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*Youth music and politics in post-war Sierra Leone**

SUSAN SHEPLER

American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20016, USA

Email: Shepler@american.edu

In Freetown's rubbish-strewn slums, where sick children defecate in sewers by pot-holed streets, music blaring from shops and taxis tells Sierra Leone's youth that politicians have failed their war-ravaged country.

'Pak N Go!' booms the chorus of a dance floor hit by rappers Jungle Leaders in a stark message to the ruling party. Other songs – in the Krio dialect … – urge young people to oust the graft-ridden establishment and take a stand against violence.

War-scarred youth hold key to Sierra Leone polls'
Katrina Manson, Reuters, 7 August 2007

ABSTRACT

The brutal, eleven-year long civil war in Sierra Leone has been understood by many scholarly observers as 'a crisis of youth'. The national elections of 2007 were notable for an explosion of popular music by young people directly addressing some of the central issues of the election: corruption of the ruling party and lack of opportunities for youth advancement. Though produced by youth and understood locally as youth music, the sounds were inescapable in public transport, markets, and parties. The musical style is a combination of local idioms and West African hip-hop. The lyrics present a young people's moral universe in stark contrast to that of their elders. This paper addresses the themes of these election-focused songs as well as the emerging subaltern youth identity discernible in supposedly less political songs.

INTRODUCTION

In mid 2007, just prior to the presidential elections in Sierra Leone, youth music about politics was ubiquitous. It blared in public transport, internet

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cafes, in bars and at parties I attended. Although understood by both producers and consumers as 'youth' music, and therefore not *quite* a part of serious political discourse, the lyrics were on everyone's lips and the tunes were hummed by market women, school children and professors alike. Christensen and Utas (2008: 536) confirm the importance of this popular youth music, explaining that references to politicians as 'educated fools' and as 'hypocrites and wicked men' were common among the ex-combatant youth they studied, and that 'such sentiments have been emphasized in Sierra Leonean popular music, in many ways the most reliable medium of expression in the country'. Wai (2008: 58) agrees about the importance of popular music in Sierra Leone, saying: 'Music has now become a major way of initiating political conversation about the country's future and the youth's role in it. Through music, spaces for social action were created, and these in turn helped in raising the consciousness of the population and [drew] their attention to the myriad of problems in Sierra Leone society and to the possibilities.' Abdullah (2009: 15) goes even further, discussing the 'emergence and dominance of a conscious and oppositional youth culture that straddles the global/local in interpreting their everyday lives', claiming: 'The campaign for change preceding the 2007 elections was inaugurated and conducted by an informal opposition: the musical artists!' I argue that the lyrics of these songs present a young people's moral universe in stark contrast to that of their elders. My analysis is based on interviews and conversations with young people across Sierra Leone, and with Sierra Leonean colleagues and friends about the meanings and interpretations of the songs. I draw on several months in Sierra Leone prior to the 2007 elections to address the themes of these election-focused songs, as well as the emerging youth identity discernible in supposedly less political songs.

My goal is to explain the significance of this youth music, first by defining what I mean by youth in the West African context; second by pointing out the shift in strategies of youth intervention from violent rebellion to cultural production; third by explaining how youth music has become so popular at this particular moment; and fourth by analysing some of the common themes of this new form of expression to elucidate key components of the emerging subaltern youth identity. Finally, I explore some of the ways in which this youth music, and youth political identity, have been understood by observers of Sierra Leonean politics.

POP CULTURE, YOUTH AND POLITICS

Popular music, like other forms of popular culture, not only expresses socio-cultural reality, but generates it. Africanist scholars have increasingly

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turned to popular music especially in its relation to politics. Bob W. White (2008: 15) states that 'popular culture represents a powerful analytic tool for understanding political culture'. Other recent work on popular music, youth and politics in Africa includes Englert (2008) on Tanzania; and Nyairo and Ogude (2005), Salm (2005) and Prince (2006) on Kenya. Of course there is an earlier tradition of studying youth, popular culture and politics in the work of the 'Birmingham School', the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and others (see Lave *et al.* 1992 for an overview of this literature). However, I have argued (Shepler 2004) that the cultural politics of youth are quite different in settings, such as much of sub-Saharan Africa and certainly Sierra Leone, where poverty means that sub-cultural style is not primarily about consumption.

Of particular interest to scholars focused on youth and popular culture in Africa has been the globalisation of hip-hop and its local African forms. Lock (2005) talks about how hip-hop, especially the music of Tupac Shakur, speaks to the unemployed youth of urban Sierra Leone. But the protagonist of her piece is Western hip-hop, and the primary interest of work like this is in how this Western cultural form is spreading around the world. The young Sierra Leoneans actually making culture drop out of her analysis.[1] I argue against those cultural critics who see African youth hip-hop as fragmented and globalised, turned towards the outside, increasingly xenophobic, world (e.g. Diouf 2003: 6). I am closer theoretically to authors who talk about pop music in Africa as a form of journalism (Mano 2007), using a *bricolage* of musical forms to get people singing along and to tell the news from the streets. I point to the way young people's artistic expression is a novel means to *engage* in the national political discourse, even if by the creation of an oppositional identity.

THE WAR IN SIERRA LEONE AS A CRISIS OF YOUTH

The recent war (1991–2002) in Sierra Leone is best known among Western observers for three things: blood diamonds, amputations, and the use of child soldiers. Many analysts have explained the war as a 'crisis of youth' (Abdullah 2002; Keen 2005; Richards 1996), pointing to the legions of disaffected youth, so angered by years of poor government and a lack of educational or occupational opportunities that they were like dry kindling in the path of war's fire, picking up weapons and expressing their dissatisfaction through violence, often against their fellow poor and oppressed Sierra Leoneans.

I first came to know Sierra Leone under very different circumstances, when I taught secondary school maths there in the late 1980s for two years

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as a Peace Corps Volunteer. And although the violence of the war shocked and surprised me – as it did most Sierra Leoneans – I was not surprised to hear the theory that dissatisfied youth were the most important players in the conflict. Their list of grievances was long, in a failed state that could no longer provide them with even the most basic opportunities. We can leave aside the various arguments about whether youths were responsible for the war, or whether they were dupes of powerful political forces outside their control.[2] What is important here is to acknowledge the belief, among both outsiders and Sierra Leoneans, that the situation of youth was a central driving force behind the conflict.

This analysis fits well with the current popularity of demographic and economic explanations for war, citing in particular the 'youth bulge' in sub-Saharan Africa as a cause for much conflict. Indeed, in this theoretical atmosphere, youth is increasingly seen as a dangerous segment of the population, requiring urgent programming in education and livelihoods (UNDP 2006; Urdal 2004). On the other hand, youth are seen as 'the future' and their participation in civil society is much desired. A rash of recent book titles lay out the dichotomy: are youth in Africa *Vanguards or Vandals?* (Abbink & van Kessel 2005), *Makers or Breakers?* (Honwana & De Boeck 2005), *Troublemakers or Peacemakers?* (McEvoy-Levy 2006). Diouf (2003: 2) puts it this way: 'Today, young people are emerging as one of the central concerns of African Studies. Located at the heart of both analytical apparatuses and political action, they also have become a preoccupation of politicians, social workers, and communities in Africa.'

WHAT IS YOUTH IN WEST AFRICA?

Along with other anthropologists, I understand youth as a socially constructed category that shifts from context to context, rather than as a time-delimited stage with a universal definition (Bucholtz 2002; James *et al.* 1998). In West Africa generally, 'youth' is constructed in opposition to 'elder', and is a political category as much as, or more than, a biological one (Durham 2000; Murphy 1980; O'Brien 1996). We can thus find 'youths' as old as thirty-five years, as, for example, in the Sierra Leone Government's Youth Policy (GoSL 2003).[3] In the introduction to the collection *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: social becoming in an African context*, Christiansen *et al.* (2006: 3) put it well:

As is obvious in current writings on Africa, 'youth' is a highly context-dependent and fluid signifier. But the way we use it in this text, which we think reflects the way it is generally used in West Africa, is as a label for marginalized young (and not so young) people, rather than for a whole population within a certain

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age bracket. The potential danger of youth is thus not dependent on bulging demographic processes, as popularly supposed, but rather on the number of young people experiencing socio-economic marginalization and powerlessness.

'Youth' in this context is almost equivalent to 'subaltern'. Youths are those crowds of people not yet 'big men', waiting for their opportunity for advancement, their opportunity to marry and start a family. One informant during my dissertation research defined youth for me as 'anyone who has not been given what they should in life'.[4]

Youth, as a political position, has long played the role of critiquing those in power (the elders) for not doing what they should. Perhaps that meant not providing enough opportunity for advancement, or not spreading the wealth around equitably. Historically, youth critiques of elders are critiques of the patrimonial political system and have served as important checks on excess (Shepler 2010). This article argues that the same tradition is being extended into the present day, albeit in a different form, with youth critiques of the *neo*-patrimonial political system of most post-independence African states.

Youth critiques in years past, the pre-colonial and colonial eras, have taken the form of plays, masquerades, songs and murals (Banton 1957; Nunley 1987; Opala 1994). In his description of colonial life in Freetown, Banton (1957: 166) describes Temne[5] 'Young Men's Companies' in Freetown in the early fifties:

The conflict between the older and younger generations and between the respective companies was expressed in some of the companies' songs, such as these of *Ambas Geda*:[6]

'Ah, look what is being said,
Look what is being done!
How they envy our play.
Ah, I do believe (in the play)
As the old folks envy the *geda*,
Let them just go on envying!
I've been done a bad turn, why?
Though not knowing me, they've
Done me a bad turn, why?
The old folks have nothing but bad turns
Up their sleeves. Hear me, Allah!

He goes on to say (*ibid.*: 168) that 'the popularity of these groups was due in part to the wartime influx of young workers from the Protectorate'.

A Sierra Leonean friend told me that when he was growing up in the fifties and sixties, young people in his village would come up with songs about popular leaders, chiefs, etc. These songs were a form of cultural and

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political critique, and might become quite popular in a limited area. Local youth music groups might travel around to neighbouring communities' festivals to sing these popular songs. However, in contrast to the popular music of today, these forms were extremely localised.

HOW HAS YOUTH MUSIC BECOME SO POPULAR NOW?

Drawing on the rich history of youth protest through music in Sierra Leone, today's young musicians can take advantage of modern production, reproduction, and distribution facilities that allow youth to record and spread their music all over the country. When I first lived in Sierra Leone in the late eighties, there was almost no locally produced music available for purchase. Subsequently, in taxis and at discos we listened to Congolese music or reggae. There were Sierra Leonean live band sets (Afro Combo, Afro National, etc.), but one went to see them perform live. It was quite difficult then to purchase a cassette; and besides, their mainly apolitical lyrics were about dancing and partying, and only subtly political in the one-party state.[7]

At the tail end of the war, in the late 1990s, we started to hear songs in Krio (the Sierra Leonean lingua franca), produced by Jimmy B., a local boy made good in South Africa. He set up a studio in Freetown, the nation's capital, and trained young Sierra Leonean musicians and singers in modern recording techniques. He was supported by the Talking Drum Studio, the Sierra Leone branch of Search for Common Ground, an international NGO focusing on media and conflict resolution. The music industry has grown in Sierra Leone to such an extent that now one hears almost exclusively music in Krio at parties, dances, and in public transport. The music is sold on cassettes and CDs all over the country.[8]

I call this popular music 'youth music', because that is how it is understood by its consumers and producers. When I asked my husband, who is Sierra Leonean, to help me track down some of the popular songs for my research, I overheard him calling up Sierra Leonean friends and asking for 'an meht ma an feth a su' – literally, 'the music of our children', in Temne. People love these songs, especially their *fityai* or disrespectfulness/resistance. This is also part of what makes them youth music, since youth are notoriously *fityai*. Remember, in the newly post-war world, people were still very nervous about the violent potential of youth. When some people expressed concern to the president, Tejan Kabbah, about the new *fityai* music, the president famously said that he would rather have them in music production studios than carrying guns in the bush.

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Most important, as a result of many of the factors I have discussed here, a new space was opened up for youth political expression through popular music in the post-war period. The youth took that space and filled it beyond anyone's imagining. Wai (2008: 57) concurs, finding that 'perhaps the most significant way in which the youths contributed to democratic awakening in Sierra Leone was through music'.

THEMES OF THE LYRICS

I have divided the music I will be discussing into three types: first, about political parties and candidates; second, explicitly political but rejecting traditional political parties; and third, implicitly political. My aim here is both to show the range of themes, and also to tie together apparently disparate themes under the rubric of youth as political identity.

About elections, politicians, political parties

The first set of music was a direct comment on the elections, and its most obvious member is the song mentioned at the beginning, 'Now di Pa de pack for go' ('Now the Pa [the president] is packing to go') by the group Jungle Leaders. The president since 1996 (though ousted by several coups and reinstated through various regional and international military interventions), Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), could not stand for a third term. The SLPP candidate was Solomon Berewa, Kabbah's vice-president and a loyal, but ageing, party fixture. The message of the SLPP was that they had brought the country out of war, and should be trusted to stay the course. His main opponent in the election was Ernest Bai Koroma of the All People's Congress (APC), the SLPP's main opposition since the time of independence and the rulers for twenty-five years during the one-party state era before the civil war. The APC's message was that the SLPP had grown horribly corrupt, and had wasted the oceans of money from the international community flooding the country in the post-war period. The third serious candidate was Charles Margai of the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC),[9] a breakaway from the SLPP, headed by Margai, a relative of the founders of the party. He shared the critique of the SLPP's corruption, and cast himself as a candidate for the youth. He was widely seen as a spoiler for the SLPP, splitting their mainly Southern constituency, thereby giving the APC a serious chance of electoral victory for the first time since the war began.

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Below are some of the lyrics of 'Now di Pa de pack for go' in Krio[10] and English:

Krio	English
Now di Pa de pack for go	Now the Pa is packing to go
Udat now get for mek Salone?	Who now will fix Sierra Leone?
Well, di Pa de pack for go	Well, the Pa is packing to go
Of course e don du in yon.	Of course, he's done his own part.

The message is not too partisan, but it is explicitly political: 'The president is leaving, who's going to rule Sierra Leone? He's done his part. Now it's time for someone new.' The lyrics go on to say, 'We really need a saviour who will let us tell poverty "bye bye".' Also, they specifically tell the new president what the new policy priorities should be, including youth employment, education and electricity provision.[11] They mention each of the parties by name, saying: 'APC, we dohn see [we have seen]. SLPP, we dohn see. PMDC, we nor no [we don't know]. Who will come now and set us free?' They tell the outgoing president: 'Some people say you tried, some people say you failed, some people say you should have done more.' They go on, in support of democracy and free speech for the youth, and ask the candidates to come forward with explicit platforms.

This song essentially expresses youth participation in a well-functioning democratic system, without too much preference for one party over another. However, there were other more provocative songs in the public sphere. For example, Innocent's popular 'Ejectment notice':

Krio	English
Den wan ya so, wi de gi den notice	These ones [the SLPP], we're giving them notice
If wi no gi dem notice, den wi nor go get peace	If we don't give them notice, we won't get peace
…	…
Wetin mek ba, una no de yehri 'lef!'?	Why can't you understand 'stop!'?
Wi don tok sote una mek lek una def	We've talked 'til, you act like you're deaf
Dem una belleh de, na im wi de bos wit nef	We'll cut your big bellies with a knife
Poof. Bo, wi wan leh una 'moof'.	Poof. Man, we want you to move [go away].

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This song is explicitly partisan and against the ruling party.[12] It talks about 'Mr Green yu dohn put wi na stress' ('Mr Green, you've put us under stress'), where green is the colour of the SLPP. It also discusses the scandal of the two shiploads of rice (the Sierra Leonean staple food) sent by Qaddafi right after the war as a gift for the Sierra Leone people. When Qaddafi's visit to Sierra Leone right before the elections made it clear that instead of distributing the rice to the people, the SLPP government had sold it in Ghana to make money for its fragile social security plan, there was uproar and public protest. APC supporters threw rice in the street at passing SLPP campaigners.

In a way, this music is a continuation of old models of youth political participation with youth organised to demonstrate support for a party or candidate, but is notable for the move from the violent participation of the war (and other forms of political violence predating the war) to an increased focus on cultural production.[13] Sociologist Zack-Williams (2008: 29) agrees, and states:

> Perhaps the most popular tune during the campaign was Ejection (sic) Notice, referring to the fact that time was up for the Government. These themes were seized upon by the long-suffering youth of the country, who during the election campaign used them as tunes for political mobilisation against what was seen as corrupt and weak government. In this way, the seeds of democratic challenges were sown and flowered in Sierra Leone.

While youth music was explicitly and loudly involved in the party political campaigning in the lead up to the 2007 elections, the story does not end there. Indeed, to think about the entirety of youth music and its relation to political culture, we must broaden our conception of democracy.

About 'big men' and corruption

This next set of songs are still explicitly political, but not in support of any particular party. In fact, they are against the whole notion of political parties and campaigning in general. Christensen and Utas (2008) found that among the ex-combatants they studied, the primary reaction to politics was one of mistrust verging on disgust. This set of songs reflect that mistrust, saying things like 'Oh, it's only because the election is coming, that's why they're saying there'll be electricity', and 'Oh, because the election is coming, that's why you are going to church and to the mosque.' As an example, here are some of the lyrics from 'Time don don' by

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Dry Yai[14] Crew:

Krio	English
Usai den komot ba?	Where are they coming from?
Time don don	Time is up
Ef yu taya yu foh go na do	If you're tired, you should get out
Time don don	Time's up
All dem wack MCs for go na do.	All the wack MCs get out.

In all of these songs (and other similar ones), the singers speak from the position of 'youth man den' (young men). However, it is not necessarily easy to speak for the 'youth man den'. There is some popular derision for government or NGO-sponsored songs (e.g. USAID-funded songs about AIDS prevention). Songs lose their power if they are too clearly speaking on behalf on some party, and therefore elders, and not on behalf of the interests of the youth. One way around this is to use youth or 'savisman' language (Jalloh 2000). In 'Time don don', the singer states 'all dem wack MCs for go na doh' ('all those wack MCs should get out'), using hip-hop based language ('wack MCs') mainly intelligible to the youth.[15]

As noted above, the three main presidential candidates were Berewa (SLPP), Koroma (APC) and Margai (PMDC). Here are the lyrics to another Pupa Bajah song:

Krio	English
Di tall wan na squirrel	The tall one's a squirrel
Di short wan na arata	The short one's a rat
Di bump wan na grohn pig…	The fat one's a guinea pig…
Na insai dis wi granat fam	It's in this our peanut farm
Na de squirrel, grohn pig, and arata wan can siddon.	That's where the squirrel, guinea pig and rat want to stay.

The lyrics are funny because they trade on the physical characteristics of the candidates, but they are also a critique of corrupt politicians, making it the point that it is stupid to elect a rodent to look after your peanut farm or a greedy politician to guard your national resources. The next part of

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the song is more explicit:

Krio	English
Eh bo, duya, leh den lef wi	Hey man, please let them leave us alone
Leh den go siddon saful	They should go sit down quietly
Leh den no torment wi – O	They should not torment us
Right now man den no gladi – O	Right now, people aren't happy
So leh den push na kohna	So let them move to the side
Wit dis den bohku campaign.	With all their campaigning.

The Sierra Leonean artist best known for his attacks on 'big men' is Emerson. He started in 2002 with 'Borbor Beleh' (literally, 'Belly Boy' – an attack on corruption) and went on to 'Tu fut arata' ('two-footed rat' – another attack on corruption). Emerson is beloved as the first of the youth artists to stand up to politicians and for his *fityai*. He says to the corrupt elders: 'You think you can eat as much as you want? Those days are over! The youths are ready to stand up strong to stop you!' Then he includes the deep voice of an elder, laughing, 'Emerson, lehf!' ('Emerson, cut it out!'). It is so effective because it so accurately captures not only the frustration of the youths, but also the dismissiveness of the elders.

About the position of youth

The last set of songs by youth are not explicitly about political parties or politicians, but are still political in their description of a subaltern youth identity. Emerson, again, had a hit with 'Bohboh Pain' (literally, 'Pain Boy', or, figuratively, 'long-suffering son'),[16] a detailed description of how poor Freetown youth struggle to get by. There are stories about the poor quality food they had to eat, the struggles with transport, school fees, and poverty. He describes where people went during the war and how they managed to survive. But Bohboh Pain (and Titi Strain – his female counterpart) are resilient figures. Emerson claims the identity proudly, declaring, 'God didn't design us to be poor, one day we'll be great.' The same voice of the elder described above appears in this song, saying, 'leh we bia, ya' ('let's be patient, OK?').

The last song I want to address is 'Mabinty' by Dry Yai Crew.[17] This is a song about the doomed relationship between a boy and a girl, hence more obviously in the vein of the romantic pop song. But even here, the underlying theme is about the social position of youth. Our hero says, 'It's

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not that I don't like you, it's not that I don't want you, it's that I don't have any money to give you.' He goes on: 'Your family is counting on you, and there are rich older men ('look the bombah den sidon' in Krio) who are ready to spend on you'. So, he concludes, 'for your own sake, I'll step aside'. But there is bitterness about his lament. He says that her family is turning her into a 'money lover'. Although 'youth' in the way I have used it in the paper so far is usually male, this song also points to the problem of young women who are forced to marry older men. This song speaks to the powerless position of youth, male and female, to control even their own romantic lives. This third set of songs can be understood as cultural critique, and is therefore potentially more radical than the political critique of the first two sets. Indeed, some of the most atrocious violence of the civil war took place in small village settings, as very personal youth retribution against elders who had wronged them in their personal and romantic lives (Keen 2005; Richards 1996).

THE ELECTION OUTCOME

After the PMDC candidate prevented either of the two major parties from winning outright in the first round, the opposition party (APC) won the elections in a run-off. A rarity in African democracy, a new party came into power through elections, and President Koroma was sworn into office on 15 November 2007 (for a full analysis of the election results see Kandeh 2008; Zack-Williams & Gbla 2008). Though we cannot conclude that these youth songs led directly to the election outcome, Sierra Leoneans of all walks of life would cite their lyrics as accurately describing the political situation in the country. Of course, some people still voted according to their party loyalties, and immediately after the elections there were some clashes between young supporters of the two main parties. So, music has not completely replaced physical violence as a youth mode of participation in politics. We cannot point to the emergence of this new musical form as the determining factor in the elections, but we can certainly say that the voice of the 'youth man dem' is now clearly, loudly and musically represented in the public sphere in Sierra Leone.

Youth music has continued to be part of the political sphere even after the elections. A prime example is Emerson's 'Yesterday betteh pass tidae' ('Yesterday was better than today'), which caused political uproar when it was released in 2009 and taken up by the anti-Koroma forces in the country. Youth music has also been enthusiastically taken up by Sierra Leoneans living in the diaspora, a group whose political power was also proven in the 2007 elections (see Wai 2008). Many of these songs have

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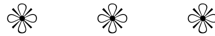
associated videos which are available on YouTube, and young Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora have set up a website[18] as a showcase for Sierra Leonean music and artists.



Youth in post-war Sierra Leone are the target of many international interventions, from skills training and livelihoods to civil society and governance reform, and money has come from multiple sources to address the 'youth crisis' which supposedly led to the war. But, as I have argued here, the youth targets (or should I say beneficiaries?) of these interventions have a political position far more nuanced than that underlying the Western conceptions of youth. Fanthorpe and Maconachie (2010: 22) have argued for 'the importance of distinguishing the real world efficacy of youth agency in Sierra Leone from that constructed within the political imaginary of international development and human rights'. I suggest it is perhaps through youth music that we can hear the 'authentic' voices of youth in post-war Sierra Leone, and begin to engage them on their own terms. The point is to see the whole range of concerns covered by youth music as the authentic voice of the youth. This means focusing, as Zack-Williams (2008) does, on the explicitly political, and therefore seeing youth music as a sign of the 'flowering' of democracy. It also means focusing on the resistance of youth as explained by Christensen and Utas (2008), and integrating the youth critique of 'democrazy and politricks'. Including the concerns of youth music as a whole yields insight into the complex and sometimes contradictory 'youthscapes' (Maira & Soep 2005) present in post-war Sierra Leone.

NOTES

1. In my experience, some of the NGOs working with war-affected youth seem to have a similarly homogenising take on the portability of hip-hop when they sponsor local musical groups to create songs for sensitisation about HIV/AIDS or the importance of education.

2. I wrote about these theories in my dissertation about shifting meanings of youth in post-conflict Sierra Leone and the reintegration of former child soldiers. I did two years of ethnographic research in Sierra Leone intermittently from 1999 to 2002 for my dissertation (Shepler 2005).

3. Youth in this usage is also generally male. Young women have a very different kind of political belonging, and in some ways become 'adults' much earlier than their male cohort. They marry young and are considered adult after their first birth (Shepler 2004, 2005).

4. This is something of a tautology, for if youth *equals* dissatisfaction, what does it mean to say that youth dissatisfaction led to the war?

5. Temne is one of the major ethnic groups or 'tribes' of Sierra Leone.

6. Banton reports that the name *Anbas Geda* in Temne means 'let us gather'. Interestingly, Les Rickford (personal communication) reports on a musical gathering of Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora called 'Ambas Gedda 2002'.

7. An anonymous reviewer disagrees with this assessment, stating that the possibility to purchase local music 'had existed since the 1960s with the music of Geraldo Pino (who made a major impact on

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the great Fela Kuti) and the Heart Beats; in particular in the 1970s there was a plethora of local artists whose works were openly copied and put on tapes by commercial capital, with no revenue to the artists. This was true of artists such as Sabanoh 75, with their big hits "Konko", "Ggbepeh mi", "Dance to me", "Baba Hausa", "Warn you pikin" and many more. The rival to Sabanoh 75 was Afro-National with its massive hit, "King Jimmy". There were lots of gigs, but there were also tapes that circulated via the group of Lebanese and Sierra Leonean middlemen who were dubbing the music.' Still, I believe that illegally duplicated cassettes of live shows are quite different from today's omnipresent CDs produced for the Sierra Leone market.

The anonymous reviewer agrees with me, however, that 'at this time [the 1970s] the genre was not resistance to Siaka Stevens' murderous regime, but it was mainly about love and self-respect and soothsaying to Siaka Stevens and his henchmen (e.g. "Papa Siakie Sai, hem want togetherness").'

8. Music in Sierra Leonean Krio is even popular in neighbouring Liberia, which seems to be a step or two behind, but catching up quickly in the production of local youth music.

9. SLPP members who worried that Margai's candidacy would only take votes away from the party joked that PMDC stood for 'Pikin Margai dohn crez' or 'The Margai child has gone crazy'.

10. I use an anglicised Krio rather than the formal Krio script, since many of the lyrics move back and forth between Krio and English.

11. According to Zack-Williams (2008: 33), 'the major issues of the campaign included, the question of youth unemployment, corruption in public life, and the state of the infrastructure'.

12. Of course, the SLPP loyalist youth came up with their own song, saying something like: 'We are the landlord and you are the tenant. Who are you to give us notice?' Clashes between SLPP and APC youth continue sporadically to this day.

13. White's (2008) book about the politics of dance music in Mobutu's Zaire makes me think that this is a model more advanced in other African settings. He says (24), 'at each stage of its development since independence, popular music in Kinshasa has acted as a mediating force between the city's rapidly growing population of youths, who try to navigate their way through a complex political economy of clientage and authoritarian rule not of their making, and a state-based class of political elites who rely on music as a mechanism of political legitimacy …' In Sierra Leone, it seems, we are only beginning to see the ways in which youth music may be deployed as a 'mechanism of political legitimacy'.

14. In Krio, *dry yai* means, literally, 'dry-eyed', and, figuratively, 'fearless'.

15. In the same song they also reference 'Dan Dogo' (a local comic figure), so they are drawing on a combination of global (hip-hop) and local cultural influences.

16. Thanks are due to an anonymous reviewer for this and other improved Krio translations throughout.

17. The video is available online at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfGlHIY-Sq4.

18. Called Sierra Leone Music Television (SLMTV), available at: http://www.slmtv.com/.

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