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ENGAGING DISENGAGEMENT: THE POLITICAL REINTEGRATION OF SIERRA LEONE'S REVOLUTIONARY UNITED FRONT

Kieran Mitton

Introduction

The conflict between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Sierra Leonean government represents a highly instructive study for reintegration projects, primarily due to the motives underpinning violence and the identity of the main protagonists. Far from being a conventional political insurgency readily lending itself to peaceful political transformation, the RUF possessed within the ranks of its young and brutalised recruits a fundamental rejection of Sierra Leone's political structures. As such, Sierra Leone presented a unique challenge for reintegration efforts, requiring not only the immediate reconciliation of ex-combatants with victims and civil society, but also the long-term political incorporation of a group of youths defined by their very disengagement from and distrust of the political system.

The conflict began in early 1991 when a small group of combatants crossed the Liberian border into eastern Sierra Leone, seeking to topple the one-party regime of Joseph Momoh.¹ Met by a weak and ineffective counterinsurgency, a decade of brutal conflict ensued in which two thirds of Sierra Leone's population were displaced and up to 50,000 were killed. It was not until 2002, following a series of failed negotiated settlements, that peace was officially declared by a new civilian government. The cessation of hostilities owed much to the intervention of British and Guinean troops in 2000, which precipitated the deployment of 17,500 UN peacekeepers, the largest such force of the time. These developments enabled the full operation of a DDR programme, which had suffered repeated interruption since its initial introduction in 1998. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Special Court were also established, and in December 2005, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) withdrew its peacekeepers. In 2007, Sierra Leone conducted national elections, returning the All Party Congress (APC) to power.

The DDR process, which ran in three distinct phases between September 1998 and January 2002, disarmed a total of 72,490 combatants (including 24,352 from the RUF) of which 71,043 were demobilised and 55,000 received reintegration assistance.² Despite the relative effectiveness of

the demobilisation and disarmament programmes, Sierra Leone remains in a state of abject poverty, with high levels of youth unemployment and limited opportunities serving to undermine the reintegration of ex-combatants. Former RUF fighters make up a significant portion of those struggling to find work, with many expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of prospects and cynicism with regard to the ruling authorities in Freetown – factors which proved instrumental to the original onset of conflict. Success in politically reintegrating ex-combatants should not, therefore, be judged solely by the absence of renewed violence or the conduct of free and fair elections. Rather, it must also appreciate the extent to which ex-combatants hold faith in the political system, and peace generally, to deliver solutions to problems of social and economic disparity or decline, and the extent to which ex-combatants themselves are shaping this process. In this light, this article argues that despite progress in many key areas, former fighters of the RUF have yet to be fully politically reintegrated. The Sierra Leone experience demonstrates that successful political integration does not simply amount to political participation *per se*, but rather requires specific *forms* of political participation which reinforce the primacy of peaceful political interaction over and above other means for affecting change.

The RUF: 'not so much a movement as an environment'³

To assess the political reintegration of the RUF, it is first necessary to understand that the rebel group was not by nature overtly 'political' in the conventional sense. The RUF differed from many non-state armed groups in that it lacked widespread popular support or a coherent overall political and military strategy.⁴ Rather than appeal to the civilian population for logistical support or to establish a political constituency, the RUF's relation to the people was characterised by brutal atrocities which often rendered it deeply unpopular, both domestically and internationally.⁵ With much of its rank-and-file membership comprised of child soldiers, many of whom had been forcibly recruited, the RUF represented a largely illiterate, politically and socially dislocated body of brutalised youths, who despite possessing a myriad of legitimate grievances, were ill-equipped to return (or be introduced) to civil society and channel these grievances through peaceful political discourse.

The initial invasion of Sierra Leone, launched across the border from Liberia in March 1991 with Charles Taylor's sponsorship, involved little more than 300 combatants, many of whom had limited connection with Sierra Leone.⁶ Whilst the border populations in the south and southeast may at first have been sympathetic to the fighters' grievances against the APC regime, any

support was quickly squandered through the RUF's looting and atrocities. As the conflict developed, former Sierra Leone Army (SLA) corporal and RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, continued to claim an ideological basis for the insurgency, framing the rebellion as an attempt to deliver Sierra Leone from decades of mismanagement by a corrupt and self-serving elite.⁷ Nevertheless, this rhetoric was consistently undermined by RUF abuses against the civilian populace, often conducted for economic profit. Despite such abuses, the insurgency was able to grow by incorporating a large body of economically and socially marginalised youth, many of whom already existed on the fringes of Sierra Leonean society prior to conflict, eking out a living in diamond mining and illicit trade. For those resentful of a government operating by an inequitable system of patrimony, the rebellion offered an opportunity both to defy political authority and to gain access to resources from which they had previously been excluded.⁸ The RUF sustained itself logistically through the systematic extraction and trade of such resources, particularly alluvial diamonds, which it exchanged for weapons and ammunition. To a considerable degree therefore, the political economy of war ensured that conflict became, for many, an end in itself.⁹

The motivation of combatants also related to physical security and social empowerment – the capacity to exact revenge on those deemed responsible for peacetime inequalities and the status and camaraderie shared among fellow fighters.¹⁰ In this sense, the RUF was far less a political movement with a definite goal as it was an environment facilitating modes of behaviour perceived as beneficial by combatants. Even so, many rebel fighters enjoined conflict not through some cost-benefit analysis but through direct abduction into RUF ranks. For many such fighters, the effects of brutalisation rather than the lure of loot defined their relationship to violence, yet as such, their motives were far removed from an overarching political ideology. This is not to suggest that combatants were without genuine political grievance or conviction. Indeed, the disillusionment with ruling elites was itself a factor in determining the RUF's apolitical nature: it did not represent a political alternative but an alternative to politics altogether. Violence was often manifested as a war against authority and as a total rejection of traditional hierarchies, with many combatants expressing a desire to punish Sierra Leonean society or to bring it to ruin. RUF activity displayed a clear determination to postpone political resolution and, accordingly, the language of democratic elections and peace prompted spates of violence clearly intended to deter potential voters and punish those pushing for political reconciliation.

The implications for political integration

The nature of the RUF has rendered its political reintegration far more complex than that of an armed group defined by a readily identifiable political agenda. In seeking through conflict a resolution to problems of economic and social disparity, and in finding in violence a means by which to achieve empowerment or a degree of basic welfare security, many RUF combatants were far less concerned with political concessions or governmental reform. Rather than formalising the RUF's political legitimacy, political reintegration would involve building a trust among combatants in political interaction over and above violence as a means to secure their basic welfare needs and address problems of corruption and economic underdevelopment. However, for those who had more to lose in peace than in conflict, political incorporation represented at best a useful façade for the continuation of abuses, and at worst a direct threat to their status and position. Included in this group were the commanders and leaders for whom conflict had secured wealth from looting, diamond mining, illicit trade and the availability of cheap labour in the form of loyal fighters. Through their involvement in atrocities, many commanders also feared prosecution and peacetime reprisals, reinforcing their reluctance to renounce violence for reconciliatory discourse. As such, the RUF leadership was in many respects an obstructionist presence at peace negotiations, with commanders across the movement actively deterring rank-and-file combatants from entering DDR programmes, taking on the role of the proverbial 'spoiler'.

If the RUF leadership was uncommitted to political reintegration, the group's rank-and-file were ill-equipped for political reintegration. For those who spent many years in the RUF, particularly those abducted at a young age or recruited at the inception of the conflict, the divorce from society was so complete as to require political *induction* rather than *reintegration*. For such fighters, the norms and codes of civil society, the historical context of the conflict and the very notion of political interaction simply lay beyond their sphere of experience. Combatants commonly shared an entrenched fear and hostility towards civilian society, which in combination with a lack of basic education and high levels of illiteracy, served to obstruct their engagement in public debate and formal political participation.

Ending the Conflict: 'Spoilers' and the Spoils of Peace

The above complexities are highlighted by the successive attempts to find a peaceful resolution to the Sierra Leone conflict. These attempts also illustrate the general principle that political reintegration efforts are often ineffective if they are not grounded in an understanding of the

unique context and nature of the non-state armed group at hand. Initial peace agreements failed to understand the nature of the rebel movement, the motivations of its leadership and the concerns of combatants – they treated the RUF as a conventional political insurgent group and sought to establish political reconciliation with the higher echelons of its leadership. These peace agreements were derailed by a lack of real commitment by RUF leaders, who continued to seek the perpetuation of conflict, preferring the spoils of war to those of peace.

The Abidjan Accord

The Abidjan Accord of November 1996 represented the first major breakthrough in bringing the RUF to the negotiating table and establishing an agreed platform for peace. Following elections – a product of internal pressure from civil society groups, who had the support of the international community - the military regime of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) was replaced by the civilian government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Kabbah promised amnesty to the RUF on condition that it sought terms of peace, threatening military action should the rebels fail to comply. Revealingly, it was the latter factor which proved most significant in bringing the RUF to the negotiating table, following as it did a series of military setbacks at the hands of the increasingly effective Civil Defence Forces (CDF), acting in conjunction with private security firm Executive Outcomes. Having failed to prevent elections through the violent intimidation of the electorate and last-minute negotiations with the NPRC, the RUF now saw peace talks as a means to halt the progress of the CDF and to expel Executive Outcomes from the military equation.¹¹

The Abidjan Accord provided clear incentives and provisions for the political reintegration of the RUF into the democratic process, including the establishment of an international trust fund to finance the RUF's transformation into a political party. However, reflecting perhaps the RUF's weakened military position, Kabbah's government did not offer the RUF any leadership posts, either in central or local government. Rather than politically incorporating the RUF into the existing regime where it could share power, the government sought to incorporate it into the democratic system where it would have to contend for power. Such democratic competition did not favour the RUF, which lacked broad political support as well as allies on the international scene. The Accord therefore failed on two key fronts. First, it offered the RUF leadership no real incentives for peace. While the invitation to form a political party held little appeal for those motivated less by political ideology as by the pursuit of status and economic wealth, the RUF's

lack of support made the prospect of a democratic contest all the more unattractive. Furthermore, despite assurances of amnesties, RUF commanders remained convinced that some form of retaliation would occur once they take their place among a hostile civilian population.

Second, the accord failed to appreciate the relationship between the RUF leadership, who on the most part profited from conflict, and its rank-and-file members, who gained less economic advantage and were generally more willing to seek peace should it provide welfare and security.¹² The provision to establish a RUF party mistakenly treated the rebel leadership as politically representative of combatants, risking a consolidation rather than a weakening of their hold over fighters. In this context, the arrest of RUF leader Foday Sankoh in Nigeria in March 1997 did appear to offer a real window of opportunity to prise young rebels away from their jungle enclaves; reports at the time confirmed that many combatants felt confusion and ambiguity over their leadership and were demoralised by diminishing supplies and increasing desertion. Nevertheless, simply decapitating the organisation proved insufficient, as other senior RUF leaders, also with a vested interest in conflict, were quick to fill the vacuum created by Sankoh's arrest. Under Sam Brockerie, who emerged to replace Sanko as RUF leader, illicit trade and diamond-mining operations actually increased.¹³ Furthermore, commanders across the RUF actively misled combatants as to the precise details of the Abidjan agreement: rank-and-file RUF were not informed of the crucial offer of immunity from prosecution nor of the benefits promised by the DDR programme.¹⁴ Rather, commanders played on the common belief that the government sought to prosecute RUF combatants for their war-crimes. This misperception was reinforced by the failure of Kabbah's government to reign in the CDF, leading to violent clashes that undermined the trust and security required for DDR and signalled the collapse of the accord.

The Lomé Peace Agreement

The lack of real commitment to the Abidjan Accord was made clear in May 1997 when disaffected elements of the SLA, calling themselves the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), seized power from the civilian government and immediately invited the RUF, their supposed military opponents, to join them in government.¹⁵ While the AFRC/RUF junta was eventually dislodged from Freetown, its devastating return to the capital in January 1999 convinced many international parties that Kabbah's government should seek a speedy power-sharing deal with the RUF. Accordingly, in July 1999 and under significant international pressure, the Lomé peace agreement was signed. The settlement provided for the RUF's direct

incorporation into government; it offered the leadership immunity from prosecution and appointed the newly freed Foday Sankoh as Vice-President and as head of the Commission for Strategic Mineral Resources, National Reconstruction and Development.¹⁶

While Lomé offered economic and political benefits, such as official control over lucrative resources in Kono along with a degree of legitimacy, commanders continued to pursue personal gain through continued conflict and at the very least, in forestalling disarmament and demobilisation. Aware that the RUF would not fare well in national elections, Sankoh sought to maintain his political status as leader of the rebel force. He therefore viewed DDR as a direct threat to his position and bargaining power, a logic shared by commanders across the RUF who had also profited from the looting and illicit trade conducted by their combatants. The RUF cadres themselves widely supported a move toward DDR, reflecting a growing war-weariness and general disillusionment with rebel life.¹⁷ However, the DDR programme lacked provisions to counteract the obstructionism of RUF leaders. Commanders again restricted combatants' knowledge of the agreement's provisions and, in some instances, forcibly re-mobilised those attending demobilisation camps.¹⁸

Full implementation of the Lomé settlement only occurred once the prospect of a RUF defeat was raised, again reflecting a military rather than political logic at the heart of the group's leadership. Following the abduction of UK soldiers in August 2000 by a faction of the AFRC, known as the West Side Boys, British troops struck a decisive blow against the group, effectively destroying it.¹⁹ The involvement of the UK signalled to many RUF fighters that the conflict could not be won, or perhaps more accurately, that it could not be maintained, and this proved an important factor in their decision to enter the subsequent DDR programme.²⁰ Of even greater significance in this regard was the role of Guinea, which responded to RUF incursions with a devastating counter-offensive.²¹ These developments led to the Abuja Ceasefire Agreement being signed in November 2000, and to the deployment of a 17,500-strong UN force to Sierra Leone in 2001. With most RUF leaders arrested or routed by the Guinean counter-offensive, their hold over rank-and-file combatants had largely been broken. In the presence of a bolstered UN force, RUF combatants demobilised in large numbers.²² In contrast to the Lomé negotiations, the RUF's military situation meant that it was in no position to insist on the disarmament of the SLA as a precondition for its own demobilisation, nor could it demand the expulsion of foreign troops operating outside of the UN mandate. Instead the RUF recommitted to the Lomé agreement in full, enabling President Kabbah to declare the war officially over in 2002. That same year

elections were held, with the RUF, as a newly transformed political body, fielding its own candidates.

The difficulties encountered in reaching peace in Sierra Leone demonstrated three requirements for political reintegration relevant to this context. First, any lasting settlement would have to involve more than the satisfaction of a particular grievance against the state. Offering the RUF an opportunity to compete for the vote of an electorate against which it had committed a decade of atrocities was also insufficient for winning its commitment to the peace process. Instead, the incentives that truly held value for combatants were the promise of security (or conversely the threat of physical defeat), the offer of amnesty, the provision of employment and basic social and economic welfare – ends previously achieved through violence.²³ Second, the political integration of the RUF also required the dismantling of the rebel leadership, whereby rank-and-file combatants could be prised apart from the negative influence of RUF commanders. By negotiating exclusively with RUF leaders, arranging for the creation of a RUF party and attempting to incorporate the RUF in a power-sharing agreement, previous peace agreements had actually threatened to empower and legitimise those very individuals perpetuating the political disengagement of combatants. In the end, effective military power was required to eliminate the RUF's spoiler leadership, allowing for a genuine attempt at political reintegration and peace. Third, the successful implementation of DDR hinged on the provision of a secure environment once negotiations were initiated. In Sierra Leone's case, the security required for DDR was heavily dependent on external actors, a factor that, as will become clear, has complicated the task of political reintegration in the long term.

The Failure of the RUF Party

In line with the experiences of other peace processes, it was perhaps inevitable that some attempt would be made to transform the RUF into a viable political entity, as opposed to dismantling the organisation entirely. This move was intended to aid political integration in a number of ways. First, it would act as a visible sign of political acceptance and incorporation, whereby demobilising fighters were assured of their stake in a new and more inclusive political landscape. Second, it could help to incorporate remnants of the RUF leadership, which might prove disruptive to continued efforts at reconciliation and reintegration if not brought into the political fold. Third, and perhaps of greatest importance to long-term peace, the creation of a political RUF party would provide ex-combatants with a conduit for political expression and an alternative

to violence as a means of realising personal, social and economic goals. The Lomé agreement therefore included provisions to help the RUF transform into a political party which were implemented by the government in the run-up to the 2002 elections. In Freetown, Bo and Makeni, offices were purchased to enable the official registration of the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF), with Nigeria contributing equipment and training to RUF representatives in party management.

Despite successfully fielding 203 parliamentary candidates for the 2002 election, the RUF performed poorly, a consistent outcome throughout the party's short existence. In 2002, it failed to win a single seat, securing just 2.2% of the parliamentary vote and 1.7% for its presidential candidate. In contrast, the ruling SLPP party of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah secured a landslide victory with 69.9% of the vote. In July 2007, the RUF as a political project came to an end when it opted to merge with the APC, the very target of its original violent invasion. The failure of the RUF to garner the votes of former combatants and to reinvent itself as a political party is key to understanding more generally why previous attempts to politically integrate its leadership had failed, directly reflecting the nature of the RUF as an organisation, the factors that had fuelled conflict and the needs and priorities of its combatants.

On a purely practical level the RUF was not equipped to operate as a political entity in the democratic system. Its members, whether at leadership level or at grass roots, had little knowledge of political campaigning or management, with experiences shaped instead by a decade of conflict beyond the bounds of civil society. More than 30% of combatants lacked formal education, with illiteracy in RUF ranks particularly high and political awareness largely determined by the commanders' selective control of information.²⁴ Indeed, the RUF was defined as a movement by the political disengagement of its young membership. A 2003 survey found that more than half of ex-RUF combatants held no political affiliation prior to the conflict and continued to hold no affiliation post-conflict.²⁵ With much of the RUF leadership under arrest, the remnants of the rebel leadership were hardly in a position to appeal to the Sierra Leonean electorate or manage the party effectively.²⁶ This problem was made clear in 2003 when five of the RUF's most senior leaders, Foday Sankoh, Sam Bockarie, Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao, were indicted by the Special Court on 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. It quickly became clear that the RUF had neither the personnel to staff a competent party and election campaign, nor a politically sensitised constituency of its own members from which to launch.

The attempt to transform the RUF into a political party not only misunderstood the technical capacity of the movement but, crucially, also its nature and the motives of its young membership. Throughout the conflict, RUF combatants had primarily been concerned with basic needs as opposed to political ideology. According to the 2003 survey, RUF combatants remained focussed upon “access to security, food, and education – and not on the political agenda of the movement”.²⁷ Combatants’ reasons for participating in the conflict were predominantly related to these priorities, with many fighters looking to gain personal security and economic advantage by joining the rebel group, as opposed to looking to the RUF to pursue a set of political goals. In the context of peace therefore, the RUF became redundant to many ex-combatants. Yet not only did ex-combatants often lack political motive; many had originally exercised little choice in joining the RUF. Eighty-seven percent of RUF respondents to the 2003 survey confirmed they had been abducted into the faction, with only 9% stating that they joined in sympathy with the movement's political aims.²⁸ With such a high rate of forced conscription, many ex-RUF combatants also viewed themselves as victims of the conflict, and as such did not see the RUF as the natural champion of their concerns in the post-conflict environment.²⁹

The RUF was also unfeasible due to the immediate post-conflict attitude of demobilised combatants. For many former RUF combatants, the end of the conflict marked a new start, with their hopes for an improvement in living conditions strengthened by a significant international presence and the extensive flow of aid. Looking to integrate into Sierra Leone's communities, former RUF fighters had to navigate a delicate reconciliation process, living side-by-side with victims of atrocities and within a population where the rebel group was deeply unpopular. In such circumstances, there was an understandable inclination for ex-combatants to distance themselves from the RUF, with some bypassing the official DDR process altogether so as to avoid the social stigma of being labelled a former rebel.³⁰ Ex-combatants wishing to play down their former RUF credentials were particularly unlikely to support the hard-line RUF leaders that were gaining influence in the absence of Foday Sankoh, himself indicted for war crimes.³¹ These leaders were not perceived by combatants as representative of their political concerns, but as corrupt, gaining considerable economic benefits which contrasted starkly with the situation of the rank and file and – particularly in the run-up to elections in 2002 – as obstructing the demobilisation and reintegration programme.³² Internal leadership disputes and bitter in-fighting further served to undermine support, ensuring that ex-RUF fighters sought other avenues for political expression, ultimately condemning the RUF to electoral failure.

It is arguable that the creation of the RUF was undertaken for political expediency in the full knowledge that its prospects were severely limited.³³ Some commentators have argued that in contrast to UNAMSIL, the Government of Sierra Leone actively sought to undermine the establishment of the RUF, obstructing the process in favour of pursuing a total military eradication of the RUF.³⁴ Nevertheless, even if active governmental support had been clearly provided, the unsuitability of the RUF for political transformation remained a major obstacle to its achievement. The damaging effect RUF leaders had upon the political integration of the rank and file further showed that the dismantling of the group, rather than its political consolidation, would be of greater benefit to the peacebuilding project.

Political Reintegration: Beyond the RUF Party

The RUF's inability to reinvent itself as a political party did not mean that the political reintegration of its combatants had failed – but rather the opposite. In the immediate post-conflict environment, ex-combatants found that they were able to pursue their concerns through established political parties and the wider institutions of Sierra Leonean civil society without recourse to their RUF identity. That the RUF failed to secure a single seat in the 2002 elections was not only testament to the unsuitability of the RUF for political transformation but also a sign that civil society had, to some extent, successfully undertaken the role of voicing and addressing the concerns of ex-combatants. Nevertheless, despite this apparent progress, ex-combatant's interaction with civil society groups and political bodies has not been linked to an associated investment of confidence in domestic institutions, but rather stems from a trust in the capacity of outside actors.

An institution which played a key role in recognising the political, social and economic disengagement which had motivated many RUF combatants was the the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).³⁵ Crucially, its 2004 statement on the causes of the conflict acknowledged the part of previous administrations in rendering Sierra Leone vulnerable to conflict through political abuses and mismanagement.³⁶ This recognition in itself assisted the political reintegration of the RUF, not only by facilitating reconciliation and understanding between victims and perpetrators, but also by signalling that addressing RUF political grievances was deemed integral to the formation of a more equitable Sierra Leonean political landscape. The TRC's final statement was also highly significant for the political reintegration of the RUF in its

attempt to move beyond a simple recognition of these legitimate issues towards the formation of government policy designed to incorporate them in the national project of peacebuilding. Of pressing concern to the TRC was tackling the “youth question”, which it viewed as central to the disengagement of RUF combatants and as representing a “national emergency that demands national mobilisation”.³⁷ The TRC recognised the devastation caused during the conflict by the “lethal cocktail of youth marginalisation and political manipulation”, and noted with alarm that youth continued to “languish in a twilight zone of unemployment and despair.”³⁸ The commission's final report therefore recommended the legal incorporation of youth in party political representation and the establishment of a National Youth Commission to “address the youth question as a fundamental priority in post-war reconstruction”.³⁹ In June 2003, the Sierra Leonean Government launched the National Youth Policy, which promised to provide youth “empowerment in a post-conflict context” and affirmed a cross-governmental commitment to “mainstreaming youth related activities in the overall process of national reconstruction”.⁴⁰ Complemented by the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Government of Sierra Leone made every indication to young ex-combatants that, following demobilisation, they would receive special political attention in their own right, allowing them a stake in society denied by pre-conflict administrations. However, tangible results of this commitment have been somewhat limited.⁴¹ Neither the establishment of a National Youth Commission nor the party political reforms recommended by the TRC have been implemented. To some extent, the Ministry of Youth and Sports took on the role intended for the youth commission, yet it was precisely because the TRC concluded that “the Ministry of Youth does not have the means to address the youth question” that it had advocated the creation of the commission.⁴² Following its success in the 2007 elections, the APC government chose to merge the Ministry of Youth and Sports with the Ministry of Education, seemingly further reducing the capacity of a ministry already underfunded and acutely lacking in political impetus. Whilst there was some expediency in merging ministries that clearly overlap in their relevance to youth, the APC move was perhaps more reflective of a financial logic, which strikes at the heart of the weakness of government-sponsored political integration efforts; namely a scarcity of budgetary resources and a weak political infrastructure.

Aside from economic limitations, the government's failure to implement the TRC's recommendations on youth-policy related also to the dominance of NGOs and civil society groups in the political sensitisation and empowerment of ex-combatants. The state had effectively outsourced this crucial area of development to NGOs, donors and UN bodies who have funded

and managed a vast number of projects aimed at facilitating dialogue between young ex-combatants and Sierra Leonean communities, providing public platforms for consultation and discussion over key issues. Through workshops and surveys, organisations such as the Post-conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) have played a crucial role in both relaying former RUF fighters' concerns and in informing them of the details of policy and related institutions. In the run-up to elections, such NGOs and donor-funded bodies were instrumental in sensitising ex-combatants to the electoral process, encouraging high voter registration and active participation in the political system. Sierra Leonean-led groups such as PRIDE, which maintain a special focus on the reintegration of former combatants, have further aided political incorporation not only through their work but through their direct employment of ex-RUF fighters. These initiatives have assisted the political reintegration project by offering former combatants a voice in the environs of peace that they were unable to locate in conflict, providing a real incentive to eschew the way of the gun for peaceful political interaction. The interaction of non-governmental groups with large numbers of young ex-RUF combatants has consequently helped consolidate the official national policy of bringing youth issues to the centre of government.

However, the NGO-led initiatives also constitute a double-edged sword. First, it is questionable whether NGOs and civil society groups, formed around immediate conflict-related issues, can provide a long-term forum for political involvement and, indeed, the employment of ex-combatants. As the international presence in Sierra Leone scales down, the capacity of the state, in particular of government bodies such as the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Education, to assume this responsibility and continue this level of political engagement with ex-combatants at a local level will be severely tested. Second, and more ominously, the involvement of ex-RUF fighters in NGO projects and civil-society groups may not translate into genuine political integration on a national level, particularly as these projects rely so heavily on external actors and donor funds. The 2003 survey of ex-combatants points towards the high price paid for NGO and UN involvement:

Ex-combatants have faith more in outsiders than in their own government. The experience with UNAMSIL has been a positive one, but ex-combatants see appeals to the international community and to NGOs as the best ways to hold their government accountable and to achieve positive results.⁴³

If former fighters of the RUF are relying on the presence and work of international organisations to guarantee their political stake in society, the political activity of many ex-combatants may not have truly assisted their integration into Sierra Leone's political system, but rather the opposite. This problem is exacerbated by continued widespread cynicism of ex-combatants towards home-grown politicians and institutions, which has strengthened the prevailing belief that Sierra Leone's future depends entirely on international intervention and regulation.⁴⁴ In a country severely lacking state capacity even prior to the conflict, the strong presence and footprint of NGOs and international organisations is perhaps to be expected, but nevertheless, the long-term reintegration of former RUF fighters requires that they invest trust in the inherent capacity of Sierra Leone's own political institutions to meet and manage their expectations. The high turn-out of former RUF fighters in the 2002 and 2007 elections would seem to indicate some success in this respect. However, the 2003 survey of ex-combatants paints a gloomier picture:

Ex-combatants believe quite seriously that the most effective means of changing government policy is through pressure from the outside. Internal accountability mechanisms are not seen as credible, when compared to the potential influence of NGOs and the international community more broadly.⁴⁵

Although ex-combatants may have voted in 2002 in order to bring about change and register their commitment to peace, much of their confidence in the ballot was firmly rooted in faith in external actors to act as guarantor. Progress in building confidence in domestic institutions since the 2002 elections has been limited. A 2007 survey by the BBC World Service Trust and Search for Common Ground, taken in the run-up to the elections, found that most respondents maintained little or no trust in national politicians and felt that political protest against unjust legislation would do little to change government policy.⁴⁶ This failure to establish trust among ex-RUF combatants in Sierra Leone's own political institutions is linked to insufficient progress on two key fronts; the fight against corruption, and tackling Sierra Leone's economic underdevelopment.

Building Confidence: Corruption

Despite voting in large numbers in successive national elections, ex-combatants still feel that corruption and patrimonial politics continue largely unabated.⁴⁷ This perception can be traced to post-conflict instances of corruption and abuse in public political institutions. In the run-up to the

2002 elections, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) was dogged by a scandal in which three of its five commissioners were indicted by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the body established to instil faith in public institutions by rooting out such malpractice.⁴⁸ In 2004, the NEC Chairman resigned from office, claiming that the ruling SLPP party had sought to tamper with the results of local elections (the NEC also expressed concern over voting irregularities the following year). In 2004, the ICG lamented the lack of commitment by the government in countering corruption, citing the case of Momoh Pujeh, a former Minister of Transport whose conviction for unlawful possession of precious materials was overturned on particularly tenuous grounds.⁴⁹ Indeed, in some respects, the government appeared to actively hinder the work of the ACC; delays in processing cases by the Attorney-General's Office consistently slowed prosecutions, and President Kabbah openly condemned the ACC for focussing on the prosecution of government ministers. In 2007, the ICG described the ACC as “virtually moribund”, accusing it of “sending the wrong message about endemic corruption”.⁵⁰

Alongside these political abuses, ex-combatants were also dismayed by the reappearance, post-conflict, of local and national elites that had dominated Sierra Leone prior to the outbreak of hostilities and represented the inequitable pre-conflict system of patrimony.⁵¹ A pertinent example was the restoration of traditional Paramount Chiefs to positions of authority in the local system of government. Enacted immediately after the war and heavily funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the move was regarded as an effective means to secure the regional control and stability necessary for post-conflict reconstruction. This “attempt to restore the past”, as President Kabbah described it, was severely criticised for reinforcing the notion of “same car, different driver”.⁵² In a subsequent DFID-sponsored evaluation, it became clear that rural youths in particular resented the restoration of Paramount Chiefs, whom they deemed responsible for imposing unfair and exclusionary private jurisprudence, precisely the grievance that had prompted so many youths to join the RUF.⁵³ Consequently, although the move initially appeared to hold value for political integration by establishing local political authority, it actually risked undermining this very same objective by restoring socio-political divisions.

Notwithstanding the criticisms aimed at government institutions and public bodies, it is arguable that progress has undeniably been made, particularly given the challenges faced and the long history of endemic corruption in Sierra Leone. An example is the NEC, which in spite of many obstacles has been relatively successful in battling electoral fraud, particularly in its handling of the 2007 elections – for which it took sole responsibility. Nevertheless, such progress may be

insufficient to restore ex-combatants' faith in Sierra Leone's political system. In a 2005 report on the battle against corruption, the Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) concluded that "most Sierra Leoneans are convinced that corruption is on the increase", confirming that many remained "pessimistic about the Commission's mission to eradicate corruption in the country".⁵⁴ Following the 2007 elections, an internal government investigation found that corruption had indeed been rife under the previous regime of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Such corruption, both in its day-to-day effect on Sierra Leoneans and in its impact on perceptions, has deepened ex-combatants' cynicism towards the political establishment, entrenching their political disengagement

Building Confidence: the Economy

Sierra Leone's long-term ability to incorporate ex-combatants politically remains intimately linked to its ability to incorporate them economically, a factor that has proven far more critical to an ex-RUF fighter's renunciation of violence than any political incentive. Failure in this area has led to a failure in tackling corruption and meeting the expectations of demobilised RUF combatants.⁵⁵ In terms of the number of combatants processed and the apparent consolidation of peace following its eventual completion, the DDR programme is widely regarded as a success.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the reintegration project in Sierra Leone has encountered severe difficulties, not only in securing funding and long-term commitments, but also with the overall desperate condition of Sierra Leone's economy into which demobilised combatants are expected to return. In 2006, the UN estimated that 70% of Sierra Leone's population continued to live below the poverty line, with the concentration of poverty the highest in rural areas away from Freetown, the very areas in which the RUF had previously prospered from economic and political discontent.⁵⁷ In 2007, the UN warned of Sierra Leone's "severe financial crisis", with the ICG also noting that youth unemployment had reached an all time high of 80%.⁵⁸ Significantly, according to a report of the Peace Building Commission, the effects of poverty have been felt most acutely by Sierra Leone's youth, a demographic that includes many former RUF combatants:

Two thirds of the youth population is unemployed and largely marginalized from the political system, and lacks adequate education and training. Significantly, many of the dire conditions that gave rise to the conflict in 1991 remain in 2006, with many youths unemployed, marginalized and lacking hope for the future.⁵⁹

This bleak assessment echoes that of the TRC in its 2004 final report, where it found that ex-combatant's political integration was being undermined by the continued desperation of their social and economic destitution, stating: “many ex-combatants testified that the conditions that caused them to join the conflict persist in the country, and if given the opportunity, they would fight again”.⁶⁰ Accordingly, following DDR, many former RUF combatants have returned to the fringes of Sierra Leone, both geographically and socio-politically, rejoining the growing number of youths seeking profit from alluvial diamond mining in the border regions or taking their place among the swollen ranks of the towns’ unemployed.⁶¹ This represents a worrying echo of the pre-war situation, where large groups of unemployed youth and diamond miners were alienated from the Freetown political machinery and came to view conflict as a means of empowerment. Once again, economic conditions are causing the political marginalisation of former RUF fighters.

Sierra Leone's economic situation also risks engendering a potentially destabilising sense of disillusionment and frustration. Clearly, incentives to eschew violence for peaceful political discourse are quickly diminishing for those former combatants who have failed to realise the economic and social advancement expected from DDR. The majority of demobilised RUF combatants who have remained in Sierra Leone had expectations of extensive economic development, which may very well outstretch the realistic capacity of the country, at least in the short term. In a 2001 report entitled “Managing Uncertainty”, the ICG warned that failure of the DDR programme and internationally sponsored reintegration schemes to meet the high hopes of former combatants would almost certainly result in their return to violence as a means to securing basic welfare security.⁶² In some instances, ex-RUF combatants have indeed returned to conflict rather than seek to navigate the complex psychological and economic difficulties encountered in peacetime. For many whose driving motivation has been to seek economic security, integration into regional conflicts such as that in neighbouring Liberia has made far more sense than seeking political reintegration into an impoverished Sierra Leone.⁶³ The apparently profitable involvement of ex-combatants in regional conflicts – or at least reports suggesting such activity – risks encouraging former RUF fighters still in Sierra Leone to reevaluate the benefits of peace.

The 2007 Elections

The 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections, widely seen as a crucial test of Sierra Leone's capacity to manage political and security matters independently from external actors, served as a

marker-point for the progress of political reintegration and confidence-building efforts. In the absence of a large UN peacekeeping force or international military presence, the task of maintaining a stable security environment for free and fair elections was undertaken by the Sierra Leonean police. Voting arrangements, including the sensitisation of the electorate, monitoring and counting the ballot, fell under the sole responsibility of the NEC. In further contrast to the 2002 election, the incumbent president, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, was constitutionally required to step down and give way to a newly elected president. In this respect, whatever the result, the conclusion of the election would involve a peaceful relinquishing of power by one leader and regime to another, a major test for any society recently emerging from civil conflict.

The 2007 election saw high voter registration and a subsequent turnout representing 75.8% of Sierra Leone's total population. The largely successful political mobilisation of former RUF fighters reflected in part an appreciation by the NEC and civil-society groups of the specific circumstances affecting youth and ex-combatants. Along with workshops and surveys of ex-RUF members, regular radio broadcasts proved particularly effective in mobilising many whose illiteracy and educational background rendered election literature or complex political discourse unsuitable. For those who had often suffered isolation from the electoral process through their rural location and distance from the hub of Freetown, the use of radio broadcasts was a crucial development.⁶⁴ The promotion of youth issues to the heart of political campaigning may also have played a part in the high turn-out, with the major parties presenting themselves as actively seeking to resolve the problems causing discontent among Sierra Leone's youth and ex-combatants. Presidential candidates focused heavily on youth employment, the provision of education and the eradication of corruption, promising at youth rallies that such issues would be the central preoccupation of their presidency.⁶⁵ The increasingly youth-centred focus of the parties owed much to the fact that of the 2.6 million Sierra Leoneans registered to vote, almost 40% were under the age of 27.⁶⁶

Despite the political rhetoric aimed at capturing the youth vote, a 2007 survey conducted prior to the polls found that many Sierra Leoneans, particularly the youth, saw the political parties as unrepresentative and as offering little real policy choice.⁶⁷ In this sense, the votes of former RUF fighters related more to a desire for change than an investment in one particular party or political strategy deemed to correspond to their interests.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, in a country where such dissatisfaction had previously been expressed through violence and a rejection of political authority, the use of the vote by ex-combatants in this manner was deemed a positive sign for the

political reintegration project. Optimism also stemmed from the country's ability to survive a number of potentially destabilising factors in the run-up to and during the elections, such as the delay of voting by two weeks, the close nature of the contest and, crucially, spates of violence in the lead-up to the second round of voting, which at one point threatened to derail voting altogether.

Yet while encouraging in many respects, the high voter turn-out and completion of the elections were not tantamount to successful political reintegration. In actual fact, the 2007 elections highlighted the growth of a number of developments which served to undermine the political reintegration of former RUF combatants. Perhaps most critically, they showed that even where ex-combatants had been politically *incorporated*, some forms of political participation actually proved divisive or detrimental to their long-term political *reintegration*.

The violence in the second round of voting provides a potent illustration of this point and of the need to examine the specific form of political participation achieved among former rebels. Following the failure of any candidate to secure the required 55% of the vote, tensions between supporters of all sides greatly intensified and street rallies turned violent. Police were forced to use tear gas to disperse battling APC and SLPP supporters across the country, moving President Kabbah to threaten to impose a state of emergency to curb what he described as “the current state of intimidation, molestation and violent acts”.⁶⁹ Tensions on the streets were matched by tensions between the contending candidates, and amid increasing claims and counter-claims of political intimidation, President Kabbah was unable to gain the attendance of both the SLPP's Solomon Berewa and the APC's Ernest Koroma at a public rally to denounce the civil unrest.⁷⁰ Despite this setback, the second round of voting was successfully completed and the APC emerged victorious. Having failed to win a court injunction barring the NEC from announcing the results on 17 September, the defeated SLPP duly conducted a peaceful transition of power. However, looters subsequently ransacked the headquarters of the SLPP and in Mile 91, a base for a large number of ex-RUF combatants, many violent attacks against journalists and SLPP supporters were reported.⁷¹

Some observers interpreted the tensions of the second round of voting as a positive sign for the health of democratic development in Sierra Leone.⁷² It is certainly clear that the closeness of the vote forced the major parties to court the electorate, increasing the likelihood that policies would incorporate ex-combatants' concerns and that ex-combatants would themselves see their votes as

having a direct effect on the political landscape. The split of Charles Margai from the SLPP to form the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC), which arguably cost Solomon Berewa the election, was widely deemed a positive development for democracy in Sierra Leone in that it limited the chances of a landslide victory for the incumbent regime, consequently increasing accountability and reliance on public support by the new government.⁷³ Nevertheless, if the aim of politically integrating former RUF combatants was to consolidate their move away from violence towards peaceful political intercourse as a means to bring change, the violence was far from positive. An immediate concern was the direct involvement of ex-RUF combatants, with all sides accused of using former rebel and CDF soldiers to intimidate opposition supporters and candidates. In an interview with IRIN, the director of PRIDE, Ibrahim Bangura, confirmed the recruitment of ex-RUF combatants by political parties as bodyguards and security, noting that the head of the APC's security operations was ex-RUF fighter Idrissa Kamara.⁷⁴ The cynical employment of former rebel combatants in acts of political intimidation and crime in 2007 was a worrying mirror of the abusive practices that had characterised the one-party regime of Siaka Stevens in the 1970s and 1980s. Through their desperate economic situation and experiences of violence, ex-combatants remain particularly vulnerable to such recruitment, a fact underlined by their involvement in regional conflicts. By incorporating former RUF fighters in acts of political intimidation, leaders and political parties in Sierra Leone actually served to reconnect ex-combatants with violence as opposed to consolidating their rejection of it. Rather than demonstrating politics as an effective substitute for violence, violence was treated as an effective means to influence politics.

The election violence also reflected the wider development of a negative political culture that did little to build confidence in the capacity of post-conflict Sierra Leone to transcend the abuses that had originally fostered conflict. In the run-up to elections, the UN Peacebuilding Commission observed that “the discourse from political parties is showing signs of growing intolerance and parties are still striving to become credible vehicles for political expression.”⁷⁵ The dangerous promotion of violence as a political method went hand in hand with party politics adopting a more confrontational tone, culminating in President Kabbah’s injunction that contending parties “desist from making provocative and inflammatory statements against each other” during the election.⁷⁶ The system into which the RUF was being incorporated was increasingly based on zero-sum political competition, with the danger that ex-combatants invested in particular parties over and above the system as a whole.⁷⁷ In the long-term, the development of such a political atmosphere risks seeing ex-combatants reject the authority of those leaders or parties for whom

they did not vote and encourage them to view any political failure of their party or leader as a defeat of their own aspirations and political stake.⁷⁸

The resurrection of bitter political rivalries risked aligning ex-combatants along ethnic and regional divisions, which have in the past informed political allegiances. The PMDC's introduction to the political scene was a potentially positive development in this respect, serving to break regional voting patterns by leading southern Mende voters to back the APC, traditionally reliant on Temne support in the north. However, such divisions were still deemed a pressing concern by the UN Secretary-General in his December 2007 report to the Security Council, in which he spoke of the “increasing dominance of ethnicity and regionalism in the politics of Sierra Leone”, which, he added “could have a negative impact on peace-consolidation efforts in the country”.⁷⁹ The most obvious negative impact on peace-consolidation was precisely the risk that ex-RUF combatants and former CDF fighters become embroiled in such rivalries, undermining their political reintegration and fostering political grievances.⁸⁰ The underlying lesson for integration efforts was that not only is the form of political participation achieved by ex-combatants an important consideration, but also by extension, the nature of the political environment into which they are being integrated. The increase in party rivalries and local divisions, leading to violence, illustrated that the environment into which the RUF was being integrated was not conducive to peace or to a view of political discourse as inherently superior to violence as a means of achieving change.

The violence and mutual distrust between parties in the 2007 election further undermined the political reintegration of ex-RUF combatants by failing to build confidence in Sierra Leone's internal political integrity. The 2002 elections had witnessed similarly violent clashes between the short-lived RUF and SLPP supporters in Freetown, which were eventually quashed by the intervention of international peacekeepers.⁸¹ This did little to reverse perceptions that Sierra Leone was reliant for its security and political stability on external actors. Similarly, despite the ability of the Sierra Leonean police to handle the more widespread outbreaks in 2007, the confrontational and internecine behaviour of the parties risked reinforced the notion that, left to its own devices, Sierra Leone's political system would inevitably default to its previous abusive configuration.⁸² Although the NEC performed with relative transparency and competence in 2007, this notion of 'politics as usual', or 'same car, different driver' was not unjustified, with allegations of wider political malpractice well founded.⁸³ In following the elections Mats Utas observed the continuing play of patron-client politics in Sierra Leone:

Hordes of people line up outside the SLPP party leader's mansion in order to receive their mandatory money in exchange for promising their votes[...] Although most visible at the SLPP party leader's mansion (simply because most money has been given away here) it is clear that all political parties and party functionaries on all levels have handed out money in exchange for support.⁸⁴

The practice of 'votes for sale' – and its very visibility – represented a further threat to the building of faith among former RUF fighters in the integrity of the post-conflict democratic system and its capacity to transcend the exclusionary politics which fostered conflict.⁸⁵ The persistence of patrimonial politics accompanied evidence of a failure to root out endemic corruption in Sierra Leone's political institutions. Following his inauguration in November, President Koroma commissioned an audit of government ministries, uncovering the continued and relatively unchecked proliferation of corruption and mismanagement under the SLPP regime.⁸⁶

The 2007 elections have been viewed by many as a positive development for the political reintegration of the RUF through their demonstration of ex-combatant's willingness to channel dissatisfaction politically, through the vote. However, this is to miss that such a commitment was made in the short-term, and that continued persistence of such dissatisfaction posed a threat to the longer-term commitment of former RUF fighters. This long-term political reintegration, and the ability of Koroma's government to build confidence in Sierra Leone's political institutions, remained dependent upon Sierra Leone's economic development. The BBC's correspondent in Freetown, Mark Doyle, pointedly observed that for the presidential inauguration ceremony, boycotted by the SLPP executive, the government was forced to rely on borrowed limousines and UN helicopters to transport its dignitaries.⁸⁷ At the focal point of one of Sierra Leone's most encouraging signs for the consolidation of peace, the economic strictures which threaten to undermine it were as apparent as ever.

Conclusion

The case of Sierra Leone demonstrates that the nature of a non-state armed group and the identity and motivations of its members directly affect the form and relative ease of its political reintegration. In the case of the RUF, the overall absence of a coherent political project, a limited

technical political capacity and the movement's deep unpopularity with the civilian population rendered it wholly unsuited for transformation into a political party. The importance of economic drivers for conflict and the large-scale perpetration of atrocities also undermined political incentives for peace, particularly when compared to appeals based on the provision of amnesty, basic welfare and security. In this respect, the political integration project in Sierra Leone also shows that offers of political power to a non-state armed actor must be informed by an understanding of the motivations of both its leadership and rank-and-file combatants, which are likely to differ widely. In Sierra Leone, the relationship of RUF leaders to their combatants was such that it served to undermine rather than facilitate their political reintegration. Hence another implication for political integration projects, which may run counter to conventional approaches, is that the dismantling rather than the political formalisation of a non-state armed actor may in fact best serve its political integration. Finally, the Sierra Leone experience shows that decisive military force applied against spoiler elements in a leadership can serve to facilitate combatants' involvement in DDR and wider political re-engagement.

The RUF's unsuitability for conventional political incorporation demonstrated that the success of political integration cannot be judged solely by a group's ability to form a party or share power. Instead, a more holistic account is necessary to appreciate the extent to which ex-combatants locate opportunities for expression and resolution of political concerns through a wide variety of formal and informal means, be it through participation in civil society groups, public discussion or interaction with established political institutions. Likewise, the Sierra Leone case shows that the success of this wider process cannot be judged by the narrow terms of electoral participation or the absence of renewed conflict, but must include less tangible indicators such as the extent to which ex-combatants hold faith in political interaction to deliver results, and the foundations upon which such confidence is based. Directly related to this approach, the experience of the RUF demonstrates that not only does the nature and identity of non-state armed actors impact on the form and potential success of political reintegration, but so too does the nature and configuration of the political system into which they are being incorporated. In the case of Sierra Leone, the involvement of international actors in politically incorporating ex-combatants was often positive and needed, but did it result in the RUF investing in external actors and assistance as opposed to Sierra Leone's own institutions? Similarly, the nature of Sierra Leone's political system, as highlighted by the 2007 elections, in many instances served to erode ex-combatants' confidence in political intercourse, or to reinforce violence as an acceptable method to achieve change. Finally, underpinning all of these factors, Sierra Leone's continuing experience

demonstrates that for a group such as the RUF, political and economic reintegration are two sides of the same coin.⁸⁸ For combatants whose primary agenda in conflict was to secure basic economic and welfare security, their long-term commitment to peaceful political interaction over and above violence is predicated upon successful economic incorporation. Given Sierra Leone's severe underdevelopment, and that of many societies emerging from violent conflict, progress in this respect represents one of the greatest challenges for the political reintegration of non-state armed groups.

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- ¹ President Charles Taylor of Liberia resented Sierra Leone's support for ECOMOG (Economic Community of West Africa States Monitoring Group) troops operating against his forces in Liberia. The RUF were actively sponsored by Taylor, who in seeking to destabilise the country, also gained access to its extensive diamond deposits.
- ² The reintegration process was officially completed in January 2004.
- ³ An analyst's comment, cited by Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, p267
- ⁴ In contrast to this article, Richards & Vincent, "Sierra Leone: Marginalization of the RUF," p88, argue that the RUF did develop "a quite coherent political agenda". However, although political grievances certainly existed, and apparent political instruction of some recruits occurred, the multitude of agendas at all levels which superseded political aims resulted in a clear lack of political and organisational coherence.
- ⁵ The track record of brutality and the absence of coherent political ideology gave rise to a number of misleading characterisations of the conflict as 'anarchic' or as driven entirely by greed. See, for example, Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy." See Richards, *Fighting For The Rainforest*, for a convincing response to such analysis.
- ⁶ Richards, *Fighting For The Rainforest*, p5, puts the initial number of RUF combatants at 100, but Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, p1, taking into account non-conflicting estimations places the number between 100-300. This group included a significant proportion of non-Sierra Leoneans, most notably a contingent of Charles Taylor's Liberian combatants.
- ⁷ Foday Sankoh regularly invoked pan-Africanist revolutionary ideology and had originally met Charles Taylor in a Libyan training camp. The RUF's 1995 pamphlet, *Footpaths to Democracy*, though often vague offered some semblance of RUF doctrine. However, though it can be argued the movement began with overtly political aspirations, the evolution of the RUF and the wider conflict involved subordination of such convictions to a multitude of other driving forces.
- ⁸ Although alluvial diamonds are often portrayed as the main resource sought by RUF combatants, access to perceived benefits such as security, food, marriage or women were far more significant in the aims of the rank and file. See Richards, *Fighting For The Rainforest*, for an examination of the link between the system of patrimonialism and the marginalisation of youth.
- ⁹ For discussion of the political economy of war see Berdal & Malone, *Greed and Grievance*, and with particularly focus on Sierra Leone, Keen, "Incentives and Disincentives for Violence."
- ¹⁰ Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, also highlights psychological functions of conflict, most notably its reversal of power-relationships and hierarchies which enabled combatants to address complex sensitivities to humiliation and shame, often serving to intensify violence.
- ¹¹ As pressure for elections had intensified, so too had violence against civilians. Hands or thumbs which could be used to mark the ballot paper were amputated, and in some instances, anti-election slogans were carved into the chests and backs of victims. The perpetrators of such anti-election intimidation not only included RUF fighters but apparently involved significant numbers of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA); Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, p154.
- ¹² Humphreys & Weinstein, *What the Fighters Say*, pp27-29
- ¹³ Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, p194
- ¹⁴ *Ibid* pp194-195
- ¹⁵ Fears of army-RUF collaboration were epitomised by the notion of the "sobel" (soldier-rebel) and highlight that the RUF cannot adequately be described as a purely political venture diametrically opposed to the state. AFRC leader, Major Johnny Paul Koroma, called on Sankoh to take the position of Deputy Chairman but Nigeria did not relinquish the RUF leader. Rather, Nigerian-led ECOMOG forces were deployed to reinstall the civilian government in Freetown.
- ¹⁶ Seven other ministerial posts were allotted to RUF leaders.
- ¹⁷ Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, p254
- ¹⁸ The UN mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, was effectively barred by the RUF from whole regions of north and north-eastern Sierra Leone, where it became a target for attacks and looting. In May 2000, the RUF abducted up to 500 UNAMSIL peacekeepers. See United Nations, *Third Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, and United Nations, *Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone*, for the UN's assessment at the time of RUF spoiler tactics and the recalcitrance of Sankoh in particular.
- ¹⁹ The abducted soldiers had been part of the original British mandate restricted to securing Freetown and the international airport.
- ²⁰ Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, pp272-273.
- ²¹ Targeting rebel positions in Sierra Leone and Liberia, Guinean forces overwhelmed the RUF with a combination of airpower and the backing of local militias. So complete was the military reversal that the RUF requested UNAMSIL deploy in Kono, the region affected by fighting and to which the RUF had previously denied access. As local CDF militias, backed by Guinea, made major inroads into this area, UNAMSIL represented a protection force not only for the local civilian population but also for the RUF.
- ²² Between May 2001 and January 2002 a total of 19,267 RUF combatants were disarmed. source: <http://www.unddr.org/countryprogrammes.php?c=60>. However, it is important to note that a significant portion of RUF combatants travelled to neighbouring Liberia to support the increasingly under-threat Charles Taylor.
- ²³ Humphreys & Weinstein, *What the Fighters Say*, p29.

- ²⁴ *Ibid* p19.
- ²⁵ *Ibid* p20.
- ²⁶ Richards & Vincent, “Sierra Leone: Marginalization of the RUF,” p82, see the detention in 2000 of 400 RUF members as severely weakening the party’s political capacity. At the time of the 2002 elections, Sankoh was incarcerated. His deputy, Issa Sesay, also failed to meet the minimum age requirement to stand as presidential candidate, paving the way for RUF secretary, Pallo Bangura. However, Bangura faced opposition within the RUF from many who pledged support solely to Sankoh. This had a debilitating effect on the leadership of the party as it failed to gain support of Sankoh loyalists.
- ²⁷ Humphreys & Weinstein, *What the Fighters Say*, p3. The survey also notes, p29, in relation to Lomé: “Combatants did not consider the substantial political gains of the RUF to be important aspects of the accords.”
- ²⁸ *Ibid* p25.
- ²⁹ PRIDE, *Ex-Combatant Views*, p15.
- ³⁰ UNAMSIL, *The DDR Process in Sierra Leone*, p7.
- ³¹ See ICG, *Managing Uncertainty*, which notes a shift in the RUF in 2001 towards hardliners, away from the more moderate Issa Sesay. Although regarded as a more moderate figure, Sesay, was also indicted for war crimes in 2003 and was resented by many in the RUF for the personal wealth he had accrued from the conflict, yet another war-association unlikely to endear the rebel movement to the public.
- ³² See ICG, *Politics As Usual*, p8.
- ³³ In recognising that the RUF was ill-suited for transformation into a political party, this article does not intend to suggest that the *move* to create the RUF was in itself a mistake. Indeed it may well have served to ease the transition to peace. Rather, the point here is that whereas in other post-conflict situations the transformation of non-state actors into political entities may constitute to some degree their political integration, this would not be the case for the RUF.
- ³⁴ See Malan et al., *Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone*, particularly chapter 9, “Electoral Issues and the Transformation of the RUF.” Richards & Vincent, “Sierra Leone: Marginalization of the RUF,” argue that UN partiality towards the government was also detrimental to the RUF’s political capacity.
- ³⁵ The Special Court also had an important immediate role to play in addressing the key issues of amnesty and justice, reassuring demobilising combatants that peace would not be an exercise in one-sided recrimination. However, both the Special Court and the TRC failed to sensitise ex-combatants to their work; former RUF remained confused over amnesty and concerned that testimonies given to the TRC, aimed at assisting reconciliation, might be passed to the Special Court to facilitate criminal proceedings. A 2002 investigation into this issue found that ex-RUF combatants were poorly informed as to the role and mandate of both the TRC and Special Court. See PRIDE, *Ex-Combatant Views*.
The Special Court also at times risked jeopardising the political reintegration of the RUF through its impact on the rebel leadership. By indicting Issa Sesay, a moderate seen as instrumental in moving the RUF towards peace, the Special Court was actually perceived as undermining the immediate interests of political integration; see Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, pp 273-274.
- ³⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Vol.2, Ch.1, *Executive Summary*.
- ³⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Vol. 2, Ch. 3, item 306. It defines youths as those aged between 18-35. However, in this article 'youth' also refers to the significant number of young teenagers and child-recruits of the RUF.
- ³⁸ *Ibid*, Vol. 3 B, Ch. 5; Vol. 2, Ch. 3.
- ³⁹ *Ibid*, Vol. 2, Ch. 3. The Commission recommended that parties be required to ensure that at least 10% of all their candidates in public elections were youths.
- ⁴⁰ Republic of Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone National Youth Policy*.
- ⁴¹ For the limited reach of youth-targeted development policy see IMF & IDA, *Sierra Leone: Annual Progress Report*, and The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), *Sierra Leone: Election campaign focuses on youth*, Freetown, 8 August 2007, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73638>
- ⁴² The means, in this instance, being funds and an adequate civil service; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Vol. 2, Ch. 3, item 308.
- ⁴³ Humphreys & Weinstein, *What the Fighters Say*, p4.
- ⁴⁴ See Clapham, *Sierra Leone: The Political Economy of Internal Conflict*, p10, for historical roots of such attitudes.
- ⁴⁵ Humphreys & Weinstein, *What the Fighters Say*, p44.
- ⁴⁶ BBC World Service Trust and Search for Common Ground, *Sierra Leone Elections 2007*, pp39-42.
- ⁴⁷ See for instance Humphreys & Weinstein, *What the Fighters Say*, p42. The survey found that more than half of respondents believed the situation regarding corruption was the same as it had been prior conflict, if not worse. Clearly the problem of corruption is strongly interlinked with economic underdevelopment, a factor covered in the following section.
- ⁴⁸ Despite the indictments no prosecutions were made and the commissioners returned to supervise elections. Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), *Report on the Government's Fight against Corruption*, p14, notes that of a total of 43 cases investigated by the ACC in 2002, only one conviction was made, suggesting such corruption may still have been relatively safeguarded.
- ⁴⁹ ICG, *Rebuilding Failed States*, p8.

- ⁵⁰ ICG, *The Election Opportunity*, p9.
- ⁵¹ At both local and national level this return reflects as much as anything the scarcity of skilled and experienced leaders among Sierra Leone's particularly young population. The eight presidential candidates in the 2002 elections were mostly veteran politicians, with the notable exception of Johnny Paul Koroma, former leader of the AFRC military junta.
- ⁵² Thomson, *Reform or Relapse?*, pp20-23, and ICG, *The Election Opportunity*, pp11-12.
- ⁵³ See Fanthorpe et al., *Chiefdom Governance Reform Programme*.
- ⁵⁴ CGG, *Report on the Government's Fight against Corruption*, p24.
- ⁵⁵ For the link between economic underdevelopment and corruption, the CGG's *Report on the Government's Fight against Corruption*, notes that low wages for civil servants and lack of financial independence for the ACC create fertile grounds for the acceptance of bribes, misappropriation of public funds and political interference in corruption investigations.
- ⁵⁶ Between September 1998 and January 2002 a total of 24,352 RUF combatants were disarmed. source:<http://www.unddr.org/countryprogrammes.php?c=60>. Humphreys & Weinstein, *Demobilization and Reintegration*, find little evidence of a link between combatant's completion of DDR and their successful reintegration.
- ⁵⁷ United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, *Country Specific Meeting on Sierra Leone*.
- ⁵⁸ United Nations, *Fifth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone*; ICG, *The Election Opportunity*.
- ⁵⁹ United Nations, *Report of the Peacebuilding Commission*, p5. See also United Nations, *Fifth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone*, p4, and IRIN, *Sierra Leone: Not a lot of guns but a lot of frustration*, Freetown, 6 September 2007, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74151>. One ex-combatant interviewed in this report expresses a common disillusionment over DDR: "We were made promises about what would happen to us after we disarmed but the promises were empty".
- ⁶⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Vol. 2, Ch. 1, *Executive Summary*, p5, item 20.
- ⁶¹ ICG, *Rebuilding Failed States*.
- ⁶² ICG, *Managing Uncertainty*, p15. The report further recognised that economic progress and integration efforts were mutually dependent, calling on those managing DDR to "reduce combatant's expectations" to realistic levels. Precisely how such a task could be achieved without stirring up disillusionment, however, is far from clear.
- ⁶³ See Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Youth, Poverty and Blood*; and Ginifer, *Evaluation of the Conflict Prevention Pools*, p16.
- ⁶⁴ BBC World Service Trust and Search for Common Ground, *Sierra Leone Elections 2007*, p12, found that those listening to radio were more likely to know the date of elections than non-listeners.
- ⁶⁵ IRIN, *Sierra Leone: Election campaign focuses on youth*, Freetown, 8 August 2007, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73638>
- ⁶⁶ Source: IRIN, *Sierra Leone: Election campaign focuses on youth*
- ⁶⁷ BBC World Service Trust and Search for Common Ground, *Sierra Leone Elections 2007*, pp19-20.
- ⁶⁸ One unemployed voter told IRIN: "I voted for the SLPP twice but now I will try another party." IRIN, *Sierra Leone: Election campaign focuses on youth*.
- ⁶⁹ BBC, *Emergency Threat in Sierra Leone*, 28 August 2007, BBC News Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6966339.stm>; IRIN, *Sierra Leone: Election tensions could help or hinder democratic process*, Freetown, 29 August 2007, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73994>. The violence, although significant, must be kept in perspective. Casualties were generally restricted to injury from rock-throwing, knives and sling-shots, and at its peak violence was never more than rioting. However, the roots of violence, its potential to destabilise and its impact on perceptions, has great significance for political reintegration.
- ⁷⁰ BBC, *Sierra Leone poll peace rally snubbed*, 6 September 2007, BBC News Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6981394.stm>. Koroma instead announced his commitment to peace in a speech at APC headquarters, also stating: "Let Berewa allow our people free access all over the country. He has armed people all over the country." The APC consistently accused the SLPP of rearming the CDF militias.
- ⁷¹ BBC, *Violence spreads in Sierra Leone*, 20 September 2007, BBC News Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7004686.stm>
- ⁷² See, for instance, IRIN, *Sierra Leone: Election tensions could help or hinder democratic process*
- ⁷³ Solomon Berewa of the SLPP was vice-president of Kabbah's government and widely expected to win the contest. However, when Charles Margai split from the SLPP to form the PMDC, the SLPP's support was weakened, and in the second round of voting, Margai's support for Koroma of the APC may have proved decisive.
- ⁷⁴ IRIN, *Sierra Leone: Not a lot of guns but a lot of frustration*. Bangura also pointed to the absence of firearms in Sierra Leone as significant in minimising fatalities and preventing violence from escalating. As a reflection on the disarmament component of DDR this would suggest a degree of success, yet the fact that violence has continued to persist also demonstrates that removal of arms alone may only alter the form of conflict without tackling its roots, an objective which can only be addressed by the reintegration component. In this respect Bangura saw little progress, stating that "under the right conditions all the peace-building efforts we have seen so far may yet collapse." For use of ex-RUF as bodyguards see also Utas, *Watermelon Politics in Sierra Leone*, p64.
- ⁷⁵ United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, *Country Specific Meeting on Sierra Leone*, p8.

- ⁷⁶ BBC, *Sierra Leone's leader urges calm*, 14 August 2007, BBC News Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6945894.stm>
- ⁷⁷ If the system as a whole was deemed corrupt or failing, this might seem logical. Yet, while it was important for parties to hold real political appeal to ex-combatants, building confidence in the wider democratic process also required promoting tolerance of electoral defeat and plurality of opinion.
- ⁷⁸ Whilst this may be a tendency of democracies generally, in a country in which rejection of political authority and political disengagement led to prolonged conflict, such developments threaten a fragile peace.
- ⁷⁹ United Nations, *Fifth Report of the the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone*, p8.
- ⁸⁰ The ethnic divide in Sierra Leone is often overstated, yet instances of political violence by youths do sometimes reflect this factor. See for example: BBC, *Violence spreads in Sierra Leone*, which reports the targeting of shops of Kabbah's Mandingo ethnicity.
- ⁸¹ Mark Doyle (BBC), *S Leone election turns sour*, 12 May 2002, BBC News Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1982817.stm>
- ⁸² There was no need for international intervention in 2007, but calls from the UN and international donors for presidential candidates to respect the peace served to reinforce the pattern of external actors as guarantors and political regulators.
- ⁸³ Despite the NEC's encouraging performance, the electoral outcome was actually contested by the SLPP, and two of the NEC's own commissioners publicly disassociated themselves from result: United Nations, *Fifth Report of the the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone*, p9.
- ⁸⁴ Utas, *Watermelon Politics in Sierra Leone*.
- ⁸⁵ Utas makes the important point that many Sierra Leoneans accepted money but still voted for their party or candidate of choice, suggesting that this may render politician's attempts to "shop for votes" redundant and limit its future practice.
- ⁸⁶ The BBC obtained a full copy of the report by the Presidential Transition Team; see Mark Doyle (BBC), *S Leone 'riddled with corruption'*, 14 November 2007, Freetown, BBC News Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7092861.stm>. The APC's willingness to investigate and expose this problem was a positive step in building confidence in transparent government among ex-combatants and the wider Sierra Leonean community. However, reporting alone is insufficient. Failure to deliver visible results in tackling corruption and abusive practises may irrevocably cement ex-combatants' views of political institutions as inherently exclusionary and self-serving, seriously damaging their long-term political reintegration.
- ⁸⁷ BBC, *SL Leader pledges graft crackdown*, 15 November 2007, BBC News Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7096013.stm> . It is also worth noting that despite the 2007 success, the UN expected to assist in organising 2008 local elections due to the logistical and financial limitations continuing to plague the NEC.
- ⁸⁸ A point also made in 2001 by ICG, *Managing Uncertainty*, p10.