Nathaniel King

CONFLICT AS INTEGRATION

Youth Aspiration to Personhood in the Teleology of Sierra Leone’s ‘Senseless War’
Indexing terms

Civil war
Conflicts
Attitudes
Public opinion polls
Social surveys
Youth
Child soldiers
Sierra Leone

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Acronyms

AFRC  Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. This regime removed the SLPP-led government, headed by Ahmad Tejan Kabba from power in 1997. Johnny Paul Koroma was the chairman. The AFRC invited the RUF to form a government and nominated RUF’s Foday Sankoh, then imprisoned in Abuja, to be its vice Chairman.

APC  All Peoples’ Congress. A party formed when one of its members, Siaka Stevens, stepped out of talks in Lancaster, England, on the insistence that the country should have elections before independence. Stevens was the first leader and he made Sierra Leone a one party state. The APC was removed from power by the NPRC in 1992.

CDF  Civil Defence Forces. A civil militia that complemented the army’s efforts in fighting the rebels. It later fell out with the army because of suspicions that the latter collaborated with the rebels.

ECOWAS  Economic Community of West African States. A regional economic organisation consisting of 16 West African states.

ECOMOG  ECOWAS Monitoring Group, formed from the armies of the ECOWAS member states. It oversaw peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and in Sierra Leone fought to restore and strengthen constitutional democracy in 1997–99.

ISU  Internal Security Unit. The APC Government’s special security unit that was accused of serious abuses against dissenters, especially students.

NPFL  National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The rebel movement led by Charles Taylor who later became president of Liberia. He was seen as a political soul mate of the leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh, as both of them were trained in rebel warfare in Benghazi, Libya. At the onset of Sierra Leone’s war, the NPFL reportedly gave manual and logistical support to the RUF.

NPRC  National Provisional Ruling Council. Headed by Captain Valentine Strasser, it overthrew the one-party government of the APC in 1992.

RSLMF  Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces. The constitutional army. It was also referred to as the Sierra Leone Army (SLA). But it became blighted by accusations of collaboration with the RUF. As a means of saving its reputation it was renamed Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) after the war.


SLPP  Sierra Leone People’s Party. Sierra Leone’s oldest party, which led Sierra Leone after independence.
This piece of work is a fusion of parts of my Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) in Sociology research. Its current character is reflective of several noteworthy inputs.

I gratefully acknowledge the drive to proficiency stimulated by Dr Mats Utas of the Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden. His exactions spanned the field research, write up and after. Immense appreciation goes to Professor Jacqueline Knörr of the Max Planck Institute for Anthropology, Germany (my current Head of Department and Doctorate supervisor) for her multiple facilitations. My gratitude also goes to Professor Cyril Obi of the Nordic Africa Institute.

The complexion of the final piece is doubtless the result of the tireless and insight-laden assiduity of Inga-Britt Isaksson Faris, also of the Nordic Africa Institute. Her readings, corrections and suggestions were indispensable to the finished product. And all this she did with remarkable, unflagging patience.
What Are the Foundations of a Senseless War \(^1\)
Phenomenon?

The "civilian" mode of thinking about war is characterised by perception of war as opposite to peace, where peace is considered to be the normal way of living civilised moral, with juridical routines of dealing with unacceptable destruction and man-slaughter leading to punishment. War is a disruption. (Macek 2001:19, as quoted in Richards 2005)

It could be that such a reading coloured the views of Sierra Leoneans and non-Sierra Leoneans alike. The rebel war in Sierra Leone has been given various characterisations. One of the most commonplace characterisations brands it a 'senseless war'. In his book, *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War* (2004a), Ibrahim Abdullah says that the rebel war was 'a protracted and senseless war' (p 4). This senseless-war characterisation features prominently in the aforementioned work and in the discourses of intellectuals and ordinary folk in Sierra Leone and beyond. It was this post-war reading of the civil strife, especially the popularity of the phrase 'senseless war' that warranted me to ask Sierra Leoneans, 'Do you think that the rebel war that started in 1991 and ended in 2000 was a senseless war? Yes or No.' The aggregate response makes interesting reading. The figures in the following table are the result of a breakdown of regional/sectoral responses.

During the war, Bo mounted a stiff resistance against the RUF and became a bastion of and a reference for the success of civil challenge to the RUF. Yet, my question regarding whether the war was senseless or not got as many no-replies as yes-replies in that town. Curiously, only Syke Street in Freetown recorded a maximum number of respondents saying the war was senseless. Ferry Junction, Calaba Town and Kissy were possibly some of the most devastated of places in the rebels' onslaught on the city on 6 January 1999. Yet, in these areas, only 10/18 of the interviewees responded that the war was 'senseless,' whereas 8/18 said it was 'not senseless'. In Newton, an area in the outskirts of east Freetown, a majority of people turned out not to see the rebel war as senseless, despite the fact that Newton suffered heavily from rebel destruction. One would expect that incapacitated people at the war amputees' camp would

1 “War” here refers to the Sierra Leone civil war that started on 23 March 1991 and effectively ended in 2000. It was initiated by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) headed by a Sierra Leonean retired army corporal, Foday Sankoh. At the outset, the main expressed aim of the RUF was to oust the one-party All People’s Congress (APC) government, headed by President Joseph Saidu Momoh.

Table 1: Reponses to whether the war was senseless

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area/region</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Port Loko (inclusive of Lungi)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Bombali</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Kabal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Bo</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Kenema</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Pujehun</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freetown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Syke Street</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Kroo Bay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Kissy/Ferry Junction/Calaba</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Newton</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Goderich/Casaba Farm/Levuma</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsular</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Aberdeen Amputee Camp</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of replies</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, 55.6% responded that the war was senseless; 38.8% responded that it was not senseless; and 5.6% chose the alternative 'don't know.' Yet that same majority of respondents who said 'yes' that the war was senseless, maybe unintentionally, gave reasons why the war was not senseless in the responses to the questions represented in the table below.

Table 2: Main responses to the causes of the war

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Poll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribalism/Nepotism</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Cost of Living</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Consciousness</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect of Education</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injustices</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Governance</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Dissatisfaction</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect of the Military</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Disgruntlement</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grudges</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralisation of Power</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalisation of Some Parts of the Country</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of respondents had previously said the war was senseless, yet only six people responded with ‘Don’t know’. 191 respondents gave one or more (possible) cause(s) for the rebel war. These replies raise some questions such as:

a. What do those who responded that the war was ‘senseless’ mean by ‘senseless’?

b. Is ‘senseless war’ just an adoption of a popular vogue phrase, which came into use during the war and the post-war period and that has stubbornly remained in the Sierra Leone vocabulary?

c. Is it that the people so interviewed mean that the motivations for the war were senseless or that it was the course that the war took that was senseless?

In any case, the responses to the last question reveal that to the majority of Sierra Leoneans, the war was not reasonless; it was not devoid of causes. Indeed most, if not all of the outlined reasons, are conceded by many Sierra Leoneans, scholarly and otherwise, as stimuli for the war. Sahr Kpuneh in Abdullah 2004a concurs with the corruption argument. Though he does not see it as the principal cause, he nonetheless said there was, at state level, ‘a […] lack of accountability – both horizontal and vertical’ (p 90). Further on, Kpuneh says that there were:

[…] general weaknesses. Patronage networks […] transcending and subverting the institution of governance […] state offices and public resources were converted into sources of private wealth among the elite (p 93).

Richard Fanthorpe (2001) observes that President Stevens’ (president of Sierra Leone up to 1985) ‘fundamental strategy was to convert the most productive sectors of the national community (diamonds and foreign exchange) into patrimonial resources’ (p 363).

Most people who gave corruption as a cause for the war gave an impression that this formalisation of the state’s resources was the major bane. The government nucleated what should have been every citizen’s resources but made them the resources of a select few that were compliant to the government in power in general and the head of state in particular. This corruption argument seems tied to two other reasons given for the war: tribalism/nepotism, which polled the second highest, 54; centralisation of political power which polled 7 and marginalisation of some parts of the country, which polled 6. What the country witnessed in the years leading up to the war was a systematic rationing of citizenship. Fred M. Hayward (n.d.) is of the opinion that:

[W]e have witnessed the centralisation of power, the personalisation of authority, and the extension of state control throughout most sectors of civil society … [W]e have observed an overall weakening of the state institutions, the powerful autonomous political and economic spheres of influence, and the fragmentation of some aspects of state control that had guaranteed its hegemony (p 1).

In accordance with the drift of the respondents, tribalism, nepotism and centralisation of political power argument, Hayward (n.d.) moreover observes, ‘Power was further centralised in the hands of the president’ (p 2). ‘In the long run, however, they were ties to the man, not to the institutions of the state’ (p 6). Richard Fanthorpe (2001) sees a nexus between the nucleation of power and the war in the light of the “tribalism-nepotism” argument. He says:

It is noteworthy that during the All Peoples Congress (APC) period the small northern town of Binkolo […] became a major recruiting centre of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF). Stevens’ successor, Joseph Saidu Momoh, began his career as one of its recruits. As APC power began to unravel in the late 1980s, Momoh used a Limba cultural association (Ekutay) as a platform to preach the virtues of ethnic nationalism (p 369).

Ethnic mobilisation in many countries starts in the army: it is a colonial by-product. But in Sierra Leone it became systematised. The Ekutay organisation presents a noteworthy peculiarity. It became an ethnicity-based body that, after crystallising the centralisation of political power, opened itself up to other ethnic group members, especially heavy-weight politicians coming over from the then proscribed Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP). The most outstanding of these nominal tribal cross-overs was when a currently highly-placed eastern Mende SLPP and government official, J. B Dauda, claimed Ekutay citizenship in the late 1980s. It seems that the politician recognised that to have a satisfying slice of the national cake he had to shed his history and previous political principles.

To most Sierra Leoneans, as the research found out, the state shrank leaving the majority of people at the periphery or margins. Yet marginalisation of parts of the country, in spite of its being seen by many scholars as very key, only polled 6. It seems most Sierra Leoneans tend to pay more attention to the effects of marginalisation as a cause of the war
than to marginalisation itself or maybe they have a problem conceptualising marginality itself. Paul Richards (1996), in describing the deprivation of the border regions of Pandebu in the Kailahun District, Eastern Sierra Leone, says: ‘Here, state influence [...] is at its weakest’ (p 127). He adds:

Pandebu had no school at all. Parents in Pandebu were stunned by the fact that national political leaders sometimes sent their own children to expensive schools overseas, drawing on diamond wealth from Pandebu and villages like it [...] In the end it was [...] the remoteness of the state, [...] the weakness of its infrastructure, and the lack of political imagination of its leaders, that served to draw insurgency into this border region. War, feeding upon the frustrations of exiles, not only destroyed villages like Pandebu but threatened the survival of the state (p 138).

‘Exiles’ here refers to situational exiles – exiled from their country within their country. At a slightly broader level of Nomo Chiefdom, which has Pandebu as one of its villages, Richards observes:

Nomo Chiefdom is one of the smallest and most remote administrative units in eastern Sierra Leone [...] But none of the villages [...] has access to the road network of either country [i.e. Sierra Leone or Liberia]. Lacking schools or any other state facilities these communities are law unto themselves (p 4).

Abdullah’s book (2004a) is, in part, a reaction to Richards’ book (1996). It contests the reasons Richards proffers for the rebel war and the weight Richards put on some causes. But in huge measures though, the two books are in agreement. Yusuf Bangura’s chapter in Abdullah 2004a, for example, concedes the effectiveness of the Pandebu phenomenon as causal to the war (pp 14–15). In unworded unity with Richards, Sahr Kpundeh, in Abdullah (2004a), observes that:

There were also distributional grievances emanating from rural isolation and ethnic and regional rivalries [...] Stevens regime aggravated isolation of rural Sierra Leone – home to 80 percent of the population and producing much of the country’s wealth through [...] deprivation of the rural areas of electricity, pipe-borne water, telecommunication facilities [...] The railway linking the rural areas to Freetown was dismantled in the late 1960s with no new network of road connecting Freetown and the Hinterland (p 93).

In fact, some roads were built, but they connected only the towns to other towns; the link to rural communities from the mainstream of the state was broken. The Pandebu phenomenon earlier discussed seems to represent that microcosm of the degenerative state of Sierra Leone unravelling into a war: the country’s many were suffering organised neglect and poverty, in stark contrast with the country’s natural wealth. Importantly, even areas that produced the country’s natural wealth were not rewarded with individual human and structural development.

‘Marginalisation’ did not carry a heavy weighting in my respondents’ responses, yet its basis, which underlay many of the other reasons given, justifies its further treatment. A profound assessment of Sierra Leone’s rebel war will put at its heart how the state was realised in Sierra Leone, or rather how it was abstracted from its citizenry. In the introduction of ‘The State and Its Margin: Comparative Ethnographies’ (n.d.), Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004) say:

The first approach [of rethinking the state] gave primacy to the idea of margins as peripheries seen to form natural contenders for people considered insufficiently socialized into the law [...] The second [...] hinges around issues of legibility and illegibility [...] Yet a third approach focuses on the margin as a space between bodies, law and discipline. After all, sovereign power exercised by the state is not only about territories, it’s also about bodies (pp 9–10).

Sierra Leoneans certainly do not think Sierra Leone’s war to be causeless. ‘Marginalisation’, though not recognised as a key factor, shares roots with corruption, tribalism, poverty, centralisation of power and bad governance, among other factors. In this situation the marginalised would aspire to three things: their individual and collective humanity; their individual and collective citizenship(s) and their survival. The mode of achieving these goals could be violent, either by the marginalised becoming the prime practitioners of their own assertion of humanity/citizenship or by becoming agents stimulated by others. The RUF sensed a state that had abdicated its responsibility; it understood that the people were feeling the pinch of state mismanagement-borne poverty and presented itself as a redemptive force for change in the people’s welfare, and carried it on a populist platter. (See RUF/SL 1995: Footpaths to Democracy. Towards a New Sierra Leone.) RUF sensed the margins of the state reflected in Kailahun and launched its anti-state project there. Richards says, ‘Pandebu floated in political limbo. The RUF stepped smartly into the breach’ (p 137).

Some of the respondents gave poverty as a cause. Poverty polled a total of 28. Abdullah (2004a) observes the following of the years preceding the wars.
'The economic downturn in the early 1980s was partly fuelled by the lavish hosting of the [Sierra Leone’s] OAU [Organisation of African Unity] conference in 1980’ (p 48). Indeed poverty itself is marginalisation. All of these ‘hard times’ were punctuated by news of embezzlements, ‘vouchergate’ and ‘squandergate’ in government circles and the APC-amenable civil service. ‘Vouchergate’ refers to the scandal that resulted when officials manipulated numbers on vouchers and signed for deceased or transferred government workers. ‘Squandergate’ refers to official theft outside the ‘vouchergate’ order. Despite its abundant natural wealth, Sierra Leone had a vast number of poor citizens – nominal citizens, but not economic citizens; this undue deprivation was a stark contrast to the nuclei of prosperity for government and associates – fellow Sierra Leoneans and foreigners. Fanthorpe (2001) comments that chiefs and local authorities of the provinces ‘doled’ out citizenships to those Sierra Leoneans whom the chiefs’ adjudged qualified. Within their chiefdoms, the chiefs simply dramatised the practices that obtained at state level. This shows how the inadequacies of failed states are configured in effective micro-states within the state.

Boás and Jennings (2005) say:

‘State failure’ assumes all states are constituted and function in the same way; on a spectrum from good to bad. Yet the relevant question is not “Is the state failing?” but for whom is the state failing, and how? This captures the fact that different actors within the state have different interests; what is good for some informalised power structures that enable elite consolidation of power and profit may not be good for ordinary citizens [...] The concept of state failure is only useful in the context of human security as it enables a fuller description of the realities and coping strategies in the state, taking into account agency, interests and incentives on the part of various local, natural and regional actors (p 385).

The government only granted the generality of Sierra Leoneans nominal citizenship, which, in any case, they would have acquired by birthright. The government denied a vast sector of the population, rural and urban, economic and political citizenship. This state-cast structural deprivation seems to be at the heart of ‘general dissatisfaction,’ given by respondents as a reason for the war. ‘High cost of living’ ‘hunger’ and of course, ‘poverty,’ were also given by respondents.

This state of being poses a justification for looking at the state’s preferences. Sierra Leone degeneration into a failed state needs to be looked at within Michel Foucault’s governmentality framework. Das and Poole (2004), attempt to articulate the Foucauldian building blocks of governmentality ‘bio-power’ and its twin ‘bio-politics’. Akhil Gupta (2001:67) takes it further. On that premise we see that Foucault thus proffers a re-conceptualising of governing. “Security” referred to here is not security such as could be the product of the state’s monopoly of violence (which the latter sees as primal to the definition of state). This security is akin to human security defined by UNDP and quoted in Boás and Jennings (2005)

It is concerned with human life and dignity. Human life is people-centred...first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease, and repression. And second it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life—whether in homes, jobs or in communities (UNDP, 1994:22–23).

It is a sign of security that the people, the citizens of a state, are satisfied and have access to the material resources and social services of that state. It is the sort of security that comes about when a people are facillitated towards and secure in their social, economic and political citizenship as a matter of right. Regarding governmentality, Akhil Gupta (2001) adds:

Foucault argues that [...] the population became the object of sovereign power and discipline in a new way, so that the growth of the welfare of the population within a given territory, the optimization of its capabilities and productivity, became the goal of government [...] The goal of “good government” became not simply the exercise of authority over people within a territory or the ability to discipline and regulate them but fostering their prosperity and happiness (p 67).

It is clear that Sierra Leone’s pre-war political dispensation, maybe even the post-war political dispensation, did not pay attention to its population but to its mineral and material resources. Neither did it affix a value to maintaining its hold on territory. Dunn (2004) say:

Furthermore, government claims of territorial integrity are highly dubious, as vast sections of territory remain outside the control of many African regions [...] The continent is increasingly made up of “states without citizens” (p 148).

Ferme (2004) says, ‘Liberia and Sierra Leone were referred to as shadow states characterised by the emergence of rulers drawing from their ability to control markets and their material rewards’ (p 81).
Ferme’s characterisation could be considered as one that fits the ‘war scape’ of the NPFL and RUF; yet this characterisation is applicable even to the state of Sierra Leone, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. As stated earlier, the focus of Sierra Leone’s statecraft was not on its population, as resources, but on mineral and material resources. These two foci were emblematised in the Natural Diamond Mining Company (NDMC) and Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board (SLPMB). These two institutions were mainstays of convenience in the one-party system of government. Later the Sierra Fishing Company contended for primacy in funding the government’s activities. The heads of these three institutions, especially the latter two, provided the first home-grown millionaires that the country bore witness to.

Does this mean that Sierra Leone had not an experience of governmentality in operation? It had, although only in name. What really operated was the adoption of a warped species of governmentality that placed an emphasis on making a select few people economically secure, and the government adopted control of the larger population by centralising political power and advanced forms of vertical politico-economic networks that governmentalised people as subjects rather than citizens. Insofar as the welfare of the entire population and the management of its territory are concerned the government adopted what seems to be organised dissociation. Organised dissociation from tending to its entire territory was sustained because it served government re-inforcing purposes. Ferme (2004) observes:

Sierra Leone’s Kono region, where the country’s richest diamond veins were located, had its own security, licensing and pass system to control the movement of a large and potentially restless population of young male diamond diggers – and this for well over two decades before the onset of the war (p 82).

Evidently, the government disengaged itself from this critical part of Sierra Leone territory (i.e. Kono District, east of Sierra Leone) because NDMC prescribed that this was necessary for optimalising the production of diamonds. In essence, government operated a proxy monopoly. The one party dispensation left Kailahun virtually ‘de-stated’ from the Sierra Leone mainstream. But this was a veritable punitive action. Richards (1996) notes that that punitive detachment existed in Kenema and Kailahun Districts in the east, which the government read as essentially its opposition bases. The state shrank, not because the leaders lacked the ability to build schools and hospitals in Pandebu (in the Kailahun District) due to scarcity of material resources, but because the government wanted to perpetuate its own economic security and that of its chosen few (from within the Sierra Leone population, and foreigners like the Lebanese Jamil S. Mohamed and Shaptai Kalmonowitch who both became wealthy by dealing in diamonds and marine resources, respectively (Abdullah 2004b:75–82)). In 2005 Sierra Leone had a declared democracy. Its government professed that the state had ‘territorial integrity’. Yet to date Sierra Leoneans in Kambia District, in the north of Sierra Leone incessantly complain of resource-aimed forays that Guinean troops make in Kambia District. What is even more dramatic is that Guineans have occupied the diamondiferous area of Yenga in Sierra Leone. Yenga in the Kissy Teng Chiefdom is in Kailahun District – the same district that Sierra Leone’s war started in. Yenga is a piece of land that was a part of Sierra Leone until Guineans occupied it in 2000, claiming that rebels that attacked Guinea came from there. On 27 May 2005, an article entitled “Guinean troops say … We will not leave Yenga” in the Sierra Leone tabloid, The Exclusive reported:

As they continue to fortify their illegal occupations of Yenga, the Guinean troops are reported to have vowed that they will not leave this Sierra Leone territory until further notice (p 1).

What is more, the Guinean soldiers are reported by locals to be mining diamonds and beating up non-compliant Yenga dwellers to date.

In this multi-party dispensation, the government is professedly attempting to governmentalise the Sierra Leone state. It conducted a census in 2004 to ascertain the number of its citizens and understand its composition for possible systemic welfare-provisioning. That is a very important first step in the governmentality notion because managing a population would of necessity start with having a fair knowledge of the number of people under prospective management. But, ironically, the resources for carrying out the census were provided by the European Union and other external funders. The government is also adopting the governmentality-prescribed prerequisites by providing partially free education, and is toying with the notion of social security by establishing the National Social Security Insurance Trust (NASSIT). Yet, this research reveals that Sierra Leoneans generally feel displeased about the current socio-economic state of the state. Instructively, people articulated a preference for past
political dispensations whose terminations the same people agitated for when they were in power. The crystallisation of these general displeasures is enunciated in local rap/pop songs sung by the country’s socio-economically and largely marginalised youth. Apparently, the general population appreciates such songs. This reveals that the essence of governmentality is a ‘good government’ that fosters its citizens’ ‘prosperity and happiness’, especially within a secure and secured territory.

The respondents polled 22 for ‘injustice’ as a cause of the war. Indeed, injustice is a natural offspring of centralised political governments. Justice and rights were determined not by dictates of the rule of law but by the whims of the justice dispenser. When speaking about President Stevens, Fred M. Hayward (n.d.) states: ‘He worked to consolidate power and assert control over the approaches of the state. Those in positions of authority became personally responsible to him’ (p 4).

Richard Fanthorpe (2001), in similar terms states, “It is also noteworthy that attempts by the APC regime to impose paramount chiefship candidates of its own choosing in chieftaincy councils, a strategy for controlling networks of access to mineral deposits and other resources, often met with fierce and protracted local resistance (p 383).

When a justice dispenser is handed the right to decide on the rights of others; when a justice dispenser is propelled not by equity, but by satisfying the dictate of the central government, injustice is democratised, and this inevitably breeds grudges. This could result in the aggrieved ‘taking the law into his/her hands’ if the offender is a fellow-‘small fry’. But if the offender is a ‘big man’, it could lead to building up of anger and grudges to be ventilated, whenever, if ever, the opportunity presents itself. Yusuf Bangura (2004) states:

The RUF war fed or ignited deep seated local conflicts in the war zone […] Rebels selected which houses to burn; who to kill first (based on information supplied by willing or coerced local dissidents) – opponents in local communities whose politics had been influenced by the strategies of the national party (p 31).

Therefore, in this light the rebel war became a means of getting even, of eliminating perceived stumbling blocks to aggrieved citizens ‘happiness and prosperity.’ To be sure, some practitioners of the war were compelled through conscription, but it seems most people, uninduced, seized the opportunity to get their own back on previously perceived indestructible dinosaurs. Respondents gave the ‘Neglect of the Military’ a poll point of 11. It did not poll much, but it is significant enough to merit a discussion. Ibrahim Abdullah (2004a) contends that: “From 1970, when the first attempt to unseat the government [i.e., the APC government] was made by Brigadier John Bangura and others for which Foday Sankoh, the future RUF leader was jailed, to the alleged coup attempt involving Mohamed Sorie Forna and fourteen others, to the fraudulent elections of 1973 and 1977, the APC party did all it could to stifle the opposition and consolidate power” (p 43).

Arthur Abraham (2004) in support indicts: ‘The state’s inability to carry out these basic duties such as defending its territorial integrity or protecting the lives and property of its citizens undermines the collective interests of the state’ (p 104). Bøås and Jennings (2005) advise that scholars and non-scholars alike should note that, ‘conflict zones in addition to being understood as an “environment of extreme uncertainty”’, should be conceptualised as lived social spaces’ (p 393).

The reason for the inability that Abraham imputes is traceable to Abdullah’s analysis. In an apparent attempt to appropriate control over the army, its opponents and the country as a whole, and thereby ensure its affluence and perpetuation in power, the APC government emasculated the army, taking away its teeth (i.e. enough and new weapons) that it could have used to bite it with. It instead equipped the para-military Internal Security Unit (ISU) to quell dissent. In a bid to tame the army into something of a private project of compliance, the APC dominated the army with potentially pliant subjects. Jimmy Kandeh (2004) says that:

The RSLMF during the pre-war period was about one thousand five hundred (1,500) strong and was largely made up of nominees of the APC party’s fat cats who were recruited into the force by a patronage system designed by ex-president Siaka Stevens to ensure that the army remained loyal to the army (p 149).

Fanthorpe (2001:369) speaks in similar terms. Regarding the strengthening of the government’s hold on the army and a further decimation of its revolting capacity, Yusuf Bangura (2004) says, ‘Labour, army, and police leaders were made members of parliament under the APC’s one party regime, but this was part of a strategy to prevent unions, army officers and the police from disturbing the APC order’ (p 27).
It could be seen then that Sierra Leone’s war was not senseless but pithy and purpose-driven, although complicated.

Ever-Integrating Youth: An Amorphous and Elastic Arsenal

The Sierra Leonean youth felt neglected both by the society and the state. At the same time they could see that the government was striving to satisfy senior army officers with heavily subsidized rice from China. Those who lived in barracks and billets had access to free power supply. Yet there were varying displeasures in the army having to do with junior soldiers being deprived of their rice quotas on flimsy accusations from senior officers. Soldiers were sent to the war-front at times as punishment. And, in a reflection of the army’s structured inability, the soldiers at the war-front were heavily outnumbered and outgunned by an evidently more motivated RUF (it is argued that most of the guns and much of the ammunition that the RUF had and used were captured from the army at the beginning of the war). Kandeh (2004) says:

Koroma [i.e. Johnny P. Koroma who took over power from the SLPP government in 1997 and united with the RUF to govern] himself appears to be at the centre of the ‘sobel’ [soldier by day, rebel by night] phenomenon. Reported to have been a delinquent even in high school, Koroma joined the army in the early 1990s and quickly rose through the ranks due to his connections with first the APC, and the NPRC leadership. As head of a detachment of troops stationed at the Sierra Rutile Mining Company […] he was believed to have connived with the rebel leaders to take over the mines and loot the company’s property (p 96).

It seems the soldiers recognised their inadequacy to match the physical and logistic presence of the RUF, as well as the power of its convictions. Richards (1996) observes that:

These ill-equipped, ill-paid war zone soldiers are especially vulnerable to ambush from determined youngsters, high on fear-inhibiting drugs, and well-drilled in forest combat. It would be understandable if some RSLMF soldiers took a safety first approach, and made informal contact with the enemy, to negotiate local deals on supplies, to minimize the risk of being cut off in a surprise attack (p 23).

In a very real part-governmentality adoption, the government employed control to ensure a veneer of compliance and stability. But in an anti-governmen-
through highly individual means.’ Within this period, many soldiers demanded to be sent to fight with ECOMOG in Liberia – certainly for economic gain. Then, the powers-that-be ‘dole out’ the ECOMOG opportunity tickets to their preferred officers. War, for the socio-economic youth of Liberia and Sierra Leone, was an entrée, which illuminates why this deprived class moved across borders to fight with and across factions. Having only nominal citizenship, these young people sought socio-economic citizenship trans-border. Lacking emotional unity with the parent country, geographical boundaries were a bridge, not an encumbrance. The fact that Liberian youth, in rebellion, sought wealth through plunder and that ECOMOG youth also looted shows: shared experiences of the gun-actors; shared objects for entering into war; and shared expectations for the outcome of war. In his amazing show of lateral thinking, Gunther Schlee (2002:154) observes

In the conceptual pair ‘integration and conflict’, ‘Conflict’ may be understood as counterpart and opposite of ‘integration’; where integration fails conflicts arise. From certain perspectives however, the contrast vanishes. If one sees how even in open warfare opponents become similar in terms of their rhetoric and symbolism [...] then one recognizes that conflicts too, are systems of communication into which one can be integrated.

In the Liberia and Sierra Leone situations it was not shared rhetoric and symbolism that united youth in warfare; it was primarily because of shared deprivation, inspiration and aspiration to survival that co-belligerants were integrated.

Respondents gave a 39 rating to ‘unemployment’ while ‘neglect of education’ (including its high cost) polled 30 and ‘youth disgruntlement’ polled a mere 10 as reasons for the war. Why did respondents give so little value to youth disgruntlement? According to the respondents’ personal accounts of the war ‘the rebels were mostly youth’. Even the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration proved it. Yet youth’s disgruntlement was not, maybe still is not, considered a cause that is significant enough for their entry into the war. The reason for this seems to lie in the hazy, sometimes credible perceptions of youth in Sierra Leone civil war as victims rather than perpetrators. Another reason is the ambiguous conceptions of youth.

Some of the inherent controversies and contradictions regarding youth are detectable in interviewees’ responses. When I asked, ‘Who do you consider a youth?’ only 10% of the respondents (mostly formally educated) gave a definition within the current government’s definition (18 to 35 years). 2.7% describe youth, not in terms of numbers, but in descriptive terms as those who are in the ghettos and idle. For instance, a civil servant in Bo says, ‘a youth is any man or woman active and vulnerable to temptation when idle’. A secretary said, ‘anyone who considers himself or herself strong enough.’ A middle-aged man in Makeni in northern Sierra Leone said ‘anybody at the helm of some community activity’.

Some saw youth in strictly male terms. 6.8% of the respondents defined youth as ‘youth man’ or ‘young men’. A chief’s wife said a youth is ‘a young man working for the good of society.’ A demobilised Kamajor (i.e. civil defence forces, mainly hunters, who fought against the RUF) in Bo defined youth as ‘the large sector of able bodied men who rise up when the need arises.’ A demobilised rebel in Bo spoke of youth as ‘a young man striving to be a man’. Yet, most respondents, about 90%, saw youth as both male and female. Only about 8% saw youth as male-specific. About 2% replied that they did not know what youth was.

Further variances about what limits define youth showed as the research progressed. A man in the Sul-pond Fakai, Mambo village on the Freetown peninsula said youth is ‘from twelve years upwards’ — no upper limit. Another respondent, also from Mambo, said ‘people from eighteen to sixty-five years.’ A youth leader in the Pottor community, Western Freetown said youth includes ‘anyone from seven to thirty-five years.’ A Sierra Leonean resident in America, who was on holiday in Sierra Leone said ‘from infancy to teenage.’ A war-amputee said ‘from one to thirty-five years.’ A teacher residing in Newton, Freetown, said ‘from zero to eighteen years’. It seems the age starting point was brought so low because of the association of youth with inability. A respondent in Kabala in northern Sierra Leone said, non-sex-determinedly ‘a youth is a sufferer.’ Others see youth in the light of their consciousness and responsiveness to situations. A male resident in Bo in southern Sierra Leone, said a youth is ‘a concerned citizen of a country.’ A middle-aged man within the age range of fifty-one to fifty-five in Port Loko in the north of Sierra Leone said a youth is ‘a conscious man.’

These varied appreciations of youth define youth as a diversely represented and diversely representative group. It also smacks of the youth not being seen as actors in their own right but as beings in transition. De Boeck and Honwana (2004) corroboratively note: ‘youth are often seen in the process of becom-
ing rather than being’ (p 3). They add that it is not adequate to view youth ‘simply as proto-adults or future beings but rather as beings-in-the-present and social actors with an identity of their own’ (p 4).

In the sociology of Sierra Leone’s past leading up to the war, youth were not agents of their own, but agents of others’ will. Donal Cruise O’Brien (1996) says:

It has been convincingly argued that the youth of postcolonial Africa in general have an unpromising political role. These young people are very poorly equipped to make their opposition effective with their limited reasons; they are easily manipulated by their elders (p 95).

Much earlier in Sierra Leone’s history, social actors saw and pursued an effective ‘wealth in people phenomenon’ as Bledsoe (2002) observes. But the effective agents-for-others phenomenon of youth attested its presence in Sierra Leone from the late 1960s. And from that onset, it seems a story of marginalisation and undervaluing of the youth. Abdullah (2004a) says,

Their [the youth’s] marginalisation was expressed in party youth wings; an arm of the party always peripheral to where real power was located. Their performance could therefore be read as ritualised; it always began with a crisis situation and their mobilization as thugs to do their dirty work (p 44).

But he cautions:

This reading of the political role of youth does not mean that all those who joined the so-called youth wing were all thugs. But their role was strictly limited to action-oriented tasks; such as the arson of Ginger Hall […] and the assault on students at Fourah Bay College in 1977 (p 44).

De Boeck and Honwana (2004) observe that the concept of youth as a social category is a recent one. Yet it seems that with the gradual adoption and recognition of the youth as a social group, they often became mainly marginalised and when they were recognised, they were recognised as agents of the objectives of others, including politicians. These ‘thuggery’ conceptions of youth still loom large in the minds of the people interviewed. Did the one party government care for the youth? I think it did care for its ‘youth’. In fact, this is one of my arguments regarding governmentality. Pa Shaki2 controlled or manipulated the youth into compliance and to perform his and the party’s wishes. They were provided with food, money and, at times, alcohol. But they

2. ‘Pa Shaki’ was the nickname that Sierra Leoneans gave to President Siaka Stevens.

were also given education and scholarship to Cuba and the Soviet Union (Yusuf Bangura 2004). It was a matter of caring for and rewarding the government’s children, in social terms (in addition to their biological children and relations) and their foot soldiers. Yet, one thing these youth lacked was latitude – agency to act freely, according to their own will. Abdullah observes that Akibo Betts, who graduated from APC party youthdom to become a successful politician, was a product of this action-orientated-rewards system. Therefore, it can be concluded that people are conditioned to act according to the will of the providers of their needs’ satisfaction. Some of the graduates of the thuggery on behalf of the APC and sycophancy were incorporated into the para-military Internal Security Unit (ISU). I think it is the warped adoption of governmentality that resulted in the government shrinking the state to a virtual monocracy that dispensed the resources of state with the aim of destroying opposition to the supreme aim of its political perpetuation. In the economic downturn that resulted, social services such as education, health and feeding suffered. As Rashid (2004) observes when the state institutions are informalised to such an extent that patrimonialism-dictated emotional, political and familial ties replace bureaucracy, the economy is bound to be incapacitated. This is the underlying reality of respondent’s replies such as ‘neglect of education’ and ‘lack of access to education’ – dealt with at the beginning of this work.

A similarly highly rated cause of the war was the ‘lack of employment’. Indeed this is, in my view, the basis of the low rated, but nonetheless significant, ‘youth disgruntlement’. Drawing on Hargreaves, Ismail Rashid (2004) notes, ‘Government supervision and funding, especially in the 1970s exposed the problem faced by the state as government’s fiscal position worsened in the 1970s and 80s’ (p 70).

Abdullah (2004a) continues by pointing to the bleak scenario:

For the 1974/75 fiscal year, the expenditure on education totalled 15.6% of government expenditure; this was reduced to 8.5% in 1988/89 fiscal year. Similarly, expenditure on health and housing dropped from 6.6% to 4.8% (respectively) in the same period to about 2.9% to 0.3% respectively (p 48).

What could be the reason for this fiscal fiasco? Well, it is expensive to run a shrunken state of cohorts and collaborators, with ever-growing felt-needs for further aggrandisement and, at the same time, for that shrunken state to spread a false impression of
the state’s effect over the rest of its territory – and among a deprived population. The result of all this seems to be what my respondents referred to as ‘general dissatisfaction’. In the general discontent that the incipient failed state engendered, it seems that most Sierra Leoneans suffered; yet it was the youth that were more forthright in their expressions of the general dissatisfaction. Rashid observes that ‘potes’ (i.e. places where youth converge to smoke marijuana and abuse other drugs) became the veritable poor-man’s parliament – where at least they could air these displeasures. He says that these ‘potes’ became ‘an embracing of the educated and the intellectually unfortunate’ (p 79).

Why did the educated youth of Fourah Bay College and high school pupils congregate with the ‘pote’ folk to vent these dissatisfactions? The answer lies in the explanation Richards (1996) gives for why RUF fused with the NPRC and AFRC soldiers. He says, ‘Young combatants are clear about the specific circumstantial reasons they fight against each other. But they are even clearer about what they were fighting for – namely education and jobs’ (p 174). The reason for the fusion of youth or integration between the ghettos and youth in academia is that they shared a common ground of deprivation, exclusion and idleness. Childhood also easily fuses into youth. Utas (2003:8) observes that, ‘to be a child implies being deprived of human agency.’ This is a deprivation that youth also suffered. They also shared a common ground of deprivation. When the University of Sierra Leone’s Fourah Bay College students revolted against the status quo in 1977, the ISU crushed this show of dissent with effective brutality. Yet Rashid (2004) says, ‘A younger generation of the youth and school children gave critical support to the students’ demands’ (p 79).

Even former adversaries configured themselves on this platform of shared circumstances. The NPRC seems to have breached RUF’s trust by not making the latter partners of their political dispensation in 1992. Instead the NPRC, in a bid to fight the RUF swelled the army by including jobless youth in a crash recruitment programme. Seemingly sensing compositional similarities in the new frontline soldiers, the RUF put aside its bitterness with the hierarchs of the NPRC and made these soldiers at the front see that both sets of fighters were situation-al twins who need not fight each other. They thus teamed up. The common enemy became the new gerontocrats: the NPRC government, with its collaborators (RUF/SL 1995, Foreward: paragraphs 3, 5, 6, 9, 16; ‘Why Armed Struggle?’ para 5; ‘Why We Continue to Fight’ paras 3, 5–7). This emotional union midwifed the sobel (soldier by day and rebel by night) (See Richards 1996:13). Richards (1996:77) says, ‘The NPRC government soon lost control of its enlarged but hastily trained army’.

Before the war, the geographical expression of the state had lost its ability to mount or countenance an effective means to articulate dissent by formalised means. Therefore, the situationally-driven youth stepped in the breach to bring about change, in whatever measure, by whatever means. This is a transformation of identity and role of the youth. They graduated from agents impelled by others to agents impelled by the situation to stand up for the poor generally and later the supreme self. According to Humphreys, et al (2004:2), ‘The RUF was a group of mutual strangers [i.e. in terms of their origins and parentages] […] The CDF on the other hand originated from a tight network of families, friends and communities’.

Yet the RUF youth were anything but ill-assorted. Youth in Sierra Leone became, not an age expression, but an embracing of deprivation. The differing definitions of youth that came from the respondents clearly points that out. The most unique definition of youth came from a fifty-one to fifty-five year old man in Kabala, who said, ‘We all in Sierra Leone now are suffering from hard times; so we are all youth.’ This relating of youth with socio-economic powerlessness is shared by Utas (2003), who in his aforementioned treatise says, ‘Youth is not primarily about chronological age but dependency on elders’. In applying to Sierra Leone’s reality, elders could mean socio-economic and/or political adults. But why were the youth at the vanguard of resistance to the establishment? I think the answer is traceable in the interviewees’ responses to the question: ‘Why do you think that youth formed a key part of the rebel movement?’ The following constitute the responses that received the most votes important polls.

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3. At that time the Fourah Bay College (FBC) was the only university in Sierra Leone; now there are two universities in the country. Because of its academic primacy, it was seen as the only viable opposition to the one-party government.
Table 3: Responses to the question why the youth formed a big part of the RUF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Poll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were mostly affected by/they were most dissatisfied with the system</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were longing for positive change</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school/educational system was not working/expensive</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were physically fit</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The drive for material needs</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth are easy to mislead</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Available scholarship provides supportive literature to all of the responses listed above. ‘Unemployment’ polled 70 and therefore justifiably merits separate treatment. But since employment is most often supposed to be an end to the process of education, I will treat them jointly, though ‘education’ polled only 28. As stated earlier, when the economy took a nose-dive it had domino effects on all spheres of society, education not being an exception. Richards (1996), commenting on the near-wrecked state of affairs says: ‘In the 1970s the group [i.e. of malcontents] included many high school dropouts and some unfortunate ‘O’ and ‘A’ Level students, mostly unemployed’ (p 44). Richards (2005) definitively says, ‘The civil war in Sierra Leone mobilised young people marginalised by poverty, educational disadvantage and injustice’ (p 117). Even graduates could not pick up employment that matched the quality and character of years of study. For them the “potes” became plebeian parliaments, stress-relievers and time-wasters. If they were employable, yet unemployed because of the nearly closed labour system, what about the dropouts and uneducated who were in the majority? Cruise O’Brien (1996) says that ‘the partially educated young people have new expectations in terms of jobs, of income, of lifestyle’ (p 100). Of the youth unemployment situation, the Economic Commission for Africa’s (ECA) Situation Analysis of Youth in Africa Report (1996) says, ‘Presently youth constitute 60–75 percent of the unemployed in African countries although they represent only a third of the total labour force’ (p 45). On the educated unemployment situation, the Report says, ‘youth employment is the biggest social problem, especially educated unemployment is the biggest problem countries have to contend with’ (p 5). The problem of youth employment was recognised by the OAU as a transnational problem, and it seems that the problem in Sierra Leone increased significantly through bad governance, a centralisation-induced closed system and the state of economic malaise. Abdullah (2004a) says:

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 down-signing […] In this grim economic context, the so-called informal sector, the natural abode of the lumpen proletariat ballooned as a result of the continued influx of an army of unemployed secondary school leavers, dropouts and university graduates (p 48).

Poverty polled 23. But poverty here seems to be descriptive of youth’s state of economic inability brought about by parents’/families’ inability to provide succour for young men and women who lacked access to legitimate means of survival. Both youth and their parents seem to be suffering from state-sanctioned economic inability. So poverty is, on one hand, a self-referential cause and an effect on the other. ‘Youth are easily misled’ polled 17. Yes, they can be, as the cases of youth as thugs, recounted earlier, might exemplify. Yet in my view, the rebel call to rally seems a means of assuring young people of their humanity, and some youth were stimulated by their new roles and opportunities.

I will treat, together, three prominent reasons given for youth involvement in the RUF war. These are: ‘they were physically fit,’ which polled 23; ‘they were mostly affected by/they were most dissatisfied with the system’, which polled 50 and ‘they were longing for positive change’ which polled 39. Taken together, I think these responses provide a very good answer to the previous question I asked ‘Why youth?’ – Why were the youth more ready than others to make a stand against ‘the system’? I agree that they are physically fit and youth offer a lot of prospects for getting things done; this ability contrasts with impediments due to (old) age. The fact that the youth were the most affected by and dissatisfied with the system could be one of the interpretations. Youth is a state of aspiration and an assertion of humanity. There are urges to get a good education and a paying job, marry and have a family and, if possible, live a life of utter convenience. Humphreys et al. (PRIDE 2004:2) state that the ‘RUF combatants were promised jobs, money and women; during the war they received women, drugs and sometimes valuable goods.’ If the socio-economic-political system was standing in opposition to that realisation youth
are bound to be confused. Is it any wonder that they should long for positive change? As Ali El-Kenz sees it, one should expect that the youth, not the old, will (re-)act in such circumstances, especially in towns and cities, where the island of extremely rich shoots up in a sea of poverty, which they, the youth swim in. El-Kenz (1996) says: ‘Within the urban sprawl […] vast differences in standards of living and lifestyles separate the well-to-do, often nouveau riche, from the vast majority of residents. The city is cruel […] The elderly are resigned to the state of affairs, but not the younger generation. Quite the contrary’ (p 55).

In the pre-war period, youth’s future seemed destablisingly bleak. Others of their age were living lives of utter affluence. While they, the huddled masses, were mere voyeurs of their own aspirations. Parents could not provide for their youth because they, the parents themselves, were socio-economic youth. The state could not provide for the youth because it was choosy about whom to grant socio-economic adulthood. For such youth, the war became a passage to delayed or accelerated adulthood. It was an attempt to move from the margins into the centre.(Utas 2003:15; Humphreys, et al. 2004:2).

The persistent high-scoring reason ‘unemployment’ for Sierra Leoneans taking their fate in their own hands deserves special attention. This shows that, in spite of popular misconceptions, youth do not want to be perpetually idle (as they themselves said during the interviews). Yet employment can be seen as both an end and as a means to an end. If state provisioning does not make education accessible and meaningful to the country’s needs, structurally the youth would still be misfits in society. If after going through the educational process, they cannot be employed, they would still be marginalised. If they are employed and the wages/salaries and conditions of service are good, then employment will not be a valuable means to an end. Youth, as well as adults and the elderly, will explore means to an end for survival reasons – and the means might not always be legitimate. Marques (1999) observes that in such a situation ‘young people’s crimes are sometimes their only means of survival. Thus their delinquent acts represent among other things, economic strategies’ (p 6). This finding matches with the following quote from Peters and Richards (2004), who spoke with an ex-combatant linked with the SLA:

“How many years did you stay in the army?” He responded “One year and six months. I liked it in the army because we could do anything we liked to do. When some civilian had something I liked, I just took it without him doing anything to me. We used to rape women. Anything I wanted to do [I did]. I was free (p 93).”

It is in this light I see respondents’ replies to why youth entered into Sierra Leone war-craft: ‘the drive for material needs’ and ‘to loot.’ Youth is a consumer-ist essence and El-Kenz (1996) attempts, justifiably, to read this into this phenomenon:

Can they [i.e. the youth] be blamed if they prefer the shiny image of the western dream to the sinister reality of daily existence? People in other parts of the world may have the same fantasies but they do not share the same reality (p 56).

What was and is the Sierra Leone reality? Sierra Leone has a lot of minerals, material and environmental resources but in Sierra Leone’s perverse adoption of the essence of governmentality, government and it supportive agencies govern the other resources but do not govern potentially its most important resources – humans, a key sector of whom is the youth. In this paradoxical situation, war is a means of turning a pyramid upside-down. Through war the youth attempted to put their large and long deprived pauperised base at the top. War was an aspiration to resource-accessing, but that upturned pyramid was only sustainable within that war period. In the closed and limiting system that the pre-war state begot, it was war that granted youth long-denied facilitation.

It is in this light that youth’s entrance into the apparent anti-state project could be interpreted. The war, which was the culmination of the mismanagement of Sierra Leone’s resources, in entirety, became a source of employment, a source of survival and a source of making dreams become reality. Richards (1996) says that the youth ‘freely admit that at the first news of the RUF insurgency they were tempted to join the rebels and live their dream’ (p 88).

The variety of the youth membership in combat company was not exclusive to the national army. Youth, contrary to the gerontocratic mould of thinking, was not averse to work/employment. The pre-war army was an exclusive class of prenominated gerontocrats-to-be. The war opened up membership of the army. In an inversion of the warped convention, the gerontocrats did not want to recruit their favourite sons and daughters to go into an enterprise that would put them in harm’s way. Therefore it was the dregs of society—the perceived unpersoned, unparented, undervalued and nobody’s darlings—that were ‘employed’ to shore up the state that fostered
their marginalisation. The RUF’s recruits were similarly composed. The fighters and those whom they fought against were thus integrated, as illustrated by Schlee’s conception of war as integration. Incidentally, as the Sierra Leone army grew it became increasingly similar in its trappings to the rebels. Both sets of fighters wore similarly discoloured weather-beaten military fatigues. At times, like seemingly disagreeable twins, they both even wore slippers to fight – as boots were in short supply. At times, both got newer uniforms, boots and helmets when enemy combatants or their colleagues fell. Humphreys, et al. (2004) state: ‘The vast majority of combatants across factions were uneducated and poor. Many had left school before the war started either due to lack of fees or because schools had closed down. Many were still students when they joined the factions’ (p 12).

Richard Fanthorpe (2001) states:

Ex-combatants from both sides voiced their anger at a political elite that they alleged had abandoned ordinary Sierra Leoneans to their fate while squandering the country’s resources and patronising the educational and health facilities […] Some had nevertheless found compensation for lost educational opportunities in combat-training (p 370).

So war-craft was the means of employment, survival, access to the adult world of sex, fathering and marriage: war brought grist to the mill. It was reported during the war, especially when the rebels seized Kono, that young rebels took off their rag-like old clothes and donned newer and flashier clothes, they stole large tape-recorders and made them into mobile disco sets. They took back what they had been excluded from for a long period because of national economic strangulation and their personal unemployment.

I asked the sample group whether they thought that if they had been provided with the necessary socio-economic facilities the youth would have joined the RUF. To this question, 90.7% of the respondents responded ‘No’; 8.4% responded ‘Yes’, 0.8% responded ‘Don’t know’. The quantity of the ‘No’ responses indicates that the Sierra Leonean citizenry, upon second thought did not think that youth’s entry into the war was one headless, motiveless venture. Surely the 56.6% of respondents who said the war was senseless meant something other than what the word ‘senseless’ actually signifies. Some of the 8.4% who responded ‘Yes’ gave pretty good reasons, though no succeeding question relative to this was asked. They said that some of the rebels were comparatively well-off, and yet they joined the war.

Humphreys, et al. (2004) who also catalogue the socio-economic statuses of the ex-combatants, did not bear this out. It could be that the few comparatively well-off that were part of the RUF youth ranks had ideological or political motivations rather than socio-economic ones. It is such voluntary departures from high to low status that could be referred to as ‘class suicide.’ I then asked the respondents to mention five socio-economic facilities which if previously available to the youth would have prevented young people from joining up with the RUF. Table 4 below shows the result from this interview.

Table 4: Facilities which would have prevented the youth entering the war

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Poll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health facilities</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable food</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheap good housing</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications network and good roads</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment and recreational facilities</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental care</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that ‘employment’ polled the highest is corroborative of the previous analysis that the war was a source of employment. It also indicates that employment has a disciplining potential. It makes an employee have a cause to be optimistic, to have something to look forward to or something to lean on. Yet, employment has a more positively conditioning potential when conditions of service, salaries and prospects for promotion are good. But ‘good salaries and conditions of service’ as a necessary facility for youth satisfaction polled only 18 (as compared to 136 for ‘employment’). This stresses the point made earlier, namely that employment by itself is a conditioning facility. This is what I will call the governmentality of employment. When a person is employed that state of being affects his/her self-worth as he or she has to contend with the cultural expectations to move from dependence on others to dependence on the self.

‘Health facilities’ polled just 50 and ‘affordable food’ polled 49 – making the two third and fourth highest rankings respectively. This justifies the point of view that the needs of Sierra Leoneans, maybe the most ordinary citizens of the Third World countries, are pretty minimalist (food, health, education, and
shelter). ‘Shelter’ polled 40 – the fifth highest rating. Yet that ‘employment’ polled the highest vote, at such a quantum in relation to the others, is indicative of the fact that Sierra Leoneans do not want to be citizens’ exclusively dependent on government for their provisioning. People simply required that government facilitated their needs’ satisfaction and prosperity within the state, but in the process they also believed that the government should help those sectors of society that cannot help themselves.

Importantly, ‘low cost of living’ polled six, a negligible quantum, (not listed in Table 4). This seems to re-state the previously hinted at security and hope generating potential that employment confers. The cost of living, it seems, could be high but employment – rewarding employment – could make life just a bit better and helpful for youth. ‘Education’ polled the second highest, 86. It is far less than the employment poll. But that it polled that much is an expression of the belief that education still carries the potential to make people, including youth, gain access to jobs. That it got fewer votes than ‘employment’ could be explained by the fact that jobs are much more a sign of one’s affluence, not necessarily education. This view I think is plausible when one notes what Cruise O’Brien (1996), in his tribute to Louis Brenner, says:

> Education produces inequality and privilege [...] but it has in recent years failed to deliver enough in terms of privilege, leaving students who have reached the peak of the educational process at an impasse in terms of employment (p 104).

‘Good roads’ got 30. In relation to the other low-rated facilities, this number is fairly high but in relation to the highly rated facilities it is quite low. Even though the absence of good roads and other means of communication arguably are causes for re-enforcing marginalisation of some communities, roads are not valued for their own sake but for what they could bring about in other development terms. In spite of the frequent complaints against its rare availability in urban areas and the non-availability of electricity in rural communities ‘electricity’ polled a low 22. Even the current frustrations engendered by scarcity of electric power supply and its non-availability in most areas of the country did not colour the respondents’ rating of it. Electricity seems to be rated as not very basic. Out of these major reasons given by the respondents, parental care was chosen only twelve times. So, in spite of the family being valued as the first agent of socialization, familial inability, in the views of respondents, did not seem to account much for youth involvement in the war.

Significant to our understanding of what Sierra Leoneans value is the fact that respondents did not seem to pay much attention to the state’s lack of attention to the voice of deprived people (like youth) and the justice system. A suggestion that the ‘government should listen to the wishes of youth’ was only made by two respondents: one male, one female – a student of the Milton Margai College of Education and Technology and a police officer. The low score of this response justified its not being included in the table. ‘Equitable rights and justice’ was chosen by only three respondents. Once again, it seems Sierra Leoneans are mainly concerned with the bread and butter issues of everyday living, rather than some substructural or structural development that could serve as ground on which their sustained prosperity and well-being can be assured.

The character of the previous question was mirrored in another question, ‘Give five things you would expect a good leader to do in order to improve your lot and the country’s lot.’ The polling pattern of the responses to this question generally followed the pattern of responses to the earlier question. But a major difference is that ‘good education’ scored 98, while ‘employment’ got 89. It seems this is a belated recognition of the value of ‘education’ as a long-term investment. One of the things that featured in the response to this question, but not in the earlier one is, ‘The leaders should care for the people.’ This statement polled 30 and is at the heart of the governmentality-laden micro-level governance concept. The fact that the respondents requested this reconstruction of the concept of government is noteworthy. It indicates that the respondents feel that past governments and even the current government do not care for their human resources. An amputee of the Aberdeen Amputee Camp said, ‘The leader should come down to the people’s level and respond to the needs of the people, especially people who cannot help themselves.’ A female respondent in Makeni spoke in the same terms as the amputee. ‘Improving access to cheap food’ scored 50, which show that the basic needs of Sierra Leoneans still remain at the heart of their wishes. But respondents suggested a means to that end, namely agriculture. ‘Encourage agriculture’ got 31. ‘Youth should be encouraged’ got 18. In comparison to the other ratings, this poll is rather low. That it was conceived as valuable in itself is a good thing, but that it could only poll a mere 18 shows society’s ambiguity towards the concerns
of the youth. The hindsight gained from youth’s key role in the rebel war does not dictate their being considered a post-war issue to be put at the centre of the country’s reconstruction and development. Yet it could also mean that youth are not considered a special class, deserving special attention. It seems youth are considered as grafted into the mainstream of society; therefore, addressing the general concerns of the citizenry means addressing the concerns of the youth as well. Twenty people suggested that the government should establish a free port in Sierra Leone as a means of resuscitating the country’s economy. All the seven districts researched and the capital came up with the suggestion.

Foucault (1978) suggests that governmentality starts with the government of the self. This is given by some respondents as a prescription for a leader. ‘The leaders should be honest’ polled 16. This shows that some Sierra Leoneans believe that a reconstruction of Sierra Leone has to start with a psychological revolution on the part of the leaders. In the main, Sierra Leoneans are still driven by minimalist needs, not structural needs. No respondent suggested anything about reconstructing the justice system to make it equitable; neither did anyone say anything about strengthening freedom of speech and other democratic building blocks.

Sierra Leone’s prewar and post-war situations reveal the youth concept as fluid and that it is an expanding class of the economically, socially and politically powerless. But such situational youth, maybe like all other youth, aspire to power, especially economic and social power. An indispensable guide to understanding Sierra Leone’s war is to recognise this contested space where power meers powerlessness.

The Pre-war in the Post-war

When the respondents were asked whether they believed that some of the conditions that led to the war still exist in Sierra Leone, 90.6% answered in the affirmative. Only 9.4% said that such conditions no longer exist.

When I asked which of these conditions still exist, the response followed the pattern of causes for the war given to an earlier question, with ‘corruption’ topping the conditions that still exist, followed by tribalism (and other non-qualification and non-merit bases, such as favouritism, etc. that determine who gets what in Sierra Leone today). Another prominent condition was ‘unemployment’. Most Sierra Leoneans think that there has not been much improvement in the lives of Sierra Leoneans. And if the concerns of youth are embedded in those general observations, as they seem to be thus far, then all is not well. This state of being is related to the responses to questions relating to democracy. ‘Do you think that youth’s dissatisfaction could be a threat to Sierra Leone’s democracy?’ Here, 92.5% responded ‘yes’; 7.5% said ‘no’.

In the follow-up question, most of the respondents opined that if the youth were dissatisfied (as could be expected in current circumstances), the situation could lead to a recurrence of the war. Two ex-combatants spoke of the possibility of the recurrence of a civil war as if war were therapeutic. They were as categorical as that. Some noted that youth constituted a big, probably the biggest, sector of the citizenry, which makes their dissatisfaction a sure threat. This recognition of the great proportion of youth is supported by statistics from the US Census Bureau which says: ‘According to the latest estimates, 55 percent of Sierra Leone’s population is under the age of 20’ (Fanthorpe (2001: 385). Other views that formed the pattern of responses were:

- The signs of youth’s displeasure are reflected in the music Sierra Leonean youth sing, play and enjoy these days.
- The youth could resort to strikes and demonstrations. Some referred to the police-students clashes of February 2005 as an example of displeasure boiling over.
- Youth could passively destroy Sierra Leone’s democracy by not taking part in voting.
- There could be (another) coup d’Etat.

\[4\] As stated earlier, it is important to note that youth in Sierra Leone’s terms rises above that age bracket.
They could get into thieving, drug-taking and armed robbery – all threatening the peace and security of the state.

They could easily be manipulated.

A male amputee specified that the Fourah Bay College students’ riots of February 2005 as a signifier of the shape of things to come if the ‘system’ for youth was not improved. He showed a dramatic insight when he compared the current situation of the Sierra Leonean youth with the struggle of the Palestinian youth in the Middle East, stressing that young people are ready to give up their lives because they have little to live for. He ended with an adage: ‘Most snakes only bite when they are attacked or when they feel threatened.’ A school-going young man of the run-down Kroo Bay (a slum in the Freetown area) opined, ‘If youth do not get opportunities they will find ways of making a living, which could be against the peace of the country.’ This ties up with the view that Wyn and White (1997) hold:

Where young people are marginalized from major institutions […] there is a greater chance they will come to be seen as a threat to the order of society, which seems to have neglected them (p 47).

A top-notch worker at the Ministry of Education indicated the possibility of a clash between the youth and the old. She observed: ‘It [i.e., non-satisfaction of youth’s concerns] will put [sic] grudge in their hearts and the old. She observed: ‘It [i.e., non-satisfaction of youth’s concerns] will put [sic] grudge in their hearts and the old. She observed: ‘It [i.e., non-satisfaction of youth’s concerns] will put [sic] grudge in their hearts. She observed: ‘It [i.e., non-satisfaction of youth’s concerns] will put [sic] grudge in their hearts. She observed: ‘It [i.e., non-satisfaction of youth’s concerns] will put [sic] grudge in their hearts.’ This latter view is a key part of my argument about youth and micro-level governability in Sierra Leone. Youth, as all humans, can only be conditioned to act in a certain (positive) way if certain conditions are made. Parents’ legitimacy does not stem from their being biological parents alone, but more importantly, by their being social parents responsive to the needs of their offspring. But what happens when poverty hinders parents from satisfy the needs of their children? Mitchell Dean (2001) defines ‘bio-politics’ as

[...] politics concerning the administration of life, particularly as it appears at the level of populations […]. It is the endeavour […] to rationalize problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity (pp 46–48).

According to Mitchell Dean, it is extremely important that a government provides for the poor and thus the youth: ‘[G]overnment must find a way of providing for those with needs whether due to human frailty and mortality or the nature of the capitalist labour market’ (p 45). This felt need for governmental provisioning is replicated in the responses to two other questions in the survey. The Sierra Leone government could sufficiently condition, discipline and control (without force) its population into compliance by engaging itself in a national project of making its people, including youth, productive and economically secure. I asked: ‘Who do you think should care for the youth?’ The following table shows the response pattern.
Table 5: Responses to the question ‘who should care for the youth?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Poll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The government</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their families</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth themselves</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their friends</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above (i.e. government, families, etc.)</td>
<td>22.07%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses throw open the varied realisations, expectations and responsibilities of the youth. The percentage that said, ‘Youth should be responsible for themselves’ is 8.4% – the fourth highest in a range of 5. This shows that the bulk of Sierra Leoneans believe that youth is a stage of ‘becoming rather than being’ (Wyn and White 1997, and De Boeck and Honwana 2004, Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006). Evidently, respondents who stated that youth should take care of themselves recognise that youth, as a biological age range, encapsulates the working age. But there is a contending reality in Sierra Leone of youth being seen as a stage of aspiration, of deprivation, of inability. ‘Youth’ in Sierra Leone’s terms could be seen as ‘struggler’ or ‘sufferer.’ Interestingly, most often when a struggler graduates to wealth and success, he or she becomes ‘the mammy’, ‘the pa’ for female and male, respectively. Incidentally, the literal Krio (the lingua franca in Sierra Leone) meaning of ‘mammy’ and ‘pa’ are grandmother and grandfather, respectively. This linguistic contradiction stems from the belief that acquisition of wealth and success is an affair of adults – it is a sociologically imprinted belief.

Those who said the families should care for the youth seem to be motivated by the belief that families are supposed to be the first agents of socialisation and provisioning. They believe, justifiably, that parents should be principally responsible for their offspring. This view is valued and should serve as a check mechanism, especially when one recognises that in Africa, children are seen as wealth, therefore justifying one having many of them. There should be birth control it seems. But how can government advocate birth control when it does not provide for its children? The logic is: since the parents themselves try to care for the health and other needs of their offspring, the higher the number of children, the greater the prospects of their survival, and subsequent productivity. But families are not an abstraction; they are units within the bigger spectrum of society. Therefore if the state does not ensure a low cost of living, the families will suffer. Families would lose control of their offspring. Therefore, the government should be prepared to provide social parenting when biological parenting proves unavailing. This seems to be the wisdom that propelled Mamadou Diouf (1996) to say, on the assumption that the state recognises its responsibilities, that, “The state assumes the right to substitute itself for parents who have abdicated their responsibilities” (p 230). It seems it is this state parenting expectation that compelled respondents to say ‘government should be responsible for youth.’ It polled the highest (47.4%). In the light of this expectation of the state’s responsibility, I think I should express the views of an amputee of Aberdeen Road Camp. He said he only got as far as Standard Six (which is equivalent to present day Junior Secondary School, Year II). He exhibited a lot of intelligence in his saying: ‘I find it inadequate and laughable when people in Sierra Leone talk about the saying: “Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country.” That is a statement that came from John Kennedy, an American president. Kennedy, said that in America and of Americans. And, Kennedy is justified in saying that because in America, the government takes care of its citizens from conception to socio-economic maturity. In Sierra Leone we need to ask: What does my country do for me? The man is right that these pretty pedestrian words of wisdom are attributed to John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States of America (excerpt from his inaugural address on 20 January 1961). I am sure that it was on this ideological platform of expectations of government that respondents shaped up their responses to this question: ‘Who/what do you think is responsible for youth unemployment?’ In the responses, ‘the government’ polled 81 – the highest by far; second was the ‘youth themselves’, which polled 30; ‘lack of access to good education’ polled 27. Probably, because provision of cheap and good education is a state service, it could be seen that respondents squarely lay the blame in the lap of the government. And I went on, ‘Do you think that Sierra Leonean youth joined the RUF to improve the structures of the country?’ The following table displays the percentage of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ responses from the various communities that took part in the survey.
Table 6: ‘Did the youth have the improvement of Sierra Leone in mind when they joined the RUF?’ Responses from various communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goderich/Lumley/Cassada Farm/Levuma Beach (Freetown West)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissy/Ferry Area/Calaba Town</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lungi/Port Loki</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kroo Bay (Central Freetown Slum)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newton</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo District</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pujehun District</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makeni (Bombali District)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koinadugu District</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenema</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mambo/Levuma/Pottor (The Freetown Peninsular)</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amputee Camp</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous (areas that fall outside the others specified)</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Yes</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 14 communities researched, 9 had a majority view that Sierra Leone’s youth ventured into the RUF to change the Sierra Leone system for the better. These communities include the Kissy, Ferry and Calaba Town areas which suffered gravely because of the war, especially so in the rebel assault of January 1999. This list also included Lungi and Port Loko, areas that mounted stiff resistance against the RUF. The latter area also housed the regional ECOMOG and the underground Radio Democracy FM 98.1, which regularly countered AFRC propaganda during the latter’s nine months in power.

Kroo Bay did not directly suffer from rebel onslaughts, but it is a vast slum that has several marks of deprivation. 75% there answered in the affirmative. Newton was another area heavily affected when the rebels were retreating from the heart of Freetown in January 1999, yet 75% responded in the positive. Bo, which is the second largest city in Sierra Leone, mounted the stiffest civilian resistance against the rebels. It polled 57.7% ‘Yes’.

The most outstanding response area in my view was the Aberdeen Amputee Camp. Inmates had tell-tale signs of the war. They had been amputated; they will be incapacitated for the rest of their lives; yet 75% of those interviewed said, ‘yes’. The comments of those who said ‘yes’ are instructive. A man in his late thirties said ‘If only they [the youth] had done it the right way ….’ A middle aged former contractor said: ‘It is sad the bad old days they [the youth] fought to remove are back with us – more than ever.’

For the areas that got ‘no’ replies one of the most valuable responses came from Makeni. Makeni is the Headquarters of the North. President Kabba had said that the North ought to apologise to the South and the East of Sierra Leone for bringing war to their people. Makeni houses the infamous Teko Barracks, which are discredited with producing turn-coat soldiers of the ‘sobel’ phenomenon. In spite of these, 60% of those interviewed said ‘No.’ The total percentage of respondents who said ‘Yes’ Sierra Leone’s youth ventured into the war to change the system for the better was 56.8% (more than the ‘no’ and ‘don’t know’ percentages combined). This reinforces the point that unlike what most respondents said earlier in their answer to my first question, the war is not really viewed as a senseless war. The general responses contradict the pronouncements of most of the respondents at the start of the interview.

It was therefore observed that Sierra Leone’s citizens, in retrospect, recognised that the war was not senseless, only that it evolved to become a project
gone bad. But in spite of the lessons of the war, the expressed and mainly credible reasons for the war, the expressed and mainly credible reasons for the war are still around. It seems, therefore, a case of the pre-war elongating into the post-war.

Theoretical versus Practical Revolutionaries

It is necessary to ask again, why was it that youth ventured into a rebel movement to bring about change? Mamadou Diouf (1996) observes: ‘Logics of youth exclusion based on tradition, like those of the post colony, renders public spaces as adult territories with limits to youth, at the same time that it denies them a private space’ (p 256). Utas (2003) contends that ‘Rebel warfare is inherently an individual form of agency rather than a socially embedded activity.’ Humphreys, et al (2004:3) bear out these basic motivations, ‘Throughout the conflict the interests of fighters, particularly those in the RUF, remained focused on basic needs – access to security, food and education – and not on the political agenda of the movement.’ This minimally instrumentalist agency of the RUF war participation was shown in the elections of 2002, when the RUF Party fared rather badly, getting only about one percent of the votes. But I think the main difference between the Liberian civil war and Sierra Leone’s is that the latter was not originally hatched and sustained as an individualised form of agency, but an anti-state intent; only that the vicissitudes between initiating and termination turned it into individualistic projects for self.

There are traditional imperatives on youth concerning their involvement in state matters; even their private spaces are denied them – those fetters all by themselves have the potential to get youth to rebound. The ‘state-effect’ did not generally seem to impact positively on the youth. The state did not seem to recognise them as a class meriting its structured and planned intervention. Fanthorpe (2001), who classes Sierra Leone’s youth rebels as ‘secular sectarians’ (p 361), says, ‘long term exclusionary processes do in fact underlie these agencies [i.e., of revolt]’ (p 361).

Indeed, Fanthorpe sees this exclusionary tendency as issues of citizenship and non-citizenship. He says, ‘In much of Sierra Leone, de facto citizenship remains a privilege’ (p 362). Poole and Das also comment on ‘doled out’ citizenship at the margins, where non-recognition of youth is dramatised:

The pedagogical aspects of the state are manifested here, not through school textbooks or citizenship, but rather through the practices by which subjects are made to learn the gap between membership and belonging … [T]he spaces are marginal spaces, with an absence of roads, schools or other signs of the presence of state.

Why did Sierra Leone’s youth venture into the RUF – to effect systemic change? It seems they were also striving to assert their humanity. Wyn and White (1997) say:

The failure of the public realm is associated, for young people, with disaffiliation from the institutions which are meant to serve them, and from the society to which they are meant to belong … One of the dimensions of livelihood – of ‘belonging’ in one’s society and having the opportunity to contribute – is the exercise of rights to citizenship. Although citizenship is frequently mentioned with regard to youth in terms of young people’s responsibilities, society also has a responsibility to recognise young people as citizens (p 47).

As stated earlier, citizenship is granted in nominal terms only (natural birthright) but not granted in socio-economic and political terms. In Sierra Leone’s sociology, youth were doubly alienated. There are cultural limitations set for them as social imperatives. There is also the downright deprivation that they suffer because of bad state management that nucleated the state and broadened and thickened the margins. It was on this second platform that youth converged with the general marginalised citizenry (non-age defined, just deprivation based). Youth craved for things they needed and wanted but could not get. When this is the case, the means which they could employ to those ends would verge on the indecent for the female and criminal for the male. Utas’ discourse on Liberia mirrors this scenario.

Many young combatants admit that it was the possibility of personal advantage that caused them to join the war […]The leap from being powerless young boy, under the authority of parents and elders to being commander with a gun is both tremendous and momentous. (Utas 2003:15)

War in both Liberia and Sierra Leone was a temporary suspension of normalcy that hastened the arrival of abnormal normalcy. The gun was the means to that end. At the onset of the war the CDF exempted itself from using a gun for self-advancement. Such was considered antithetical to the magic that fostered its invincibility. But the CDF themselves, in limited but real measures, adopted the gun for the
Ibrahim Abdullah defines ‘lumpens’ in these terms:

...with the non-conformist politicians bludgeoned into silence, with civil society broken down, youth became the aspirants to change. Ismail Rashid (2004) says,

The radical students of the 1970s were militant and more directly involved in national politics. Radical students exposed a mixture of anti-establishmentalism, populism and reformism’ (p 69).

Rashid adds, as noted earlier, that educated youth fraternised with the uneducated youth in drug dispensing centres in run-down areas of town called ‘potes’ (p 72). Students of Fourah Bay College mounted an anti-establishment revolt in 1977; yet it was effectively liquidised by the state-protecting Internal Security Unit (ISU). In my view, this crushing show of force illustrates that dissent expression through mere words or demonstrations against the government were ineffectual to shake the rooted establishment, much less talk about removing it. The government was impervious to change and undeniably adept at its entrenchment drive. Abdullah (2004a) catalogues the growth of malcontents among youth and the mosaic of the youth-resisters’ composition:

In this grim economic context, the so-called informal sector, the natural abode of the lumpen proletariat, ballooned as a result of the continued influx of an army of unemployed, school-leavers, dropouts and university graduates [...] Muted discussions about revolt 1977 gave way to open talk about revolution. How this revolution was to be executed was never systematically discussed [...] But the talk about revolution, vague and distorted as it was remained alive in the discourse of rebellious youth (p 48).

Abdullah gave the impression that though the idea of revolution was popular, the youth as resisters, especially the educated, lacked the nerve to carry it through, in spite of their being under the umbrella of a resistance coordinating body of the Pan-African Union (PANAFU). Abdullah adds that it was a PANAFU high school dropout, who was active in revolutionary circles in the 1970s, that recruited Foday Sankoh (2004, p 54). Therefore, it seems that members of PANAFU were merely theoretical revolutionaries who galvanised pent-up anger with the magnetic word ‘revolution’ and after whipping up a revolutionary spirit, it jumped ship, deputing by implication, the revolution to the doughtier lumpens. Their escapism matches Nkrumah’s notion of craving for a beautiful picture of a dragon;
but when the real dragon comes the paper-dragon admirer runs scared. Yusuf Bangura (2004) rues the implementers of the RUF, imputing that ‘Lumpen or marginals [...] constitute poor material for social change’ (p 21). Abdullah (2004a) in similar terms, says, “It was the ‘wrong individuals’, lumpen, in my view who therefore took the next step, the bush path to destruction” (p 55). The truth is the ‘right individuals’ who conceived the germ or germ of revolution set the fire of revolution burning and then ran away without guiding the inferno or giving it, sustainedly, direction and, where need be, extinguishing a path threatening to run wild. They were not like the intellectuals of Guatemala who returned to the countryside to implement a revolution (Lofving 2005: 82). It seems our intellectual revolutionaries were drawn to the prospects that their education could offer them, when, by some magical means, the status quo was over-turned and a level-playing field emerged therefrom. That it was the lumpens that formed the vanguard of the practical revolution would suggest the following: the Freetown-based thought revolutionaries were seriously enervated by the ISU’s (later Special Security Division (SSD)’s) deployment against them or the resultant beatings and imprisonment, as well as the very real possibilities of the these punishments being extended to their family members. But none of those (threatened) acts of violence of the forces against Freetown-based revolutionaries matched the first true carnage that the state apparatus visited on dissenters. This was inflected in Zimmi and other parts of Pujehun, when citizens in these areas resisted an imposed APC-candidate for the General Elections in that area in the 1980s. This carnage did not deter provincials, lumpens (from the ghettos in or outside Freetown), from carrying out the RUF’s revolution. Utas (2003) rightly observes that when the subject of youth is discussed, the rural youth are often omitted. In Sierra Leone’s warscape the rural youth were the most marginalised of the margins. As touched upon earlier, when people do not have anything to lose because of personal inability or perceived state-countenanced inability at the barest prompting, such people could rise up to fight for something. The youth of Pujehun had seen or had been graphically told how detached they were as nominal citizens. They had seen or heard how their relatives had been killed by an abstraction called a government, ensconced in the capital about 200 miles away. Because it was the state that killed the resisters in 1982, no state institution could offer the wronged succour or redress. Because large numbers of Pujehun people had been killed, a sector of the revenge-driven survivors became reactive rebels that lost their right to fear. Theirs was a contestation to be Sierra Leonean. Foday Sankoh had tact. He launched his revolution where the state’s influence was weakest and in other areas where the government neglected its citizens on purpose, at least seemingly so. This made them citizens by name and not by nature. One of the strongest signs of the Freetown revolutionaries being uncomfortable with sacrificing the comparative security of their houses or indeed shacks for a possible long stay in the bush was their eagerness to embrace a ready-made revolution executed by the NPRC against the APC government. Readily un-nested and unpersoned, the youth that willingly joined the RUF, on the other hand, found bush habitation or rehabilitation easier or even fitting. Lacking the psychological and emotional stamina to implement a revolution, theoretical revolutionaries, including former tormentor-in-chief of the APC government, Hindolo Trye, took up an NPRC ministerial position. Many other intellectuals also joined the NPRC revolution. But while theoretical revolutionaries settled for an ersatz of revolution, the RUF, patently piqued by being left out in a possible fast-tracked revolution arguably caused by its impulsion, took their bush path formula to another level, even more bloody than before. The RUF accused the NPRC of replicating the ousted regime. In effect the NPRC were mere new-fangled revolutionaries, nouveau riche replication – who had an ideological one night stand with revolution, but soon mimicked the patrimonial state. The NPRC had thus become the new gerontocrats, mostly chronologically young.

It is justifiable to deduce that the category of youth that implemented the RUF’s struggle were stimulated by the trap of hopelessness that their joint circumstances engineered. When a person finds out that he or she has nothing to live for, he/she becomes stoical even in the face of potential death. When these states of mind are frequent, a struggle of any sort can get willing recruits. But this does not mean that many Sierra Leoneans were simply forced combatants of the RUF. What it does mean is that the natural seeds of resistance were cultivated and promoted by the establishment?
The Logic of Violence

If youth’s involvement in the recent shaping up of Sierra Leone’s sociology can be reasoned as it has been, why do people continue to brand the war as a ‘senseless war’? Certainly, respondents do not mean that the war was without cause or that it was directionless. What is more plausible in explaining that ‘senseless’ branding is the course that the war took – the violence, arson, killings, rapings and maimings. Yet violence is not without logic. This is one of the major disagreements between Ibrahim Abdullah and Paul Richards. But it would be good to examine some sociologists’ views of violence. J. and J. Comaroff say that ‘youth […] are challenging the right of states to commandeer the means of violence’ (p 41).

Danny Hoffman (2001) says:

Robert Kaplan, Hanson and other self-styled classicists have argued that a careful reading of Thucydides is all we need to do to understand the world and its instabilities; others commit acts of violence because they are inherently barbarian, we [i.e., humans of these times] commit acts of violence because we inherently are not (p 328).

Ali El-Kenz (1996) says, ‘Everywhere, almost, violence is the mode of response to the problems that adequate political institutions and outdated codes of behaviour have proved incapable of solving’ (p 51). He adds that, ‘The dissemination of violence is aided by the state’s decline’ (p 55). In a state’s decline, everybody becomes a law unto him/ herself. Friedman (1989:30), writing about life in Beirut during the Lebanese civil war, agrees that there could be hideous prospects when a state degenerates or becomes impotent and warns that things could become mechanistically Hobbesian. He recalls:

Hobbes says that where laws and government broke, man returned to the state of nature […] Man [in such a situation] is an enemy to everyman […] and what is worst of all continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, brutish and short Friedman (1989: 30).

But Friedman (1989: 30) contends, ‘Hobbes was right about life in such a world being ‘nasty, brutish and short’ but he was wrong about it being poor and solitary[…]When a society collapses into a state of nature, men will do everything to avoid being solitary and poor’. Friedman goes on to explain how the Beirutis strove to bring order and convenience into their lives during the civil war. Though Friedman’s view on Lebanon would have an inexact applicability on the Sierra Leone war situation, it could have qualified utility. For example, in part it explains the phenomenon of civilian collaboration with ‘the enemy’. In the war years, life was brutish and short. In the face of the brutishness and brevity, there were copy-cat adoptions of pretty much atavistic practices by all facets of vestigial society. Most Sierra Leoneans believe that the culture of maimings and amputations of limbs came from outside Sierra Leone. Be that as it may, the RUF adopted it to cow the SLA, later civilians; the SLA later adopted the same tactics to frighten the RUF about their acquired taste. The CDF used similar shock tactics against the conglomeration of SLA and RUF. This mimicry not only illuminates Hobbes’ views on circumstantial brutishness, but also illustrates Schlee’s (2002) view (expressed in the Introduction to Integration and Conflict, unpaged) that belligerents tend to integrate in their exactions. Civilians were often caught in the middle and were often the objects of the belligerents’ transferred anger.

CruiseO’Brien (1996), quoting Diop and Diop (1993), similarly attempts to rationalise youth’s violence, the looting and destruction of property. As far as graver violence of raping and maiming are concerned, a middle-aged man from the village of Gama, in the Dama Chiefdom of Kenema District – less than a two kilometres from the Sierra Leone-Liberia border – informed me that the rebels’ revolution was quite welcome at its onset. ‘Their message,’ he informed, was simple: ‘Do you like the life they [the government] are forcing you to live?’ They then brought out commodities and asked villagers for their prices – which were expectedly high. The rebels went on to idealise the days of Sir Milton Margai (i.e. Sierra Leone’s first Prime Minister) when things were much cheaper and stressed that the then prime minister cared for his people. He informed me that the rebels become violent, very violent, when government attempted to fight and kill them. This view is corroborated by respondents in the South and other respondents in the East. But this view is different from the views of respondents in the North of the country. Clearly, by the time the war reached the North it had become ceaselessly brutal. After attacks on them, the RUF blamed the villagers for selling them out to the enemy. Respondents added that the rebels became much enraged when the NPRC, whom they believed were their protectors, turned on them.

A positive derivative of Friedman’s appreciation as regards Sierra Leone was that non-collaborators developed micro-communities in the neighbourhood. Neighbours who previously had not been on
speaking terms united. Rich people who were obvious targets of the rebels left their mansions to stay in the shacks of the ordinary people for the collective safety poor people provided by default. As such, neighbourhoods became microcosms of society, and loci of interaction, exchange and sharing. To fill the gap of absent official security, the poor and the comparatively rich converged to form neighbourhood watches. But the essential rationalisation of Sierra Leone’s degeneration is premised on the nexus between objectives and means. Horowitz (1970) postulates: “Since there is unequal access to legitimate means for the attainment of success goals there will be an unequal utilization of illegitimate means. In short, the less access to legitimate channels the greater the deviant behaviour” (p 255).

This Horowitz excerpt illuminates an interesting derivative of the responses to the last question I asked respondents: ‘Do you believe in the saying, “If som man nor die, som man nor go betteh?” I asked this question in the lingua franca, Krio, and that expression roughly translates as, ‘Do you believe that if the lives of some people do not come to an end, other people will be perpetually down?’ 78.4% responded ‘yes’; 20.9% responded ‘no’; 0.7% responded ‘don’t know’. The response pattern seems to indicate that in spite of the war being over for six years now, most Sierra Leoneans feel that the country’s system is still not a meritocracy; individual effected, not means-approved modes, allot resources. That Sierra Leoneans, in spite of the hideousness of the war, still could prescribe death of other individuals to make way for the advancement of the others is important. It seems an indictment of the system, post-war. It hints at the mini-wars that go on in the minds and feelings of Sierra Leoneans, maybe premised on Sierra Leone’s socio-economic inabilities and inequalities.

When youth became actors in Sierra Leoneans’ anti-state project, they were socialised by others and by the drama of their deprivation to become the actors in pursuit of a dream of a more equitable society for them. Mind control was employed as a tactic by older theoretical and practical revolutionaries; but it seems one of the catalysts for youth’s affinity with their counter-hegemonic, anti-state cause was the seemingly social parenting that the RUF movement provided, and the access it provided to necessities for everyday living and even ephemeral luxuries. The (mythicised) hands-on leadership of the situational blend of youth cum father, Foday Sankoh, and hope-generating potential for the self-realisation that that movement conveyed were veritable tonics for the project’s sustenance. The fact that the war set off multiple strands of relationships, interrelationships and symmetries in asymmetries exposes Sierra Leone’s enduring contest between situational youth striving to adulthood and the situational gerontocrats (also represented by the state) pressing the former back into youth. It must be noted that there were, prior to Sierra Leone’s civil war, pre-existing constructions of state/political violence inflicted on the minds and bodies of Sierra Leoneans. Efforts at dissent against the establishment were met by (disproportionate) force. Journalistic dissent, attempted by the Tablet Newspaper, resulted in its personnel being beaten and its offices being burned in the 1980s. Internal Security Unit (later Special Security Division) officers were deployed almost instantaneously to extinguish students’ demonstrations against the system. Pop songs considered ‘cynical’ were banned. At times, people were arrested for ‘careless talk’. The houses and persons of pronounced remnants of political opposition were attacked by armed gangs. During the 1977 University Congregation attended by President Siaka Stevens, students displaying placards commenting on deplorable conditions on campus and ‘the system’ generally were brutalised. The president ordered that the University be closed down, that some students be expelled. On their own advice, some students went underground. In the 1982 General Elections, the people of the Southern District of Pujehun revolted against a government imposed candidate. The rebellion lasted that year out and continued until the following year. In a show of force, the government mustered and engaged all its armoured personnel carriers. Reportedly, hundreds of people were killed and many homes destroyed. Violence in the pre-war period had logic; it was used by the state to impose compliance and peace. There was not a war, but as Richards (2005) says, “[M]any wars are long periods of (uneasy) peace interrupted by occasional eruptions of violence, that often […] a state of mind shared among participants, that ‘peace’ can be often more violent and dangerous than war” (p 5).

Before the war, Sierra Leone experienced uneasy peace, pseudo-peace or enforced invisible dispeace. The prewar one-party system engineered social stability: yet stability does always mean peace. The forces then were trained to be violent and circumstances enabled them to master their invested violence. It seems that when these forces were asked by their commanders to crush challenges and challengers, they were actuated by the fact that in spite of their best attempts to exterminate all opposition
such challenges revealed their attempt at enforced stability as hollow.

In ‘Reflections of Violence’ (2002), Hannah Arendt attempts to explain violence. She says, ‘violence, we must remember, does not depend on numbers or opinions but on implements’ (p 32). Sierra Leone’s pre-war security forces in relation to the population were few – less than five thousand, compared to a population of about 3.5 million then – but they had guns and that gave strength to a numerically weak force over a numerically strong, although in terms of force weak population; hence the enforced stability. The one-party state adopted a typical Machiavellian dictum of rather to be feared than to be loved. But this meant a loss of people-based power: power was derived from violence. Arendt points out additionally that it has often been said that impotence breeds violence and psychologically this is quite true. Politically speaking, the point is that loss of power tempts into substituting violence for power (p 33.)

In the prewar period, the state neither saw nor treated dissent as an expression of legitimate torment, and lacked therefore the ability to manage conflict. But the crushing of opposition only succeeded in bottling up anger and grievances for possible future effusion. These bottled-up energies and other torments were given an outing in the civil war that started in 1991. It seems that the RUF mimicked the state’s violence on the state itself and its representatives. Reportedly, they did not attack powerless civilians at the outset. They attacked a police station, hunted and killed government officials and village gerontocrats (Richards 1996:8). These targets were perceived reinforcers and beneficiaries of an unjust system. Typically, the government did not attempt to engage in peace talks, which would have looked like an acceptance of a chink in its monopoly of violence.

The RUF did not start its project by killing civilians; it wanted to play the redeemer, because killing the redeemed would have been counter-productive. Their pacific entry was corroborated by the quoted respondent from Dama chiefdom – close to the Liberian border. For a while, it seemed that the RUF had qualified commonplace support in the areas where they operated. For good measure, the RUF cajoled government soldiers into seeing that they (i.e. RUF and the soldiers) converged in their socio-economic outlook. It is argued that the RUF spurred the soldiers to topple the one-party government. The RUF wrongly believed that the NPRC would engage them to hasten the longed-for state reformation. When the NPRC neglected the RUF, the latter felt betrayed (Richards 1996:19). In my view, this repudiation, coupled with the NPRC’s expressed resolve to fight the RUF ‘on land, sea and air’ caused a seismic shift in the character and direction of the war. The RUF mistrusted the civilian population and was very touchy and suspected frequently that the latter was leaking off secrets to the new and old enemies and at times harbouring them. To the RUF, pliant, persuasive interactions had proved gratuitous. Exasperated by an anti-state revolution hijacked by the NPRC, the RUF turned its weapons towards the people it said it had come to redeem; its exactions graduated from violence to terror, by killing, amputating and maiming them. The mimicry of violence became institutionalised as copy-cat forms of violence were adopted pretty much by all sides against the perceived enemies and civilian collaborators. Mercy was in desperately short supply. As the war degenerated in its continuation, the fighting sides showed increasing integration in: codes of violence, ‘tactics’, propaganda, use of mercenaries, clothes and use of sorcery. Amid all this confusion, fighting forces attempted to carve out ever-shifting islands of affluence by their having (forced) girlfriends/wives, diamonds, money and flashy goods.

Like Christopher Marlowe’s German literary character, Dr Faustus, who recognised that he had sunk too deeply into evil to reclaim Heaven, the rebels ended up as insular desperadoes after their loss of faith in the top-notch personnel of the NPRC cum RSLMF and the loss of emotional unity with the civilian populace. When they could not lay their hands on opposing soldiers they attested their continued existence by mounting bloody attacks on villages and ambushed civilian-laden vehicles. In the face of this macabre reality, the civilian population itself became progressively militaristic in self preservation. This bid for survivalism led to the civil citizenry itself copying the modes of violence of the fighting forces by killing rebels and rebel collaborators in sadistically ingenious ways by cutting the enemy up into small pieces or burning him/her alive in car tyres.

The intricacies of the war were brazenly demystified to civilians as they found out that Sierra Leonean soldiers dressed up as the RUF and dishevelled imitated rebel attacks on the villages and civilian vehicles in ambushes. For the attacks to be believed as those of the rebels, they had to be very bloody and very bloody they were. At times, it was alleged by
many civilians that the RUF and RSLMF mounted joint raids and even fought over booty. In September, 2006 during the proceedings of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (set up to try those deemed to bear the greatest responsibility for the war) a witness, dubbed DAB 434 was asked, ‘Who attacked Tombodu in the Kono District? He responded:

I don’t know whether they were RUF rebels or SLA soldiers because they were the same [people], they were dressed the same way and they did the same things. They were rebel soldiers.

Doubters of the applicability of emotional and psychological convergences between the Sierra Leone army soldiers and the RUF were confounded when in May 1997, after the non-commissioned officers’ coup the soldiers invited the RUF to form the government, with the position of the Vice Chairman of the constituted AFRC reserved for the leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh. The two sides collaged into a single force, the People’s Army.

Violence and terror were implemented of the Sierra Leone war that destroyed many Sierra Leonean lives, but aspects of the citizenry seemed to have recognised the utility of these implements (of violence and terror) and also used them. It goes to show that violence has a logic of its own, which in a state of anarchy shows belligerents and co-belligerents as pretty similar than different.

Conclusion

The ‘senseless war’ appellation seems to have been driven by the courses the war took or rather resulted in. The maze of Sierra Leone’s war revealed itself as having several layers of integration in the general scheme of state disintegration. This probably reveals that the RUF originally had a plan for establishment overhaul – to be replaced by a more pro-people system. Whether or not the RUF would have instituted a redemptive plan, we will never know. That construct was stopped in its tracks by events that showed that there was more integration not only in the situational phenomenon of youth but also between youth and gerontocrats. Another revelation was that the war youth were socio-economically misbegotten, wrought by a decidedly sick state; therefore, these youth maladjusted to peace and adjusted to war. A real post-war challenge is to make peace wholesome and facilitatory for youth (i.e. its various constellations) development and to make war– physically and psychologically– undesirable and unthinkable.
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