period to be useful. Too long an encampment, it was argued: *will bring the possibility of fighting, in particular when the ex-combatants are idle, [and] 2: encampments are very costly and 3: it was realised that sub-centres should be created to enable ex-combatants to receive training in their own area* (NCDDR official).

In the period between the signing of the Lomé accord and the hostage taking crisis and subsequent re-imprisonment of Foday Sankoh in May 2000 a total number of between 17,000 and 19,000 ex-combatants disarmed (Assessment Report 2000).

During the period between May 2000 and May 2001 the process was clearly in a stalemate; only 2,628 fighters disarmed (Richards, *et al.* 2004b). It was not until after the signing of the last ceasefire accord, the Abuja accords, on the 10th of November 2000, that the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process finally got under way, 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).

The final numbers are 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 | 72,490 | 99.9 |

Source: NCDDR (2004)

It was agreed under Article XVI of the Lomé peace agreement that encampment, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration should extend to all fighters of the RUF, CDF, SLA and paramilitary groups (Lomé Peace Agreement 1999).

The Lomé accord specified that the disarmament was to be implemented by ECOMOG and UNOMSIL (United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone). However, ECOMOG forces were partly withdrawn¹⁴⁷ and the remainder absorbed into a new UN military entity, the UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone) peace keeping forces, which emerged at the end of November 1999, mandated to provide security and protection to the disarmament and demobilisation process (Assessment Report 2000). So it was UNAMSIL who undertook the actual disarmament. A series of disarmament sites and reception centres were opened¹⁴⁸ where combatants could disarm on an individual basis or preferably as a group.¹⁴⁹ To qualify for the UNAMSIL disarmament process one had to present a modern weapon; it was a “one weapon, one fighter” system. But in the cases of team-managed weapons, such as Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) and Heavy Machine Guns (HMG), several fighters per weapon were registered.¹⁵⁰ Child combatants did not need to possess a weapon before they could register as an ex-child combatant, and did not follow the same DDR procedures and programme. In their case encampment was the normal procedure. Clips of ammunition or mines were in most cases also accepted for validation. Many female dependents registered in this way. Bush knives and shotguns (including single barrel) were not sufficient to validate militia membership. This discriminated against the CDF, which was legally empowered to carry modern semi-automatic weapons only in December 1998, and as a result perhaps up to 80% (Richards *et al.* 2004b) of the CDF fighters may not have been able to register as combatants, and subsequently did not profit from the special DDR provisions.

After validation an ID card was provided to the ex-combatant with his or her picture and name on it and a DDR number, but not the faction he or she belonged to. This was done to

¹⁴⁷ ECOMOG forces pulled out fully at the end of April 2000.

¹⁴⁸ It was agreed to create the following sites, taking into account the geographical spread of the various factions (note: not all centres operated simultaneously) (NCDDR 2004):

- 18 DC's (Demobilization Centres)
- 45 RC's (Reception Centres)
- 5-10 ICC's (Interim Care Centres to provide care and shelter to unaccompanied child soldiers)

Disarmament varied regionally as far as the time of opening and closing of the centres was concerned. In the northern and western part of the country disarmament kicked off first, but disarmament in Kono and Kailahun and parts of Kenema only started towards the end of 2001

¹⁴⁹ Disarmament by groups is preferred since it speeds up to the process and has logistical advantages. But there is also a political dimension to it: ‘handing over weapons through the command structure of the belligerent group (...) [will] test the political will of all belligerent parties’ (Assessment Report 2000:iii).

¹⁵⁰ Clear guidelines for team-managed weapons were lacking. This resulted in combatants negotiating with UNAMSIL personnel about the number of fighters eligible for registration for one such a weapon. A female RUF ex-combatant describes it as follows: *At the disarmament site there were a lot of negotiations going on between the commanders and the UNAMSIL about how many combatants were accepted for every weapon.*

prevent stigmatisation. The letters A B C & D were printed on the card, representing the following entitlements:¹⁵¹

- A = first tranche of the TSA (the total Transitional Safety-net Allowance was Le 300,000, equivalent of US\$150)
- B = second tranche TSA
- C = skills training plus monthly allowance
- D = tool kit

Upon receiving one of the above entitlements the corresponding letter on the ID card was perforated.

After he or she had handed over the weapon, the ex-combatant entered the demobilisation phase. Here it was verified if indeed the ex-combatant had gone through the disarmament, if he or she accepted the terms and conditions of the DDR programme, and if he or she was in possession of an ID card. Eligible ex-combatants received transition support¹⁵² (Transitional Safety Allowance and transport payments, i.e. A on the ID card).

Then the individual was briefly prepared for the psychological, social and economic reintegration challenges ahead through the provision of a Pre-Discharge Orientation course. Socio-economic profiling, medical screening and registration of expectations, took place. Preferences for reintegration support were also assessed (Assessment Report 2000).¹⁵³

After all steps described above the ex-combatant was “dismissed”. Some time later - two weeks in theory - the ex-combatant received the second tranche (B on the ID card). He or she then awaited the call for reintegration support: skills training, educational support or an agricultural start-up package. Encampment took place only during the disarmament and demobilisation phase.

As mentioned, while still at the demobilisation sites, the disarmed ex-combatants received so-called “Pre-Discharge Orientation” courses. A part of the instruction served to inform the ex-combatants about what they could choose for their reintegration component. Basically there were five “packages” or options. One could:

- re-enlist in the New Sierra Leone Army (RSLA) and become a soldier. Only a few thousand ex-combatants chose this option, which was offered during the first one or two years of the DDR programme. Those who re-enlisted in the new army were trained by IMATT (International Military Advisory and Training Team).
- go back to school and continue education. Depending on the time at which a fighter demobilised he or she would be given a specific entitlement to a number of years of educational support: the earlier demobilisation took place the more years of school fees were provided, up to a maximum of three years. This package was chosen by 20% of ex-combatants (NCDDR 2004)
- follow skills training (of 6-9 months) such as carpentry, masonry, tailoring, hair dressing etc.. A monthly allowance (normally about Le 60,000) for the ex-combatant in training was attached to this package. A toolkit with basic, but relevant tools was received upon graduation. The majority, 51% (NCDDR 2004), of ex-combatants chose this package.

¹⁵¹ There was remarkably much confusion among the ex-combatants about which letter corresponded to which specific entitlement.

¹⁵² Humphrey & Weinstein (2004:31), drawing on a quantitative survey of 1,000 ex-combatants, give the following analysis of what ex-combatants did with their transition money: ‘On average, Le144,000 Le was spent on living expenses and Le71,000 given to family. By contrast, ex-combatants saved less than Le40,000 to help meet future needs.’

¹⁵³ These activities are likely to sound more impressive than they were in reality; assuming tens or even hundreds of anxious combatants from different factions are standing in line, DDR and UNAMSIL officers probably wanted to limit the time spent on procedures as much as possible.

- opt for an agricultural package. Sometimes this included a training programme similar to other skills training offerings (and a monthly allowance and toolkit). More often it came in the form of a one-off package including farming tools, rice and seeds. Relatively few ex-combatants, 15% (NCDDR 2004), chose this package, in a country where the majority of the population rely (at least in part) on agriculture for their livelihood. The majority of those who chose this option are likely to have been older (illiterate) ex-CDF fighters who were already farmers before they enlisted. But as shown in this thesis, there is also a group of longstanding ex-RUF (and often better educated) cadres who, perhaps surprisingly given the predictions of the “lumpen” thesis, actively embraced the agricultural option.
- enlist for participating in public works, micro-enterprise, etc. When opting for public works, the ex-combatants received “food for work” and sometimes a small allowance.

Skills training by Implementing Partners

Those ex-combatants who felt that their best chances for economic reintegration into society would be by possessing a skill, opted for the vocational training package. This choice was made during the Pre-Discharge Course where ex-combatants indicated their preferred choice from among a list of several skills. The lists of options were not standardised, however; some skills were not offered in certain places and some skills were not offered at all times at certain places. Moreover, for some options, only a limited number of ex-combatants were allowed to attend the courses. So it often happened that ex-combatants, after waiting months for their preferred skill, had to choose another skill in order to start training. The following skills were in most cases available:

- carpentry
- masonry and construction
- tailoring
- (car) mechanic
- hairdressing
- gara tie-and-dye
- soap-making

Training in computer skills was only offered in a limited number of cases, and the aim was to attract high ranking (RUF) commanders, to ensure their cooperation in the DDR process. Hairdressing, tie-and-dye (painting and dieing cotton) and soap making were chosen by a majority of female ex-combatants. Of the first four skills, skills training in car mechanics was often also limited to a certain number of ex-combatants. Masonry and construction was offered in general only by the larger Implementing Partners. So the majority of male ex-combatants were either trained in carpentry or tailoring.

The implementation, providing the courses to the ex-combatants, was not done by NCDDR itself. Implementing Partners (IP's) were identified to provide the courses for each of the various skills. These IP's might be International Non-Governmental Organisations, Local NGO's, existing training centres or newly created training centres. As a result the training centres varied a lot in numbers of ex-combatants attending. Some had hundreds of ex-combatants in training, like GTZ for instance, while others only a handful. This last type of IP might be skilled craftsmen who had apprentices before the war. With no clear standards set, the quality of the training and the available training materials also varied widely. Every IP would receive a certain amount of money from NCDDR for each registered ex-combatant attending the skills training. Some IPs offered skills training only to ex-combatants. Other IPs took a certain number of ex-combatants as trainees but also took in ordinary youths, or war-affected youths, with the idea that reintegration could be promoted in this way and resentment

among the war-affected population limited. Some IPs had programmes where ex-combatants were heavily outnumbered by ordinary youths in training.

--- PICTURE ---

DDR shortcomings

So far the DDR process has been described in a rather descriptive way. On paper the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme in Sierra Leone looked sound, in practice it had a number of deficiencies. There were three major drawbacks to the programme. These flaws affected two of the most important reasons for implementing DDR (to achieve short-term and long-term security, by offering combatants a peaceful alternative to the gun, and to limit ex-combatant dependency on potentially hostile, and perhaps vengeful, home-communities. These three flaws are:

- 1) The extent to which the DDR programme failed to deliver the entitlements of ex-combatants agreed upon during disarmament, as represented by the letters A, B, C & D on the ID card, including the preferred package and (in particular) provision of monthly allowances and tool kits upon graduation.
- 2) The difficulty faced by many ex-combatants, who actively took part in the conflict in one or other of the armed factions, to validate themselves as ex-combatants and subsequently receive DDR entitlements. Some were – and remain - scattered in neighbouring countries, others claim extensive identity theft took place, i.e. fake combatants demobilised in the place of real ones.
- 3) The extent to which NCDDR failed to recognise and allow for the rural crisis that was one of the root causes of the war. Planning reflected urban-biased assumptions and the

influence of the “lumpen” model, and (thereby) a chance was missed to address, proactively, a crisis that may yet well come back and haunt the country.

Hereafter these three DDR shortcomings will be discussed in more detail and illustrated by the statements from ex-combatants who became victims.

Entitlements: a right or a privilege?

By the end of 2001 I visited the regional NCDDR office in Kenema on a few occasions. During one of these visits a large crowd of ex-combatants from all factions had gathered inside and outside the NCDDR office. Inside the office new lists with names of those ex-combatants who were going to profit from training were posted on the wall. Clearly the majority of the ex-combatants present were again not yet on the list and had, much to their chagrin, to wait for a further round.¹⁵⁴ DDR officers, grown wise through experience, advised them to choose another skill that would perhaps increase their chances of being short-listed the following time round. Protests grew, stones were thrown and the police came in. After some time two armed personnel cars arrived with an HMG-weapon on top. This provoked the ex-combatants even more: *do not carry a gun to me who has carried guns for so many years*, was shouted by one ex-combatant. Ex-combatants of all factions were like brothers with a common enemy - the DDR officers. In the end the conflict died down, with the arrival of the CDF spokesman, but not until some firm promises were made by the DDR officers. To illustrate these shortcoming further, a selection of some cases¹⁵⁵ is presented:

- Female ex-RUF fighter: *During the war I was the wife of an important rebel commander. During the time of the DDR process, because I was with him, I profited. I chose computer skills but I never received my D [referring to the punch hole on the entitlement card]. I still like school but I have two children so that is a bit difficult.*
- Male ex-Junta fighter: *I am 33 years of age. I disarmed in Kabala in the year 2001 and was brought to Lungi. There they told us that we could choose a job but they never informed us about any training opportunities or that it was possible to go back to the army. After Lungi I stayed in Freetown for about 2 to 3 years and in that period I checked over 10 times at the DDR office. I only received my A and B. I lost my card in a fire-accident. Presently I am helping my brother making “shakers” [sieves] for the miners.*
- RUF signals officer A: *You know, I did not get any benefit from the DDR programme, although I registered many times for it. So I decided to forget about the whole thing and just focus on my farming activities. But I am not used to farming, it is just because of family responsibilities.(...) Before the war I was an artist. I was a painter decorating places and I also did weaving. Now, my relatives look up to me for help because they heard about the DDR supporting ex-combatants. My first and only DDR allowance I divided among my friends and my wife, for her to start a business.*
- Male ex-SLA fighter: *I joined in 1996 and disarmed in the year 2000. On January the 14th 2002 the Konomokwie took place. Konomokwie means “Mi na get iya” [Krio: this*

¹⁵⁴ Checking is easy for those ex-combatants who live in the regional centres. But what about those who live in remote villages, sometimes a day or two’s travel distance away? After two or three fruitless visits it is likely that they have to forget about the possibility to receive their C and D entitlements at all. Richards *et al.* (2004b) suggest that the chances of not having C and D entitlements increased with distance and remoteness, i.e. either ex-combatants found distance a barrier to demanding benefits, or there was some systematic attempt at office level to supply the remotely-located last, since they would be least likely to make a fuss. This reproduces exactly the politics of patrimonialism and exclusion that fed the war!

¹⁵⁵ Most of the ex-combatants presented here were interviewed by me during a short research visit to Kono as part of a wider study (Richards *et al.*, 2004b). However, it is important to underline that the following examples are not limited to the Kono area but were found in every part of the country that I visited.

place is mine]. We also called it the cutlass war. The Kono people drove out all strangers.¹⁵⁶ Many ex-combatants lost everything that day, including their ID card. I myself had my A burst but then I lost the card. Many went to Liberia although there was no active recruitment going on here in Kono. (...) If a commander makes promises now we will never join him to fight again. But if he will bring US\$100 we will join him straightaway. The people at the NCDDR office are crooks. They always say that their computer is broken. They withdraw information and they do not communicate. The office was attacked one time. It is both the ex-RUF and the ex-CDF who are disappointed.

- Male ex-RUF fighter: I am 27 years of age and I went to St. Michaels [school] in Bo. During a holiday in my home area in Pujehun this rebel commander “Bai Bureh” [a nom de guerre] captured me. That was in ‘92. I received two months of training in the Zogoda. After that I became a G5 because I felt sorry for the civilians. In ‘99 I went with my wife and two children to Kono, because in Pujehun there is only farming you can do. During the time of the Konomokwie I lost my ID card so I have not received my D. My wife, I met her in the movement and she also went through DDR but she did not receive the monthly allowance and also not the D.
- Male ex-RUF fighter in Makali: I chose agriculture but the groundnut and rice did not reach us in time and it was not of a good quality. Now I am managing my life by doing some small business. M., our former commander, told us to give him our ID cards. Later we got them back with the D burst but we only received two bags of rice. Last time they promised 4 bags but I did not receive anything. I blame M. because he should pressurize ADRA [the Implementing Partner in this area]. As soon as I receive my benefits I [will] go back to farming.
- While having an informal discussion at a street corner in the centre of Kono, some ex-combatants showed up out of the blue, having heard the news that someone was asking about their experience of the DDR process. They were all eager to ventilate their frustrations, considering this as perhaps a last opportunity before the DDR programme was scheduled to close down (by the end of 2003).¹⁵⁷ Some were able to show ID cards with only one, two or sometimes three letters punched (i.e. although NCDDR was already winding down there was still an incomplete case load). Others stated that they had lost their ID card, most of them during the *Konomokwie* incident:
 1. A.B.: I disarmed in Lungi and have received my A and B but I have lost my card. I complained many times but each time I was told to wait.
 2. T.B.: I disarmed in Port Loko. I was among the first to disarm. I only received my A. They told me to wait.
 3. T.A.: My story is similar to that of my mate. All I got from DDR is my A.
 4. I.K.: I have received A and B, but I have lost my card during the *Konomokwie* and have never received anything.
 5. J.M.: I am from Kono and I was with the RUF. I handed over my gun to my commander and I never ever received anything.

¹⁵⁶ The *Konomokwie* incident is like the ex-combatant explained – it was caused by illicit miners (strangers and ex-combatants) who started to mine under the foundations of a bridge, risking its collapse. This triggered violent reactions by the indigenous Kono population.

¹⁵⁷ The next day the NCDDR Director addressed the Implementing Partners at a meeting in Kono. Confronted with the question about the closing down procedures and the delays in the arrival of ex-combatant entitlements the Director stated that the implication of the coming closing down of the DDR programme is that any delays in the reports and financial administration of the IP will not be tolerated. As far as the toolkits are concerned, he stated that these had been imported, which explained the delays in the process. The payment of the allowances had been improved but remained “a delicate system”.

It seems clear that NCDDR failed to deliver the entitlements of the ex-combatants in many cases.¹⁵⁸ The draft report of Richards *et al.* (2004b) made this claim in fairly blunt terms, and NCDDR objected to the language. It was conceded that there had been difficulties but computer difficulties and ex-combatant dishonesty were the principle reasons given. What Paul Richards (the team leader for the study) notes in the revised version of the report is that many of the specific cases where ex-combatants had waited many months for action were cleared up in days once they were reported by the team writing the report, but that in other cases where he recorded details but did not immediately report back to NCDDR nothing further happened. It is clear that Implementing Partners were often to blame for a hoarding of benefits, perhaps deliberately, but in the end NCDDR had the overall responsibility to supervise the process and impose sanctions.

Humphreys & Weinstein (2004), having interviewed nearly a thousand ex-combatants, conclude that: ‘the[ir] teams found that multiple complaints about specific aspects of DDR, centered on two issues: the timing of delivery of allowances and toolboxes and the lack of support for finding or creating jobs’ (2004:30). They furthermore state that: ‘About one-quarter of those that entered DDR did *not* [their emphasis] participate in a training programme’ (2004:32).

Stavrou *et al.* (2003), having interviewed over five hundred ex-combatants, conclude that: ‘The handing out, or rather the lack of handing out, of toolkits was the single biggest identified problem of the NCDDR training process during the mid-term evaluation. It would seem that it remained a problem until the very end. (...) Of these [interviewed] ex-combatants (433) that should have received a toolkit, only 191 (43.1%) had done so at the time of the survey, the balance still awaiting their toolkits.’ (2003:20).

Richards *et al.* (2004b:5) - a qualitative study, with a large geographical coverage, following groups of combatants, some of whom had been known to the principal researcher for many years - state that: ‘Rather large numbers of ex-combatants encountered were waiting for the complete delivery of promised reintegration benefits, and were becoming uneasy as the scheduled date for closure of NCDDR loomed.’

A remark is in place: all three studies were executed while the DDR programme was still operating. So it is still possible that ex-combatants did in fact receive their entitlements in the end, but if so the charge that delivery was often severely delayed still stands. NCDDR, confronted with the outcomes of above studies, tended to speed up delivery of entitlements to the ex-combatants in question. However, it remains doubtful whether NCDDR succeeded in all cases. Figures produced by Stavrou *et al.* (2003) indicate that those ex-combatants who completed their training 18 months prior to the study are more likely to have received their toolkit straight after graduation than those ex-combatants who completed their training less than 6 months prior to the study. In other words, NCDDR and the IP’s kept their promises, as far as toolkits are concerned, better during the initial stages of the DDR programme than later on. One conclusion might be that the efficiency of earlier operations reflected the perceived threat that combatants still posed to the peace. Later, complacency may have set in.

The importance of receiving a toolkit cannot be underestimated. According to more than 85% of the interviewees in the Stavrou study, the toolkit was instrumental in finding employment or creating work. In Sierra Leone tools are usually *not* provided by the contractor but are supposed to be brought along by the person being contracted, in particular when it concerns small contracts. Without tools one will not easily get a job. Even so, the DDR programme was highly valued by the ex-combatants. Humphreys & Weinstein (2004)

¹⁵⁸ Of all ex-combatants I interviewed during fieldwork, only *one* had his DDR process run from the beginning to the end as it was supposed to. Almost every single ex-combatant experienced problems with the process. The main problem was delay in the issuing of different entitlements (in particular the C and D) or the total unavailability of some elements (in particular D).

conclude that: 'Despite these specific complaints, the DDR programmes received very positive overall reviews from ex-combatants.' (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2004:3). What contributes to this overwhelming positive feeling of ex-combatants about the DDR process? In this respect it is important to realize that the majority of the combatants, from all factions, came out of the war with next to nothing. Many will have greatly appreciated the Transitional Safety Allowance, the monthly allowances, the training and the toolkits already, especially as an aid to supporting dependents, either in their communities or at training sites. And this has reinforced the lesson that life in post-war Sierra Leone is not only a struggle for ex-combatants but for the majority of the population. The ex-combatants at least had the opportunity to benefit from training or other packages in part.

DDR validation: a right or a privilege?

To some extent the numerous ex-combatants who received their DDR entitlements after long delays, or received only part, were still the lucky ones. It seems that a substantial - but difficult to estimate - group of combatants of all factions was never able to register under DDR. Several causes can be distinguished, preventing registration under DDR:

- Large numbers of CDF fighters fought with single barrel shot guns or bush knives. According to the DDR standard the basic qualification was the possession of a modern weapon, ruling out these hunting implements.
- Commanders ordered their fighters to disarm at the base, rather than at the UNAMSIL disarmament site. Some of these commanders never returned weapons to their fighters, enabling them to distribute the guns they collected among friends, relatives and village patrons with whom they wished to make friends, perhaps in order to gain permission to settle. These new patrons made their own choices about whom to benefit, and often selected clients who might never have been near the war. These gun holders were validated for DDR without having been fighters. Real but unarmed fighters were left with nothing. It seems to have happened to quite a large number of ex-combatants.
- Some combatants (perhaps a smaller group) refused to go to the disarmament sites. Some older CDF fighters just slipped quietly back into village society, having no interest in training. Among the RUF, some fighters refused to go to the DDR sites out of fear of punishment at the hands of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission or Special Court. In some cases, these fears appear to have been deliberately cultivated by commanders, enabling them to distribute weapons among new post-war friends or potential clients.
- A perhaps equally small percentage of the fighters disarmed (from '98 and onwards) before the final disarmament took place. They neither profited fully from earlier (disrupted) disarmament programmes, nor were they able to register for the subsequent one (having already handed over their weapons).

Richards *et al* (2004b) estimate, based on various ex-combatant sources, that – overall - the number of excluded combatants might be as high as 50-60%, and the number of CDF combatants excluded through not possessing a modern weapon as high as 80%. This figure was based on examining detailed records kept by the Kenema District CDF secretariat. The data set classifies all CDF fighters in the district by chiefdom of operation and weapons carried. The modern weapons were mainly clustered in the mining chiefdoms. Projecting from these data suggests there might have been as many as 200,000 CDF fighters in all. This seems too high, except that in some chiefdoms practically every able bodied adult male did, in the end, play some kind of role in the CDF, acting as vigilantes, spies, trackers and the like - and running high risks – even if not engaging in pitched battles. The CDF view is that the

organization defended the country when no else would do so, so the government owes its members inclusion in DDR. To illustrate the situation of those not able to register, some interview fragments are now given:

- Ex-RUF combatant: *After disarmament it is better for you to go far away so that you will not see the person everyday who has taken your benefit.*
- Female ex-RUF combatant: *During the time of the disarmament many were afraid to go and register. They said that the pictures they take are not only for DDR and that the A, B, C, and D on the ID card stand for A is for Pademba Road [prison], B is for the Special Court, C is for the TRC and only D is for the disarmament. Everything - your name and picture - will be in the computer.*
- A group of four ex-CDF fighters: *Our weapons were collected at an earlier stage in the war. Our initiator collected them to bring them to a place where the fighting was more intense. So although we have fought we were not entitled to any DDR support because we did not have a weapon. After that time we were either in Kono working as miners, or as farmers in other areas. If the war would start again, we will not join. The reason is that we did not get anything out of this fight. We did what they asked us to do. Now, if another war will start, we will not join because of all these false promises. This disappointment is very dangerous.*
- Female ex-RUF combatant: *I am 35 years of age. Both my parents died during the war. I was caught by the rebels in 1992. I never went to school. I was cooking for the rebels. I have been disarmed for two years now but I never received any benefit. Through friends I have been able to learn some tailoring and gara tie-dye. At the moment I am just doing some business [petty trade].*
- Commander in ex-junta forces: *Many of the junta fighters choose to go back to the army after May 2000 so they did not disarm. By that time Johnny Paul [Koroma] was helping the Kabbah government. Then they were trained by the British. I myself stayed for another year in the army but there was nothing for me to do so I planned to leave. But when I left I was arrested. The senior ex-junta members are not trusted by the New SLA whenever they talk to their juniors. Most of these seniors are put away in Pademba Prison for little things. When a junior is accused for something, his uniform is taken away and he will be dismissed. But for the seniors it is different. At the moment there are five ex-junta officers, who all have been trained by the British, in Kono prison. Presently I guess there are about 50 junta soldiers in town, but there are many more in the [diamond] pits around town, all with similar stories. We all are just surviving through our networks and some by means of mining. I myself make some money as the coach of this football team. I fought from '91 up till disarmament and I never got any benefit out of it. I am very angry on the government.*

Humphreys & Weinstein (2004) state that: 'NCDDR acknowledges that the disarmament process missed a sizeable number of former fighters. Official estimates tend to congregate around 3000 or so.¹⁵⁹ Many of these fighters fled across the border to fight in conflicts in neighbouring countries; others, particularly from the CDF, self-reintegrated into their home communities.' (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2004:15). In their own sample of a thousand ex-combatants, 138 (14%) did not participate in the DDR programme. The researchers also note that, although measures were taken to limit any bias, there may have been bias towards sampling DDR participants, since DDR lists were an important source in identifying the locations of ex-combatants being interviewed. Moreover: 'To the extent that individuals

¹⁵⁹ This figure does not refer to the - predominately CDF - combatants who fought with cutlasses or single barrel guns, and who were not considered combatants, according to DDR standards, in the first place.

participated in the war but did *not* see themselves as fighters,¹⁶⁰ it is unlikely that survey teams were able to identify such individuals and recruit them to interviews.’ (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2004:16). Assuming Humphreys & Weinstein’s data to be a true random sample of all fighters, extrapolation gives a number of about 10,000 ex-combatants who escaped DDR (cf. 70,000 who did pass through), but with a proviso that if sample bias could be corrected and CDF fighters without modern weapons included the figure would be significantly larger still. Among these 10,000 ex-combatants it is likely that the majority were low in rank, and in the particular among the ex-RUF group, to have been abducted. These unfortunate young people are now among the most vulnerable groups to exploitation in post-war Sierra Leone. The war has deprived such young people of the - perhaps little - education they could have had, and in many cases dragged them far from their places of origin.¹⁶¹ They simply lack the funds to travel home to reintegrate, and without skills training do the worst kind of manual jobs, for little or no pay. Remote from the potential protection of family and kin they approximate to the condition of 19th century domestic slaves (cf. Richards *et al.*[2004b] for details of a specific instance).

Denial of the government and NCDDR of a rural/agrarian crisis of youth

It seems rather odd to assume that the Government of Sierra Leone is not aware of the socio-political and economic situation of young people from weak families in isolated and run-down rural areas. On the other hand, the lack of measures by the government to address the problem, which this thesis argues is a major cause for the outbreak of the conflict, suggests that Freetown is indeed not aware or fails to see the significance of the problem. A central policy of the government is to decentralise power by rebuilding and re-strengthening 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 tax payers. 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 tax payer’s 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 only the Government’s alone. NCDDR equally missed an opportunity to act constructively in relation to this crisis. The reintegration package, part of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme, offered the former 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. As mentioned, about 70% of the population in Sierra Leone is in some way or the other dependent on (semi) subsistence agriculture for its livelihood. But only about 15% 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; the work 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

¹⁶⁰ It is possible that fighters only identify themselves as such when they have participated in the DDR process.

¹⁶¹ Thousands of ex-combatants or camp-followers, born in the North and West of the country, are now in the East and visa versa. Most of them do not share the same language with local populations.

found the idea of involving oneself 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 compared to 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 the Implementing Partners of NCDDR.

It is necessary to explore this deficit a bit more closely. Politics and corruption are part of the answer. As pointed out before: ‘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’ (Richards 1996:48). Many urban-based elites, including politicians, have mining concessions and have 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. It is better to keep the countryside 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 (i.e. skills training was never supposed to make good a longer term deficit in training, only to keep these angry young people occupied long enough for their militia organizations to lose command and control). But an even more negative interpretation also seems possible. Had young people moved into pig farming, poultry rearing and oil palm cultivation on a large scale - as many wanted to - 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 merchant-capital dominated mining sector 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. Demand is not infinite, especially in a country with an economy running at such 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 on-going training programmes based on monthly allowances. A former CDF administrator and Implementing Partner himself 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, twenty or thirty 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 [e.g. 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 starting 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 of their training, rather than hanging around idle in the (expensive) towns where these vocational projects were predominately located. However, in many cases the call did not come, or if it came, announced on the radio, was heard too late. Moreover, there are many cases documented of ex-combatants travelling to town after an announcement of NCDDR that the new candidates had been short-listed, 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 be easily 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. The urban “lumpen” hypothesis had done its work.

Agrarian solutions to the challenge of ex-combatants’ reintegration

Making agricultural packages central

Two sectors in the Sierra Leonean economy are capable of absorbing large numbers of predominately young ex-combatants with limited or no educational qualifications, namely the agricultural and mining sector. If NCDDR had done its sums (perhaps it did, if the cynical hypothesis above 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 the ex-combatants could 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 prefers 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 the agricultural sector.

Demand is not a problem, since the country’s food production is currently 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 of emergency

relief, and food bought on supposedly open markets, but in fact highly subsidised by Europe and North America. Still the majority of Sierra Leoneans survive on one meal a day.

It is often assumed that ex-combatants have little interest in agriculture, but is this really true?¹⁶² Richards (2005d) 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% 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 tools¹⁶³ 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 have 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 largely made up of young people. As a result of time spent under arms they tend to have lost agricultural experience, with the exception of RUF cadres who believed that they ought to farm as well as fight. Agricultural skills training thus seems to be required. Basic skills are needed, but it could also 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 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, e.g. contact is not 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 farmers field schools, pioneered by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. It is not outlandish to suggest that the “RUF” projects should be followed closely in coming years, to see if they offer useful pointers to involving rural youth in agricultural training more generally.

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.

¹⁶² 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 have been exposed to farming during their time in an Interim Care Centre, waiting Family Tracing, were more involved in agriculture than their counter parts 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.

¹⁶³ The basic tools needed for involving oneself in upland rice (and mixed cropping) farming are: a cutlass, an axe and a hoe. Swamp rice production requires besides these three already mentioned tools also a shovel, a spade and a pick axe.

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 particular rural youth organise themselves as “labour gangs” to perform these tasks, sometimes on a rotational basis, and sometimes they hire themselves out to third parties as a group (see before). 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 activities – e.g. contract ploughing with a power tiller or cassava grating.

So there is both scope for the individualistic farmer as well as for ex-combatants who prefer to remain together as a group. The group solidarities created during the war do not have to be only destructive, and thus a focus for demobilisation. They could also be remobilised, i.e. directed 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

Again it seems that there is little problem for the older ex-combatants who were already involved in agriculture before the war. Many have established land rights. Many 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-combatants 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 not oriented to enforcing contractual agreements. To overcome this limitation the Tongo project used waste land, which was easier to negotiate from the land owners. 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. However, how well this works over time is unclear. According to the founders of NADA, the success of their association was at risk because the community continued to treat them as “strangers”, making mobilisation of labour much more difficult. BANSAL was more successful, partly because the organisers built up a good working relationship with local communities during the war. 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 using violence - as often as not it depends on a return to the world of deference to elders from which the movement tried to break away. And the undue reverence in which the young cadres still hold the late Foday Sankoh (their papei) indicates that there are no easy answers to the question what lies beyond patrimonialism.

Towards a new approach to agricultural training

In post-war countries like Sierra Leone, undergoing DDR (Liberia is the obvious example), 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 make agriculture more attractive. This will require some degree of creative thinking.

It is clear from the kind of analysis undertaken above that three kinds of agricultural packages 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, 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 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 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 might indeed be an agricultural settlement. In this way the ex-combatants can profit from each other's knowledge and outside experts - an experienced villager or extension officer - targets a large audience with advice. Again tools and seeds must be provided and 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/community¹⁶⁴ and the ex-combatants (cf. Tongo case). Farming communities will additionally benefit when provisions are made in the project design for the introduction of simple farm-level innovations (e.g. 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" (i.e. especially forced) community labour (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 through villages offering mechanised ploughing or cassava or rice milling services comes to mind. 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

¹⁶⁴ 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 overgrown. Harvesting on a pre-war scale will only be possible after labour intensive brushing. It might be worth to explore 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.

heavy equipment around the bush, only this time for peaceful (money-making) purposes (Richards pers. comm.). Some former cadres also got involved in simple forms of rural transportation, using home-made wheel barrows and two-wheeled carts to bring produce to local markets. In Sierra Leone, groups of CDF ex-combatants have formed labour gangs to undertake agricultural rehabilitation contracts: brushing plantations, levelling swamps and rehabilitating feeder roads so necessary for the marketing of local produce, on contract to NGOs and even UNAMSIL. Demand will eventually 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 – e.g they can be for 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 taking place in the rural areas.¹⁶⁵ We have seen above that the socio-economic and political situation in the rural areas has been for many young people a reason 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,¹⁶⁶ at the same time as ex-combatants receive training and agricultural packages. Otherwise, the thrust of the analysis in this thesis suggests that 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 & 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 in re-introducing 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 will be to re-visit 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 re-settle chiefs and their subjects. One point that comes out these documents (held in the Governance Reform Secretariat offices in Freetown) is the extent to which youth and women were no longer prepared to be subjects, but felt that their role and sufferings) in the war had already entitled them to be considered citizens. Building on this change of political mood is probably one of the major consequences of the war, and the basis for successful rural reintegration of the rebellious cadres and the populations once sought to destroy.

¹⁶⁵ However, the importance of farming or vegetable gardening in urban areas should not be underestimated in developing countries.

¹⁶⁶ At the same time macro-economic 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 (road block “taxes” imposed by the security services, and such like).

Chapter 8

Realities of reintegration: between conformity and transformation

Introduction

The term *reintegration* of ex-combatants is somehow a peculiar one. It suggests that the ex-combatants need to be supported and equipped to make their re-entry to peaceful society successful, but does not ask if there is still something into which to reintegrate. It is assumed that the physical and social structures of communities exist, and continue to function. This assumption is especially troubling if and where (as argued in this thesis) these pre-war structures might be suspected of playing some kind of catalytic role in conflict generation.

Many villages and communities in Sierra Leone suffered extensive destruction during the conflict, and many inhabitants were forced to seek refuge at some time or other. Over the decade long war more than half of the population of the country was displaced. The process of re-claiming and re-inhabiting villages was already under way during the war, since the conflict was often localised. But it was only after the war that the bulk of displaced people returned to the worst affected areas. And return was more than a matter of making villages function again: roads had to be safe and repaired to allow transport to resume, it was necessary to re-start legal institutions and re-elect local authorities, schools and clinics had to be rebuilt, and often, reconciliation activities were needed to make normal village life possible again. It is safe to state that many villages and communities are as yet only half the places in physical, demographic, socio-economic and legal terms, they were before the war.

If there were not so much at stake, one could describe the post-war rehabilitation of villages, communities and towns as exciting. To some extent this rehabilitation is as much a fight as the war – a fight in which contested claims concerning rights and positions surface. Some players “stood their ground”, remaining in the village during the war, and subsequently claim privileges, varying from farming land to a voice on the village council, as reward for their efforts, which they view as keeping alive the possibility of return for those who fled. Then there are the early returnees, often younger inhabitants, who pioneered much of the actual physical rehabilitation of the villages.¹⁶⁷ Older people, or those who had the means to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, returned later. Generally, the last to return were the local authorities and patrons or “big men”, who - through their contacts or money - had the means to escape the bitterness of war and limit the impact of the conflict on themselves and their families. They returned with the hope or expectation that everything would return to “normal”, i.e. the pre-war situation would re-assert itself. But new powerful players and groups have arisen during the war. These include local CDF commanders, who played an active role in protecting the villages, and now lay claim to influence over daily matters, and

¹⁶⁷ Some youths of Sendumei, a village presented as a case study below, explain: *It was by the end of '96 that we returned to this place, just after the rebels were driven away. We stayed at that time at a displaced camp close to Bo. Then the Kamajors gave the information that the place was safe. We returned in a group, mainly consisting of young people. The road was so much overgrown. So we started to clean the place and sent a message. First the citizens came and later some people from the Potoru area. From that day on, when we gave that message, people started to return.* (It is almost impossible to maintain the anonymity of this settlement, because - after the great majority of its population fled - it became well known during the war as a base from which RUF raids were launched on the main Bo-Kenema highway. In a second village case study (a village in Kailahun) I have not made known the name of the place, especially since it remained populated during the war, and is a village from which fighters of all factions came, and in which peace-making is on-going).

women, displaced to urban centres where they saw a different, more emancipated lifestyle, who are unwilling to accept the pre-war situation anymore. As a result, local traditional authorities are challenged by commoners, both ex-combatants and civilians, who claim that their “*eyes are open*” as a result of the war.

That there is more at stake than only the physical reconstruction of war-torn villages and communities becomes all the more clear when one realises that the causes of the conflict must be sought in the marginalisation of young people through the pre-war attitudes of elders and traditional leaders. Where the DDR process has been for many ex-combatants a test of the sincerity of the government and its proclaimed new direction, the process of post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation of villages and communities is the test for local authorities and traditional values; will it be business as usual based on pre-war (traditional) institutions as tools for exploitation by local and national elites, or are changes going to take place based on more inclusive and democratic principles? Or to put it plainly - what social lessons (if any) have been learnt from the war?

It is extremely difficult to give a general answer to the question how the reintegration process is going in Sierra Leone. Since there are so many factors influencing the reintegration process of an ex-combatant, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to state that every single ex-combatant represents a unique combination of factors. Some of these factors are obvious; for example if an ex-combatant has received a DDR toolkit or not,¹⁶⁸ or whether he or she has been fighting with the RUF or with the CDF.¹⁶⁹ But there are also many factors not taken into account in quantitative research that nevertheless play a role in the reintegration process: is the ex-combatant the oldest son of the father or does he have older brothers? Is the father still alive or already deceased? This affects whether or not the ex-combatant can assert control over resources, or is dependent on the willingness of older family members to be reconciled. The ex-combatant might indicate that land is owned, but how far is it away from the village and what is its quality? How long has the ex-combatant fought, and how severe is any trauma that he or she might have developed? Was he or she initiated into the secret society (Poro for men, Sande for women) before or during the war? Non-initiates will be regarded as an outsider or child, whatever their age, etc.

A few case histories are now presented, to give a sense of the multiple trajectories of reintegration. These case histories cannot answer the question whether or not the reintegration process of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone is to be regarded a success or failure overall. Rather, the aim is to give the reader a taste of the complexity of the changing society into which ex-combatants must attempt to reintegrate. Indeed, “align” might be a better term than “re-integrate”. Each case illustrates one or other of several major factors relevant to the reintegration process. The cases are purposely chosen to cover reintegration trajectories in, respectively 1) rural, 2) mining and, 3) urban settings. The three reintegration trajectories illustrate how ex-combatants (and youth in general) still struggle with the problematic issues determining marginalisation and exclusion before the war. The first case study – covering two villages in rural Sierra Leone - draws attention to the relationship between elders and youth after resettlement. It becomes clear that some kind of “youth emancipation” has taken place, and elders cannot rely on their “customary” authority to sanction or exploit young people, as would have been the case before the war. Where resettled ex-combatants are concerned, as is the case in one village, youth emancipation sometimes takes extreme forms.

¹⁶⁸ But even in these straightforward cases complicating factors arise such as the possible stigmatisation (an obstacle for reintegration) that might take place after an ex-combatant arrives with a toolkit (a marker of DDR support, and thus of having been a combatant) in his or her village.

¹⁶⁹ A combatant with RUF history who behaved badly in his or her village might not return home after the war but might then reintegrate smoothly in another location.

The second case study describes the tensions between a returning landholding group and a large group of “footloose” or “family-less” former RUF combatants, unwilling to subject themselves to the propertied local elite. This tension is played out against the background of mining in Tongo, the town described in the preface, and focuses on the issue of housing.

The last case deals with a partial answer to the problem of lack of employment (and/or control over jobs by patrons). An interesting urban economic niche for ex-combatants unwilling to return to their rural communities is described. Some make their living by riding motorbikes as a local taxi. What makes this case so interesting, besides the fact that it is a new (post-war) development, is that the bike riders have organised themselves as a membership-based trade association drawing some inspiration from modalities associated with former fighting groups. This case study (for Makeni) shows similarities and some differences between Makeni and Bo (where Fithen & Richards [2005] analyse similar developments). All-in-all, the cases (in their diversity) show how complex the issue of reintegration is.

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Reintegration in a rural setting: case I*Back to normal? Life in Sendumei, a former rebel stronghold*

Sendumei is a village about halfway along the dirt road from Blama to Potoru in Kenema District. A two hour trip by public transport will take you from the village to Kenema. The village is the headquarters of Niawa Chiefdom. This Mende-speaking village depends, like so many villages in Sierra Leone, on a combination of subsistence (rice) farming and cash (tree) crops. Before the war, many of the younger people left the village on a temporary basis, during slack periods in the farming year, to labour in diamond pits. Some went as far as Tongo or Kono, but since the slack period lasted only two or three months, most went to nearby sites, such as the area above Blama. This practice has been resumed since the war. According to the secretary of the village youths organization: *Here in the village you do not have a choice; you must be interested in farming. Youths who are not interested leave and go to the diamond mines or go back to the towns. The youth are more interested in swamp rice because it is the most simple and it takes 4 to 5 months [one cycle]. Then they still have time to go to the mining areas. Elders are more interested in upland farming because of the mixed cropping. The youths already help their parents in the upland farms so they do not have the zeal [energy] anymore to start their own [upland farm]. I estimate that between 35% and 40% of the youths who live in this town are in the diamond areas. Most of them return when it is harvesting time, but some will stay behind in the mining areas.*

Sendumei had its first taste of war at the beginning of 1994. After the near defeat of the RUF by the end of 1993, the movement withdrew into the Gola forest complex, and established, early in 1994 (see chapter 3) a string of bush camps, fanning out through the interconnected reserves running from the Liberian border to the centre of the country. The main RUF camp during 1994-1996 was the mysterious “Zogoda”, located in the Kambui Hills South reserve. Kambui South is the hinge of hill-top forest that links the border Gola reserves with the extensive forests of the centre of the country. This key camp was only about 4 kilometres (as the crow flies) from Sendumei. The nearby villages, including Sendumei, were all under the control of the RUF. Units of the RUF were based in Sendumei village, and G5 officers supervised the few civilians remaining in the area (augmented by civilians captured by the RUF in other areas and brought to Sendumei and neighbouring villages to work). According to the chief of Sendumei: *There are almost 4000 people in this town. But not more than 5% stayed during the war. The rebels searched the [areas] surrounding the village for people. Later, when the Zogoda was attacked the rebels burned this place down and looted everything. They established the Zogoda in March 1994. It was in 1996 [in either late September or early October] that the Zogoda was sacked. And in 1997 the place was declared safe and continued [from that time] to be safe.*

The attack on the “Zogoda” was a joint operation of the Kamajors and hand-picked units of the Sierra Leonean Military,¹⁷⁰ trained by EO. Interviews with Kamajor fighters involved in the operation were undertaken in October 1996 by Patrick Muana in Kenema (Richards *et al.* 1997). EO operatives have also provided accounts of the sacking of the Zogoda. Hooper (2002) claims a Nigerian (ECOMOG) Howitzer battery was a key element in the operation.

By the end of 1996 the rebels had been driven out of the Kambui South reserve, and never came back again. The young people of Sendumei played an important role in making the ground safe in the aftermath of the EO-coordinated attack, and they now make claims based on their achievement. Sendumei youth were both members of the Kamajor group involved in driving the rebels away, and later among the group of pioneers leaving the displaced camps to

¹⁷⁰Some informants claim that the RSLMF only moved in after the fighting was finished.

return to Sendumei and commence its rebuilding. According to one of these early returnees: *Youth played an important role in the war. The Kamajors were youths and they protected the people and the chiefs. So the chiefs have realised that if you squeeze the youth too hard they will run back to the bush and retaliate. The chiefs have been sensitised due to the war. Even if we, the youths, have money, they will not fine us a higher amount. That is because they have been sensitised.*

In addition to using the jargon of the relief agencies working in displaced camps, who regularly “sensitise” their charges, the last statement raises an interesting issue. It has been argued in this thesis that the socio-economic and political marginalisation of the youth in Sierra Leone was a root cause of the conflict. Here we see an opposite development taking place: young Sierra Leoneans making claims, based on their role as defenders of the community during the wartime, to better rights and a fairer treatment by the older generation, while at the same time suggesting that traditional authorities have begun to realise there can be no return to the pre-war situation, without running the danger of another rebel war, this time fought by the very youth who rallied to the CDF.¹⁷¹ It is not an isolated response. Others have reported on the way the war has helped to empower and emancipate sections of rural youth, who now expect the chiefs they assisted to change, to head off the danger that the CDF might one day become a new RUF (cf. Archibald & Richards 2002, Richards *et al.* 2004b). Exactly those issues that led to the social exclusion and vagrancy of rural young people in the past and fed the war, are under question. The levying of high fines for minor offences, paid off in labour, the dragooning of young people for community labour (Mende *ta yenge*, “town work”), or excessive demands for bride service are customs increasingly under dispute by young people in Sendumei. But whether this challenge is more than bravado and rhetoric seems doubtful from material to be discussed below.

There are many factors which influence this process of questioning custom. In some villages the socio-economic and political circumstances have truly changed, perhaps because a new and younger chief has taken position, or because a young CDF commander has become a dominant player in the politics of the village. In other villages little change has taken place, perhaps because the war did not really affect the village, or because local elites were able to capture and manage external support from NGOs to restore their political dominance in the village. But it seems unlikely that many villages will remain the same as before the war.

Change not only arrived through realisation by traditional authorities that the marginalisation of young people creates an easily-recruited pool of disaffected fighters. There is also a more practical effect of the war; it eroded the financial power of elders over the youth. The Sendumei chief explains: *Youths can still help their parents but not in the same way as before the war. This change is because of the war. Before, the parents took care of all the financial responsibilities,¹⁷² but now they cannot do that because they do not have the money. So the youth say: why should we help for nothing?* Where poverty used to marginalize some youth, it is now so general and pervasive that it sets an entire rural generation free of control by elders, who simply lack the resources to renew themselves as patrons. And yet despite rhetoric of youth fed on military success Sendumei appears a village where actual

¹⁷¹ According to some senior men, including the chief of Sendumei, NGOs also played a role in this: *The NGOs sensitised us about the necessary changes that were needed. We attended a workshop about the role of the chiefs and about the youths.* The government also played a part. There was a programme for restoration of Paramount Chiefs in which consultations by teams mandated by the Secretariat for Governance Reform were carried out in more than sixty accessible chiefdoms (mainly in the southern and eastern provinces) during 1999 and 2000. An objective was to listen to local grievances, in order to gain the support of young people to contribute labour to the building of houses to accommodate returning chiefs. Meetings lasted two days, and often involved role play exercises on factors participants put forward as having contributed to the war (Archibald & Richards 2002).

¹⁷² We only have to look at the pre-war school enrollment figures (see Wright [in Skelt 1997] and Davies 1996) to see that the statement is too optimistic.

institutional values have changed rather little. Customs and regulations concerning the relation between the youth and the elders are still deemed to have morally binding force.¹⁷³ According to some elders: *All the youth in the town belong to us. They work for us and for the development of the town. The youth is providing the community their labour free of costs. Normally they will brush the roads but now they are busy on their farms, controlling the pests [rodents and birds] that affect the rice. They work in groups on a “tehigi”¹⁷⁴ [rotational] basis. The youths are obliged to work on the elder’s farms, sometimes in groups and sometimes on an individual basis. And if the youths do some mining and get some money they will hand it over to their parents. We are their parents and we show them care and whenever there is a [court, or secret society] case the parents will take the responsibility [to pay fines] for their youthful child. And it is the parents who arrange the marriages and sometimes pay for the dowry [bride wealth]. Even if a boy has money, the parents of the girl will still go to the parents of the boy. Little has changed after the war compared with before the war. We do not like radical changes in our customs. Immediately after we resettled the [secret] society started their initiations on an annual basis. After that there have been no further problems. If a boy or girl runs away, to escape initiation, we send the parents to catch the person and bring him or her to the society. Everybody who resettles and has not yet been initiated will be [treated] so.*

At issue seems to be the extent to which, in specific cases, such as that of Sendumei, the elders have been able to access resources on resettlement for the key event through which their power is reproduced – viz. initiation. Resettlement in Sendumei started at the end of 1996, and in early 1997, during the time of the Abidjan peace accord, when external support was locally available. The villagers mention specific support from ICRC, major facilitators of the evacuation of the RUF leadership from the Zogoda to Abidjan for peace talks. To hold an initiation requires considerable amounts of rice – besides other food items – and most resettling communities are unable to hold the necessary ceremonies until several years after resettlement, when agriculture has sufficiently recovered. With external support, Sendumei was able to resume perhaps more quickly than other settlements less in the international limelight. The point about initiation by the seniority plays a key role. Much of the symbolism of secret societies has to do with the submission of the initiates to the Poro and Sande authorities. According to Murphy the initiation period is more about inducing an atmosphere of fear than actually learning something. It is aimed to intensify respect for elders and benefit from the fruits of labour during the initiation period (Murphy 1980). With external sources of

¹⁷³ In other villages the pre-war relationship between elders and youth has changed more drastically, as we will see in the next case story of the village of A., or in the following account of an elder in the village of Levuma (a settlement between Mobai and Pendembu in Kailahun district). These villages have been more affected by the war (and were under RUF occupation for a long time). As a result little of the wealth of the pre-war elite and senior class has survived. This has its effect on the relationship between the elders and the youth. An elder comments on this: *Between the elders and the youth there is a misunderstanding because they have different interests. Youths are interested in education, skills training, entertainment and sport. But elders have more interest in society and culture and like the traditional way of solving conflicts. The youth like to solve problems in a simple way. But traditionally the elders were levying fines after they had come together to discuss. The youth however just want to confess and then forget. The youths do not respect the elders anymore because the elders are poor nowadays. But if we are able to raise money from our farms and plantations the youth will respect us once again. But this is only possible if we receive external support. (...) This fining of the youth really solved the problems that occurred because when we were able to fine them they were afraid of us. I have a few mature sons but I cannot force them to work on my farm, they just go there on their own terms. While blaming the youth for not having respect for the elderly, the old man concludes his explanation with a self-reflective statement: *It will not be possible to divide the [my] land, because it will only create more problems as I have many children. The educated ones live faraway but one day they will come back. This whole problem has been created by this polygamy. In particular when the man dies there will be a lot of problems. In fact, it has been one of the root causes of the conflict.**

¹⁷⁴ For a discussion of different forms of rural labour gangs in Sierra Leone, see chapter 2.

food Sendumei elders were rather quickly able to subdue their recalcitrant young people, before too much damage had been caused to tradition.

The young people in Sendumei do not deny the authority of the elders. According to the secretary of the youth association in Sendumei: *As far as the community labour is concerned, the chiefs and elders can order the youth groups to do the work. But the elders cannot force us to do this work every day. There is a good relationship between the youths and the elders. The parents will help to arrange the marriages and take care of the wives whenever the youths are going to the diamond areas. They also resolve any issues arising, so that is why we respect the elders. Whenever you have committed a crime the elders will [enter a] plea on your behalf. The control of the elders over the youth is because of their monopoly in pleading on our behalf. Because if a person is asked to pay Le 100,000 it means that in fact a person is asked to leave the town. In the end it is the elders who are really in control because they have the final word [on who stays, or who becomes a vagrant].* The secretary of youth is a brokerage position generally approved by the elders. He is more than likely to take a conservative line, since he knows that it is the elders who have to be placated. His comments suggest the war may have changed remarkably little.

Another aspect that does not appear to have changed is the weak position of (poor) “strangers”. Unlike native youths, young strangers do not have a family to speak on their behalf and are thus in an extremely vulnerable position. The war has created many “strangers” since so many people have fled from their original area but not all have returned or have been able to return. A special category among this group of strangers is the ex-combatants and camp followers of, in particular, the RUF. As mentioned before, many RUF ex-combatants from the north can be found stranded in the east and south of the country, while many from the east and the south have ended up in the north. They not only lack family ties but also struggle with a different tribal language and different customs. The following account of one such young “stranger” (it is unclear whether he is an ex-combatant) illustrates the vulnerable position in which tens of thousands of dislocated Sierra Leoneans find themselves. At first this informant’s vulnerability is apparent not in his words but in his reluctance to criticise: *I am a stranger to this town, I come from Magburaka. Everything is smooth, there are no problems. Only the tools and the seed rice [are] a problem. I am working on the land of my wife. As long as you are hard working there is no problem. There is [then] no difference between the citizens and strangers.* But he then reports a new self-reliance among youths. By implication, the chiefs, before the war, exploited young people through manipulating dispute resolution. But after the war, and due to the fact that young people were among the first to return, and the chiefs last, the youths now try and sort things out among themselves: *We as the youths try to solve issues to prevent that we have to carry [our disputes] to the chiefs. This is how we do after the war. We started this among the people who returned to this place first. It was really a mixed group of people who were the first to return.*

Having reminded himself of this new youth self-reliance he then feels more secure, and modifies his picture of the position of a stranger: *But as a stranger you must be careful, because nobody will talk on your behalf, in particular when you do not have money. As a non-citizen..., they summons [fined] me Le 150,000, of which I [have] already paid Le 50,000. I must be very careful otherwise they will drive me out of this place. It is only after several years that you become a bit closer and only if you behave very calmly. Then they may start to talk on your behalf, even to other villagers in other places. Strangers and citizens are not held in the same way, so the strangers link together.* In other words, the new self-reliance is found among strangers as well as among youth.

Then finally he makes a most significant comment, about the way the burdens of community labour and donations (informal taxes) for community development work fall upon those lacking local citizenship rights: *They, the chiefs, ask for contributions, but for me as a*

stranger I will not see the benefit of it. Perhaps a third of the total population of rural Sierra Leone counts as strangers (Richards *et al.* 2004a). Demands for unpaid community labour are levied on strangers as well as citizens, but strangers are more likely to move on (or be moved on) and thus see less benefit from their exertions. The disenfranchisement that fed vagrancy (and militia recruitment) in the countryside pre-war remains, but there is now sufficient confidence among the marginalized to talk about the issue, even if in guarded terms. Those who have known Sierra Leone over the longer term consider this a real shift in mood (Archibald & Richards 2002).

Reintegration in a rural setting: case II

War-induced shifts in inter-generational values: reintegration in A.

A. is a village of not more than five hundred inhabitants on the old (and broken) paved road from Daru to Pendembu in Kailahun District. Located close to the edge of the Gola North Forest Reserve it is only 15 kilometres from the Liberian border. The chiefdom headquarters – Mobai – is slightly larger, and before the war boasted a secondary school, a hospital, a palm kernel mill and a shop and bar or two to provide mainly for cocoa farmers and diamond diggers. A. is a Mende-speaking village people, though like most settlements in the region is far from ethnically homogenous. In religion the villagers are almost exclusively Muslim. Before the war the inhabitants of A. mainly depended on agriculture. Upland and swamp rice farming are combined with tree cash-crops, mainly cocoa, coffee, oil palm and cola. Production was considerable. Household heads often owned plantations of over four or five hectares. Three produce buying agents were active in the village. Many farmers in satellite villages brought their produce to market in A.

There was one primary school in the village, which had on average about 50 pupils. Any pupil who wanted to go to secondary school, in Mobai for instance, had to pass a common entrance exam. According to a former teacher only about 30% of pupils continued their education in secondary school. This was less because of difficulties in passing the exam than because of lack of funds to pay secondary school fees. For the young school dropouts there was little alternative than to involve themselves in farming. However, the older ones – between the ages of 15 to 20 – often tried their luck in the diamond areas or major towns. Many dreamed that finding one large stone would be enough to put them back into full-time education. They remained out for several years, only visiting A. sporadically during holidays or off-seasons. In the end a few youths who were successful returned to K, but most continued in the pits or towns, hoping for a break one day. Some recognised sooner or later that success had eluded them, and returned to A., where they had no other option than to involve themselves in farming after all. The educational situation in A. deteriorated after the primary school teacher left the job as a result of the low salary and delay in payments.¹⁷⁵ He became a nurse in Mobai in a private clinic, leaving A. without a single teacher. As a result many of the children went to the Koranic school¹⁷⁶ in the nearby village of Y. However, because of the

¹⁷⁵ Delays of several months were more the norm than the exception, and teachers often had to travel to the regional capital or to Freetown to collect the delayed salary.

¹⁷⁶ Van der Heide (2004:13) describes Islamic schools in Sierra Leone as follows: ‘Outside the regular schooling system there are Islamic or Koran schools. There are two types of Koran schools. One of them resembles a formal school: it has an official school building, with separate classes. Generally a high number of children (at least 50 per school) are enrolled in this type of Koran school. The other is more an informal Koran school, where the lessons take place in or outside the house of the marabout (the teacher). Normally there are less than 50 pupils enrolled in this kind of school. Children write on slates of wood (*waala*’s) with a stick. They use local ink, made of the juice of a mango, which can be easily erased. The teacher is responsible for these school materials.

limited curriculum, these informal schools are considered insufficient preparation for secondary education. According to a village elder, before the war the young people in A. behaved *in a correct way*. Whenever problems occurred – e.g. using abusive language or fighting, or having sex with a married woman, or failing to turn up for communal labour, the young people were put on trial by the authorities and fined. Those not able to pay (the elder continued) had little option than to run away and wait until the authorities had forgotten about the case, or to return after collecting enough money from labouring or helpful relatives to clear the outstanding fine.

Most of the inhabitants of A., including the youths, returned after the war. Many of the younger ones indicate an interest in resuming their education or starting vocational training or education. Neither will be easy. With few exceptions, people are farming, but this time at a reduced, subsistence level. Upland and swamp rice production for people's own consumption are the main activities. As a result of ten years of occupation by the RUF most of the cash-tree crop plantations have become overgrown.¹⁷⁷ Intensive brushing is needed before any produce can be effectively harvested. Obviously this brushing requires a lot of labour, which could be provided by the young people in the village. However, the owners of plantations do not have the financial means to hire the labour.¹⁷⁸

There are two carpenters active in the village but, although there is enough work to do, they do not have any apprentices. Again the problem is to feed them. Young men are either working on the farms, or more likely, are involved in diamond mining. There is a Fula man from Guinea who comes every morning to collect a good number of youths for a day of work in a diamond pit. This is a serious drain on the available village labour¹⁷⁹ but the youths consider it attractive since the Fula man pays them in cash. The only blacksmith active in A. has left, after being approached by a NGO to provide training in their skills centre. In a nearby village there are at least seven people who have knowledge of tailoring, but there is only one sewing machine to go around.

In May 1991, about one and a half months after the RUF entered Sierra Leone, the rebels came to A.. No battle took place, but eleven people were killed. The rebels specifically looked out for people who were in some way involved in the government, but among these eleven victims there were also ordinary civilians: *They just said that you were a "Momoh soldier" and then they killed you*, is how one villager remembers it. It seems that the majority of the RUF fighters occupying A. may have been Liberians, since they spoke Liberian English, or Krio with a Liberian accent.¹⁸⁰ The rebels - at first merely a handful, but later according to the sources up to a few hundred - made their headquarters in the eastern section of A.. The first

Classes here are shorter than in the 'formal' Koran school, most of the time only one hour a day, six days a week, while classes in the 'formal' Koran school can sometimes even take 4 hours a day, six days a week. Also the curriculum shows differences. In the 'informal' Koran school, the only subjects that are handled are Arabic language, the Koran and sometimes Islamic Law (*Sharia*). In the formal schools up to ten subjects are handled. For Muslim parents it is very important that their children go to a Koran school. First of all because the children learn the Arabic language. If you do not understand Arabic, you cannot properly read the Koran. Besides, studying the Koran and Arabic will inform the children about the norms and values of Islamic religion and religious life. And the Koran schools help to keep the children off the streets.'

¹⁷⁷ Due to increasingly effective control and boycott of products coming out of RUF territory during the last years of the war, cash crops produced in RUF territory could not be sold at the markets in Guinea or Liberia. It has been reported that RUF combatants cut down the by-then useless plantations to replace them with rice.

¹⁷⁸ No one yet seems to have thought of share-cropping. Share-cropping is an unfamiliar system in Sierra Leone, where the cash economy remains highly undeveloped in rural areas. Even share-cropping requires the landlord to contribute resources, notably – in this case – the rice needed to feed the worker.

¹⁷⁹ Some of the villagers took disputable measures: *Presently my father is using my two smaller brothers to work on his farm. They are only at the age of ten. Instead he should send them to school, as they did before.*

¹⁸⁰ Some of the Sierra Leonean Vanguarders who had lived in Liberia for several years also had the Liberian accent (i.e. spoke Liberian English).

commander was a Liberian, named James Kaway. *They said that they were freedom fighters but they behaved like bandits straight from the beginning. Youths were forced to carry looted items on their head to the Liberian border where they were forced to join them*, is how one villager describes rebel behaviour.

Another villager gives a more detailed account about the conscription process. This source claims that many of the youths who joined were those who had been forced to leave the village as a result of not being able to pay their fines; others (he asserts) were dropouts from school. The informant continues: *Some youths already decided to join the RUF as soon as it would reach A.. Other youths had no option than to join when the RUF reached the village, but because they did not run away from the village it is possible that they had in mind to join them. Some of the older people who stayed behind were forced to start working for the rebels. (...) Some of us were forced to join, others joined voluntarily. When you join they cannot abuse you anymore. Instead you can abuse other people.* The Liberians stayed for two to three years in A. and then left. The village remained occupied by the RUF for the duration of the war, and until the end of 2002. After the commander, Kaway, went back, a Sierra Leonean commander replaced him by the name of “Manawa”, In 1995 the RSLMF was able to drive the rebels out of A. towards Pendembu, but this was temporary. They returned after a few months.¹⁸¹ A villager states: *‘The rebels stayed long enough to teach the Sierra Leonean boys how to become a rebel. In 1993 the SLA soldiers drove the rebels out of the town, but now we had to work for the soldiers. We had to brush the roads so that they would have a clear vision [free fire zone]. We were just tools in the hands of fighting parties. If you refuse, they will flog you. If you die, you die.* This was as true when the RUF re-took A., which became the site of a notorious mass execution.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ The following account by a civilian who had lived under RUF control explains how living conditions could differ from place to place in RUF territory: *In 1995 the soldiers drove the rebels out of A. but they returned in 1996. They killed 70 people during that attack and from then on till the end of the war A. was under their control. We were in Daru at that time, which was under government control. But it was so difficult that we decided to go back to A. to live there. At the government checkpoint the soldiers let us pass because the food situation was so bad in Daru that they did not bother [us]. We just told them that we were in search of food. When I came to the rebel checkpoint I told them that I [had come] to visit my father. So they checked for the name of my father. Unfortunately, my father died just a few months later. Because I had to work very hard in A. for the rebels, I decided to go to B., which is also in their territory and a place where I already had lived before under their control. A. was so close to the frontline, so the rebels threatened the civilians a lot more. I told them that I would be going in search of food so they issued me a pass. Life in B. was much more normal.*

Another villager explains more about the daily life in RUF territory and how the RUF organised villages under its control: *The rebels elected their own town chief. When you enter the town a relative will bring you to the RUF town chief. In A. this man was called Foday, he was a native from a nearby village. The town-chief then introduces you to the commander. Then the laws are explained: One, never go to the soldiers side, two, for any travelling inside RUF territory a pass is required, three, no running away on penalty of death, four, there is no forced labour but they can call upon you anytime they need you. When you do something wrong they will judge you and if you are guilty they will beat you or kill you. But there is a court to defend yourself. (...) Here, nobody was amputated (...) Medicines were not given to civilians, so we the civilians had to use the bush medicines. But we were seldom sick. Now with these English medicines we are sick all the time. In the beginning there was no school but towards [the time of] the Lomé peace accord they started to run a school for 30 minutes [per day].*

¹⁸² According to the survivors of the massacre, interviewed in village W.: *We cannot tell the exact day, but maybe you can tell the day from our story. The year General Abacha [Sani Abacha, president of Nigeria] died, [June 1998] that day the rebels came from A.. We already heard that they would come to evacuate us. They said that they would come to take us away. On that day there was a lot of shooting in the surrounding villages. They were gathering civilians. We ran into the bush. We wondered what was going to happen. Then we met some rebels and we asked them why they were shooting. They replied that their enemy has died, that was General Abacha. They said that there was no need to run away and that some of them already have gone to Kenema. But we just looked out for a hide-out in the bush. But we were too late. They ordered us that because we tried to hide in the bush we should go and gather everybody who had hid themselves. But we still tried to escape to the government territory. On the way going we met an old woman who asked where we were going. We told her so, but later she informed the rebels in Jojoima. Then the rebels started to track us down and shot two persons dead.*

There has still been little research on the specific attitudes of civilians towards ex-combatants after the war. The national credo of “*forgive, but not forget*” by which the government seeks to prevent an endless cycle of revenge seems to have had its effect on the ground. What is requested from the Sierra Leonean population is immense, as events described in the below footnote make clear. And these were just a few events in one village. According to some inhabitants of A.: *Presently the ex-RUF [combatants] are held in a nice way by the villagers. But we found it difficult to forgive them. However, the government is saying that we must forgive them for the sake of peace. If we do not do that, we will have another war coming to Sierra Leone. (...) But the government is asking us to forgive them and live peacefully together, but the government is not forgiving. What about the families of the ones that will be punished [in the Special Court]? Will they not look for a way to take revenge? How[ever] hard it will be, even Foday Sankoh should be forgiven for the sake of lasting peace.*

The role of the government is important. The SLPP government is widely supported by the Mende-speaking population of the south and east. A measure of the prestige it still enjoys in this region of Sierra Leone is that when the government requests forgiveness the people try sincerely to forgive.¹⁸³ What further helps the civilians to forgive ex-RUF fighters is that those who behaved most badly have gone away after the war, while those who did not behave so badly have remained behind.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, it will not be easy for family-members to refuse a fellow family member who asks for reconciliation, even though he may have earlier joined the soldiers or rebels.¹⁸⁵ Utas draws a similar conclusion on the reintegration of ex-combatants in rural Liberia (Utas, 2005:145). But what is stated or appears to hold good on the surface does not necessarily represent true feelings, or machinations in the “underneath of things” (Ferme 2001). The ex-combatants might be forgiven for the moment, but their acts are not forgotten, so whenever an ex-combatant does something wrong, the wrong that person committed in the past will be recalled, and penalties will be much harder.¹⁸⁶ It is through the general desire for peace that ex-combatants are forgiven.¹⁸⁷

Four of us were captured and were brought to Jojoima. We had to tell them that we were coming from W. Then they sent a message to A. and later rebels came from there to collect us all and brought us there. They counted 450 people and brought them to A.. Then they asked who had left the village the previous day, but we told them that nobody had left. They brought the four who were captured in front of us. They asked us if we knew these four people. Now we had to say yes. The rebels said that we were all Kamajors and that they were going to kill all of us. But some rebels suggested that they should identify the family members of the ones who tried to escape. So the four people who tried to escape had to point their family members. Then they killed three out of the four people in front of all the people. But they still looked for more. There were about 25 family members. Out of that 25, 18 were put in a cell for 25 days. They interviewed them one by one. One was released, the others were taken to Yoya junction and were killed. They killed 17. So the killing was true and this is the way the killing came about. They accused us all of being Kamajors but that is a lie. The rebels belonged to the RUF and the AFRC, fighting under Manawa and Momoh Rogers. Baseru, alias Muyepe from Yoya was there and Safakla from Mobai and John Rambo from Mano Junction were there. C.O. Vandy from Nomo Famaa and Jeremia from Bunumbu. There were a lot of commanders present. Sam Bockarie even said that they should kill them all.

¹⁸³ According to the brother of one of the 17 people executed in A.: *Until I die I will not like them [the rebels]. But the government tells us that we should forgive them. But if the government will say that we should take revenge we will do it.*

¹⁸⁴ According to an RUF ex-combatant: *If you behaved badly during the war, the victims will tell it around. The perpetrator will feel insecure and run away otherwise his life will be made impossible.*

¹⁸⁵ According to an ex-SLA combatant: *Among the Mende they have to accept their tribesmen, if they want to settle in a village. And even if you are a stranger from another tribe - for a few nights as a guest and even if someone wants to settle down. If they behave in a proper way they cannot refuse. But my stepmother warned me not to move around with Amara [Peleto, see note] because he has been a former rebel. (...) If you have done bad in the village they will never forget you, although they must forgive you.*

¹⁸⁶ A villager in A. stated: *Presently the rebels have a tough life because they do not have any money. We can greet them but we will never do good for them. If a dispute arises there is no difference between a civilian and an ex-rebel, but the people will comment on it saying that he was a RUF guy and was having this behaviour*

So what is needed is research on the long-term reintegration process of ex-combatants. Initial data (see below) seem to suggest that in some cases ex-combatants, after having settled down in their home-communities, leave again after some time. One reason for this is that it is only after some time that the more subtle discriminations of the community people become clear to ex-combatants and impinge on daily life.

*Samuel: the biography of a fighter from A.*¹⁸⁸

What will follow now is the story of a former child and teenage soldier, linked to various army factions (RSLMF, Kabbah-loyalist sections of the divided army under the junta, and the new [British-trained] SLAF]) and his attempt to reunite with his family and re-adapt to village life in A. Samuel is a pseudonym.

Above, it has been argued that the RUF was organised on meritocratic principles, in which command was re-assigned according to daring and success in operations. The SLA, however, had an organisational structure much more based on a fixed, and age related, hierarchical command structure (i.e. the army modelled itself on notions of patrimonial precedence dominant in the wider society). The following case study makes clear that it is not easy for fighters to shed their factional socialization. They continue to reproduce the structures and attitudes of (in this case) army-based clientelistic dependency, even where the benefits are hard to perceive. Samuel's story shows that the larger structure within which the patron operates is not the issue. Young people like Samuel are searching for patrons and protectors, and will even change sides to secure the kind of relationship of support combat life has taught them they need. Getting the fighter out of the militia is one thing – getting the militia out of the fighter is another matter. Samuel¹⁸⁹ has been an irregular¹⁹⁰ in the army for most of his

already during the war. What is most important is that the government says that we should forgive them and that they turn up for the community labour. If they do not turn up they must pay a fine and if they do not pay they must leave the town.

¹⁸⁷ A villager states: *For now we are happy because everything is over. We do not think about it much.*

¹⁸⁸ The following section has been published before in a slightly revised version in Peters (2005).

¹⁸⁹ I first got to know Samuel in 1996, and I have followed his career in detail ever since. Over the following years we kept in contact by telephone, e-mail and letters. I undertook extensive formal interviews in 1996 and then again in 2000, and 2002/03. During my main period of fieldwork (2002-2003) he became a key informant and accompanied me on some of my field trips. As someone who fought against the RUF he was especially valuable in helping me probe and contextualize material I was (at the same time) gathering from RUF key informants.

¹⁹⁰ Many of the army irregulars were under-age, both male and female, and were highly rated by the commanding officers: they are good in fighting and in ambush situations, one of the main combat tactics. Separated from their kin, they are fiercely loyal to their *bra* (*Krio*, literally 'big brother'), the officer responsible for recruiting and training them (Peters & Richards 1998a). Whenever an officer is transferred to another location he takes his 'boys' with him. The Sierra Leonean army, which was supposed to function on hierarchical principles (like most standing armies), began to operate differently. The anonymous command structure, in which ranks and not individuals were important, was replaced by personalized links between officers and their irregulars. Irregulars were loyal to their *bra*, more so than to other (sometimes higher-ranking) officers or to the army in general. A patrimonial system, present in so many other sectors in Sierra Leone, started to operate on the front line. So whenever a commander changed sides, joining the RUF or later the AFRC, all his boys went with him. If for some reason the relationship between the irregular and his officer ended, for example if the officer died or a dispute arose, the irregular faced serious problems. Without an official army number he was not entitled to any military provisions and, excluded and alienated from his village and family, had few options other than to search for another commander willing to function as his *bra*. Many of the irregulars faced problems as the war was coming to an end. The military resources available to their commanders dried up, making it hard for them to cater for all their boys. At the same time, there was less need for a commander to have a large group of loyal boys around him as bodyguards. Rather than dividing up the capital some of these commanders had been able to accumulate during the war, they chose to abandon many of their boys. Obviously this was to the disappointment and anger of the irregulars who considered the ties as ever-lasting, having fought and survived together for many years. Many expected to be employed by their commanders in any commercial venture they would undertake. Others expected to be taken along if their *bra* travelled overseas to study or live in England or America. But rather than learning a lesson from this deception, most irregulars found it difficult to change their way

teenage and adult life. He joined the army in 1993 at the age of twelve but was demobilized in 1995 as part of a larger demobilization programme for under-age combatants during the military regime of Chairman Valentine Strasser. In 1997, after the overthrow of the newly elected democratic government of President Kabbah by renegade soldiers, he rejoined the forces, as did a majority of other demobilized former-child combatants. In Samuel's case he became one of the Kabbah loyalist troops helping ECOMOG to overthrow the AFRC junta. This was the beginning of a new period of fighting for Samuel, culminating in the defence of Freetown during the 6 January 1999 attack by combined AFRC/RUF forces (the notorious operation 'No Living Thing').

According to the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord, the Sierra Leonean army would be restructured and absorb fighters from all different factions. It was then to be trained by British troops. Our interviewee – who by now was a young adult – received this training but, not feeling secure in a revamped army that had enrolled so many of his former enemies, decided to desert and go to Ghana. In 2002 he returned to Sierra Leone. After a failed attempt to settle in his native village, he joined the LURD rebels in Liberia just prior to Liberian president Charles Taylor quitting office in August 2004.¹⁹¹

Samuel's army years

Samuel voluntarily joined the army when he was twelve. He fled A. during a rebel attack in the early stages of the war and went to the town of Kenema where he stayed with a relative.¹⁹² Without access to parents, and with his relative unable to pay his school fees, he decided to join the army. After two weeks of military training he was sent to Daru, close to the front line. Here he became the personal bodyguard of a Colonel M. *All the young men around Daru had joined together to fight the rebels in the bush. We all were boys, but there was a big leader, the commander. That is where I met this man, Colonel M. So I was with Colonel M. and took part in patrols.*

Without an official army number Samuel was not entitled to receive a salary. He was solely dependent on what his commanders gave to him and what he was able to get at the front. Later, Samuel was able to take the army number of a soldier who had died in action, and subsequently received a small monthly allowance. At some stage Samuel was wounded and treated in hospital. *So from there I wanted to find where my colonel was, Colonel M.. At that time he was in this place Cockerill [military HQ, Wilkinson Rd, Freetown]. Right now [1996] he is in Bo, as a brigade commander. His wife is here in Freetown ... everyday I can go to her. But now we are here in Freetown.* At the time of his first demobilization Samuel visited his former commander's house on a regular basis. When the 1997 coup took place, he immediately rushed there. *We heard Corporal B. on the SLBS radio announcing that they had overthrown the SLPP government. But I did not know the Corporal. I was still in the house with my guardian¹⁹³ for about one hour more. Then I decided to contact my commander, Commander M. I went to him to hear more about it. They said that it was a coup and that I should join. So I did not waste time, there was a reserve weapon and a reserve uniform. I took it and wore it.*

The following part clearly shows the dilemma these irregular forces faced. Although Samuel seems to have had some sense of a wider loyalty towards the country and the

of thinking, going in search of another, this time civilian, *bra*. Others returned to the most familiar world they knew and re-enlisted in the army. The durability of the patrimonial bond, in war and peace, is one of the most striking facts about the sociology of Sierra Leone over the last 100 years.

¹⁹¹ According to the latest information (mid 2005) Samuel has re-enlisted in the Sierra Leone army once again.

¹⁹² See interview in Peters & Richards (1998b).

¹⁹³ The former child combatants in this particular programme spent at least six months in a demobilization camp. After that, if no relative could be traced, foster families were found for them.

president, his feelings were more to the army. However his real loyalty lies with the person who is directly responsible for him and taking care of him. *After that I came back to my guardian. I was in a different mood now. When he saw me he said very angrily: 'What is that?' I said to him that it was not my fault because they said that I should join them and it is a military order that I should not refuse.* [Q.: So you joined the coup?] *Well, not actively. But I participated. Well, I should not lie, I joined.* [Q.: You said that it was a military order but you must also be loyal to the president?] *Yes, but ... I was not directly under his ... But yes, he is our Commander in Chief, but by then I was not enlisted as a numbered soldier because I had my own commander.* [Q.: So you are more loyal to your commander than to your president?] *Yes, because I do not have direct contact with the president. They do not even know me.*

In 1998, after his long-time commander was accused of collaboration with the junta forces, Samuel built up a relationship with a new officer. During the 6 January 1999 attack on Freetown Samuel personally safeguarded the properties of this other officer. *My commander was already out of the city but I was still in his house. Then he phoned me and told me to check if his bag was still there. He told me that I just had to take that bag and bring it to him. So I found the bag, jumped on my bike and managed to reach the safe area where I handed the bag over to him. He opened the bag and inside were millions of Leones. You know what he did? He counted the money two times to see if there was anything missing! All the money was there, I had not taken a single cent, but he never gave me even 500 Leones.* Samuel became even more disappointed in his new bra. At some point his officer went to England to study, leaving Samuel behind. Not being protected by a high-ranking officer anymore and with the New Sierra Leonean Army containing soldiers formerly belonging to the various opposing factions, it became a dangerous place for Samuel, since some of his new colleagues considered him a traitor and one-time enemy. He decided to go to Ghana to wait for calmer times.

Samuel's reintegration attempts

By the end of 2002, Samuel was again living in Freetown. Without a job, he managed to live by linking up with friends who were better off. This is common practice in Sierra Leone for the many youths looking for a person of substance able and willing to support them in their education, to help them find a job or give them a little money. These persons are also referred to as *bra*.

A friend of Samuel's, a former child soldier himself, had recently arrived from London and was staying in one of the city's top hotels.¹⁹⁴ On arriving in Sierra Leone he found out that Samuel had been arrested, together with some other soldiers, and had been in prison for the previous two months. His friend immediately paid for his release. Then Samuel stayed with him – his new *bra* – and enjoyed expensive meals, drinks and female company, all in large quantities. Not having a cent to his name, he was totally dependent on his friend. Without doubt, Samuel would have preferred to have had the cash rather than the meals. *You know, I am really confused by his behaviour. How he can spend so much money on staying in this hotel and these expensive meals. I wish I had that money, I would make better use of it.* His loyalty to his well-off friend became clear during an incident (an argument between his former commander and some other visitors escalated into a fight) at a bar, where Samuel was eager to protect *my captain with my life*, if necessary. The luxurious lifestyle was short-lived and came to an end with the sudden departure of his friend, leaving Samuel empty-handed.

Samuel had to make a choice. One possibility was to go back to the army, the life that was most familiar to him. But he stated: *I do not want to go back to the army because I really*

¹⁹⁴ This young man became the spokesman for former child combatants during the first under-age demobilization programme. Later, he became close to ECOMOG's Chief Commander Maxwell Khobe. Introduced to NGO workers, business people and some researchers, he was able to get a British visa.

decided to leave that life behind. And I know that if I stay here in Freetown I will not do a better thing. I can survive but I will probably run into problems, and life is very expensive here, and all these goods they have here, make you to want to have a lot of money. Without doubt, with his contacts and street wisdom, he would have managed to survive in Freetown. But his other option was to return to his village and start a new life. Samuel returned to his village in early 2003 and after a preliminary visit decided to settle there. Since he had not taken part in the final disarmament process, and he had not profited from reintegration support, I decided to assist him with US\$ 150, an amount equivalent to the financial support combatants received upon their disarmament under the official DDR programme. He bought a bundle of second-hand clothes and a few marketable items such as medicines and salt to set up a small business in his village. Almost everybody in the village depended on farming, but he did not yet see himself as a full-time farmer.

About a month later, I visited Samuel during a field trip. He had finally decided to settle in the village and had even started to build a house. Most of the houses in the village had been badly damaged or totally destroyed during the war. The remaining houses were already occupied, while internally displaced people and refugees were still returning to the village, putting even more pressure on the limited facilities. Samuel's mother, the first of his father's three wives, was not even living in his father's house. *You know, I am living with my mother in her brother's house. But we should really live with my father in his house. When my mother returned to the village after the war, the family of my father's second wife was already living in my father's house, so there was no place for my mother. If it was not for my mother who convinced me otherwise I would have driven them away. I was really angry with my father.* And he told his father so. In pre-war Sierra Leonean society, children rarely argued with their fathers. But times had changed.

Although part of the labour required for building the house was 'donated' by his family members (mainly his relatives on his mother's side), some of the labour had to be paid for. Some of the clothes were used to pay people off. In general, the rate at which Samuel was able to market his second-hand clothes was much slower than he had expected, and he found himself walking miles to nearby villages to sell just a few items. The need might be high, but the necessary cash to buy clothes was not yet available to village people. This is probably one of the biggest problems the villagers face. Before the war most of them earned the cash they needed by selling their cash crops – cocoa, coffee and palm kernels. As a result of the conflict, and associated long-term displacement of so many people, cash-crop plantations had become seriously overgrown. Before any real income could be made out of the plantations, considerable cleaning of the undergrowth had to take place. To do this heavy work, a group of young people could be hired, if the money was available.¹⁹⁵ Before the war, parents – like Samuel's father – could easily mobilize their children to work on their plantations, but not anymore. *Before the war you were supposed to work for your father for nothing. You were working for him until he died. It was only after that that you would start to profit for yourself. But now, everything has changed. I am not going to help my father for nothing. But he still expects me to help him for nothing. He even expects my older brother to come all the way from Freetown to help him on the farm. But my brother is following a course over there and the amount of money he needs for the journey, he just does not have it. And it is not only me. Every youth in the village is focusing on his own garden or farm, for his own profit.*

The power of the chief and the elders over the young people has also decreased. This becomes clear from the difficulties the authorities have in mobilizing the youth for

¹⁹⁵ One financial injection of cash seems to be enough to break this post-war cycle of lack of cash-generating possibilities. A few months later a project was implemented in the area to help farmers with the brushing of their plantations. After registration the project paid people, mainly village youths, to clear the plantations of the registered farmers.

community work, such as the repair of the *bari* [court house] or collective brushing on community-owned land. *When they rang the bell the first time to gather the youths, I did not even know what it was meant for. Later my father told me that all the youths were supposed to come to start to work for the community. The next time I heard the call for community labour, I just ignored it, although my father was annoyed with me. You know, as long as you are single and not yet married you can easily escape community labour. You can even go to another village for one or two days. They just do not have a grip on you yet. That is why they want you to marry at an early age in the village.* Nowadays, young people are present at village meetings and important community decisions are not taken without youth representation. Most of the elders have realized that the social, political and economic marginalization of youth was one of the root causes of the conflict. Afraid of creating another pool of disgruntled and excluded youths, they know that they should not discourage them. Moreover, villagers need young people's labour to rebuild villages and revive their plantations.

Business was going too slowly to make a living, so Samuel decided to start farming. His father owned 25 acres [10 ha.] of improved oil palms and another 30 acres [12 ha.] of cocoa and coffee trees. He had enough land to give a part to Samuel, one might think. *My father did not give me anything. He said that I should help him on the land and that we later would share the profit, but I know that he will keep it all for himself. So now my mother gave me 8 acres with coffee trees. Her uncle was the owner of the land and even had a court case about it because the village people said that the land was part of the Poro Society. But nobody will take this land from me. Nobody will scare me with any threats or devils. You know, my blood is too bitter for their witchcraft.*

Samuel's almost complete lack of respect for traditional belief is interesting. In general belief in things such as witchcraft, devils and spells remains strong among rural people in Sierra Leone, and the power and control of the secret societies over daily life in rural Sierra Leone is still considerable. But even before the war it was recognised that migrants into the forest and diamond fields of the Liberian border region could no longer be controlled by the supernatural sanctions wielded by village chiefs and elders (Richards 1996). Lack of respect for traditional sanctions, almost by definition, identifies any young person thought to possess "rebel" mentality. *Now, the Sande Society has just started in our village. The little rice my father had, he has used it all to send a daughter of his second wife to the [Sande] society. This society is just about eating food. Everyday they are carrying food to the women who are leading the initiation.* Although born and raised for the first part of his life in the village, Samuel clearly is now rooted in a different world and reality. He survived ten years of active service during the war that took him to various parts of the country, and even abroad. He experienced life in the city and has been exposed to its novelties. Listening daily to the BBC World Service and accessing the Internet whenever he is in Freetown, he is as much part of today's 'global village' as his youthful counterparts in the West.

Another factor sets him apart from the other villagers. During the time of his first demobilization in 1995 in Freetown, he became a Christian, much to the disapproval of his father, a respected Hajji who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca three times. Now he finds himself a Christian in a village where almost the entire population is Muslim. *Here in the village, even speaking the language, the Mende, is a bit hard for me. Because I cannot speak it fluently, the people become suspicious. (...) When my father found out that I was going to church he almost cried. He just could not believe it. But that will not stop me. I told him that if he had not spent all his money before the war on these useless trips to Mecca we would not be suffering now. The only thing I do not want him to know is that I drink alcohol. If he finds out he will never forgive me. My mother knows but will not accept it. She refused to wash the cup I always take when I am going to drink the local wine.*

During the following months Samuel stayed in his village, occasionally going to the regional capital for a few days. It seemed that he was going to settle down in the village, slowly leaving his former way of life behind. In fact, he stated that he liked his new life and the village. The only setback seemed to be the almost complete lack of entertainment. *You know, after all, this is my home. This is the place where I was born. And here you do not need money. Even 1,000 Leones is enough for a day. After seven or eight o'clock it becomes quiet in the village. Only if it is full moon do the people stay up longer. It is only my radio which helps me through the long evenings.* Compared to the city and larger towns where youths have access to clubs, bars and video centres, and which are livelier in general, life in this small village must have seemed boring. During the war many people lived for a period of time in the displaced-persons' camps that were located close to the major towns and there they came in contact with a more modern lifestyle. And of course those who had been involved in active fighting had experienced a much more 'lively' life than any village could ever offer. However, there were quite a number of ex-combatants living (temporarily) in the village. Some had been born in the same area and considered it their home. Others were based in the village during the war when it was a RUF stronghold. These ex-RUF fighters did not yet consider it the right time to return to their own places of birth. Some were afraid to return to their homes, either because of the atrocities they had committed in their home area, or because their hometown was located in a former CDF stronghold. Another group felt that after so many years of being away from home it would be embarrassing to return to their family with nothing. An ex-RUF commander commented: *My family is living in Freetown and they are doing fine. But how can I go back to them after all these years without anything. If I had some money, I am sure that my brothers would help me to start up a business by adding some of their own capital. But if I do not have anything, the first day they will be happy to see me, but the next day they will start to grumble.* So this interviewee decided to stay for the time being in the village and is raising some money by farming. According to Samuel, this ex-RUF fighter had secretly cultivated a large marijuana farm (I never actually saw it for myself) and was planning to use the profit to buy his ticket home. Another ex-RUF commander, who was in control of a part of the diamond production in the latter part of the conflict, was also residing in Samuel's village. Born in a nearby village he was using Samuel's village as a temporary base. During the war he owned two nightclubs, and he currently had a music-set with him that people could hire for discos and parties. A few of his former boys lived with him. Upon his arrival Samuel immediately started to build up a relationship with him, although he was the former enemy against whom he had fought so long. Clearly, Samuel was using the same survival mechanisms as he used during the war. *I just must make friendship. He has a complete music-set so he will be doing fine. If you have a friendship with him, it may help you in the future.* At some other time he frankly acknowledged that he would not stay in the village if there was no outside support at all: *The village life is a bit hard. If there was no support at all I would go back to the army. There at least is a commander who is responsible for you and you will have your monthly payment plus the opportunity to do some business once in while.*

Samuel's relationship with his father might be best described as one of mutual annoyance. They had many arguments, varying from his father neglecting Samuel's advice in matters where Samuel feared that his father would be fooled by business people¹⁹⁶ to more general grumbling by Samuel about his father's many wives, and the resources he had "wasted" to acquire them. *My father just does not care about us. He cannot give us anything, not even the*

¹⁹⁶ For instance, many plantation owners had trees on their land which could be sold for timber production. Small groups of youths, equipped with a chain-saw, went around doing this job. Urgently in need of cash, the land owners saw themselves agreeing to extremely unfavourable terms with the chain-saw operators, as was the case with Samuel's father.

smallest support. He never helped my brother with his education in Freetown, but if he succeeds in finding a job my father will be so proud, and the next thing he will do is ask for assistance from my brother. I told him that if he had not married so many wives and had not had so many children, he would have been able to assist his children properly. But he says that I must be quiet because that is not my business. You know, now he has raised a little money, he wanted to marry another wife, can you imagine? Obviously, his father was annoyed with Samuel because of his rebellious behaviour and the scant respect shown to a father's orders. But many people in the village, in particular the youth, liked Samuel for his outspoken character, while also fearing him for his stop-at-nothing valour.

Back to his old life?

Samuel spent several months in his village. Unfortunately, during a next visit to the regional capital an incident happened which influenced our relationship and, to some extent, the little financial support I was still giving him. A quick calculation of the new situation was enough to change his mind. He would leave the village, at least for the time being, because he obviously did not have the patience to accumulate wealth step by step. He told me that he would be going to Liberia to see what the situation was like. *If I live in the village I just keep on waiting. We, the young people, we just have to wait until our fathers die. I am going there [to Liberia] to check up on the situation. If I am able to link up with a big commander of the LURD rebels,¹⁹⁷ I am sure that as soon as they are in power, I will get a good job. And when they take Monrovia there will be a lot of loot.*

After a few weeks I got a phone call from Samuel. He enthusiastically told me that he had succeeded, and was now staying with an important LURD rebel commander somewhere in Liberia [in 2004, at the time of the cease-fire agreed upon by the factions after the departure of Taylor LURD controlled Lofa County and territory south as far as Tubmanburg.]

Discussion

Irregulars such as Samuel have been shaped by their years spent in and around the army. They have typical patron-client relationships with their commanders, in which the commander provides food, protection and training in military skills, while the irregular, as a personalised loyalist, protects the commander and hands over loot. For both parties this was, under the given circumstances, a profitable relationship. To the younger irregulars the commander was probably considered a substitute for a lost family, but the older and more experienced ones consciously evaluated whether or not the relationship was beneficial to them. If not, they would try to look for another *bra*. In this way it would be wrong to consider irregulars, together with other youthful combatants, as hapless victims. They were used by their commanders, but at the same time they used their commanders to get scarce but necessary resources, such as protection, food and shelter. They also found in military activity a substitute for disrupted education or vocational training, including learning the deadly – but productive – skills of how to handle a weapon and how to deploy the tactics of jungle warfare.

When Samuel returned to his village without the backing of a *bra*,¹⁹⁸ he immediately set about identifying a potential new 'big brother' (the ex-RUF commander with the music-set). The relationship was short-lived, because the commander, afraid of the Special Court, decided

¹⁹⁷ The Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) fought against the former warlord, but later democratically elected president, Charles Taylor.

¹⁹⁸ It became clear to me that my friendship with Samuel might not have been on as equal a footing as I had assumed it to be. In helping Samuel financially to return to his village, he probably considered me not only as a friend but also as a *bra*. This reminded me of some former child soldiers who I had interviewed at the end of 2001 and who had been in the same reintegration programme as Samuel in 1994/95. These former army combatants still felt that the programme should assist them in their education and daily life six years later, considering the programme almost to be a *bra* in itself.

to move further into Kailahun District (the former stronghold of the RUF close to the Liberian border). With most of the people in the village, including his father, being poor farmers recovering from the war, Samuel was forced to build his life without the support of a patron – something he had never learned to do before. If he had been determined, hard-working and patient, he would have stood a good chance of accumulating some wealth in a few years' time. With his contacts, experience, and skills in English, he could have played an important role in the village. However, his years in the army had made too big an impact on him. The gap between his father and the more traditional way of life on the one hand, and Samuel's army life and ways of surviving on the other hand, was too big to be bridged.¹⁹⁹

What is clear from the above case study is that there was considerable generational tension between Samuel and his father. His father felt that now the war had ended everything should return to how it was in pre-war days, including the absolute authority exercised by parents over their children. Samuel clearly held a different opinion. But to consider the post-war tensions between elders and youth in terms of generational conflict, only partly explains the situation as it is in Sierra Leone today. The war catalyzed already existing organizational modalities and value systems in Sierra Leone. Samuel grew up in a totally different culture, with its own specific social features. To understand fully the social dynamics in post-war Sierra Leone, and more specifically the difficulties and constraints youth ex-combatants experience during their reintegration process, an analysis of the organisational structures which were dominant in the various fighting forces would be useful. Once fully aware of the different value systems of the various factions and those present in post-war Sierra Leone, careful consideration of these different types of cultural biases, as predicted for instance by the neo-Durkheimian analysis (see chapter 6), policy-makers might be able to link those which correspond. This should smooth the reintegration process, make it more sustainable, and anticipate many of the problems a DDR programme and post-programme reintegration process might face, thus offering improvements for programme design.

It is perhaps important to stress again that the value systems of opposed factions do not need to be violent. They are rooted in the specific way a group manages constraints and regulation, often imposed by others groups, or the environment. They could be considered, perhaps, as social capital. Rather than trying to break down the socialization of ex-combatants, more attempt should be made to discover if militia socialization can be put to peaceful purposes (Fithen & Richards 2005). Post-war Sierra Leonean society offers a wide variety of new challenges, in which the task group culture of former fighters may indeed be an asset, e.g. in helping set up successful gangs to rebuild roads in remote terrain, and indeed some agencies have successfully used ex-combatant groups in this task. It is common to argue that social capital is an asset for community development. The point made here is that problems in Sierra Leone stem from the dominance of only one type of social capital (patron-client relations), risking a descent into mafia-like factionalism (in politics, business and war). Other modalities, such as the egalitarian task group cultures common among rural youth, both in farming and fighting, need to be built up to provide competitive alternatives. It is out of this healthy competition between alternative institutional forms that a sense of organic and more all-embracing social solidarity might one day emerge, without reversion to the emotional simplicities of tribe, class or faith-based identities (cf. Richards *et al.* 2004b).

¹⁹⁹ An ex-CDF combatant might have been more patient under the same circumstances. The apprentice system (the CDF mode of operation) is based on benefits in the future, after graduation. Farming does not bring immediate rewards, and an ex-CDF fighter might even patiently wait to inherit his father's land.

Other reintegration stories: reintegration in a mining setting

Tongo: a reintegration problem at large

Tongo (Field) is located in Lower Bambara Chiefdom, about 50 kilometres (or two to three hours by public transport along bad roads) north of Kenema. The chiefdom is divided into seven sections. Tongo (an area covering 15 towns) is part of Naiwa section, with its headquarter town at Lalehun. After Kono, Tongo is the main diamond producing area in Sierra Leone. However there is little to indicate that millions of dollar's 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.

Since the discovery of diamonds in Sierra Leone (in the late 1920s) 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 both Tongo (and Kono) more capital-intensive and mechanised kimberlite mining has also taken place. 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. Sierra Leone Selection Trust, 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.

Tongo differs a lot from the villages of A. and Sendumei. It has always been a much more dynamic and ethnically diverse community, with lots of young people coming to Tongo on a temporary basis from all parts of Sierra Leone. Whereas in A. the natives struggle to accept their kinsfolk who joined armed factions, but can hardly refuse, 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, e.g. mechanised cassava grating (see Richards *et al.* 1997). 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 go home in the first place - since it will be hard to gain re-acceptance arriving empty handed after so many years of absence, and in any case many dare not to go home, afraid of retribution for the atrocities they have committed. Only those who have profited fully from DDR support stand a chance to leave 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 one or other of the diamond areas. Diamond areas offer the advantage of social anonymity in a multi-cultural 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 options 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 re-absorbing 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.*²⁰⁰ *Traditional rituals of giving forgiveness only took place in Tongo on a very limited scale.*²⁰¹ 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, in part privatised, security procedures regulating diamond mining activities under the restored SLPP regime.

As in the past, present-day Tongo is overcrowded with young Sierra Leonean males working in mining sites. Mining is predominately alluvial but some of the richer landowners or investors are involved in a limited amount of small-scale kimberlite (first or sometimes second vein) mining. The mining plant closed its gates long since but some geological engineers have recently been spotted, checking if new international investment would be profitable. Meanwhile the local economy is boosted a bit by the presence of the UNAMSIL Zambian Battalion. The German NGO GTZ also runs a vocational training centre for ex-combatants and war-affected youth. Traditional authorities have returned and the police force is active on the ground again.

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 yet reside in Tongo. 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 one or several diamonds to sell.

In Tongo, the usual mining operation scheme is characterized by a three-pile system (contrary to Kono where they generally work with a two pile system [cf. Fithen 1999]); the diamond containing gravel is divided into three heaps and labelled as follows:

- Labour pile
- Expenditure pile
- Bush (owner) pile

The piles are allocated by lottery between the labourers, the sponsors, who provide food, equipment and fuel, and the landowner. The tools are a shovel, a bucket, a shaker (siever) and an optional water-pump. First the sand is removed until the gravel is reached. The gravel contains the diamonds. The gravel is dug out of the pit and later washed in the shakers, and the diamonds detected. If one of the miners finds a diamond, this is bought by the master (at local prices, perhaps only a fifth of the international value), after which the money is divided equally among the miners. The master can then sell the diamond in town to a diamond-buying agent. Some miners will use the money to start up a business (petty-trade), others will re-invest it in mining.

²⁰⁰ 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).

²⁰¹ Rather ironically, in view of this statement, the only ritual of forgiveness that I actually witnessed in Sierra Leone took place in Tongo, and was related to diamond mining; a mining gang leader had started washing the gravel in 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.

Of major concern to the diamond mining community in Tongo is the fact that the alluvial deposits seem to be running dry; many plots have been mined in the past and due to lack of (access to) other suitable plots, some miners start to bring up the gravel in old plots again. But there are other problems in Tongo as well. Health services are nearly non-existent, and reasonable sanitation and clean drinking water are scarce. It is not hard to imagine that a place crowded out with young people in a landscape of water-filled pits is a paradise for all kind of diseases in general and water-borne diseases in particular. Moreover, the deadly Lassa Fever is endemic to Tongo, as well as neighbouring Panguma. Sexual Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS are also a major worry with such a large population of sexually active youths around. Another major problem relates to housing, as we will see.

Housing as a reintegration flash-point in Tongo

The town of Tongo seems to represent a rather unique situation in post-war Sierra Leone. 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 (2002) the concentration of ex-RUF combatants was extremely high in Tongo, 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 was only limited. Of greatest worry to the authorities was that on regular basis ex-RUF fighters, absorbed within the New Sierra Leonean Army, and thus re-equipped, 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.

The “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.²⁰² The houses thus belong to the community. Moreover, whereas many locals from Tongo have seen 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 are the RUF ex-combatants thus living there illegally, and without paying rent on community property, they are also living in the best houses at a time when the need for housing is particularly great. Until recently, the inhabitants of Labour Camp were also mining illegally – i.e. without the permission of the legal landowner - in a nearby plot named “Pump Station”. This issue seems, however, to have been solved. The miners accepted the rights of the legal landowners and pay the necessary amount of gravel to the owners 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 ending of the war. The indigenes of the Kono diamond fields then drove away these former rebels in a violent action (the *Konomokwie*, see chapter 7), reclaiming their pre-war possession and rights. Up to now this kind of communitarian violence has been avoided in Tongo, although there are voices from within the chiefdom, and more specifically the ranks of the former Civil Defence Force, calling for a violent solution. During the elections in spring 2002 former RUF combatants wore RUF shirts and sang RUF songs loudly. This drove the situation to the brink.

²⁰² 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.

Deadlines for the self-removal of the ex-rebels had long passed. Youth organisations²⁰³ 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, backed up by ex-CDF militia fighters and chiefdom authorities, seems 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 5 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 Lower Bambara Youth Council, 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 the demands of the LBYC is the influence of the local authorities, attempting to reassert control over all aspects of diamond mining.

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 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 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 the detriment of the interest of the RUF ex-combatants, thus potentially fuelling a view that the promises of reintegration offered in Abuja have not been fulfilled (clearly the worry of the UN peace-keeping officer).

The Labour Camp case has one last interesting twist, as explained by the chairman of the LBYC: *A few days after the RUF left, on the 15th, the police occupied all the houses. They wanted to settle down while the new police barracks were under construction. We organised a meeting with the police and Paramount Chief, who ordered the police to leave the houses, because they had violated the laws. So they all left. Presently teachers, nurses and some staff of the GTZ programme occupy some of the houses, with the agreement of the Chief. After all, although they have given up the houses, the ex-combatants were not very reasonable, otherwise they would have given up the houses straight [away]. The UN Civil Affairs [people]*

²⁰³ 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 local authorities. The RUF has been quite co-operative, involving themselves in communal labour. But the local authorities do not want to see that and only want them out of the place.*

played a large role in [trying to resolve] this problem, but the Military Observer was very much in favour of the ex-RUF combatants. 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 other ex-combatants, whether ex-CDF, ex-SLA or some ex-RUF, 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 mobilization is, indeed, a security problem resolved, or a resentful faction biding its time, remains to be seen.

Reintegration in a town setting

The towns

There are only four larger towns in provincial Sierra Leone, viz. Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Koidu. Kenema is the provincial capital of the east, about 300 kilometres east of Freetown, somewhat adjacent to the Liberian border, and between 6 and 10 hours by public transport from the national capital. It is located by a gap in the north-south ridge of the Kambui Hills, a finger of rain forest (now much depleted) providing direct connection to the three Gola forest reserves containing the greater part of the country’s remaining high forest, located to the south and east.

Bo, the provincial capital of the south, is about ninety kilometres west of Kenema, on the same main road to and from the capital. Travelling time by bush taxi to Freetown can vary between 5 to 8 hours, depending on the time of the year, since a large part of the (once paved) road has become a dirt track. Both Kenema and Bo are found within the Mende-speaking part of the country. Makeni, the provincial capital of the north, currently about 4 to 7 hours from Freetown by taxi, lies north-east of Freetown on the edge of the boli-lands (seasonally flooded ancient lagoons at the foot of the highland escarpment that trends NW-SE across the country). The main language of the region around Makeni is Temne.

Koidu, the capital of Kono district and the main diamond-mining centre in Sierra Leone, is a further 3 to 6 hour journey east of Makeni (depending on time of year), making the travel time from Freetown a whole day’s journey. The hilly terrain around Koidu is the homeland of the Kono people, but as the major diamond region, has attracted labourers from all parts of Sierra Leone, and (like Freetown) can be considered a true melting pot.

These four provincial towns have long been a magnet to young people from rural areas. The effects of the discovery of diamonds has been discussed briefly before. Large groups of mainly young people migrated from all over the country to the diamond centres to work as tributors and diggers on a seasonal basis. There are three main diamond regions – the area around Kono, the Sewa trench east of Bo, and Tongo Field, north of Kenema, though a fourth area south of Kenema District (Zimmi) has become increasingly important, and served as an important source of capital for the CDF during the war (Fithen 1999). Kenema, Bo and Makeni are provincial head-quarters, and noted for government services, including regional education. Koidu is a true diamond boom town, with few functions other than servicing the diamond trade. When SLST was based at Yengema (in effect a suburb) Koidu town was rich, with 24 hours electricity supply and many places of entertainment. At one stage there were direct daily flights between Freetown and Koidu.

Kenema is the country’s second largest diamond area, drawing product not only from Tongo Field to the north but also from Zimmi in the south. It is also renowned as the centre of

the country's timber business. Before the war a government factory prepared timber (mainly for the national market) and made decent-quality furniture. A privately-owned (French) saw-mill in Panguma also channelled product through Kenema. The timber business has revived in the post-war building and repair boom, but most of the logging and plank making is done by local chain saw operators in an uncontrolled manner. The protected forests of the Kambui North Reserve above Kenema have practically disappeared since the war ended.

Although Bo is also an important diamond centre, channelling much of the product from the Sewa trench, it is a more diversified city than Koidu or Kenema, serving as a regional centre for trade in agricultural products, including rice, palm kernels and cassava, and noted as the country's most important educational centre: the Bo government school for sons of chiefs (1906) was among the first secondary schools to be located in the protectorate. Today – in addition to numerous secondary schools – it also has a large teacher training college and a para-medical training centre. Thus, there are other opportunities than diamonds alone that draw young people to Bo. It is noted as the provincial town least damaged by the war, and much of this is to be explained by the fact that its inter-ethnic youth population (in which students and apprentices played an important part) decided to resist the RUF (Richards 1996), and then again avoided serious division on ethnic lines during the war's later stages (Richards & Fithen 2005). Bo was a main centre for the rise of the CDF, but there was a clear distinction between the unarmed civilian youths who protected Bo, mainly through excellent intelligence and coordination, and the young armed rural IDPs (Internal Displaced People) who flocked to the CDF.

Makeni is the smallest of the four towns, but serves a diversified function for its region similar to Bo. It is a major market for agricultural produce (especially rice from the bolidands), has a well-known gara (tie-and-die) industry, is noted for its schools and colleges, and serves as an ancillary centre for the Kono diamond trade. This last function was boosted during the period of rule of the (northern-dominated) APC regime, when a main paved road was built through Makeni to the Kono diamond fields, after the railway (through Bo and Kenema to Pendembu, in Kailahun) was closed in the 1960s. A second paved road was made from Makeni to the far north of the country (Kabala) in the 1980s.

Prior to 1997 the four main provincial towns suffered from the war in only limited and indirect ways. Kenema, Bo and Koidu came under direct RUF attacks, but these were repulsed in both Bo and Kenema. It was only in Koidu that the RUF succeeded in holding the town for some months. Because of its economically strategic function Koidu has always been heavily defended by the army. At several stages government troops closed the area to civilians. Many Sierra Leoneans are cynical about the reasons, believing strategic necessity played a smaller part than the desire of influential army officers to gain free and unobserved movement for mining and looting purposes. The RUF was never effective in taking over the major towns of Sierra Leone – though it clearly hoped to rally youth in Bo and Kenema – but it was effective in cutting the towns off from the capital, by disrupting road communications. From early 1994 the RUF created bush camps in strategic areas and from there it organised its hit and run actions and ambushes. Usual targets were vehicles and convoys travelling on the roads between the major towns. As a result transport between the towns and the capital decreased day by day and at some stages ceased altogether. In mid-1996 the only feasible route from Freetown to Bo and Kenema, for example, was by air.²⁰⁴ Clearly this had an enormous impact on the local economies and the food security situation in the towns. Food availability deteriorated for two main reasons: 1) local production of food in the countryside decreased due to threat of RUF raids and 2) many people from the rural areas had fled to the towns for safety reasons.

²⁰⁴ A Lebanese company opened up a daily service from Hastings airfield outside Freetown using elderly ex-Soviet 17-seater planes.

The position of the towns as relative safe havens changed suddenly after the military coup in 1997. The issue was that many government soldiers, stationed in garrisons around these towns, declared for the AFRC, and as a result of the junta and RUF agreeing a power-sharing truce, official enemies become allies overnight. RUF units were invited into both provincial towns and the capital, while at the same time CDF fighters had to seek cover in the urban areas or retreat into the countryside. Only in Bo, and to a lesser extent Kenema, could it be said that the CDF stood its ground. In Bo, the Garrison was in a quite isolated position to the west of the city, and civilians, resisting the RUF attack in December 1994, but distrusting the role played by the army, briefly imposed on the soldiers a humiliating “curfew”, forbidding army units entry to Bo town. Several soldiers who “disobeyed” the curfew were treated as looters and lynched by the citizenry. After the 1997 coup neither army nor RUF had much stomach for subduing the feared vigilantes of Bo.

One by one these towns were taken over by CDF and ECOMOG forces during the first half of 1998, as part of the Nigerian-led counter-attack on the junta, intended to restore the Kabbah government by force. Then things went into reverse. Koidu and Makeni were re-taken by AFRC/RUF forces towards the end of 1998, and the rebels marched on Freetown for the first time. After the January 6, 1999 battle for Freetown, the AFRC/RUF was repulsed, and retreated northwards; Makeni became the *de facto* rebel capital until the end of the conflict. Bo and Kenema – where the CDF was strong – remained under government control, while the RUF controlled a cigar-shaped piece of land in the middle of the country, stretching from Buedu, in the Kailahun “pan handle”, where Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone meet, to Gbendembu, a boli-land town in the far west, but including, importantly, Koidu town and the Kono diamond fields.

The RUF/AFRC allies were re-armed (in 1998) by a Ukrainian-Israeli-South African business and military training consortium modelled along similar lines to the group involving Executive Outcomes that decided the fate of the Abidjan peace process. This determined that the international community and media – who woke up very late to the war in Sierra Leone - perceived the fighting largely or only as a struggle for diamonds. It has been a central argument of this thesis that young people in Sierra Leone fought the war more for jobs than diamonds, and that labouring in diamond pits is not a career choice of preference but necessity. Below, we will examine what happened to some of the more fortunate ex-combatants. We might expect, given the greed-not-grievance model, that they would – given the chance – invest their demobilization gratuities and ill-gotten gains in diamond mining, but on more favourable terms (i.e. by acquiring licences to operate as tributors). The case study of Tongo (above) shows that land-owners and government loyalists hold the whip hand in the diamond fields. Even if the ex-combatants want to return to diamonds, they cannot, except as labourers working on very unfavourable terms. Earlier we discussed evidence that RUF ideologues articulated an agrarian vision. We will now consider the fate of a larger group of less obviously ideologically-motivated, and more urbanised, combatants from both CDF and RUF. Their enthusiasm seems to be focused more on motorbikes than diamonds.

--- PICTURE ---

An army of motorbikes

The local economies of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Koidu are recovering. But the larger companies once active in these towns – e.g. the saw mill in Kenema - had not been renovated by 2003. In Kono no large mining company has become a large-scale employer as yet. This lack is partly substituted by smaller and informal economic activities that are more labour intensive. Urban schools are operating again, and in many cases (unlike their rural equivalents) operated throughout the war with surprisingly few interruptions, except for a brain drain of teaching staff (many qualified teachers went to The Gambia as refugees, for example), and buildings undergoing repair. The internally displaced population continues to return to the villages from the urban centres where they sought protection. Many ex-combatants, profiting from DDR support, prefer to remain in the (more anonymous) larger towns. Some of those who have completed their training have returned to their place of origin, but many prefer to hang on in towns in search of jobs. The perspective of going back to a village and becoming involved in farming is not very attractive, especially while the

institutional obstacles discussed above remain in place.²⁰⁵ In the village they are exposed to risk of revenge,²⁰⁶ and it is questionable if ex-combatants can hide a violent past for long. In the towns on the other hand they move more anonymously, although ex-combatants are likely to know each other. So the towns, like the mining fields, offer the best social and economic niches for reintegration for those ex-combatants dubious about returning to home areas. But a job is needed, and employers, even if not scared of an ex-combatant's past, are unlikely to rate ex-combatants highly in a buyer's market. One approach to this dilemma is for the ex-combatant him or herself to create a new niche in the job market. One such niche is the phenomenon of the motorbike taxis, common in many Third World cities, but hitherto largely unknown in urban Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, it remains largely unknown in Freetown, the capital, but has taken off as one of the most visible of post-war changes in the four main provincial towns. It is an activity largely in the hands of ex-combatants.

Before the war local transport inside the towns and between town and countryside was provided by mini-buses and four-wheel taxis (small four door saloons) shared by several passengers (5 at the back and 3 in the front might not be uncommon). They drove more or less fixed routes, or at least remained on the larger roads. As a passenger it was necessary to walk to the nearest main road where taxis passed, flag one down, and ask whether the driver was going your direction, and find a place inside (something apparently always possible, even if a taxi was already jammed to the ceiling). Then, depending on your destination, you might have to change halfway to another taxi and walk the last few hundred metres or so. It was inconvenient and uncomfortable, but costs were low since the taxis were shared.

This taxi system almost completely disappeared after the war in the provincial towns. Many vehicles were ambushed and burnt during the war. Owners - typically business men or women, or civil servants and other professionals - fled to Freetown or neighbouring countries, taking any surviving vehicles with them. Drivers lost their jobs, often reverting to whiling away their hours hoping for a casual contract, e.g. sitting in the marijuana-smoking *pote* behind the Kenema transport park in Bo.²⁰⁷ Only a few yellow cabs continue to ply the streets of Makeni, Kenema, Bo and Koidu. They have been replaced by motor bike taxis, mainly 125 cc Honda road and trail bikes and a number of cheaper Chinese brands, of which the Victor is preferred by passengers for the comfortable shape of the pillion. The advantages are that these motor bike taxis literally criss-cross the towns in search of passengers and even on the back streets it is only a few minutes before a taxi arrives. It then takes you straight to the preferred destination, without detours to hunt or deliver other passengers, or losing time in traffic jams. The disadvantages are that costs are two to three times higher than a car taxi, you get wet when it is raining (although many passengers somehow manage to keep an umbrella above their head during their journey) and it is less safe, since no helmets are (yet) provided for the passengers. Taxi riders unions battle to get the riders to wear helmets, but with little success, riders fearing the heat and catching TB from a multi-owner second-hand helmet (Richards, pers. comm. based on unpublished interview with the Bo union executive in 2003). Nevertheless the motor taxis have become an institution in Kenema, Bo, Koidu and Makeni.

²⁰⁵ A relief worker, of Sierra Leonean extraction commented that the single light-bulb people from the rural areas now have in the towns was enough a reason not to return to their village. Another NGO worker, a Sierra Leonean who provided shelter for much of his family during the war at his house in Kenema, commented that: *Most of my relatives have left my house [2003] and returned to their villages. I was able to persuade them by saying that here in Kenema they need to pay for everything, while in their villages they can have their food for free. Only three youths stayed to continue their education.*

²⁰⁶ Poisoning is said to be a commonplace of the village revenger's art (cf. Bellman 1975)

²⁰⁷ The significance of the *pote* for recruitment of combatants, as Abdullah (1997) claims, has been doubted. But there is no doubt that ex-combatants doubtful about a rural return risk joining the general ranks of urban unemployed youth in such places after the war.

What makes this new phenomenon worth mentioning in a discussion of the reintegration of ex-combatants is the fact that ex-combatants are disproportionately well represented among the taxi-riders. In Makeni, of the three hundred young people who are active as (taxi) bike riders, about three quarters were combatants during the war, according to the estimates of the Makeni Bike Riders Association (Hoek & de Jong, 2004). The post-war bike (taxi) phenomenon was first researched in Sierra Leone by Richards and colleagues in 2002-3, with results briefly described in Fithen & Richards (2005) and Richards *et al.* (2004a). Their data refer mainly to Bo and Kenema. The work of Hoek and De Jong is based on the situation in Makeni. I concentrate here on the Makeni study, with which I was associated.²⁰⁸

An 18-year old rider in Makeni, Abdul, told Hoek & de Jong (2004) *The war was exciting, but bad. To be a bike rider is exciting and good. (...) In the past nobody dared to jump on the back seat, because we were ex-combatants, since they were afraid to be undressed, raped and robbed. They were afraid that we still had this rebel blood in our body. But such a thing never happened after the war* (my translation).

Why are so many ex-combatants now riding motorbikes and ferrying passengers, rather than robbing and killing them? Clearly, being a bike rider is a preferred job for young but uneducated Sierra Leoneans, filling the role performed by the four wheeled taxi driver in the past. But as becomes clear from Abdul's statement, excitement is an important part of what drew fighters to the war, and the excitement of riding a bike is an acceptable substitute in times of peace. Perhaps (and rather worryingly for passengers!) if speed is high enough the amount of adrenaline released comes close to fighting. Ex-combatants who ride bike taxis are almost certainly the commanders, and others, who did well out of war. Most riders are owners, or have the bike on hire-purchase terms, and aspire to become owners, sometimes as part of a consortium keeping the machine on the road 24 hours a day. But ex-combatants who did well out of fighting might also have decided to invest in a conventional taxi. Drivers – of necessity - had to develop good ties with the various factions, simply in order to get a taxi, bus or truck from one place to another through numerous checkpoints manned by different factions. If we presume the nexus between transport owners and faction commanders to have been reasonably good during the war, we might have expected a goodly number of these commanders to call, post war, on owners they had helped, and apply for a driving job.²⁰⁹ We have seen Samuel prepared to seek a *bra* wherever he could, even a RUF disco-owner he had fought against in the war. So why does patrimonialism not re-assert its pull among the ex-combatant bike riders?

The key factor seems to be that combat provided fighters with a dense nexus of new connections, and ideas about social solidarity, that serve as a counter-balance to the pull of patrimonialism. To become a bike-rider an ex-combatant might aspire to buy the bike outright, though this is unlikely, since few left the war with much, and the costs are high (2 to 3 million Leones [1 to 1.5 thousand US\$]), though not so astronomical as acquiring a cab (where a *bra* would definitely be necessary). The more general pattern (in Bo at least, according to Richards *et al.* 2004a) is to take a bike on hire purchase from the Guinean businessmen who bring (smuggle?) Chinese bikes from Conakry. Bikes are quickly confiscated when there is any default, after which the businessman can sell the bike to another potential rider, or revert to the old system, and hire a rider as he might once have found a driver. One way to ensure there is no default is to join together with one or two former

²⁰⁸ Hoek and de Jong gathered information on the bike riders in Makeni as part of a research and advocacy mission (2004) for Plan Netherlands and Rap4Rights. I accompanied this mission as an interpreter and guide, and was thus able to check their sources and findings.

²⁰⁹ In Liberia many ex-combatants were selling gasoline and petrol on a small scale. During the war their commanders were in charge of these fuel reserves and remained in this position after the war (i.e. in 1997), employing some of their most loyal fighters.

comrades and ride the bike night and day, seven days a week. The ex-combatants with a hire-purchase contract can find trusty comrades from among those who were bonded by life-and-death struggles in the bush. Bonds created in war have not lost their value, especially in an activity that recapitulates some of the excitement and danger of handling a weapon, and where the group interest is protected by the application of equal amounts of riding skill among all partners on a daily basis.

Some important regional differences must be noted here, however. In Bo and Kenema the more usual practice is that a businessman provides the bike and the rider leases it, but after a time becomes the owner (i.e. it is a hire purchase contract).²¹⁰ For this reason the union is known as the bike renters association. But in Makeni, the riders only rent the bikes from the owners, and do not own the machine eventually. This may reflect the fact that although RUF ex-combatants are quite numerous in the Bo and Kenema association ex-CDF fighters are in the majority, whereas in Makeni the background of most riders is RUF. Businessmen may have more confidence in ex-CDF types. Whatever the reason, it suggests fighters of CDF background have an advantage in extracting better terms.

A final factor worth discussing is the nature of the niche. The activity is new. If ex-combatants had trained in traditional skills such as carpentry or tailoring, they would have to compete with carpenters or tailors already active before the war. Confidence or bravery as ex-combatants might count for little with potential customers. But there were no bike taxis in Sierra Leone before the war, and the modality seems a great step forward to busy women traders, among the major customers, in a spread-out town like Bo or Makeni. Ex-combatant riders may even be perceived as particularly useful pilots in out-of-town or after-dark trips where there is risk of robbery. Bike-jacking is indeed a problem in Bo, but somewhat mitigated by mobile phones and growing cooperation between police and riders' union (Richards, pers. comm.) A general point becomes clear. Skills training for demobilization might work better if it equips ex-combatants to supply new socially-necessary services. The urban areas, as the bike case suggests, might be left to the hidden hand of the market. But rural areas might benefit from hitherto scarce skills, of a kind generally provided by NGOs, such as well digging, latrine construction, plantation rehabilitation or swamp development. It is possible to envisage training (including business skills) that equips ex-combatants for these tasks, organising trainees into small construction gangs, and then establishes a system in which rural communities use vouchers to purchase the service of choice from competing gangs.

One of the often repeated messages of this thesis is the need for institutional modernization, suitable to the needs and aspirations of youth. What makes the bike riders development interesting on the institutional level is that it is an example of post-war organisation around shared labour interests rather than ethnicity. The Bo union told Richards *et al.* (2004a) that they had members from both CDF and RUF, and stressed that this was a decisive break with war-time organization (the CDF was – despite some attempts to make it appear otherwise – a strongly ethnicized organization, and the RUF was widely perceived as being a kind of sect – a “secret society” [sodality] of rarrays or lumpens). This perpetuated some of the pre-modern mentalities associated with intra-youth egalitarian organization, such as rural labour gangs, diamond digging crews, in which big men and bras were always hovering in the background to confiscate the output, and ensure a snug fit with the hierarchical world over which elders and chiefs presided.²¹¹ The bike riders associations are different. In all towns a rider's

²¹⁰ In 2003 this was Le 20,000/day. A ride cost Le 1000. So it is only after 20 rides (plus fuel costs) that the rider starts to make a profit on the day's work

²¹¹ This brings us back to Durkheim. The solidarity of combatants generated in “fighting” has survived the war but applied to a different “job”, riding a motorbike taxi. The union is a key difference, however, since this is the means to link (through peaceful conflict management) with the wider society. *In professional ethics and civic*

association has been created specifically to protect the stake of the riders against the business men providing the bikes, and the police and road transport authority applying traffic laws, often in quite problematic and corrupt ways. The unions not only look after the interests of sick or injured riders, resolve disputes between riders and customers, and generally interest themselves in health, safety and innovation, but they are also explicit about the need to take on and challenge the pre-war patrimonial order. The Bo union told Richards *et al.* (2004a) that they no longer trust “big men” patrons, who they view as having caused the war by fooling youth into fighting without any real reward. They prefer now to follow a commercial route, and have hired a commercial lawyer in Freetown to fight “class action” cases, e.g. against the police, who had been harassing riders over registration papers for which they had paid but which were deliberately held back – they alleged – by the authorities. The role and strength of the association becomes clear from the following example; police harassment of riders for bribes and fines resulted in ‘confrontation between riders and the police in both Kenema and Bo, the arrest of 32 riders and imposition of high fines (averaging Le 100,000). The association went on strike, supported by women traders, who are among the major clients of the two-wheeled taxis. According to the executive [of the Bo Bike Riders Association], the confrontation required the intervention of the [British-seconded] Inspector-General of police, and court action by the association’s lawyer, who succeeded in having fines reduced by an average of 40 per cent.’ (Richards *et al.*, 2004a:36). Explicitly, the Bo association is fighting a “war” for its young members, but not any more through force of arms, but through the classic instruments of trade unionism (Fithen & Richards 2005). Job interests, strikes and the law of contract have become the weapons of choice, not forced recruitment and summary executions.

The role of the union is also important in Makeni. According to the executive of the Makeni Bike Rider Association: *Our members were quite wild before. When they were still carrying guns they could intimidate everybody, but now they have to stick to the rules. No violence, no drugs and of course the traffic rules. If for instance someone rides too fast, we confiscate the bike for a few days* (Hoek & de Jong 2004, my translation). The various bike rider associations are telling examples of the levels of reconciliation and reintegration possible for even the most battle-hardened ex-combatants. According to the Makeni executive: *Boys who have fought against each other, now work together. People try to live after the war as brothers, but if you do not have any job, you are likely to see each other much faster as enemies again* (Hoek & de Jong 2004, my translation).

Conclusion

Thus this study has come full circle. It began with an account of young fighters roaring into a small diamond town in eastern Sierra Leone, in the early days of an insurgency that mopped up unemployed young people and inducted them into a dangerous world of armed combat. Eleven years of war attacked traditional if problematic rural solidarities, and questioned many social values. The young combatants are once again roaring about the main towns of provincial Sierra Leone. But this time the tool is not the AK47 but the Honda trail bike taxi. Former fighters are laying the foundations for a new, post-war modality of solidarity based on craft unionism. More generally, ex-combatants in the provincial towns are in a different position to those who remain in the diamond fields as diggers, or who have returned to the countryside to farm. The urban bike taxi riders now fight with the law of contract, not guns. This is consistent with Durkheim’s argument that the basis of modern (organic) solidarity lies in recognition of the general applicability of the law of contract to social life (Durkheim 1964 [1893], 1957 [c. 1890-1900]). It suggests that whatever the roots of the war in Sierra Leone – rural oppression, ghetto life, greed-not-grievance – the way forward lies through building not

morasl Durkheim lays stress on the emergence of medieval European guilds as a basis for organic solidarity (Durkheim 1957 [c. 1890-1900]).

only employment opportunities for young people but also the institutional capital to protect and advance those opportunities. Arguably, craft organization and trade-unionism have more to offer post-war Sierra Leone than Special Courts and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. But we might also reflect that the worst of the war was felt both in the deeply disconnected countryside and in Koidu and the capital, Freetown – all too readily connected to the global economy (via diamonds, and perhaps in future through off-shore oil). The least damaged places (in retrospect) proved to be the three main provincial towns. These towns are more economically diverse, enjoying both global connectivity and local links (more so than Freetown) to the diversity of the countryside. It may be no accident that it is in these three provincial towns that we glimpse the beginnings of a re-integration process not only connecting ex-combatants to employment but also providing opportunities for former fighters actively to contribute to the growth of organic social solidarity.

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Annex I

A chronology²¹²

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 1200 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% of voters in a referendum

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 declares a unilateral ceasefire
- 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
- September/October RUF enters Kono but is pushed out of Koidu in October
- November 1992 to January 1993: RUF controls Kono's diamond mining areas.
- December 29th, the execution of nine suspected coup plotters and seventeen other prisoners by the NPRC, makes the UK government cut 4 million pounds 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
- 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 from Teko Barracks in Makeni abscond and head east
- Ambushes on the Kenema-Bo and Makali-Masingbi highway increase
- October, an estimated 40% of new army recruits have defected and misbehave. Evidence of collusion with the RUF in attacks on civilians grows
- Irish priest (Fr. MacAlester) and Dutch medical missionary family (the Krijns) are killed in a RUF ambush at Panguma

²¹² Information in this chronology is partly based on Conciliation Resources (2000)

- 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 and more hostages taken
- 24 January, RUF attacks Kambia town, seizing weapons and new conscripts
- February-April, NPRC employs Gurkha mercenaries but these are ambushed by RUF and withdraw. (their American commander, McKenzie, is killed on c. 24 February)
- March-July, after intervention by International Alert (a NGO) and the support of Ghanaian NPFL publicist Addai-Sebo, a number of hostages is released to the ICRC, after a 17 days 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 (Hooper 2002).
- 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, Fayia 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 the RUF can 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 to implement a weekly war council including EO, President Kabbah and senior commanders from the three ECOMOG contingents. EO and a Nigerian general persuade Kabbah to "neutralize" the RUF headquarters and its senior people. Kabbah authorizes this operation. (Hooper 2002)
- Five days after the start of the attack on the Zogoda by EO and Kamajor, Sankoh requests for a ceasefire.
- EO and the Nigerian general warn Kabbah that the RUF will not hold to the ceasefire
- Large numbers of soldiers are returned to the barracks while the government increasingly depends on Kamajors 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.

FOOTPATHS TO REINTEGRATION

- September/October, Kamajor with EO attacks several RUF camps, in the Kambui Hills, Soro-Gbema chiefdom and the Gola Forest, and surrounds Bokor camp in the Kagari 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 Fayia Musa move to Freetown to prepare for the fuller incorporation of the RUF in the government
- Number of clashes between Kamajors 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 Fayia Musa) claim to take 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 5000 automatic rifles intended for use by the Kamajo militia
- March, International Alert (at the request of the UN) attempts to intervene between the UN and the RUF after their relationship has broken down.
- 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.
- July, junta calls for a national conference and new "truly democratic" elections
- August, ECOWAS imposes sanctions on the junta
- October, Junta representatives and Nigerian and Guinean foreign ministers for ECOWAS sign for a six-month 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

- February, ordered by General Sanni 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 (Buedu)
- 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
- October 17th, 24 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
- December, rebels are within fifty kilometres of Freetown
- ECOMOG flies in reinforcements, junta forces increase their grip on Kono diamond fields, Bockarie demands the "immediate and unconditional release" of Sankoh and peace through dialogue

1999

- 6 January, attack on Freetown. AFRC and RUF control east and centre of the town but after one week and 5000 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 (Feb. 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 Lome where Sankoh is now allowed to stay
- 25 May, detailed peace negotiations start after the promise of the release of Sankoh and a ceasefire
- 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. The ECOMOG troops are to be replaced by UN peacekeepers and military observers.
- Implementation of peace-accord is painfully slow, with limited access to RUF controlled areas and non-implementation of DDR.
- Sam Bockarie flies to Liberia

2000

- 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.
- A thousand British troops, initially based to protect the airport, are now deployed to protect Freetown
- Protests led by women in front of Sankoh's residence in Freetown results in 19 people killed, Sankoh flees to the hills above Freetown, but is captured
- Koroma calls on current and former soldiers to join with CDF units to fight the RUF.
- UN SG recommends immediate reinforcement of the peacekeepers from 9,250 to 13,000
- June, Liberian President Charles Taylor uses his influence to secure the release of hostages.
- August, British forces free hostages taken by the West Side Boys
- 14 August, an agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1315 calls for a Special Court to prosecute war criminals²¹³
- 10th of November: signing of Abuja peace accords.
- End of 2000 UNAMSIL has deployed 17,500 troops

2001

- May 2001 – January 2002: a total of 42,551 fighters demobilise.

2002

- 18 January: Joint Declaration of End of War.
- May 2002: presidential elections won by SLPP candidate, Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah. RUF Political party only receives 2.3% of the vote.

²¹³ The Special Court is estimated to require a three year budget of \$60 million. In contrast, Sierra Leone's total judiciary payroll in 2001 amounted to only \$215,000 (Reno 2003).

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 AFRC (A) |
| M 14 | 2001 | f | Child soldier (B) |
| M 15 | 2001 | Koidu +/- 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 | Kailahun 1991v | Commander (C) |
| M 33 | 2003 m | Kailahun 1991c | Commander (D) |
| M young | 2003 | Kailahun 1997f | Signal Officer (A) |
| M 33 | 2003 | Western Area 1997f | Military Police (A) |
| M 33 | 2003 m | Kailahun 1991v | Commander (E) |
| M middle age | 2003 m | 1993f | Commander (F) |
| M 33 | 2003 m | Kailahun 1991v | Commander (E) |
| M 56 | 2003 | Bo 1991f | Dispenser (A) |
| F 45 | 2003 | Kailahun 1999?v | Educational Officer (A) |
| M 33 | 2003m | Pujehun 1991c | Signal 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 | Tonkolili 1992v | Commander AFRC (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 AFRC (B) |
| M young | 2001 | Kailahun 1993 | Child soldier AFRC (C) |

Voetpaden naar Reïntegratie

Gewapend Conflict, Jeugd en de Rurale Crisis in Sierra Leone

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift gaat over de oorlog in Sierra Leone. Het richt zich op een beruchte rebellen groepering, haar jonge strijders en hun naoorlogs reïntegratie proces. Het probeert inzicht te geven in de wijze waarop de jongeren werden gerekruteerd en hoe hun wereld eruit zag toen zij deel uitmaakte van het rebellenleger. Tot slot wordt ook hun demobilisatie en reïntegratie proces bestudeert. Dit alles in de context van een land dat in een diepe sociaal-economische crisis verkeerde, waar vooral de jonge mensen op het door oorlog verscheurde platteland de gevolgen van ondervonden.

De introdunctie van dit proefschrift brengt ons naar het kleine stadje Tongo, gelegen in het oostelijk deel van het West-Afrikaanse land Sierra Leone. Het beschrijft de verschillende aanvallen op dit diamantenrijke gebied door het door jeugd gedomineerde rebellenleger; het Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF). Alhoewel Tongo pas in 1994 voor het eerst de gruwelijkheden van de oorlog direct ervoer, heerste er in Sierra Leone al vanaf 1991 oorlog tussen het RUF en drie opeenvolgende regimes: de eenpartij staat van het “All People’s Congress” van President Joseph Momoh, het militaire regime van de “National Provisional Ruling Council” (1992-96) van dictator Valentine Strasser en het gekozen regime van President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah vanaf 1996.

Wat er gebeurde met Tongo - de herhaaldelijke aanvallen en gruwelijkheden die er plaatsvonden - is tot op zekere hoogte representatief voor hetgeen er ook op andere plaatsen in het land gebeurde. De gebeurtenissen en feiten, zoals bijvoorbeeld de aanvallen, de gruweligheden en de ontvoeringen, die plaatsvonden in Tongo en op andere plekken, als bewijs worden gezien van de juistheid van drie nogal verschillende verklaringen voor de oorlog in Sierra Leone en voor de aard en motivaties van hen die er aan deelnemen. Volgens diegene die geloven in de “Greed, not Grievance” (enkel hebzucht en geen wrok) verklaring vond het conflict in Sierra Leone plaats omdat er waardevolle mineralen aanwezig waren. De hoofdrolspelers, en dan vooral toch de rebellen, zo wordt gesteld, werden door economische motieven gedreven: vandaar de herhaaldelijke aanvallen van de rebellen op het diamantenrijke Tongo!

Anderen stellen dat het conflict is veroorzaakt door Malthusiaanse factoren zoals populatie druk en schaarsheid van land, welke op haar beurt weer “onderhuidse primitivisme blootlegde die mede aan hun cultuur moeten worden toegeschreven.” (Danner, 1993). Deze verklaring wordt (door de tegenstanders ervan) ook wel “New Barbarism” of de “apocalyptic view” genoemd. Hier zou dan een verklaring mee worden gegeven voor het gewelddadige gedrag van de verschillende gewapende partijen en in het bijzonder van het RUF, tijdens aanvallen zoals die plaatsvonden op Tongo en andere dorpen en steden.

Een derde verklaring ziet de oorzaken van het conflict in Sierra Leone als een gevolg van de ineenstorting van de staat, welke gestructureerd was volgens neo-patrimoniale principes. De gevolgen van deze ineenstorting werden vooral door jongeren op het platteland ervaren, die sowieso al een lage en kwetsbare sociaal-economische status hadden. Uiteindelijk leidde de hierdoor ontstaande spanningen tot een gewelddadige explosie. De constante marginalisatie van de jeugd resulteerde in groot reservoir van jonge mensen die uitgesloten werden van de samenleving en als gevolg daarvan extra kwetsbaar waren voor de ronselpraktijken van gewapende partijen; dit zou dan de verklaring zijn voor de hoofdzakelijk

jonge en vaak zelfs minderjarige strijders onder de gelederen van de gewapende partijen en vooral onder die van de rebellen.

Er is veel inkt gebruikt om de hierboven genoemde verklaringen te verdedigen, echter met een opvallend gebrek aan bewijs van diegene die daadwerkelijk hebben deelgenomen aan het conflict. Dit proefschrift probeert dit gebrek te compenseren door zich te richten op de ervaringen en interpretaties van de protagonisten van de oorlog, met bijzondere nadruk op de tot nu toe genegeerde kaders van het RUF. Met deze kennis wordt er opnieuw gekeken naar de drie verklaringsmodellen. Oorlog is altijd complex en controversieel, en een genuanceerde beoordeling van bewijs van ooggetuigen valt meestal ten prooi aan verwoede propaganda gevechten. Het onlangs afgeronde onderzoek van de Waarheids- en Verzoeningscommissie in Sierra Leone voorziet ons van een belangrijke hoeveelheid documentatie materiaal over de oorlog en de bredere context ervan en is gebaseerd op de perspectieven en ervaringen van velen en niet in de laatste plaats die van de slachtoffers. Desalniettemin moet men aannemen dat vele voormalige strijders hun ervaringen en visies niet hebben gedeeld met de commissie. Naast de wijdverbreide en overdreven angst onder ex-strijders voor vervolging door het Speciale Hof voor Oorlogsmisdaden in Sierra Leone, liggen hieraan ook vooral culturele aspecten ten grondslag, zoals de algehele nadruk die op het platteland van Sierra Leone wordt gelegd op het belang van geheimhouding. Geheimhouding speelt een belangrijke rol in de sociale cohesie in ruraal Sierra Leone. Het is de norm om niet zomaar te spreken, of zich als vrijwilliger aan te melden, als daar niet nadrukkelijk om wordt gevraagd.

Ongetwijfeld zal er nog veel worden gediscussieerd over de vraag hoe effectief de Waarheids- en Verzoeningscommissie is geweest in haar doel de gebeurtenissen die tijdens de oorlog plaatsvonden zo nauwkeurig mogelijk weer te geven. Ondertussen volgt dit proefschrift een ander lijn, namelijk die van een antropologische benadering waarbij over een langere periode, stap voor stap een relatie van vertrouwen met de ex-strijders werd opgebouwd. Als onderdeel van deze benadering werden onder meer verscheidende locaties bezocht waar specifieke militaire operaties hadden plaatsgevonden, met als doel het stimuleren van het geheugen en het controleren van hetgeen de ex-strijders vertelden. Illusterend voor deze benadering was het bezoek met enkele ex-rebellen aan het voormalige hoofdkwartier van het RUF, het junglekamp “Zogoda”. Een uren durende jungletocht over smalle voetpaden bracht ons naar het sinds 1996 verlaten en nu overwoekerde kamp van het RUF. Zonder de uitleg van de voormalige strijders wezen slechts enkele voorwerpen op voorbijse bewoning zoals een kapotte accu of een onderdeel van een typemachine. De ex-strijders echter wezen de plek aan waar ’s ochtends iedereen verzamelde, de nog zichtbare gaten in de grond waar eens de latrines zich bevonden, de plekken waar hun hutten hadden gestaan en waar de rebellen leider Foday Sankoh had gewoond.

Uiteindelijk dient deze focus op diegene welke actief hebben meegedaan aan de oorlog hoofdzakelijk een etnografisch doel; het verzamelde materiaal is bedoeld om tot een beter begrip te komen van hoe de oorlog werd ervaren door de protagonisten. Dit ervaringsgerichte perspectief, zo word beargumenteerd, is belangrijk om de oorlog te proberen te begrijpen en daardoor ook voor het trachten te voorkomen van een heropleving ervan.

Het eerste hoofdstuk heeft een duidelijk etnografische karakter. Hier wordt interview materiaal gepresenteerd met hen die actief hebben deelgenomen aan het conflict. De ex-strijders antwoordden op een tweetal kernvragen; 1) ‘wat denk je dat de oorlog veroorzaakt heeft?’ en 2) ‘waarom heb je de wapens opgenomen en ben je gaan vechten?’ Wellicht is het geen verrassing dat, als men deze twee vragen stelt aan diegenen die vrijwillig de wapens hebben opgenomen, de antwoorden op deze vragen elkaar overlappen, echter niet in alle gevallen. Maar velen die meevochten bij de verschillende militias, en vooral zij die bij het RUF hoorden, werden ontvoerd. Zij werden vervolgens gedwongen om voor de desbetreffende gewapende factie te strijden. Diegenen die werden ontvoerd geven vaak twee

verschillende antwoorden op de hierboven gestelde vragen, en antwoordend op de tweede vraag verklaarden zij dat zij werden gedwongen tot het opnemen van de wapens, echter – en wellicht verrassend – was dit niet altijd het geval. Een aantal van diegenen die werden ontvoerd door het RUF ontwikkelden toch een loyaliteitsgevoel naar deze groepering. Wellicht is dit een manifestatie van hetgeen psychologen het Stockholm Syndroom noemen. Een beroemd voorbeeld hiervan was de erfgename Patty Hearst, die ontvoerd werd door de stedelijke guerrillagroepering, het “Symbionese Liberation Army” uit Californië en na enige tijd overtuigd aanhanger leek te zijn. Hoe dan ook, het is opvallend dat beide categorieën, vrijwilligers en zij die waren ontvoerd, min of meer dezelfde redenen noemen voor het uitbreken van de oorlog. Nog opmerkelijker is het dat deze redenen niet afhankelijk zijn van de rank (gewone soldaat of officier), gewapende factie (CDF²¹⁴, RUF, SLA²¹⁵), etnische afkomst of de leeftijd van de geïnterviewde ex-strijder. Samengevat stellen zij dat de oorzaken van de oorlog moeten worden gezocht in het ontbreken van opleidings- en arbeidsperspectieven voor de jeugd en het falen of de onwil van de heersende klasse – vooral op dorpsniveau – om diegenen die kwetsbaar en hulp behoeften (weer in het bijzonder de jeugd) te helpen en bij de samenleving te betrekken, i.p.v. te negeren en uit te sluiten. Dit resulteerde vervolgens in een grote groep jonge mensen die zichzelf als gemarginaliseerd en buitengesloten zagen, en die bereid waren – of geen ander alternatief zagen – de wapens op te nemen.

Zijn deze door de ex-strijders naar voren gebrachte redenen slechts rationalisaties achteraf, een poging tot zelf rechtvaardiging of een voorbeeld van een collectief waanidee? Als dit inderdaad het geval zou zijn dan zou het nog steeds een uitdaging zijn om dit nader te verklaren, te meer omdat voormalige vijanden toch dezelfde analyses van de oorlog en haar oorzaken geven. Maar wellicht zijn deze verklaringen gebaseerd op factoren die daadwerkelijk het conflict hebben veroorzaakt en gevoed. Daarom wordt er hoofdstuk 2 gekeken naar de geschiedenis van rurale gemeenschappen in Sierra Leone en naar de rol van de overheid. Hierdoor kan worden bepaald of en in welke mate er een uitsluiting en marginalisatie van jongeren heeft plaatsgevonden en of de ex-strijders die zijn geïnterviewd tijdens het onderzoek – op grond van hun achtergrond – in de hierdoor ontstaande sociale klasse kunnen worden geplaatst.

Heeft er een sociale, politieke en economische uitsluiting van een segment van de rurale jeugd heeft plaatsgevonden? Deze vraag staat centraal in het tweede hoofdstuk. De politieke economie van ruraal Sierra Leone, beginnende bij de koloniale periode – en vanaf de afschaffing van binnenlandse slavernij in 1928 in het bijzonder – wordt gedomineerd door onopgeloste spanningen tussen enerzijds de landbezittende elite en anderzijds ontwrichte kleine boeren of “vreemdelingen”. Hierin verschilt Sierra Leone niet van de situatie zoals beschreven in Trevor Getz’s recente analyse van de rurale maatschappijen in Ghana en Senegal na de afschaffing van de binnenlandse slavernij. Zelfs het proces van de uiteindelijke afschaffing van deze vorm van slavernij, ten tijde van koloniaal voogdijschap, werd nog gestuurd en gemanipuleerd door de dorpsleiders en handeldrijvende elites, ter meerdere glorie en voordeel van henzelf (Getz 2004).

Na de afschaffing van de slavernij ontbeerden de ex-slaven en hun kinderen en kindskinderen noemenswaardige rechten met betrekking tot land, eigendom en huwelijk. Velen bleven, kaakstoot op de dag van vandaag, de pionnen en ondergeschikten van een gerontocratische rurale elite. Zij die hieraan probeerden te ontkomen konden dit doen door weg te trekken uit hun geboortedistrict, om zich vervolgens te moeten vestigen in een naburige district met de kwetsbare status van “vreemdeling”. Velen kozen er echter voor om in de diamantenvelden te gaan werken, maar werden hier op gewelddadige wijze

²¹⁴ CDF: Civil Defence Force

²¹⁵ SLA: the Sierra Leone Army

gecontroleerd door (de door de staat beschermde) entrepreneurs van de diamanten industrie. Dromen over het vinden van een grote diamant bleven enkel dromen en een cyclus tekende zich af waarin periodes van graven naar diamanten voor een marginaal loon werden afgewisseld met periodes in het dorp waar men het land verbouwde. Zij die niet bereid waren om zichzelf weer onder de controle van de dorpschef en ouderlingen te plaatsen, bleven ronddwalen op het platteland waar zij probeerden te overleven als dagloner en waar zij (soms) ook betrokken raakten met licht criminele activiteiten. Deze uitzichtloze situatie van armoede en marginalisatie reproduceerde zichzelf generatie na generatie. De kinderen van deze kleine boeren en diamanten gravers hoopten steeds weer dat zij aan het lot van hun ouders konden ontsnappen door middel van een opleiding. Een moderne staat – hoe arm deze ook mag zijn – wordt verondersteld om bepaalde basisvoorzieningen beschikbaar te maken voor haar inwoners, op basis van gelijkheid. Voorzieningen zoals primair onderwijs, basale gezondheidszorg en gelijkheid voor de wet. Het neo-patrimoniale regime dat van 1967 tot 1991 de macht had in Sierra Leone voorzag slechts in zeer geringe mate het merendeel van haar burgers hierin, de hoofdstad, enkele provinciesteden en het Noorden van het land waar zij haar machtsbasis had daargelaten. De grensstreek met Liberia werd een broeinest van oppositie tegen dit regime, en werd daarom op haar beurt gedurende een lange tijd systematisch uitgesloten van de al weinige sociale voorzieningen. De locale bestuurlijke elite (de dorpschefs) en (groot)grondbezitters hadden een alternatief; zij konden hun kinderen naar de steden sturen waar deze konden profiteren van de onderwijsvoorzieningen. De gemarginaliseerde rurale armen werden echter het kind van de rekening. Een rurale onderklasse, rijp om te worden gerekruteerd door gewapende milities, werd gevormd.

Nu, na de oorlog, is het duidelijk dat de ex-strijders en de burgers het in grote mate met elkaar eens zijn over de oorzaken van het conflict in Sierra Leone. Deze oorzaken zijn echt en vormen een integraal onderdeel van de geschiedenis en samenleving van Sierra Leone. Mede op grond daarvan luidt de belangrijkste hypothese van dit proefschrift dan ook als volgt: het RUF moet worden beschouwd als een extreem gewelddadige opstand van gemarginaliseerde jonge rurale Sierra Leoners, welke op gang werd gebracht door de tekortkomingen van een ineens stortende neo-patrimoniale éénpartij staat.

Voordat er in detail kan worden gekeken naar eventueel bewijsmateriaal dat deze hypothese bevestigt, is het van belang als de lezer een duidelijk overzicht krijgt van het tien jaar durende conflict in Sierra Leone. Hoofdstuk 3 probeert dit overzicht te geven en tevens wordt er een puntsgewijs chronologisch overzicht gegeven van de belangrijkste gebeurtenissen. Sommige van deze gebeurtenissen worden verder geïllustreerd aan de hand van persoonlijke herinneringen en commentaar van de ex-strijders en burgers die voor dit proefschrift zijn geïnterviewd. Veel van deze persoonlijke ervaringen vinden slechts zelden een plaats in een officiële geschiedenis van de oorlog, omdat zij zich afspelen op een microsociologisch vlak (hebbende betrekking op zeer specifieke en locale gebeurtenissen). Toch is het belangrijk om enige kennis van dit soort ervaringen en de interpretaties daarvan te hebben, omdat dit uiteindelijk de oorzaak kan zijn voor gewelddadige gebeurtenissen op individueel of groepsniveau.

Om een goed antwoord te kunnen geven op de hierboven gestelde hypothese is kennis over de oorlog niet voldoende. Inzicht in het RUF – haar organisatie vorm, haar overtuigingen en haar militaire acties – is ook noodzakelijk. Maar hier stuiten we op een probleem; het RUF is een synoniem geworden voor extreem geweld, en werd alom gemedan. Zoals een voormalige Eerste Minister van het Verenigd Koninkrijk het met betrekking tot de IRA in Noord Ierland zo grafisch stelde; “de zuurstof van publiciteit” werd ontzegd. Het RUF heeft haar bedoelingen en overtuigingen slechts in enkele formele voorstellen kenbaar gemaakt, en dit beperkte aantal verklaringen werd in de regel geridiculiseerd en met minachting bezien, in het bijzonder door enkele invloedrijke Sierra Leonese wetenschappers. Mede hierdoor komt het

dat - los van het wijdverspreide doch diffuse beeld van het RUF als zijnde een monsterlijke organisatie – de kennis die voorhanden is over de aard van het RUF vooral komt van diegenen die ertegen waren. Wat vooral ontbreekt is kennis over de achtergronden en motivaties van de RUF strijders – gedurende lange tijd werden RUF gevangen routineus geëxecuteerd door het leger, in plaats van ondervraagd – en hoe de kampen van het RUF en de gebieden onder haar controle werden georganiseerd tijdens de eerste helft van het conflict. In hoofdstuk 4 wordt getracht dit tekort te compenseren. Hier kijken we in de wereld van het RUF en komen meer te weten over haar strategieën om rekruten te binden, over de organisatie van haar basiskampen en over haar wetten, regels en politieke ideeën. Het wordt duidelijk dat het RUF desertie van de ontvoerde rekruten probeerde te voorkomen met meer middelen dan enkel het gebruik van geweld of het dreigen hiermee. Gedurende de “junglekamp” periode (1994-1997) ontstond er een bepaalde vorm en mentaliteit in het RUF - en structureerde zij haar activiteiten volgens een bepaalde organisatorische vorm – die gestoeld was op egalitaire principes. Dit als antwoord op de cliëntelistische en uitsluitende principes die dominant waren in de samenleving sinds de afschaffing van de binnenlandse slavernij. Dit bewijs bevestigt, maar nuanceert ook, de algemenere – meer door de theorie gestuurde – speculaties over de aard van het RUF zoals deze zijn gemaakt door Richards (1996). Uit hoofdstuk 4 wordt duidelijk dat het RUF beter georganiseerd en gedisciplineerd was, en dat het striktere regels had, dan haar tegenstanders bereid waren te geloven. Dit op haar beurt vraagt dan om een goede verklaring naar het waarom van het gewelddadige en misdadige gedrag van de RUF strijders. RUF misdaden vonden vooral, maar zeer zeker niet uitsluitend, vanaf 1996 plaats toen de beweging met opzet werd buitengesloten van het democratische politieke proces, onder het mom van “Verkiezingen voor de vrede” waardoor het RUF werd uitgesloten van deelname aan de verkiezingen. Deze opzettelijke uitsluiting was wellicht een gevolg van de pogingen van de VN en andere organisaties om het Abidjan vredesproces te beheersen. De verklaring voor de toenemende misdaden van het RUF wordt in hoofdstuk 6 gegeven.

Uit het bewijs dat wordt gepresenteerd in hoofdstuk 4 blijkt dat een van de beleidsdoelen van het RUF (of althans van sommige secties van haar leiderschap in de jungle) het promoten van landbouw was, als kernpunt voor een rurale transformatie in Sierra Leone. Tot op zekere hoogte was deze aandacht voor voedselproductie een noodzakelijk gevolg van de situatie waarin het RUF zich bevond. De strijders van het RUF moesten worden gevoed. Maar er zijn sterke aanwijzingen dat zowel gewone als een aantal vooraanstaande RUF leden oprecht waren in hun betrokkenheid met veranderingen in de landbouw. Dit mag als een complete verrassing komen voor hen die het RUF als een rebellenbeweging zien met een urbane wortels of voor hen die geloven dat het RUF vooral was geïnteresseerd in de diamantenrijkdom van het land. Maar als het inderdaad zo is dat vele RUF strijders tot een rurale onderklasse behoorden met een zeer beperkte aanspraak op land, bezit en huwelijksrechten zal dit minder verrassend zijn. Het bewijs voor de betrokkenheid van het RUF met een specifieke agrarische ontwikkeling wordt verder in detail getoetst in hoofdstuk 5. Het bewijs dat een agrarische betrokkenheid van een bepaalde groep binnen het RUF oprecht waren, en niet slechts van opportunistische aard, kan worden afgeleid het feit dat verschillende groepen van RUF ex-strijders hebben gekozen voor het uitvoeren van agrarische projecten als onderdeel van hun reïntegratie steun. Deze groepen en hun projecten worden besproken. Zowel de collectieve wijze van opzet van deze projecten en het feit dat deze ex-strijders deze projecten zien als een voortzetting van de strijd en idealen van het RUF, maar dan met vreedzame middelen, zijn veelzeggende bevindingen. Een zekere mate van succes – in een land bezaaid met de overblijfselen van gefaalde agrarische ontwikkelingsprojecten – geeft reden tot het heroverwegen van de aard van het RUF, voordat het explodeerde in een chaotische en extreem gewelddadige groepering na het (controversiële) mislukken van het Abidjan vredesproces.

Hoofdstuk 6 behandelt de hypothese van het RUF als zijnde het resultaat van een jeugdige rurale onderklasse die ten strijde trekt. Enkele fundamentele aannames worden allereerst getest. In de eerste plaats, waren de leden van het RUF hoofdzakelijk jeugdig en kwamen zij inderdaad van het platteland? Er is namelijk een wijdverbreid en algemeen geaccepteerd idee dat het RUF vooral bestond uit urbane proleten. Een recente studie - de zorgvuldig uitgevoerde kwantitatieve en grootschalige analyse van ex-strijders en hun achtergronden en motivaties, Humpheys en Weinstein 2004 - bestrijdt deze urbane mythe. De meeste RUF kaders hadden een rurale achtergrond en behoorden tot de armste klassen. Dit hoofdstuk onderzoekt deze bevinding nog verder en stelt dat de organisatorische structuur van het RUF een reflectie is van al aanwezige organisatorische vormen onder jongeren in ruraal Sierra Leone. Tevens wordt het bewijs behandeld dat deze alternatieve organisatorische structuur specifiek bedoeld was om die mechanismen van socio-economische en politieke uitsluiting, zoals deze werd ervaren door de kaders, te vervangen. Hieruit wordt duidelijk waarom de hoofdzakelijk gemarginaliseerde rurale jongeren die werden ontvoerd door het RUF de ideeën van het RUF aantrekkelijk begonnen te vinden, toen zij eenmaal door de factie waren opgenomen. Deze aantrekkelijkheid was niet enkel gebaseerd op objectieve rationaliteit – in zekere mate kan de beweging worden begrepen als een soort Cargo Cultus²¹⁶, er op uit zijnde de minachting van de samenleving terug te draaien.

Alhoewel ik ruimte wil laten voor hen die het gepresenteerde materiaal anders zouden willen interpreteren, is het duidelijk dat de geïsoleerde jungle kampen van het RUF een alternatieve gemeenschap boden aan de rekruten, gebaseerd op meritocratische in plaats van gerontocratische of patrimoniale principes. Het verlies van deze kampen, als gevolg van militaire operaties van overheidsmilities, geholpen door huurlingen, ten tijde van een wapenstilstand, had als gevolg dat het RUF naar een fatale en instabiele paranoia afgleed. Het verlies van de kampen ondermijnde de autoriteit van de ideologische leiders en leidde ertoe dat er een groep van meer instabiele strijders aan de macht kwam. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met een discussie van de “greed, not grievance” en de “new barbarism” verklaringen, en brengt enkele tekortkomingen van deze naar voren. Het materiaal dat in dit proefschrift is gepresenteerd wijst in de richting van een rurale crisis, veroorzaakt door onopgeloste spanningen tussen de landbezittende elite enerzijds en “vreemdelingen” of kleine boeren anderzijds. Deze crisis werd versterkt en versneld door het ineensstorten van een patrimoniale staat met als gevolg de buitensluiting en marginalisatie van jongeren.

Hoofdstuk 7 begint met een beschrijving van het ontwapenings, demobilisatie en reïntegratie (DDR²¹⁷) proces van ex-strijders in Sierra Leone. Enkele tekortkomingen van dit programma worden besproken. De overheid van Sierra Leone in het algemeen en het Nationaal Comité voor Ontwapening, Demobilisatie en Reïntegratie (NCDDR) in het bijzonder schoten tekort in het onderkennen en adequaat aanpakken van de rurale crisis voor jongeren in Sierra Leone en dus ook voor de tienduizenden ex-strijders die onder de verantwoordelijkheid vielen van NCDDR; meer dan 70.000 strijders zijn onder NCDDR ontwapend en hebben reïntegratie hulp gekregen, hoofdzakelijk d.m.v. een vakopleiding en gereedschap. Met deze rurale crisis wordt, zoals gezegd, de dichotomie in de rurale samenleving bedoeld tussen de heersende rurale elite enerzijds en de “vreemdelingen” en kleine boeren anderzijds, waarbij de eerste groep door middel van haar vergaande controle

²¹⁶Een cargo cultus is gebaseerd op de redenering: post hoc ergo propter: daarna en dus daarom. De inwoners van Papua, Yaliwan, Vanuatu en andere plaatsen viel het op dat wanneer de koloniale bezetters havens en landingsbanen bouwden, deze havens en landingsbanen al snel werden bezocht door schepen en vliegtuigen die vracht (cargo) afleverden. De lokale inwoners concludeerden dat de schepen en vliegtuigen arriveerden als gevolg van de gebouwde havens en landingsbanen, en besloten dus om hun eigen havens en landingsbanen te gaan bouwen in de verwachting dat ook zij snel de eerste schepen en vliegtuigen met vracht zouden mogen ontvangen (John FitzGerald 1996, *my translation*)

²¹⁷ DDR: Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

over de wetten tot het gebruik van land, arbeid, huwelijk en het gewoonterecht, arme rurale jongeren exploiteerde en uiteindelijk marginaliseerde. Doordat NCDDR de agrarische crisis voor de jonge Sierra Leoners op het platteland niet onderkende, kon het niet voorzien in de vraag van de ex-strijders naar agrarische pakketten. In plaats daarvan voorzag het reïntegratie programma in een aanbod van veelal op de stedelijke gebieden gerichte vakopleidingen (illustreerend is computer training in deze), maar dan weer helaas niet in die mate dat de getrainden een redelijke kans maakten op de arbeidsmarkt. De uitvoerende organisaties van de vakopleidingen ontbeerden soms de nodige expertise of waren corrupt, met als gevolg dat ongepaste en slecht afgeleverde programma's toenamen. Hierbij kwam nog dat, door de specifieke opzet van het DDR programma, zij die weer terugkeerden naar hun geboortedorpen in de meest afgelegen gebieden, het kwetsbaarste waren voor het falen en de kwade praktijken van de NCDDR staf. Het hoofdstuk sluit af met een uiteenzetting van een alternatief reïntegratie traject, dat wel openstaat voor mogelijkheden binnen de agrarische sector, en dat relevant zou kunnen zijn voor de nog grotere uitdaging van het reïntegreren van ex-strijders in het naburige Liberia. De algemene conclusie die hier naar voren komt is dat – in plaats van ex-strijders te laten reïntegreren in een falende rurale samenleving – er vraag is naar een nieuwe benadering die zich richt op de gehele rurale en jeugdige onderklasse. DDR zou daarom moeten worden gevolgd door een op de jeugd georiënteerde agrarische transformatie.

Hoofdstuk 8 beschrijft een drietal reïntegratie trajecten. Dit om de problemen te illustreren waarop de ex-strijders, en jeugd in het algemeen, heden ten dage stuiten waarneer zij proberen de kwesties die verantwoordelijk waren voor hun aanvankelijke marginalisatie en uitsluiting achter zich te laten. De eerste case beschrijft een tweetal dorpjes op het platteland van Sierra Leone en gaat in op de relatie tussen de ouderlingen en de jeugd na terugkomst. Het wordt duidelijk dat er een soort van “jeugdemancipatie” heeft plaatsgevonden en dat de ouderlingen de jeugd niet langer kunnen uitbuiten zoals ze deden voor de oorlog op grond van aanspraken op de autoriteit van het “gewoonterecht”. Waar het de reïntegratie van ex-strijders betreft, zoals in het geval van het tweede dorpje, heeft deze jeugdemancipatie (of beter gezegd, “door de oorlog gegenereerde waarden”) zich zover ontwikkeld dat het soms niet meer kan worden overbrugd binnen de meer traditionele dorpsamenleving. De tweede case beschrijft de spanningen tussen enerzijds een terugkerende klasse van grondbezitters en haar pogingen om de patrimoniale wijze van bestuur te herinvoeren en anderzijds een grote groep van “vreemdelingen” en jeugdigen zonder direct aanwezige verwantschapsbanden, in dit geval ex RUF strijders, die het moeilijk vinden zichzelf te onderwerpen aan de meer traditioneel ingestelde groep van grondbezitters. Deze spanningen worden beschreven tegen de achtergrond van het mijnstadje Tongo, beschreven in de introductie, en spelen zich af rond het probleem van huisvesting. De laatste case die wordt beschreven geeft een gedeeltelijk antwoord op het alom aanwezige probleem van een beperkt aanbod van banen en de onbehoorlijke controle van patrimoniale ouderlingen over de arbeid van jeugd. Het beschrijft een interessante urbane economische niche voor die ex-strijders die onwillig zijn om terug te keren naar hun rurale gemeenschappen. Sommige van deze ex-strijders verdienen hun dagelijks brood als taxi chauffeur op een motor. Wat deze ontwikkeling zo bijzonder maakt – lost van het feit dat het een volledig nieuwe ontwikkeling is – is dat deze motorrijders zichzelf in een vakbond hebben georganiseerd, die qua organisatorische opzet lijkt te zijn gebaseerd op de organisatievorm van de door hen achter zich gelaten gewapende milities.

Wat alle beschreven cases laten zien is hoe divers en complex het reïntegratie proces is. Of de reïntegratie van ex-strijders in Sierra Leone een succes of een mislukking wordt hangt niet af van de specifieke hulpprogramma's maar of de algemene situatie die jongeren (meisjes, zowel als jongens) in rurale gebieden zo kwetsbaar maakt voor de ronselpraktijken van milities kan worden veranderd.

About the Author

Krijn Peters was born in the small village of Bokhoven, the Netherlands, in 1975. He went to the Orduynen College in 's-Hertogenbosch and finished his Atheneum education in 1993. Interested in “development issues” he then went to Wageningen University to study Rural Development Sociology. He achieved his MSc degree in 1998, with a dissertation on the reintegration process of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone and another dissertation on the long-term reintegration prospects of ex-Khmer Rouge combatants in Cambodia.

In 2000 he worked a year for the British NGO Save the Children, undertaking an evaluation of its child soldiers’ reintegration project in Liberia. This culminated in a publication of a report together with Sophie Laws.

The following year he started his PhD research, again on the reintegration of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone, but this time with a specific focus on the former rebel combatants.

In 2005 he became a lecturer at the Centre for Development Studies at Swansea University, Wales.