The Journal of Modern African Studies, 36, 2 (1998), pp. 203–235
Printed in the United Kingdom

Bush path to destruction: the origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone

Ibrahim Abdullah*

We recruited fifty-four boys, mostly from Bugisu, and started training them at Nachingwea. Unfortunately, once again, these boys had not been well selected. They had been working mostly in towns like Nairobi and had a *kiyaye* (lumpen proletariat) culture. They began misbehaving in the Frelimo camp and soon after their training, the Tanzanian government dispersed them.

I took personal charge of the Montepuez group and stayed with the boys during the training months in Mozambique because I feared that some of the recruits might be undisciplined *bayaye*, like those of 1973, and they might have caused us problems. With my presence in the camp, however, we were able to suppress most of their negative tendencies and attitudes.[1]

When the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone (RUF/SL) entered Kailahun District on 23 March 1991, few people took them seriously or realised that a protracted and senseless war was in the making. The corrupt and inept government in Freetown was quick to label the movement as the handy work of Charles Taylor; the incursion a spillover from the Liberian civil war. This erroneous representation of the movement and the war was echoed by the media, both local and foreign; it later appeared in one scholarly investigation as 'the border war', and in another as an attempt by Charles Taylor to 'do a RENAMO' on Sierra Leone.[2] Twelve months after the initial attack in Kailahun, a group of army officers from the warfront trooped to

* University of the Western Cape, South Africa. I would like to thank the following for their comments, suggestions and support: Aisha Ibrahim, Yusuf Bangura, Ishmail Rashid, Patrick Muana, Lans Gberie, Ben Weller, Mike West, Paul Richards, Alie Kabba, Mohamed Jabbie and Odulami Williams.

[1] Yoweri Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda* (London, 1997), pp. 85, 90.

[2] Cecil Magabaily Fyle, 'The military and civil society in Sierra Leone: the 1992 military coup d'état', *African Development*, 18, 2 (1994), 127–46; A. B. Zack-Williams and Stephen Riley, 'Sierra Leone: the coup and its consequences', *Review of African Political Economy*, 56 (1993), 91–8.

Freetown, the seat of government, and seized power from the corrupt politicians amidst popular support.[3] Calling itself the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), the new regime declared its intention to end the war, revamp the economy, and put the nation on the path to multiparty democracy. Following an eventual return to civilian rule in March 1996, with the election of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, a further *coup* in May 1997 led to the bloody takeover of Freetown by elements drawn from both the RUF and the army against which it had been fighting, under the title of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

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

A RADICAL TRADITION/ALTERNATIVE?

The demise of the militant Youth League inaugurated by Sierra Leone's legendary Pan-Africanist I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson in 1939, did not presage the end of radical labour/political agitation.[4] Rather,

[3] No serious study has been done on the 1992 *coup d'état* but see the following: Magabaily Fyle, 'The military'; Zack-Williams and Riley, 'The coup'; Jimmy Kande, 'What does the militariat do when it rules? Military regimes: The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia', *Review of African Political Economy*, 69 (1996), 387–404.

[4] See Ibrahim Abdullah, '"Liberty or Death": working-class agitation and the labour question in colonial Freetown, 1938–1939', *International Review of Social History*, 40 (1995), 195–221; La Ray Denzer, '*I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League: A Case Study in West African Nationalism* (Ph.D., University of Birmingham, 1977).

it closed the formal avenues for radical politics through a series of concessions, in the form of constitutional arrangements, which eventually led to independence. Eliphas Mukonoweshuro has admirably mapped out the contours of this process of negotiation in his study of decolonisation in Sierra Leone.[5] The sanitisation of politics, which was its outcome, did not adversely affect the labour movement. Labour activists such as Marcus Grant and George Thomas who were inspired by the Youth League tradition of continuous agitation became influential in shaping the process of remaking the working class, once Wallace-Johnson had been imprisoned and his organisation proscribed. The incorporation and subsequent cooptation of prominent labour leaders Akinola Wright and Siaka Stevens into positions of authority in the era of decolonisation, did not blunt the radical edge of labour politics. In 1950, strikes and riots rocked the iron ore mines, while in 1952 diamond miners in Yengema demanded a wage rise and shut down the mines for two weeks. In February 1955, Marcus Grant with the active support of Wallace-Johnson, defied the colonial state and called a general strike which paralysed the city, and forced colonial officials and employers to concede workers' demands for a wage rise and the right to bargain directly with employers.[6]

The Youth League tradition was therefore alive in the 1950s; but it did not assume a national dimension nor did it emerge as a coherent and organised force in post-colonial politics. Arguably, it was partly because of the defeat of the Youth League and partly because of Wallace-Johnson's exit to Ghana that radical politics or a leftist tradition was shunted out of Sierra Leone's political culture. Attempts to revive this radical tradition with a working-class party, the Sierra Leone Labour Party, were abandoned after the party was defeated in the 1957 elections.[7] Elsewhere on the west coast, notably Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal, a radical tradition was kept alive in the labour movement and in national politics. What therefore marked Sierra Leone's post-independence politics was not its tolerance of a leftist tradition, in the labour movement or in national politics, but its

[5] Eliphas G. Mukonoweshuro, *Colonialism, Class Formation and Underdevelopment in Sierra Leone* (Lanham, MD, 1993). See also Martin Kilson, *Political Change in a West African State* (Cambridge, MA, 1966); John Cartwright, *Politics in Sierra Leone 1947–1967* (Toronto, 1970).

[6] These issues are discussed in Ibrahim Abdullah, 'The colonial state and wage labour in post-war Sierra Leone: attempts at remaking the working class, 1945–1960', *International Labor and Working Class History*, 52 (1997), 87–105; Ibrahim Abdullah and Ishmail Rashid, 'Uprising discourses: workers, peasants, and the state, Sierra Leone, 1955–56', American Historical Association Conference, New York, 1997.

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

conservative orientation and uncritical support for the West. The APCs pretence at reviving the Youth League tradition was betrayed by its ethnic composition and empty socialist rhetoric.[8] It was only after the party made an impressive start in the 1962 general elections, and then swept the polls in the 1964 city council elections, that it was able to establish its credentials as a viable opposition. Siaka Stevens' trade union career and the party's predominantly working and lower-middle-class leadership, lent credence to its claim to radicalism. This was in sharp contrast to the SLPP which was dominated by the upper and middle-class professionals, and their 'traditional' allies, the Paramount Chiefs.[9]

But the APC government after 1968 was markedly different from the party in opposition or when it controlled the Freetown City Council. Once it had successfully reduced the number of SLPP members in the House of Representatives through fraudulent and not so fraudulent election petitions, in which the judiciary fully acquiesced, the party quickly dismantled the national coalition cabinet that was instituted in 1968. This move signalled the beginning of the APC's consolidation of power, and opened the road to a one-party dictatorship.[10] From 1970, when the first attempt to unseat the government was made by Brigadier John Bangura and others, to the alleged coup attempt involving Mohammed Sorie Forna and fourteen others, for which Foday Sankoh, the future RUF leader, was jailed, to the fraudulent elections of 1973 and 1977, the party did all it could to stifle the opposition and consolidate power. By 1978 when the one-party state was declared, the SLPP had been disabled by the arrest and detention of its members. The atmosphere of violence against any form of organised opposition or dissent, and the centralisation of power in the hands of the party and the Pa, as President Stevens was normally referred to, transformed the state and by implication politics into an affair for and by APC members and supporters.[11] This centralisation of politics made access to resources impossible for non-members; it made membership of the party a *sine qua non* to get by; exclusion literally meant death by attrition.[12] It was within this context that university

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

[9] For a detailed account of this period see Cartwright, *Politics*.

[10] The best account of this period is Alpha Lavalie, 'The SLPP in Opposition', in *Sierra Leone Studies at Birmingham* (London, 1985).

[11] See *APC: The Rising Sun* (London, 1982).

[12] See Fred Hayward, 'State decay and fragmentation', in John Dunn (ed.), *West African States* (Cambridge, 1989); Jimmy Kande, 'Politicization of ethnic identities in Sierra Leone', *African Studies Review*, 35, 1 (1992), 81–99; Tunde Zack-Williams, 'Sierra Leone: crisis and despair', *Review of African Political Economy*, 49 (1990), 22–33.

students and youth emerged as the informal opposition to the corrupt and decadent APC.

UPRISING DISCOURSES: THE MAKING OF INFORMAL OPPOSITION

The search for an alternative political space to the SLPP, not necessarily a radical one, did not emanate from the youth. Nor did they make or organise any independent contribution, based on their own agenda, towards the defeat of the SLPP. The immediate post-colonial period, from independence in 1961 to 1968, was characterised by a tussle for power between the two organised political machines: the SLPP and the APC. If the youths were involved their role was simply as foot soldiers. Their marginalisation was expressed in the form of party youth wings, an arm of the party always peripheral to where real power was located. Their performance could therefore be read as a ritual; it always began with a crisis situation, and their mobilisation as thugs to do the dirty work. Once the project was complete, they fell back to the wings, waiting for another assignment. This reading of their political role does not mean that those who joined the so-called youth wings were all thugs. But their role was strictly limited to 'action oriented tasks', such as the arson at Ginger Hall in Freetown in 1970, and the assault on students at Fourah Bay College (FBC) in 1977, with occasional trips to communist countries.[13] On both occasions it was the unimaginative and politically ambitious members in the party's youth wing who organised lumpen youth (thugs) to do the dirty work. It was only in the 1970s that the party gave those who were still in the fold a rightful place in the sun.[14]

By lumpens, I refer to the largely unemployed and unemployable youths, mostly male, who live by their wits or who have one foot in what is generally referred to as the informal or underground economy. They are prone to criminal behaviour, petty theft, drugs, drunkenness

[13] The massacre and arson at Ginger Hall, a predominantly migrant suburb in Freetown's east-end, took place during the 1970 municipal elections. For the 1977 student demonstration see George O. Roberts, *The Anguish of Third World Independence: The Sierra Leone Experience* (Lanham, MD, 1982); Ismail Rashid, 'Subaltern reactions: student radicals and lumpen youth in Sierra Leone, 1977–1992', *Africa* (forthcoming).

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

and gross indiscipline. It is precisely this culture, with its anti-social characteristics, which Yoweri Museveni so eloquently describes in his autobiography.[15] This youth culture which became visible in the post-1945 period, had its genealogy in the so-called rarray boy culture.[16] It is a male-specific oppositional culture which easily lends itself to violence. In Nigeria, they are referred to as *yan banga* and *Jaguda* boys (or the now popular area boys) respectively; in Algeria, they are called *hittiste*; in East Africa they are generally referred to as *bayaye* – they are to be found in every city in Africa.[17] Their role in post-colonial politics, especially their language of protest, is only now beginning to attract scholarly attention.

In Sierra Leone, the first generation rarray boys acted as thugs for the politicians, a role they played partly because of their defective education.[18] Mostly unlettered, they were predominantly second-generation residents in the city, whose abode, the *pote* (historically a popular peri-urban area of relaxation for unemployed youths), was also a cultural/leisure space constructed around the *odelay* (masquerade).[19] They were known for their anti-social culture: gambling, drugs (initially marijuana, now crack cocaine), petty theft and violence. Their periodic carnivals on public holidays were always under the watchful eyes of the police; they needed permits for their carnivals, first from city officials and later from the police.[20] Their revelry and riotous behaviour alienated them from the city inhabitants: they were seen as a good-for-nothing bunch, best avoided.

This representation of lumpen culture began to change in the early 1970s, particularly when middle-class youths became key players in

[15] Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*.

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

[17] See Ali El-Kenz, 'Youth and violence', in Stephen Ellis (ed.), *Africa Now: People, Policies and Institutions* (London, 1996); Alessandro Triulzi, 'African cities, historical memory and street buzz', in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds.), *The Post Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London, 1996); Mamdou Diouf, 'Urban youth and Senegalese politics: Dakar 1988–1994', *Public Culture*, 8 (1996), 225–49; Neil J. Savishinky, 'Rastafari in the Promised Land: the spread of a Jamaican socioreligious movement among the youth of West Africa', *African Studies Review*, 37, 3 (1994), 19–50; for Uganda see Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*.

[18] Ibrahim Abdullah, 'Lumpen youth culture in post-colonial Sierra Leone: a research agenda' (unpublished paper, 1996); 'Babylon Inna Zion: Rastafarians in Freetown' (unpublished paper, 1996); Rashid, 'Subaltern Reactions'.

[19] The *pote* shares a lot in common with the shebeens in Southern Africa. See Michael O. West, '"Equal rights for all civilized men": elite Africans and the quest for "European" liquor in colonial Zimbabwe, 1924–1961', *International Review of Social History* 37 (1992), 374–97.

[20] For a study of odelay as urban art see John Nunley, *Moving with the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa* (Urbana, 1987). But Nunley's treatment of this oppositional culture lacks depth.

this urban popular culture. The character and composition of the *pote* also began to change as *odelays* emerged as a more reputable element of the urban cultural landscape. Yet this change was replete with the contradictory tendencies inherent in lumpens as a social category. Thus whereas politicians were interested in taming and coopting this culture to ensure a ready supply of thugs to do their dirty work, the entry of middle-class youth and others into the *pote* as participants in the periodic carnivals, transformed the culture as well as the nature of the *pote* from an area for social misfits into one of political socialisation and counter-cultural activities.[21] A majority of the middle-class youth element was still in high school but participated in the drug culture, and gradually acquired the mannerisms, language and iconography of the emerging popular culture. Others dropped out of school entirely, following the footsteps of the original rarray boys. The entry of this new crop transformed the social composition of the *pote*. This change coincided with the coming of reggae music and a decided turn to the political.

Ishmail Rashid has explored the connections between this new lumpen culture and Fourah Bay College (FBC) students. His discussion underscores the importance of 'organic intellectuals', those who were in the forefront articulating some form of change, as a distinguishing feature of this linkage. In the 1970s the group included many high school drop-outs and some unfortunate O and A level holders mostly unemployed. Though some later went to the university, most joined the city's expanding army of unemployed who lingered in *potes* and the numerous working-class pubs in the city. This group were conversant with the political philosophy of some distinguished Africans, they knew in outline the history of the slave trade and the dehumanisation of the African which it entailed. They could make connections between the colonial past and the post-colonial present and generally espouse some form of Pan-Africanism. *Pote* discourse was spiced with generous quotes from Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley, Kwame Nkrumah, Wallace-Johnson, and at times Haile Selassie. Some of these *pote* types had read Kwame Nkrumah and Frantz Fanon, a bit of Che Guavara and Fidel Castro, and some undigested Marx and Lenin.[22]

[21] Ibrahim Abdullah, 'Context, culture and crisis: changing identities of urban youth in Sierra Leone', forthcoming; Rashid, 'Subaltern reactions'.

[22] Kwame Nkrumah's *Class Struggle in Africa* and Fidel Castro's *History Will Absolve Me* were the most popular texts. There is no evidence that these students were influenced by the ideas of Alvin Toffler, the American futurologist, despite the suggestion in Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (London, 1966), that Alvin Toffler's ideas were influential among radicals at Njala campus. This prompted him to make a rather far-fetched

The 1977 student demonstrations were organised and led by students who were participants in this rebellious culture.[23] This was not the first time that students had been involved in national politics. FBC students were involved in the APC inspired agitation against the introduction of a one-party system under Sir Albert Margai. When the APC came to power in 1968, the populist Alfred Akibo-Betts sponsored the establishment of a youth league on campus. But like the lumpens before them, the students did not enter the political arena as independent actors; they were brought in as foot soldiers in the service of a mythical common agenda; 1977 was therefore the first time that FBC students as a body intervened in the political arena with a clear cut agenda: to push for reform in the political sphere. The initiative was taken by radical students who did not anticipate the consequences of their actions. The demonstrations were extremely popular, and exposed the fragility of the APC regime. The president was forced to grant some concessions: a general election was called three months later. In spite of its limited gains the demonstration was successful: it revealed the potential of organised protest by students.

By the 1980s, university students, particularly those at FBC, were a respectable bunch in the *pote*; they had become an important reference group for their unfortunate brothers. Their role in the 1977 demonstrations enhanced their status *vis-à-vis* other groups. In the *pote*'s code of honour, essentially an extension of the general clientelist relations in the society, due regard was given to the *pote* frequenting 'service man' who was also a student at FBC. Their unfortunate brothers listened to them as they preached, smoked and philosophised in the safe confines of the *pote*. It was within this milieu that the change from 'service man' to 'man dem' took place; signifying a move from the individual to the collective.[24] The camaraderie had come full circle; one love and brotherhood was the slogan of this new group of youths, evident in the popular support the 1977 demonstrations received from this youth constituency. From this vantage point the series of student protests in the 1980s become intelligible. The students, who were immersed in the rebellious youth culture, became the most articulate

connection between the RUF's alleged emphasis on technology and its non-existent emancipatory project. Francis Deen, a founding member of Future Shock, denied this influence. Francis was emphatic, 'I have never heard of this Toffler guy!' interview, USA, December 1996.

[23] Foday Sankoh claimed to have been involved in the 1977 student demonstrations. This writer was actively involved in the organisation of the demonstration in Freetown, and Sankoh was not part of it.

[24] Man dem denotes a sense of community, of belonging to a particular group, in this case the collective sense of oneness within youth culture.

group to oppose the APC. They used the platform of student politics to launch an attach on APC rule and call for radical change.

It was therefore not surprising that the APC government became involved in student politics by attempting to sponsor candidates. The move to draft noted radicals on campus did not succeed, but it revealed the polarised nature of student politics as the nation entered the turbulent 1980s. The economic downturn in the early 1980s, partly fuelled by the lavish hosting of the 1980 OAU conference, and the dwindling mining revenues exacerbated by rampant smuggling, affected the provision of scholarships for students as well as expenditure on health and other social services. For the 1974/75 fiscal year, the expenditure on education totalled 15·6 per cent of government expenditure; this was reduced to 8·5 per cent in the 1988/89 fiscal year. Similarly, expenditure on health and housing dropped from 6·6 per cent and 4·8 per cent in the same period to about 2·9 per cent and 0·3 per cent respectively.[25] Since the state was the largest employer of labour, the downward economic trend affected the general employment situation. Thus whereas the number of pupils in secondary schools registered a phenomenal increase from 16,414 in 1969 to 96,709 in 1990, there were only about 60,000 in paid employment by 1985.[26] By 1990, it had become impossible even for university graduates to secure jobs in the public sector, and this at a time when the private sector was downsizing.

In this grim economic context, the so-called informal sector, the natural abode of the lumpenproletariat, ballooned as a result of the continued influx of an army of unemployed secondary school leavers, drop outs and university graduates. This army of the unemployed continued to shape subaltern discourse in the *potes*, so that the muted talk of 1977 gave way to open talk about revolution. How this revolution was to be prosecuted was never systematically discussed, nor were other options explored. But the talk about revolution, vague and distorted as it was, remained alive in the discourse of rebellious youths. Thus the language shifted from man dem to comrade, and finally to brothers and sisters, symptomatic of a political cum ideological change particularly amongst the *pote* revolutionaries in the numerous study groups in Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Koidu. This change was evident

[25] National Accounts: 1970–71 to 1974–75 & 1983–84 to 1988–89 cited in Zack-Williams, 'Crisis and despair', p. 37.

[26] Abdul Karim Koroma, *Sierra Leone: The Agony of a Nation* (Freetown, 1996), p. 123; CIA: World Book, cited in Lansana Gberie, *War and State Collapse: the case of Sierra Leone* (MA Thesis, Wilfred Laurier University, 1997), p. 131.

in the political groups which had emerged at FBC campus in the early 1980s. Anti-imperialist slogans were appropriated as part of this youth iconography.

Meanwhile student–administration relations on FBC campus deteriorated. A student demonstration in January 1984 resulted in a three-month lock out. A commission of inquiry set up to look into the frequent complaints of students and conditions in the campus was favourable to students.[27] By 1985 the college administration was determined to discipline students and keep state interference to a minimum. The appointment of an ex-police chief, Jenkin Smith, as warden of students reflected the change of policy.[28] It was in this context that a radical student union leadership emerged. The Mass Awareness and Participation (MAP) student union president Alie Kabba was elected unopposed, while he was in Libya attending the annual Green Book celebration. The MAP was a loose coalition of radicals consisting of the Green Book study group, the gardeners' club, PANAFU, and the socialist club. Its fierce rhetoric, bordering on adventurism, alarmed the college administration. The new student leadership took the initiative, partly because of the popular youth culture of which they were a part. Their publicity campaign spawned numerous anti-government posters and graffiti on campus and in the city. A 'peoples' tribunal adjudicated between students, serving as check on anti-social behaviour. It was a popular leadership based on an imaginary peoples' power. These activities, along with rumours that the student leadership was being sponsored by the Libyans, did not endear them to the administration.

Why did student radicals, obviously backward in comparison to their counterparts in Nigeria and Ghana, embrace the word of bland pan-Africanism and Libya's Green Book ideology? Why did Ghadaffi's Green Book 'take root' in Sierra Leone and not in other West African countries? During this period, students in Nigeria and Ghana supported the anti-imperialist stance of Colonel Ghadaffi and applauded Libya's uncompromising position on Africa's liberation and Third World independence. But they did not embrace the colonel's message, partly because they were wedded to Marxian/dependency political economy analysis and partly because they were critical of Ghadaffi's 'Third Universal Theory'.[29] That radical students in

[27] The Kutubu Commission report was never published.

[28] This was the first time an ex-police chief was appointed to the position of warden of students. His strict regime made the college administration very unpopular with the students.

[29] The following works were influential: Claude Ake, *Revolutionary Pressures* (London, 1978);

Nigeria did not theorise the role of students as vanguard of the revolution was partly because of the existence of a recognised radical fringe in national politics and in the labour movement. Their position on the Nigerian 'revolution' was always articulated from the vantage point of an alliance of progressive forces. The disastrous attempt by Issac Boro, a student leader in the 1960s, had seemingly foreclosed this option for student radicals in Nigeria.

The poverty of the student movement in Sierra Leone with regard to ideology, and the lack of a post-colonial radical tradition, were probably the principal factors in explaining the attractiveness of Ghadaffi's Green Book.[30] Their failure to critique Ghadaffi's ideas indicates their level of political consciousness. They did not debate Ghadaffi's populist ideas and could not make the obvious connections between the Green Book and Libya's foreign policy. No attempt was made even to understand the Colonel's support for Idi Amin or his claim to Chadian territory.[31] This lack of critical ideas explains why pan-Africanism was uncritically appropriated, and why bland revolutionary pan-Africanism became the option. Pan-Africanism was therefore the ideational context within which the movement unfolded; Libya, the midwife of the 'revolution' to be.

GHANA AND LIBYA: THE EXTERNAL CONNECTION

The Libyans entered Sierra Leone in the mid-1970s and began to make in-roads into civil society by using religious as well as non-religious channels to establish a presence. They gave generous grants for the annual pilgrimage to Makkah; established links with the powerful and crafty diamond dealer J. S. Mohammed who arranged a state visit for Siaka Stevens; provided a printing press for *The Table* newspaper, the main opposition tabloid; and sponsored Green Book study groups at FBC. They generally maintained a low profile and gradually worked their way into State House. Their alleged bankrolling of the 1980 OAU conference in Freetown remains unsubstantiated.[32]

Dan Nabudere, *The Political Economy of Imperialism* (London, 1978); and some of the exchanges published in the University of Dar Es Salaam faculty of arts journal *Utafiti* in the late 1970s. For a good summary of the debates on the Nigerian left, see Narasingha P. Sil, 'Nigerian intellectuals and socialism: retrospect and prospect', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31, 3 (1993), 361–85.

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

[31] Oye Ogunbadejo, 'Qaddafi and Africa's international relations', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24, 1 (1986) 33–68; Geoff Simons, *Libya: The Struggle for Survival* (New York, 1996).

[32] Richards, *Fighting*, alleges that the Libyans paid part of the cost for hosting the 1980 OAU Conference in Sierra Leone.

The first student union president to visit the Libyan Arab Jama'riyya was Abdul Gbla in 1982. But Gbla's visit was not clandestine; he was invited to participate in the annual revolutionary celebration, and went with two other students, Abdul Gabisi and Nurudeen Wilson, and two faculty members, Cleo Hanciles and Moses Dumbuya. Gbla received executive treatment; he had a session with the colonel and was specifically asked to stay after the celebrations. He politely declined the offer because of fear of getting involved with the Libyans.[33]

The link which eventually led to the training of Sierra Leoneans in Benghazi in 1987 and 1988 was established by Alie Kabba, who was elected student union president in 1985. It is quite possible, based on interviews with student radicals who knew him, that he had visited Libya before 1985; his occasional disappearing acts lend credence to such beliefs. Expelled from FBC following a bizarre charge that they intended to camp Libyan mercenaries in their student hostels, Kabba and three other students were at first imprisoned, and on their release travelled to Conakry, where a Libyan people's bureau official instructed them to proceed to Ghana where they subsequently gained admission to Legon University.[34] They were allegedly provided with generous grants.[35] The choice of Ghana is significant. During this period the Libyans were busy trying to set up their African revolutionary army to pursue the colonel's dream of controlling the Aouzou Strip in Chad. Ghana had a regime sympathetic to Libya, and Jerry Rawlings' 'revolutionary' pretensions also endeared him to the Libyans. Libyan foreign policy was crafted in the 1980s in furtherance of a specific goal: 'revolution'. Everything about Libyan foreign policy in West Africa in the 1980s therefore revolved around this idea. It was this aspect of Libyan foreign policy which interested them in individuals like Alie Kabba, and before him, Charles Taylor and the confused Kukoi Samba Sanyang (known as Dr Manning), who proclaimed a dictatorship of the proletariat in The Gambia in 1981.[36]

The Libyan connection brought in some money which made it possible for the expelled students in Ghana to sponsor four others who

[33] Interview with Abdul Gbla, former student president, FBC, 1981–2; USA, Oct.–Nov. 1996.

[34] Interview with some of the expelled students. Freetown and the US, Oct.–Dec. 1996. Ali has denied this, saying it was 'purely out of luck and coincidence, not the pre-arranged help from any foreign government.' Leonenet, 19 Dec. 1996.

[35] The four expelled students enrolled at Legon University reportedly received $6,000 each from the United Nations.

[36] For an account of the centrality of Ghana and Burkina Faso as a haven for 'revolutionaries' in the 1980s see S. Byron Tarr, 'The ECOMOG initiative in Liberia: a Liberian perspective', *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 21, 1–2 (1993), 74–83; Stephen Ellis. 'Liberia 1989–1994: a study of ethnic and spiritual violence', *African Affairs*, 94, 375 (1995), 165–97.

joined them the following year, bringing the number to eight. Kabba was known to frequent the People's Bureau in Accra, made numerous trips to Libya, and occasionally to Guinea. It was during this period that he met Charles Taylor of the NPFL who had been imprisoned in the United States and Ghana, Kukoi Samba Sanyang and other so-called revolutionaries who criss-crossed the Ghana–Burkina-Faso–Libya 'revolutionary' triangle'.[37] Kabba's relationship with these types validated his 'revolutionary' credentials. This was important because what is known about Libyan connections with revolutionary organisations in Africa suggests that they always operate through a contact person, through whom they channel funds and issue directives about 'revolutionary assignments'. This was the type of relationship they had with the several Chadian factions they supported in the 1970s and 1980s; with Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM); and Kwame Toure's All African Peoples Revolutionary Party (AAPRP). The onus of communicating with the organisation therefore rests with the individual, in this case Kabba. What the Libyans did not understand, or rather did not want to understand, was that the ex-student leader had no constituency outside the FBC campus. Perhaps because the Libyans had never experienced or made a social revolution, they were incapable of distinguishing between inflammatory student rhetoric and a revolutionary movement in the making. When he was given a 'revolutionary assignment' to attack US targets in Freetown, Kabba could not get the job done: he tried to subcontract the job to PANAFU by promising monetary support but was told to go away. And when it was time to deliver recruits for military training in 1987, Kabba and his group in Ghana had no alternative but to turn to Freetown.[38]

When the recruitment exercise commenced there was no programme of action, nor was there any guideline on the procedure and mechanism for recruitment. The students in Ghana espoused no concrete political philosophy which would have provided a theoretical guide for their commitment to armed struggle, nor did they operate through any formal political structure or organisation. They remained, throughout their stay in Ghana, an informal political group linked together by their common experience of expulsion and commitment to radical change. There was therefore no common ideological platform nor an agreed

[37]See Tarr, 'The ECOMOG initiative'; and Ellis, 'Liberia 1989–1994'.

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

political programme besides acquiring military training. The period from April 1985 (when students were expelled from FBC) to July–August 1987 (when Sierra Leoneans started leaving for military training) saw a shift in the composition of the radical groups in the city of Freetown and elsewhere. Student unionism had been proscribed at FBC in 1985 so that the centre of operation for the radicals became the cities of Freetown, Bo, Kenema and to a lesser extent Koidu. This shift catapulted radicals operating in 'revolutionary' cells into the forefront of the movement for radical change. It was therefore to these groups, especially PANAFU, that the students in Ghana turned for recruits when they were ready to embark on the bush path to destruction.

The expelled students and others who saw themselves as 'revolutionaries' were not the first to initiate a call to arms, nor were they the first to emphasise the need for military training. The APC had established training camps in Guinea under the command of then Col. John Bangura in 1967. After the 1977 student demonstrations the insurgency alternative was freely discussed in radical circles. Other victims of APC repression, notably in Pujehun District in the early 1980s, had expressed interest in arming themselves as a form of protection against state sponsored terrorism.[39] What the student group and their allies appropriated was therefore the collective property of the growing army of potential insurgents. Armed struggle had become part of the folklore of the revolution-to-be. The major difference is that it would not be an ex-military officer who would coordinate the new call to arms. By a curious irony it turned out to be an ex-corporal in the signal unit, Foday Sankoh, who had been convicted for his involvement in an attempted coup, who would champion this ancient call to arms and pursue it to its logical conclusion: the overthrow of *DE SYSTEM*.

When the call for recruits came from Accra in June 1987, a special session of the PANAFU congress in Freetown reluctantly tabled the issue. The majority decided against an adventuristic enterprise in the name of revolution. This led to a split in the union between those who supported the move to Libya and those who were against. Those in favour were in the minority, and were eventually expelled from the union. Among these were Abu Kanu, a founding member of Future Shock club and a graduate of Njala University College, and Rashid Mansaray, an activist from Freetown east end, who had left the country in 1986 to join the MPLA in the fight against UNITA in

[39] No study has been done on this massacre of defenceless peasants popularly referred to as Ndorgborwosu. For the connection between this rebellion and the RUF see Gberie, *War and State Collapse*.

Angola, only to be told to return home and pursue the struggle in his own country. Abu Kanu, Rashid Mansaray and others left Freetown in July 1987, via Conakry and Accra, for Benghazi. Another group which included Foday Sankoh left in August 1987. Sankoh's group included recruits from Freetown and the hinterland. A third group consisting mostly of high school students arrived in January 1988. It was not the case that politically conscious individuals were specifically targeted. Once PANAFU had rejected the idea of participating as an organisation, the project became an individual enterprise for any man (no attempt was made to recruit women) who felt the urge to acquire insurgency training in the service of the 'revolution'. This inevitably opened the way for the recruitment of lumpens. It is therefore no coincidence that only three of those who went to Libya had any form of regular employment.[40] Richards' belief in an excluded intellectual group in the RUF is unfounded.[41]

There was no concrete programme about what was to be done once the military training was over, nor was there any debate about the programme of action to be adopted. The only available document – *The Basic Document of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL): The Second Liberation of Africa*, copiously quoted in the RUF propaganda booklet *Footpaths to Democracy: Towards a New Sierra Leone*, vol. I – was essentially a critique of the neo-colonial regime. It was originally a PANAFU call for a popular democratic front (PDF), involving a return to multiparty democracy, even distribution of resources, reform of education and an end to mercantilist rule of the Lebanese/comprador bourgeoisie over the economy, which was subsequently redrafted and edited by Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray to reflect the armed phase of the 'revolution'. Parts of it were butchered to appear as Foday Sankoh's words. But the document had nothing to do with Sankoh or the RUF; it predated the formation of the RUF, and was appropriated by the RUF-to-be before they entered Kailahun in 1991.[42] The document was produced in Ghana before the departure for military training in Libya.

[40] There was one high school teacher, an engineer and Sankoh, an itinerant photographer.

[41] See Yusuf Bangura, 'Understanding the political and cultural dynamics of the Sierra Leone war: a critique of Paul Richards's *Fighting for the rain forest*', in Ibrahim Abdullah (ed.), *Youth, Culture and Violence: the Sierra Leone civil war* (Dakar, 1998).

[42] The document became part of the propaganda material of the RUF-to-be when Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray teamed up with Sankoh after their return to Sierra Leone in 1988. For excerpts from this document see *Footpaths to Democracy: towards a new Sierra Leone*, I (1995). Alie Kabba has claimed authorship of this document, Leonenet: A discussion of Sierra Leonean issues, 19 Dec. 1996.

Perhaps the tragedy of the 'revolution' has to do with the fact that those who recruited Foday Sankoh underestimated his capacity to think and act politically. Sankoh was recruited by a PANAFU member, Ebiyemi Reader, who was active in Freetown in the late 1970s. Ebiyemi left for the hinterland after a key member of his group, Said Kamara, departed for Cuba around 1980, and organised a 'revolutionary' cell in the diamond area where he discovered Foday Sankoh.[43] Sankoh became associated with his group, attended meetings and started, for the first time, to acquaint himself with pan-Africanism. But Sankoh was not interested in reading, he was an action-oriented man who was impatient with the slow process of acquiring knowledge and understanding of the situation which a revolutionary project entails. Put in another way, Sankoh was a militarist.[44] Before this period his world view did not go beyond the Sierra Leonean border; his ideas remained those of an angry man who had an axe to grind because of his imprisonment. His critique of what was popularly referred to as *DE SYSTEM* was very much party and personality centred. Yet, he was willing to listen and eager to learn. His age and involvement with youths, some of whom could have been his children, earned him some respect and sympathy – hence the name Pa Foday or Papei. There is evidence that Sankoh did not abandon the possibility of seizing power through another military coup.[45] His idea of revolution, if he had any before this period, was to seize power by any conceivable means. So when the call to Tripoli came from Accra, Sankoh willingly joined the crowd. What the others did not realise was that they were paving the way for Sankoh who had waited for just this kind of opportunity.[46]

Kabba's control of the purse, his clandestine and not so clandestine

[43] Sankoh claimed to have started a study group in Bo. He also claimed in another interview that 'By 1983 we had cells all over the country'.... 'It wasn't so hard, really. All over Sierra Leone people were crying.' See Howard French. 'African rebel with room service'. *New York Times*, 23 June 1996. This is not supported by the evidence. Alie Kabba's account that 'Sankoh came out of a cell/movement that initially operated out of Kenema when Victor Reader (Ebiyemi) returned from Guinea Bissau' is correct. Leonenet discussion, 19 Dec. 1996.

[44] Sankoh alleged that he wanted to use PANAFU in 1986 but 'they were only concerned about South Africa and the rest of the world, forgetting that we have our own local problems'. This is false, because it was through PANAFU that Sankoh was able to make the trip to Libya. See Concord interview; interview with PANAFU members; Ali Kabba. Leonenet discussion, 23 Dec. 1996.

[45] This point should be emphasised in the light of the bloody takeover of 25 May 1997. In the interview granted to Howard French, Sankoh is reported to have said about his involvement in a coup attempt in 1971 that 'They wanted to make coups, while I always wanted a real revolution... but I was still a corporal and nobody listened to my suggestions because of my rank'. See 'African Rebel with room service' *New York Times*, 23 June 1996.

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

connections with people's bureau officials in Accra, and his unbridled ambition to be the spokesperson of the 'revolution', had begun to sow discord within the group in Ghana as early as 1986.[47] It was however impossible to put up any organised opposition because the recruits were scattered in various camps around Benghazi, and only Kabba knew where all the groups were. When Kabba subsequently installed a 'revolutionary' high command, supposedly to direct the Sierra Leonean contingent, it was stoutly opposed by the majority of the recruits. The charge that he wanted to establish himself as the spokesperson of the movement was echoed; others simply repeated what they had been told about his undemocratic practices; while others made it clear they were not interested in pursuing the project any longer. Attempts to get Kabba to account for money he supposedly got for the whole recruitment project proved impossible. In the end the motley collection of 'revolutionaries' who went to Benghazi, about thirty-five, some say fifty, left Libya frustrated and divided.[48] Some decided to forget about the experience; others decided to pursue the goal of 'revolution'. For the expelled students in Ghana, this was the end of the project. But 'It is here,' Kabba pleaded, 'that we should locate the vacuum that made it possible for the wrong individuals to lead the journey to what turned out to be anything similar to the democratic programme we had earlier envisioned.'[49] It was the 'wrong individuals', lumpens in my view, who therefore took the next step in the bush path to destruction.

THE MAKING OF A LUMPEN MOVEMENT

All those who went to Libya, and who later became involved in the RUF, including Sankoh, returned to Sierra Leone before the launching of the armed struggle. Attempts were made to recruit and train cadres in the Yele area; this was however abandoned because it was considered risky. Up to this point Sankoh had not emerged as the leader of the movement; there was no organisation, it was a loose collection of individuals who had returned from military training in

[47] Interviews with some of the expelled students and those who went to Libya for insurgency training.

[48] Sankoh alleged that 150 youths were trained outside Sierra Leone without specifying where. This figure is an exaggeration. Perhaps he is referring to those who trained in Liberia. According to him 'we were eleven at first and I later sent about 150 men'. See *Concorde Times* interview. The number of Sierra Leoneans who went to Libya between 1987 and 1988 were not more than thirty-five, and Sankoh was not in charge of the Libyan project. He was recruited like the others.

[49] Ali Kabba, Leonenet, 18 Dec. 1996.

Benghazi. 'At the beginning, there was no leadership. All of us were all (*sic*) organisers,'[50] Sankoh revealed in a recent interview. Among those who returned to Sierra Leone determined to pursue the 'revolution' were Foday Sankoh, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray. They formed a close-knit group in the city, met periodically to discuss strategy, and embarked on another recruitment drive. This time, they decided to leave Freetown and settle in the hinterland, a move which opened the link between the RUF-to-be and the NPFL in Liberia. From the time they left Benghazi in 1988 to the period when they entered Sierra Leone as armed combatants, this trio travelled extensively in Sierra Leone and Liberia, exploring avenues through which to further their 'revolutionary' objectives. It was during one of these trips that they allegedly came into contact with NPFL officials.

According to one source, Sankoh met Charles Taylor in Libya in 1987, who then invited him to join the NPFL. This account appears credible because the NPFL was originally constituted as a pan-African movement with membership open to all Africans. The Gambian Kukoi Samba was a founding member and vice-president of the NPFL. But it remains uncertain that the meeting took place. Taylor had parted company with the Libyans around June 1987, before Sankoh went to Libya, though he did meet other Sierra Leoneans in Libya and Ghana in 1986, and again in early 1987. However, if Sankoh had met Taylor in Libya, he would definitely have turned up at Po, Burkina Faso, where the majority of the NPFL fighters were trained.[51] There is no evidence that Sierra Leoneans were trained in Burkina Faso, and Sankoh, the master strategist, would hardly have missed such an opportunity. The other account, that they came into contact with an NPFL official in Freetown, who introduced them to Taylor, recently released from detention with a Burkinabe diplomatic passport, is in keeping with what subsequently happened.[52]

By mid-1989 a deal had been struck: Sankoh and his group would help Taylor 'liberate' Liberia, after which he would provide them with

[50] Sankoh was referring to 1986 when in fact this is true of the period after their return from Libya in 1988. See *Concord Times* interview.

[51] Sankoh stayed on in Libya after the three months training, claiming he was sick. According to Alie Kabba 'there was a conscious attempt to establish an independent contact with folks in Tripoli that would ensure that the movement/cell that Sankoh belonged to could have their own "underground railway"'. Leonenet discussion, 23 Dec. 1996; interview with expelled students and those who were in Libya.

[52] It was this NPFL official who introduced Sankoh to Charles Taylor, who had just been released from detention in Freetown in 1988. Sankoh even revealed that they 'should have actually started in 1988 or 89' but 'because there was no outlet and inlet (entrance and exit) that was why our struggle was delayed'. See *Concord Times* interview.

a base to launch their armed struggle. After this informal alliance *The Basic Document* was amended to reflect the change. The historical relevance of the name – Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone – remains intriguing. Wallace-Johnson's West African Youth League was always the West African Youth League/Sierra Leone. Whether this was inspired by the pan-African ideal or whether it was a leaf from the Wallacian script is not clear. Yet it remains an aspect of the pan-africanist image with which the organisation wants to be identified. There is no evidence that any Sierra Leonean took part in the initial NPFL attack on Nimba county in December 1989, though by November 1990, some members of this group, notably Kanu and Mansaray, had seen action as NPFL combatants. Sankoh, Kanu and Mansaray were in Freetown up to a week before the initial RUF attack in March 1991 to convince those who had gone to Libya to join the RUF. Their activities alarmed some PANAFU members who threatened to report their presence to the police.[53]

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

The insurgency force from Liberia was composed of three distinct groups: those who had acquired military training in Libya (predominantly urban lumpens) and had seen action with the NPFL as combatants; a second group of Sierra Leoneans, resident in Liberia, mostly lumpens; and a third group of hard-core NPFL fighters from Liberia on loan to the RUF. Contrary to Richards' account, the Sierra Leoneans recruited in Liberia were not 'political exiles and economic refugees',[54] but were lumpen Sierra Leoneans resident in Liberia.[55] The late Capt. Papa Kamara, one of the RUF's ablest commanders, and the current RUF strong man Col. Sam Bockarie were both recruited in Liberia. Kamara was a high-school drop out who later

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

[54] Richards, *Fighting*, p. 4.

[55] *Footpaths to Democracy*, p. 7. Interview with Sierra Leoneans who returned after the NPFL attack on Monrovia, Freetown, October, 1996.

became an APC thug and was involved in criminal activities before drifting to Liberia. Bockarie (Maskita) left high school in form three, and had a stint as an illicit diamond miner in Kono before moving to Liberia, where he was recruited by Sankoh.[56] This social composition of the invading force is significant in understanding the character of the RUF and the bush path to destruction.

THE CHARACTER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY UNITED FRONT

How revolutionary is a revolutionary movement which slaughters and terrorises the very people it claims to be liberating? What yardstick do we use to judge a movement which claims to be revolutionary without revolutionaries? To understand the character of the RUF, we need to look at the social composition of the ruffians, their policies, actions, statements and programmes, if any. We need to go beyond their rhetoric and examine the contradictions in their pronouncements and actions; the silences, and the (mis)representations, about themselves and their programme. The wanton destruction of life, the hacking of limbs and the slitting of pregnant women was so disturbing that Foday Sankoh was compelled to make a special plea: 'Yes, we have committed atrocities. One day we shall stand before the people and ask for forgiveness.'[57] In whose name were those atrocities committed?

The Revolutionary United Front is a peculiar orgnisation. It does not share any of the essential characteristics of ideology, organisation and discipline which mark revolutionary movements in Africa or elsewhere, except for the use of force to attain power. The RUF is strikingly similar to RENAMO which was formed as a counter-revolutionary force to sabotage the Mozambican revolution, and whose bandido activities did not cease when the leaders were compelled to reinvent themselves as liberation fighters and democrats.[58] Unlike RENAMO, the RUF started as a 'revolutionary' movement. What connects the two is the wanton violence on women and children, the systematic destruction of the economy, and the general terror in the countryside.

Though Richards does come to grips with the role of youth in the

[56] Broadcast interview of Col. Sam Bockarie (aka Maskita) SLBS, Freetown, June 6 1997.

[57] Amnesty International, Sierra Leone: Towards a Future Founded on Human Rights, 25 Sept. 1996, p. 25.

[58] For RENAMO see T. Young, 'The MNR/RENAMO: external and internal dynamics', *African Affairs*, 89, 357 (1990) 491–509.

drama surrounding the war and its continuation,[59] his heavy reliance on resources of the forest (he should instead have concentrated on the trees) to explain the war totally neglects the centrality and dynamics of rebellious youth culture in shaping the process leading to the rebellion and war. His assessment of the movement leaves too many substantive issues unanswered. His comparison with the Shining Path also neglects the historical contexts within which the two movements evolved. The Shining Path was formed by radical intellectuals inspired by Mao. There were no radical or excluded intellectuals in the RUF, nor did the movement establish any meaningful relationship with the peasantry based on the acceptance of a common programme produced within the context of a revolutionary dialogue. The RUF had a chronic lack of cadres imbued with any revolutionary ideology. Its lumpen base made it impossible for the movement to attract support from any other social group. It is not surprising that the only movement with revolutionary pretensions comparable to the RUF was the NPFL: they were products of the same cultural milieu; their membership was recruited from the same social group; and they employed the same tactics – indiscriminate use of drugs, forced induction and violence – to further their goal of capturing power. The torture and eventual murder of Sergeant Doe by the former NPFL commander Yormie Johnson, the mutilation, murder and rape of innocent women and children by the RUF, are acts that are incompatible with a revolutionary project. These 'revolutionary' acts, I would argue, were committed again and again precisely because of the social composition of these movements and the lack of a concrete programme of societal transformation. A lumpen social movement bred a lumpen revolution.

The RUF's *Footpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone* contains words and phrases lifted from Mao Zedong and Amilcar Cabral. Hurriedly drafted in London and tossed back to the *Zogoda* (the RUF headquarters in the Sierra Leone rain forest) for approval, it was subsequently reformatted complete with the RUF anthem and generous quotes from the head of ideology, Foday Sankoh.[60] 'We moved deeper into the comforting bosom of our mother earth – the forest'…'The forest welcomed us and gave us succour and sus-

[59] What is presented here is totally absent in Richards' account. See Richards, *Fighting*; Paul Richards, 'Rebellion in Sierra Leone and Liberia: a crisis of youth', in Oliver Furley (ed.) *Conflict In Africa* (London, 1995). For a critique of Richards, see Bangura in Abdullah, *Youth Culture*; Ibrahim Abdullah, 'Violence, youth culture and war: a critical reading of Paul Richards', Leonenet: A discussion of Sierra Leonean issues, 19 May 1996.

[60] This is a propaganda document hurriedly put together. The second volume is yet to be published.

tenance'… 'Why we continue to fight' – these phrases are taken from Mao and Cabral. If the RUF cadres or leadership had actually read Mao and Cabral, however, they would have related to the peasantry in a different manner. If they had read Cabral, they would not have recruited lumpens. Cabral had cautioned, based on the PAIGC experience in Guine, against the recruitment of lumpens in revolutionary organisations. It is tempting to attribute this to Frantz Fanon who is quoted on the first page of *Footpaths to Democracy*. But this would be reading too much.[61]

There is, I would argue, no revolutionary theory which guided the practice of the movement. If there is any theory, and certainly not a revolutionary one, it evolved on an *ad hoc* basis as a result of their experiences in the forest. The RUF document acknowledges this:

> Initially we fought a semi-conventional war relying heavily on vehicles for mobility. This method proved fatal against the combined fire power of Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana… Frankly, we were beaten and on the run… We dispersed into smaller units… We now relied on light weapons and on our feet, brains and knowledge of the countryside.[62]

If the RUF leadership was immersed in any revolutionary theory and practice, it would have come to grips with the basics in guerrilla warfare, and thus avoided a suidical 'semi-conventional war'. A semi-conventional war in a context where people were not politically organised could only lead to collective self-destruction. The RUF might have acquired its fighting skills on the battlefield, but it did not learn how to relate to the people in the area under its control. Instead of implementing a revolutionary programme, it embarked on a campaign of terror in the countryside. This aspect of the RUF explains why the peasantry, the natural ally of most revolutionary movements in the so-called Third World, deserted the movement. It is also not surprising that in the predominantly rural Mende southeast, the major theatre of war, the RUF cadres were collectively referred to as the Njiahungbia Ngonga, meaning riff raffs, lumpens and unruly youths.[63] The bulk of the current RUF battle front commanders were lumpens from the rural south-east. These include Capt. Mark Lamin, Capt. Vandi, Capt. Massaquoi, Lt. Manawai, Major Morris Kallon and Capt. Augustine Koroma.

[61] The quotation 'Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfils it or betrays it' is taken from Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

[62] *Footpaths to Democracy*, pp. 10–11.

[63] See Patrick Muana, 'The Kamajor militia: violence, internal displacement and the politics of counter-insurgency', forthcoming in Abdullah, *Youth Culture*.

Richards' emphasis on the communitarian principles which the RUF allegedly established in the enclaves under its control have nothing to do with Green Book ideology. Such populist pronouncements as 'Every member of the community has rights to basic needs (food, housing, health, and transport)'[64] are consistent with the demands of movements like the RUF seeking to sell themselves as popular movements, but do not in themselves constitute revolutionary practice. They should be seen as populist propaganda rather than influences from the Green Book. If the RUF had any ideology, it was definitely not shaped by the Green Book. Its populist rhetoric backed by some *ad hoc* measures, such as the change from semi-conventional to guerrilla warfare, were designed as survival tactics to win support from the very public it terrorised. Richards' assumption that the Green Book was influential in shaping the views of student radicals led him to look for Green Book signs that were markedly absent in the RUF. Ironically none of the student radicals whom Richards claimed were influenced by the Green Book joined the RUF.[65]

When the RUF first entered Sierra Leone in 1991, the movement was divided into two sections: vanguards and special forces. The former were further sub-divided into two: those who trained in Libya in 1987/88 and lumpen Sierra Leoneans recruited in Liberia. The first group included the three leaders: Sankoh himself, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray. Vanguard members sat on the war council, which was constituted before they entered the country in 1991, and were in charge of administrative day-to-day affairs, including intelligence in the areas under their control. The special forces were NPFL fighters on loan to the RUF. They were directly under the control of Rashid Mansaray who was very popular and had distinguished himself as a combatant with the NPFL before 1991. The erstwhile commander-in-chief, Mohammed Tarawalie (Zino), was also with this group. Foday Sankoh was and still is the head of ideology. After the NPFL special forces were recalled in 1993, the movement was reconstituted along military lines with the establishment of battle-group and battlefront commanders. The battle-group commanders were directly in charge of operations; they coordinated and commanded all battle front commanders in their sectors and were also members of the war council. The battlefront commanders were mostly lieutenants and captains directly

[64] Richards, *Fighting*, p. 54.

[65] This is not to say that the Green Book has nothing to offer. For the political and philosophical relevance of the Green Book, see Cecil Blake and Saleh K. Abu-Osba (eds.), *Libya: terrorist or terrorized* (Ontario, 1982).

responsible to the battle-group commanders. Below them were the standbys, mainly captives and conscripts, followed by the under-age combatants. The total strength of the combat forces totalled about 4,000.[66]

If the initial wanton violence against innocent civilians, which, the RUF concedes, 'became a nightmarish experience for our civil population' (mainly women and children), was attributed to the special forces on loan from the NPFL, why did the violence continue after they left?[67] An explanation has to be sought in the composition of the movement, its lack of discipline, its indiscriminate use of drugs of all sorts, and the absence of a concrete programme besides vague populist formulation about foreigners and rural development.

The first major crack within the RUF was connected with the indiscriminate violence and terror against civilians in areas under their control. In August 1992 Abu Kanu was executed by firing squad for failure to follow instructions (FFI) and conniving with the enemy. The following November, Rashid Mansaray was executed for technical sabotage – failure to defend a strategic position against the enemy.[68] He was tried in front of the last two-storey building on the Koindu–Kailahun road and shot by firing squad. These trumped-up charges against the two other members of the initial troika were masterminded by Sankoh to get them out of the way. They were the only top-ranking members who were with Foday Sankoh before the formation of the RUF; they were popular with the cadres and could have contested the position of leadership had there been a general congress or popular assembly. They were also among the two leading strategists in the movement.

There is evidence that neither Kanu nor Mansaray were happy with the random violence that RUF forces were committing in the name of the 'revolution'. An ex-PANAFU member in the army reported that the area under Kanu's control was generally peaceful and well organised; he reached out to explain what the RUF was about to the peasants, and was not engaged in unnecessary violence against

[66] The information presented here is culled from Paul Richards et al., *Reintegration of War-Affected Youth and Ex-Combatants: a study of the social and economic opportunity structure in Sierra Leone* (London 1996). This writer participated in this study, which was commissioned by the ministry of national reconstruction, resettlement and rehabilitation established in 1996 by the Tejan Kabba administration.

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

[68] Richards et al., *Reintegration*.

civilians.[69] Mansaray's opposition to the indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians was one of the reasons why he was executed. This was confirmed by his second-in-command, who served as provost to I. H. Deen-Jalloh, the former head of RUF intelligence.[70] Stories about the slitting of pregnant women and the raping of young girls, some of whom were forcibly taken as 'wives', were common.[71] Once the movement had established some presence with the help of Charles Taylor, and Sankoh had acquired some modicum of respectability with his new found pan-Africanist credentials, he no longer needed these vanguards. Those who subsequently became key players in the movement did not know Papei, as Sankoh is called, before 1991, or the prehistory of the RUF. Philip Palmer, Faiaya Musa, I. H. Deen-Jalloh, Dr Barrie, Gibril Massaquoi, Sam Bockarie, Mark Lamin and the former public relations officer Abubakarr Sankoh, joined the movement after they returned from Libya or after they attacked and occupied Bomaru in 1991.

'WE ARE NOW AT PEACE WITH THE ARMY':[72] FROM YAMOUSSOUKRO TO BLOODY SUNDAY

The bloody takeover of 25 May 1997 cannot be understood outside developments intrinsic to the RUF. These developments shaped the collective response of the membership, particularly the battle-group commanders directly responsible to the head of ideology Foday Sankoh. The experiences of the NPFL in the series of botched peace agreements in Liberia and the initial intransigence and subsequent refusal of the NPRC to end the war peacefully, strengthened the leadership's resolve to continue fighting. Thus the movement was unanimously opposed to the February 1966 elections, which it vowed to disrupt through terror tactics, and was determined to capture state power through violence. But the intervention of the Ivorians and International Alert, a conflict resolution group based in London, made the RUF rethink its hardline position. The installation of president-elect Ahmed Tejan Kabba, and the subsequent signing of the Yamoussoukro communiqué in March, seemed to have won over some sections of the leadership to the peace proposal. Ironically, these developments led to a split in the movement between those in favour of

[69] Interview with PANAFU members, October 1996.
[70] Personal communication. I am grateful to Patrick Muana for this information.
[71] Interview with under-age girls captured, abused and molested by the RUF; October, 1996.
[72] This quote is from a captured RUF commando. See Richards et al., *Reintegration*.

the peace proposals and those who wanted the war to continue, if only because their survival depended on it. The latter group were predominantly the battle-group commanders and lumpen (uneducated) elements, uncertain about what an end to the war without military victory or state power would mean for their future. As Olu Gordon has recently pointed out, the RUF could well be 'a military organisation with a political agenda not a political movement with an armed wing'.[73]

From May 1996 when an indefinite cease-fire was declared to 30 November when the peace accord was signed, the RUF commanders remained ambivalent about the cease-fire and the peace proposal. This ambivalence was reflected in the continuous violation of the cease-fire agreement by both parties. But the lull in hostilities changed the situation, with the government forces, which now included the Kamajor militia backed by Executive Outcomes (a South African based military organisation), gaining the upper hand.[74] This move, spearheaded by deputy minister of defence Hinga Norman, brought the RUF under tremendous pressure from the joint Kamajor and Executive Outcome operations. And Sankoh, who had been in Abidjan since March for the Yamoussoukro talks with the educated cadres, could not directly contact his men. As in 1993 when the RUF was on the run, and the NPRC wrongly thought the war was over, the all-out offensive against the RUF by the Kabba administration was incorrectly interpreted as the end of the RUF. It was widely reported that the movement was dying slowly, that the RUF cadres were war weary and starving as a result of the continued assault on their position, and that the logical thing to do was to completely wipe them out.[75] This reading of the situation culminated in a major Kamajor offensive in October 1996, which led to the capture and destruction of RUF headquarters, the Zogoda, and the killing of its commander-in-chief, Mohammed Tarawallie (Zino). The RUF retreat signalled the dawn of a new phase in the conflict, so that the following month President Kabba was confident enough to talk tough and issue an ultimatum to the beleaguered RUF: sign the peace proposal or the deal is off. On 30 November 1996 the Abidjan peace accord was signed.

But, as subsequent events were to reveal, the signing of the agreement was one thing, its implementation quite another. Sankoh's reluctance to move ahead with the peace plan and the continued

[73] Olu Gordon, 'Hostages to the gun' in *For Di People* (Freetown), 11 June 1997.
[74] Muana, 'The Kamajor militia'.
[75] Interview with top government officials, Oct. 1996.

assault on RUF positions were the first obstacles to the realisation of the much needed peace.[76] And even when members of the Peace Commission were appointed, the whole business got bogged down over the presence of UN forces to supervise the demobilisation exercise. Sankoh's insistence in limiting the number to 70, instead of the 720 proposed by the Kabba administration, was the major stumbling block which wrecked the implementation of the peace accord. To break this deadlock, the educated members of the movement decided it was time to quit: they denounced the leader and founder of the RUF and expelled him from the organisation. Capt Philip Palmer issued a press release accusing Sankoh of persistently refusing to hold talks with the UN and members of the Peace Commission as stipulated in the peace accord. His charges included refusing to nominate members to join the monitoring and demobilisation committees; provoking ethnic war by referring to the Kamajor activities as Mende programmes directed against the Temnes; neglecting the RUF combatants by his reluctance to allow humanitarian agencies to supply them with much needed food and medicine; and using his communication sets in Abidjan and Danane to urge commanders to continue the war instead of promoting peace.[77] This 'pro-life decision',[78] welcomed by the Kabba administration, was denounced by the battle-group commanders, who challenged Palmer's claim that the expulsion of Sankoh was the unanimous decision of the RUF High Command. Two weeks before the expulsion, Sankoh was arrested at Lagos airport, where he had gone to consult with the Nigerian head of state.[79]

Those who welcomed the putsch failed to recognise that those who expelled Sankoh had no support from the battle-group and battle front commanders who were doggedly loyal to their leader.[80] 'There is no faction. Only a few criminals trying to cause trouble.... To cause problems with the peace accord for their own selfish aims, because they want money, they want ministerial post', Sankoh charged from his imprisonment in Lagos.[81] Asked about a fax sent from Accra on 20 April, by a battle-group commander, Major Morris Kallon, threatening an RUF an attack on Freetown if he was not released in seven

[76] Yusuf Bangura, 'Reflections on the Abidjan Peace Accord' in Abdullah, *Youth Culture*.
[77] Press Release, Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL) 15 March 1997.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Foday Sankoh was reportedly charged with possession of ammunition but never arraigned before any court of law.
[80] Sankoh claimed that the move to unseat him was planned by the Kabba administration. See Agence France Press, 'Ousted Sierra Leone rebel leader says he is still in charge,' Abidjan, 30 April, 1997.
[81] Ibid.

days, Sankoh replied that 'Kallon hardly speaks English, was deep in the Sierra Leone bush'.[82]

The split in the leadership deprived the movement of cadres to continue the peace process. Apart from Philip Palmer, an engineer who had joined the movement in Liberia, all the other educated members – Ibrahim Deen-Jalloh, Agnes Deen-Jalloh, Faiya Musa, Dr Barrie – joined the RUF after they entered Sierra Leone. Again, with the exception of Palmer, all of them were in the RUF intelligence unit, and therefore had no military rank. Little wonder then, that they were the only non-combatants in the RUF leadership. An attempt to get the two sides together ended in a fiasco: the educated members were kidnapped together with the Sierra Leone ambassador to Guinea, Col.(ret.) Diaby, and are currently presumed dead.[83] This was the situation on the eve of the bloody takeover of 25 May 1997.

It is difficult to establish a direct connection between the reverses suffered by the RUF – the incarceration of Sankoh in Nigeria and the leadership squabble – and the takeover of Freetown by the RUF in alliance with a section of the army. However, such an alliance was not unlikely, given the history of collaboration between the two groups, undoubtedly an outgrowth of what is popularly referred to as the sobel phenomenon.[84] The commonplace fraternisation between the RUF and the military after the cease-fire in May 1996 had prompted RUF battle-group commanders to redefine their enemy as the Kamajor and Executive Outcomes. There were frequent classes between the RUF and the Kamajor militia right up to the eve of the takeover.'We are now at peace with the army', a captured RUF commander revealed in September 1996. Both the RUF and the regular army therefore had a common interest: they resented the Kamajor militia albeit for different reasons: the RUF because the Kamajor were attacking their positions with success, and the army because they saw the Kamajor as usurping their role as the national fighting force. Since it was the Kamajor militia that was doing most of the fighting in the all-out offensive against the RUF which started in September 1996, it is not impossible that the fraternisation might have opened other possibilities of joint action. The fact that the seventeen soldiers who took part in the action

[82] Ibid.

[83] It is not clear what became of this group. The ambassador was released after the takeover on 25 May. See President Tejan Kabba's address to UN Security Council (October 1997) and ECOWAS Abuja, (August 1997) where he claimed that the men are still unaccounted for.

[84] The word sobel is a neologism; a fusion of (so)ldier and re(bel). See Arthur Abraham, 'War and transition to peace in Sierra Leone: a study of state conspiracy in perpetuating armed conflict' in Abdullah (ed.) *Youth Culture*.

on Bloody Sunday were all members of the elite Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), recruited from the same social group as the RUF, and known for their antipathy towards multiparty politics, strengthens the popular view that the takeover was a joint operation.[85]

Much more important was the social basis of the coup, that is, the group directly responsible for its organisation, planning and execution. The voice of Corporal Gborie, the soldier who announced the change in Krio, rattled those who heard him speak; it was clear that the takeover was more than a *coup d'état*.[86] Those who organised and executed the operation in collaboration with RUF fighters who were already in the city belonged to the same social group as the bulk of the RUF fighters. They were predominantly the 'rural unemployed, a fair number of hooligans, drug addicts and thieves'[87] – in a word, the quintessential lumpenproletariat. Recruited during the late 1980s and early 1990s when the war started, they dominated the lower ranks, though some of them had moved up the military hierarchy as non-commissioned/junior officers. They shared the same anti-social culture with the rural lumpens who dominated the RUF. Their actions during and after the takeover, actions unprecedented in the history of *coups d'etat* in Africa, echoed the activities of the RUF in the countryside.

Thus one of the first broadcasts after the takeover proclaimed an end to the war by publicly announcing the alliance between the RUF and the lower ranks:

> We are all one; the war is over. As I am talking now, as the spokesman now, all Kamajors are to be disbanded forthwith. No more Kamajors, no more civil defence forces as from now. We are the National Army. We have to fight for this country through the support of you, the nation.[88]

Subsequent broadcasts urged all senior military and police officers 'to report at Defence Headquarters immediately', and warned that those caught looting 'will be shot on sight'.[90] The new regime, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), was headed by a Major Johnny Paul Koroma, recently released from prison for an alleged coup attempt in August 1996, with Foday Sankoh as the number two man. Besides the allegation that the civilian regime was undermining the

[85] RUF combatants had infiltrated the city about three weeks before the takeover. Some were allegedly employed as labourers by a construction company, Compagnie Sahlienne Entreprise (CSE) Interviews with Sierra Leoneans in Guinea, June–July 1997; January 1998; President Tejan Kabba's address to the UN and ECOWAS; Olu Gordon, 'Hostages to the gun,' *For Di People*, 10 June 1997.

[86] Interviews with Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea, June–July, 1997.

[87] Koroma, *Agony*, p. 44.

[88] Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service, 25 May 1997, 10.28 GMT.

[89] Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service, 25 May 1997, 19.30 GMT.

national army through its support of the Kamajor militia, the other charges – tribalism, suppression of press freedom and refusal to end the war – were the usual justifications in support of military takeovers.[90] The whole performance surrounding the release of Koroma, a sobel suspect, from the maximum security prison, was a replay of a typical RUF tactic of releasing prisoners and common criminals.[91]

It is therefore not surprising that the first seventy-two hours of the takeover were characterised by generalised mayhem, arson, looting and the raping of defenceless women – actions which resonated with the style and character of the RUF. The destruction of the Central Bank and the Treasury, and the attack on the Wellington industrial estate, were actions consistent with the RUF's military message to the people of Sierra Leone: it is either us or no state. Thus for the first seven days after the takeover there was widespread anarchy. It was not a case of collapsed state structures that could be revived; the state had become non-existent; the rule of law an abstraction. This senseless and indiscriminate violence in the city, which compelled the RUF to apologise once more to the people of Sierra Leone, was therefore not 'an example of the militariat in action', 'a social group within the military who lack the clientelist ties of more senior officers'.[92] As Lansana Gberie has convincingly argued, it was not the militariat who were behind the coup. Rather, it was the lumpen underclass elements, those 'criminally disposed and undisciplined', whom Marxist literature had incorrectly assumed were incapable of doing battle in their own behalf.[93] It is indeed tempting to suggest that the takeover approximates the dictatorship of the lumpenproletariat. Yet the atrocities committed by the so-called 'Peoples Army', the two organised and armed factions of the lumpenproletariat formed after the takeover, continue to denude the notion of a militariat of any explanatory power.

The takeover was widely condemned in Sierra Leone. The labour movement, the powerful womens' movement, the national union of students and virtually all civic organisations denounced it, and called

[90] The ousted leader has convincingly rebutted all the charges. See his address to the UN and ECOWAS.

[91] The RUF reportedly released prisoners in Kabala and other towns in the hinterland. Johnny Paul Koroma was suspected of complicity in the RUF takeover of the Sierra Rutile mines in 1995 which led to his recall to Freetown. For details see Gberie, *War and State Collapse*.

[92] For the RUF letter of apology which Sankoh had promised in an interview with Amnesty International see 'The rebels' position – a statement to Sierra Leoneans by the RUF', *West Africa*, 30 June–6 July 1997, p. 1042; Steve Riley, 'Sierra Leone: The militariat strikes again', *Review of African Political Economy*, 71 (1997), 287–92.

[93] See Lansana Gberie, 'Sierra Leone: A "Militariat" Coup?', in Ibrahim Abdullah (ed.), *Youth Culture*.

on the newly proclaimed AFRC to hand over power to the constitutionally elected government. These internal voices were strengthened by the outrage expressed by the international community. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) immediately dispatched troops to Sierra Leone and urged Freetown to restore the constitutionally elected government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabba; the OAU secretary general dubbed the takeover a 'set back for Africa', while the UN affirmed the organisation's support and commitment to 'a democratic order'.[94] The British, French, Americans and Lebanese quickly organised to evacuate their nationals, while attempts by the diplomatic corps to induce the new leaders to restore the Kabba administration failed. A week after the takeover, Nigerian troops under ECOMOG command bombarded the seaside area around the military headquarters. This attempt to dislodge the AFRC led to an outcry against 'Nigerian intervention' by the junta and their new-found spokespeople, the veteran politician and opposition leader John Karefa-Smart and the unsuccessful presidential aspirant Abbas Bundu. The city's middle-class professionals, and those who could afford to emigrate to neighbouring countries, started leaving in their thousands.

The military confrontation in June created a tense atmosphere in the capital. The unpopularity of the regime internally and externally, the continued violence against life and property, the RUF's fortification and installation of anti-aircraft guns in the city, and their resolve to fight till the end, made it impossible for any peace initiative to get off the ground. Meanwhile, the ECOMOG forces continued to build up their strength on the outskirts of the capital and at Lungi, across the estuary from Freetown, the country's only international airport. By the end of June, the regime was still unable to function as a government; it could not put together a cabinet nor could it guarantee peace and security. The majority of the city's inhabitants did not go to work; almost everything was at a standstill.

Lacking support from any credible group or organisation, the AFRC, like the RUF before it, came to depend on the services of an amorphous group of politically marginal individuals with an axe to grind. In these circumstances, the old APC kinship network was revived amidst speculation that it was an APC sponsored takeover. This chaotic situation strengthened the position of the RUF, so that by

[94] Panafrican News Agency, 'Kofi Annan distressed by coup in Sierra Leone'; 'Africa deplores coup in Sierra Leone,' May 26 1997.

July it was virtually in control of the military and political situation in the capital. The capture of Freetown which had eluded the RUF in 1995 had now become a reality; a product, no doubt, of the unholy alliance which brought together two different groups of alienated youths in arms: the RUF and the lower ranks in the national army.

YOUTH CULTURE AND VIOLENCE

The involvement of lumpen youths in political violence is not particularly new. This group provided some of the fighting force for the Mulele rebellion in the Congo in the 1960s, the MPLA and FRELIMO in Angola and Mozambique, ZANU and ZAPU in Zimbabwe, the fighters of Goukouni Waddei and Hissène Habre in Chad, the UPC in the Cameroons, the warlords in Liberia and the Revolutionary United Front.[95] Whereas the 'classical' liberation movements had policy guidelines with respect to the recruitment and training of lumpens, the new movements, with the sole exception of Museveni's NRM, were more concerned with having people who could wield weapons in the name of 'revolution'.[96] The lack of discipline and of a clear-cut ideology helps to explain why the RUF tolerated terror and anarchy in the name of revolution. Another important difference was the influx of more teenagers as lumpens; a true reflection of Africa's economy in this age of structural adjustment. This new development significantly narrowed the age differential between the leadership of these movements and the rank and file. In the case of the RUF, with the exception of Foday Sankoh and a few others who were not in the original group, the bulk of the leadership and membership were below thirty-five. This was also true of the NPFL in Liberia.

In his perceptive analyses of the social structure in Guine-Bissau, Amilcar Cabral laid bare the considerations which informed the recruitment efforts of the PAIGC in Guine, and identified this particular group as the crucial link between the urban and rural networks so important to the success of the PAIGC. But Cabral, as usual, was careful not to generalise; he mapped out the specificity of the situation in Guine, he did not provide a blue print for activists.[97] Museveni had approached the issue from the viewpoint of culture,

[95] For the recruitment policies of one of the classical liberation movements in Africa see Josiah Tungamirai, 'Recruitment to ZANLA: building up a war machine', in Ngwabi Bebe and Terence Ranger (eds.), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (London, 1995).

[96] For Museveni's NRM, see *Sowing the Mustard Seed*; Mahmood Mamdani, 'Uganda Today', *Ufahamu*, 15, 3 (1986–7), 33–53; *Critical Reflections on the NRM* (Kampala, 1995).

[97] Amilcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guine* (London, 1969).

while Cabral had emphasised their social dislocation as problematic. Both Museveni and Cabral identified the same group which Frantz Fanon had singled out as the only revolutionary force in the continent: the lumpenproletariat. But Fanon's analysis ran counter to orthodox Marxists who had nothing but contempt for lumpens; an idea which stems directly from Marx's obsession with proletarian consciousness and revolution.[98] This line of inquiry was pursued by some British-based Africanists in the 1970s. They argued that the lumpenproletariat were incapable of taking political action on their own because they always ended up fighting the battles of others in the political realm.[99]

But the so-called second independence struggle tells a different story, at least in the Sierra Leonean context. The Revolutionary United Front was not only a product of lumpen culture but its membership was also lumpen. They took political action and proclaimed a 'revolution' which reflected the true character of their lumpen base. The movement did not possess the revolutionary drive or the maturity to undertake a concrete analysis of the situation which comes with a revolutionary project. It had no revolutionary intellectuals, and the radical students who originally spearheaded the call to arms were not involved in the project. Lacking an alternative source of arms, since the Soviet Union was no more, they had to depend on exploiting the resources available in their area of operation to pursue their 'revolution'. Their failure to win the sympathy of the very people they claimed to be fighting for compelled them to recruit their army from lumpens and juveniles, two vulnerable groups to whom their bush path to destruction appeared more appealing. It is this lack of a clear-cut programme, the wanton use of violence for the sake of violence, and the absence of a well-articulated ideology, which disqualifies such second independence movements as a vehicle for progressive change in Africa.

[98] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*.

[99] See Robin Cohen and David Michael, 'The revolutionary potential of the African lumpen proletariat: a sceptical view', *IDS Bulletin*, 5, 2/3 (1973), 33–9.