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The Political Economy of Internal
Conflict in Sierra Leone

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Foreword

This paper is part of a larger research project, 'Coping with Internal Conflict' (CICP), which was executed by the Conflict Research Unit of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' for the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The CICP, which was finalized at the end of 2002, consisted of three components: 'The Political Economy of Internal Conflict'; 'Managing Group Grievances and Internal Conflict'; and 'Security Sector Reform'. This paper was written in the framework of the research component 'The Political Economy of Internal Conflict'.

Addressing the political economy of internal conflict calls for policies based on good analysis, and this component's purpose was to make such analyses. Studies on Angola, Colombia, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka were carried out, and the studies particularly examined the local dimension of political economies of conflict, the interface between the national and the international dimensions, and the role of outside actors.

I. Introduction - The Political Economy of ‘New War’

It is widely recognised that post-Cold War armed conflicts are especially likely to occur in poor countries where the state is weak. Explanation has to take account of the importance of non-state actors. These actors include ethnic militias, religious groups, terrorist cells, private security companies, mercenaries and organised criminal gangs. ‘New war’ is said to involve an apparent blurring of the boundaries between war (violent struggle for political or social ends) and criminal violence (force used for private material gain).¹ Some analysts consider criminal motivations to be the main explanation for some recent conflicts. The war in Sierra Leone, 1991-2002, is often viewed in this light.

The present paper offers a critical examination of this view. The evidence for the criminality thesis is less clear-cut than sometimes assumed. There is better support for the idea that the Sierra Leone conflict was fostered by social exclusion of the young and poor. This has major implications for post-war reconstruction. Areas where the impact of war has been greatest are now in a state of political and social flux. The war has fostered self-reliance, especially among young people in rural areas. Rural populations are now more ready to claim their rights. Actions of ruling elites are openly challenged. Eyes are open to the value of rural produce. This implies potential far-reaching changes in the political economy of rural Sierra Leone. There is a counteracting tendency, however, for humanitarian and other overseas development assistance to revive patrimonial systems of appropriation and distribution.

The essay is divided into three parts. The first part offers a review of eleven years of war in Sierra Leone from March 23rd 1991 (the war was officially declared at an end in February 2002), including description of the part played by non-state combatant groups. A second section critically addresses the so-called ‘greed, not grievance’ theory of ‘new war’ and its applicability to Sierra Leone. It is concluded that although parties to the conflict in Sierra Leone have funded their war efforts from mining there is little evidence that diamonds are the fundamental cause of the conflict. A third section draws on recent evidence to assess patterns of organization of combatant groups and civil defence. This evidence provides important confirmation that social exclusion is a basic cause of the war. The likely legacy and legitimacy of war-induced social change in post-conflict Sierra Leone is assessed.

¹ Kaldor, Mary, 1999. *New and Old Wars Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

II. The War in Sierra Leone

2.1. The Protagonists

The war in Sierra Leone has been long and confusing. Before offering an account of the main events it will help to describe the principal parties to the conflict:

- The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), formed sometime during the 1980s by a group of activists seeking to overthrow the All Peoples Congress (APC) regime (in power from 1968, under a one-party state constitution from 1978). Political influences on the RUF included orthodox Marxism, radical Pan Africanism and the populism of the Green Book of Col. Gaddafi. Some foundation cadres trained in Libya. One of this number was Foday Sankoh, a cashiered army corporal jailed for seven years for his part in a coup attempt in 1969. In Libya, along with other founders of the RUF, Sankoh encountered the Liberian guerrilla leader Charles Taylor. Taylor and Sankoh later moved to Burkina Faso, and were among the group involved in the overthrow of Thomas Sankara by Blaise Compaore in 1987. Sankoh and the infant RUF then gathered guerrilla experience by assisting Taylor in the uprising of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia from 1989 to 1991.
- A national army, known from 1991 to 1998 as the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF), and from 1999 as the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), fighting against the RUF on behalf of successive governments, viz. the northern-dominated APC regime, under the presidency of Joseph Saidu Momoh (1985-1992), a military junta, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), formed after a coup by junior officers (1992-96), and the democratic regime of President Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah - a coalition led by the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) - from February 1996 to present (with brief interruption - see below).
- Various army splinter groups, including (from 1992) APC loyalists, at times fighting in loose alliance with the RUF to undermine the NPRC and SLPP. In May 1997 a fraction of the RSLMF, stood down and deprived of its benefits by the Kabbah government, mutinied and formed a second short-lived military regime, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), into which it invited the RUF leadership. The AFRC was driven from Freetown by Nigerian troops of the West African peace-keeping force, ECOMOG (Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group), in February 1998, and the democratic government restored. AFRC and RUF renegades brought the war back to the capital Freetown in January 1999, causing extensive loss of life in a short-lived but devastating raid.
- A civil defence force (CDF) formed from various groups of local civil defence volunteers defending villages from RUF incursions using traditional hunter tracking techniques and magical protections. Local groups of this type - generally a master hunter and handful of apprentices - opposed the RUF from the outset of the war, but at first mainly under army

tutelage.² Later (from 1993) such groups began to operate independently in the south of the country.³ From 1996 they were amalgamated and expanded under the patronage of the new democratic government's deputy Minister of Defence, Samuel Hinga Norman, a former captain in the RSLMF. This resulted in the CDF militia, a large force with c. 30-50,000 members. CDF personnel were trained in use of automatic weapons and counter-insurgency techniques by a private security company (Executive Outcomes, EO) and deployed in offensive operations against the RUF during a cease-fire negotiated to facilitate peace negotiations (Abidjan, 1995-6). The sacking of three of the main RUF forest strongholds, with EO assistance, September-October 1996, undermined the Abidjan accords, even before a treaty was signed (November 30th 1996). The CDF, with a majority of its intake from Mende-speaking regions in the south and east, continued to reclaim village lands even during the displacement of the Kabbah government by the AFRC in 1997-8. By the end of the war the unconventional and uninhibited CDF - perhaps as versed in atrocity as its enemy - had become the force most feared by the RUF.

In addition to the main groups of protagonists we should also take note of various irregulars allied with one or other of the main protagonists. These include bands of both adult and under-age fighters recruited and trained - often from among trusted relatives - by RSLMF war-front commanders.⁴ Unrecognised by the government, the irregulars often fended for themselves for supplies, and largely lived off what they could loot. The West Side Boys, prominent in 1999-2000, was one such group, comprising mainly jail escapees, and led by a handful of renegade AFRC mutineers. It lived by harassing travellers on the main road into Freetown, until dealt with by the British army after a hostage taking incident in August 2000. Looting by irregulars (and RSLMF troops) was at times confused, by civilians, with rebel activity. The RUF sought to enhance this impression by at times dressing its combatants in stolen army-pattern fatigues. APC-loyalist in the army also sought to discredit the NPRC by acts of destruction and sabotage. Much of the confused international reporting of the war - especially from 1992 to 1996 - stems from such activity. Civilians, unable to work out who had attacked them or why, referred to 'sobels' (shape-shifting soldiers who changed to rebels by night). A picture of generalised banditry and lawlessness obscured the core activities of the RUF, and fed the impression that the war in Sierra Leone lacked political motivation.⁵

Two groups of foreign irregulars are of some significance. Both were of mainly Liberian origin and known as 'special forces'. One group was armed in 1991 by the APC government and RSLMF from among Sierra Leone-based Liberian refugees opposed to Charles Taylor, in the hope of stemming RUF advance, especially in the south of the country. After having pushed the RUF back

² Fithen, C. and Richards, P., Making War, Crafting Peace: Militia Solidarities and Demobilization in Sierra Leone, in: B. Helander & P. Richards (eds), *No Peace no War: Learning to Live Beyond Violent Conflict* (forthcoming).

³ Muana, P. K. 1997. 'The kamajoi militia: civil war, internal displacement and the politics of counter-insurgency.' *Africa Development* v. 22(3/4), pp. 77-100.

⁴ Peters, K. & Richards, P. 1998a. 'Why we fight: voices of youth ex-combatants in Sierra Leone.' *Africa*, v. 68(1), pp. 183-210 and Peters, K. 2002. *The storm is not yet over? Interviews with ex-combatants from the war in Sierra Leone*. Unpublished typescript, Technology & Agrarian Development Group, Wageningen University & Research Centre, The Netherlands.

⁵ Kaplan, R. D. 1994. The coming anarchy: how scarcity, crime, overpopulation, and disease are rapidly destroying the social fabric of our planet. *Atlantic Monthly* February, 44-76 and Kaplan, R. D. 1996. *The ends of the earth: a journey at the dawn of the 21st century*. New York: Random House.

towards the Liberian border in mid-1991 these government-allied Liberian fighters then re-formed as the ULIMO (United Liberian Movement for Democracy), and returned to Liberia to battle Taylor's NPFL. A contingent remained in Sierra Leone, however, based at Matru-on-the-Rails, near Bo. This group was especially active in 1996, looting villages, and at times ambushing RSLMF troops, probably to acquire materiel for ULIMO's Liberian campaign.

The other group of Liberian 'special forces' fought alongside the RUF in 1991-2. They came to help the less experienced Sierra Leonean volunteers of the RUF in their initial sweep through the eastern borderlands towards Bo and Kenema. Most appear to have been ex-NPFL fighters (mainly Liberian, but also apparently including some Burkinabes). Among the most battle-hardened of Taylor's troops, they carried out atrocities on defenceless rural civilians in the initial stages of the RUF campaign. Many rural Sierra Leoneans - especially in Kailahun District - were ardently opposed to the APC regime, and might have joined the uprising, but for this extreme violence. The RUF leadership soon realised its mistake, and the 'specials' - young killers Taylor perhaps wanted to 'dump' - were sent back in March 1992.⁶ But it was too late. Their activities had lost the RUF the initiative.

Finally, among foreign forces, various groups of peace keepers should be mentioned. The Nigerian-dominated peace keeping force, ECOMOG (Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group), was first formed to protect Monrovia from attack by Charles Taylor's NPFL in 1990. A small detachment of Nigerian forces was posted to Sierra Leone in July-August 1991, deploying to protect the strategic bridge over the Sewa river, at Gondama, south of Bo. Earlier, a detachment of Guinean troops, operating under the terms of a mutual defence pact between Guinea and Sierra Leone, had taken up positions to defend the equally important bridge at Daru, east of Kenema, during the RUF advance in April 1991. ECOMOG - into which these Nigerian and Guinean detachments were later absorbed - was fully re-deployed to Sierra Leone after the Liberian war ended in 1996. It had a mandate to guarantee the peace following the Abidjan accords. ECOMOG switched to peace enforcement in Sierra Leone in February 1998, when the Nigerian dictator, General Sanni Abacha, ordered Nigerian units to re-take Freetown from the AFRC, to restore the democratically-elected president. ECOMOG quickly moved up country to secure most of the provincial towns and main roads, but never deployed in the countryside, and later, in November 1998, suffered reverses in Kono from a re-trained and re-equipped AFRC-RUF counter force. ECOMOG units fell back towards Freetown. The capital was attacked by resurgent rebel forces in the first week of January 1999, with great loss of life. An undisclosed number - perhaps up to a thousand or more - of Nigerian troops lost their lives in resisting the attack on the city.

The AFRC/RUF attack on Freetown appears to have been intended as a raid, perhaps to force a resumption of peace negotiations. The loss of life among ECOMOG troops and an impending election following the death of General Abacha caused the Nigerian government to reconsider its commitment to peace keeping in Sierra Leone. After a generous settlement was reached with the RUF (but from which the AFRC was largely excluded), in Lome in July 1999, it was agreed that a new peace-keeping force would be formed under UN auspices. This was named UNAMSIL. Two battalions of Nigerian troops were absorbed into UNAMSIL, and further troops were pledged from Kenya, Zambia, Jordan and India. UNAMSIL almost died at birth. ECOMOG was due to complete its withdrawal in April

⁶ RUF/SL. 1995. *Footpaths to democracy: toward a New Sierra Leone*. No stated place of publication: The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone.

2000, but before UNAMSIL had fully deployed, RUF units - awaiting disarmament under the terms of the Lome agreement - hijacked weapons from a Guinean contingent and seized groups of recently arrived Zambian and Kenyan UN peace keepers. Indian troops deployed to Kailahun were surrounded and cut off. Rumours spread of a new RUF threat to Freetown. This was only resolved by the rapid deployment of about 1000 British troops, initially to protect the airport and greater Freetown. The British army also became involved in training the new Sierra Leone army (SLA, the RSLMF was disbanded in 1998). Former AFRC leader, Johnny Paul Koroma, declared loyalty to the Kabbah government, effectively terminating the AFRC-RUF alliance, and no RUF attack materialised. The hostage crisis moved slowly to a resolution, while UNAMSIL was reorganised, reinforced and fully deployed. By the end of 2000 it had become the largest of all UN peace-keeping operation, with 17,500 troops, including a force of 110 Russians, manning and servicing four Mi-24 helicopter gunships.

2.2. The Course of the War

To probe the political economy of war in Sierra Leone, we need first to examine the main events and processes, including an assessment of how the fighting factions developed during 11 years of conflict. At issue is whether the data conform to a picture of a small criminal element seeking to control mineral wealth, or whether the violence suggests more basic flaws in society and economy feeding violence, and that remain to be addressed if recurrence of war is to be avoided.

The RUF launched a two-pronged attack into Sierra Leone Liberian territory controlled by Taylor (from Bomaru in the north and the Mano River bridge in the south) on 23rd March 1991. At the outset the movement stated its aim as the overthrow of the one-party APC regime. It is clear that in Kailahun District, in particular, there was more popular support than admitted at the time. Kailahun had long been a major focus of opposition to the APC. Four truck-loads of armed thugs sent into the district for the 1977 election 'disappeared'. Relations with the APC were never repaired, and in 1991 the Momoh government took it as fact that the Liberian border districts were engaged in an uprising. Long-term RUF fighters from Kailahun - interviewed after demobilization - are frequently explicit that they joined voluntarily.⁷ Forced conscription came to predominate only at a later stage. RUF cadres evincing greatest commitment to the movement tend to be Mende-speakers from the Liberian border zone. This includes a hard-core of young people recruited from among the families of victims of a fratricidal 'bush war' - the *ndogboyosoi* conflict - fought between supporters of rival politicians in Pujehun District in the mid-1980s. It also seems possible, from guarded comments by some senior party figures, that some activists of the then banned and dormant SLPP, a party with its greatest historical support in the Mende-speaking districts of the south and east, were in contact with the RUF, if not active in their support, prior to the invasion. Foday Sankoh, the acknowledged leader of the RUF, from 1992, was jailed for complicity in a coup attempt against the APC, and is reputed once to have held membership of the SLPP. Villagers were asked to cut palm fronds (the SLPP symbol) to wave in support of the advancing RUF. At first only the spokesman for a leadership collective that included a handful of university-trained intellectuals, Sankoh denied in radio interviews with the BBC

⁷ Peters, K. 2002. *The storm is not yet over? Interviews with ex-combatants from the war in Sierra Leone*. Unpublished typescript, Technology & Agrarian Development Group, Wageningen University & Research Centre, The Netherlands.

any presidential ambitions, stating the movement's purpose to be solely the overthrow of the Momoh regime and a return to multi-party politics. After sifting the evidence over several years I am inclined to believe the movement was genuine in its early claims.

Two circumstances conspired to cut the ground from under the feet of the RUF. First president Momoh was in the process of planning a referendum on a return to multi-party politics at the time of the invasion. Second, the extreme violence against villagers deployed by the Liberian and Burkinabe 'specials' lost the movement potential support.

The RUF made quite rapid early progress. Along parts of the Liberian border it had good rapport with local people, and even ran a rudimentary system of civil administration. RUF courts were said to be more fair and effective than the notoriously corrupt local courts presided over by court chairmen appointed by the APC. But expansion westwards brought into play a tactic of emptying the countryside and concentrating populations in the towns, through a combination of rumours and hit-and-run raids. Village chiefs would often be sent letters predicting the day of an attack. The rebels were rarely if ever interested in holding the villages they sacked. They had too few troops, and needed to move on. So an attack would displace the population and sow the seeds of local dissension, e.g. by burning the houses of only one faction in a land dispute, or the houses of, say, Christians but not Muslims. As villagers ventured to return they might conclude, from the pattern of damage, that the violence was an 'inside job'. A good number of communities - only lightly hit by the rebels - continued the work of destruction unaided, a reflection of local tensions built up over many years of corrupt one-party rule. One post-war consultation on the causes of the war was told 'our village was destroyed, only 5 per cent by the RUF, and 95 per cent by our own indigenous rebels'.⁸ It is claimed that the small trading town of Rotifunk - now more or less a ruin - was largely destroyed by infighting, after the RUF had implied (through the way it patterned the damage in a hit-and-run raid) that burning of houses and looting had been done by one or other of the various rival ethnic trading factions in the town.

The RUF tried to use such tactics to panic the town of Bo (the capital of the southern diamond districts and a major educational centre). Letters were sent to the Bo authorities predicting an attack on 25th April 1991. Aid agencies, the police and government departments, officially denying the receipt of any such letters, quietly evacuated their personnel from the town. By 24th April several thousand 'strangers' from Guinea, and parts of northern Sierra Leone, associated with the diamond trade, had fled. But perhaps 70 per cent of Bo, a town then with a population of about 50,000, was native, and had no place to which to run. The lessons of an earlier attempt to divide the youth of the town along ethnic lines (between Mendes and Temnes) during the election campaign in 1977 were quickly recapitulated, with youth organisers coordinating potential neighbourhood resistance. The town remained calm, and the RUF (which would have been hopelessly outnumbered) melted away. Documents came to light later indicating the RUF intended to establish an interim administration for provincial Sierra Leone in Bo, much like Charles Taylor ran provincial Liberia from an up-country head-quarters in Gbarnga.

In subsequent months the RUF continued to infiltrate areas south of the Sewa as far as the Jong estuary, but the failed attempt to empty Bo in April 1991 had been a turning point. Officers in the RSLMF hailing from the south and east began to organise counter-insurgency, which included training

⁸ Richards. P. 2002a. 'Green Book Millenarians? The Sierra Leone war from the perspective of an anthropology of religion.' In *Religion and Civil War in Africa*, ed. Niels Kastfelt, London: C. Hurst.

village youngsters as local auxiliaries. Liberian volunteers were mobilised and armed for what was to become the ULIMO force. The Guineans helped secure Daru. Nigerian troops blocked the Sewa bridge south of Bo. The RUF lost ground as the rains subsided, and towards the end of the year found itself pushed back into two small enclaves (upper Kailahun District, from Pendembu northwards, and Pujehun District, south and east of Pujehun and Potoru) in which it enjoyed a degree of local support. In other areas, villagers began to re-occupy their homes.

The war might have ended at this point, but for a new dynamic. When it first expanded westward the RUF emptied villages of adult populations but forcibly recruited children and young people.⁹ The movement already had an idea - perhaps from studying other African insurgencies, such as the wars in Uganda and Mozambique - that children make good guerrillas and would readily adapt to life in a small 'total institution' such as the fortified bush camp. The movement began to take on aspects of a 'children's crusade'. RSLMF soldiers opposing the RUF reported they found it hard to figure out how to deal with child soldiers.¹⁰ There was an understandable reluctance to gun down very young teenagers. But child soldiers seemed not to know when they were beaten. Child combatants did not surrender like normal troops, but kept on fighting even when their position was hopeless. The problem was compounded when ULIMO, and beleaguered RSLMF units with uncertain supply lines, began to execute rebel captives rather than take prisoners.¹¹ Child captives of the RUF found that even if they escaped the movement they faced death at the hands of soldiers, or even (on occasion) village lynch mobs. The RUF made this a more certain fate by its practice of branding or tattooing new recruits. Lacking realistic exit options the young captives had little choice but to try and survive as members of the movement. Many later became ardent converts. This created a gulf between the parties to the conflict that lasted until the final days of the war. The RUF became, in effect, an introverted and intransigent 'armed sect'.¹²

After the NPRC coup in April 1992 war-front RSLMF officers were better supplied, and the RUF came under even greater pressure. By the end of 1993 the movement was on the verge of losing even its small civil enclave in Kailahun. The leadership took a decision to abandon heavy weapons and vehicles, and go to ground in the Gola forest, a network of three forest reserves running from the middle portion of the Liberian border to the Kambui Hills south of Kenema. Pinned down at Christmas 1993 by RSLMF troops in thick forests behind Faama in Nomo chiefdom, the leadership contemplated retreat into Liberia, but found that due to ULIMO success Taylor's troops were no longer in control of the border. There was little option but to struggle on in the bush.¹³

⁹ Richards, P. 2002b. 'Militia conscription in Sierra Leone: recruitment of young fighters in an African war.' *Comparative Social Research*, v. 20., pp. 255-276. (Special Issue: L. Mjoset and S. van Holde, eds., *The comparative study of conscription in the armed forces*.)

¹⁰ Richards, P. 1995. Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone: a crisis of youth?, In O. W. Furley, ed. *Conflict in Africa*, London: I. B. Tauris.

¹¹ Amnesty International 1992. *The extrajudicial execution of suspected rebels and collaborators*. London: International Secretariat of Amnesty International, Index AFR 51/02/92.

¹² Richards, P. 1999. 'New political violence in Africa: secular sectarianism in Sierra Leone.' *GeoJournal* 47: 433-442, 1999 (special issue: *Grid-Group Cultural Theory*, ed. V. D. Mamadouh) and Richards, P. 2002a. 'Green Book millenarians? The Sierra Leone war from the perspective of an anthropology of religion.' In *Religion and Civil War in Africa*, ed. Niels Kastfelt, London: C. Hurst.

¹³ RUF/SL. 1995. *Footpaths to democracy: toward a New Sierra Leone*. No stated place of publication: The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone.

By its own account the RUF became a forest survivalist movement. Some of the leadership came from Bunumbu College, a rural teacher training institution on the eastern border.¹⁴ Bunumbu once had a UNESCO-supported project training its students to maintain rural education without reliance on expensive government-supplied lesson materials. The curriculum emphasised foraging in the bush for materials from which lessons could be improvised. The RUF began to deploy its own forest-reliant approach to training its cadres, perhaps under the influence of the head of RUF military intelligence, Ibrahim H. Deen Jalloh, once a lecturer at Bunumbu. Other Bunumbu colleagues staffed the RUF women's wing. One became a movement convert after witnessing her husband, a suspected RUF sympathiser, hacked limb from limb by RSLMF soldiers in the early days of the war.

The question of the intellectual capacity of the RUF leadership has been hotly disputed. Those who wish to portray the movement as comprising criminals and hooligans cannot deny the Libyan Green Book influences, but insist on a complete hiatus between the Green Book world of student radicalism and the RUF in the bush. The unease of those who were part of the student radical movement with what the RUF later became is understandable, but they risk protesting too much. The movement maintained more intellectual capacity, and ability to adapt effectively to changing circumstances, than some analysts admit. Some of the original Green Book-influenced leadership of the RUF were killed in fighting, and others were eliminated by Sankoh as a result of various internal disputes in the first year or two of the conflict, but not all this cohort disappeared, and there were educated sympathisers waiting in the wings.¹⁵ Some claim they were abductees who later sympathised with their captors. Others were 'sleepers', already recruited, but incorporated only when the RUF reached centres of student dissidence, such as Bunumbu or Njala University College. One such figure was Fayia Musa, a rusticated Njala student teaching in Kailahun, later the movement's 'minister of agriculture', and prominent spokesman during the Abidjan peace negotiations in 1995/96.

By 1994 the movement was fast reviving. Its forest camps were secure. The RSLMF had no training or capacity for jungle warfare, and was limited to vehicle-based operations along roads. RUF combatants became especially adept at mounting ambushes against the RSLMF on lonely rural roads. By now they were learning the geography of the bush paths that interconnect all parts of rural Sierra Leone. Materiel, including guns and new pattern army fatigues, were acquired from disloyal RSLMF officers, some by barter for diamonds being mined in isolated localities such as the Moro River on the Liberian border, an area protected by the thick curtain of the Gola North forest reserve. Hit-and-run raids on mines, saw-mills, and mission or humanitarian compounds yielded a range of supplies, including some solar-powered radio sets. After a raid on Kabala, in the far north of the country - to hit a specialist hunter whose initiates were assisting the RSLMF in the Gola Forest - two British aid workers for Voluntary Services Overseas were abducted. Over the next few months the movement seized a total of 17 international hostages. This brought the RUF to the notice of foreign governments and the international media, at a time when the NPRC regime preferred to suggest the movement had been wiped out, with only pockets of banditry remaining. One reason to hide the extent of the revival of the RUF in 1994-5 was a concern to divert attention from extensive diamond mining carried out in parts of the war zone by members of the military regime. The violence in Sierra Leone, the donors

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Abdullah, I. 1997. 'Bush path to destruction: the origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)' *Africa Development* 22, 3/4. Special Issue: *Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: the Sierra Leone Civil War* and Richards, P. 2002a. 'Green Book millenarians? The Sierra Leone war from the perspective of an anthropology of religion.' In *Religion and Civil War in Africa*, ed. Niels Kastfelt, London: C. Hurst.

were told in Freetown, was 'residual', and would be resolved by restructuring the army, to bring 'sobels' under control.

After RUF raids on Bo, Kenema and Mile 91 at Christmas 1994 the secret was harder to maintain. As in 1991, young people rallied to the defence of Bo. The rebels were repulsed. But a volunteer defence armed with no more than bush knives and staves had time to mobilise because the RUF was reluctant to open fire. It had learnt from earlier mistakes in killing unarmed civilians. The raids on Bo and Kenema were attempts to extend its message. The movement sustained significant casualties as a result. But the message could no longer be ignored. The RUF was once more visible, and clearly motivated by an ideology.

The subsequent story covers six violent years of international incomprehension and missed opportunity. The RUF established bush camps in all parts of the country during 1995, including especially troublesome ones in the Malal Hills and the area behind Bradford and Rotifunk, which were close enough to Freetown and the main roads to Makeni and Bo seriously to disrupt the main arteries of transportation. Supplies ran short in several provincial towns. All parts of the country were raided and children taken as captives for induction and military training. Even the outskirts of Freetown came under attack. These were hit-and-run raids designed to spread panic rather than hold terrain. The RUF retreated to its secure bush camps confident the RSLMF had no air cover or bush fighting capacity.

Under pressure, the NPRC turned to the international private security sector, and recruited a company based in the Isle of Man. (UK) using former Gurkha soldiers. The company withdrew after the RUF killed its Vietnam-war veteran commander and twenty operatives during a reconnaissance mission. In some desperation the regime accepted an alternative offer from South-African based Executive Outcomes (EO) to provide bush warfare training, air support, and sophisticated tracking and communications equipment. The deal was secret, but seems to have involved diamond mining concessions. Freetown and the international community meanwhile preferred to focus on the problem of bad governance, not the RUF. The NPRC came under intense pressure to concede elections, even before a controversial peace process, facilitated by a London-based conflict resolution group, International Alert, had got off the ground. In effect, the international community opted for elections before peace, thus excluding the RUF from democratic politics.

The decision was fateful. The election in February 1996 brought president Kabbah, and an SLPP-led coalition government, to power. Kabbah distrusted his own army, divided into factions loyal to both the APC and NPRC. The contract with EO was extended, but the emphasis was now placed on training and arming the CDF. British and Canadian based mining companies appeared on the scene, advocating further extensions of private security solutions. Hints appear to have been dropped that these plans would not meet disapproval in British government circles. One of the mining company officials was named in the UK Parliament as a former British overseas military intelligence officer. The army was stood down as a token of sincerity in the Abidjan peace process, but meanwhile EO, commanding helicopter support, was preparing to assist the CDF in the first effective strikes against the all-important bush camps of the RUF. The headquarters camp, the Zogoda, in upper Koya chiefdom, on the border between the Gola West and Kambui South forest reserves, and at least two other camps in the south and east of the country, were destroyed in September-October 1996. No prisoners were taken. Bokor camp in the Kangari Hills, controlling the main road into the Kono diamond field, was encircled by CDF, reinforced by RSLMF specialist troops.

The RUF was under extreme international pressure to sign the Abidjan accord, but feeling it had been 'jumped' while intent upon the peace process, evinced little interest in meeting its treaty

obligations. Sankoh never went back to the bush, but promptly set about acquiring weapons in return for its stock pile of diamonds. He was arrested in Nigeria, in February 1997, apparently trying to secure new materiel. The UN - seeking a third opportunity for success in African peace-keeping, after failures in Somalia and Rwanda - did little to shore up the Abidjan peace, apparently preferring to control the process more directly. The RSLMF was threatened with dismemberment through demobilization, and its food subsidies were withdrawn on the advice of the International Monetary Fund. A void loomed.

Matters came to a head with an army mutiny in May 1997, leading to the establishment of the AFRC junta. President Kabbah fled to Guinea. With little prospect of any international recognition, the junta allied itself with its old enemy, the RUF. Disoriented cadres streamed in from the bush, happy to escape further raids by the CDF, now supported by EO's replacement, a British company, Sandline International, providing similar services to those on offer from EO, and likewise linked to major diamond mining interests in Sierra Leone.

The AFRC regime was inherently unstable. When several deadlines for implementing an October 1997 agreement to restore the civilian government were missed Nigerian ECOMOG forces launched an attack (February 1998) to drive the AFRC from Freetown. The RUF had never really believed in the AFRC, and took the opportunity of its short period in Freetown to stockpile resources against an anticipated return to the bush. When the Nigerian ECOMOG contingent drove the AFRC out of Freetown, the RUF took charge and conveyed junta leaders over bush paths to Buedu, its secure base in northern Kailahun District. The Nigerians secured the main roads and towns, but did not risk following the RUF into the forest. In the ensuing military stalemate mining and security interests rivalling the government-linked EO/Sandline, Diamondworks and Branch Energy consortium - mainly South African, Ukrainian, Israeli and Russian - realised they could do for the RUF and AFRC what EO and Sandline had already done for the CDF. Mopping up the RUF and AFRC in the bush was of less interest to some ECOMOG officers than diamond mining. Vainly, the Kabbah government promised the war would be over by Christmas.

In the hope of breaking a deadlock in which its own troops were implicated the Nigerians returned Sankoh - whose detention had only strengthened his aura in the eyes of his beleaguered followers in the bush - to seek some kind of deal that might avoid a return to war. The Kabbah government had other ideas. Sankoh was imprisoned and placed on trial for treason, and a death sentence handed down. On 17th 1998 October the restored regime executed 23 former RSLMF officers for treasonable complicity in the AFRC coup, despite strong international pleas for clemency.¹⁶ The re-trained AFRC and RUF groups in the bush began a push towards the capital, either in the hope of securing the capital, or (perhaps more realistically) to force an amnesty from the Kabbah government. The RUF was determined to rescue its leader from death row in Pademba Road jail. AFRC and RUF cadres - many apparently under the influence of drugs - hacked and amputated their way into eastern and central Freetown (January 6th 1999), intent on revenging executed officers and causing maximum humiliation to ECOMOG.

As quickly as they had come the raiders withdrew, pursued by doughty Nigerian forces, to resume former positions in the bush, awaiting their prize - peace negotiations in Lome on terms more favourable than tabled in Abidjan. Sankoh's death sentence was rescinded, and he was offered vice-presidential status. The RUF was granted three cabinet posts in a power-sharing interim government.

¹⁶ Ganda, A. 1998. 'The degradation of Sierra Leone.' *Focus on Sierra Leone* v. 3(1), pp. 1-5.

AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma was made chairman of a commission for consolidation of peace (and later contested the presidential elections in May 2002). Outstanding charges against other AFRC loyalists were dropped. Installed in Freetown, Sankoh apparently became convinced the government was terminally weak. He used diamond industry contacts to acquire the resources for a further assault on state power. Whether he intended a presidential bid, or a coup, is unclear. ECOMOG was in the process of disbanding, and RUF cadres - fearing forced disarmament took UNAMSIL soldiers hostage in April 2000. Rumours of an RUF advance on Freetown were first fanned and then hastily corrected by UNAMSIL. The capital was in uproar. Once again foreign workers withdrew. British troops were deployed. A peace demonstration outside Sankoh's Freetown house on May 8th 2000 turned into a riot. His supporters opened fire on the crowd, killing more than 20 people. Sankoh and close colleagues fled. Eldred Collins and other Sankoh aides trekked through the bush as far as the RUF base in Makeni, but a mixture of privations in jail and fine living appears to have undermined Sankoh's powers of endurance. He gave himself up to the authorities after several days in the forests above Freetown. Something of his grip over his followers, as warrior and magician, appears to have left him at this point.

UNAMSIL - chastened by failures - was re-organised and reinforced. At last, the isolation and enclavization of the RUF stemming from summary executions of prisoners at the battlefield began to be reversed. Proper attention was paid to confidence building, based on attempts to understand the mind-set of captive rank-and-file RUF cadres. The government approved - or did not ask UNAMSIL to prevent - trading contacts into and vehicle movements out of RUF areas. Groups of cadres began to rejoin the wider society, mentally, as well as physically. UNAMSIL was also effective in building links with the interim leadership of the RUF, especially with Sankoh's deputy in Makeni, Issa Sesay. Despite the reservations of others in the movement (especially some of the leading cadres from Kailahun and Pujehun Districts) Sesay - a northerner, with family links to Sankoh's home (in Tonkolili District) - displayed considerable skill and determination in piloting a nervous, not to say paranoid, movement towards a more durable peace.

Pressure on Liberian supply lines to the RUF, and careful confidence building measures on the ground, resulted in series of cease-fire accords with the RUF, negotiated in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, in late 2000 and early 2001. Demobilization of the majority of RUF, AFRC and CDF combatants then followed. A total of some 45,000 fighters had completed disarmament by the end of 2001. Apart from pockets of renegades in the bush, only UNAMSIL forces and about 8000 troops of the new SLA were under arms in Sierra Leone by the end of 2001. The war was officially declared at an end in February 2002.

Elections took place on May 14th, 2002. Sankoh remained in detention, charged with the murder of civilians on May 8th 2000. Many senior figures in his movement believed he was their rightful presidential candidate. But his grip on the rank-and-file, now they were no longer incarcerated in the bush, had noticeably weakened. The RUF, meanwhile, transformed itself into a political party (RUFPP). The RUFPP decided to field Dr Paolo Bangura, a university lecturer in political science, and former RUF minister under the AFRC junta, as its presidential candidate. Some sources, however, suggest that the RUF had stashed significant supplies of weapons on the Liberian border, and could remobilise a small but experienced force within a matter of days. The elections returned President Kabbah to power with a substantial majority. Of the seven other presidential candidates only the All People's Congress candidate, Ernest Koroma, made any showing.

III. A War Fought With, or Over, Diamonds?

Recent literature has paid considerable attention to the economic dimensions of ‘new’ wars.¹⁷ This is a welcome development. War requires money, and it is always pertinent to ask about sources of funding. Research on long running African wars in Angola and Sierra Leone makes clear that military forces are poorly disciplined and barely paid; and that unsurprisingly, much of the fighting is on a pay-as-you-go basis, essentially funded through loot, and commercial opportunism.¹⁸ Everything is up for grabs.

In Sierra Leone, army units and the RUF stripped and sold anything that could be moved from mining sites, such as the Sierra Rutile operation at Mobimbi, or from the prosperous diamond town of Koidu. From the earliest days of the war Liberian irregulars could be seen ‘hawking’ looted items up and down the bars of Kenema, their ‘pickings’ for the day. One NPRC commander, apparently more disciplined than most, once justified an attack against renegade troops from his own side, with the startling words ‘real soldiers do not return from the battlefield carrying TV sets’. Local merchants - and Lebanese and Guinean trading diasporas - have not been squeamish to deal in whatever was on offer (including quantities of mining equipment). International dealers in anything relevant, from guns, ammunition and uniforms, to armoured cars, light aircraft and helicopter parts, have gravitated towards the conflict. Ukrainian, Dutch, Belgian, Israeli, British, South African, Kenyan and Thai business people are among those identified and named for dealing in Sierra Leone, or with Sierra Leonean rebels via Liberia. Much of this activity is a matter of official record in the report of the special advisors to the UN security Council.¹⁹

The ready availability of gemstone quality alluvial diamonds adds a further complication to the economic aspects of the war in Sierra Leone. Alluvial diamond mining is an activity requiring few capital resources, and its products are easily smuggled and disposed. According to the work of Fithen it also adapts - more so than almost any other activity - to the exigencies of conflict.²⁰ Using the ‘two pile’ system gravel supplies can be extracted in deals that need not last more than a few days, i.e. they can be set up in intervals in fighting.

Controlling the alluvial diamond industry has been seen as a way of limiting war. But to assume that any such strategy will work depends on this being the main or only source of significant funding, and upon the correctness of the basic hypothesis that economic activity is a cause (rather than

¹⁷ Berdal, M. and Malone, D. eds. 2001. *Greed and grievance; economic agendas in civil wars*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner. Collier, P. 2000. *Economic causes of civil conflict and their implications for policy*. Washington: The World Bank. Le Billon, P. 2000. *The political economy of war: what relief agencies need to know*. Humanitarian Practice Network, Network Paper 33, Overseas Development Institute, London.

¹⁸ Le Billon, P. 2000. *The political economy of war: what relief agencies need to know*. Humanitarian Practice Network, Network Paper 33, Overseas Development Institute, London. Keen, D. (forthcoming). *The best of enemies: conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*. Oxford: James Currey.

¹⁹ UN Experts 2000. *Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to the UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), para. 19, in relation to Sierra Leone* (mimeo., United Nations Organization, December 2000).

²⁰ Fithen, C. 1999. *Diamonds and war in Sierra Leone: cultural strategies for commercial adaptation to endemic low-intensity conflict*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Anthropology, University College London.

correlate) of current wars in Africa. The thesis has been dubbed ‘greed, not grievance’. Evidence in regard to Sierra Leone will be critically reviewed below. First it is necessary to assess the argument in more general terms.

3.1. ‘Greed not Grievance’?

Close reading of a representative text makes clear that proponents of the thesis tend to be careful not to claim too much.²¹ Le Billon appears at first to be about to offer a new theory of war, but nowhere does he actually say greed causes war. What, in the event, he argues is that economic factors are necessary but not sufficient conditions for conflicts to occur, and that ‘perpetuation of war can become an end in itself’.²² It would be hard to disagree with the first proposition. All wars need resources. Long-running conflicts like Angola provide plenty of support for the second. But Le Billon’s analysis offers no instance in which economic free-for-all is the only factor behind a war.²³

Second, we should take careful account of a bias built into the language used by some proponents of ‘greed, not grievance’. Downgrading political enemies as ‘bandits’ or ‘gangsters’ has long been stock-in-trade for parties to any conflict. Duffield suggests this now happens on a global scale.²⁴ The North, reluctant to engage in real political debate about the costs and consequences of global economic restructuring, determines instead to impose a ‘humanitarian’ peace on a South apparently over-run by ‘criminals’. ‘Greed not grievance’ serves clear ideological and practical purposes. If Southern conflict is a-political the world needs not diplomacy but international policing. Closing down bank accounts and supply trails, imposing sanctions regimes, and naming and shaming diamond merchants, drug dealers and gun runners seems to offer more prospects than tedious and frustrating negotiations with politically illiterate, self-styled ‘rebels’.

‘Greed not grievance’ has been subject to empirical test, via econometric analysis. Collier has compiled a data set covering civil wars since 1960.²⁵ The findings are illuminating. Ethnic diversity correlates only weakly with war. Highly ethnically diverse countries such as Tanzania are better at avoiding conflict than countries such as Nigeria or Rwanda, where two or three powerful ethnic blocks compete for control. Inequality (e.g. as measured by access to land) and dictatorship are also poor statistical predictors of conflict (though in the latter case, some might want to argue that it is the business of dictators to crush internal dissent). The third (and perhaps most counter-intuitive finding), is that having a large US-based diaspora is a major factor disposing towards risk of internal war.

Collier assumes this is an economic issue (that wealthy diaspora elements have the financial resources and business connections to meddle), but exiles are as likely to be engaged in unfinished political business.²⁶ Diaspora personalities figured prominently in the mid-war democratic transition in

²¹ Le Billon, P. 2000. *The political economy of war: what relief agencies need to know*. Humanitarian Practice Network, Network Paper 33, Overseas Development Institute, London.

²² Ibid., p. 1, my emphasis.

²³ Le Billon, P. 2001. ‘The political ecology of war: natural resources and armed conflicts.’ *Political Geography* 290, 561-584. Peluso, N. and Watts, N. eds. 2001. *Violent environments*. Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press.

²⁴ Duffield, M. 2001. *Global governance and the new wars*. London: Zed Press.

²⁵ Collier, P. 2000. *Economic causes of civil conflict and their implications for policy*. Washington: The World Bank.

²⁶ Richards, P. 2002a. ‘Green Book millenarians? The Sierra Leone war from the perspective of an anthropology of religion.’ In *Religion and Civil War in Africa*, ed. Niels Kastfelt, London: C. Hurst.

Sierra Leone (1996), and they bear some responsibility for under-estimating the threat posed by the RUF, by focusing instead on a national army still mainly loyal to a regime that drove the exiles overseas. Nor should we underestimate the importance - especially under the Clinton administration - of the American emphasis on (diaspora-led) 'African solutions to African problems' as a factor in international peace keeping responses to the crisis in the Mano River countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone). Some would say American diplomacy gave Liberian president, Charles Taylor, far too much leeway to rebuild the RUF in Sierra Leone from c. 1997 because of his political 'pull' among some segments of the African-American community well networked to US-based West African diaspora elements. Diaspora intellectuals also serve as important gatekeepers of academic debate, disallowing certain kinds of analysis and 'approving' others. In the Sierra Leone case, such intellectuals especially favour the idea that 'lumpen' criminality is the main cause of the crisis.²⁷

Some people have doubts about Collier's econometrics. Since wars cannot be fought without material resources it is no surprise to find correlation between war and economic variables. But the way Collier reaches his conclusion that 'new wars' are fought for economic rather than political reasons is problematic. At root, concern focuses on the way his study partitions the data set and labels proxy variables. Collier finds low education a correlate of civil war, but excludes lack of access to education from the list of grievances. This makes nonsense of some of the evidence; those who fight the war in Sierra Leone consider lack of education their grievance.²⁸ Why Collier thinks it would be 'greedy' to want a basic education or a job is unclear.

Between doubts about Collier's handling of proxy variables, and the caution of le Billon, we might sense there lies a general conclusion. The 'greed not grievance' debate has been useful in highlighting the importance of economic agendas in warfare, and there is certainly evidence that economic factors greatly complicate and prolong violent conflicts. But there is much less convincing evidence that 'new wars' are triggered solely by competition for economic 'niches'. As Berdal & Keen note (in regard to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia) a penumbra of economic opportunism tends to attach itself to any guerrilla war, and sometimes - where an insurgent movement is remotely sequestered - it is hard for remote observers to see beyond the penumbra to the political concerns and motivations at the core.²⁹ As suggested, this has definitely been a problem in assessing the threat posed by the RUF in Sierra Leone. Collier thinks it misleading to judge the 'rationality' of a guerrilla movement by the coherence of the claims it makes. All such discourse, he believes, is ideology, and thus an 'excuse' for, rather than cause of, social action. Only analysis of behaviour reveals true motivations, and these motivations are always (in his eyes) material. But this is to assume a movement

²⁷ Abdullah, I. 1997. 'Bush path to destruction: the origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)' *Africa Development* 22, 3/4. Special Issue: *Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: the Sierra Leone Civil War*. Bangura, Yusuf 1997. Understanding the political and cultural dynamics of the Sierra Leone war: a critique of Paul Richards's *Fighting for the Rain Forest*. *Africa Development* 22, 3/4, 117-148. Special Issue: *Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: the Sierra Leone Civil War*. Kandeh, J. 2001 'Subaltern terror in Sierra Leone.' In Tunde Zack-Williams, Diane Frost and Alex Thomson, eds., *Africa in Crisis: new challenges and possibilities*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 179-195.

²⁸ Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002b. 'Seeds and rights: new approaches to post-war agricultural rehabilitation in Sierra Leone.' *Disasters* (forthcoming). Peters, K. 2002. *The storm is not yet over? Interviews with ex-combatants from the war in Sierra Leone*. Unpublished typescript, Technology & Agrarian Development Group, Wageningen University & Research Centre, The Netherlands. Peters, K. & Richards, P. 1998a. 'Why we fight: voices of youth ex-combatants in Sierra Leone.' *Africa*, v. 68(1), pp. 183-210.

²⁹ Berdal, M. and Keen, D. 1997. 'Violence and economic agendas in civil wars: some policy implications.' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, v. 26(3), pp. 795-818.

such as the RUF is author of its own destiny. It might be equally plausible to regard it as a symptom of a more general social or political malaise, i.e. the product of a process with unintended (behavioural) outcomes. Civil war in Sierra Leone might, in short, be what Emile Durkheim called a 'social pathology'. Implicit in the idea of a social pathology is the notion that we cannot read off motivations from behaviour, any more than we could conclude that a sufferer of a cancer is motivated to acquire the disease by a particular behaviour, such as smoking. Colliers's argument smacks of neo-liberal dogma. Deciding whether a conflict is economic or political, or both, and whether agents are truly in control of developments, requires careful on-the-ground examination. This brings us, specifically, to a consideration of how, and with what consequences, alluvial diamond mining might have affected the war in Sierra Leone.

3.2. Diamonds and War in Sierra Leone

After the ECOMOG intervention (1998) the war was fought between three factions (CDF, AFRC and RUF), with up to 60-80,000 combatants. Such a level of military activity in a small country (population c. 4.5 million) represents a huge drain on resources. It is beyond doubt that diamonds became the main way to pay for the war in its later stages. Diamond-mining interests linked to security companies helped fund the rapid expansion of the CDF (from a few hundred combatants at the beginning of 1996 to in excess of c. 25,000 fighters by 1998). Rival mining interests bank-rolled the AFRC and RUF in 1998-99. More controversially, there have been claims that diamond mining also affected peace-keeping operations. The first commander of UN forces in Sierra Leone, an Indian general, Kumar Jetley, specifically charged, in a leaked memo, that Nigerian troops were keen to remain in Sierra Leone because of diamond mining opportunities.³⁰ The memorandum, intended for the UN Security Council, claims that the RUF bribed Nigerian commanders to maintain a military stalemate favouring Foday Sankoh's presidential bid, after the Lome agreements in 1999. Apparently the memorandum was never sent, which perhaps raises doubts about the authenticity of versions circulating on the Internet. Counter-claims circulate that UNAMSIL forces also engaged in diamond mining.

Expert assessments reckon the alluvial diamond economy of Sierra Leone to have been worth about \$70 million per year in 1999-2000.³¹ To put this figure in perspective, this is about half the value of the normal annual subsistence rice crop. In other words it is a rather small amount. The idea that the country is awash with untold diamond wealth is an enduring myth of popular politics in Sierra Leone that has adversely affected some assessments of the political economy of the war. It is estimated that the RUF may have been able, at maximum, to control between \$20 and \$50 million of the total amount, though another estimate claims the range is \$25-125 million.³² 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. At the same time this leaves unaddressed the interesting question of who

³⁰ Jetley, Kumar 2000. *Report on the crisis in Sierra Leone (May 2000)*. As posted on Sierra Leone Web, <http://www.sierra-leone.org/jetley0500.html> (25th September 2000).

³¹ OTI 2000. *Diamonds and armed conflict in Sierra Leone: proposal for implementation of a new diamond policy and operations*, USAID Office of Transition Initiatives, Washington, Working Paper, http://www.usaid.gov/hum_response/oti/country/sleone/diamonds.html. (August 2000).

³² Ibid. and UN Experts 2000. *Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to the UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), para. 19, in relation to Sierra Leone* (mimeo., United Nations Organization, December 2000).

controlled the balance. In 1999 less than \$1.5 million flowed through government coffers.³³ In the later stages of the conflict, regular mining activities, funded by Lebanese, Guinean and Senegambian dealers, ground to a halt.³⁴ The dealers remaining in business were mostly acquiring stones from the armed factions. If the RUF supplied about \$20-50 million of the total output then it is reasonable to assume the other belligerent parties (including the government's own CDF) supplied the rest. If diamonds are a cause of war then the explanation applies to all parties. This important fact is not always clear from some of the writing about diamonds and war in Sierra Leone.

Three recent special reports, in particular, throw valuable new light on how diamonds financed war in Sierra Leone. Only one argues that diamonds are a cause of war. The other two claim clandestine diamond mining is an important modality of warfare. The reports, and originating organizations (an important consideration in evaluating their contents, since none is the product of independent academic research), are:

- *The heart of the matter: Sierra Leone, diamonds and human security*, Partnership Africa Canada [an NGO], January 2000.³⁵
- *Diamonds and armed conflict in Sierra Leone, proposal for implementation of a new diamond policy and operations*, Office of Transitional Initiatives, United States government aid programme (USAID), August 2000.³⁶
- *Report of the Panel of Experts Appointed Pursuant to the UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), para. 19, In Relation to Sierra Leone*, The United Nations, December 2000.³⁷

3.3. The Heart of the Matter?

The report of Smillie et al covers a broad range of relevant topics - the global diamond industry, alluvial production in Sierra Leone and surrounding areas, the role of De Beers and the Antwerp diamond bourse, and the activities of various, mainly Canadian, 'junior' mining companies in diamond production and marketing in Sierra Leone.³⁸ The concessions granted by the Kabbah government to these mining interests are spelled out, as is the link between mining companies and arms supply to the CDF. Issues such as identification of diamonds by source and certificate of origin are also discussed.

Where the report is decidedly thin is in any analysis of the war, or of the nature and organization of the RUF, including its diamond mining activities. This is surprising, since the authors specifically promise to provide a 'strong critique of prevailing orthodox explanations of conflict'. Only the first

³³ OTI 2000. *Diamonds and armed conflict in Sierra Leone: proposal for implementation of a new diamond policy and operations*, USAID Office of Transition Initiatives, Washington, Working Paper, http://www.usaid.gov/hum_response/oti/country/sleone/diamonds.html. (August 2000).

³⁴ Fithen, C. 1999. *Diamonds and war in Sierra Leone: cultural strategies for commercial adaptation to endemic low-intensity conflict*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Anthropology, University College London.

³⁵ Smillie, I., Gberie, L., Hazleton, R. 2000. *The heart of the matter: Sierra Leone, diamonds and human security*. Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada (January 2000)

³⁶ OTI 2000. *Diamonds and armed conflict in Sierra Leone: proposal for implementation of a new diamond policy and operations*, USAID Office of Transition Initiatives, Washington, Working Paper, http://www.usaid.gov/hum_response/oti/country/sleone/diamonds.html. (August 2000).

³⁷ UN Experts 2000. *Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to the UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), para. 19, in relation to Sierra Leone* (mimeo., United Nations Organization, December 2000).

³⁸ Smillie, I., Gberie, L., Hazleton, R. 2000. *The heart of the matter: Sierra Leone, diamonds and human security*. Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada (January 2000)

chapter devotes itself to the topic of the political economy of war, and offers no data on the actual conflict. An opening section sub-titled 'murder, terror, theft' sketches a few generalised facts about the conflict, before remarking that 'Sierra Leoneans are not alone in seeing their country, and their lives and families destroyed for diamonds'.³⁹ The war is caused by 'the theft of Sierra Leone's diamonds', and the thieves are 'rebel groups'.

The chapter proceeds not to establish and test hypotheses about the main 'rebel group', the RUF, but to highlight the correctness of its own assumptions by criticizing the views of 'some writers' who have explained the war in terms of youth alienation, the RUF's Libyan connections, its intellectual leadership, and conditioning in terror techniques 'by repeated viewing of Rambo and other 'lone warrior' videos'. Smillie and colleagues reject the view that the war is a crisis of modernity, brought about by the weakness of a corrupt post-colonial state. Instead they endorse the views of various unnamed 'Sierra Leonean writers' who reject this type of analysis 'on several grounds'. In fact, the 'several grounds' collapse into but one - that a very high proportion of the disaffected young men who make up the RUF 'were already alienated and dangerous before the RUF opportunity for rape, drugs and pillage arose' (as they put it). That there once was a radical intellectual leadership of the RUF is conceded, but they claim this leadership was extinguished 'in murderous purges during the RUF's first year of operation'. In fact, some of these intellectual elements survived, since they were rounded up and detained in the 'sweep' of the RUF on May 7th/8th 2000.⁴⁰

Addressing Smillie et al.'s mis-reading of Richards is beyond present scope. The authors might have acknowledged, for example, that no generalised claim was made concerning 'repeated viewing of Rambo and other 'lone warrior' videos', but that the discussion is focused on detailed interview material, in which a cross section of Sierra Leonean youths explained that they saw in the first Rambo film, *First Blood*, a crisis of social exclusion mirroring their own lack of educational opportunity.⁴¹

Given that Smillie et al. reject the idea that the crisis in Sierra Leone is a product of state collapse, of greater interest is to ask what explanation they do offer for the onset of the war. It cannot be disaffected youth, they argue, because other countries in Africa have large numbers of disaffected youths and no war (a remark that both tempts providence, and suggests they know little about violence in cases as far apart - and diamond-free - as Algeria, Somalia and Senegal).⁴² The reader infers - because no evidence is actually discussed - that Sierra Leone suffers from an unfortunate combination of alluvial diamonds and a rather large hard-core of criminal youth, and that sanctioning both the youths and the illicit diamond trade should settle the issue. The rest of the chapter in question drifts off into a general discussion of Clausewitz, the political economy of war, and the role of private security companies. Other chapters provide more useful and, for the most part reliable, overviews of the global diamond trade, diamond smuggling, and the links between the 'junior' diamond houses and the diamond mining concessionaires-cum-private security companies operating in Sierra Leone. The net effect is to constitute not only an indictment of the rebels, but a critique of how such companies, working on behalf of successive governments, may have greatly prolonged the conflict, when there

³⁹ Ibid., p. 2, 10.

⁴⁰ Richards. P. 2002a. 'Green Book millenarians? The Sierra Leone war from the perspective of an anthropology of religion.' In *Religion and Civil War in Africa*, ed. Niels Kastfelt, London: C. Hurst.

⁴¹ Richards, P. 1996. *Fighting for the Rain Forest: war, youth and resources in Sierra Leone*. Oxford: James Currey (reprinted with additional material 1998), pp 57 - 59.

⁴² El-Kenz, Ali 1996. 'Youth and violence.' In *Africa now: people, policies and institutions*, ed. Stephen Ellis, The Hague: Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

was prospect of negotiated settlement in 1995. There is little further analysis of the RUF. Of the promised ‘strong critique of prevailing explanations of war’ there is no trace.

3.4. Poverty, Corruption and Bad Governance

The report of the Office of Transitional Initiatives offers a quite different perspective. Well-informed about the actual operation of alluvial diamond mining in Sierra Leone under war-time conditions, the report’s anonymous author tends to downplay the significance of the diamond sector as a basic cause of the war, perhaps reflecting the point of view of an industry ‘insider’.⁴³ Much more to blame is the ‘shroud of mystery’ cloaking diamond mining transactions from the very earliest days, and the ‘spectacular, mysterious wealth’ to which it leads.⁴⁴ These have been unhealthy for politics, justice and democracy in Sierra Leone, the report decides. What is now needed is to bring openness and accountability to the diamond mining sector (‘secrecy about the income of traditional authorities and politicians is part of the system that prevents poor people from obtaining a fair share of the income pie’).⁴⁵ The report discusses various solutions to the problem, including empowering diggers. It argues they make very little from their labours in the longer term (‘most diggers are the poorest of the poor, doing body breaking work with no certainty of finding stones’), and that this poverty ‘has conspired with ignorance to create a system of virtual servitude’ hardly imaginable to a ‘new observer to the scene...in the 21st century’.⁴⁶ Peace will be permanent, the report argues, only ‘when diggers are not so destitute and disenfranchised that they can be recruited and intimidated into waging a war of cruelty against their own kinspeople’.⁴⁷ But it is also clear that ‘solving the illicit marketing problem will not address the fundamental development problems that are the root causes of the war’.⁴⁸ These are ‘poverty, corruption and bad governance’.⁴⁹

3.5. Diamonds and the RUF

The most detailed of the three items under review, and the most thoroughly grounded in evidence, is the special report of the panel of experts appointed by the UN Security Council, to prepare the way for a sanctions regime against Liberia imposed in early 2001.⁵⁰ The report reflects a political decision taken by the international community to bring the RUF to heel by addressing its wider sources of support. Liberia was the principal foreign backer of the RUF. Cutting off sources of weapons supply via Liberia, and re-directing RUF diamonds towards marketing channels within Sierra Leone, it was reasoned, would reinforce moves towards peace. This assessment has largely proved correct.

The report is highly specific about the means through which the RUF smuggled its share of alluvial diamonds in the later stages of the war, and how it obtained materiel from a loose consortium

⁴³ Fithen, C. 1999. *Diamonds and war in Sierra Leone: cultural strategies for commercial adaptation to endemic low-intensity conflict*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Anthropology, University College London.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 6 and 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁰ UN Experts 2000. *Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to the UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), para. 19, in relation to Sierra Leone* (mimeo., United Nations Organization, December 2000).

of Ukrainian, Dutch, South African, Kenyan and Israeli businessmen and military specialists, by plane and helicopter, and through Liberian logging roads leading to Buedu and other RUF secure bases in Kailahun District, from c. mid-1998. Operatives are named, and flight and shipment details specified. Slack registration of planes and poor air traffic control in the region are listed among the reasons it was so easy for these business interests to re-supply the RUF and AFRC in preparation for the raid on Freetown in January 1999.

The continued functioning of supply routes through Liberia, with Burkina Faso acting as a staging post for weapons transfers from eastern Europe, served to threaten the peace process, after the Lome accords were signed in July 1999. The report considered Foday Sankoh still to be planning to take over the state, through a combination of wheeling and dealing over mineral contracts and the clandestine stockpiling of materiel for the RUF. Sankoh's detention after the Freetown events of May 2000, full UNAMSIL deployment, and an international sanctions regime on Liberia effective from early 2001, persuaded RUF rank-and-file that demobilization was a better option, and the war came to an official end in February 2002. The report is careful to distinguish between the problem of 'illicit' diamonds, and the much more circumscribed issue of 'conflict' diamonds. Largely confining itself to the latter issue - how to cut off the flow of wealth to the RUF in order to leverage a post-Lome peace - the report does not speculate about more widespread 'illicit' transactions as a cause of the conflict. RUF diamond mining - clearly - was a major means to its survival when threatened with post-Abidjan extinction, but as to whether 'the point of war may not actually have been to win it, but to engage in profitable crime under the cover of warfare' the UN experts express no view.⁵¹

3.6. Summary: Bad Boys or State Collapse?

All three sources reviewed are clear that diamonds became a way of funding armed conflict in Sierra Leone, especially in the latter stages of the war. The evidence indicates that all parties to the dispute, including agents of the government-allied CDF, depended on diamonds to fund their war efforts, and that there was nothing special about the RUF in this regard. Only Smillie et al. claim that the war was fought for diamonds. Their explanation reflects moral assumptions rather than empirical analysis. According to them, the country was plunged into disaster by a potent and unfortunate combination of criminality and alluvial mining opportunities. They offer no evidence for favouring this perspective over rival explanations couched in terms of political corruption, poverty and lack of transparency. The UN report restricts itself to examining the modalities of RUF support. The OTI report is explicit that the nub of the diamond 'problem' in Sierra Leone is lack of transparency, but claims the more general cause of the war is poverty and injustice (though without offering specific evidence). Accordingly, the solutions suggested are different in each case. The UN report proposes a general tightening of international and national regulatory frameworks, especially for air traffic, as well as establishing the grounds for the imposition of a sanctions regime on countries supporting the RUF. The OTI report envisages opening up the diamond sector to free trade, and empowering impoverished diggers. The report of Smillie et al. envisages cracking down on 'bad boys' and the rogue traders with whom they interact. How the warring parties were organised, what kind of political economy this entailed, and what might happen to that legacy after the war, are issues that remain to be addressed.

⁵¹ Smillie, I., Gberie, L., Hazleton, R. 2000. *The heart of the matter: Sierra Leone, diamonds and human security*. Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada (January 2000), p. 2.

IV. The Political Economy of War and Recovery: Recent Evidence

All war involves human organization. Human organization implies both a sociology and a political economy. These are mutually constitutive. War, like peace, has its own sociology and political economy. But war never exists in isolation, and the sociology and political economy of war do not necessarily disappear with the return of peace. There are always links to and legacies for the wider society. It makes sense both to ask how the political economy of war evolved, and what impact this might have had on the wider society, especially as momentum towards peace strengthened. So far, as we see from material reviewed above, analysis - to the extent there has been analysis - has focused on the sources of wealth tapped by movement leaders. Here we begin the process of assembling evidence concerning the more mundane political economy of survival among the warring factions. How were units supplied? How was daily life organised? What experiences and values arose from or were associated with these modalities of survival and supply? What will be the legacy of these experiences and values?

Combatants are carrying out a kind of work. They have dependents. These dependents might exist only in a secure forest camp - as with some members of the RUF. Or they might be scattered throughout zones of conflict and in areas at peace, as was the case for many RSLMF, AFRC or CDF fighters. Analysis of the political economy of war requires us not only to understand the life of combatants, but also how they redistributed wealth to their families and other dependents.

Interest in the mundane survival strategies of the rank-and-file will then lead us to enquire what distributional arrangements and attitudes to material resources, created under wartime contingency, might survive into the post-war era, and what legitimacy might they enjoy. Will this legacy be either an obstacle to, or a resource for, making peace?

4.1. The Egalitarian World of the RUF

As explained above, the RUF evolved, under the persistent pressure of summary executions of its cadres, from 1991, into a rather distinctive 'enclaved' organization, with very few links to society outside the confines of its highly organised and strongly defended forest camps. The camps were a forcing ground for egalitarianism.⁵² Interviews with recently demobilised RUF ex-combatants confirm a rather distinctive approach to social justice typical of an isolated sectarian organization.⁵³ It was

⁵² Richards, P. 1999. 'New political violence in Africa: secular sectarianism in Sierra Leone.' *GeoJournal* 47: 433-442, 1999 (special issue: *Grid-Group Cultural Theory*, ed. V. D. Mamadouh). Richards, P. 2002a. 'Green Book millenarians? The Sierra Leone war from the perspective of an anthropology of religion.' In *Religion and Civil War in Africa*, ed. Niels Kastfelt, London: C. Hurst.

⁵³ Peters, K. 2002. *The storm is not yet over? Interviews with ex-combatants from the war in Sierra Leone*. Unpublished typescript, Technology & Agrarian Development Group, Wageningen University & Research Centre, The Netherlands. Sivan, E. 1995. 'The enclave culture', In M. Marty, ed., *Fundamentalisms comprehended*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

death to leave the movement. As with many closed sects, the defection of one threatened the solidarity of all. But within the confines of camps, tribalism was eschewed, religious pluralism was cultivated, age hierarchies were abolished, Krio was the *lingua franca*, cases between members were settled by open group arbitration, and basic items - notably whatever few health and educational resources the movement could command - were distributed to members according to need.⁵⁴ Less is known about whether there were attempts to foster gender equality among cadres, though the movement had a significant number of female fighters (unlike RSLMF, AFRC or CDF), and a group of influential women figures were members of the war council, the main leadership organization. Sexual violence, however, was reportedly rampant, especially against female captives.

RUF fighters received no wages. The movement 'lived off the land', i.e. it acquired the means of subsistence through looting.⁵⁵ However, looting was strictly controlled. Several cadres have emphasised that they had to pool items they seized.⁵⁶ Severe punishments were levied on those who tried to hide items for personal use or accumulate their own sources of wealth.

In Kailahun, where the movement enjoyed some local support, there was a rudimentary RUF civil administration, in 1991-2, and at various later periods. The RUF tried to run elementary schools, and local courts. It appointed civil administrators - 'town commanders' - from among local sympathisers. Local populations were 'tithed' to support the war camps, and trade began to emerge (in basic items such as palm oil and rice).

As the movement expanded across the country along its bush path network in 1994-5, zones of civility began to emerge in the vicinity of the larger and longer established rear bases. These bases attracted the more adventurous traders from nearby towns. In 1995-6 the best sources of information about Bokor camp in the Kangari Hills, and various camps between Blama and Potoru, came from palm oil dealers, sex workers and taxi drivers in towns such as Bo and Kenema. It seems likely that with time such places would have 'normalised' through trade, developing an existence equivalent to the 'maroon' camps of run-away slaves in the New World. Any such prospect was ended by CDF attacks, supported by Executive Outcomes, in the run-up to signing of the Abidjan peace agreement in September-October 1996. Shearer opines that this pressure was necessary to bring the RUF to the negotiating table (the treaty was signed November 30th 1996).⁵⁷ An alternative view is that these attacks on the movement's most secure assets deeply destabilised its membership and laid the

⁵⁴ For evidence see: Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002a. 'Conversion to human rights? Popular debate about war and justice in rural central Sierra Leone.' *Africa* (forthcoming). Peters, K. 2002. *The storm is not yet over? Interviews with ex-combatants from the war in Sierra Leone*. Unpublished typescript, Technology & Agrarian Development Group, Wageningen University & Research Centre, The Netherlands. Peters, K. & Richards, P. 1998a. 'Why we fight: voices of youth ex-combatants in Sierra Leone.' *Africa*, v. 68(1), pp. 183-210. Richards, P. 2002a. 'Green Book millenarians? The Sierra Leone war from the perspective of an anthropology of religion.' In *Religion and Civil War in Africa*, ed. Niels Kastfelt, London: C. Hurst.

⁵⁵ RUF/SL. 1995. *Footpaths to democracy: toward a New Sierra Leone*. No stated place of publication: The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone.

⁵⁶ Peters, K. & Richards, P. 1998a. 'Why we fight: voices of youth ex-combatants in Sierra Leone.' *Africa*, v. 68(1), pp. 183-210. Peters, K. 2002. *The storm is not yet over? Interviews with ex-combatants from the war in Sierra Leone*. Unpublished typescript, Technology & Agrarian Development Group, Wageningen University & Research Centre, The Netherlands.

⁵⁷ Shearer, D. 1997. 'Exploring the limits of consent: conflict resolution in Sierra Leone.' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, v. 26(3), pp. 845-860.

foundations for horrors to come.⁵⁸ Henceforth, the movement never hesitated in its pre-emptive use of terror tactics against rural civilians suspected of supporting the CDF.

Bokor camp, which controlled a large part of the centre of the country, was invested by CDF fighters from September 1996, but in the chaos of the May 25th take-over by the AFRC in 1997 inmates evacuated the camp. Mainly they headed for Freetown. The site reportedly remains abandoned. The camps in the south of the country - including the movement's headquarters, the Zogoda, in upper Koya Chiefdom - were sacked by the CDF in 1996 and again never re-occupied. But the movement hung on to its bases in northern Kailahun, and quietly re-stocked them from supplies accessed in Freetown via its temporary partnership with the AFRC (1997-8). When the AFRC was deposed by ECOMOG in February 1998 the junta leaders were led on foot by RUF cadres along bush paths to Buedu base. Among the party was the former head of state, Joseph Saidu Momoh. A bulky man, he was said to have lost so much weight on the trek that he was for a time unrecognisable.

In the relative quiet of the post-Lome period the RUF settled in a cigar-shaped belt in the middle of the country linking Makeni and Magburaka with Koidu, the centre of the Kono diamond fields. Kono was essential to the RUF's post-1998 strategy of seeking ultimate safety and recognition through a direct assault on the state. It needed to acquire diamonds to pay for materiel. The movement also mined gold in the region in and around the escarpment of the Kangari Hills in Tonkolili District.

The Kangari Hills scarp became an important axis of the war between the CDF and RUF from 1998-9. Two powerful chiefs - Samuel Hinga Norman, the Kabbah government's deputy Minister of Defence and principle architect of the CDF, and Norman's main northern ally, the Paramount Chief of Bonkolenken, shared mining interests. A Mende, Norman had a gold mine secured by Sandline operatives in Valunia Chiefdom, his home area. The Paramount Chief of Bonkolenken, Bai Sunthaba, a Temne, once a mining engineer in Kono, was anxious to reclaim his chiefdom from the RUF, and turned to Norman for advice. The result was a decision to sponsor large numbers of Temne-speaking subjects as *kamajoi* fighters, i.e. they were initiated according to a Mende rite, a quite striking inter-cultural innovation. The scheme worked. With some military advice from Executive Outcomes, Bai Sunthaba succeeded to drive the RUF northwards. The front line then became fixed in Tane chiefdom, where the main motor road ascends the Kangari Hills scarp on its way from Makeni to Kono. North of this line the villages are today physically undamaged, because this is an area the RUF controlled. South of the line most villages were levelled in the course of attacks and counter attacks between RUF and CDF (1998-99).

Interviews in Tane Chiefdom (April 2002) give some insight into life under the RUF. Principally, the movement extracted food from the people and mobilised forced labour for gold mining activities. As in the Kono diamond fields, it seems to have eased its controls to allow local people to work some days each week on their own behalf. In Kono, the RUF used what is known as the 'two-pile system'.⁵⁹ The gravel is divided into two heaps and the diggers take one and the movement takes the other - a rudimentary 'share-cropping' arrangement. In northern Tane chiefdom there was little or no evidence of even the most basic administration. Latterly, however, a few attempts seem to have been made in Magburaka, Makeni, and one or two other places along this RUF controlled axis in northern Sierra

⁵⁸ Fithen, C. and Richards, P. 2002. Making war, crafting peace: militia solidarities and demobilization in Sierra Leone, In B. Helander & P. Richards, eds. *No peace no war: learning to live beyond violent conflict*. (forthcoming).

⁵⁹ Fithen, C. 1999. *Diamonds and war in Sierra Leone: cultural strategies for commercial adaptation to endemic low-intensity conflict*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Anthropology, University College London.

Leone - known as 'Togo' by the cadres - to pay the salaries of teachers in elementary schools. UNAMSIL on its first visits to Makeni in February 2001 found the RUF keen to organise an under-fives vaccination programme.

After demobilization in late 2001 most RUF cadres appear to have drifted away from northern Tane chiefdom. Some went to demobilization camps in Freetown, Makeni and other places, where they remain, undergoing job training. Some of the leading cadres - described as Mende-speakers from the east - were said to have returned to Kailahun, to 'reconcile with their families' (or perhaps to be close to hidden supplies in the event of any resumption of hostilities). A few - rather diffidently described as 'new civilians' (they were auditing the discussion) - have remained in local villages, with the permission of chiefs and land owners, perhaps uncertain of their reception at home, and awaiting the outcome of elections. One conversation about the havoc caused by the RUF threw out some interesting comments on the incidental benefits of the war. In transporting rice from the scarp foot zone in the centre of the country to the east the RUF had introduced valuable new varieties, to the benefit of resettling farmers in Kailahun. This, it was agreed, was an unwitting development. But a second development was credited as a conscious achievement. The movement had 'created awareness', both among its members, and in the minds of many of its victims. For the young at least, patrimonial deference is dead or dying.

4.2. The Individualist Legacy of the CDF

In the CDF there are two rather different elements. Original volunteers tended to be village youths, displaced by the rebels, and anxious above all to recover their farmlands and plantations, and perhaps avenge the death of loved ones. As the movement expanded under the patronage of Chief Norman in mid to late 1996, and especially after the AFRC coup in May 1997, new elements came in. Quite a few volunteers came from the ranks of the urban unemployed, where their experience and background ranged from labouring, to truck driving, to teaching. One estimate, made as part of a demobilization planning exercise, suggested that as many as 10 per cent of CDF intake might have degrees, teacher's certificates or similar qualifications. After May 1997, CDF ranks were swelled by professional soldiers loyal to the Kabbah regime.

Seemingly - for the details are as yet unclear - the professional soldiers and those with an urban background tended to staff the more specialist offensive operations, such as the major attacks on the RUF bases in September-October 1996, supported by EO or Sandline. Village volunteers were mainly deployed in re-taking localities they knew at first hand. Many were recruited once an area was cleared by CDF advance. Volunteers from among the returning villagers would then put themselves up for kamajoi initiation (sometimes sponsored by a patron, sometimes at their own expense). They would deploy locally, under a 'ground commander', securing the terrain against subsequent re-infiltration.

The more foot-loose elements in the CDF are pretty much comparable with fighters from the RUF and AFRC. In demobilization they look for a benefit package that includes skills training, to prepare for a return to urban or professional life. The village CDF have settled back into their farming world. Some continue to keep the spirit of bush combat alive through organising former comrades into farm labour gangs familiar from before the war.⁶⁰ But if this taken as evidence that the old social order

⁶⁰ Richards, P. 1986. *Coping with hunger: hazard and experiment in a West African rice farming system*. London: Allen & Unwin.

is re-emerging unchallenged, appearances may be deceptive. In some ways the CDF has changed the political climate in the countryside in ways as dramatic as the changes wrought upon captives in RUF camps.

To understand these changes it should be understood that the CDF developed considerable independence of the patrimonial hierarchy of rural chiefs during its field campaign against the RUF. Volunteers became members of the CDF by undergoing initiation as kamajoisia (Mende specialist hunters). Initiates join a craft guild.⁶¹ As skilled practitioners, specialist hunters are feared by the general population because of their esoteric knowledge. They are comparable to the blacksmiths operating one or two to a village throughout the region.⁶² Both hunters and blacksmiths work not in teams but as individuals, and hand on their skills by apprenticeship. Some chiefs underwent initiation as kamajoi, but the two worlds only partially overlap. In many areas kamajoi fighters opened the way for the return of rural civilians, but (with exceptions) chiefs were slow to follow. The RUF considered rural chiefs bastions of the corrupt one-party system it hoped to destroy. Chiefs hung back, concerned lest the war should revive.

Back home, but without their leaders, the common people got on with rebuilding their lives from their own limited resources. They supported the CDF fighters with food and other 'morale boosters'. They continued the same system with returning school teachers and health workers. Informal dispute resolution methods revived, while quarrels among CDF members were settled not by the local courts presided over by chiefs, but by the guild of kamajoisia. The closer to RUF lines the fainter the voice of governmental authority became. Chiefs were no longer in a position easily to impose on young men as in the days before the war. On several occasions we were told that among the causes of the war were arbitrary fines in chiefdom courts rendering young men, unable to pay, fugitives from justice, and thus vulnerable to recruitment by the RUF (see below). Many young rural Sierra Leoneans thus view the label 'criminal' with some scepticism.⁶³ They know the extent to which pre-war justice was perverted by those in power, under a one-party system of government that as blatantly interfered in the appointment of chiefs and chiefdom court chairmen as it did in the appointment of magistrates and judges. In some instances CDF fighters were as loud in their condemnation of corrupt chiefs as the RUF. Consultations on restoration of the chief in one chiefdom, Nomo, a former RUF hotbed on the Liberian border, resulted in CDF fighters threatening the chief with violence.⁶⁴ At times it is hardly possible to separate the RUF and CDF in terms of their determination to secure a new deal for youth.⁶⁵

The legacy of the CDF is an enhanced individualism in the countryside. Deference died in the war. C. shows me a piece of paper. I have known him since 1982. In those days he was strong young man, leader of a labour gang subduing bush and turning it into farmland. Twenty years later he is still a 'youth'. He has served as the local CDF 'ground commander'. Once again - this year - he has felled a large area of bush for a farm. He will burn it tomorrow. He asks me to pray for a good burn. The

⁶¹ Muana, P. K. 1997. 'The kamajoi militia: civil war, internal displacement and the politics of counter-insurgency.' *Africa Development* v. 22(3/4), pp. 77-100.

⁶² McNaughton, P. R. 1988. *The Mande blacksmith: knowledge, power and art in West Africa*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.

⁶³ Smillie, I., Gberie, L., Hazleton, R. 2000. *The heart of the matter: Sierra Leone, diamonds and human security*. Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada (January 2000). Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002a. 'Conversion to human rights? Popular debate about war and justice in rural central Sierra Leone.' *Africa* (forthcoming).

⁶⁴ Governance Reform Secretariat, 2000c. *The Nomo chiefdom consultation report*, 11th/12th July 2000. Freetown: Ministry of Presidential Affairs, Government of Sierra Leone.

paper he wants to show me is a summons, from the court in the chiefdom headquarters some miles away. It is hand-written (there will be no copies on file), but it is carefully inscribed in blue ball-point pen, with the vital information - the date of his trial, and the charge - written in red. C. must attend, to answer an accusation he committed a breach of the peace. Yes, he had a drink or two, and was fighting with a friend who cursed his mother. But he wants the 'head of the youth' in the village to settle the matter. The 'headman' for youth is chosen by acclamation of all the young men, as the one with the wisdom to sort out their little quarrels. The justice of the 'headman' of youth is informal, and he levies no fines. C. knows the court chairman in S., the chiefdom headquarters, already plans to fine him Le 30,000 (all the money he has set aside to buy seed rice to plant his farm this year). If C. pays he will starve. His option is to abscond, and be branded a criminal. Will I write a character reference, in the hope the fine can be reduced? I pen a note to the court chairmen, saying C. is truly sorry, promises not to fight again, and that he deserves respect as the CDF 'ground commander' who rid the area of the RUF. C. wonders why they can't settle things among themselves without government intervening to make money from poor people? The rebel war has created awareness. But the old Leviathan stirs. Now there is peace, the patrimonial order once again has access to resources from aid programmes, and might thus undermine the achievements of the common people during eleven years of war.

4.3. A New Model Army?

Government soldiers were different from RUF and CDF fighters. They received a wage. But the wages of government soldiers were hardly ever more than a pittance. Sometimes they never arrived. The salary truck was 'hijacked' before it reached front-line units. This was one of grievances that sparked the NPRC coup in 1992. In fact, government soldiers, like RUF abductees and CDF volunteers, expected, in large measure, to fend for themselves. At the war front they took local women to run their households, they organised villagers to grow their food, they acquired cash through mining diamonds or selling looted items. That the self-financing of combat operations was a general circumstance in the war in Sierra Leone is clear from the evidence that even the peace-keepers succumbed to its logic. It has been suggested that among the more important reasons ECOMOG peace-keepers lost the initiative to a re-armed and re-trained AFRC-RUF alliance in December 1998 was that demoralised rank-and-file had not been paid for some months, the money having been diverted by their officers to pay labourers for dry-season diamond mining operations.

Keen refers to the war in Sierra Leone not as the product of a guerrilla movement dogged from the outset by poverty and weakness but as a recurrent series of failures in counter-insurgency.⁶⁶ The culminating (and certainly the most expensive) of these failures was the UNAMSIL fiasco in April-May 2000. The British subsequently took on the task of creating a new model army, properly trained, equipped and motivated, and also properly paid. But whether the country will be able to afford such an army after the British have left and aid support declines is an open question. It seems almost inevitable that the forces of law and order, commanding cheap modern firepower in an impoverished country rich in readily exploitable mineral resources, will be tempted once again to 'live off the land', if and when government funding becomes tight.

⁶⁵ Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002a. 'Conversion to human rights? Popular debate about war and justice in rural central Sierra Leone.' *Africa* (forthcoming).

⁶⁶ Keen, D. (forthcoming). *The best of enemies: conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*. Oxford: James Currey.

4.4. 'Truck and Chuck'? The Political Economy of Rural Reconstruction

Humanitarianism is a further important aspect of the political economy of war and its aftermath. More than half the population of rural Sierra Leone suffered displacement as a result of the war. There are now reasonably good data on the patterns of displacement and resettlement in the centre, south, and south-east of the country, from which some provisional conclusions can be drawn about the political economy of humanitarianism.⁶⁷

Displacement in this region took place mainly in 1994-96, as the RUF revived from near defeat on the Liberian border in 1993. Villages were emptied by sequences of hit-and-run raids, frequently resulting in the burning of houses. Village elites (chiefs, merchants, teachers, development workers) headed for Freetown and other main towns, aware of the atrocities committed by the RUF against their peers in 1991.⁶⁸ Commoners often tried to subsist locally, in isolated forested areas, where they built temporary camps known in Mende as *sokoihun* ('in corners'). Farm and bush were their resources, and to go far off to a camp risked these, their only assets. Some groups tried to compromise with the rebels, but as CDF counter-attacks intensified in 1996 the RUF revenged itself on the most impoverished of 'corner dwellers'.

Sites were sometimes betrayed by disgruntled local informers. In the confusion leading up to and beyond the AFRC coup (May 1997) most corner dwellers briefly quit and attempted to settle in the main camps for the displaced in Bo and other centres, but there found themselves at risk of AFRC reprisals, and returned to the bush, as CDF units cleared the RUF out of the countryside.

This task was assisted by the RUF joining the AFRC junta. Cadres formerly engaged in patrolling the villages now headed for Freetown, hoping to find an end to the war under AFRC protection. Rural resettlement in areas of CDF influence was occurring even while the AFRC was in power (since the regime controlled little more than the roads and towns in the south and east), and intensified after ECOMOG displaced the AFRC from Freetown in 1998. International humanitarianism - slowed almost to a halt under sanctions imposed on the AFRC - revived after the restoration of president Kabbah, with the focus switching (in the centre, south and south east of the country) to aid for resettlement rather than camp feeding. Seeds and tools, water and sanitation and shelter (mainly plastic sheeting, but later corrugated pan roofing) became major commodities in the humanitarian economy of resettlement.

How did this economy work? Because of security considerations much was done on the basis of what has been termed 'truck and chuck' humanitarianism.⁶⁹ Supplies would be shuttled by truck to a distribution point and off-loaded into a warehouse. Villagers from the interior would arrive to claim their allocation, generally on the basis of some prior registration exercise by field agents. But the trucking team would need to turn round and head back for a secure locality well before nightfall. Distribution was often extremely rapid, and thus very approximate. Local authorities - a chief or his regent - might sign or thumb-print acceptance of an allocation to a village or administrative section, but many of the supplies would then disappear. Intended beneficiaries from the further villages might

⁶⁷ Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002a. 'Conversion to human rights? Popular debate about war and justice in rural central Sierra Leone.' *Africa* (forthcoming). Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002b. 'Seeds and rights: new approaches to post-war agricultural rehabilitation in Sierra Leone.' *Disasters* (forthcoming).

⁶⁸ Richards, P. 1995. Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone: a crisis of youth?, In O. W. Furley, ed. *Conflict in Africa*, London: I. B. Tauris.

⁶⁹ Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002b. 'Seeds and rights: new approaches to post-war agricultural rehabilitation in Sierra Leone.' *Disasters* (forthcoming).

arrive late to find nothing. They might discover their village had been registered without their knowledge, and that ‘brokers’ had claimed resources on their behalf. From the agency perspective the documentation would be impeccable - long lists of names, all written in the same hand-writing, with a neat line of thumb prints from the recipients alongside (perhaps the same thumb print in all cases?). But checks on the ground would reveal more remote villages had been missed out, there were many unregistered people even in villages covered, and that there were many cases in which registered ‘recipients’ complained the items had been collected without authorization by a person they did not know, who claimed to be acting in their interest. The speed with which tarpaulins for shelter started to appear in urban areas, and on the roofs of bars and video parlours, is probably as good an indicator as any of the extent to which humanitarian resources were diverted from intended recipients. In some extreme cases entire lorry loads would disappear before reaching the drop point - forged way bills doing away with necessity even to reach the ‘chuck’ stage of the exercise. The contents would quickly find their way to the urban market.

Much of this was perhaps inevitable in the chaos of 1997-98. Some of the supplies may have reached the AFRC and CDF, but in many cases they simply boosted local commercial circuits in Bo, Kenema and elsewhere. As conditions stabilised in 1999-2000 agencies were able to tighten up on the major abuses, but local distribution to final beneficiaries still proved problematic. The difficulty lay in the fact that to ensure better distribution to the needy many agencies experimented with some form of makeshift local institution, typically termed the ‘village development committee’ (VDC). Where there was no such entity in existence it was rapidly created, without too many questions (if any) being asked about the process of appointment or selection to membership, or without clear guidance and training concerning duties. The general idea was that in every rural community - even ones re-settling after war - there must be a ‘civil society’ made up of public-spirited individuals who will give time voluntarily to over-see the fair distribution of humanitarian inputs.

This is a flawed assumption. After a war, every villager is fighting to survive. No one has the time or motivation to undertake unpaid committee work in the public interest. In case after case, it turns out that the VDC comprised the village elite, or their agents (the ‘woman chair’ might turn out to be the sister of the village chief, for example), and that the beneficiary list was mainly or exclusively made up of the family dependents or political clients of the committee members. At times, inputs labouriously hauled into the village were hauled back again to feed the town or city-based family or school-age dependents of VDC members, whereas recently arrived displaced people were omitted from lists compiled by the committees because they were ‘unknown’ to village patrons, and therefore deemed ‘untrustworthy’. In short, humanitarianism served to revive the dormant patrimonial hierarchy on which the rural political economy had rested prior to the war.

Patrimonialism once had a certain logic in the subsistence-oriented rural communities met with in central and southern Sierra Leone.⁷⁰ But the patrimonial networks were thoroughly subverted by party political considerations under the APC regime. In village after village, young people and the poor - often migrant ‘strangers’ without land rights - complained that village patrimonial elites caused division prior to the war by hogging whatever development resources came to hand. They also reported that in conditions of state recession the same elites - deprived of resources from central government - supported themselves by manipulating un-codified local laws (in both customary courts

⁷⁰ Richards, P. 1986. *Coping with hunger: hazard and experiment in a West African rice farming system*. London: Allen & Unwin.

and secret associations) to squeeze resources from commoners. These - it was suggested on many occasions - were the grievances that caused the war, because a young man, arbitrarily fined by a village court chairman, on a trumped up charge, might see no option but to flee a fine and become a criminal (i.e. a fugitive from justice). We were told the RUF preyed upon such footloose young men, when hunting recruits.

This is, of course, but one aspect of a complicated war, with many causes. But there is no doubting that patrimonial breakdown is seen locally as a significant factor in making the countryside vulnerable to the RUF. It is thus a cause for local concern that humanitarianism, rather than repairing the damage, is perceived to be making the problem worse. It is seen as reviving the old Leviathan, when there is a desire - even on the part of village elites - to move on to newer, more transparent, more accountable systems, capable of reversing the social exclusion of potentially violent young people. Explanations of the war in terms of 'natural criminality' or 'subaltern terror' are little heard in the countryside.⁷¹ If a footloose youth has become a fugitive from justice then the first question asked is why he or she went on the run in the first place. This is regularly seen as more a problem to do with local justice than the lure of diamonds.

One group of villagers - first displaced by the RUF in January 1995, and resettled from early 1998 - explained the problem humanitarian now posed in their village. A humanitarian agency registered families for seeds, tools, and food-for-agriculture, but there was not enough to go round. The villagers were told to form a VDC and decide who was most vulnerable in the village. The committee decided that the most vulnerable were all the people above about age 40, starting with members of the VDC. The youths - including the CDF 'ground commanders' who had fought to reclaim the land - were denied inputs as a group, on the grounds they had the strength to fend for themselves. The response of the young people was to withdraw from the village *en masse*, and make a *sokoihun* at some distance. The elders were thoroughly alarmed. The 'corner' resembled the camps in which the RUF had sequestered its young fighters. 'Through injustice we have turned our own young people to rebels', an informant remarked.⁷²

There seems little doubt there is currently demand for more inclusive, transparent, accountable systems of resource distribution in the Sierra Leone countryside recovering from war. The problem is how to capitalise upon this important shift in attitudes provoked by the war. Break-away settlements resembling RUF camps risk a return to conditions of open inter-generational conflict. Democratic transition - while important - is a process largely affecting the higher reaches of state and society. There is, as yet, no comprehensive plan for the reform of local government in Sierra Leone. It can be objected, in any case, that the area where there is the greatest need for openness and inclusiveness is in the resource distributions upon which rural re-settlement is currently based, i.e. the political economy of humanitarianism and development assistance. These areas tend to be omitted from the agenda of political and governance reform as conventionally conceived. The agencies themselves will have to reform practices, to address issues of human rights and distributional justice alongside the familiar agenda of humanitarian need. Some experiments that link local debates about discussion of rights,

⁷¹ Smillie, I., Gberie, L., Hazleton, R. 2000. *The heart of the matter: Sierra Leone, diamonds and human security*. Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada (January 2000). Kandeh, J. 2001 'Subaltern terror in Sierra Leone.' In Tunde Zack-Williams, Diane Frost and Alex Thomson, eds., *Africa in Crisis: new challenges and possibilities*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 179-195.

⁷² Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002a. 'Conversion to human rights? Popular debate about war and justice in rural central Sierra Leone.' *Africa* (forthcoming).

responsibilities and accountability to new modalities for the distribution of inputs for agricultural recovery are currently under way in central Sierra Leone, and may provide wider lessons for a thorough overhaul of post-war rural development.⁷³

⁷³ Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002a. 'Conversion to human rights? Popular debate about war and justice in rural central Sierra Leone.' *Africa* (forthcoming). Archibald, S. & Richards, P. 2002b. 'Seeds and rights: new approaches to post-war agricultural rehabilitation in Sierra Leone.' *Disasters* (forthcoming).

V. Conclusion: Beyond Greed Versus Grievance

At the end of a lengthy critique of the argument that the war in Sierra Leone is a crisis of patrimonialism the political economist Yusuf Bangura indulges a constructive moment - he describes a functioning state and society in Sierra Leone in terms of a list of desirable institutions.⁷⁴ What he fails to show is how such a set of institutions could be achieved. An alternative is to start from where people find themselves. Where do the mass of Sierra Leoneans now locate, in terms of institutions and values, in the aftermath of war?

As an aid to navigating worlds of institutions and values world Mary Douglas, Michael Thompson, and colleagues, have developed the legacy of Emile Durkheim into a theory of institutional cultures and organizational forms in which institutional viability requires some kind of balancing act between four basic solidarities, each of which serves as a check and balance on the others.⁷⁵ It is not hard to see that societies undergoing 'pathological' change, such as a vicious civil war, have, in some way, lost this balance. One (or more) of the solidarities has slipped the leash. In Sierra Leone, patrimonial hierarchy over-sold itself. As with pyramid selling schemes, the world of patronage proved incapable of expanding quickly enough to incorporate all the new young faces, when the diamond money began to run dry. In opposition, the young people of the RUF tried to 'go it alone', evoking a second solidarity - the egalitarian enclave. The war has tested this option to destruction. Many rural people then found themselves in refugee camps. Camp dependencies risk over-emphasis on fatalist solidarities. Nothing can change; people accept what life throws at them. Currently, much of the running in rural districts recovering from war is being made by individualism. This solidarity empowers rural producers, and breaks their dependence on unaccountable elites. If the political economy of the war has any lasting impact in Sierra Leone it may be in terms of a greater individualism and entrepreneurship, connecting farmers and diamond diggers to market places, free of patrimonial exactions.

But the war has also revealed the potential weakness - for civil society - of over-reliance on individualism for social reconstruction. Looting has made the 'parallel market' an endemic aspect of social life. People refer to the system for acquiring food, building materials, drugs or medical items (misappropriated from the humanitarian sector) as the economy of 'hide and seek'. Even the most ardent proponent of market forces can hardly have in mind such a system as a route to national recovery. Thus it is apparent that good governance in Sierra Leone requires a careful re-balancing of solidarities. How might this be achieved?

⁷⁴ Bangura, Yusuf 1997. Understanding the political and cultural dynamics of the Sierra Leone war: a critique of Paul Richards's 'Fighting for the Rain Forest'. *Africa Development* 22, 3/4, 117-148. Special Issue: *Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: the Sierra Leone Civil War*.

⁷⁵ Douglas, M. and Ney, S. 1998. *Missing persons*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Hood, C. 1998. *The art of the state: culture, rhetoric and public management*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Thompson, M. 1998. 'Style and scale: two sources of institutional inappropriateness', In M. Goldman, ed, *Privatizing nature: political struggles for the global commons*. London: Pluto Press. Fardon, R. 1999. *Mary Douglas: an intellectual biography*. London: Routledge.

Some proponents of neo-Durkheimianism as espoused by Douglas et al. emphasise a self-regulatory or cybernetic focus based on information flows (equivalent to ideas about communicative emancipation in Habermas and theories of participatory development). Others (Perri 6, personal communication) advocate a more fundamental re-assessment of the Durkheimian heritage, suggesting that the key to good governance lies in re-linking tools and rites (or to put it more grandly, in inter-relating the anthropology of technology and anthropology of religion). Our own sympathies lie with the second approach.

The weakness of 'greed, not grievance' (and the political economy approach to war in general) is that it risks over-emphasis on tools. War is also ritual action. It is ritual action that forces the solidarities apart. Restoration of peace also has to engage a ritual re-balancing of the solidarities. The rituals of peace - from family ancestral rites, through village 'peace days', up to national public rituals of justice, repentance, forgiveness and remembrance (such as a truth and justice commission) - will be as important to peace-making in Sierra Leone as attempts to manage the material means of post-war reconstruction.

One of the first participatory exercises in which I took part in rural Sierra Leone over 20 years ago resulted in a conclusion that the local priority was aid to build mosques and churches. The donor refused the results of its own analysis. It did not 'do' mosques. The compromise (a good one) was to support the construction by communities of village court buildings, which doubled as stores for bridge, road and school building materials. This held in balance - in creative tension - tools and ritual action. Public materials for development could be seen to be under lock and key, in a court house whose open sides symbolised (and facilitated) an attempt to dispense accountable justice. Aid for post-war reconstruction will have to absorb the same lesson. Dealing with greed requires attention to the ritual spaces in which to articulate grievance.

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