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## Are "Forest" Wars in Africa Resource Conflicts? The Case of Sierra Leone

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Until Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, African wars were wars of independence. During the 1980s the continent's conflicts mainly were determined by the Cold War or apartheid in South Africa. The 1990s saw a rise in African conflicts escaping earlier categorizations (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Goulding 1999). Seeking to account for these recent conflicts, authors have opted for either the idea of reversion to a long-suppressed African barbarity (Kaplan 1994, 1996) or the notion of a "criminalization of the African state" (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1997).

Duffield (1998) shrewdly notes, however, that current or recent African wars fall, more or less, into two regional groupings: wars from the Horn of Africa to Mozambique that are in effect "old" proxy conflicts, perhaps prolonged by humanitarian interventions, and conflicts in the western half of the continent (from Zaire to Liberia) sustained by abundant local natural resources (oil, gemstones, gold, and timber). Stretching a point, we might label these two groupings "desert" and "forest" wars, respectively.

Some recent literature treats African "forest" wars as predominantly economic phenomena, directed by "war-lord" business elites (Berdal and Keen 1997; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Duffield 1998); the opportunist Charles Taylor in Liberia is seen as the paradigmatic protagonist (Reno 1997; Ellis 1999). All conflicts need resources, but we should be careful to distinguish the plausible idea that war has economic dimensions from the more contentious notion that resource endowments, and in particular resource shortages, "cause" violence (Homer-Dixon 1991, 1994; Kaplan 1994, 1996).

Violence is a social project—it has to be organized or opposed, accepted or rejected, by groups of human agents. Whether or not war achieves specific ends is influenced by environmental factors (including resource endowments). Environments select among social projects, like they select for

genes, but they no more cause social life than they cause genes. A resource endowment is a circumstance, and not a social project.

Although agreeing that wars—all wars—necessarily involve resource mobilization, this chapter argues against the notion of “resource wars,” a special category of conflict in which a certain configuration of resources, or lack of resources, determines a turn toward violence. “Forest” wars in western Africa or elsewhere, it is suggested, will be understandable only through closer examination of the social projects involved.

If wars in western Africa have a common distinctive feature, it is that the resources in question (e.g., diamonds, uranium, oil) are of strategic significance in industrial countries but of less immediate local utility. In these circumstances, the element of external intrigue, and hence external obfuscation, tends to be rather high. Reporting rarely penetrates beyond the oil or diamonds. The world has limited time for the intricacies of African politics and little capacity to assess grass-roots social change in remote mining landscapes. Anthropologists are not much attracted to such fields, except perhaps by accident (my situation, cf. Richards 1996, 1998). Mining interests, protecting their assets through private security, add to the confusion. As we shall see, advisers to governments, sympathetic to (or implicated in) private security options, are wont to misrepresent the social projects feeding “forest” war as criminal banditry. Insurgents are “rebels without cause” (cf. Bradbury 1995). The sociology of “forest” conflict is buried by default. Here I try to exhumate it.

### “Forest” War

The “forest” war in Sierra Leone was begun on March 23, 1991, by a group of one hundred or so guerrillas calling itself the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF), led by a cashiered army corporal Foday Saybana Sankoh. The RUF launched itself from Liberia, with the support of faction leader Charles Taylor, to overthrow the All Peoples Congress (APC), the one-party state regime of (retired) General Joseph Saidu Momoh. The rebels rounded up young diamond diggers and schoolchildren in the heavily forested border zone and inducted them into a “people’s army” but failed to win wider civilian support (Abdullah and Muana 1998; Richards 1996, 1998).

The failure of a northern-dominated government army to defend the south and the east of the country against the RUF led to a coup that ushered in a populist military regime, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), in April 1992. The NPRC realized that the RUF was aiming to provide a focus for the country’s unemployed and footloose youth. The NPRC set out to control the same constituency, drafting large numbers of unemployed youth to fight the RUF.

The army was increased from 3,000 to about 15,000, but training was perfunctory and discipline poor. Young irregulars recruited in the border region proved effective in defending their own communities and put the RUF on the defensive, but the urban underclass element in the government army resorted to criminal activities. Looting was rife, and NPRC officers used recruits for private diamond-mining ventures.

With the RUF sequestered in isolated forest reserves on the Liberian border, public confidence in the army plummeted. The popular view among civilians was that the RUF had ceased to exist and that the war was an excuse by the NPRC regime to dig diamonds. In places that were vulnerable to raiding by the RUF, rural civilians turned increasingly to civil defense. A number of militia bands were formed, drawing on initiates to local hunting guilds (Muana 1997).

But the RUF survived and, by selling diamonds to rogue soldiers in return for arms and uniforms, revived. It used these resources to carry out numerous pinprick raids, undermining civilian morale and seizing hostages right across the country. By 1995, these raids were coming sufficiently close to Freetown to threaten panic in the capital.

The NPRC was then forced to seek help from a South African-based security firm, Executive Outcomes (EO). EO also contracted to provide security for a mining company (Branch Energy, a subsidiary of DiamondWorks) planning to exploit kimberlite diamond pipes in Kono, a district heavily destabilized by RUF raids. EO trained and ran military support operations for units of the NPRC forces (Peters and Richards 1998; Shearer 1997). Details of the EO contract were never made public, but it is presumed that diamond-mining opportunities were among the modes of “payment.”

Internal and international pressure forced the NPRC to concede elections in early 1996. The outgoing regime had launched a peace process with the RUF, and this was continued by the new democratic government of Ahmad Tejan Kabba and the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP). Kabba also reconfirmed the security contract with EO.

Under scrutiny from the Mandela government in South Africa, EO phased out in Sierra Leone in 1997 (and disbanded in 1998) to be replaced by a British-based security company, Sandline International. This group also took over the task of providing security for the mining company Branch Energy. Sandline provided training inputs and specialized support for irregular forces loyal to the Kabba government (the expanded civil defence militia, now known as the Civil Defence Force [CDF]). Branch Energy was granted a kimberlite mining concession reportedly worth \$1 billion by the Kabba regime.

Enclaved in camps in forest reserves in the east of the country, the RUF had become an increasingly intransigent and introverted movement. Opposing the elections in 1996, it carried out bizarre attacks, including the random amputation of limbs of women and children, in outlying village

communities, revenging itself—so it claimed—on those who supported civil defense (Richards 1998). Despite a peace agreement signed in Abidjan in November 1996, the irregular forces loyal to the Kabba government never suspended their military operations against the RUF, sacking several of the most important rebel forest bases shortly before the signing of the peace accords.

Then in May 1997, fearing the democratic government was planning to disband the army and shift its entire military effort against the RUF to civil defense, a group of army officers and other ranks mounted a coup against the Kabba regime, driving the president into exile in neighboring Guinea and attempting to bring peace to Sierra Leone by inviting the RUF to join a power-sharing regime. The resulting unstable junta was ostracized internationally. With its kimberlite concessions resting on the restoration of the Kabba regime, the mineral-cum-security nexus engaged in the war in Sierra Leone was active in arguing that private security for Kabba was tantamount to support for democracy and good governance (Spicer 1998).

A scandal then enveloped the Blair government in Great Britain about whether Sandline International was assisting the military restoration of the Kabba regime with or without official encouragement. It transpired that Peter Penfold, the British ambassador to Sierra Leone, had been giving President Kabba advice on the Sandline option in a private capacity and that a principal agent of Branch Energy was a recently retired officer of British overseas military intelligence (MI6). The lack of clarity about the boundaries between democracy, private security, and strategic mineral interests was complete. The junta was deposed and the Kabba regime restored (February 1998), largely through the military efforts of the mainly Nigerian troops of the Economic Community of West African States Military Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), assisted by Kabba-loyalist irregulars of the CDF.

RUF elements in the junta withdrew into the forest. Supposedly, they were only a remnant awaiting final mopping up. But RUF intransigence was attracting new support. Perhaps raising the possibility of a renegotiation of kimberlite contracts, new backers appear to have been instrumental in securing Eastern European arms supply and military and training assistance for the RUF, to match the assistance to government forces from EO and Sandline (Richards and Fithen 2001).

Sensing that political changes in Nigeria had weakened the resolve of the Nigerian peace-keeping troops, the rearmed RUF, assisted by Ukrainian mercenaries according to some reports, launched an all-out attack on ECOMOG forces late in 1998, driving the Nigerian peace keepers in disarray toward Freetown. Large parts of the capital were destroyed in an attack launched on January 6, 1999. Bereft of military options, the Kabba government had little choice but to resume the aborted peace process with

the RUF, while the country was left to cope with the widespread devastation and population displacement caused by the fighting (450,000 Sierra Leoneans are refugees, and perhaps up to one million people have been internally displaced).

Throughout the war, all factions—RUF, NPRC, CDF, international mercenaries, and ECOMOG—have alternated combat with periods of alluvial diamond mining. At first sight, warfare in Sierra Leone is nothing other than alluvial diamond mining by other means. True enough, outsiders have little interest in Sierra Leone beyond its diamonds. But for Sierra Leoneans, diamond mining is a means through which social and political projects are articulated. It will be argued that the war cannot be understood unless we pay attention to these projects.

### Alluvial Diamonds

Diamonds were first proved in Sierra Leone in the 1930s. Mining became important after World War II. The main deposits are found in the south and east of the country, in the high forest zone, in alluvium and river terraces. The percentage of gemstone diamonds is among the highest in the world (Fithen 1999). The richest concessions were allocated to a De Beers subsidiary in and around Yengema in Kono District, but the profitability of industrial extraction was threatened by illegal diggers creaming off some of the best stones. A tributor scheme regularized the activities of illegal diggers, but eventually (in the 1980s) formal operations ceased and, with the best deposits approaching exhaustion, the field was left clear to small-scale producers.

The APC regime of Siaka Stevens (1968–1985) built its power through a combination of strong-arm methods and the politics of patronage, applied to the control of small-scale diamond mining in Kono (Reno 1995; Zack-Williams 1995). Capital was supplied mainly by a Lebanese trading diaspora. Maronite and Shia groups were at one stage equally prominent in mining and marketing Sierra Leone diamonds, but the Maronites shifted their resources to other projects during the 1970s and 1980s leaving the field clear for the Shia groups (Fithen 1999).

A typical small-scale alluvial diamond mining operation is likely to involve a Lebanese “supporter” in partnership with a local landowner or a political protector from the national elite (a policeman, civil servant, or army officer, for example). A trusted mine manager will supervise a team of diggers in the bush. Laborers are generally known as “sand-sand boys.” Many are footloose youngsters from Freetown or the northern part of the country, drifting through the diamond districts in search of excitement or

laboring because they have run out of resources or patronage to complete their education.

Operators in more accessible parts of the alluvial belt generally have mining licenses and are well-supplied and regularly supervised by mining "supporters" (Zack-Williams 1995). Elsewhere—and especially toward the Liberian border, an area of thick forest reserves—operations tend toward greater informality or outright illegality (all mining in the reserves is illegal, so there is no point in seeking a license). Perhaps especially where illegal, any mining venture requires good contacts, both in the national arena and with local landowners and other power brokers, or it will be subject to claim jumping and sabotage.

As the more accessible claims have been worked out, the border districts have assumed greater importance. Experts claim eight years of uncontrolled digging under wartime conditions in Kono have more or less exhausted the Kono alluvials (Fithen 1999). The lesser field at Tongo, on the edge of the Panguma forest concession northwest of Kenema, remains viable and has been hotly contested by all the main armed factions throughout the war. The best alluvial deposits are now reckoned to be in the south-eastern border zone, in an arc below the Gola Forest complex of reserves centred on Zimmi in Soro Gbeima Chiefdom, Southern Province, adjacent to the Liberian border. This area was once strongly dominated by the RUF, but more recently, control of the deposits has been wrested by the CDF. Kono's importance is now especially in terms of kimberlite pipes. Kimberlite requires underground mining, sophisticated skills, and equipment available only from international companies.

### Diamonds and Politics

Politics in Sierra Leone is strongly patrimonial (Reno 1995; Richards 1996, 1998; Zack-Williams 1995). Most politicians depend to some degree on having links to the mining industry to secure the resources needed to service networks of clients and followers. The central figures in Siaka Stevens's APC system had well-established stakes in Kono diamonds. Emergent politicians have to look to the less well-known deposits, including those along the Liberian border, where the war was first incubated. Some of the confusion in the war is traceable to the fact that this is a region where social and political projects are still taking shape, carefully hidden from rivals in transborder obscurity. An ethnography of the domain around the Gola Forest is very revealing of contested projects and the mixed loyalties on which the war has thrived (Richards 1996).

More has been at stake, however, than simply chasing the lesser worked

deposits. Changes in the pattern of diamond mining are altering the mold of patrimonial politics in Sierra Leone (Fithen 1999).

As part of plans to control Kono diamonds, Siaka Stevens uprooted the old colonial government railway line that was the axis of power for the rival Sierra Leone People's Party through the South and East (the axis on which many of the main provincial secondary schools lay, for example). Instead, Stevens built a main road leading directly to Kono through the northern provincial centers of Makeni and Magburaka. This helped secure APC political elites more direct control over the Kono alluvials. With the working out of the Kono deposits, however, the pendulum has swung back to the South and East.

The new alluvial field around Zimmi is more readily accessible from Monrovia in Liberia than from Freetown. Halting cross-border incursions for clandestine mining purposes has been a preoccupation of a Mende ethnic elite centered around retired army captain Samuel Hinga Norman, the Kabba government's Deputy Minister of Defence and chief patron of the CDF. Norman bases his activities on the Southern Province headquarters, Bo. CDF units grew from village civil defense (Muana 1997; Peters and Richards 1998) but are now centered on Bo and the other main diamond town in the Southeast, Kenema. The CDF, as developed by Norman and colleagues, is a well-armed modern militia with an offensive capacity (Richards and Fithen 1999). With assistance from EO and Sandline, it has the motivation and capacity to pursue the RUF into its forest lairs.

The CDF is more than defense of villages against RUF raids. It is a clearly articulated political project by Norman, other SLPP politicians, and some of the paramount chiefs of the region to stabilize the relationship between diamond mining and society (Fithen 1999). Under the Stevens system in Kono, much of the finance for mining came from Lebanese merchants and much of the digging was done by itinerant northerners. Neither group has a long-term stake in local social systems in alluvial mining areas. This encouraged a degree of recklessness in pursuit of diamonds. Lack of local social responsibility is, in the opinion of the Norman group, one of the factors causing the war. In the emergent "Zimmi System," as described by Fithen (1999), security and digging are the responsibility of local recruits to the CDF, and the marketing chain (as far as Antwerp and New York) is controlled by an elite of Mende chiefs. Ethnic loyalty and discipline are the intended antidote to the mentality of lawless and violent cut-and-run mining that fed the RUF's cross-border incursion from Liberia during the 1990s.

The shift in balance of alluvial mining toward Zimmi (and Tongo, an area controlled by CDF units loyal to Kenema-based SLPP political figures) has in effect allowed the resurgence of a regionalism drawing on Mende ethnic identity. Although there are questions about the longer-term viabil-

ity of such a strongly ethnic project in a small and highly intermarried nation, it is clear nevertheless that the Norman/CDF project to control diamond mining in the south is a means to reach social and political ends.

A second change in the diamond landscape pulls in a different direction. This is the shift in balance of resources from alluvials to the recently discovered kimberlite. As noted, kimberlite pipes require investment by international mining companies. Alluvial mining requires complex local brokerage, but kimberlite mining focuses attention on the national level. The key issue is not so much the degree of control or influence exercised over local politics but the sovereignty of the national government. The president and cabinet control the all-important central negotiations with concessionaires. To some extent, kimberlite resources have already revitalized national politics, as reflected in the modernist language of figures such as James Jonah, the Kabba government's Minister of Finance, and Charles Margai, Minister of the Interior. Margai rejects civil defense in favor of establishing a rural police force under the control of a centralized Ministry of the Interior. Kimberlite also helps account for the recent rebirth of the RUF, apparently under the aegis of (Eastern European?) mining-cum-security interests, offering the kind of military assistance provided to the government side by British-linked mining interests.

Evidence for this interpretation will be determined by whether the peace agreement with the Kabba government signed by the RUF in mid-1999 leads to longer-term renegotiation of kimberlite options. It was striking that the Kabba government reconfirmed the Branch Energy concession in early 1999, even as it contemplated a revived peace process with the RUF and ECOMOG was struggling to restore control in the capital. Under the 1999 Lome accords, RUF leader Foday Sankoh assumed a position as head of a national minerals commission, with protocol status of vice-president (making him directly accountable only to the president). Sankoh soon used his position to announce the revocation of all existing mineral agreements.

### "Diamonds Are a Curse"

The RUF is supposedly a movement without politics or reason to exist. This is the view of those who have other projects to defend. It will be argued that the RUF is plausibly characterized as a social movement of the "masterless classes" (cf. Rebel 1986)—especially young men excluded from the wider society by the exigencies of diamond mining.

ECOMOG troops were welcomed to Kono in 1998 with a graffito, "Diamonds are a curse." Gemstone diamonds, however, are lumps of carbon of

no practical use. What makes for trouble is not the diamond itself but what happens to social cooperation and trust in communities dependent on such a high-value but easily concealed item. "Forest" war in Sierra Leone is shaped by diamonds being extracted far from the beaten track by young migrants (in conditions of chronic suspicion and summary violence) lacking local attachments but "supported" by prominent figures in the country's business and political elite.

Diggings spring up overnight at news of a find. One such camp mushroomed in the heart of the unlogged Gola North Forest in 1988. Several hundred diggers descended on the catchment of the Mobai stream, an area earmarked for strict nature reserve protection (Davies 1987). Tools, supplies, and guns (to hunt for the cooking pot) were all rapidly dragged to the site over the rough forest trails. No women are allowed in an instant camp of lean-to shacks and sleeping platforms for fear of spoiling the diggers' luck. Each gang dug and sifted its piles of gravel in forest seclusion for weeks at a time. When raided by forest guards, the camp disappeared as quickly as it had arisen, leaving a devastated site.

I once asked a young digger what would prevent his absconding with any large stone he found. He told me that diggers always keep their companions under close observation. A digger choking on his chewing gum risked having his stomach slit open on the suspicion that he had swallowed a large stone. Then again, he told me, the police operated with speed and surprising efficiency in diamond cases. The sponsors paid well. To his mind, no diamond was worth the beatings the police were liable to administer to extract the truth.

Diamond mining resembles a lottery. Those who, week by week, fail to draw a winning ticket find themselves more and more abandoned and yet addicted to the harsh, asocial way of life of the pits, hoping that yet one more week might result in that big find. It is not in the interests of an elite, living off diamonds, to draw attention to the way in which its wealth is created. Diamond digging groups are a key to the country's economy, but they constitute a cryptic labor force, carefully screened from outside attention. Social conditions in diamond camps and villages are among the worst in the country, especially in the clandestine diggings scattered along the Liberian border. Yet, politicians invested in diamonds are less than keen to agree to open up such areas with roads or to provide social or educational facilities for the families of diggers, for fear of drawing undue attention to their own sources of wealth.

Contesting this carefully maintained lack of visibility, the RUF political program is a populist call to account for the country's misappropriated mineral wealth. The rebel movement first recruited among the most thoroughly marginalized diggers working the "border-zone limbo-lands." Inti-



mate with the processes through which the magic money sustaining national politics is made and angered by social marginalization, this secret army of gravel sifters was quick to heed the call.

### From Insurgency to Violent Enclave

Those who first planned the RUF rebellion were drawn mainly from the ranks of the urban unemployed inspired by student radical debate (Abdullah 1997; Abdullah and Muana 1998). Along with Sankoh, an older and embittered survivor from anti-Stevens struggles in the army of the 1970s, the founders of the movement trained in Libya and then acquired field experience as fighters with the Taylor faction in the Liberian civil war. Taylor later reciprocated by helping the RUF guerrilla launch its campaign in Sierra Leone, accompanied by Liberian and Burkinabe "special forces."

These special forces were responsible for some of the worst atrocities against civilians. Fleeing civilians reported a populist violence—the hacking off of the heads of village merchants, for example—in the name of revolutionary justice by young people who spoke in thick Liberian accents, or even in French. Many of the early guerrillas were Sierra Leoneans but residents for long periods in Liberia or Cote d'Ivoire, whence several had fled from diamond-related trouble at home. Samuel Bockarie, *de facto* senior field commander of the RUF 1997–1999, is typical of this group.

Adopted son of a Kissi from Kailahun on the Liberia-Guinea-Liberia border, Bockarie is a one-time sand-sand boy who claims not to know his father. Quitting the diamond town of Njaiama in Kono, he drifted through Liberia, working in bars, as a disco dancer and eventually learning a trade as a women's hair stylist. He ended up in Abidjan just as the Ivoirian economic miracle was coming to an end. Encountering a party of Sierra Leonean recruits to the RUF en route to a training camp (in Burkina Faso), he claims (according to his own account) to have jumped aboard their truck on a whim. Diamond diggers are ever gamblers, even to the extent of gambling with their lives.

The RUF was at first a conventional insurgency, moving heavy weapons along roads and seeking to hold terrain and towns. Driven back into the forest, mainly by Sierra Leone army irregulars, it then developed a guerrilla strategy suited to its forest-enclaved circumstances.

This second phase was initiated, according to members of the movement's own account, after two years of war. Driven out of the small towns of Kailahun District, the leadership found itself in late 1993 sequestered behind the Gola North forest reserve in Nomo-Chiefdom on the border with Liberia contemplating ignominious withdrawal into Liberia (RUF/SL 1995). The path was blocked, however, by a decline in Charles Taylor's

military fortunes in the Liberian war. There seemed little option but to try and survive in the forests.

The new strategy involved abandoning heavy weapons and vehicles in favor of infiltration and widely scattered pinprick raids mounted from secure forest camps via the numerous bush trails crisscrossing the country. Along these trails, the small RUF bands were unopposed by vehicle-bound and at times mapless government forces. A wedge was driven between civilians and the NPRC army through a campaign of dirty tricks. RUF cadres carried out many attacks dressed in the uniforms of NPRC troops or left behind forged army-style identity passes to convey the impression that attacks were the work of rogue government troops.

Isolation in the forest of a movement made up largely of diamond diggers and captive primary schoolchildren, with few elders other than Sankoh, now the RUF's unchallenged leader, seems to have selected rather strongly for values associated with so-called enclave social formations. The enclave—Mary Douglas's preferred term for a formation more often described as a "sect" (Douglas 1993; Douglas and Ney 1998; Sivan 1995)—is a group that was organized on the basis of strong internal mutuality and low levels of hierarchy and "walled off" from (an often-hostile) wider society. Enclave entry and exit costs tend to be high, typically involving harsh initiation procedures and sanctions against, or ostracism of, would-be deserters.

Once an enclave has formed (perhaps as much a response to external attempts to disorganize the group as through any internal ideological commitment), distinctive procedures for maintaining adherence (including information-handling procedures to protect the group against desertion) tend to give it life and values of its own.

The RUF appears genuinely proud of its internal egalitarianism—rotation of command among young fighters, model accommodation, redistribution of looted items such as medicines, strong stand against ethnic or religious divisions, and adaptation to high risks associated with combat as a "lottery of life and death" (RUF/SL 1995). But the enclave also held in place the realization among the leadership group that their own safety—especially after increasingly effective, mercenary-supported raids by civil defense forces under cover of cease-fire agreements—depended on draconian attempts to wall off the group from wider society. Desertion was nearly impossible. Runaways were amputated or killed. Any successful escapees, some crudely scarred with the letters "RUF," risked summary execution by government, civil defense, or peace-keeping forces, as apparent from film footage compiled by Sorious Samura, a Freetown-based filmmaker, broadcast on CNN, January 2000, (cf. Amnesty 1991; Peters and Richards 1998; Richards 1998; Richards and Fithen 1999).

Douglas (1993) and Sivan (1995) suggest that enclave leaders are vulner-

able to leadership challenges and hands-on managerial mistakes ("Who made you leader over us?" is a typical enclave cry). One option is to cultivate a distanced, charismatic authority. Today Sankoh, as the movement's one clear elder, seems to have quickly realized the potential of this approach with the *de facto* distancing from executive control of his movement thus implied. Many cadres saw Sankoh only after occasional hazardous expeditions to reach his Gola Forest base camp (the Zogoda) or knew him only through field radio broadcasts (Peters and Richards 1998). These radio messages became especially intermittent after EO began to track rebel concentrations through monitoring and triangulation of transmissions.

British advice to the Kabba government appears to have been that after the signing of the 1996 Abidjan peace accords, Sankoh was irrelevant. Others thought it important to break his "sinister" hold over his young followers.

The Kabba government made attempts to split the RUF by encouraging Philip Palmer, a southern member of the RUF team sent to Freetown to implement the Abidjan peace agreement, to step up and replace Sankoh. The plan backfired (RUF/SL 1999), and Palmer was seized by the RUF on a visit to Samuel Bockarie's Kailahun stronghold to encourage disarmament in early 1997.

Perhaps in some desperation (the move might seem reckless in the light of enclave theory), the Kabba regime asked the Nigerian authorities to detain Sankoh, on a visit to Nigeria, and hold him under house arrest. As the theory predicts, this served only to strengthen the distant leader's authority in the eyes of his followers. Despite Sankoh being separated from a supposedly apolitical and fragmented movement for more than two years, it was his release from jail in Freetown, where he was awaiting execution for treason, that spurred the well-coordinated attack on Freetown in January 1999. This event humiliated the largely Nigerian peacekeeping troops responsible for Kabba's restoration to power after an army mutiny in May 1997. A reluctant Kabba government, lacking any real military options, released Sankoh on license to play a major part in resumed peace negotiations in mid-1999, resulting in the Lome Accord.

### Rain Forest Casuals

In building secure fortresses in the forest, the RUF touched on a more general problem of social identity and social security within the transborder region. I first became aware of the issue when writing up an ethnographic study of villages adjacent to the Gola Forest (reserved forest making up the middle third of the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia). Working on data collected on the eve of the RUF rebellion, it became ap-

parent I was grappling with two fundamentally distinct kinds of rural communities (Richards 1996, 1998).

Type 1 villages (the majority) were still basically agrarian, with political leadership exercised through a loose hierarchy of "traditional" chiefs. These chiefs were linked by a Paramount Chief to a national political system shaped by parliamentarians and certain key figures in bureaucracy and security services. These figures were well connected to the State House and the president. These national-level "patrons" would pass benefits downward through the chiefly hierarchy and expect chiefs to maintain local order and, in a variety of ways, to mobilize local political support when required. Agrarian villages might have quite high numbers of resident "strangers" (persons born outside the community), but all such persons would be "tied in" to the social system either through marriage or formal ties of clientage. Chiefs always were keenly sensitive to new issues that enhanced traditional authority. For example, I found local chiefs closely monitored the international "conservation" debate (via BBC World Service) because this gave them an enhanced role in land matters, universally recognized as belonging to their domain. Young people in such villages were still remarkably "deferential," respecting local bylaws and in awe of the mystical forces thought to underpin such laws.

Type 2 villages were radically different. For a start, they were hard to visit and easily might have been missed. A visit not prearranged caused the population of some of the smaller and least formal settlements to scatter, leaving nothing but a cloud of marijuana smoke on the breeze or (in one case) an abandoned but still spinning "ghetto blaster" humming to itself on a veranda wall. Some such settlements were no more than temporary and illegal camps of diamond diggers in reserved forest and unmarked on the map. Others still sometimes enfolded Type 1 village elements—a small "traditional" population of farmers might sit alongside a larger population of predominantly male, part-educated diamond diggers hailing from all parts of the country. There might still be some vestige of "traditional" authority in such cases, but typically the "town chief" would be closely chaperoned by a quick-witted and sharply dressed young man who, it would transpire, was the agent of the principal mining sponsor in the area (perhaps a senior civil servant or military officer). In the villages closest to the Liberian border in remote and underpopulated Nomo Chiefdom, at least some of the sponsorship for diamond mining came from Monrovia. On one of the few occasions that I was able to engage one of these normally tight-lipped chiefs' minds in conversation, I was treated to a surprisingly well-informed lecture about British perfidy in delimiting the border to Liberian disadvantage. These were off-limits communities, known to and entered only by those under the protection of the political agents of diamond mining in the region. Not even an official authorization from the

government's district officer could prise open the door to one of the largest of these Type 2 settlements given over to diamond mining on the Liberian border and secluded from prying eyes by a 30-kilometer-thick curtain of high forest. In the end, I risked an uninvited and unannounced visit.

Type 2 communities around the Gola Forest were among the first places to succumb to the RUF in 1991, and it was in such villages that the movement, when close to military disaster in 1993, gathered to reconstitute itself as a forest-camped "environmental" movement. All Type 2 settlements are de facto "camps" lacking public facilities such as roads or schools. Manifestly, they are not places where anyone, given the choice, would seek to make a long-term life by founding a family. Yet some indeed were large, remote, and permanent enough to contain entire families.

I narrowly escaped being thrown out of one Type 2 settlement I visited without prior arrangement in 1989. But because it was clear that I was physically incapable of wending my way the twenty miles or so back over the forested Gendema Hills without a night's rest, I was allowed to stay. Hospitality and curiosity then took over, and conversation flowed—about political corruption, about the World Bank (then visiting Freetown to announce a new packet of reforms), about the prospects of those trapped by diamond digging for half a generation without favorable outcome. The result was that I was asked by the diggers to stay for a day or two to carry out a census of households so that the organizers of the community could appeal to the government for assistance with a road and, above all, a school. It was on the minds of the young residents that they wanted their place to become a home, although none could so regard it without a primary school. (What school teacher would ever agree to stay in a settlement eight hours by forest track from even the roughest road?) Conversation played on a recurrent thought that far from being "forever," diamonds are a gambler's ruin and no basis for making communities that work.

### Homelessness and Enclave Culture

The young people of the settlement just noted were swept into the RUF during the invasion from Liberia eighteen months later. It became an RUF stronghold and was later obliterated in fighting. Because the RUF picked up so much of its initial following in Type 2 settlements along the border, where camping in the forest was a long-established reality, it is perhaps not surprising to find evidence within the movement, as it became more and more forest enclaved, of the strong desire to make a home, however fluid and dangerous the circumstances.

These concerns are evident in *Footpaths to Democracy*, a document "ghost-written" by Ghanaian (ex-student radical) consultants to the conciliation agency International Alert as preparation for the Abidjan peace process. It accurately reflects some of the movement's circumstances and beliefs (RUF/SL 1995). The descriptions of life in the forest offer an almost cargo-cultlike attention to idealized detail. *Footpaths* claims, and film footage and interviews with cadres confirm, model "planned" camps based around neat lines of sleeping huts, complete with mosque and church, inside a defensive ring in the forest. Daily life is organized to reflect Libyan *Green Book*-inspired redistribution according to young people's basic needs.

The organized way the RUF set about running its camps, and the draconian discipline asserted therein may have been a factor in the apparent rapid conversion of some captives from Type 2 settlements to the cause. Camp life also gave a certain temporary tangibility to the RUF's stated ambition for Sierra Leone of a road, a school, and a health center in every village.

A shared legacy of "homelessness" thus seems to be a central factor in whether the RUF made sense to its conscripts. Those with families and villages report they longed always to escape. Others lacking any such secure home (however poor it might be) were determined to create a place for themselves and to achieve some kind of social recognition, by whatever violent means it took (Peters and Richards 1998). A stop-at-nothing violence appears to be the special province of the most rootless of the elements making up the RUF—the Liberian-born or Liberian-based "special forces" of Sierra Leonean extraction remaining with the RUF after Liberian (and Burkinabe) fighters supplied by Taylor were withdrawn in 1992.

Even with the collapse of the Abidjan peace accords, many of the local captives still hoped to find their old homes. But the longer-term homeless in the RUF—diamond-digging drifters like Bockarie—had only the option to press on, in the hope they might one day claim recognition from the nation and not the village. This would help explain the anti-ethnic stance of the RUF and why villagers supporting civil defense eventually became the target for a violence more reckless and apparently indiscriminate than the populist antitrader, antigovernment worker violence characteristic of the first phase of the RUF struggle (1991–1993). It was ethnically mobilized villagers who, increasingly, stood between the RUF and this claim to national recognition. Where earlier villagers had simply rejected the RUF revolutionary call, what was now clear to the RUF diehards was that rural society was no home at all but merely an expedient to shed some of the costs associated with the social reproduction of the casual worker in alluvial pits. "Who needs that kind of home?" seems to have been the conclusion. Wipe out all traces, and begin again.



### Camp Burkinabe

One of the persistent popular assumptions about the war in Sierra Leone is that Burkinabe fighters take a leading role in RUF attacks. Evidence of Burkinabe involvement is sketchy. Even so, popular perception may hint at an underlying truth.

The greatest historical example of the "homelessness" of youth in West Africa is that of Burkina Faso, fount of a major coastward migration of youth under French colonialism. Migration to Cote d'Ivoire or Ghana was supposed to equip Burkinabe youth with the resources to return home and take a recognized place in village society.

But labor migration in West Africa no longer works as it once did. In particular, the overexpanded cash crop economy of Cote d'Ivoire ran into extreme economic difficulty in the late 1980s. Burkinabe youths were among its prominent casualties.

Here we should understand that "Burkinabe" stands for impoverished young castoffs, from a wide range of backgrounds, dumped along the migration trails leading into Cote d'Ivoire and unable to fund or face a return home. To survive, a number of "Burkinabes" of this description have drifted into the clandestine activities possible in the dense forest block that stretches from southwestern Cote d'Ivoire, through Liberia, into eastern Sierra Leone. Fearing being trapped into hustling indefinitely and locked out of urban work and rural home, some were quick to jump aboard the militia recruiter's bus, as Taylor's and Sankoh's violent projects to transmute circular migration into "forest" war took shape in the late 1980s.

For many of these "Burkinabes" (and not just young people born in Burkina Faso) in spirit the radical Thomas Sankara, the military ruler of Burkina Faso in the mid-1980s, was a hero. They credit Sankara with trying to address the problem of securing stable futures for footloose youth. His political intervention, however, was a challenge to a business element already threatened by imminent loss of subsidies from France, Africa's last great colonial power, and he was overthrown in a coup in 1987. NPRC Vice-Chairman Solomon Musa (later an RUF ally) and Sankoh are among those in the region who aspired to fill the gap, seeing themselves as revolutionary Pied Pipers to homeless youth.

When from the wreckage of Sankoh's aborted youth revolution in Sierra Leone the RUF invented the world of the forest camps, it opened a chasm in social values between enclaved cadres and deferential villagers whose poverty reproaches their loyalty to diamond-mining chiefs. The RUF tried to rub out the reproach by force. Civil defense emerged in reaction as an attempt to find a better link between "new" (diamond) money and "old" social values. The battle still rages between camp dwellers and neotraditional civil defense, with dire consequences for the civilians caught in between.

Meanwhile, RUF diehard Sam Bockarie's redoubt on the border between Kono and Kailahun—halfway between diamond workplace and agrarian birthplace—is somehow fittingly named for a citadel in which violent egalitarian social values break so sharply with both the individualism of (capitalist) work and the hierarchy of (deferential) home. It is Camp Burkina.

### Home at Last?

The cadres at the heart of the RUF suffer a sense of injustice at their social exclusion from a country where the political classes build their power and authority on money made from diamonds in dubious cross-border social terrain. Encouraged by Libyan radicalism, RUF organizers sought common cause with border-zone diggers experiencing the contradictions of an economy in which the beneficiaries of diamond wealth move toward international respectability, while unlucky diggers find themselves driven by rough justice out of the nation and into "limbo-land."

Latent egalitarian tendencies fostered by life in diamond pits were intensified by forest sequestration, where young inductees had little option but to cooperate in elaborating an enclave social world, beset, as they were, by outside attempts to provoke desertion and by threat of summary execution. RUF leaders originally envisaged an end game in terms of triumphant entry to the capital and their acceptance as saviors of the nation. Instead the RUF became a sect by default (Richards 1998). It knows how to survive in diamond-rich forest indefinitely, but no one yet has had the wit to devise a scheme to bring it out of the forest and calm its sectarian anger.

Homelessness is still the movement's bugbear. The RUF anthem insists "Sierra Leone is our home" but then warns parents that their abducted children are "fighting in the battlefield for ever." Indeed, the leading cadres hardly have homes to which to return, yet they retain a strong sense of the nation as their home. This is surely the residual around which peace will have to be constructed.

### Conclusion

Insisting that "forest" wars in Africa are economic phenomena narrows the range of options in favor of private security but not in a way—as events suggest—that deals successfully or permanently with the radical homelessness of groups like the RUF. Ignoring, or denying, the social projects of the perpetrators of "forest" war in Africa risks also disabling peaceful social solutions. The cost of such asocial dogmatism will be high. Even though an African refugee costs the United Nations refugee agency only one-fif-

teenth the average per diem costs of a Kosovo refugee, the agency spends 40–50 percent of its total budget in Africa. The profitability of international mineral extraction is without reference to such high “transaction costs,” in part the result of the spread of “forest” war (in Angola, the two Congos, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Niger Delta). This is why, more than ever before, it is essential to understand the sociology of resource-linked violence in Africa. British Prime Minister Tony Blair, challenged about support from Sandline International for the restoration of President Kabba, dismissed doubters with the remark, “The good guys won.” By implication, the “bad guys” were the RUF. Given Mr. Blair’s strong concern to reverse the social exclusion of the young in his own country, following a period of devil-take-the-hindmost capitalism, it is highly ironic if the RUF, as argued here, is best to be understood as a violent attempt to reverse homelessness and social exclusion caused by rampant alluvial diamond extraction in Sierra Leone. The stubborn survivalism of Sierra Leone’s “rebels without cause” hints that the violence of “forest” war enfolds within it a social project after all.