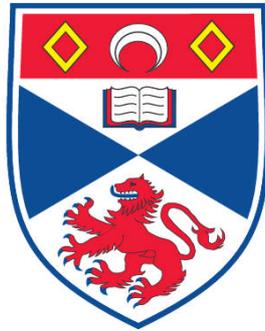


**EMBEDDED VIOLENCE AND YOUTH  
THE TRANSMISSION AND PERPETUATION OF VIOLENCE IN  
POST-WAR SIERRA LEONE**

**Elisa Dari**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



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UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS  
School of International Relations

# Embedded violence and youth

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*The transmission and perpetuation of violence in post-war Sierra Leone.*

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14/03/2011

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

I, Elisa Dari, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 40.000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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## Abstract

War exerts an undeniably significant influence on the values, norms, behaviour and attitudes which constitute the shared culture of the society. During prolonged armed conflicts, the exposure to extreme violence creates a 'culture of violence' in which violence becomes embedded in the values system of the society and is therefore permitted and condoned, making violence resilient to peace-building efforts and therefore likely to recur. In order to understand how a 'culture of violence' persists long after the official end of war, it is necessary to understand how it is transmitted to younger generations and through them is carried over into peace time. This thesis aims to explore and understand the phenomenon of transmission of a 'culture of violence' focusing on youths as carriers of such transmission. To analyse the phenomenon, an integrative and comprehensive analytical framework was developed and a case study was chosen to which to apply the framework. The case study is Sierra Leone. The analytical framework is constituted by four 'spaces' of transmission which have emerged from the preliminary research. The four 'spaces' are: poverty, family, peers and social groups. The analytical framework was then utilised during the fieldwork stage of the project in order to identify the relevance of each 'space' as well as the interactions at work among the various 'spaces'. From the material collected during fieldwork, poverty and family emerged as structural factors of the process of transmission while peers and social groups emerged as immediate factors. As a result of the fieldwork political factionalism was added to the analytical framework as a fifth 'space'. The analysis of the fieldwork material revealed how the different 'spaces' are inextricably connected with one another and how they support each other while creating a network of forces that supports and perpetuates the transmission of a 'culture of violence'.

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## List of abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Ruling Council
APC	All Peoples Congress
AYPAD	Africa Youth for Peace and Development
CCYA	Centre for Coordination of Youth Activities
COOPI	Cooperazione Internazionale
CORD	Christian Organisations in Relief and Development
ENCISS	Enhancing the Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State
GTZ	Gesellschaft Für Technische Zusammenarbeit
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLYEO	Sierra Leone Youth Empowerment Organisation
SPW	Students Partnership Worldwide
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNIPSIL	United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

# Introduction

War comes and devastates. Officially it ends with the signing of a peace agreement after having caused widespread death and destruction. It is over; no more violence. However, the transition from war to peace does not happen in a moment, it is a long difficult process that involves the reconstruction of the state institutions, of the economy, as well as the reconstruction of society, its bonds and its structures. War leaves deep scars and wounds, to the landscape and the material properties, to the social fabric and societal institutions, and to the individual both in the body and in the mind. The day the peace accord is signed might represent the end of the war but often it does not translate into the end of violence. Violence seems to be resistant to peace agreements, it does not disappear after the official end of the war, instead it is reshaped. Post-war societies are characterised by high levels of violence even many years after the official end of the armed conflict, and a society characterised by violence cannot be considered a society at peace. Therefore in order to build a sustainable and long-lasting peace it is essential to identify why and how violence survives as part of the system within a society. This resilience is often at the root of so-called 'cycles of violence' which refers to the resumption of old or new hostilities among the fighting parties and sometimes the resumption of armed conflict (Lumsden, 1997). How is that made possible? Why is violence so hard to eradicate? Steenkamp, among others, argued that war "has impacted on society's norms and values in such a way as to foster a great social tolerance of individuals' violent behaviour. This tolerance has become so embedded in society that it survives the peace accords and can be helpful in understanding continuing high levels of violence" (Steenkamp, 2005: 254). This thesis is based on this understanding of the impact of war on societies and communities.

Violence is normalised during armed conflict, it becomes part of the everyday functioning of a society torn apart. It is not even perceived as violence any more, it is simply part of how things work. Violence is also internalised by those who experience it as

an everyday occurrence; it becomes part of the way of thinking, the way of living, the way of surviving. It becomes an element of the culture shared by the community or society and as such is transmitted in the form of values and norms regulating accepted and deviant behaviour. This has been referred to as a 'culture of violence' that emerges as a consequence of a prolonged war. 'Cycles of violence' and 'culture of violence' are two different concepts, the first referring to a temporal phenomenon of return to violent conflict and the second referring to the condition of many post-war societies in which violence is normalised also during peace time. However the two are not completely foreign to one other. The resilience of a 'culture of violence' in post-war countries can leave them vulnerable to future 'cycles of violence' representing a threat for the stability of peace. So the question that needs to be answered, and that this paper attempts to answer, is: how does the transmission of a 'culture of violence' take place? In this paper I will explore this phenomenon and try to explain its mechanisms and dynamics by focusing on the role of youth.

I choose to focus my attention on youth for several reasons. Firstly because youth are the group most deeply affected by exposure to the extreme violence of war to the point that violence shapes the system of norms and values that children and young people learn to be normal. The literature on the impact of war on children and youth has broadened greatly in the past two decades, with a special focus on their psychological well-being and on post-traumatic stress disorder syndrome. Children are often depicted as passive and vulnerable *a priori*, and because of this their agency and their role as active participants within their environment, both during and after the war, is often missed. This paper aims to put youth at the centre of the stage both as recipients and as agents of transmission of ideas, values and behaviour. Secondly, I choose to focus on youth because they represent the unintentional vehicle of transmission of violence into future years as they embody the new and future generation. In fact once the war ends, and youth become young adults, they bring their understanding and perception of violence into the time of peace, creating a continuum, a bridge between war and peace. This is

especially evident in the case of the phenomenon of child soldiers who experience military life and military roles at a very early age. As a consequence, after the war, they experience serious difficulties in shifting from military roles to civilian roles. These ex-combatants re-enter society and can exert some level of influence on its members. Third, the choice of focusing on youth stems from the fact that in many post-war societies children and youth represent a numerically important proportion of society, often above 50% of it. The aim of this research project is to investigate how youth can function as carriers in the process of the transmission of a culture of violence, thus ensuring the survival of violence within a post-war society, in an attempt to explain how the transmission of a 'culture of violence' takes place.

In general, literature about the process of transmission of violence is scarce. When the variable 'youth' is added, then the gap becomes even wider. Each discipline looks at a small aspect of it, but a more comprehensive account of the process of transmission of violence is hard to find. Psychologists focus on the consequences of trauma and its transmission between generations, mainly between parents and their offspring (Leavitt and Fox, 1993; Thabet and Vostanis, 1999; Papageorgiou et al., 2000; McIntyre and Ventura, 2003; among others), which is rarely shared as a concept by non-Western societies and which tell very little about the transmission of violence. Sociologists focus on violent behaviour mainly in Western societies and even more specifically on metropolitan suburbs which do not share the same traumatic experience of post-war societies (Kendal, Murray and Linden, 1997; Côté and Allahar, 1994; Marquardt, 1998 and Carrigan, 1998, among others). Nevertheless some interesting insights about peer relations can be drawn from these studies.

Considering the lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework that can account for the many aspects of the phenomenon of transmission, I have put together my analytical framework through which to analyse the phenomenon. Using the existing literature from various disciplines, I have identified the possible 'spaces' in which this

transmission can take place. These are four: family, peers, poverty and social groups. These 'spaces' constitute the analytical framework which acted as a guiding structure within which to explore the process at work in a real situation. First, the family (and parents in particular) as demonstrated in the experience of Holocaust survivors and their offspring. Secondly, peer groups represent a space in which attitudes, beliefs, values and norms are created, recreated and transmitted. The third space is to be found in the context of poverty, lack of opportunities and marginalisation. The economic and political stagnation that often follow long-lasting wars can support the perpetuation of violence as the only means of survival. The fourth space is social groups and social identity. As explained in the case of Mozambique and South African youth (Errante, 1999) as well as in many cases of youth soldiers, the systems of meaning and templates of socialisation constructed during the time of war become inextricably part of the way in which youth read and understand the world and social relations. In this way violence comes to sit at the foundation of youth identity, defining who they are in relation to others and the outside world.

The use of a case study became necessary to scrutinise the validity of the identified 'spaces' and the way they interact with each other. The case study I will focus on in this paper is Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone has experienced a brutal civil war that has plagued the country for 10 years. Almost 10 years after the signing of the peace agreement, Sierra Leonean society still experiences extremely high levels of violence. Children and youth represent the majority of the population and they played a crucial role before, during, as well as after, the conflict. For all these reasons, Sierra Leone seemed to be a relevant case study within which to apply the analytical framework in the attempt to identify the mechanisms of transmission that make violence an ordinary fact of everyday life in Sierra Leone.

Fundamental to this study was the contribution of fieldwork. In fact a simple research project based on secondary sources was unable to provide a satisfactory

explanation of the phenomenon. The very nature of the subject demanded direct research in the field in order to prove the validity of the analytical framework and truly account for the complexities of the process of transmission. Only through the fieldwork have I been able to identify the way violence manifests itself in each of the various 'spaces' that constitute the analytical framework, as well as the interactions between them, and the way they support each other. Through the interviews the picture has acquired a third dimension that would have been missed otherwise. Crucial elements that were not part of the analytical framework emerged through the interviews conducted during fieldwork, adding an unexpected 'space' in which the transmission of ideas and behaviours takes place.

The study and analysis carried out for this paper revealed how the transmission of violence takes the shape of a system in which youth retain a crucial position. The spaces of transmission interact with one another to create a network that can reach all levels of Sierra Leonean society. This system can support and perpetuate violence, even in time of peace, and the implications for the stability of Sierra Leonean society are extremely serious.

The organisation of the paper will reflect the progression of the research project. In Chapter One I will discuss the concepts of culture and violence in order to define the idea of a 'culture of violence' which represents what it is that is transmitted, the object of the process of transmission. Considering the lack of consensus about what both culture and violence are, it becomes essential to make clear how culture and violence are understood in this paper. In Chapter Two the discussion will move to the process of transmission. Various disciplines focus on different aspects of this phenomenon and each of them conceptualises the transmission of ideas, values and behaviour from a different perspective. There is no single comprehensive theory of transmission that includes every aspect of the process, nevertheless all the theories discussed in this chapter are relevant

to understanding how the transmission takes place. Each perspective on the process identifies a 'space' in which the transmission takes place. In the belief that the study of this phenomenon needs a more integrative approach, the 'spaces' identified in this chapter will combine to form the analytical framework used to carry out this study. How the analytical framework will be utilised is outlined in Chapter Three, together with the rationale behind the fieldwork and the research methods that I used on the ground. The fieldwork findings need to be understood in the specific context of the recent history of Sierra Leone, hence Chapter Four will provide the reader with a background on the country's history with a special focus on the civil war and on the role of youth with regard to the war and to Sierra Leonean society in general. Keeping in the background the events of the past two decades, Chapter Five will take the reader in today's Sierra Leone through the voices of those who participated in the fieldwork interviews. The fieldwork findings will be reported in this chapter without engaging in any sort of discussion on my part. The intention is to maintain the voices of the people interviewed as genuinely as possible, letting them 'speak' directly to the reader about their lives, the society, the reality of youth in Sierra Leone and the process of transmission of violence. In Chapter Six I will discuss what has emerged through the fieldwork, what trends and dynamics were highlighted by the interviews and how the analytical framework proved relevant and appropriate to the understanding of the process or not. Both chapters Five and Six are structured following the 'spaces' composing the analytical framework in order to maintain a clear pattern throughout the paper. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I will draw some broader conclusions about the process of transmission in its entirety, its nature and its consequences with regard to the Sierra Leonean case.

## Chapter 1: A culture of violence

The objective of this thesis is to try to understand how a culture of violence is transmitted, with a particular focus on the role of youth in the process. The crucial objective of this first chapter is to fix the starting points of the paper and it will do so by defining the object of the process of transmission. First of all we need to know what it is that is transmitted. So as a point of departure I will aim to answer the question 'what is a culture of violence?' Thus in this chapter I will discuss the concept of what I call a 'culture of violence'. It does not have a single, fixed interpretation. It is, therefore, necessary to clarify what is meant by the phrase 'culture of violence' as it sets the foundations upon which the rest of the research is based.

Both culture and violence are highly debated terms and complex ideas. When we speak of culture, as well as of violence, we do not refer to monolithic meanings. Attached to the words are sets of meanings, which are highly subjective. Culture brings up ideas of identity, of belonging, of beliefs and so on. It is a difficult term to define, and it has been the subject of heated debates within numerous disciplines. The same can be said for the word violence. Violence is not a word with a single clear definition. The concept of violence encompasses many and diverse aspects, ways of understanding it, conflicting definitions. Violence reaches into various spheres of life and has multiple dimensions. Similarly to culture, violence has been at the centre of debates across many different disciplines. The two concepts do not belong to one discipline or the other but rather cross over among Sociology, Anthropology, International Relations and more. Hence the need to clarify the position of the researcher regarding the meanings and definitions of these two words.

The chapter will therefore start with a discussion of the concept of culture, and this will be followed by a discussion about what violence is or is not. In the third part, I will

attempt a definition of what combination of the two words creates, namely a 'culture of violence'; what this combined concept means and what it entails.

Special attention will be given to the concept of a 'culture of violence' within post-war settings. In fact post-war societies have specificities of their own as the disruption caused by the war creates a context especially vulnerable to the perpetuation of violence, as Steenkamp explains "The conflict thus created a culture of violence, which produces a socially permissive environment within which the use of violence continues, even though violent politics has officially ended" (2005: 254). The high level of violence that post-war societies often experience has been widely reported, and more and more studies have focused their effort on trying to explain the persistence of violence after the end of a war (Borer, Darby and McEvoy-Levy, 2006; Darby, 2001; Steenkamp, 2005; Lumsden, 1997, among others).

Most importantly, the resilience of high levels of violence has also been identified as a dangerous destabilising factor for peace processes (Darby, 2006). Scholars of Peace and Conflict studies have focused more and more on the problematic survival of high levels of violence in post-peace accord societies, identifying in it a cause for the possible failure of peacebuilding efforts. Hence the importance of understanding the perpetuation and transmission of a culture of violence. However, in this chapter the focus will be limited to defining the concept of a 'culture of violence'.

## **Defining Culture**

The term culture is understood in a variety of ways and from many different perspectives. The multifaceted nature of the term culture stems from its intangibility. Culture is not something concrete that can be seen with the eyes and explained objectively. As a generic definition, culture has been understood as the ensemble of norms, values and

beliefs shared by the members of a group or society “as socially inherited, shared, and learned ways of living possessed by persons by virtue of their membership in social groups” (Avruch, 2002). From this perspective culture does not consist of the symbols, the rituals, music, literature or the arts, as often referred to in everyday speech. Distancing his understanding from this everyday use of the word culture, Geertz defines it as “not cults and costumes but the structures of meaning through which men give shape to their experience” (Geertz, 1993: 25). Through a “web of significance” (Geertz, 1993: 5) the individual interprets the external world around him/her and relates to it accordingly. This web determines the values and norms shared by the community, with which the individual needs to comply. Culture is the context, the connective tissue within which social behaviours, institutions and social processes are inscribed and thus expressed. The individual is immersed in the system of meanings specific to his society every day and as a consequence the images, codes and schemas are “deeply internalised and affectively loaded” in the individual (Avruch, 1998: 19). Culture is transmitted within a community from one generation to the next, it is produced and reproduced “through socialisation and sanctioning of deviant behaviour” (Steenkamp, 2005: 245).

The comprehension of culture as a frame of meanings allows the meanings themselves to be accessible and intelligible for the individual (Depkat, 2004). In turn the expression and articulation of culture takes place within people’s behaviours and social action. In this way culture becomes a cause, a source of motivation for social dynamics. “[...] First, culture is a system of meaning that people use to manage their daily worlds, large and small; second, culture is the basis of the social and political identity that affects how people line up and how they act on a wide range of matters” (Chabal and Daloz, 2006: 22). It is a two-way process, on one side culture provides those templates of meaning that are necessary to the individual to orientate himself within the society, its values and norms, and on the other side those same templates are enacted, produced and reproduced through people’s behaviour and actions. When this process leads to

action then it can be said that culture has causal potentiality (Avruch, 1998). For this reason culture has always had a main role in political agendas because it holds the potentiality to drive people into action.

Culture can be considered a map of the world constituted by images and schemas. “Mental maps actually produce entities like nation-state and notions of the other; [...] As such a system of meaning, culture refers to a complex circle: a community produces certain perceptions and imaginations about the self and the other, and in turn, these perceptions and imaginations produce and sustain these ‘imagined communities’” (Depkat, 2004: 179). This map is the means through which individuals translate the external world and make sense of it. Since maps of the worlds are socially constructed they become the expression of the differences between different communities. Through these culturally constructed maps the individual organises the data and the perception of the world but also determines accepted behaviours and attitudes within the social system, what is right and what is wrong. It should be noted that culture is not fixed and timeless. Culture is highly dynamic as it is not only received by the individual and passively learned but it is changed through the individual’s performance of it. Since culture is bound to the individual’s experience of the world then it is to be expected that it will adapt to the situation and the environment in which the individual enacts it, or as Avruch has put it, “Culture, the ‘derivative of experience’, is rooted deeply in ongoing or past social practices. This means (contrary to the reified or stable or homogeneous view of culture) that culture is to some extent always situational, flexible, and responsive to the exigencies of the worlds that individuals confront” (1998: 20).

Crucial to the understanding of the way in which violence survives in post-conflict societies is the link between culture and identity. In fact culture is strongly involved in the creation of a sense of identity. Avruch considers culture and identity are linked in two ways:

“Culture is connected to identity in two main ways. First, culture makes available a reservoir of shared symbols able to constitute collective or group identity. Secondly, because many of these symbols are invested with great affect or emotion, and since membership in certain groups is emotionally binding for individuals, such collective identity anchors individual identity. Culture, in short, links individual and collective identities, at the same time defining potential boundaries between social groups.” (Avruch, 2002)

The individual recognises him/herself in the norms and values sustaining the societal system he/she operates in, conforms his/her behaviour to them and defines categories such as what is right and wrong, normal and deviant. Through this structure of meanings the individual identifies him/herself with the community in which those same norms and values are shared, building his/her sense of identity. Vayrynen too described this link between culture and identity: “The identity of a person is created through the social groups and in accordance with the cultural patterns which prevail in the groups the person belongs to” (2001, 110). If during armed conflict systems of meanings are constructed within a highly violent environment, these templates will most likely be shaped by the reality of war and will account accordingly for the presence of violence in the everyday life. These templates of meaning that emerged during war time will represent the source of identity for the individual. It follows that not only is a ‘culture of violence’ created during the time of conflict and maintained after the end of it, but also that it becomes the social environment in which identity is created. This dynamic allows us to understand how deep and internalised violence can become. In the case of youth it becomes evident that this process can have a major impact on their sense of identity, especially when their identity is formed in times of extreme violence. However identities, as well as culture, are not fixed. On the contrary they are constructed and reconstructed, renegotiated and changed over time. Therefore, what needs to be understood is how the perception and understanding of violence is transformed, accepted and reproduced or rejected and substituted by the young members of society in the years following the peace agreements.

Chabal and Daloz in their *Culture Troubles* stress the tight bond between culture and the political sphere to the extent of considering culture “the coordinates, the mapping, or the very blueprint of politics” (2006: 21). In their study, culture is considered foundational to the social system and discourse not only synchronically, but also in the long term (diachronically) as culture is an environment in constant movement and evolution. Culture formation is not static, but a fluid evolutionary process of society.

Considering the crucial role that culture plays in the life of the individual and of society, especially with regard to the formation of values and norms that regulate accepted and deviant behaviours and attitudes, it becomes necessary to understand how culture is influenced by the reality of war, armed conflict and prolonged and extreme violence. The persistent exposure to high levels of violence is likely to have a deep impact on a societal system of meanings and structure. Hence it is vital to understand this impact and its consequences for the transition of a society from war to peace.

### **Violence in post-peace accord societies**

As pointed out in the introduction, the question that needs to be addressed is how high levels of violence survive in society even after a peace accord is signed. In this thesis I explore how this happens, that is how violence survives in post-war societies through the process of transmission of ideas, values, norms and beliefs that support and accept violent attitudes and behaviours. In the same way that culture as a concept was discussed in the previous section, in this section I will proceed by discussing the concept of violence. Like the concept of culture, violence too has multiple dimensions depending on the context and who is defining it. It is both a specific term used by scholars to describe specific phenomena and a word used in every day speech with many different nuances.

Bufacchi identifies two main kinds of violence within the philosophical debate about what violence is, namely violence as excessive force and violence as violation (2005: 197). Defining violence as the use and abuse of physical force to intentionally harm somebody is a rather limited approach to the study of violence as it “misses out on too many other important dimensions of the phenomenon of violence” (Buffacchi, 2005: 197), for example on the psychological dimension of violence, the structural, or the institutional dimension which all can be more pervasive and devastating than physical violence. On the other hand Bufacchi warns that the use of a broader understanding of the concept of violence seen generically as a physical or psychological violation “offer only a more obscure and less precise definition of violence” (2005: 198). The conclusion of Bufacchi’s paper is that there is no agreement among scholars on a single definition of violence and what accounts as violence and what does not.

Others have divided violence into direct and indirect violence. Galtung differentiates between these two categories of violence in his paper ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research’ (1969). If direct violence consists of one person harming another, which is a rather immediate and obvious description of violence, indirect violence is much more subtle and dangerous as it is often hard to detect. In Galtung’s categorisation, indirect violence can be structural or cultural. Both are vicious dimensions of violence as they are deeply embedded in a society’s structure and culture. A clear description of structural violence is given by Du Nann Winter and Leighton:

“Structural violence, however, is almost always invisible, embedded in ubiquitous social structures, normalised by stable institutions and regular experience. Structural violence occurs whenever people are disadvantaged by political, legal, economic, or cultural traditions. Because they are longstanding, structural inequities usually seem ordinary – the way things have always been. But structural violence produces suffering and death as often as direct violence does, though the damage is slower, more subtle, more common, and more difficult to repair” (2001: 159).

The effects of structural violence are more damaging to the social fabric and human well-being than is direct violence. Also, this dimension of violence goes unnoticed and therefore lasts for long periods of time. However, the systematic exclusion of a certain group from resources, education, or politics, and the inequalities experienced by a certain group, tend to slowly wear out the capacity of that group to accept exclusion and inequalities, which often leads it to resort to direct violence to escape a no longer tolerable status quo.

The next level of violence that Galtung identifies is cultural violence. This dimension of violence refers to those elements of culture that “legitimise and justify structural and direct violence” (Galtung, 1990: 291). Through cultural violence direct and structural violence become acceptable, even normal to members of society and also to the victims of the violence. Violence is internalised by members of society. Violence is made invisible, so embedded in the structures of society and in the way things work that it is not perceived as violence at all. According to Galtung cultural violence provides the nourishment, the fuel for structural and direct violence. He also points out how the combination of cultural and structural violence creates the environment for direct violence to erupt in the effort of breaking the cycle. But then the cycles of violence starts again (Galtung, 1990). Since culture provides the templates of meaning that are necessary to the individual to orientate himself within the society, its values and norms, when the templates themselves contain elements that justify and legitimise violence, as the concept of cultural violence suggests, they become entrenched in the very systems of meanings through which the individual understand the world and his own existence in it.

This classification of the different dimensions of violence reflects a broad understanding of what to consider constitutes violence. For the purposes of this paper violence will be considered in a broad sense, as the very concept of a ‘culture of violence’ implies more than simply direct violence; instead it refers to a more complex and multilayered phenomenon in line with the categorisation outlined by Galtung.

Violence can also be categorised by the point of view of who experiences the violence, namely perpetrators or victims. The perceptions of the two groups about what constitutes an act of violence and what doesn't are clearly diametrically opposite. Often perpetrators do not perceive their action as violent and they would not call themselves perpetrators, instead they might consider themselves as victims in the first place which in turns legitimises their actions (Eller, 2006). Also perpetrators tend to either minimise the nature of their actions and the impact of them on the victims or de-value the victims' humanity. Hence there are no neutral or objective perspectives on violence since victims, perpetrators and observers would interpret the event through their personal set of meanings and evaluation (Schroder and Schmidt, 2001). From this perspective violence is a "social construction" in that "people have their reasons for their actions, which are not abstract or purely conceptual; that these actors are at least partially aware of their actions and their reasons; and that the entire context of the violent episode must be considered in a full and useful account of the violence" (Eller, 2006: 13). The social and cultural context in which violence occurs is vital to the understanding of violence itself.

Post-war societies represent one of the many contexts in which violence has been studied. As many scholars have pointed out, the end of direct fighting and the signing of a peace accord does not signify the disappearance of violence (Borer, Darby and McEvoy-Levy, 2006; Steenkamp, 2005; Darby, 2006). The attention of scholars of International Relations, Political Science and Peace and Conflict studies focused on the different faces of violence in post-accord society derives from the acknowledgement that the persistence of violence can undermine the stability of the peace process and put at risk the peacebuilding effort which follows the peace agreement. For this very reason, numerous research studies have investigated the continuum of violence that characterises post-accord societies and the impact of the persistence of violence on the stability of the peace accord, its implementation and success. Particular attention has been paid to how peacebuilding projects should reflect the resilience of violence within society, aiming specifically to create policies that address violence in its different shapes and within the

various sectors of society. What has been underlined is the threat that violence can represent, and did represent, to the sustainability of the peace accord. In fact the persistence of violence within society has led in some cases to the resumption of fighting and of a state of war.

In a society that has experienced war, disruption, displacement and disintegration of its own structures and institutions, violence tends to take the form of what is defined as 'cycles of violence' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). Scholars have concentrated on understanding and analysing the persistence of violence in order to improve peace building strategies and policies and ultimately to try to avoid the creation of 'cycles of violence'. The focus, therefore, has been put on "the larger project of national rehabilitation, constructing a sustainable peace by addressing cultural violence (beliefs and values that support and sustain or justify violence) and structural violence (such as poverty, discrimination, and institutionalized inequality) as well as preventing a return to direct violence (immediate physical harm)" (McEvoy-Levy, 2001: 89).

Steenkamp tried to map the factors that play a major role in the support of violent behaviour in order to explain the continuation of violence (2005). In her study she highlighted factors in support of violence at many different levels from the macro (international), to micro (individual), but at the same time she recognised as the main dynamic at work the "impact of violent conflict on the norms and values of society" (2005: 253). The crucial point of her study is the recognition of the shaping power that violence has on the norms and values shared within a society, to the point that violence becomes widely tolerated. The system of norms and values that is created through and by violence during the time of conflict is referred to by Steenkamp as a 'culture of violence' (2005: 254). However, if on one hand adults are more likely to have known and lived in a pre-conflict environment where norms and the values system were not influenced by violence, and therefore can more easily return to those societal structures and system of behaviour, on the other hand the question is how much a 'culture of violence' will be perpetrated and

transmitted by youth and children who have grown up during the conflict and have no experience outside war.

Steenkamp's understanding of the impact of violence on the values and norms of society represents the foundation on which this paper's approach stands. Given the complexity and multidimensionality of violence a broad understanding of the term should be adopted in order to grasp as many aspects of the reality and dynamics of violence as possible. In particular Galtung's categorisation of violence will represent the underpinnings of how violence is understood. In this paper violence will be considered not only in its physical dimensions but also in its social, structural and cultural aspects because, as Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois put it, "The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what give violence its power and meaning" (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004: 1). During the fieldwork various examples of the different dimensions of violence in the context of Sierra Leone have emerged: examples of direct violence such as robberies, rape, murders. Structural violence can be found in the corruption of the justice system, in the barriers of access to health treatment and education and in the inequalities between men and women as well as between the elders and the younger generations. The belief in initiation rituals to secret societies as compulsory rite of passage for the youth is an example of how cultural violence justifies and legitimises violent practices and behaviours.

### **Conclusions: a culture of violence**

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, in this paper culture is understood as the values, norms, beliefs and behaviours constituting the system of meaning of a given society or group which are learned, shared, produced and reproduced. Following the discussion on the various types of violence, violence is here understood broadly as direct violence but also and foremost as structural and cultural violence. Moreover the

understanding that violence exercises a deep influence on society represents the foundation of this paper's approach to violence. From the combination of the two terms the meaning of the expression 'culture of violence' is derived, and is understood here as the phenomenon that sees violence becoming embedded in the values, norms and behaviours of a group or society. A 'culture of violence' refers to "the system of norms, values or attitudes which allow, make possible or even stimulate the use of violence to resolve any conflict or relation with another person" (Cruz quoted in Steenkamp, 2005: 254).

Through the use of this concept, I want to put the focus on the normalisation of violence and its acceptability in the everyday functioning of a community. Violence is in this way not perceived as violence any more, and simply becomes part of the everyday experience of the individual within the society. During violent conflict, violence is normalised through a continuous, daily exposure to it, to the point of being accepted or even expected. This process of normalisation is not only passively received by the members of society but, on the contrary, it is acted, created, transformed and transmitted by them. Once normalised, the violence-based behavioural system becomes so internalised as to be acted upon and reproduced automatically, ensuring its lasting long after war has officially ended. Thus, as Waldmann has pointed out in his work on a 'culture of violence' in Colombia

"To find out something about how they [the facts of violence] are supported and embedded in a culture, we are well advised to pay less attention to statements that refer directly to coercion and violence, and more to exploring the conceptual and ideological settings in which they are made. There is in fact a general sociological argument supporting this more indirect approach. Sociological system theorists realized quite early that a society's central value and norm orientations are by no means continuously emphasized. Rather, they tend to be mentioned in passing precisely because they are unquestioned matters of course." (Waldmann, 2007: 595)

War is a devastating event for any society at all levels of its structures. The main impact of war on the individuals as well as on the society is represented by the effects of the extreme violence and the long exposure to it experienced during the years of fighting.

There is a continuum between the violence of the war and the violence of peace after war. Violence enters socialisation dynamics and becomes entrenched in the individual's understanding of self, the other and the world. However, as culture is learned and therefore 'taught', a culture of violence is 'taught' or rather transmitted too, especially to the new generations, and in this way it persists as part of the system of meanings shared by the community. In the next chapter I will explore the process of transmission in relation to youth in order to identify how a 'culture of violence' makes its way into peace time and remains a main feature of post-accord societies.

## Chapter 2: Youth and the transmission of violence

The impact of war on children is particularly devastating in the modern warfare because of the increasingly blurred boundaries between combatants and civilians. Children are displaced, separated from their families, they are psychologically and physically wounded. They are abducted as fighters and become directly involved in armed struggles, they are killed and raped and abused. Children and youth in modern conflicts are both victims and perpetrators, but they can adopt coping mechanisms. In general, exposure to the extreme violence of war and armed conflict is responsible for the internalisation of a 'culture of violence' (Machel, 2003: 82) so that "Images and practices of violence among both perpetrators and victims (especially when young) become part of a new *habitus* of violence – an internalised mental response pattern anchored in behavioural routines – and also a template in the collective memory of a society" (Abbink, 2005: 18). But what happens to that 'culture of violence' internalised during the war when the fighting ceases? When and how do values, attitudes and forms of behaviour based on the normalisation of violence and aggression survive in the society under reconstruction? Is a 'culture of violence' transmitted by those children and youth who experienced the war, and if yes, how?

Exhaustive answers to the above questions have yet to be given as the existing studies and analysis carried out in various disciplines rarely focus on these issues (McCough, 2009). Nevertheless in this chapter I will try to delineate how the studies of youth and of the transmission of culture have been assessed so far in various disciplines, in order to lay the foundations for further analysis of the process of transmission of a culture of violence in post-war societies. First of all it is necessary to clarify what is meant by youth, the definition of which is rather controversial and on which there is little agreement among scholars or policy makers. In the second part of the chapter the different approaches to the study of youth and of the process of transmission are

delineated in order to identify the base for the analytical framework that will be applied during the field research.

## **Defining 'youth'**

The category 'youth' has been defined in a myriad of ways. The United Nations at the celebration of the Year of the Youth (1985) defined youth as being between 15 and 25 years of age (Tyyska, 2005). In Western cultures youth is a rather flexible concept but is mainly defined by age. However, in other cultures such as many in Africa and in other countries of the 'southern hemisphere' the age-boundary is less applicable and instead the discriminatory factors are social and economic, as well as cultural. Also, it is necessary to bear in mind that the population in many developing countries is composed in certain cases of up to 65% of children and young people. In sub-Saharan Africa, out of a population of 500 million, half the people are under the age of 15 (Olawale and Alao, 2007: 6). The tendency is to define youth according to 'social status' rather than age. In particular, the dependency of the individual upon parents or family members for material support is the main factor applied (Kostelny, 2006). Some researchers approach the concept of youth as a socially constructed one that depends on the historical, cultural and political milieu. From this perspective the meaning attributed to the different stages of life are culturally-specific, so that the idea of childhood and youth as a happy and care-free stage of life is strongly rejected outside Western societies (Wyn and White, 1997; De Boeck and Honwana, 2005; Barber, 2009).

The notion of youth can also be understood as the process of transition from childhood to adulthood in which it is not simply the age that changes but the role, responsibilities and social status that change. In the Western countries adulthood tends to be postponed in modern times by the prolongation of education and the consequent

financial dependence of young people on parents and family. This phenomenon is reversed in many developing countries. In these instances education is lacking and much shorter in duration, mainly due to poor conditions and the incapacity of the family and the state to support children through school (Abbink, 2005). In conditions of extreme poverty children also represent a source of economic support through child labour, so that many children are compelled to interrupt education and start working. In these conditions children enter a more mature stage of life very early (Kostelny, 2006). But poverty is not the only factor that precipitates adulthood. War and armed conflict have similar consequences. "In Africa there are many such people who have had to delay their entry into adulthood: they feel excluded and powerless and struggle to survive" (Abbink, 2005: 6). When parents and other adult family figures are missing because killed or because of displacement, children may find themselves to be the carer for their younger brothers and sisters (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005). Education may be suspended in time of war and if children cannot access schools any more, this creates a halt in the child's life, childhood is put on hold. After the end of the violent conflict many young people, who have had the responsibilities and roles of adults during the war, re-enter the school system and the return to school puts them back into the category of children/youth (McIntyre, 2005). The result is that when talking about youth in Africa, individuals aged up to the mid-thirties are included in the category because of unfinished education, unemployment, or inability to raise a family. Therefore a youth in Africa can be considered to be an individual whose age lies between 14 and 35 years. Up to 14 years of age, people are considered children because they are still dependent on others for subsistence; once one has reached 35 years old, one is expected to have already started a family and to have a stable job that ensures a certain social status (Abbink, 2005). So family, employment or the completion of a cultural rite of passage are the major factors that define a person as a youth or not, both for males and females. In this system marriage, or entering the work force, can represent rites of passage for young people, so that a young 14 year old girl who gets married is not considered a child or a youth anymore, while a 30 year old unemployed

single man is still called a youth and is treated as such (Kostelny, 2006). In the specific case of post-war Sierra Leone the government defined youth as being between the ages of 15 and 35 because of the delay caused by the war (National Youth Policy, 2003).

Youth are also often stereotyped as a category, usually as troublemakers or as peacemakers, as the problem or, less often and naively, the solution for the future of the society (Olawale and Alao, 2007). This dichotomy prevents a realistic understanding of the category of youth. As troublemakers, youth are often depicted and perceived as prone to violence and aggression. However they are not only a source of potential instability but they can be an asset for the development of post-war societies. The black and white view of youth essentially obfuscates their agency as it pictures them as passive recipients, easily manipulated in a world ruled by adults. Whether participating in guerrilla movements or in grassroots peacebuilding projects, it is important to recognise their agency in trying to find their own course in the society and environment they live in; and by participating in it, they concur to shape, negotiate, produce and reproduce its meanings, values, norms and identities (McEvoy-Levy, 2006).

### **Transmission of a ‘culture of violence’**

The impact of war on societies is not only the disruption of existing societal systems and structures. From the annihilation of the fabric of society, war derives space for the negotiation and creation of new social systems and structures (Boas, 2007). As outlined in the previous chapter, when a society experiences protracted violence and war, the traces of that experience can survive within the norms, values and beliefs that constitute the cultural system of the society. This set of norms and values that has been created during the time of conflict as survival strategies are kept alive even after the official end of the violent conflict by the transmission and reproduction that naturally take place within a

society. However, the transmission of norms, practices and culture does not have a single locus and means. Among whom this process of transmission takes place is an extremely important aspect. Values and norms can be passed from one generation to the next one as for example from parents to their children. The other main space for the reproduction and production of practices and ideas is among peers. Youth socialise with each other in schools, sport centres, leisure centres, in the neighbourhood and so on.

There are also more practical aspects to take into consideration when looking at the perpetuation of violent behaviour in post-war societies. One is the economic and survival aspect, or more specifically the role of poverty in the reproduction of violent behaviours. Studies have demonstrated how a lack of job opportunities, education and access to basic services can be the reason why many youth keep engaging in illegal activities and petty crimes to provide for themselves and their families what is necessary for survival (Patterson, 1991; Kramer, 2000; Lederman et al., 2002; Mac Ginty, 2006). Urdal points out how “historically, the coincidence of youth bulges with rapid urbanisation, especially in the context of unemployment and poverty, has been an important contributor to political violence” (2006: 613). Most post-war societies are characterised by extreme levels of poverty. War disrupts formal and informal economies, damages infrastructures and leaves the country dependent upon foreign aid. The collapse of the state during a period of violent conflict limits the capacity of a country to restore a functioning economy. Poverty also means lack of education and unemployment, which in turn result in marginalisation and exclusion of large parts of the population, especially vulnerable groups such as children, youth and women. During war families are displaced, parents can be divided from their children, or parents can be wounded or killed, and in both cases they are no longer able to provide for their children. The traditional social safety nets are destroyed by war and as a consequence children and youth often become the bread winner of the household supporting not only themselves but brothers and sisters too. To ensure their own daily survival, they find coping mechanisms and often resort to direct or indirect violence to obtain what is needed. Stealing, robbing, smuggling and pick-

pocketing are among the activities in which youth engage to provide for themselves and sometimes also for their families. Poverty is indeed a relevant element in the study of the perpetuation of violence and describes a part of the reality of violence in post-war societies but, *per se* it does not explain the magnitude of the phenomenon.

The study of youth in post-war environments has been covered more in-depth in academic research and international institutions and governments only fairly recently (McIntyre and Ventura, 2003). Previous and current research on youth has been mainly carried out within the discipline of sociology and psychology. In both disciplines the focus was respectively on deviant and pathological youth, mainly located in the industrialised world and, more specifically, in urban suburbs. Tyyska tried to put order into the numerous theories of youth developed in the past fifty years (2005). As Tyyska (2005) pointed out, an important group of theories concerning youth is represented by 'conservative theories' which focus mainly on issues of conformity, i.e. how youth are prepared and educated to play their social role within the social environment and to productively function in it. This umbrella of theories is also defined as functionalist, and it has influenced most of theories of youth in the twentieth century (Tyyska, 2005: 5). Within this group of theories scholars have focused on two different loci of socialisation. Some concentrated on the socialisation mechanisms that take place within the structure of the family (Parsons, 1956 quoted in Jones and Wallace, 1992) while others put at the core of their studies a 'secondary socialisation' which instead takes place through other institutions such as schools and more generally among peers (Mannheim, 1952 cited in Tyyska, 2005). This second group of scholars identified in the peer groups and in the socialisation dynamics among peers a crucial space for the transmission of values, attitudes and behaviours. Both the variants of functionalist theories look mainly at how to control destructive tendencies in youth and their delinquent forms of behaviour.

Critical theories about youth, on the other hand, concentrate on the disempowerment that youth experiences in Western societies. According to these theories,

the very system of society is adult-oriented and leaves youth in a secondary and marginalised position in which their economic and political rights are negated (Marquardt, 1998 and Carrigan, 1998). The most prominent approach within Critical theories is the Marxist approach or political economy approach (Wulff, 1995). This group of scholars focused their studies on working-class youth and their politicisation. The age stratification theories that evolve from this economic approach look at how the various age strata are exploited and marginalised in industrialised societies. In this context peer groups are seen as the means of escape from conformity and from those figures who represent it, e.g. adults in general, parents and authority figures. Peers become the space which provides freedom for developing and sharing an alternative set of values and norms of behaviours and attitudes (Kendal, Murray and Linden, 1997; Côté and Allahar, 1994). The focus is shifted in order to shed light upon youth subcultures and the importance of understanding them both as rebellious manifestations and as a reflection of the dominant/adult-led social system. In this vision of youth subcultures, young people are considered as active agents instead of mere passive recipients.

In the last two decades, parallel to the theories developed in the 'North', critical theories have been emerging from the developing countries of the 'South'. The first critique formulated by these scholars is directed to the idea, dominant in the European and North American sociological tradition, of uniformity of the stage of transition between childhood and adulthood. Scholars pointed out, for example, how in many ways the stage of life called youth is much less complicated and how it seems to be burdened with fewer difficulties than other life stages (Jones and Wallace, 1992; Sharp, 2002). These scholars have highlighted how colonisation had disrupted the traditional age categories of pre-colonial Africa for instance. The changes that occurred inside African societies due forces resulting from colonisation have greatly affected young people's roles within society. During the colonial era, the dynamics of exclusion of local populations and marginalisation created a generation of young men which was referred to by the colonial rulers as the 'youth', identifying in this way youth with the young male population and with those

members of society who were emerging as the driving force toward independence (De Waal, 2002). Aggravated by poverty, marginalisation, exclusion and disempowerment, as family structures and social systems were annihilated, young people found themselves caught in between incompatible sets of values and norms. These dynamics have continued into the present, escalating and leading to resentment, frustration, violence and too often to armed conflict (Argenti, 2002; Everatt, 2001).

All the aforementioned theories explore that stage of human life that is commonly referred to as youth. However, little has been said in these theories about the particular reality of those youth who have experienced the trauma of war or who have been long exposed to extreme political violence.

Events such as war and armed conflict leave profound wounds in society as a whole and in its single members as well. Children and youth are even more vulnerable to exposure to the brutalities and atrocities of war, and the consequences of this exposure have been the focus of studies and research carried out in great part within the discipline of psychology (Leavitt and Fox, 1993; Thabet and Vostanis, 1999; Papageorgiou et al., 2000; McIntyre and Ventura, 2003; among others). The concept of trauma and its consequences was principally the concern of psychologists. In particular the aftermath of war for children and youth was looked at through the lens of mental health and especially Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), in short in pathological ways. Numerous studies have been conducted in post-war countries in an attempt to map the symptoms of PTSD and its incidence within the young members of the society (Argenti and Schramm, 2010). This approach to the effects of war on children has its limitations. In the first place concepts developed within Western psychology are often not applicable to societies that share little or nothing with Western concepts of mental health and mental illness; at the same time a lot can be missed or left out when the cultural specificities of the community under study are ignored (Wessells and Kostelny, 2009). Also this approach tends to

atomise the problem, separating each individual and his/her experience from the larger social and cultural environment and “a focus on trauma can marginalise other effects of war such as mistrust, hopelessness, social exclusion, and the current stresses of daily life” (Kostelny, 2006: 22).

The work of psychologists and psychiatrists has also given important insights into the transmission of such traumas from one generation to the next, mainly within the context of the parent-child relationship. The majority of these studies on the intergenerational transmission of trauma have been conducted on Holocaust survivors and their offspring (Klein, 1971; Freyberg, 1980; Berger, 1988; Rowland-klein and Dunlop, 1997; among others). Although the focus has been maintained on PTSD pathologies, nevertheless important results have been achieved in understanding the conscious, as well as unconscious, mechanisms of transmission and its repercussions on the so-called ‘second generation’ (Rowland-Klein and Dunlop, 1997). These studies show how the children of Holocaust survivors tend to identify themselves with their parents’ experience and tend to become the vehicles for the parents’ healing process. This inhibits the independence of the offspring and creates a strong sense of identity centred in the parents’ traumatic past (e.g. Auerhahn and Laub, 1998; Feltsen, 1998).

An alternative approach to the impact of war exposure on youth is that deriving from the aggressive behaviour tradition, as discussed by Punamaki in her work on “the link between exposure to war violence and the potential development of antisocial and aggressive behaviour” (2009: 62). This perspective is founded on the link between exposure to violence and aggressive behaviour as evidenced in the numerous studies on children who have experienced community and domestic violence (Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, 1990; Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny and Pardo, 1992; Garbarino, 1995). According to these models of aggression, aggressive behaviour is socially learned and “there is an increased risk for aggression because in crime-intensive environments children learn violent behaviour by modelling and imitating others” (Punamaki, 2009: 63).

This approach has led to the labelling of youth as a 'lost generation' in various post-war situations due to the rather deterministic nature of the behavioural model of aggression itself. Researchers have demonstrated how the link between violence and aggressive behaviour is highly person and situation specific, and defies generalisation (e.g. Schwartz and Proctor, 2000). Putamaki, recognising the limits of the social learning approach to aggression, points out how the processes involved in the impact of violence exposure on youth are multiple and include the cognitive, emotional, and psycho-physiological realms, and also external factors such as the family, political ideologies and social environment. In developing a framework to analyse the link between exposure to violence and aggression behaviour in war environments she stresses the need for an integrative approach that accounts for the complexity of the factors that influence youth. However, her framework leaves out elements of identity and culture and does not explain the dynamics and mechanisms through which violence becomes normalised and therefore embedded in the societal, and consequently youth's, behavioural codes, norms and practices. Thus the question that remains unanswered is how violent practices, norms and values are transmitted, ensuring their survival within a society and creating the ground for potential future instability.

In his work on the transmission across generations of the experience of war and violence, Prager calls for a marriage between psychoanalysis on one side and sociology on the other, with the former accounting for the experiential side of the issue and the latter accounting for the collective/institutional side (Prager, 2003). From the psychoanalytic side, he draws on the studies of the transmission of the traumatic experience of the Holocaust from the survivors to their children that have been described above. From the sociology side he draws on the theories of generational transmission as developed by Mannheim. According to Mannheim's theory, a generation does not occupy exclusively a time span but also a specific space and position within society (1928). The element 'generation' becomes in his analysis crucial to change and as a source of social dynamism. Following this concept then, the process of transmission of the traumatic

experience of violence from one generation to the next, as in the example of the Holocaust survivors, obliterates the difference between the two generations. This results in the loss of the natural generational dynamics within the society in what Prager calls “lost childhood and lost generations” (2003: 174), as the experiences of one generation become those of the following, “Trauma thus deprives the collectivity a critical resource of social and cultural renewal” (2003: 176). The idea that the family occupies a central position in the well-being of children and youth is reflected in many international conventions (e.g. the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Most often policy papers stress the role of family in protecting and nurturing children, especially for those children experiencing war and armed conflict. This vision though of dependency and vulnerability of children has implications for the policies put in place by international and humanitarian institutions (Ager, 2006). Ager, instead, calls for the recognition of the “plurality of socialising forces in the lives of children”, especially in the context of war and armed conflict (2006: 42). The design of projects directed to children and youth needs to take this multiplicity of sources of influence and the children’s agency into account if they want to be effective.

Parents and the family are not the only space of transmission of norms, values and beliefs. The influence of peers on youth seems to be as important (Espelage, Holt and Henkel, 2003). During the time of adolescence in particular meaning and belief systems are formed and in this phase of development, the environment the child or youth lives in plays a central role. If during the early stages of the life of the individual the principal source of influence is represented by the parents and the family which guides the child in the first phase of development, once children enter adolescence the influence of, and exposure to, external sources and especially to peers, increase (Winstok and Perkis, 2008).

Studies on peer influence in youth have been mainly focused on deviant behaviour, delinquency, alcohol or drug abuse and antisocial behaviour. Again the space of

observation of youth behaviour and attitudes has been largely inside Western society and in suburbs of large metropolitan areas (e.g. Bauman and Ennett, 1994; Kupersmidt, Burchinal and Patterson, 1995; Kiesner, Cadinu, Poulin and Bucci 2002). Nevertheless it is useful to keep in mind some concepts developed by sociologists regarding the influence of peers among youth: homophily and socialisation seem to be the prevalent ones at work in youth dynamics. Homophily refers to the phenomenon by which “social contact occurs at a higher rate among similar individuals than among dissimilar individuals” (Prinstein and Dodge, 2008: 4). Socialisation refers to the mechanism of acquisition of the values, norms, attitudes and behaviours of the community by the child. This process provides the child with the ‘cognitive and socialisation templates’ that the child will use to interact with the world (Ross, 1993).

These are not the only concepts applied to peer influence among youth. In his study on peer influence in adolescent socialisation, Campbell draws from Festinger theories about peer groups. Festinger developed a two factor theory of peer groups’ influence. The first important factor is ‘group attractiveness or valence’ (Campbell, 1980: 325). This factor aims to explain the function that the group performs for the individual, i.e. the affirmation through the group of his/her identity. The second important factor is known as ‘means control’ which can be explained as “the ability [of the peer group] to mediate goals which are important to its members through the mechanisms of applause, shame, or the withholding of social status or goods” (ibid.).

The experience of war and armed conflict has an immense impact on the whole population that lives through its tragedy. Therefore the variables that affect the development and life of children and youth differ from those of more peaceful societies. How does the experience of war and extreme violence weigh on youth development, values and meanings systems, beliefs, and consequently on attitudes and behaviours? Studies that have explored these topics are still scarce; therefore it is not easy to find an answer to these questions.

Are socialisation, homophily, group attractiveness and means control still the most relevant factors through which we can analyse the realities of youth in post-war settings? The study of youth in Mozambique and South Africa conducted by Antoinette Errante (1999) attempts to answer this question by using the concept of socialisation to analyse the impact of war on youth tendencies toward both aggression and peace. Her analysis of youth through the lens of socialisation theory reveals how the context of violence and war creates templates of socialisation based on vilification and dehumanisation of the outsider and violent responses to conflict. The templates created by children and youth during the time of war survive after the end of fighting and define the way in which youth interact and read the world around them and experience human relations. This is possible because, in general, templates that were formed during war time tend to elevate those values, norms and forms of behaviour that dignify aggression and violence. The survival of a socialisation for aggression is possible because during a protracted armed conflict the social bond and social capital of the community is broken down, resulting in a lack of sources for the guidance and protection of children and youth.

She concludes by pointing out how the violence persisting after peace accords is often considered by policy-makers as an inevitable consequence of the social and economic conditions following the armed conflict. However, this attitude ignores completely the link between socialisation patterns of aggression and the protracted exposure to armed conflict, and consequently leaves the issue completely unaddressed. In this way patterns of socialisation of aggression undermine the construction of much-needed socialisation patterns for peace, putting the stability of the whole peace process at stake. Adding to this risk there is also the danger of having the youngest members of society marginalised because of the violent behaviour associated with socialisation for aggression which are no more acceptable and legitimised within their own community. Unaccepted youth, outcasts in their own community, can further exacerbate violence-based conflict and behaviours. At the same time resorting to violent and aggressive behaviour can ensure the recognition and respect of the peer group. Sharing norms and

values based on a template of socialisation for aggression can bring social status to the young people (Wessells and Kostelny, 2006). This is especially true when it comes to child soldiers and the military identity that youth develop when directly involved in armed groups and fighting. The embracing of such identities implies a complete shift in the sets of values, aggressive behaviour patterns that can combine to lead youth to perpetuate 'cycles of violence'.

Within the discipline of Social Psychology, socialisation theory has been utilised before to explore the links between war and the resilience of violence across societies and cultures (Ember and Ember, 1994). It has also proved successful in explaining the resilience of violence among youth in post-war society, as through the work of Antoinette Errante. Her findings had greatly influenced my work since it supports the idea that violence survive well into peace time and characterises the socialisation templates of youth and children that have experienced war (Errante, 1999). However socialisation theory will not be directly used in the analytical framework of this thesis as it does not account for the resilience of violence into the new generation that does not have experience of the war.

The spaces of interaction for youth in the aftermath of violent conflict are various and each of them represents an opportunity for youth to socialise, share meanings, define and exchange values and norms; they are places where peer influence is exerted. McEvoy-Levy has tried to account for and narrate all these places, because "the agency of youth in war and post-war situations is multidimensional and extremely influential. Young people's actions, and their collective narratives of those actions, influence how conflicts are experienced, understood, remembered, transmitted across generations, and, potentially, transformed" (McEvoy-Levy, 2006: 134). The places of interaction that she analyses are armed groups, post-war gangs and militia, refugee camps, schools, the streets, economic activities, religious communities and finally communities of peace. In her work the stress is put on the agency of youth who, far from being apathetic, passive recipients dependant on

the mediation of adults to act within the society, act inside each of the spaces mentioned and construct their own identities, meanings, social rules and norms. Directing the focus to the agency of youth proves how they are a multidimensional social force that strongly influences the post-war society. Often as a social force youth can be the carrier of a 'war system' and a culture of violence but also, and increasingly, they become the driving force for the creation of a 'peace system' (McEvoy-Levy, 2006: 149). In this view their role becomes crucial in the struggle for ending intractable conflicts and in the effort of maintaining peace. However youth are still denied a space in official politics and their voices continue to be marginalised and neglected.

Another important dimension of the process of transmission of values, ideas and beliefs is that of identity and how a culture of violence can survive as the distinct element around which the group, and a sense of belonging and identity as a member of the group, are constructed. The concept of social identity is defined by Tajfel as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978: 63). Scholars of social psychology have focused their attention on the way the individual identifies him/herself with a group. The identification with a group is always matched with the attribution of positive values to one's own group, in contrast with negative values attached to other groups. This mechanism of social categorisation represents "a system of orientation which helps to create and define the individual's place in society" (Tajfel, 1978: 63). Membership of a social group can also represent a means to personal achievement for the individual, access to otherwise inaccessible resources and power, creating a positive reinforcement for membership of the group. This aspect can trigger competition between social groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979: 94). It has also been noted how individuals tend to attribute positive values to themselves as well as to the group to which they feel they belong "because they have a natural need for high self-esteem" (Curley, 2009: 651). The positive or negative connotations attached to the inner-group and to the outside groups are learned by the child through the process of

socialisation (Tajfel, 1978). Groups have standards of values that the members seek to stand up to and at the same time are required to comply with. In the case of a post-war society in which violence has become deeply entrenched in the society's culture, the standards that characterise the group's values can include violent practices and attitudes which would be produced and reproduced through the processes of social categorisation.

More and more often over the past decade, scholars have been calling for the use of multiple methodologies in the approaches to the study of war-affected children and their impact on society. As Kostelny reminds us

“Although Western psychology has yielded an impressive body of science and practice, it embodies the Enlightenment values of individualism. In conceptualising how children have been affected by armed conflict, this lens leads people to focus on individual impact, when effects on children are mediated by their social ecologies, such as families, peers, and communities. Even our understanding of the child and these ecologies is culturally constructed. One cannot assume the universality of Western constructs of children, families and communities” (Kostelny, 2006: 19).

Still the question of how elements of violence among youth persist in post-war society, and how this 'culture of violence' is transmitted, remains mostly unanswered.

## **Conclusions**

Youth has been the focus of many studies in the past decades, most of which explored youth in Western societies and mainly in relation to deviant behaviour and delinquency. The theories developed by these studies have rarely been applied to post-war societies. However, Errante proved that theories such as socialisation theory can help in understanding the dynamics of youth in relation to violent behaviour in countries like Mozambique and South Africa.

The concept of trauma and of PTSD used in psychology to explain the impact of war on children, even with its limitations when extracted from its milieu and applied to other cultures, can still help us understand how the experience of violence can also be transmitted also unconsciously from parents to their children, keeping the traumatic experience alive.

More and more scholars have identified the need for a more integrative approach to the study of youth, of the impact of war on them but also of the life of youth in the aftermath of war. In a similar way to the work of McEvoy-Levy on the space of interaction and socialisation of youth in the aftermath of war, the attempt made throughout this paper is to identify the spaces in which a culture of violence is perpetuated, transmitted and transformed through the use of an multi-lenses approach that integrates multiple methodologies in order to grasp the phenomenon in all its complexities and facets. Sociologists tell us that family and peers are the primary sources of influence upon youth and that they represent the two spaces in which meanings, beliefs, norms and values are learned and transmitted. These two spaces will be the focus of the current research, together with processes of social categorisation. In fact the organisation of society into social groups with which the individual identifies him/herself can support the perpetuation of violent practices and attitudes as if these constitute the group's standards and requirement for membership. However environmental factors such as poverty should be taken into account as well. In fact in an environment of poverty, social disruption, and with limited or no access to education and health care, youth who are politically and economically marginalised can resort to violent behaviour for other reasons, mainly pushed by the need to provide for themselves and family members in the everyday struggle for survival.

During the preliminary research into the process of transmission of a 'culture of violence' the possible 'spaces' of transmission that have been identified are poverty, the family, peers and social groups. These 'spaces' form the framework through which I

analysed the case study during fieldwork. The analytical framework that results from the preliminary research allows an integrative approach to the process of transmission and it was used to describe and understand the phenomenon in all its aspects simultaneously and in all its complexity. However, during fieldwork an aspect of the process emerged that had not been considered during the phase of the project reported in the current chapter. In fact throughout the interviews all the participants mentioned the role of political factionalism as being vital to the transmission of a 'culture of violence'. This demonstrated the validity and importance of the fieldwork in the study of such a dynamic and complex phenomenon.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

In Chapter One and Chapter Two the focus was centred on the outline and identification of key concepts and theories which pertain to the issue explored in this research project. Chapter Three is now concerned with the explanation of the various aspects related to field research. The aim is to point out the rationale behind the field study, the strategies employed by the researcher and the way in which the project was conceived and implemented. It will also be necessary to discuss the researcher's position about ontology and epistemology as the latter determined the angle and perspective adopted in approaching the topic as well as helping explain the aims and goals of the research effort. The point of view being exposed by the researcher is that of a post-positivist ontology, sharing the belief that "as fundamentally social beings, individuals or states cannot be separated from a context of normative meaning which shapes who they are and the possibilities available to them" (Fierke, 2007: 170). In terms of epistemology, the researcher maintains a point of view that is consistent with the ontological position previously mentioned and one that is indebted to the constructivist tradition. The idea of the existence of an objective world will be rejected; instead the researcher and the object of the research 'talk' to each other, influence each other and mutually construct each other. As Kratochwil pointed out: "what we recognise is always already organised and formed by certain categorical and theoretical elements" (2000: 91).

Once the position of the researcher on ontology and epistemology is established, the chapter will delve into the details of the various aspects of fieldwork. First, it will explain how the theories delineated and discussed in the previous chapter combine to compose the analytical framework which guided the researcher during the fieldwork experience. Second, the methods used to conduct the research are discussed. In the third part, the author will explain the choice of the case study and the rationale behind it, while

in the fourth section issues related to the context, to ethical matters and research biases will be addressed.

## **Analytical framework**

The first two chapters of this thesis delineated the theoretical elements on which this thesis stands. In Chapter Two, theories on youth and on the transmission of ideas and practices have been discussed. In this section, how those same theories will be used as a framework to analyse the case study during fieldwork will be explained. In order to explore a complex process such as the process of transmission of a culture of violence, it is necessary to use an integrative approach, that is an approach that integrates multiple methodologies, applies multiple perspectives and draws from multiple disciplines. Instead of a single lens this research employs multiple lenses through which to look at the various loci and means of transmission. More specifically the four spaces of transmission discussed in Chapter Two come to constitute a four-part analytical framework which was used to organise the way interviews carried out during fieldwork were conducted. The different elements that support the transmission and survival of violence in post-war societies are intertwined and coexist in any given context. However, the way in which these elements are combined, which is more salient to the process of transmission and support of violence and which is less, makes each instance unique. The aim of this project is to determine which of the 'spaces' theoretically identified, and discussed in the previous chapters, are indeed relevant to the specific case of youth in post-war Sierra Leonean society, and also to explain how the factors interact with each other and support each other.

The 'spaces' that emerged from the theoretical discussion of the previous chapter are four: family, peers, poverty and social groups. These four 'spaces' are the factors

constituting the analytical framework. First, the family (and parents in particular) as demonstrated in the experience of Holocaust survivors and their offspring. Secondly, peer groups represent a space in which attitudes, beliefs, values and norms are created, recreated and transmitted. The third space is to be found in the context of poverty, lack of opportunities and marginalisation. The economic and political stagnation that often follow long-lasting wars can support the perpetuation of violence as the only means of survival. However the word 'space' is used here in an abstract way, therefore poverty should be understood as the conditions that characterise the environment in which youth live. Poverty, lack of opportunities and marginalisation is here considered a trigger, a contextual factor that allows for the persistence of violence in the society. Poverty represents the conditions in which violent behaviours and attitudes are accepted as a way of dealing with the everyday needs for survival as well as a means of empowerment amid widespread marginalisation. The fourth space is social groups and social identity. Social groups have values and norms to which the members are required to share and comply to. By becoming a member of the group the individual embraces the values and norms shared within the group. Through this process the group becomes a vehicle for the transmission of ideas, values and norms about attitudes and behaviours. The concept of social identity tells us how the individual defines his/her own identity through the identification with the group. Thus, the values and norms shared with the group come to form the foundation for the individual's own identity, so that the social group is not only a vehicle for transmission but it is also a very powerful and effective one as the values and norms are internalised as part of one's own identity. As explained in the case of Mozambique and South African youth (Errante, 1999) as well as in many cases of youth soldiers, the systems of meaning and templates of socialisation constructed during the time of war become inextricably part of the way in which youth read and understand the world and social relations. In this way violence comes to sit at the foundation of youth identity, defining who they are in relation to others and the outside world. The social groups that characterise Sierra Leonean society are various and are present at many

levels of society. Widespread throughout society and characteristic of Sierra Leonean societal landscape are secret societies such as the Poro society. Secret societies are embedded in the traditional organisation of society in Sierra Leone both for men and women. In addition to this traditional type of social group, other kinds of social groups are present among youth. Youth groups range from school cliques, university fraternities (called camps in Sierra Leone) and societies to street gangs, community- and neighbourhood-based groups or associations.

As previously mentioned the word 'space' should be read here in an abstract sense. The 'spaces' of transmission identified and delineated in chapter two are not to be considered physical or geographical, thus tangible, spaces. They are factors that allow the transmission of culture. Because of the abstract nature of these factors their borders are blurred and, at times, they overlap. The distinction between one another is maintained artificially by the researcher, however it is in their overlapping areas that the interaction among the four 'spaces' is revealed. At the same time the demarcation between one space and the other was kept fluid and flexible during the fieldwork. During the interviews it was not specified what was meant for family or peers or which social groups. The interviewee was left free to talk about what he/she considered to be family, who were peers in his/her context and his/her understanding of the social groups.

The four 'spaces' here identified do not encompass all the possible factors responsible for the transmission of a 'culture of violence' in Sierra Leone. These four 'spaces' are the result of research in the existing literature on the process and phenomenon of transmission of ideas, beliefs, values, norms and, attitudes and behaviours. Other 'spaces', for instance, could be the international community, the state, Western culture. Steenkamp, for example, includes in her work the international level and the state level in the factors that create and sustain a 'culture of violence' (Steenkamp, 2005). Unlike Steenkamp, this paper focuses on micro communities and applies ground research to explain the phenomenon under study. For these reasons the four factors

identified and used in this paper emerged as the most appropriate to analyse and study the micro mechanisms that underpin the process of transmission within the communities and among individuals.

A call for an integrative approach to the study of youth and the consequences of exposure to violence has been made by many scholars (Boothby, Strang and Wessells, 2006; Punamaki, 2009; Barber, 2009). The analytical framework put together in this project seeks to answer that call. In particular, the aim is to include both the individual and the social context. This choice derives from a belief that on one hand it is impossible to isolate the individual from society, and on the other hand it is impossible to look at society disregarding the basic fact that it is composed of individuals. It is hoped that the four 'spaces' that emerged in the previous chapter and which constitute the analytical framework of this study will account for both spheres and for the integration of the two.

The four elements represented by family, peers, poverty and identity, provide the lenses through which the process of transmission is analysed, understood and explored. Use of the analytical framework conceived as a combination of factors aims to unfold the process of transmission in its all complexity and multiple facets. This approach will also attempt to unfold the process of transmission and simultaneously to understand the impact that this process has on the society and on the society's efforts to rebuild and maintain peace. The fieldwork was organised according to the 4-factor analytical framework. The interviews were structured following the four-factor outline and each participant was asked about all four 'spaces' in order to collect information and perspectives about each of them from all the participants. Through discussing each factor with all the interviewees, I was able to identify the connections between the 'spaces' of transmission and understand how they interact with and support each other. Additionally asking questions about all four factors at each interview gave me several different angles on each factor, helping to form a complete, rounded picture of the phenomenon.

## Research methods

The methods employed in this project were based on qualitative research methods, as the intent of the study was that of reaching a deeper understanding of social phenomena than what merely quantitative data would provide. The focus of this study is the process of transmission of violence and its mechanisms, something that quantitative analysis would be unable to provide deeper insights about. Qualitative research, on the other hand, allows one “to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives” (Berg, 2001: 7), thus providing the researcher with the tools necessary to understand and explain the phenomenon under study.

Within the broad range of qualitative methods, the researcher chose to adopt an ethnographic approach. Ethnography is understood in a variety of ways by scholars engaging in ethnographic work (Gay y Blasco and Wardle, 2007; Berg, 2001) but in general ethnography can be described as the attempt to study and understand human behaviours and societies through the direct observation by the researcher who immerses him/herself in the setting that is the focus of study. Therefore, for the ends of this project ethnography is considered as

“the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally” (Brewer, 2000: 10).

The choice of using an ethnographic approach to the study proposed in this project was given by the very nature of the topic of scrutiny. In fact this project is concerned with social and individual processes of transmission of culture that would not be grasped or accessed without the direct presence and contact of the researcher with the agents of transmission,

post-war generation of youth. Moreover the aim is to disassociate the research from the Western influence of the existing literature on the topic, as described in the previous chapter, and to try to understand how the Sierra Leonean society defines and measures the process of transmission and the perpetuation of violence among youth. In order to obtain a deeper understanding and knowledge of these processes and mechanisms, ethnography provides the most effective and productive approach.

Within the methods provided by ethnography the one that was used for this project consists of semi-structured interviews. This kind of interview involves predetermined open-ended questions asked in a systematic way to all interviewees in a semi-formal setting. Compared to questionnaires and fully structured interviews, it has the advantage of leaving the interviewee the freedom to shape or even change the direction and focus of the interview, instead of he/she being a mere 'respondent' (Fife, 2005). Since semi-structured interviews often develop into conversations more than real interviews they tend to put the interviewee more at ease, which in turn tends to result in more openness and co-operation. In this way it is possible to build a relationship with the participant that allows for a more full immersion in the participant's life and environment. In a few occasions the participant offered to introduce me to his group of peer's friends, family or school environment. The limited length of the fieldwork did not allow for a complete immersion of the researcher in the environment under study however semi-structured interviews allowed a more personal atmosphere to be established that in turn opened the possibility for more direct observation of the reality of youth life. This method also gives the researcher the space for flexibility which "reflects an awareness that individuals understand the world in varying ways" (Berg, 2001: 70). Specifically, structured interviews would not give the chance to the interviewee to express his/her ideas and thought in a meaningful way; also, closed questions could not possibly account for such a multifaceted and diverse phenomenon such as that explored here. The context of the interviews was also predominantly informal, for which formal interviews are not appropriate.

The type of questions asked depended greatly on the interviewee as the language and the framing of the questions had to match the status, role and education of the person interviewed. However the interviews always covered all the four factors of the analytical framework which formed the basic template on which the conversations were carried out. When interviewing INGOs or NGOs personnel, the questions explicitly mentioned the process of transmission of a culture of violence, conversely when talking to a street youth, the questions more generally concerned his/her own everyday life experiences with regard to the four elements of the analytical framework. It is thanks to this flexibility in the conduction of the interviews that the complexities and interconnections of the process emerged and the crucial role of political factionalism was brought to my attention, which resulted in its integration in the report of findings as an independent factor. The material was recorded through notes taken by the interviewer without the use of any mechanical or digital recording device. This choice was made for the purpose of maintaining informality in the interviews. Participants tend to speak more freely when they are not recorded on tape, hence taking notes manually seemed to be the best approach to gain the most genuine answers. Finally, the material collected through the interviews was processed in the aftermath of the fieldwork and subdivided according to the four spaces of transmission, such that each of the four factors forming the analytical framework was reported upon through the direct use of the comments of the interviewees.

Special attention was paid to the sampling method and a complete list of the participants in the interviews can be found in Appendix 5. Since the focus is on a process in its diachronic more than synchronic manifestation it became necessary to adjust the sampling of potential interviewees accordingly. In order to get the most complete picture possible of the phenomenon, two groups were targeted for interviews: a) government officials from the Ministry of Youth and Sport, personnel from UN agencies and INGOs, local NGOs and organisations, community associations and charities whose projects target youth and youth-related issues; b) youth (18 years and above) who took part or still take part in such projects, youth groups, and student associations, and street youth. The

former group was selected as witnesses of the process of transmission and its mechanisms. Working in direct contact with youth, and having engaged with them over a period of time from the end of the war up to today, enables them to describe the dynamics and forces at work among youth as groups and individuals. Since the projects are designed with regard to the needs and realities of youth on the ground (or at least they purport to be), personnel who collaborate in the projects can provide testimony of the changes that have taken place over time in the approaches to and involvement of youth in violence. Through the intercession of IGNOs and local NGOs I was put in contact with grassroots-level organisations and community associations. In this way I was able to cover various levels of organisations, from the advocacy organisations to the operational ones who are implementing INGOs' projects, as well as community associations supported by the work of community members. The second group, being 18 years of age or more, are instead likely to have undergone such processes themselves, even if they might not be conscious of it. The fieldwork was based on the youth's characterisation of their own interaction with each of the 'spaces' constituting the analytical framework and not on observation of youth within the 'spaces' of transmission. Through specifically designed questions the researcher aimed to access their direct experience of the transmission of a culture of violence. Since often violence is normalised and internalised by those who experience it during and after time of armed conflict, the interviewee might not be aware of surviving elements of violence in their personal attitudes, beliefs and even behaviours. This lack of awareness does not mean, however, that they cannot give important insights about the persistence of violence in their society and in their daily life. On the contrary their perception and understanding of violence and its manifestations are the main interest of this research project.

I did not rely on a single gatekeeper, on the contrary I asked each organisation to put me in contact with other organisations at a lower level. Often INGOs or local NGOs personnel accompanied me to visit the community they had projects in and to meet with youth within those communities. On other occasions the youth themselves were

gatekeepers for me. Through a volunteer in a local NGO who had recently graduated from the local university, I gained access to the student groups at the university. In the case of street gangs I was accompanied by an ex- member who now works with them to improve their livelihood through music projects. This variety enabled me to meet with youth at different levels in society which allowed a wide assessment of the perpetuation of violence in their everyday life.

## **Why Sierra Leone?**

This project is concerned with the survival of violence in post-war societies and in particular with the process of transmission within the younger generations that enable the perpetuation or breaking of cycles of violence. Prolonged armed conflicts tend to normalise the everyday presence of violence and both its victims and perpetrators tend to internalise it. As a result of these two processes violence often remains after the signing of peace accords, as disrupted societies find it difficult to build new structures and systems of meaning that do not incorporate the presence of violence (Steenkamp, 2005).

When choosing the case study for this research, several elements were taken into account. Firstly, the society that was to be studied must have experienced prolonged conflict as this projects stems from the idea that prolonged armed conflict has a deeper impact both on the functioning of the society and on the individual. Secondly, enough time must have passed after the formal end of the war. This is because the process of transmission takes place over time and becomes manifest particularly in the new generation that is born soon after the war or toward the end of the war. In addition the society under study needs to be well into peace time in order to see more clearly how the violence of the war is transmitted during peaceful times. Third, a particularly young population would have been more useful in order to observe the phenomenon and since

the focus of the paper is on how youth are the vehicle of transmission. Sierra Leone emerged as the ideal case study as all three of the above elements apply. In particular, youth count for more than 50% of the population in Sierra Leone (Richards, 1996), which means that most of this part of society experienced the war in their childhood and teenage years. Also the atrocities committed and witnessed by youth during the long war had a deeply disrupting impact on the societal fabric and systems of meaning of the whole Sierra Leonean society. Youth as a group played a central role during the conflict and, according to some scholars, also before the conflict, to the point of being considered the main force that commenced and fuelled the war (Abdullah, 2005). In the aftermath of the war the new state, together with international agencies, centred peacebuilding projects on youth, recognising the importance of this group for the stability of the peace process. However, youth remain marginalised as Sierra Leone has become the second poorest country in the world and the state fails to provide education and job opportunities.

Fieldwork was conducted within the capital of Sierra Leone, Freetown. From this geographical limit a specific focus on the urban youth population was derived which excluded the situation and realities of young people in the rural areas. There is a strong tendency for centralisation upon the capital within Sierra Leone. The distribution of population, and in particular of youth, is concentrated in Freetown as a result of the phenomenon of urban migration from rural areas to the capital, especially of young people during and after the war. Currently the population of Freetown is estimated to be 1.2 million, which represents about one quarter of the total population of the country (DFID, 2007). Hence this research speaks mainly of the situation of youth in an urban setting which cannot be taken as applicable to the realities for youth in the rest of the country. The choice of limiting the research to urban youth was made in order to make the fieldwork feasible in its practical execution within the time given on the ground. Also, the inclusion of rural youth would have required further discussion about the specificities of society in the rural areas, and that would have exceeded the capacity of this thesis.

## **The context, ethics and biases**

In this section, consideration is given to the context in which the research was conducted, the ethical implications of the research and the biases embodied in various aspects of the project. The fieldwork was carried out from 17<sup>th</sup> March to 17<sup>th</sup> April 2010. Ethical approval had been obtained prior to the fieldwork from the University of St. Andrews<sup>1</sup>. The first point that should be considered stems from the nature of the environment in which the research was conducted. As Nordstrom and Robben have noted, post-war societies raise specific difficulties for researchers especially when the focus of the research is violence (1995). The lack of a formal societal structure can bring problems in terms of gaining access to people and information. One must also consider the expectations that the people we interview as part of the research have, and this needs to be taken into consideration both when the researcher approaches the subjects and in the collection of their experiences and stories.

What can particularly weigh on the research effort are the emotional scars and baggage of the experience of extreme violence, and of the war, that characterise most of the population. People can be unwilling to discuss what for them are sensitive topics. This raises ethical issues related to trauma and psychological wounds. It is the responsibility of the researcher to make sure he/she does no harm to the interviewee (Smyth, 2001). Asking respondents who have witnessed or experienced extreme violence and atrocities to talk about issues related to those experiences can reopen emotional wounds that the researcher is not able to deal with. This is especially true for vulnerable groups such as youth, hence the choice of this author to meet and interview youth within a 'safe' environment where they felt protected, such as at NGOs' and associations' premises with the availability of a trusted adult at hand in case of need.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for the Ethical Approval documentation

The 'outsider' factor can play a role in the respondent's willingness to communicate and collaborate (Smyth, 2005). This author is an 'outsider' to the society under study. This position in relation to the society has consequences at various levels. On one side, as an outsider, it can be more difficult to obtain data and access to sources and people as the local population may look upon the researcher with suspicion. This can be especially so when being an outsider is made obvious by the colour of one's skin, which raises issues of power hierarchies as well as stereotyped identity representations. Responses given during interviews can be shaped by these 'insider'-'outsider' positions and the researcher should be aware of this possibility when collecting data (Gabriel, 2000). On the other, hand the contrary might also happen where being an 'outsider' can be perceived as being neutral to the forces and powers of society and as a consequence the interviewees might feel more comfortable and safe in expressing their ideas and stories to an 'outsider'. Nevertheless in both cases the 'outsider' often has a more detached understanding of the events and the society he/she is studying. While this can result in fewer biases in relation to societal groups and interests, it also means that the knowledge of the outsider is often more shallow and limited (Smyth, 2005). With regard to this aspect of conducting research, during the fieldwork in Freetown in one instance, when approaching a street gang, I was immediately recognised as an outsider and some members of the gang became very upset and angry about my presence. Because of my appearance, they thought I was working for an NGO or some international organisation. Since the end of the war they have been approached several times by NGOs or international organisations personnel who wanted to get them involved in youth empowerment projects or employment programmes. However, in all cases after six months or a year the funding would stop and the projects would end, leaving them in the same poor and marginalised conditions as before, but now additionally with frustration and anger towards those same organisations who promised help and a way out of poverty. In their eyes I was representing those same people who were getting rich behind their backs. Only with the intervention of the gatekeeper who was accompanying me at the time did

they agree to participate in the interview, after having understood that I was not there to exploit them once more. In this case the intercession of an 'insider' to vouch for me was vital for the youth to overcome their suspicions.

The colour of one's skin is not the only physical characteristic that can influence the research work. The gender of the researcher can make a difference in the way the person is accepted or rejected by the community and by each potential respondent. For example, as a female it can be possible to have difficulties in creating rapport, trust, and respect with members of the population of the opposite sex. The obstacles that a female researcher can encounter could range from not being taken seriously because of her gender to not getting interviewees' collaboration because of embarrassment due to the social rules on relationships between genders (Gurney, 1991). To overcome obstacles such as these, a possible solution can be that of wearing very professional-looking outfits, and in the latter case it might be advisable to be accompanied by a male person or colleague.

What can represent the most influential bias for the researcher is his/her own identity since "no matter our dedication, we cannot escape the legacy of our culture" (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995). The identity of the researcher has an impact on the whole research effort, from the conceptualisation of the project to the fieldwork organisation, implementation and analysis of data. Even if the researcher tries to apply objectivity and neutrality, most scholars agree that complete objectivity and neutrality are just not achievable. Each of us brings the baggage of our upbringing, social environment and cultural education which together shape our view of the world and our understanding of it and of human relations. We 'read' the world through the lenses that we have acquired during a lifetime and that guide us in our daily lives. As researchers

"There is also the fact of having been immersed in a particular society since childhood, having interiorised its language (and the mental structures that go along with it), its habits, traditions, myths, sensitivity and affectivity. History counts at least as much as intelligence, and geography more than genes. We are part of the Western world." (Comte-Sponville, 2008: 62).

This awareness, however, must be the starting point for the researcher in attempting to conduct research in a comprehensive, objective, inclusive and detached way (Smyth, 2001).

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter the author has delineated all the elements that underpinned and constituted the fieldwork project as well as the difficulties and possible biases. First, I tried to explain how the theories discussed in the previous chapter were used to create an analytical framework to be used during fieldwork as a lens through which to study the phenomenon of the transmission of violence and its impact on post-war Sierra Leonean society. The rationale behind the choices made in terms of research methods and case study was then discussed, in order to make clear to the reader how the fieldwork project was designed. Last, I tried to identify the possible issues, obstacles and biases inherent in conducting this research. It was not possible to foresee all of the challenges and difficulties that may be encountered in the field, but this researcher was confident in her abilities to make the necessary adjustments when confronted with any possible obstacles in the field.

In Chapter 5 the material collected during the fieldwork will be organised according to the structure of the analytical framework, namely utilising the four 'spaces' of transmission of poverty, family, peers and social groups, plus the unexpected space of political factionalism which emerged during the fieldwork. Before reporting the fieldwork findings, the next chapter will provide the reader with a background overview of Sierra Leone, the war and the role of youth during the armed conflict as well as today.

## Chapter 4: Sierra Leone, Civil War and Youth

Before commencing the report on the material collected during fieldwork and its discussion, it is necessary to outline, however briefly, the context in which the research has been carried out. Sierra Leone experienced a 10-year civil war that devastated both the material and human capital of the country. In order to understand the reality of Sierra Leone today the causes and events of the civil war need to be addressed. A heated debate has evolved around the nature of the Sierra Leonean war; however, the crucial role of youth as stakeholders in the armed conflict seems to be a common element in many of the different perspectives on the causes and dynamics of the war. In the context of this paper it is useful to highlight the role and participation of youth in the violence preceding the war, as well as during the war, thus to better understand the legacy that the experience of the violent conflict has left to youth as individuals and as a group.

Therefore the aim of this chapter is to outline the background in which the present study is embedded, giving basic information about Sierra Leone, the events of the war, the debate surrounding its nature, and finally the role of youth in Sierra Leonean society and in particular in the armed conflict.

## About Sierra Leone: General data

Surface area (square kilometres)	2008	71740
Population (estimated, 000)	2008	5560
GDP per capita (current US\$)	2008	418.0
Population aged 0-14 years (%)	2009	43.4
Urban population (%)	2007	37.4
Life expectancy at birth (women and men, years)	2005-2010	48.7/46.1
Human development index <sup>2</sup>	2009	180 out of 182
Poverty (% of population below national poverty line) <sup>3</sup>	2002-2008	70

(<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Sierra%20Leone>)<sup>4</sup>



Source: UNITED NATIONS Map No. 3902 Rev. 5 January 2004<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> UNDP, Human Development Index, Country profile: Sierra Leone, [http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_SLE.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_SLE.html) accessed 20th August 2010

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, Sierra Leone at a Glance, [http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/sle\\_aag.pdf](http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/sle_aag.pdf) accessed 20th August 2010

<sup>4</sup> UNdata, United Nations Statistics Division, Country Profile, Sierra Leone, (<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Sierra%20Leone> accessed 20th August 2010

<sup>5</sup> [www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/sierrale.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/sierrale.pdf) accessed 23rd August 2010

## **10 years of civil war**

The civil war in Sierra Leone started in March 1991 when a group of rebels crossed the border from Liberia. This rebel group, composed of some National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF) military personnel from the Liberian civil war, some mercenaries from Burkina Faso and some Sierra Leonean dissidents, called itself the Revolutionary United Front, RUF (Keen, 2005). The RUF portrayed the attack as the beginning of a revolution which aimed to overturn the corrupt one-party government controlled by the All Peoples Congress (APC) party. The war lasted for a decade during which the fighting forces multiplied and shifted alliances to the point that the borders between the different groups became blurred. In 1992 a coup d'état was successfully perpetrated by young military ranks, creating the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) and virtually dissolving the reason for the RUF armed struggle. However the war did not end. The NPRC saw the RUF as an enemy but "offered amnesty in return for unconditional surrender" (Richards, 1996: 11). However, the RUF continued to fight the National Army, and later the Civil Defence Forces that emerged as pro-government militias during the second part of the war, in the name of the poor and marginalised and "throughout its nearly eleven-year campaign of largely terroristic violence, the RUF targeted mainly those very dispossessed people, killing and mutilating them in an orgy of bewildering cruelty" (Gberie, 2005: 6).

In 1996 general elections were held that brought the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) to power. In 1997 the military staged a coup d'état, deposing the newly democratically elected president and inviting the RUF to join in forming a military junta government (Hoffman, 2006). In early 1998, less than one year after the coup of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), the democratically elected government was reinstated. The war continued until 2002 when it was officially declared over, ending with the disarmament of all fighting factions (Gberie, 2005).

By the end of the war more than 75,000 people had been killed or maimed and about half of the whole country's population was displaced (Keen, 2005). Because of the length and spread of the armed struggle "most Sierra Leoneans experienced it directly, and virtually every aspect of life was affected by what became a *habitus* of war" (Hoffman, 2006: 5). The civil war in Sierra Leone became infamous around the world due to the attention that the media paid to the atrocities committed by the fighting forces as well as to the widespread use of child soldiers. Even more tragic and shocking were the reports of child soldiers being the perpetrators of some of the worst atrocities such as maiming other children and pregnant women. The involvement of youth in the fighting and the role that they played during the war makes the research focus of this thesis especially relevant and important. The brutality of the war in this otherwise forgotten small country in West Africa was looked at as senseless and barbaric by the foreign public and international community (Gberie, 2005) but nevertheless attempts to explain the causes of the war were made by numerous scholars.

### **The causes of the war: A debate**

Many questions have arisen from the bloody war in Sierra Leone. On one side there was the necessity to identify the causes and roots of the conflict, its genealogies, its rationale, and what made it possible. On the other side there was the necessity to understand how the war could last for so long; who were the groups that were benefiting from it, who supported it, and what was the real aim of the revolution? A number of scholars tried to give answers to these questions both during and after the civil war. However, they did not answer with one voice. The perspectives and angles from which the conflict, its causes and dynamics have been explained are multiple.

Some scholars focused mainly on the crisis of the state as the principal cause of the 'revolution'. Boas argued that the crisis of the neopatrimonial state was the main cause of the inevitability of the war both in Sierra Leone and Liberia (2001). Some scholars explored the role of greed, grievances and the interaction between the two in trying to identify the aims and goals of the different actors involved in the armed conflict within the context of a collapsed state (Keen, 2005). In his work, Keen stressed the importance of the economic agendas of the different players. Economic factors are also at the centre of Hirsch's theory of the war which interprets the case of Sierra Leone as a "prime example of an internal conflict where economic aspirations for control of valuable mineral resources, especially diamonds, have been largely responsible for its inception and protracted duration" (2001: 15). Similarly Gberie considered the protracted life of the RUF phenomenon as "a case of organised mass delinquency" (2005: 8) mainly aiming at economic accumulation through the diamonds trade, even if she recognised that the "progressive disintegration of the Sierra Leonean state" also played an important role in the causes underpinning the war (2005: 7)<sup>6</sup>.

A more apocalyptic view is that of Kaplan who considered the Sierra Leonean war as the result of a 'new barbarism'<sup>7</sup> provoked by environmental degradation, population pressure, rising crime and youth delinquency (1994). Richards' interpretation of the civil war in Sierra Leone is a direct response to and criticism of Kaplan's thesis of senseless anarchy. Richards considered the war as "a sectarian intellectual response to the perceived corruption of a metropolitan patrimonial state", as a 'crisis of modernity' in which the rain forest and its resources played a symbolic and material role (1996: xxv). In turn Richards' work was strongly criticised by Sierra Leonean scholars such as Abdullah, Rashid and Bangura whose work was collected in the book 'Between democracy and terror: The Sierra Leone civil war' (Abdullah, 2004).

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<sup>6</sup> On the role of natural resources and diamonds in the war in Sierra Leone also see Campbell G., *Blood Diamonds*, 2004; Smillie I, Gberie L. And Hazleton R., *The heart of the matter: Sierra Leone, diamonds and human security*, 2000

<sup>7</sup> The term 'new barbarism' was used by Richards (1996) to describe the theory that Kaplan presents in his work.

## **The role of youth before, during and after the war**

The debate among these scholars has been fervent. However, they all recognised the pivotal role of youth in the tragedy of the civil war, even if in rather different ways. Kaplan refers to youth as 'loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid' (1994), while Richards depicted them as the major victims of the recession of the state (1996). Although Richards recognised the importance of youth culture in the dynamics underpinning the armed conflict, Bangura pointed out how he failed to understand the role of youth culture and its nature in full (2004). The development of youth culture within the political and economic environment during the two decades preceding the war is the main focus of Abdullah's, Rashid's and Bangura's study of the causes of the civil war as it is described by Rashid at the beginning of his paper 'Student radicals, lumpen youth, and the origins of Revolutionary groups in Sierra Leone, 1977-1996' (2004):

"An investigation of the history and sociology of urban youth culture and politics in the 1970s and 1980s is more likely to yield more insight into the character of the conflict and its main architects than other interpretations. The architecture of that youth culture, and the way it impinged on national politics, are crucial in understanding the events that led to the rise of the RUF and the general character of the movement." (2004: 67)

The three Sierra Leonean scholars investigated the development of youth cultures at various levels, in universities, and schools as well as among marginalised uneducated and unemployed youth. From their studies, youth emerged as the only opposition left for the one-party government of the APC. This opposition started within the university's institutions and spread to the so-called lumpen youth as "The interaction between radical students and the urban youth significantly influenced the political orientation of the latter" (Rashid, 2004: 67). The focus was also put on the role that lumpen youth played as thugs for the APC since the late 1960s, and how political violence has characterised urban youth culture since a very early stage of the life of Sierra Leone as an independent state.

Lumpen youth were present in Freetown as early as the colonial period. Lumpen youth were those youth who were not educated, mainly unemployed and living at the edge of society. They were “mostly pickpockets and petty criminals, engaged in violence in their everyday life” (Abdullah, 2005: 173). They were, however, lacking any political agenda. In the 1970s and 1980s more and more educated youth found themselves sharing the same marginalisation and unemployment of the lumpen population due to the harshening of the economic situation. This new type of lumpen youth was different in that “it included a significant youth element with middle and lower middle class backgrounds. Being literate, they were more aware of the country’s problems and more critical of its political leadership. With their unfulfilled higher aspirations, they tended to be strongly anti-establishment and rebellious towards authority” (Rashid, 2004: 73). In this context the collaboration between the radical students at the universities (especially those at Fourah Bay College) and the urban, lumpen youth population against the government became stronger and stronger. Abdullah, Rashid and Bangura showed how the revolutionary feelings that became crucial to the formation of the RUF were born from youth culture and youth political engagement (Abdullah, 2004).

Youth were also fundamental elements for the continuation of the war. The widespread phenomenon of youth/child soldiers became a distinctive trait of the civil war in Sierra Leone. There is extensive literature describing the methods of recruitment of children as young as 7 years by the different fighting factions, the various tasks they were assigned to, the impact of the military life on their mental health, and the challenges of reintegration (Peters and Richards, 1998; Zack-Williams, 2001; Abdullah and Rashid, 2004; Shepler, 2005; Peters, 2005; Rosen, 2005; Devon, 2010; among others). Not only the RUF but also the National Army and the Civil Defence Forces and militias used under-age combatants. The habit of giving drugs and alcohol to the young recruits and forcing them to witness or commit killings and atrocities against their own community was a method commonly used to cut off all bonds with families and communities. The army then became a surrogate family, providing protection, food, and clothes (Peters and Richards,

1998). One of the estimates of the number of individuals under 18 years of age participating with the fighting forces during the 10-year civil war is as high as 40,000 (Maclure and Devon, 2006: 2). The extension of the phenomenon demanded that special attention be paid to the effects of the exposure to, and participation in, the violence and atrocities of the war on these young individuals.

The involvement of children and youth with the fighting factions necessitated immediate attention in the aftermath of the war. Reintegration for these young individuals in the communities and families has not been an easy process. Perpetrators or victims? “The paradox of this brutal war was that children were its most vulnerable victims as well as some of its most vicious prosecutors” (Abdullah and Rashid, 2004). The agency of child soldiers has been vastly debated (Maclure and Devon, 2006). The dichotomy, victims or perpetrators, does not belong exclusively to the literature about child soldiers but also, and more importantly, it belongs to the perception of the communities that suffered the war and the families of the child soldiers themselves (Peters and Richards, 1998). The reintegration of under-age soldiers faced many challenges, as indicated by Wessells’ study of reintegration processes in the northern provinces. The difficulty of shifting from a military role to a civilian role is coupled with shame for what they have committed as soldiers and the fear of reprisals by those same communities they attacked during the time of fighting. In turn communities are suspicious of these young men who are looked at as animals (Wessells, 2006). A major aspect of the reintegration of child soldiers was the possibility of economically sustaining themselves through employment. Most of them lacked both education and skills, so part of the reintegration process involved skills training in order to allow them to meet their basic needs. However, “the combination of stigmatisation, fear, and lack of livelihood left many child soldiers in doubt over their ability to reintegrate into civilian society” (Wessells, 2006: 186). During the war children and youth were among the most vulnerable groups and after the war children and youth are still the most vulnerable part of society.

Youth have also been recognised as a priority after the end of the war, both by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and by the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). The final report of the TRC was published in 2004 and contained an in-depth analysis of the role of youth in preparing the ground for the armed struggle as well as their contribution in the continuation of the war.<sup>8</sup> The TRC report outlined recommendations for containing the risk of renewed conflict and for the construction of a sustainable peace with regard to youth.<sup>9</sup> The TRC recommended the formation of a National Youth Commission to deal effectively with matters concerning youth, who are considered a priority for effective post-war reconstruction. A second recommendation of the TRC concerning youth is the inclusion of youth in politics and decision-making in order to eliminate their marginalisation and exclusion that were among the root causes of the conflict. Most importantly, the Commission called for the recognition of the youth question as a matter of ‘national emergency’ which needs ‘national mobilisation’ (Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, 2004: Vol 2 Chapter 3, pg. 166). Tackling youth issues such as unemployment and disempowerment is also among the priorities identified by the UN Peacebuilding Commission “for risk reduction and peace consolidation in Sierra Leone” (PBC/2/SLE/1, 2007: 3)<sup>10</sup>.

In 2003 the Sierra Leone government released the National Youth Policy that has been designed “to mainstream Youth activities and contributions and to highlight Youth concern as critical input in the development process” (National Youth Policy, 2003: 3). The National Youth Policy defined youth as any individual between 15 and 35 years of age; it also delineated the rights and responsibilities of youth as well as the roles of the various players in the post-war reconstruction that should be dedicated to youth-related issues. The policy should have been reviewed every three years, but up until today no revision has been done. The priorities identified by the policy correspond to the areas which both the TRC and the PBC later found crucial for the reduction of the risk of renewed violence

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 2 for the TRC report on Youth.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 3 for the TRC recommendations concerning Youth.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 4 for the UN Peacebuilding Commission report

and the construction of sustainable peace. In 2009 some steps forward were taken, but there is still a lot to be accomplished with regard to youth empowerment, inclusion and job creation (UN Security Council meeting, SC/9890, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2010).

## Chapter 5: The youth population in Sierra Leone. Research findings

Keeping in mind the history of the war in Sierra Leone and the role of youth in Sierra Leonean society as delineated in the previous chapter, the attention will now be directed to the conditions of every-day life of youth in relation to the transmission of violence today in Sierra Leone, as emerged through the fieldwork. The preliminary research was dedicated to defining the focus of interest and building an analytical framework to use as a lens to explore and understand the mechanisms of transmission of a culture of violence. During the first phase it became clear that in order to cast light on such a dynamic and multifaceted process, first-hand research on the ground was necessary. Semi-structured and informal interviews were identified as the most fruitful method of investigation and two target groups were delineated, on one side people working with youth and on the other side, youth themselves. The fieldwork lasted for over a month during which numerous interviews were carried out. This chapter is a report of the interviews and talks conducted during the fieldwork. The aim is to let the voices of the interviewees speak of the 'spaces' of transmission of a culture of violence that compose the analytical framework. The intention of this chapter is to report on the findings of the research through the statements and comments of the people who participated in this study. A list of the interviewees cited in this chapter can be found in Appendix 5.

In the following section the material collected during the interviews will be organised according to the 'spaces' of transmission: poverty, family, peers, social groups. Also, the main trends that emerged from the interviews will be highlighted. Additionally, attention will be given to those aspects that initially had not been included in the analytical framework but that were identified as significant by the interviewees, namely the

unexpected space of political factionalism. The analysis of the collected material will be left to the next chapter in order to ensure as much authenticity as possible.

## **Poverty**

Poverty and marginalisation have been recognised to be major factors in the persistence of violence in post-war societies before. With no exceptions, every single interviewee stressed how in the case of Sierra Leone the widespread poverty has an even harsher impact on youth and how the high rates of unemployment and illiteracy especially among youth are among the principal causes for the engagement of youth in violent activities. “Poverty is the major cause, together with marginalisation, why violence is still embedded in society. Youth have nothing to do and they see violence as a means of survival.” (COOPI, Programme Manager, Mr. Robin Yoki.)

Poverty supports the continuation of violence on many different levels. Many interviewees used an expression to describe the link between unemployment, lack of education and violence: “idle hands will do the devil’s work” referring to the coping mechanisms that youths have to put in place to survive everyday life. For a young man or a young woman no job means no home and no food. The consequences of such a precarious life were described in many interviews, for example “You see young girls and boys sleeping at night on the pavement in front of businesses, they are vulnerable.” (CCYA, National Coordinator, Mr. Ngolo Katta.) Another interviewee connecting poverty and violence told me “Unemployment is also a huge problem because it leaves youths down the street doing nothing, and a beggar has no choice”, (Youth Employment Secretariat, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Mr. Yusuf Kamara), and also “They run toward violence when they see it because they can use that as a chance to get money out of it, stealing and robbing.” (SLYEO, Executive Director, Mr. Charles Lahai.)

The result is in front of your eyes when you walk the crowded streets of Freetown. Youth of all ages are hanging around doing nothing, and according to an interviewee “They engage in violence because they have nothing to do, bad habits are result of idleness.” (AYPAD, Executive director, Mr. Philip Bangura.) “Every night there are many sleeping just here (pointing at the narrow concrete corridor running between the street and the entrance of his shop), they have no place to go, they sleep on the street, can you imagine?” (Issa, Young entrepreneur.) As it was pointed out during many interviews, often the cycle of poverty starts in the family. The parents in the first place do not have a stable job and struggle to provide for the children: “The parents cannot afford to provide for all the children, children are down the street to help home.” (UNICEF, Project Officer – Child Protection, Mrs. Rosina Conteh.) This results in the inability to send the children to school. “A lot of kids are down the streets too, helping with the stands, selling food or other goods at the side of the street, they are literally everywhere!” (Graduate student, Rahim.) In this way “Children became the breadbasket of the family.” (CCYA, National Coordinator, Mr. Ngolo Katta.)

The interviewees seem all to agree that the street is the first real space for the transmission of violence. On the street children learn how to survive. “When you wake up in the morning, you don’t know what you will eat that day, so you go and sit at the junction and you wait for a friend to pass by and hope he will help, maybe one day you’re lucky and you get some chop (food), other days no chop at all, just water.” (AYPAD, youth 1.) Once on the street, the teachers and trainers of young people are older youths: “Parents don’t have enough to support their children so the kids end up on the street. When you don’t have to eat you don’t think to go to school you think of how you can find some food and if a friend on the street, normally an older youth, can provide for you then you don’t care about what your family says since they cannot provide for you, you just do what he says.” (AYPAD, youth 2.) Petty trade is the norm for children and youth and “In petty trading in this city you need to be violent if you want to succeed and to get a living.” (YAPAD, National Coordinator, Mr. Bockarie Enssah.) They sell what has been stolen,

robbed or smuggled the night before. Stealing and pick pocketing are also means of survival: “Armed robbery is a way for the youths to make easy money to support themselves which shows them that violence pays.” (International Youth Forum, Director, Mr. John Paul Bai.) Violence becomes the way to access resources, as expressed by this interviewee, “Every time there is some mayhem you see the youth running there because in the chaos they can steal something or loot or pick pocket and in that way they make enough for that day.” (International Youth Forum, Director, Mr. John Paul Bai.) With no education and no jobs, violence is seen by many youth as the only way of achieving something in life. “The only way of fulfilling their aspirations is through crimes and informal economy. There is no hope so youths find a space of personal development in the violence of the street life.” (CCYA, Programme Officer, Mr. Edward Massaquoi.) As one young guy explained to me, stealing occurs even among friends and family: “If I don’t have to eat I check my mom’s purse when she’s not looking and take the money she has, or I rely on my friends to share. If in the morning I have nothing then I go and see my friend to share something with him but if he has nothing, I don’t know, maybe he leaves the phone on the table you know and when he doesn’t look I take it and I walk out, like that you know. And go and sell the phone to get chop for that day. But we are still friends after.” (Base, Aberdeen, youth 1.)

In some interviews the role played by the DDR programmes in sustaining the perpetuation of violence in a context of extreme poverty also emerged. According to the interviewees “DDR programmes were not sustainable because the skills training was not properly focused resulting in no job placement which in turn resulted in new vulnerabilities for the youth. Ex-combatants are everywhere, poor and unemployed and hungry which make them dangerous.” (YAPAD, National Coordinator, Mr. Bockarie Enssah.) A university student at Fourah Bay College explained to me that the way of life that characterised the war has transmigrated into the post-war setting, “The culture of ‘I take what I want with violence’ coming from the war is still spread today especially among ex-combatants” (Fourah Bay College, youth 2), so that still today youth with no job

opportunities and no education re-enact the same way of life down the streets of Freetown where “you need to be strong so that nobody will mess with you.” (Base, Aberdeen, youth 1.) This phenomenon was also described by another interviewee: “A lot of children and youth during the war used to not work hard to get what they wanted but they are used to get what they want with violence, with force. This became a culture.” (ENCISS, Youth Officer, Mr. Ishmael Bash-Kamara.)

Psychologically, the youth interviewed expressed depression and hopelessness. “Youths are desperate. The frustration turns into aggression because they are not ensured their basic needs.” (Fourah Bay College, youth 3.) Many street youth told me that the ghetto with its alcohol and marijuana is often the way to forget the struggle of everyday life. “The ghetto is the best place to be to cool down from the stress of the street life.” (Base, Aberdeen, youth 3.) The youth of the Black Street Family, a renowned gang occupying a territory next to the national stadium, were smoking marijuana and drinking pojo (palm wine) even while talking to me, and they explained that “We drink pojo and smoke marijuana to forget about our stress and frustration because we are screwed. The car wash is all we do and we do it with no good equipment not even running water, we are paid pittance and the police come every day to try and kick us out of here. There is nothing for us, this is what we will do until we die.” (Black Street Family, youth 1, youth 3.) As a consequence of the extremely poor life conditions, many children and youth abuse both alcohol and drugs. “Very few job opportunities in the country, kids are often just looking for survival, to cope with the frustration of life they take drugs. When they take drugs they would do anything, engage in violence, rob, attack people. Fighting can be a coping mechanism for this frustration.” (WarChild, Deputy Country Director, Mr. Saidu Mansaray.) Youth are described as ticking bombs, ready to start fighting at the first chance. “People are very short tempered nowadays and fights can start in a second because of the frustration of everyday life and lack of livelihood.” (CCYA, Programme Officer, Mr. Edward Massaquoi.) Frustration characterises their state of mind as they feel that society and the state are doing nothing for them. “They see themselves as nothing in

the society which aggravates their anger.” (iEARN, National Coordinator, Miss. Jane Peters.) They simply stop caring about the consequences of their actions and what people might think of them. “They don’t care, even if people frown at them, they just do it anyway, they don’t care; they don’t realise how bad it is to kill somebody, they are not educated to the value of life.” (iEARN, National Coordinator, Miss. Jane Peters.)

Although poverty emerged as a central ‘space’ for the transmission and support of a culture of violence in post-war Sierra Leone, it would not be enough by itself to explain the persistence of violence within society. Poverty is one aspect of the process and it relates to all the others, in the first place to the family.

## **Family**

The family was often recognised as holding responsibilities for the transmission of violence. In numerous interviews the family was described as a highly violent environment. “There is a lot of violence within the household between the parents and the children learn from the parents arguing with each other and abusing each other.” (COOPI, Programme manager, Mr. John Saidu.) Violence characterises the relationship between the parents as reported by these interviewees: “Fighting between the parents is very common and they use a lot of abusive language, the kids learn that as a practice. The parents might be themselves traumatised by the war.” (Warchild, Deputy Country Director, Mr. Saidu Mansaray.) “Parents can be aggressive and abusive to the partner, to other people and the children copy it.” (Salone Youth and Adolescent Network, youth 1.) Regarding the relationship between the parents and the children: “Parents continually beat the children and non-violent moral values will be absent from those children.” (International Youth Forum, Director, Mr. John Paul Bai.) The situation in the household was described as even more serious when the father is an ex-combatant or ex-child soldier. The war legacy

manifests itself in high levels of domestic violence and this is clearly explained by the words of one interviewee: “the father is angry for what happened during the war, the children are angry as well without knowing for what reason.” (Youth Employment Secretariat, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Mr. Yusuf Kamara.) The father’s past actions as a combatant are used to intimidate and threaten both the partner and the children during arguments and moments of tension within the family, when for example, “Ex-combatants now have families, kids and when they quarrel they use abusive language and they threaten the wife and the kids with the stories of what they did during the war. The kids learn these stories and take them to school where they repeat them and they become slogans.” (YAPAD, National Coordinator, Mr. Bockarie Enssah.)

This aspect emerged only a few times compared to other dynamics that involve the family in the process of transmission of a culture of violence. In fact, reading through the interviews, what recurred most often is the impact of family breakdown as a consequence of the war. Through the war, or because of the war, the family has been profoundly transformed. “Before the society was like a whole big family. Everybody took care of the children. Now the family has become modular and only the parents are responsible for the children. The culture of upbringing has been distorted.” (ENCISS, Youth Officer, Mr. Ishmael Bash-Kamara.) Families were divided, parents were lost, children were lost and those networks which characterised the family were destroyed: “The breakdown of families’ structures and safety nets means that the youngsters live on their own.” (CCYA, National Coordinator, Mr. Ngolo Katta.) A considerable number of interviewees recognised in these changes the reason for the perpetuation of violence. The main consequence of these changes that was pointed out by the interviewees was the lack of control and authority that the parents have on their children “Families have no control over their children. Children do not have the respect toward their elders that they used to have,” (UNICEF, Project Officer – Child Protection, Mrs. Rosina Conteh) which resulted in the incapacity of the family to pass on values and norms to the offspring: “The families are not in control of the passing on of values which results in a loss of traditional values.”

(Plan International, Youth policy advisor, Mr. Martin Sisay Hudson.) This vacuum is filled from other sources of influence with new ideas and new systems of values, thus becoming one of the most important aspects of the transmission of a culture of violence. Often in the interviews it emerged how children and youth find in Western culture an alternative to fill the vacuum created by the loss of their traditional culture. “There is no ‘light’ in Sierra Leone so they look elsewhere for ideas and hope. Hip-hop and gangsta star from the West are the youth’ role models, they think that what they see in movies and music videos is real and they want to imitate it.” (AYPAD, Executive director, Mr. Philip Bangura.) Another interviewee also described this phenomenon to me: “There is a deviation from the traditional cultural heritage toward an acquirement of Western culture without understanding it. Kids follow these role models and they form gangs and groups in school and down the street like they see in the American movies. Violence is the main element of this new identity.” (ENCISS, Youth Officer, Mr. Ishmael Bash-Kamara.)

The loss of the traditional role of the family couples with poverty and the lack of jobs, hence the inability of the family to provide for the children. “Parents do not have strong control over the children as they cannot provide for them.” (COOPI, Programme manager, Mr. John Saidu.) The breakdown of family structures and social safety nets are the reasons why so many youngsters live on their own, often down on the street. The frustration of the parents is a main source of domestic violence. “Domestic violence comes from the everyday challenge of life because there is little to hope for.” (CCYA, Programme Officer, Mr. Edward Massaquoi.) The abuses become part of the daily life of the children inside the household. “Children are exposed to a lot of violence in the homes, then take the habits and become violent.” (SLYEO, Executive Director, Mr. Charles Lahai.)

In a number of interviews it was stressed how this situation is exacerbated by the introduction of children’s rights, and human rights in general, in Sierra Leonean society. Children are taught their rights as children, which they turn to their advantage in demanding that the parents ‘respect’ their will and listen to their voice: “Parents think twice

before saying anything to the children because the children can take them to the police. There are great misconceptions about child rights.” (ENCISS, Youth Officer, Mr. Ishmael Bash-Kamara.) The roles of the parents in guidance and education of the children are misread as a violation of the right of the child to choose for himself as it is his life. “The kids hear about their rights from the media and at school so the parents cannot educate and control the kids anymore because the kids can take them to the police. Children are left loose, they think they can choose for themselves.” (Oloshoro, youth 3.) An interviewee explained to me that “As parents lose the grasp on the children the norms and values which were traditional of the Sierra Leonean culture are not forced on the kids anymore. Youth think they can do anything and there are no consequences. Old social structures are eroded but no new structures are put in place that fit the society. There are a lot of misconceptions about the child rights.” (COOPI, Programme manager, Mr. John Saidu.) The issues created by the uncritical introduction of Child Rights within the Sierra Leonean society were recurrently brought up during the interviews. In almost all the interviews the lack of control of the family over the children, and the resulting incapacity of the parents to educate the children, was pointed out as the main reason for the perpetuation of a culture of violence, especially when the breakdown of the family was coupled with poverty and marginalisation.

## **Peers**

The role of peers' influence in the transmission of violence came forth relentlessly during the interviews. What especially emerged is the extent of peer influence in contrast with family influence: “The influence from outside the home is far stronger than that from the family.” (GOAL- Sierra Leone, Disadvantaged Children and Youth Project Coordinator, Mr. Michael Thompson.) The interviewees seemed to agree that the strong influence of peers cut across the social strata, being a common feature of youth both on the street and in the

schools or universities, for example. “Children, even if they come from a good family and they behave nicely at home then once they go out they are more influenced by the peers,” (PLAN International, Youth policy advisor, Mr. Martin Sisay Hudson), and similarly “At home they are peaceful but when they are outside with their peers they are dragged into violent activities because they admire the group’s culture, like the gangs from the Western culture.” (Bananawater, youth 1.)

Interviewees often reported on the peers’ dynamics at work on the streets where so many youth are forced to live and work. Many interviewees reported how the children and youth who are forced to the street are subjected to the influence of other youth and children who are already on the street. Many youth find themselves on the street looking for survival: “Children often have no choice and once down the street they follow their ‘bras’ older brother/boss” (UNICEF, Project Officer – Child Protection, Mrs. Rosina Conteh); here they meet with other youth who have found their ways of getting what is necessary for their daily living. “The younger ones want to copy the actions of these people because they see them getting a living like that.” (Salone Youth and Adolescent Network, youth 2.) In the absence of any other guidance or protection, the newcomers learn from those who are already part of the system. Many interviewees stressed how street life is entrenched with violence. On the street it is a matter of survival so youth have to learn quickly the tricks and the rules that let you survive: “They have to survive. What they learn down the street from other youth counts more than what they learn in the house.” (SLYEO, Executive Director, Mr. Charles Lahai.) “Younger ones are in the ghetto where they take drugs, and they learn from the older ones, they teach themselves about the techniques of survival like pick pocketing and smuggling.” (GOAL-Sierra Leone, Disadvantaged Children and Youth Project Coordinator, Mr. Michael Thompson.)

Considering the level of poverty and the lack of jobs and opportunities, a large share of the economy is informal and often illegal. “When in a slum out of 200 youths 10/15 of them go out at night to rob and smuggle and come back with TV sets and other

stuff to sell, the others will soon follow.” (CORD, Executive Director, Mr. Alfred Sandi.) Even with education and training it is likely that youth would still be unemployed, while on the street they can make a living, achieve what even a university degree might not be able to guarantee. “They are down the street where they learn that they can be somebody through bad behaviours learning from older youth. They get to believe that violence is the way to succeed and be somebody.” (EMERGENCY, Head of Paediatrics, Dr. Jane Babati.) In this context those youth who are already on the street and who are doing fairly well become the role models for the younger ones, as even university graduates holding masters’ degrees are still unemployed 6/7 years after finishing university. “The head of the ghettos or the drug dealers make money easily, they make a lot of money and in a poor society they become role models, they encourage the youngest to join them.” (National Youth Coalition, President, Mr. Ishmail Al-Sankoh Conteh.) Violent youth demonstrate how, with violence, you can survive in the day-to-day struggle with poverty and marginalisation: “the negative influence that the kids get when involved in petty trading comes from older youth or adults who think of themselves as youth even if they are 40/50 years old and they behave as the Godfathers, they are the role models and they influence the young kids. These adults use to be violent back when they were young and they tell stories about their past and what they would have done back in the days.” (YAPAD, National Coordinator, Mr. Bockarie Enssah.)

Another aspect that emerged through the interviews is the impact that the reintegration of ex-child/youth soldiers has in relation to the perpetuation of a culture of violence. Ex-child soldiers were reintroduced within the communities at different levels. “DDR programmes, reintegration brought ex-combatants back in the communities and in schools, whenever there is violence they are at the forefront.” (National Youth Coalition, President, Mr. Ishmail Al-Sankoh Conteh.) Many interviewees agreed on the inadequacy of the rehabilitation programmes which result in the socialisation of violent-prone individuals with other youth and/or children. “A lot of ex-combatants or even just the young kids who helped the fighting factions, during the rehabilitation process they were put back

in school sometimes in primary school and there they socialise with the younger kids and with their behaviour and attitudes they teach to the smaller kids.” (YAPAD, National Coordinator, Mr. Bockarie Enssah.) Through this interaction, the rules and dynamics that characterised the war enter society, influencing the youngest and creating a continuum between the war and the present. “Ex-child soldiers were reunited with the families and they brought violence within the house and the younger kids copy from them.” (National Youth Coalition, President, Mr. Ishmail Al-Sankoh Conteh.) Again, “Sometimes ex-combatants who cannot go back to school, they end up being the caretakers of the younger kids and pass a culture of violence to them” (YAPAD, National Coordinator, Mr. Bockarie Enssah.) “When in 2002 ex-combatants and youth who experienced the war started to be replaced in learning institutions (schools and universities) events of sports and leisure among or between schools turned into violent events.” (CAUSE Canada, Peacebuilding project coordinator, Mr. Daniel N’bompa-Turay.) Another interviewee explained how during the sport events youth were literally mimicking/staging the violence of the war, reproducing the gestures, the actions that were part of everyday life during the war: “during sport events you see gangs of youth literally mimicking with fake, or sometimes real, weapons what was happening during the war.” (Youth Employment Secretariat, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Mr. Yusuf Kamara.)

The problems inside the household are one of the main causes that bring children and youth to the streets. “In the streets the other youth help you, encourage you and don’t beat you so you will like the street better than home.” (iEARN, youth 1.) The conflict inside the home drags the children toward their peers, increasing the influence of the peers over that of the family: “The influence of the peers is stronger than that of the parents because there is no finance for the parents to take care of the children” (BASE, Aberdeen, youth 2.) Children and youth are completely out of the control of the family. “Kids in their teens go to clubs, cinemas, stay out late at night, and if you don’t conform they pick on you.” (PLAN International, Youth policy advisor, Mr. Martin Sisay Hudson.) In the process of socialisation with their peers, the youth have to adopt the norms and behaviours of the

group, otherwise they are treated as an outsider: “Youths consider you old-fashioned if you don’t smoke marijuana.” (CORD, Executive Director, Mr. Alfred Sandi.)

During the interviews it was often pointed out to me how the influence of peers on the streets and at school is highly correlated: “The school kids see violence in their own communities and take it back to the schools. If you are the bad guy, taking drugs, you are cool, you have something to be proud of.” (National Youth Coalition, President, Mr. Ishmail Al-Sankoh Conteh.) The cliques and groups that are formed at the community level are not confined to the community. “Groups are formed outside the schools but they are then taken inside the schools.” (COOPI, Programme manager, Mr. John Saidu.) An interviewee explained the dynamic of peer influence as a result of the war in these terms: “A negative outcome of the war was an extreme rural-urban migration, Freetown was the safe haven during the war so a lot a lot of youths came here, a lot of them formed a family here and got children here; during this process the new youth have been socialising with youth who have been idle already from before the war, with drop-outs and uneducated youth. These youth were influencing their peers and the influence is spilling over to the schools. These idle youth who have left home are living with friends who might be going to school and who are influenced by these dropout youth in their lifestyle so that the culture gets into the schools.” (GTZ, Programme Manager, Mr. Muhamed Lebbie.) The school institution also fails to act as a place of education for the children and youth, as “9/10 hours per day are spent in school which are overcrowded so the teachers cannot educate them either, as a consequence children are more influenced to bad practices by their peers.” (National Youth Coalition, President, Mr. Ishmail Al-Sankoh Conteh.) A dynamic that was often reported by the interviewees sees the children of wealthy families as the initiators: “They are violent to be noticed, to be popular. A lot of these kids have families with money, the parents can pay to get them out of troubles which results in impunity.” (ENCISS, Youth Officer, Mr. Ishmael Bash-Kamara.) Again, “In schools the rich kids think they can get away with anything so they are the leaders and they influence the poor ones.” (COOPI, Programme manager, Mr. John Saidu.) The financial resources of the

family are the means of getting out of trouble, so that “The offspring of high society people are often the bad boys; because of the resources and money they influence their peers, they become a model because of the social position of the family.” (International Youth Forum, Director, Mr. John Paul Bai.)

Although brought up only few times during the interviews, it is interesting also to include in the picture the influence that Sierra Leonean children and youth from the diaspora are having among the youth in Sierra Leone. As explained to me by an interviewee, “Troublesome kids from SL who were abroad studying, learnt about the fraternities in the West and because they were troublesome they were sent back to SL and they brought with them the fraternity culture that now is creating so many problems and violence, spread to the secondary schools with all these cliques and gangs.” (iEARN, youth 2.) Similarly, “Sierra Leonean kids abroad are sent back to Sierra Leone because of their violent behaviour and because they cause trouble where they are: once here they influence other kids because here there is a widespread impunity.” (Salone Youth and Adolescent Network, youth 3.) The impunity that characterises Sierra Leonean society, as pointed out in the last comment, seems to be recurrent in many settings. It is the same impunity that allows the children of wealthy families to get away with violent behaviours, or that allows rape to have no consequences for the perpetrator.

### **Social identity: Social groups**

A theme that emerged in almost every single interview is that of social groups, identity and belonging, and how a society that traditionally tends to organise itself into groups creates a space for violence and for the transmission of violence. “It’s part of the characteristics of Sierra Leonean society to organise in groups and identify oneself with the group. It is a matter of identity. Some of these groups advocate and preach violence.” (Peacelinks,

Programme Coordinator, Mr. James Hallowell.) “The original culture in Sierra Leone has a lot of societies/groups which is on its own a platform for violence because the different views are not respected/accepted.” (SPW, Country President, Mr. Farai Muronzi.) In the history of Sierra Leone, the groups to which society was divided were the secret societies. Secret societies were central to societal life, they were the locus of decision making where youth could become men: “Until you are part of the decision making you are not an adult. Before it was about being part of the secret societies and being at a certain level of hierarchy within the secret society to take part in the decision making. Until this point youth can be ordered to do anything and the decisions taken are in the interests of the elders.” (WANEP, National Coordinator, Mr. Edward Jombla.) Secret societies played a central role in Sierra Leonean society, but the nature of their role has been highly ambivalent; on the one hand, for example, they were a means of education for the youth: “Formerly the secret societies used to be educational institutions, youth were being trained and learned during the time of initiation but this changed over the years.” (National Youth Coalition, President, Mr. Ishmail Al-Sankoh Conteh.) However, on the other hand, together with knowledge, skills, ideas and values, violence was also transmitted as “The traditional aspects of the secret societies are violent as for example in their initiations.” (International Youth Forum, Director, Mr. John Paul Bai.) The very structures of traditional society were means for the perpetration and transmission of violence. “Violence is appreciated, it’s been planted a long time ago by the structures within the society, by the politicians, by the secret societies, by ethnic groups, by the parenting models, by elders-youth relationships, especially by the elders controlling totally and marginalising the youth.” (GOAL-Sierra Leone, Disadvantaged Children and Youth Project Coordinator, Mr. Michael Thompson.) However, while the networks and structures of the traditional society were in great part disrupted by the war, what has been created in substitution maintains the violent aspects in new forms, as many interviewees pointed out: “There has been a transfer from the secret societies to university groups of a culture of violence.” (GOAL-Sierra Leone, Disadvantaged Children and Youth Project Coordinator, Mr. Michael

Thompson.) This tendency to organise themselves in groups is more and more evident among youth. “Before the war there were social groups in the school institutions and universities for social activities. Violence has become the criteria for being part of these groups. This continues after they graduate as those who are leaving become the patrons for the groups.” (ENCISS, Youth Officer, Mr. Ishmael Bash-Kamara.) To begin with, “The traditional secret societies have youth groups in them,” (SPW, Country President, Mr. Farai Muronzi) which means that youth have already been exposed to violence as perpetrated within the secret societies’ framework. When youth form groups outside these traditional structures, they tend to reproduce the violence that characterises the secret societies, for example by using the same violent method of initiation: “If you want to be a member you have to go through a violent process, this is true for the secret societies as well as the university groups.” (GOAL-Sierra Leone, Disadvantaged Children and Youth Project Coordinator, Mr. Michael Thompson.)

Youth organise themselves into groups and cliques inside the schools, and in the university as well as down the street: “Groups/gangs are in the schools, in communities, in university. 5stars is the general; everybody wants to be the general, the more you are violent the more people respect you; each gang has a 5 stars that rules.” (AYPAD, Executive director, Mr. Philip Bangura.) Among street youth the group is represented mainly by the gang which recreates the structures that were in place during war time. “Within the gangs they use military ranks and military language as during the war; the structure, the hierarchy within the gangs are the same of the war time, one older guy, the most violent guy is the commander.” (WANEP, National Coordinator, Mr. Edward Jombla.) Within the gangs violence is appreciated and rewarded. “They have military hierarchy within the groups and you get up and get promotion depending on how violent your actions are. They see it as a way of being social.” (AYPAD, Executive director, Mr. Philip Bangura.) In the gangs system, respect equals fear and the members want to be perceived as intimidating in their communities. “They are proud of having names that scare people; they want to show other groups they are ready to fight.” (iEARN, National

Coordinator, Miss. Jane Peters.) And the names of the gangs are written on every wall around Freetown, some of the names being 'Prison thug', 'Skull gang', 'Freetown gangstas', 'Thug money', 'Evil squad', 'Rambo', 'Devil sons'. As an interviewee pointed out, respect is strongly associated with fear, "People fearing you is respect, fear is respect as during the war." (GOAL-Sierra Leone, Disadvantaged Children and Youth Project Coordinator, Mr. Michael Thompson.) Another interviewee also told me that "Respect comes from the use of violence, being strong and brave." (GTZ, Program manager, Mr. Muhamed Lebbie.)

Gangstarism is widespread among street youth but it also spills inside the schools "In schools there are cliques that perpetrate violence, going to school with knives, stones and getting into fights with other cliques." (Graduate student, Rahim.)<sup>11</sup> The reasons for school children and youth engaging in violence are based on social position and popularity. "The young people want to be the big, strong ones, they start in school where they want to be the most popular by copying the gangs down the street, they want to be superior," (iEARN, National Coordinator, Miss. Jane Peters), while for street youth it is mainly a matter of survival: "The need to be the top-dog is entrenched in the culture, it was like this during the war and it is the same now. Being superior, being the top-dog becomes your focus in life. That is the system and the mindset of youth works within that system." (UNIPSIL, Youth Employment and Conflict Advisor, Mr. Eldridge Adolfo.) There has been a mushrooming of social groups and cliques within the schools after the war. "Gangstarism is very spread in schools, the mentors are the bad boys, those who use violence and abusive language", and also "Cliques are bad boys; most of the times they have money therefore they influence their peers." (International Youth Forum, Director, Mr. John Paul Bai).

Almost all the interviewees indicated the creation of groups and cliques among youth as a focal point in the transmission of a culture of violence, especially because of

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 6 for newspaper articles concerning with the issue of gangstarism in schools

the inherently violent nature of many of these groups. “They organise in small groups at school and university, and the initiation is through beating and harming by their peers. The lecturers are involved as well and this supports the use of violence.” (Youth Employment Secretariat, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Mr. Yusuf Kamara.) The interviewees were often concerned about the incapacity of the school institutions to limit this phenomenon and control the violence. “The problems in the schools are not dealt with so they keep going. A school can expel somebody but that same kid next day is in another school. Nothing really changes for them which results in impunity.” (SPW, Country President, Mr. Farai Muronzi.) What especially emerged through the interviews is how the group has become the platform for youth to express their identity, a means of achieving something and feeling part of something: “The school kids who take part in the gang groups have names that scare people and they are proud of that so they start feeling safe with the group; the group is the protection for the kid, the group becomes the family, it’s very united, it gives sense of belonging.” (iEARN, National Coordinator, Miss. Jane Peters.) The sense of belonging and violence seem to merge in the group system as a young activist explained to me: “It is an element of belonging to the groups, I’m part of the group so I’m violent, I’m violent therefore I’m part of the group.” (AYPAD, Executive director, Mr. Philip Bangura.) According to another interviewee, “In schools and other institutions occult societies perpetrate violence and engage in violent activities as part of the belonging to the group, influencing the new students, for example taking drugs,” (WarChild, Deputy Country Director, Mr. Saidu Mansaray); he also further explained “Occultism used to be only in universities but now it got down to the primary schools supported by teachers as well. The initiation processes involve drugs and violence. These groups create a sense of belonging and they will help you in your life to get jobs and be connected.” (WarChild, Deputy Country Director, Mr. Saidu Mansaray.) Parallel to gangs that reproduce the structure and hierarchy in place within the fighting factions during the war, other types of ‘social group’ were reported by many interviewees as being widespread among youth. These other types of social group are based on the hip-hop culture and on the imitation of

the life-style preached by Western hip-hop stars. "After the war young people have been creating groups and cliques imitating gang culture of hip-hop stars, imitating the life-style of gang groups. They get to stab each other especially among students but also at the community level." (National Youth Coalition, President, Mr. Ishmail Al-Sankoh Conteh.)

The situation in the university institutions, and particularly at Fourah Bay College, had been recurrently reported as extremely serious with regard to violence. "In the universities there are groups, social groups among which there is high rivalry, for example about student politics. This is connected to the war because the level of violence nowadays in these institutions is so much higher." (GTZ, Programme Manager, Mr. Muhamed Lebbie.) In fact, "By the end of the war the White/Black camp differentiation came up. These are the most powerful and dangerous groups and they are widespread also in secondary and primary schools. You have to go through an initiation process that involves a lot of violence and creates a lot of troubles to the point that people dies during it or some women came out pregnant from it without knowing who the father was. These two groups have infiltrated student union politics. The two groups are increasingly regionalised, Black from the south and White in the north and the rivalry between the two groups is very strong. Student union elections involved as much violence as the general elections." (Anonymous local NGO officer.)

A university student described his initiation to the White Camp in these terms: "In the university groups initiation is very very hard, they beat you up, they humiliate you, they will do anything to destroy your will and dignity and you do it because they tell you that you will have all these advantages from it, like spare material, no problems with the courses, and they will help you to find a job but then once you are in you don't receive any of these benefits so I want to leave because it's just evil, what I had to go through is evil. And you have to vote accordingly [at the university elections] and they are so powerful that you don't vote against them, and you take an oath with them so even if your own brother runs for the other side, you would not vote for him, you would go against your own

blood rather than vote against your group.” (iEARN, youth 3.) Violence inside the two camps and the numerous subgroups has been escalating after the war, as pointed out by an interviewee: “If I’m beaten during initiation next year I will beat the new initiated even more as reprisal, so that the initiations are getting more and more violent.” (International Youth Forum, Director, Mr. John Paul Bai.) The initiation rituals have become so violent that every year students die during the initiation. With regard to university groups, and especially the two camps, the overlaps with the traditional secret societies have become especially evident “There are a lot of similarities between the two groups and the Poro secret society,” explaining, for example, “The hierarchy of the black camp is the same of that of the Poro society” (Graduate student, Amin.) The White and Black camps are not simply social groups, they are layered structures with a lot of subgroups, female wings and even militant wings which are dedicated to the perpetration of violence, as the same member told me: “White and Black camps have militant groups which fight and take up arms,” [...], “The militant group of the Black call themselves Bakasi boys after a militant group of youth in Nigeria which is an extremely violent group that kills and use extreme violence. The militant group of the Black camp wants to be associated with them.” (Graduate student, Amin.)

University students involved in this dualistic system are linked with the rest of society at various levels and they spread the tentacles of a culture of violence. They are connected with street youth. “Youth in university are networked with street youth who can be their brothers or community friends. The street youth are the ready battalion for the university students.” (WANEP, National Coordinator, Mr. Edward Jombla.) University students represent the future élites of the country and since reaching university education is rare in Sierra Leone, they already have great potential influence for the younger generations. “A lot of factions at university against each other and see each other as enemies and they are the foundations for political unrest, intolerance and these youth will have strategic positions in the country. Also these youth from university become role models for other younger students.” (Salone Youth and Adolescent Network, youth 4.)

The rivalry is increasingly passed on to the schools and to the communities. The division between the two camps is reaching secondary and primary schools as “The two groups are fishing for members for the university already in the secondary school; it is an orchestrated structural violence. The logic is that I have to stop other students from the other camp to take the exam or to get good marks, it’s an unhealthy competition.” (WANEP, National Coordinator, Mr. Edward Jombla.) The communities are affected as well: “This rivalry is transferred in the community. Once out of university when seeking a job if I know you were part of the Black camp and I was part of the White camp I’ll make sure that you don’t get the job.” (WANEP, National Coordinator, Mr. Edward Jombla.)

What emerged strongly through the interviews is that youth groups, whether among street youth, school youth or university students, share an underlying rationale that can be summed up in the explanation of an interviewee: “You have to belong to a group to get someone to respect you/to fear you, the group is the only way to achieve something”, [...], “There is a strong need to have something to identify themselves with and the groups are that something. It’s about superiority, my group is better than the others.” (SPW, Country President, Mr. Farai Muronzi.)

### **Unexpected ‘space’: Political factionalism**

The political element was not considered as part of the analytical framework. However during the interviews the role of political factionalism in the transmission of violence was brought up on many occasions.

The connection between the political system and youth emerged mainly at two different levels, with street youth and with university associations, but it was also often stressed, more in general, that “Elders take advantage of the vote/political power of youth because they are the largest bulk of votes.” (SPW, Country President, Mr. Farai Muronzi.)

In fact, “The relevance of youth comes out only for political reasons before the elections when they are manipulated by the political parties.” (SLYEO, Executive Director, Mr. Charles Lahai.)

In the previous section the violence that characterises the two university camps has been explained. The other element that kept coming up during the interviews is the link between the two camps and the national political system. “The politicians are deeply involved with the two university camps. Student union politics became involved with the state politics. The politicians support also financially these groups. This reality is becoming a threat to the stability of the country.” (Anonymous local NGO officer.) A graduate student explained to me that “Black and White camps are highly political; they play in miniature what happens in national politics. The two groups are affiliated with the two political parties, the White with All Peoples Congress and the Black with Sierra Leone People’s Party.” (Graduate student, Amin.) Politicians are involved in university politics and the two camps to the point that “Politicians participate in the initiation rituals.” (Graduate student, Amin.) Not only do the two camps mirror the two political parties, but also the rivalry that characterises the political parties is reproduced within the university environment: “There is a duplication of the rivalry in the national politics within the university environment. Now university groups are all about violence, especially during elections.” (WANEP, National Coordinator, Mr. Edward Jombla.) During an interview, I was told the reason for this tight relationship: “Politicians support these two groups because they are élites youth and they need them. Universities are breeding the young leaders and that’s what the politicians are aiming for.” (WANEP, National Coordinator, Mr. Edward Jombla.) The two camps have special subgroups dedicated to politics which are characterised by extremely violent initiations. As an insider told me, “AURADICALS is the political wing of the Black camp, they are considered very prestigious and they choose only the brightest to be members. The initiation process for this group lasts 40 days and it’s very brutal. This organisation breeds politicians. The LIBERALS are the same thing but for the White camp.” (Graduate student, Amin.) This polarisation along political lines of the university students creates a

platform for tension among youth which often results in violence: “Adults use youth, for example student unions are politically used by the political parties creating tensions among young people.” (SPW, Country President, Mr. Farai Muronzi.)

This polarisation is not limited to the university environment. “The country is highly politicised and polarised; you have to be affiliated with your political party for survival. Youth are politicised by poverty and marginalisation, it’s easy to manipulate them. It’s a patronage system.” (CCYA, National Coordinator, Mr. Ngolo Katta.) This mechanism applies even more to those youth who are unemployed and uneducated. Street youth become very important for the politicians to carry out the dirty work, for example, “Young people collaborate with senior state officials in illegal activities in order to survive. Sometimes the youth blackmail the officials for what they know.” (Anonymous local NGO officer.) Many interviewees pointed out how election campaigns are characterised by a high level of violence because “There are still politicians who are giving alcohol, drugs and money to youths to mobilise them. Because of poverty youths are easy recruits for the politicians.” (Peacelinks, Programme Coordinator, Mr. James Hallowell.) Street youth are recruited to perpetrate violence against the opposing party: “Youth are very active and are the majority to vote so they have been used by politicians against the opposite party to perpetrate violence,” (Warchild, Deputy Country Director, Mr. Saidu Mansaray); and also, “During elections’ campaigns politicians use the need of youth of food and drugs to mobilise them against the opposition party.” (ENCISS, Youth Officer, Mr. Ishmael Bash-Kamara.) It was also pointed out to me that the politicians have an interest in keeping youth in a subordinate, and therefore easy to manipulate, position. “The élites are very happy to keep the youth down because they can be manipulated,” (UNIPSIL, Youth Employment and Conflict Advisor, Mr. Eldridge Adolfo), and further, “Politicians hope for young people to be marginalised and hopeless so that they need them, depend on them.” (CCYA, Programme Officer, Mr. Edward Massaquoi.) Because of the poor living conditions of the youth, “It’s cheap for the politicians to have followers ready to start the violence. For last year’s riots against the opposition party’s offices the youth were paid just

5000 Le [1\$] each.” (Anonymous high rank official.) A young man I interviewed in a community candidly told me how “Politicians come to the Ghetto to take us to fight for them.” (BASE, Aberdeen, Youth 1.)

In this way violence among youth, and perpetrated by youth, is highly supported by the political élite who make use of youth for their own interests. An example of this system is given in the following story narrated to me during an conversation. “A high-up politician, he is in the current government, lives next to me and couple of weeks ago he got into a fight with a female neighbour. Other couple of neighbours and myself got out to try and pacify the two, while we were there the politician made a call and within 10 minutes 10/15 motorbikes ridden by big bad guys arrived ready to ‘take care’ of the person who was creating the problem to the politician, without asking questions about what happened or anything. You see this is the way fear and intimidation is created. Each politician has his boys, his thugs that he can call and mobilise at any moment.” (Anonymous informant.)

Some interviewees also stressed on how violence is condoned at the highest political level and how this influences how violence is perceived by the youth, mainly stripping violence of its gravity. “The culture of violence has not been sincerely addressed by the state, people who have been perpetrating violence in the past become heroes of the state, are admired and they have been rewarded by becoming presidential guards. This is condoning violence, they become role models.” (Anonymous INGO officer.) The politicians exploit the ex-child soldiers thus “Politicians have taken these ex-child soldiers on board, giving support to them, employing them for protection, surveillance, giving them cars, drugs, alcohol,” (National Youth Coalition, President, Mr. Ishmail Al-Sankoh Conteh) because of their proneness to violence. “Some politicians believe that the best way to make a point is to use ex-combatants, who are poor, unemployed and hungry and therefore dangerous, for violence.” (YAPAD, National Coordinator, Mr. Bockarie Enssah.) The example that was given to me of this phenomenon relates to the permanence of ex-combatants and child soldiers in high positions within the establishment such as the

presidential guard, “Presidential guards are often ex combatants, this gives a bad message about what violence means and makes violence look cool for the kids so they want to imitate these people and they admire them.” (YAPAD, National Coordinator, Mr. Bockarie Enssah.) The same idea was expressed by another interviewee: “The presidential guards are ex-combatants, and some of the worse ones too, but in this way they are turned into heroes, into role models, they are famous for what they’ve done. This becomes a message to the youth.” (Anonymous high rank official.) What is also well known is the role that these individuals continue to have in today’s violence. “During the attacks to the opposition party offices few months ago those same presidential guards were leading gangs of boys to loot, destroy, set on fire, beat people and women were raped during it too.” (Anonymous INGO officer.) This was confirmed by another interviewee: “The presidential guards were leading the riots and attacks to the opposition party’s offices that ended in rapes, looting and burning down of the offices.” (Anonymous high rank official.)

The politicians emerged in the interviews as having an active role in transmitting a culture of violence, as clearly pointed out during an interview: “Politicians are deliberately encouraging the youth to engage in violence, they maintain the youth to be loyal to them to perpetrate violent acts.” (GOAL-Sierra Leone, Disadvantaged Children and Youth Project Coordinator, Mr. Michael Thompson.)

## **Conclusions**

The aim of this chapter was to let the voices of the participants in the research project speak of the dynamics and forces at work within Sierra Leonean society. Each one of the ‘spaces’ of transmission was dealt with as much as possible exclusively through the material that was collected during the fieldwork and the stories heard from those who work

with youth, as well as from the youth themselves. Through the interviews carried out during the month spent in Freetown, the process of transmission was explored using the analytical framework. The interviews allowed me to identify which factors are relevant to the phenomenon under study and how each of them contribute to it. Also, without the contribution of the participants, vital elements involved in the transmission of a culture of violence would have been missed, such as the role of political factionalism which was added to the analytical framework as a result of the fieldwork. In this sense the contribution of the fieldwork has been crucial to the revision of the analytical framework and to a full understanding of the way a culture of violence is transmitted.

One difficulty lay in maintaining the fictitious borders created by the categories that compose the analytical framework since the process of transmission happens simultaneously at all levels. It will be the aim of the next chapter to analyse how the process is constructed through the interaction of the dynamics and forces at play within each category. Emphasis will be put on the complexities that emerged through an analytical reading of the same material that contributed to this chapter.

## Chapter 6: Living with violence in peacetime. Discussion of findings

In the previous chapter I attempted to report faithfully what emerged during the fieldwork through the voices of the interviewees while leaving the analysis of the collected material for this chapter. The discussion of the elements and trends that emerged during fieldwork aims to cast light on the dynamics and forces at play within and between the spaces of transmission of a culture of violence. So far in this study the various elements of transmission of a culture of violence have been described only two-dimensionally. In this chapter I attempt to highlight the third dimension of the phenomenon by revealing the connections among the various elements and the way they interplay and support each other, bringing volume to the picture.

In fact, reality proved to be much more layered than anticipated by the analytical framework as outlined in Chapter Three, and the various elements were found to be highly interconnected. What emerged relentlessly during the time spent in Freetown is how the transmission of a culture of violence stretches its tentacles in all directions within society and impacts on youth in multiple interwoven ways. It runs horizontally and vertically within society creating a net/web of forces that in turn support the transmission and perpetuation of violence. What is accepted in terms of behaviours and attitudes, or even encouraged at times, has become or is becoming institutionalised as societal norms, and values are shaped around endemic violence. Confronted with the reality of the fieldwork findings the analytical framework had to be modified to include new elements which emerged through the interviews, and reviewed to reconsider the role that each factor constituting the framework plays.

A recurrent theme in the numerous interviews was the disruption of traditional values and norms that allows the formation of new sets of values and norms which have

been forming in a highly violent environment (namely the post-war setting) and which consequently normalise violent behaviours and attitudes. The process also functions in the other direction as the widespread occurrence of violent attitudes and behaviours shapes the production and reproduction of values and norms which support them. It is in the carrying out of everyday life that the negotiation of what is acceptable and what is not takes place. Throughout the interviews it became clear that violence is often taken for granted as part of the range of societal mechanisms, especially among youth.

This chapter will discuss in more detail how the various 'spaces' are related, how they support each other and what the consequences are for the future stability of Sierra Leonean society. More specifically I will try to identify the connecting lines in order to reveal the structure that is created by the interaction of all the 'spaces' of transmission. An attempt will be made to cast light on the depth that the phenomenon reaches within Sierra Leonean society and the risks that are inherent in it.

In the effort to show the connections between the 'spaces' forming the analytical framework used so far, it becomes harder and harder to maintain the borders among the categories and explain them individually, as the discussion of one aspect overlaps with the others and vice versa. The division into categories is in fact artificial, and since in the discussion an attempt is made to delineate the real dimensions of a process that involves all the categories simultaneously, it is extremely difficult to identify when one category begins and another ends. However, the purpose is to highlight the complexities and multifaceted nature of the process of transmission, and the overlaps and redundancies can be seen as evidence of the interconnectedness of all the different aspects of the phenomenon.

## Poverty

In the previous chapter we have seen how poverty and marginalisation are considered by the interviewees to be the main forces that promote the perpetuation of violence in Sierra Leonean society. Lack of jobs and limited access to education were among the main grievances that mobilised youth during the war in the first place. The 11 years of civil war aggravated the situation, leaving Sierra Leone the second-poorest country in the world. For the youth of Sierra Leone this meant even higher levels of unemployment and lack of education than before.

The war left a disrupted economy, the private sector did not exist any more; all the infrastructure, such as roads, ports, railways, electricity etc., necessary to develop the country's economy had been destroyed. The government has become more and more dependent on foreign aid as it is unable to restart the domestic economy. The unemployment rate remains extremely high, especially among youth who were not able to achieve either an education or job skills during the long war. The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission pointed out how conditions for young people were among the root causes of the conflict in the first place, and urged that priority be given to policies intended for the creation of jobs for youth, in order to create stability and build long-lasting peace in the country. However, the policies for job creation remain political rhetoric leaving the youth with no real prospects for the future. The same can be said for education. Even if primary school is officially free, often the family cannot provide food for the children let alone uniforms, books and school materials, and as a consequence boys and girls find themselves on the street instead of in a classroom.

Soon after the end of the war poverty started creating distortions among youth which resulted in the reproduction of violent identities. During fieldwork it emerged how the DDR policies had created a division among youth, between ex-child soldiers and all the others who were witnesses and victims of the war. The DDR programme paid the

young combatants to disarm, thus producing an initial division in the youth population. The message sent to the youth was that violence in the end pays. In this situation many youth pretended to be combatants in order to receive the \$300 provided by the DDR programme to each combatant who surrendered a weapon and demobilised (Solomon, 2008). However, pretending to be an ex-combatant meant adopting violent attitudes and behaviours accordingly, to play the part as it were. This system indirectly supported those who had been using violence as a way of life during the war.

Reintegration of the ex-child soldiers involved skills training. However, numerous interviewees pointed out how the training schemes put in place to change the role of the ex-child soldiers from military to civilian through work was highly ineffective, if not counterproductive. At the end of the training period the job market did not offer positions for the youth, who eventually sold the working kits to raise some money and then found other ways of making a living. Again this policy generated distortions among the youth. In the first place those who fought the war were 'rewarded' with skills training, while victims and witnesses of the war were left apart. Secondly, it failed to provide jobs for the ex-child soldiers who often resorted again to violence for survival. Many ex-combatants and especially ex-child soldiers became taxi drivers or Okada drivers<sup>12</sup> (motorbike drivers) as these professions do not need real skills, and are in much demand. As a consequence drivers are regarded with suspicion and fear by the general public as they are considered drug addicts at best (mainly as a consequence of the war), and as violent individuals and criminals as well in most cases. Okada drivers especially are described as 'drivers by day and criminals by night' as the motorbikes which function as taxis during the day are used during the night for robberies and smuggling. Acts of extreme, and at time random, violence, such as murder and rape, committed by both taxi drivers and Okada drivers who are ex-combatants are reported with extreme frequency.

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<sup>12</sup> The name Okada comes from Nigeria where the phenomenon of motorbike taxis started. The format was imported into Sierra Leone after the war and has spread to all the major towns of the country.

The 'legacy' of the DDR programmes in a context of extreme poverty played a crucial role in the perpetuation of violent behaviours and attitudes which is still at play today. The result is that being an ex-child soldier is 'cool', and ex-child soldiers are respected because they are feared by adults and youth alike. The extent of the poverty in Sierra Leone has created a bulge of marginalised and disgruntled youth who are fighting every day for survival. Poverty represents the fundamental condition in which a culture of violence can breed and perpetuate itself. The experience of the frailty and insecurity of their very existence exacerbates the frustration of youth. They compete every day with each other for the limited resources available and any means that ensure survival are acceptable. In the end it is a matter of life or death. The situation is aggravated by the relatively easy access to alcohol and drugs. Many ex-child soldiers were drug addicts by the end of the war. In most cases the addiction has continued until today. Drugs and alcohol were used during the war to increase bravery and the proneness to violence. In peace time drugs and alcohol are still used by youth to make them 'bold' and able to carry out whatever is necessary to survive for another day. However, youth are increasingly using drugs and alcohol to numb themselves, to evade the daily reality of their desperate living conditions and lack of hope.

Poverty, together with unemployment and a lack of education, is at the root of the youth' resorting to violence in everyday life: "The harshness of society makes the youth react with equal harshness." (Peacelinks, Programme Coordinator, Mr. James Hallowell.) When survival is at stake, strength and proneness to violence are crucial to ensure one's own survival. Consequently youth, and especially street youth, feel the need to be physically strong and simultaneously to demonstrate their readiness to fight. This state of things promotes the use of violence and in a sense provides justification for youth to engage in violent activities. Violence in a context of extreme poverty becomes culturally acceptable, as it is seen as part and parcel of how things are, how things work, part of the societal dynamics and societal system: "Unemployment aggravates their anger and so to survive they end up using violence." (COOPI, Programme Manager, Mr. Robin Yoki.) The

protraction of a situation of extreme poverty results in creation of the ground for the perpetuation and transmission of violence.

The condition of poverty interacts with all the other elements and in a way underpins all other dynamics. Poverty erodes the integrity of the family as an institution, forcing so many children and youth onto the streets where they are vulnerable to any kind of exploitation and violence; the war has torn apart the social fabric and destroyed the safety nets that were in place in the communities before, so children are left completely alone. To survive they steal, rob, pick pocket, sell drugs, and smuggle goods, all illegal and dangerous activities, but households are so poor that parents do not have the luxury to worry about where their children got the money from, or how. When girls find themselves on the streets begging for money or food, they become easy targets for sexual exploitation and often become prostitutes, when they are vulnerable to rape and beating as well as sexual transmitted diseases and early pregnancies, but again when they go home with money the family do not ask what they had to do for it. The despicable living conditions of so many youth make them vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation by the richer and more powerful strata of the population, as, for example, political élites as well as educated peers. In general poverty provides the wider context in which the use of violence remains possible, thus poverty is better considered a structural factor in the process of transmission of a culture of violence.

## **Family**

The role that the family plays in the transmission of a culture of violence is pivotal. In the analytical framework, the role of the family was considered mainly in terms of transmission of psychological trauma from the parents to the children, consciously at times but unconsciously in most cases. This role of the family in the transmission of war trauma is

known from the literature that is concerned with the survivors of the Holocaust, and their offspring. However, what emerged through the interviews conducted during fieldwork is a different, and somehow unexpected, role of the family in the transmission of a culture of violence.

Firstly, it is important to point out the complete lack of studies about the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next in Sierra Leone. The dynamics of the relationship between parents and children have also generally not been explored. Hence, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to comment about the impact of psychological trauma related to the war within the family realm in the Sierra Leonean case. The interviewees themselves could not comment specifically on the issues defined using concepts belonging to Western psychology, and more generally about mental health<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, with regard to the role of the family, it is necessary to take a different approach and follow what emerged from the voices of the interviewees in order to understand which dynamics are at work within its realm.

When discussing the role of the family, the participants in the study highlighted two main aspects. The first aspect was related to children's exposure to high levels of domestic violence within the household. The violence that is experienced within the family is not specifically derived from the war. It was part of the male-female dynamics and elders-youth dynamics within the Sierra Leonean society also before the war. Domestic violence is still rampant today despite the social campaigns and the dedicated police task force, mainly because family issues tend to be resolved at the community level. The use of violence and abusive language within the household is commonly linked to the poor conditions most family are forced to live in. The frustration and, at times, desperation experienced day after day by the parents translates in domestic violence. The daily exposure to this type of violence was not reported as a factor directly responsible for

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<sup>13</sup> There is only one psychiatrist in the whole country and the facilities outside Freetown are limited to the work of foreign NGOs which cannot possibly cope with the number of patients that the war has left behind. Syndromes related to PTSD and trauma, and more general mental health problems, are still today mainly treated by traditional healers.

children engaging in violence. Instead, domestic violence seemed to be considered to create the ground, or the context for children and youth to engage in violent activities. In fact this element can be read within the aggressive behaviour tradition which links the exposure to violence with aggressive behaviour. Aggressive behaviour is considered to be socially learned, in this case from the parents at home. However, Putamaki pointed out that the social learning approach to aggression is not on its own enough to explain the involvement of youth in violent behaviours and activities (Putamaki, 2009); the participants in this study seemed to agree that exposure to domestic violence, however important in the everyday life of youth and children, is not in itself enough to explain the process of transmission of a culture of violence in Sierra Leonean society. Instead, domestic violence is one major reason for children and youngsters to leave the household. Before the war it was unthinkable for youth and children to simply leave their family or run away. Today it is extremely common. Youth and children do not accept the situation in silence, on the contrary they rebel against the violence that they experience at home. It is in the breaking of the bond between the family and the child that the conditions for negative influence enter the life of the children and youth. Away from the family children and youth are exposed to the harshness of street life and the coping mechanisms offered on the streets are often entrenched with violence.

A second dynamic within the family realm emerged during the fieldwork. This aspect seemed to be the most important one in terms of effect on youth' lives and in terms of perpetuation of violent behaviours. More than on what the family does, the focus was put on what the family cannot do any more for the children and youth as a result of the war or of poverty. Before the war the family used to largely coincide with the community; in this societal system the education of the children in the norms and values of society was shared within the community. After the war the family shrank to the nuclear unit consisting of the parents and children only. As a consequence of the war, there is often only a single parent, making the situation even more difficult. Moreover, the extreme poverty in which most families live means that parents cannot provide for their own

children any more, not even satisfying the daily need of food. The family lost its role within the social system and the social fabric; the family is no longer capable of being a respected place for the transmission of shared values and norms. This disruption of the guidance role of the family is made even more serious by the endemic poverty that affects the households. Families are crippled both psychologically and economically. When the family is unable to provide for its young members it loses credibility in their eyes, and as a consequence it loses authority over them. The new generations are inevitably looking elsewhere to fill the vacuum left by the retreat of the family capabilities.

As pointed out by Ager (2006) when children are separated from or lose their family during armed conflicts and wars, they find alternative spaces of socialisation. Children cannot be considered only as dependent on the family and as vulnerable if separated from it. On the contrary, children have their own agency and when the institution of the family fails or is unable to provide (physically or psychologically) for them, they will find other sources, other ways to make sense of reality, to create sets of meaning that will constitute their system of norms and values within which to act and perform everyday life and relate to others. This is the case for many post-war Sierra Leonean children.

In their rebellion against the family, children and youth are strongly supported by what they learn through the media and at school or from NGOs personnel about children's rights. The introduction of the concept of child rights and what that entails has provided children and youth with the justification and legitimacy for resisting parental authority. Justified or not, the awareness of children and youth of their rights exacerbates the lack of grip and control that parents exercise over their offspring. It erodes the capacity of parents to pass on values and the system of meaning that characterised the traditional Sierra Leonean society. What children and youth take from the child rights narrative is their right to decide for themselves and to reject any imposition by the parents that is conveniently read as a violation of their rights and as violence toward them. Many youth leave their

household because of the frustration that builds between the two generations, the parents and the offspring. Children and youth naturally look for alternative sources of norms and values to create the system of meanings they need to make sense of their surroundings in their everyday life. Peers are the first source of influence for children and youth, but this will be discussed more broadly later in the chapter.

During the fieldwork something else emerged as a crucial and widespread source of influence upon children and youth: Western culture, as in Western movies, music, stars. The West has become the principal influence on Sierra Leonean youth culture. Problems arise because of the complete lack of censorship regarding what children can watch or listen to. The levels of violence of the movies children are exposed to would horrify any parent in most Western societies. In Sierra Leone cinemas are not a formal enterprise, cinemas are a dark room made with metal siding that mushroom around town without any need of licensing or permit. This uncritical exposure to violent life styles leads children to believe that what they see in Western or Nigerian movies and music videos is real. Children come to believe that in the West we do live in a constant street-gang-warfare reality and because it comes from the West, it is automatically considered 'cool', and children start in this way to imitate the behaviours they see in the movies and music videos projected around town. Moreover, the gang culture fits very well in a society that is traditionally organised around the concept of groups and membership/belonging to a group, be it a secret society or a social group or a political party. This is where the family becomes powerless. The influence from the outside is too strong. The family does not have positive role models to offer to children and a vacuum is created that needs to be filled. Often the filling is characterised by violence as a normal way of life.

In conclusion, the family emerged as a contextual factor in the process of transmission that this study aims to delineate. The family is not directly involved in the process of transmission; the 'space' of the family is not recognised *per se* as a place where values and norms that include and accept violence are transmitted. It is the

breakdown of the family that plays a central role in creating the context, the conditions within which children and youth are initiated into violent practices and in creating the ground where violence is acted out and re-enacted in everyday life. However, it needs to be noted that the family has the potential to restrain the transmission of violence; when the structure and institution of the family is not eroded, it can still act as a positive guide for children and youth.

## **Peers**

The influence of peers has emerged during the fieldwork as a major element in the process of transmission of violence. As pointed out above, the breakdown of the family creates a vacuum which children and youth need to fill. The peer group is the most immediate source to which children and youth will look for guidance and for those meanings, social norms and values indispensable in the construction of their own identity and in making sense of the world around them. It is in this context that peers become crucial in the process of transmission of violence.

Because of poverty and/or family breakdown, children and youth are forced more and more onto the street. As the concept of homophily indicates, contacts occur more frequently among similar individuals which, in the case of the streets of Freetown, means that children and youth socialise mainly with their peers. It is when socialising with their peers that those templates that dignify violent attitudes and forms of behaviour as a way of life are transmitted. Similarly to what Errante described in Mozambique and South Africa (1999), the values, norms, attitudes and behaviours that are acquired on the streets of Freetown by youth from other youth derive from the wartime when the templates of socialisation promoted aggression and violence. Demonstration of the persistence of those templates can be found in the mimicking by youth of the violence of the war, of its

gestures and actions, in the use of military ranking within groups of youth and in the practice of taking with violence what they want and need for survival.

Ex-child soldiers in particular seem to be the principal agents of the transmission of those socialisation templates that they have acquired when fighting during the war. The difficulty that child soldiers experience in shifting from military identities to civilian identities makes the templates formed during the war time especially resilient. When reintegrated with society, back in the families and schools, ex-child soldiers socialise with other children and youth. Ex-child soldiers act as involuntary vehicles of norms and values that include the use of violence as accepted behaviour, and they introduce them at different levels of society, influencing street youth as well as family members and school children and other youth. A culture of violence is in this way transmitted at all levels of society with no regard to class.

At the street level boys and girls forced out of the home and struggling for survival are ready recipients of those norms and values that can help them in the everyday fight for survival. In this case poverty creates the context in which the transmission of a culture of violence is acceptable, even well received and useful. During the war children and youth learned that they could obtain what they wanted through the use of violence. Today, 10 years after the end of war, it is still the case. When children and youth find themselves on the streets they quickly learn from other youth that they can obtain what they need with violence. Thus the norms and values that promote or legitimise certain violent behaviours and illegal activities become the way for personal achievement in a system that does not provide it otherwise. In other words, there are no real incentives for youth to change their attitudes and behaviours as violence proves to be effective in the logic of street life.

The transmission of violence continues not only for the material gain that youth recognise in it but also for the social status derived from sharing norms and values based on templates of socialisation of aggression. To be violent is 'cool', it brings with it respect for the individual and social status among the youth group. The individual is pushed to

comply with the values and norms shared by the peer group through mechanisms of applause and shame, the recognition of social status and its withholding. If one is ready to fight, steal, smoke marijuana or drink alcohol, he/she is considered cool and modern; other youth would respect that individual and he/she would enjoy popularity within the group. On the contrary rejecting violent attitudes and behaviours results in marginalisation, being ridiculed, picked upon, called names. This mechanism, called 'means control' (Campbell, 1980: 325), is particularly effective when the children of wealthy families and Sierra Leonean children from the diaspora participate or even initiate the violence. In this way the equation violence=social status is reinforced, since these children and youth already enjoy greater social status thanks to their family wealth, or because they have returned from abroad.

Peer influence is not limited to street youth but it is preponderant in schools and universities as well. These institutions are not immune from the levels of violence of the streets. On the contrary, schools are the principal place of socialisation for children and youth. The presence of violence in school institutions was identified as a major problem by most interviewees. Violence characterises in particular the social groups and cliques that are formed among students. These groups fight for popularity and 'power' within the schools and the rivalry often ends in violence. Secondary-school students go to school with stones, knives and blades, sometimes even guns. Sport events seem to be the catalysts for youth violence. At any school sport event violence may burst out and the police have to intervene<sup>14</sup>. Rivalry in general seems to be framed in violent terms, as if the logic underpinning it is 'either you or me'.

Similar dynamics are at play at the university level. However this aspect is mainly related to the organisation of groups, which is discussed in detail later in the chapter. What needs to be pointed out here is how peer relations are crucial in the transmission of a culture of violence not only where street youth are concerned, but also among school

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix 7 for a local newspaper article about violence perpetrated during school sport events.

pupils and university students. An additional point to be made is that university students have a particular influence on younger youth because of the special status they embody as university students. In fact university education is expensive and therefore rare in Sierra Leone, and as a consequence those youth who makes it to university enjoy a special status; they are highly respected and listened to by other youth. The violent dynamics in place within the universities (which will be discussed in detail in the next section) are therefore passed on to younger youth in secondary schools but also to street youth.

Schools and state institutions in general seem powerless to break the perpetuation of violence among children and youth. Schools are overcrowded and teachers are severely underpaid, therefore schools fail to act as educators as much as the family fails. Moreover, since the end of the war and the introduction of children's rights, teachers, and educators in general, cannot use physical punishment to control the pupils. Far from saying that corporal punishment is a good means of education, I am simply reporting the inability of teachers to control and impose their authority over the children. They are not given any alternative means of holding their authority over the pupils, which translates as a complete inability to guide and educate children and youth to accept values and norms that do not support violence. Teachers also tend to be involved in corruption mechanisms as they do not earn enough to support their families, thus being negative role models for children and youth who learn from them that illegal/criminal activities pay more and that that is the way society works.

Violence seems to be deeply entrenched in peer relations and socialisation dynamics. Among peers, and elsewhere, there seems to be a distortion of the value attributed to violence. Violent behaviours and attitudes are perceived as normal, to say the least, if not as positive and revered. Peer pressure and peer socialisation are the vehicles for the transmission of violence not only down on the street but at other levels of society as well. The interviews carried out during the fieldwork mainly confirmed not only the

validity, but also the centrality, of the peers' influence in the process of transmission of ideas, behaviours and attitudes supporting the perpetuation of violence.

### **Social identity: Social groups**

Sierra Leonean society tends to organise itself in groups. This is not a result of the war but a characteristic of traditional Sierra Leonean society, part of its traditions and of its way of structuring itself. This aspect of society was revealed to be crucial to the transmission of a culture of violence. From one interview to the next, this 'space' was more and more vehemently brought up by interviewees who stressed its importance and also its complexities.

The tendency of the Sierra Leonean society to organise itself into groups and the importance that the groupings have in the societal dynamics and mechanisms unfolded slowly but relentlessly. The roots of this phenomenon are so deep that they reach across society, at all levels, horizontally and vertically; it is simply everywhere, from street gangs to school cliques, university 'camps' and secret societies. Sierra Leonean society seems to have taken the concept of social identity and social categories to a new level. Meanings are formed and shared through these structures; the process of group creation and membership entails the sharing of values and norms among the members, which means that violence can travel through this system and as a result can be transmitted through it. This aspect of the society represents in itself a very powerful and pervasive vehicle for the transmission of a culture of violence. Inherent in the construction of groups is the definition of the in-group in opposition to an out-group. This contraposition lays the ground for the creation of rivalries and possibly violence between different groups.

In this system, it is which group a person is affiliated with that determines social position, what can be achieved in life and ultimately defines who you are. The interviews

pointed out how, increasingly, one of the required elements for membership in the group is the readiness to take up violence. This is especially true for street gangs but also more and more for school cliques, university camps and so on.

Violent initiation practices were part of the traditional secret societies that represent the skeleton of Sierra Leonean society; however, the practice of initiation through violence of new members spread to other types of groups that adopted the same usages of the secret societies. The adoption of the structure, the modality, and the initiation practices of the secret societies is particularly obvious in the two university camps (similar to fraternities). Violence characterises several aspects of the camps' activities. From the violence of the initiation rituals reported by new members to the violence that characterises the rivalry between the two camps in relation to university politics, and more blatantly the existence of armed wings within both camps, violent practices have become an inherent part of the two sides. As a consequence those youth who belong to the two camps (and university students do not really have a choice, because if you do not join the camps you are considered an outcast) are immersed in a system that perpetrates acts of violence. Higher education does not seem to be an antidote to violence and the fact that the university structure has been infiltrated by a culture of violence, and becomes itself a vehicle for the transmission of it, testifies to the extent to which the tentacles of violence have spread inside Sierra Leonean society. Besides, university students represent the future élites of the country, which means that the practices that become normal within the university structure will impact on the culture of the future ruling class, with an impact in the long term upon what is accepted and acceptable in terms of use of violence. In addition we have to take into consideration the influence that university students have on younger youth, but also on street youth. Considering the violent nature of the rivalry in place between the two camps and the consequences of the animosity between their members, it becomes clear which kind of values and ideas underpins the two groups, and thus which kind of role model university students are for the younger ones. The extent of the link between university and street

youth<sup>15</sup> is demonstrated by the recruiting of street youth to perpetrate violence against the other camp during university politics campaigns or in other moments of tension between the two groups.

After the war groups tended to adopt the structure and hierarchy that existed within the war fighting forces, maintaining in this way a link with the reality of the war, including the normalisation of violence. So today children and youth aim at becoming the 'general' within the group they join and in order to advance in the ranking system, which resembles the army ranks, one needs to commit violent acts, such as stealing something, beating up a member of a rival group or even killing somebody. This marriage between a structure deeply entrenched in Sierra Leonean society and elements deriving from the war proves to be of great concern among the interviewees principally because of how elements of the war become normalised by their combination with something so familiar, widespread and widely accepted in Sierra Leonean society. The violence of the war enters in this way from the back door into the fundamental structures that constitute society in Sierra Leone, and since it does so through the young generations it is likely to take hold and persist in the long term.

Youth are strongly driven into violent practices by the influence of elements of Western culture, and more specifically, hip-hop gangster culture<sup>16</sup>. Hip-hop music and its stars from the West are highly regarded by youth in Sierra Leone. They get to re-enact the life style of the rap American stars and their rivalry. In a society that naturally tends towards the creation of groups, the mentality portrayed in the music videos fits easily. Youth adopt the Western models from the media but they de-contextualise them, there is no critical reading of what is portrayed in the music videos and movies, therefore youth get the idea that a violent way of life is normal in the West. Groups are created in relation

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<sup>15</sup> Often in a family only one child has the chance to reach university education. Families in Sierra Leone are often large and the other children are most likely drop-outs, under-employed or even street youths. University students are strongly connected with the rest of the youths in Freetown and they can easily mobilise their peers whenever they need.

<sup>16</sup> For an assessment of the impact of violent music on youths' behaviours and attitudes, see Wilson and Martins, 2006; Tatum focused specifically on the link between hip-hop music and youth crimes (1999). While for a discussion on the influence of media in general on youth see Anderson et al., 2003.

to one or another rapper in the West or the corresponding hip-hop gang in Freetown, and the rivalry with other groups that support a rival rapper or hip-hop gang is automatic. Violence in the hip-hop gang culture is a positive element; being violent translates as being tough. Violent practices enter the way of life of children and youth through the imitation of Western hip-hop culture, as violence is the main element of this new identity. The lyrics of foreign as well as local hip-hop groups' songs are extremely violent and preach extreme violence against the enemy groups and the establishment. The phenomenon is so widespread that it often makes it into the newspapers in Freetown, especially with regard to the way in which the gang culture has infiltrated the school institutions and encourages youth and children in the use of violence<sup>17</sup>. However, music is also considered a means of expressing oneself in a society where youth have no space. Youth use music to make their voices heard about their needs and their hopes in a context of disempowerment and marginalisation. As a consequence many NGOs have developed music or film projects in order to allow youth to express their disagreements, grievances and frustrations in a positive and productive way.

This tendency to look up to Western culture in general is widespread and it derives from the rejection of traditional values by the young generations. Traditional values and ways of life are considered not adequate for the present time. Comparison is made between the wealthy West and the poor condition of Sierra Leone. As a consequence young people are attracted more by Western or foreign cultural practices in general as they are considered modern and respectable. However, the uncritical reading of the movies and music scene from the West misleads young Sierra Leoneans into thinking that what they see is reality and as a consequence they simply imitate and reproduce the violence they see. Gangs and groups formed on the streets or in the schools take rap music stars and gang culture as role models, and in doing so they adopt the violent practices and values embedded in that way of life. The extent of this phenomenon of the copying of Western practices has to be understood in the context of extreme poverty and

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 8 for a local newspaper article about the hip-hop culture and violence in Sierra Leone

lack of family support. Hip-hop culture represents a way of surviving in a violent context, which is what Sierra Leonean youth experience every day. Thus the gangster's way of life gives hope to poor and marginalised youth for a better future, showing them a way of achieving success and wealth through the use of violence.

Sierra Leonean society has traditionally organised itself into groups as a form of social structure but also as an identity formation process. Today this characteristic remains strong and in itself is a vehicle for the transmission of values and norms that accept and normalise violent practices. However, this grouping tendency is acquiring new forms as influences from the West and from the war entered the system, adding more factors that support violence.

### **Political factionalism**

While I was researching the literature in order to build the analytical framework through which to study the transmission of culture of violence, politics and the political sphere did not appear to be relevant to the phenomenon in question. However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, politicians and the political arena play active roles in the transmission of a culture of violence and in perpetuating it.

There are at least three areas in which politicians have an important influence that need to be discussed. First their involvement with the university camps, the White and the Black. The relationships of the two political parties with the two university camps transformed university politics in a miniature of national politics. However, the fact that the two camps both have the structure and the practices of secret societies distorts their rivalries and at the same time distorts a healthy political debate over group opposition that often breaks out into violence. Politicians all have interests in influencing the politics of the university and in breeding university students within this oppositional system since in the

process the two parties create a reservoir of party loyalists, future cadres and voters. The two camps become places where the future politicians are bred. This link in turn creates a continuum between the violent practices of the university camps and the violent rivalry that characterises their relations and the political arena, and the practices of political actors on a national level.

Since the end of the war the political rhetoric has become increasingly polarised between the APC and the SLPP and the two major ethnic groups, the Temne and the Mende, as the two parties represent respectively more and more one specific ethnic group, and consequently the related region of origin within Sierra Leone. The exacerbation of this division is more evident inside the White and the Black camps at university where the two groups recruit along regional, and therefore ethnic, lines and incite their members to vote for the corresponding political parties in the national elections. Therefore the rivalry between the two university camps is also a political rivalry between the two national parties, and more and more between the two regions/ethnic groups of the country. The violent terms of the rivalry between the White and the Black camps and the violent rhetoric preached by these groups and their level of influence cast a dark shadow on the future relations between opposing groups at the national level. The division along regional and ethnic lines is reaching to the future generations as the White and Black camps have started recruiting in secondary schools, and corresponding groups have also appeared as low down as primary schools, creating a cleavage that runs down to the youngest generation.

A second aspect that emerged from the interviews is the connection between political élites and street youth. In this case the political élite not only supports the use of violence but directly promotes it by recruiting street youth to create mayhem and perpetrate violence. The thug-culture introduced during the 1970s has not yet disappeared. On the contrary politicians count on the desperation of large bulges of youth who are unemployed and uneducated. The struggle for survival makes these youth

vulnerable to the manipulation of those with power and economic means. As a result of these practices, street youth get still highly involved in violent and criminal activities, behaviours and attitudes that are 'legitimised' by the politicians themselves who promote them as a way of achieving their own ends. This implies that there is little interest in the political arena in substantially improving the livelihood of young people, since the current conditions provide them with a large supply of highly easy-to-influence individuals. During election campaigns politicians directly address the needs of the young in order to get their votes, just to forget them once they obtain power. In the process street youth receive some money or alcohol and drugs to attack the opposite party, in order to influence the election result. The violence that the country experiences before both national and local elections speaks as proof of this system. The level of violence preceding elections has been increasing significantly since the end of the war, which is the result of the normalisation of the use of violent practices for political reasons and the consequent escalation in the level of violence. With this in mind, concerns were widely expressed during the interviews for the next national elections in 2012. The level of violence perpetrated by street youth recruited by the political élite is incredibly high, and includes physical assault, looting, beating, burning buildings and houses, and rape. Rape seems to occur every time there is civil unrest, riots or mayhem. Some consider it a left-over from the practice of rape as a weapon of war during the 10-years of civil war. More generally the levels of rape in Freetown are extremely high, which seems to be connected to the concept of masculinity related to the wartime that is still entrenched in the common mentality, especially of young men.

The third aspect again brings to the surface the distortion that characterises the perception and the position of violence within the set of values shared within Sierra Leonean society. Violence has come to have a positive connotation at many different levels. The political arena is not immune from it; on the contrary, it is complicit in attributing to violence a positive connotation through condoning it publicly. Numerous ex-combatants and ex-child soldiers have been reintegrated in the police forces, as personal

security for politicians and ultimately as presidential guards. These individuals are known by the public to have been responsible for extreme violent acts and atrocities during the war; however, only the highest ranks have been persecuted, while the others have been left free to re-enter the forces. The presence of these individuals in the presidential guard sends a clear message to young people about the consequences of using violence: no or few consequences. Moreover, the presidential guard has been witnessed to promote and organise violent attacks against the opposition party and to rally street youth to carry out riots and create mayhem. Interviewees have pointed out how the presidential guards have been portrayed as national heroes and how young people look up to them as role models. In this way violent practices become legitimate and acceptable, almost expected as the normal way of doing things in the political arena. Youth learn from these individuals that using violence pays career-wise, as brutal and violent ex-war commanders now hold such powerful and reputable positions. Violence is condoned at the highest levels and this provides additional legitimacy for violent attitudes and behaviours as well as institutionalising violence and the transmission of values and norms supporting it.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have tried to highlight the importance of the connections between the 'spaces' of transmission. None of them on its own is enough to explain the resilience of violence among youth in post-war Sierra Leone but together they create a system of forces that reinforce each other and that perpetuate a culture of violence. The interaction of the different categories composing the analytical framework creates a network that reaches all strata of Sierra Leonean society. In this way a culture of violence is becoming an integral part of the societal structure and of the system of meanings, values and norms shared by the Sierra Leonean society.

The culture of violence enters the life of youth from many different directions and at many different levels. In turn youth interiorise the values and norms that constitute the system described in this chapter. Attitudes and behaviours are shaped according to this system of values and youth performing them in their everyday life become the agents of transmission of a culture of violence.

Some of the categories identified in this study act as contextual factors relevant to the process of transmission, as factors such as poverty and family do not contribute directly to the transmission of violence. However, they are not less important in explaining the phenomenon as they create the conditions, the context in which violence still germinates, is picked up by the young generations and is ultimately transmitted. The other categories, peers, social groups and politics, can be described as more immediate factors as they have a direct role in the process of transmission.

Youth are deeply involved in, and at the same time affected by, the resilience of a culture of violence within Sierra Leonean society and by internalising it and becoming the vehicles of its transmission to other youth, they involuntarily create a bridge to the next generations, projecting the impact of a culture of violence in the long term. The implications for peace and stability in Sierra Leone are serious. The levels of violence seem to slowly but relentlessly escalate and this process could open the door for further cycles of violence.

## Conclusions

The resilience of violence in post-war societies represents a serious challenge for the implementation of peace accords and the construction of long-lasting peace. The experience of the war leaves marks both on the society and on its members which last for a long time after the official end of fighting. This 'legacy of war', as Steenkamp (2005) called it, is often characterised by the persistence of high levels of violence after the signing of peace accords. A society during war responds to its disruption by creating new systems, structures, norms and values that function in the context of war. Thus war not only tears apart families, kills and traumatises, but also impacts on the norms and values of society and inevitably changes them. During war, violence is part of everyday life and the continual exposure to it makes those who live through it take violence for granted, accept it, and they become numb to it. Violence becomes so embedded in the societal system of values and norms that it is perceived as an acceptable, and expected, form of behaviour. Through this process violence comes to be part of the culture of a society to the point that we can talk of a 'culture of violence' (Steenkamp, 2005; Waldmann, 2007). Culture is shared by a community and is learned by its members, and in the same way a 'culture of violence' is passed on within the society and to the new generations, and in this way it survives over time.

However, the impact of war is especially significant for children and youth who know very little or nothing of the reality of peace time and who learn in the early stages of their life the practices, values and norms at work in time of war. Children and youth represent the group most vulnerable to the violence of war. Often forcibly abducted by the fighting parties, displaced and separated from their families, exposed to violence and sexual exploitation, they pay the highest price during armed conflict (Machel, 2003). Children and youth also represent the next, future generation which makes them a vehicle

for the transmission of the practices and ideas that support and perpetrate violence in the society.

The transmission of a 'culture of violence' explains how high levels of violence can still be found in post-war societies. The process of transmission is a complex and multilayered phenomenon that cannot be understood from a single perspective. In this thesis, four 'spaces' of transmission were identified during preliminary research: poverty, family, peers and social groups. These four factors constitute the analytical framework used during the fieldwork in Sierra Leone to research the phenomenon of transmission. The first-hand research carried out during fieldwork produced findings fundamental to the understanding of the process of transmission of a 'culture of violence'. In fact what had emerged through the preliminary research using secondary sources depicting a flat two-dimensional picture which did not account for the dynamism of the process. From the interviews, the picture gained more depth as the actual role of each factor was clarified and the interactions among the various 'spaces' were revealed, together with unexpected elements that had not emerged during the preliminary work and would not have emerged otherwise.

In the case of Sierra Leone a 'culture of violence' was demonstrated to be indeed transmitted and perpetuated throughout society and its institutions. Some 'spaces' of transmission acted as contextual factors, as in the case of poverty and family. The reality of extreme poverty and consequential marginalisation, and the disruption and retreat of the family, both contribute to the creation of the context in which practices of violence and the values sustaining them can spread and perpetuate. More proximate factors are peers, social groups and political factionalism. In these 'spaces' violence is directly or indirectly promoted. Violence seems to characterise relations between the individual and the group and among different groups. Due to the disruption of the family, peers become the main influence for youth. In a context of extreme poverty youth mainly socialise on the streets where the fighting for daily survival takes place. Youth and children learn violent strategies

of survival from other youth like them. Those who can afford to attend school are also more influenced by their peers than by the family, and in school too violence characterises everyday life. With the reintegration of ex-child soldiers into families, communities and schools, youth have been exposed to the influence of peers who have fought in the war and often still retain the mentality of military life. The same can be said for the ex-child combatants living on the streets where they socialise with fellow youth. Ex-child soldiers face difficulties in the shift from military to civilian identities, and as testified by several interviewees, they tend to re-enact the logic of 'take what you want and need with force' that was characteristic of the war. Throughout society, peers represent a crucial vehicle for transmission of ideas and practices of violence.

Even more widespread at all levels of society is the influence of social groups. In fact the whole of society tends naturally and traditionally to organise itself in groups. Membership of a group is fundamental for social life and for defining one's own identity. From street gangs to university camps (similar to confraternities) through school cliques and secret societies, the mechanisms of social grouping are deeply entrenched with violence. Most groups demand violent acts by their members as requirements for membership or during the process of initiation. The rivalry among different groups is fierce and it promotes the use of violence against outer groups and their members. The social group is often a means to access resources, receive benefits and achieve power and social status. This system promotes favouritism in schools, colleges and university. The system itself becomes saturated with structural violence as members of a group are guaranteed benefits that others do not have. The same mechanism is at work in the political arena where the political élite promotes violence against the opposing party and supports the perpetuation of violent practices within and between university camps, and now also in secondary schools. Rivalry at the political level is based on the use of violence against the adversary; political competition is violent confrontation. The use of violence is widely condoned at the highest levels of society and this sends a message to youth, telling them that violence has no consequences and ultimately it even pays.

Reinforcement in the use of violence also applies to street youth since violent strategies guarantee their daily survival.

On one side there is the violence related to the conditions of extreme poverty and marginalisation, scarce resources, lack of education and endemic unemployment that push youth to find alternative ways of survival such as petty trade, pick pocketing, smuggling, and prostitution. These conditions create frustration and anger which push youth toward alcohol and drugs. Daily life is a matter of survival and fellow youth are seen as competitors. Violence becomes a means by which to access resources and live yet another day. Because of these contextual factors, youth become vulnerable to manipulation by the élites who can easily mobilise youth to commit violence on their behalf. On the other side there is the violence entrenched in the social systems and structures. In this case violence is embedded in the functioning of society at all levels. The violent rivalry that characterises social groups from the school level up to the political level is the main support for the transmission of a 'culture of violence'. However, these two areas in which violence is perpetuated are not separated and independent of one another. The two are constantly reinforcing each other in supporting the preservation of a system that is fuelled with violence.

In the case of post-war Sierra Leone, a 'culture of violence' reaches all layers of society and characterises values systems as well as institutional structures and functioning. The interactions among the various 'spaces' of transmission create a network of forces; this network perpetuates and supports those practices and ideas which are shared within the society and which promote, legitimise and condone violence. The process of transmission takes place at many levels and involves all the 'spaces' composing the analytical framework, and more. The system that is constructed through the interrelations among the various levels spreads its tentacles to all layers of society. In this system youth are at the centre. They act and re-enact violent behaviours and attitudes, but they also transmit the ideas, values and norms that support violent practices. They

pass them on to other youth and children, and by embracing them as their own set of values, they crystallise them, normalise them. Violence is becoming more and more the leitmotif that regulates relations within Sierra Leonean society and therefore it is more and more difficult to eradicate it, especially since the younger generations are already deeply involved in the perpetuation of violence. Violence is internalised and normalised at a very young age in today's Sierra Leone and children and youth learn early to act upon it. This situation was described by many interviewees during the fieldwork as a 'ticking bomb', especially in view of the coming national elections in 2012. The mix of direct violence as perpetrated on the streets or during initiation rituals, and structural violence entrenched in the system of social groups and political factionalism, together with poverty and marginalisation, has much potential for creating future cycles of violence. If the new generations learn that violence is the norm in the ordinary functioning of society they will use violence to achieve their goals without questioning it; they will simply act according to the rules which they have learnt regulate their own society dynamics.

The phenomenon explored in this thesis explains how violence survives in post-war Sierra Leone, but if some elements are specific and unique to Sierra Leone, wider lessons can be applied elsewhere in post-war societies. In fact, the way poverty supports the use of violence as a means ensuring survival goes beyond the case of Sierra Leone, and in the same way the destruction of the social fabric and of the societal systems occurs in most post-war societies and the vacuum that is created can free the ground for violent practices and behaviours to spread in all cases. More generally, in societies that have experienced prolonged war, violence manifests itself in multiple aspects of the society and at many levels, therefore in order to understand the extent of the phenomenon, an integrative and comprehensive approach is needed. The norms and values that constitute a 'culture of violence' are deeply entrenched in society and reveal themselves in different shapes according to the space in which they are acted upon. Beyond the case of Sierra Leone, the potential consequences of the transmission of a culture of violence resulting from a prolonged war can only really be grasped through the consideration of all the loci in

which the process takes place. The omnipresence of the phenomenon represents a serious risk for the stability of a post-war society. This is especially so when children and youth play such a crucial role in the perpetuation of a 'culture of violence'. What can be drawn from this study is that in order to restrain the transmission of a culture of violence, special attention should be paid to the role of youth and children, and also that to restrain the transmission, a holistic and multilayered approach should be adopted.

Different themes emerged from this research that deserve attention on their own and should be further studied. First, there is the role of the media and the influence of Western culture, as in music and movies, in shaping youth's behaviours and sets of values. In this paper this element was discussed within the context of erosion of traditional values and of formation of social groups using the template of American rap gangs. However, the cultural influence that the West has on the current Sierra Leonean society and the consequences of the adoption of Western models and values should be further explored. Another element that is left to future studies is the concept of masculinity and of femininity in the cultural system of Sierra Leonean society, especially in the aftermath of war. Rape was widely perpetrated during the war and it is still extremely common today, and every time a riot takes place, or some sort of urban unrest, women are raped. This seems to suggest how the radicalisation of stereotypes of masculinity that takes place during war still exists today. A third element that should be further explored is the situation relating to a 'culture of violence' and its transmission in the rural areas, as this paper focuses on the capital, Freetown, and therefore on urban youth. In this research an integrative analytical framework was demonstrated to be an effective tool for the understanding of a phenomenon that spreads across the entire society and manifests itself in numerous and diverse ways and aspects of people's lives. Further studies should aim for inclusiveness in their approach in order to be able to account for the dynamics of the processes at play in society.

A final note needs to be made. In this thesis I have mainly discussed violent elements in Sierra Leonean society. However, it is not my intention to 'pathologise' Sierra Leonean society as a place where violence rules or where violence is overpowering. During the fieldwork, I encountered numerous positive examples of youth who refuse the use of violence, who recognise the violence that is entrenched in the way society works, and take a stand against it, youth who got out of street gangs and help the former gang mates to find alternative ways of living, youth who help fellow youth to find their voices to escape marginalisation and disempowerment. However, their efforts might go in vain if the structural factors supporting violence are not seriously addressed.

# Appendixes

## APPENDIX 1

### UNIVERSITY ETHICAL APPROVAL



University of St Andrews

International Relations School Ethics Committee

22 February 2010  
Elisa Dari

<b>Ethics Reference No:</b> <i>Please quote this ref on all correspondence</i>	<b>IR6162</b>
<b>Project Title:</b>	Embedded violence and youth: The transmission and perpetuation of violence in post-conflict societies.
<b>Researchers Name(s):</b>	Elisa Dari
<b>Supervisor(s):</b>	Prof. Roger Mac Ginty

Thank you for submitting your application which was considered at the IR School Ethics Committee meeting on the 17 February 2010. The following documents were reviewed:

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1. Ethical Application Form                                      | 17.02.10 |
| 2. Participant Information Sheet                                 | 17.02.10 |
| 3. Consent Form  | 17.02.10 |
| 4. Debriefing Form   | n/a      |
| 5. External Permissions  | n/a      |
| 6. Letters to Parents/Children/Headteacher etc...                | n/a      |
| 7. Questionnaires  | n/a      |
| 8. Enhanced Disclosure Scotland and Equivalent<br>(as necessary) | n/a      |

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view. Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC.

Approval is given for three years. Projects, which have not commenced within two years of original approval, must be re-submitted to your School Ethics Committee.

You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed. If you are unable to complete your research within the 3 three year validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the 'Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice' (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/UTRECguidelines%20Feb%2008.pdf>) are adhered to.

Yours sincerely

Dr. J.S. Murer  
Convenor of the School Ethics Committee

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## APPENDIX 2

### TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION REPORT, 2004, CHAPTER FIVE: YOUTH

#### Introduction

1. In Sierra Leone, the youth is the lifeblood of the nation. Every Sierra Leonean between the ages of 18 and 35 years old is considered to be a youth. According to a government paper of 2003, youths constitute forty-five percent of the country's estimated 4.5 million population.

2. In the conflict, youths were both victims and perpetrators of human rights violations on a massive scale. It was a dual role to which youths had become accustomed in post-independence Sierra Leone: on the one hand, they were abused; on the other hand they became the abusers. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the one-party system became increasingly tyrannical, youths formed the only viable opposition to the ruling All People's Congress (APC) because the other political parties had been co-opted and assimilated into the government.<sup>2</sup> When institutions and their leaders in so many sectors of society failed to speak out against the injustices of the APC regime, invariably it was the voice of youth that called for accountability. Conversely, though, youths were often the instruments of oppression, acting as vicious thugs to influence the outcomes of elections and put down anti-government demonstrations. In times of transition, Sierra Leone's youth has always struggled to find its rightful place in society.

3. Testimonies received by the Commission indicate that the majority of participants in the war were youths. Many of them were children at the time of their recruitment. Others joined voluntarily in protest against the social and political ills of the day, or in the name of defending their communities. They all lost their youth to a career of fighting and violence. Some are now exporting

their combat "expertise" to neighbouring countries in conflict. The experiences and prospects of youth in Sierra Leone require careful consideration.

4. In the course of the war, youths committed brutal and malicious acts against their family members, communities and fellow Sierra Leoneans. Their experiences during the war have disrupted their lives and traumatised them. Many youths are currently drifting without direction, unable to access education or employment. Some are so disillusioned with their environment that they are desperately seeking a way out and would readily resort once more to violence.

5. Sierra Leone faces the daunting task of reclaiming a "lost generation" of youth. The "youth question" is therefore central to lasting peace and development in the country. This examination of youth participation in the war will enable the Commission to make detailed recommendations on how to respond to the challenges created by misguided youth in the past and how to restore youths as productive members of their communities.

1 See Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone National Youth

Policy, strategy paper published in July 2003, at page 5.

2 More detail on the lack of credible opposition to the APC regime, as well as analysis of the failures of the wider society to hold the political élites to account, can be found in the chapters on Governance and the Historical Antecedents to the Conflict in Volume Three A of this report.

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6. In his statement to the Commission, Brima Vandy, who was 30 years old at the start of the conflict in 1991, made this confession:

“When I was in the bush... I committed many violations and abuses.

I killed innocent people, took away their property by force... asked them to leave their houses for me to sleep inside... and forced their women to make love to me.”<sup>3</sup>

7. In her testimony to a closed hearing of the Commission, a young woman in the Koinadugu District told of her experiences:

“Upon our arrival (at their base) we were distributed to different rebels to become their wives... when we refused, they flogged us. We were raped by two or three men daily... when we fought back, they threatened to kill us. We eventually got married to them. They gave us drugs like marijuana to smoke. When the roads were free, we pleaded for them to release us to go back to our relatives... but they refused.

Commander Sofila pleaded with them to release us but they threatened to kill us if we tried to escape. Commander CO Ray inscribed RUF on our bodies. They looted properties whilst we carried their ammunitions.”<sup>4</sup>

8. Similar narratives by youths, both as victims and perpetrators, abound in the testimonies, statements and interviews gathered by the Commission. In addition, the youth question has stimulated considerable analysis and debate among academics and writers on the conflict. One Sierra Leonean historian, Ibrahim Abdullah, has described the war as the high point of a rebellious Freetown youth culture of “rarray man dem” that started in the 1940s.<sup>5</sup> Another Sierra Leonean historian, Ishmael Rashid, has detected a strong impetus for the war in the convergence that took place in the 1970s and 1980s between these rarray man dem and groups of radical students influenced by leftist ideologies.<sup>6</sup> British anthropologist Paul Richards has traced the cause of the war to a patrimonial crisis, sidelined intellectuals, violent films and a desire by youths to manage the resources of the rain forest more equitably.<sup>7</sup> Finally Jimmy Kandeh, a Sierra Leonean

political scientist, has noted that the atrocities committed by youths during the war stemmed from the “subaltern” appropriation of what was previously the violence of the elites.<sup>8</sup>

3 Brima Vandy, TRC statement recorded at 11 Battalion Headquarters, Kambia District, March 2003.

4 TRC confidential testimony received during closed hearings in Koinadugu District, 14 May 2003.

5 See Abdullah I.; “Youth Culture and Rebellion: Understanding Sierra Leone’s Wasted Decade”, in

Critical Arts journal, Volume 16, Number 2, 2002 (hereinafter “Abdullah, Youth Culture and

Rebellion”), at page 29. Rarray man dem are streetwise urban youths, subordinated by the system.

6 See Rashid, I.; “Subaltern Reactions: Lumpens, Students and the Left”, in Abdullah, I. and

Bangura, Y. (eds.); Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: The Sierra Leone Civil War, Africa

Development special edition on the Sierra Leone conflict, Volume XXII, Nos. 3 / 4, 1997 (hereinafter

“Rashid, Subaltern Reactions”), at page 24.

7 See Richards, P.; Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone, The

International African Institute, Netherlands / UK, 1995.

8 See Kandeh, J.; “Ransoming the State: Elite Origins of Subaltern Terror in Sierra Leone”, in

Review of African Political Economy, No. 81, Roape Publications, 1999 (hereinafter “Kandeh, Elite

Origins of Subaltern Terror”).

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9. Combining these perspectives, it is possible to build a picture of the origins of violent behaviour among youths. Members of the political elite deployed “subalterns”, or rarray man dem, to silence their opponents during the days of the APC one-party state. Youths learned violence from their masters and developed violent reactions to the injustices and frustrations they encountered in their daily lives. As the conflict arrived, youths used brutality not to prop up the political elites, but to accumulate resources and power that had been denied to them previously, attacking the very foundations of the elites’ society. The major difference between elite-orchestrated violence and subaltern violence, however,

was that the latter made no distinction between public and private property. The violence of the youths was largely indiscriminate.

10. This chapter builds on these perspectives and makes use of submissions, testimonies and interviews gathered by the Commission to analyse and report on: the nature, causes and extent of the violations and abuses perpetrated and suffered by youths; the context of these violations; and the impact on of the conflict on youths. The chapter concludes by considering current interventions geared towards addressing the youth question in Sierra Leone. Youth Categories and Violence

11. Youth in Sierra Leone can be roughly divided into two categories: mainstream and marginalised youths. These categories can be further sub-divided to take into account the geographical locations and associated characteristics of youths. Thus there are mainstream urban youths and mainstream rural youths. The same distinction can also be made for marginalised youths.

12. The defining characteristic of mainstream urban youths has always been their access to formal western-type education. They would typically be secondary school or university students, expected to take up white-collar jobs upon completion of their studies.<sup>9</sup> They belong to the world of the law abiding – those who play by the rules. Rural mainstream youths equally abide by long-standing traditions. They respect their elders and work on the farms.

13. In Freetown before the conflict, there was a particular category of marginalised youths, referred to above as the rarray man dem. They constituted a predominantly male-specific, oppositional sub-culture, prone to violence and other anti-social behaviour such as drug dealing, petty theft and riotous conduct. Mostly illiterates, they were economically insecure. They survived by moving in and out of casual jobs as domestic hands, night watchmen and labourers. They lived on the margins and were alienated from mainstream society. The violence they committed was mainly within their potes (enclaves or ghettos for marginalised youth) and on festive occasions when they moved around the city with their “masquerades”, or processions, known as odelay. Their violence mainly involved chuk (stabbing with a knife) and was of a non-political nature.

14. The utilisation of the violence of marginalised youths for political purposes started with the 1969-1970 by-elections, when the APC rallied soldiers, the police and rarray man dem to intimidate members of the opposition SLPP. The rarray man dem were mobilised by the APC strongman S. I. Koroma,<sup>10</sup> who later became Vice President after the promulgation of the Republican Constitution in 1971. Koroma’s cynical tactics transformed rarray man dem into “thugs”.

9 See Abdullah, *Youth Culture and Rebellion*, at page 21.

10 See Rashid, *Subaltern Reactions*, at page 24.

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15. In the common parlance of Sierra Leone at the time, “thugs” came to mean youths who were utilised for political violence. The word “youth” itself became a synonym for the unemployed young person who was vulnerable to manipulation. Youths were considered to be auxiliary troops for political parties. During elections, or crises, they did the dirty work

for the politicians. Payment was often made in the form of drug supplies or token cash handouts. The violence offered youths an outlet for acting out their machismo, which although loathed by society was encouraged by the political elites.

16. A few leaders of the rarray man dem were eventually rewarded with high positions (one was made a minister, another an ambassador<sup>11</sup>), but most thugs were unceremoniously dumped after the completion of their violent assignments.<sup>12</sup> The majority of youths remained unskilled and impoverished.<sup>13</sup>

17. In the provinces, marginalised youths were known as “san san boys” and “njiahungbia ngornga”. San san boys were marginalised youths eking out a living in the “sandpits” of the diamond mines. Most of them never fulfilled their dreams of becoming wealthy through diamonds. Instead, they became part of a harsh, greedy and adventurous way of life. Later they became easy prey as recruits for the purveyors of state and counter-state violence.

18. “Njiahungbia ngornga” is a Mende phrase meaning unruly youth.<sup>14</sup> This group included semi-literate youths in the provinces who loathed traditional structures and values. They saw “the rebellion as an opportunity to settle local scores and reverse the alienating rural social order in their favour.”<sup>15</sup> Freetown youths referred to the marginalised youths of the provinces who had adopted Freetown lifestyles and world-views as bonga rarray man dem or upline savis man dem.

11 The rarray man dem who achieved high positions were: Alfred Akibo-Betts, who became a

Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance; and Kemoh Fadika, who became Ambassador to Egypt.

12 See Ngolo Katta, Director of the Centre for the Co-ordination of Youth Activities (CCYA),

Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, April 2003 (hereinafter “CCYA submission

to TRC”), at page 4. See also Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 8 July 2003. See also Victor Reider, Member of Parliament

and former youth participant in a training programme in Libya, TRC interview conducted in Freetown,

23 October 2003. See also Abdullah I.; “Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the

Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)”, in Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: The Sierra Leone

Civil War, Africa Development special edition on the Sierra Leone conflict, Volume XXII, Nos. 3 / 4,

1997 (hereinafter “Abdullah, Bush Path to Destruction”), at page 49.

13 See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission, 8 July 2003.

14 See Muana, P. K.; “The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of

Counter-Insurgency”, in Abdullah, I. and Bangura, Y. (eds.); Lumpen Culture and Political Violence:

The Sierra Leone Civil War, Africa Development special edition on the Sierra Leone conflict, Volume

XXII, Nos. 3 / 4, 1997 (hereinafter “Muana, The Kamajoi Militia”), at page 80.

15 See Muana, The Kamajoi Militia, at page 126.

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The Increasing Marginalisation of Youths and the

Convergence of Educated and Uneducated Youths

19. The country’s deteriorating economic and political situation from the 1970s onwards saw an increase in the number of school dropouts. Education was no longer a right for all, but a privilege for the few. Employment and the grant of government scholarships were dependent on APC party allegiance and what Sierra Leonean youths referred to as “connectocracy”, meaning personal connections to a political patron or senior public servant. Most youths could never fulfil their ambitions because they were not “connected” to the political system. Only the wealthy could provide a reasonable education for their children. The children of politicians and government officials attended private schools, often travelling overseas, while the government schools were totally neglected. The number of school dropouts increased annually as the education system deteriorated, swelling the ranks of the marginalised youths in the potes.

20. In the provinces, traditional political and judicial authorities served the interests of the local elites. Political marginalisation and harsh judicial penalties for the breaching of traditional norms pushed many youths to the margins of their societies. Some youths in provincial urban settings like Bo and Kono also set up potes akin to those of their Freetown counterparts.

21. The stagnating economy increased the numbers of even well educated youths who could not find employment. Western-type education no longer guaranteed employment. Graduates found themselves exposed to the same harsh economic realities that had long been experienced by the uneducated marginalised urban youth.

22. This convergence of the material conditions of educated (mainstream) and uneducated (marginalised) youths provided a basis for the convergence of their lifestyles and world-views. Many of the educated but unemployed youths started frequenting the potes. Unemployment induced in them the habits of the marginalised youth. They were

frowned upon by mainstream society, but their visits to the potes gradually elevated their social status amongst their uneducated peers. With the increase in the number of marginalised youths came a corresponding increase in the number of potes. The peddling of drugs became a form of full-time employment for many youths.<sup>16</sup> University students also joined the drift to the potes. Student activists began establishing potes on their campuses and the drug culture started to gain a grudging acceptance in the society – it became a sine qua non for radicalism and non-conformity.<sup>17</sup>

23. The newcomers to the potes were au fait with unfolding world events and were more politically conscious than the original marginalised youths. Many had read revolutionary texts from which they had developed new political ideas. They took it upon themselves to “conscientise” their “less fortunate brothers” while in return they were themselves gradually absorbing and adopting the style and language of the “ghetto”.<sup>18</sup>

16 See Abdullah, *Youth Culture and Rebellion*, at page 29.

17 See Abdullah, *Youth Culture and Rebellion*, at pages 31 and 32.

18 See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission, 8 July 2003.

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24. This transformation was also influenced by contemporary music, particularly reggae music by Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer. The lyrics of their songs depicted realities of the day – hardship, degradation and oppression – in a style of social commentary known as “system dread”.

25. The new groups emerging out of the fusion of educated youths and their uneducated peers in the potes were not involved in petty theft or political thuggery, at least at first. The potes became rallying points for alienated, unemployed youths and an arena for political discussion centred on the corrupt practices of the dominant political class and the stifling political atmosphere under one-party dictatorship. *Repression of Student Demonstrations in the 1970s and 1980s and the Evolution of Revolutionary Thinking*

26. Student leaders were conversant in theories of liberation and spiced up their discussions with quotes from revolutionaries like Kwame Nkrumah, Marcus Garvey, Wallace-Johnson, Fidel Castro, Malcolm X and Steve Biko. Students and school leavers read extensively and intensively outside their fields of study in order to contribute meaningfully to philosophical debates and discussions that lasted far into the night. Another significant influence was the presence of refugees from Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia on almost all campuses. Their experiences as freedom fighters made them influential in student circles and they occupied leadership positions in some student union executives.<sup>19</sup>

27. Student thinking and the campus climate were ripe for protest action. Hindolo Trye was elected president of the Fourah Bay College (FBC) student union in 1976. The student motto “The Self” implied the importance of self-esteem and dignity, the awareness of the right to liberate oneself and the right of the collective self to initiate liberation.<sup>20</sup> The

students' first direct confrontation with the APC came in 1977, when President Stevens was humiliated while delivering his speech at the annual university convocation ceremony.

28. The APC organised a counter-demonstration involving rarray man dem led by Kemoh Fadika. Supported by the armed Special Security Unit (SSD), these youths were brought in to flog, rape and brutalise students. The deployment of such a force foreshadowed events to come during the conflict, when youths were pitched against youths in an orgy of violence. The government's backlash led to a nationwide demonstration by students in February 1977 following the arrest of their student leader Hindolo Trye. According to one participant:

"They sent thugs and members of the paramilitary to beat us up. They destroyed the campus, which led to a national uprising led by the students and sparked up by school children. It is what we called the "no college, no school" demonstration. It spread countrywide and became a national uprising, which lasted for several weeks."<sup>21</sup>

19 See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission, 8 July 2003, at page 6. See also Victor Reider, Member of Parliament and former

youth participant in training in Libya, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 23 October 2003.

20 See Currey, J.; *The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone: African Guerrillas*, 1998, at

page 175. See also Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, Submission to the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, 8 July 2003, at page 7.

21 See Olu Gordon, former student of Fourah Bay College in the 1970s who later became a lecturer

and prominent participant in PANAFU, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 11 March 2003.

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29. The student protests, planned and led by radical students, received popular support and forced President Stevens to make certain concessions. A general election was called three months later. Violence by APC-sponsored rarray man dem resulted in a massive electoral victory for the APC. The hopes of the educated youths for an opening up of the political system were dashed.

30. The 1980s saw the emergence of well-organised radical groups and study clubs on university and college campuses, including the Green Book study club (promoting

Ghaddafi's ideas of revolutionary mass participation from Libya), the Pan African Union (PANAFU), which called for a popular movement,<sup>22</sup> and the Socialist Club. Unlike other campus clubs, PANAFU brought both categories of youth together and was concerned with educating its members about apartheid in South Africa and neo-colonialism in Africa. PANAFU operated outside the campuses and had revolutionary "cells" in central and eastern Freetown.

31. Following a student demonstration in 1984, the Fourah Bay College campus was closed down for three months and upon resumption of classes, students had to sign an agreement for re-admission into the university. This repressive act helped "contain" students and brought relative calm to campus. Then, in 1985, Alie Kabba, a keen member of several radical clubs, was returned unopposed as president of FBC student union on a platform of collective selfadvancement that he referred to as "we-ism". Kabba's student union executive made no secret of its intentions to put its radical leftist ideologies into practice once in power. The student leadership was constantly at loggerheads with the university authorities, who perceived Kabba as a subversive firebrand.

32. Events reached a climax at the end of the second term in 1985 when students refused to hand in their dormitory keys. The authorities accused them of planning to bring in Libyan mercenaries to oust the APC government. The paramilitary SSD, again called in to put the students in their place, used undue force in restraining the students and beating them into submission.

33. The SSD's actions gave rise to a Freetown-wide demonstration. When the college reopened for the third semester in April 1985, forty-one students were declared ineligible to register, among them Alie Kabba. The student union protested against this decision. The campus demonstration spread to the city centre, where shops were looted and vehicles burnt down,<sup>23</sup> apparently by unemployed youths who used the political demonstration of the students as a chance to wreak havoc and enrich themselves. Such opportunism, to many differing degrees, would become a constant feature of the conflict in the 1990s.

34. Alie Kabba and five other students were arrested and detained for two months, while three lecturers – Cleo Hancilles, Olu Gordon and Jimmy Kandeh, the original founders of PANAFU – were summarily dismissed from the university without a proper explanation or compensation up to the present day.<sup>24</sup>

22 See Cleo Hancilles, former lecturer at Fourah Bay College (FBC) who later conducted ideological

lessons for trainees in Libya, TRC interview in Freetown, 8 April 2003. See also Abdullah, Youth

Culture and Rebellion, at page 32. PANAFU wanted to link people across diverse social sectors.

23 See Rashid, *Subaltern Reactions*, at page 36.

24 See Cleo Hancilles, former lecturer at Fourah Bay College (FBC) who later conducted ideological

lessons for trainees in Libya, TRC interview in Freetown, 8 April 2003. See also Olu Gordon, former

student of Fourah Bay College in the 1970s who later became a lecturer and prominent participant in

PANAFU, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 11 March 2003. See also Gibril Foday-Musa,

former student of Fourah Bay College who attended a training programme in Libya in the 1980s;

TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 26 September 2003.

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35. Some of the expelled students eventually found their way to Ghana and gained admission into the University of Legon. From Ghana, Alie Kabba made frequent visits to Guinea and Libya and was also a regular visitor to the People's Bureau (as the Libyan embassy was called) in Accra. According to Olu Gordon:

“The idea of the RUF actually came from the expelled students from Fourah Bay College, especially Alie Kabba. And the specific reason why it was called a “united front” was because they had attempted to draw several organisations into their plan, including the organisations belonging to the Pan African Union (PANAFU).”<sup>25</sup>

36. Other witnesses, who were part of PANAFU, as well as some members of the RUF, have challenged the veracity of this testimony. Indeed, Gordon's account is not entirely accurate, since Alie Kabba's umbrella idea went by a different name altogether – the Popular Democratic Front, with the acronym PDF – and had a non-violent agenda for change at its heart. RUF members further pointed out that at the time the students were in Libya, no name had been chosen for the movement they joined. The name RUF was coined by others in Libya and had no direct connection to PANAFU, which had by that time become detached from the revolutionary project.

#### Divergence of Youths and the Spiral into Violent Rebellion

37. The exiled students raised the idea with PANAFU in Freetown of sending members of their revolutionary “cells” in the city to undertake training programmes in Libya. Four trainees nominated by PANAFU left for Libya during the rainy season of 1987. By the time they returned in 1988, leading members of PANAFU were no longer committed to the revolutionary project, which led to a split in the movement. One group went underground and carried on planning for new batches of trainees, recruiting mainly marginalised youths from the city. 38. PANAFU's withdrawal from the revolutionary project starved it of ideologically educated youths and turned it into what one writer has described as:

“an individual enterprise... any man (no attempt was made to recruit

women) who felt the urge to acquire insurgency training in the service of the “revolution” [could join up]... This inevitably opened the way for the recruitment of lumpens.”<sup>26</sup>

39. Alie Kabba had assumed the position of co-ordinator of the “revolution” because of his pre-existing links with Libya. Many trainees were opposed to Kabba’s leadership, though. They objected to his personal refusal to undergo military training. They also accused him and his friends in Ghana of “sitting on millions of dollars” and benefiting from their recruitment for training in Libya. By the time Kabba left Ghana for Libya, most of the trainees had revolted. The bulk of them had returned to Sierra Leone by 1989 or 1990 and never assumed roles in the RUF movement, or indeed in any of the factions that fought in the conflict.<sup>27</sup>

25 See Olu Gordon, former student of Fourah Bay College in the 1970s who later became a lecturer

and prominent participant in PANAFU, TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 23 March 2003.

26 See Abdullah, *Bush Path to Destruction*, at page 63.

27 See Cleo Hancilles, former lecturer at Fourah Bay College (FBC) who later conducted ideological

lessons for trainees in Libya, TRC interview in Freetown, 8 April 2003. See also Abdullah, *Bush*

*Path to Destruction*, at page 65.

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40. Divergence of paths and purposes occurred during the time of the training in Libya. Sierra Leone’s original student revolutionaries realised they had little in common with some of their countrymen who trained on the camps near Tripoli. Alie Kabba and Cleo Hancilles, the two ideological driving forces, grew wary of the direction their project had assumed and decided to opt out. Into the resultant leadership vacuum stepped Foday Sankoh, an aggrieved former soldier of the Sierra Leone Army who was an anomalous, older presence among the mostly youthful trainees. In Libya, Sankoh met Charles Taylor, the leader of the Liberian trainees on the camp. The two men forged a joint plan for insurgencies in their respective countries, starting in Liberia and moving into Sierra Leone. From that moment on, the course of the “revolution” – and with it the destiny of the sub-region’s youth – changed irreversibly. Sankoh and a handful of cohorts made their way to Liberia and joined an insurgency alongside Taylor’s NPFL. Among the youths involved, only Abu Kanu, a graduate of Njala University College, had reached a level of higher education comparable to the original PANAFU-led group of the mid-1980s.

41. Foday Sankoh began to assemble more fighters for his RUF rebellion in 1990. He used Charles Taylor’s NPFL bases and logistics to train Sierra Leoneans from diverse backgrounds who had been caught up in the turmoil in Liberia. Some were migrant workers whom Sankoh plucked from prisons in NPFL control areas; others were

marginalised urban youths and common criminals. They became known as the RUF “vanguards”. In March and April 1991, the vanguards entered Sierra Leone with a troop of NPFL commandos who outnumbered them by about four to one. The Sierra Leone conflict had begun, with youths from unlikely and unsettled circumstances very much to the fore.<sup>28</sup>

42. After the launch of the armed rebellion, most of the youths who joined the RUF, or who were compelled to join the organisation, were marginalised rural youths. Thus different categories of youths were involved at distinct stages of the conflict history of Sierra Leone. Educated youths were involved in the formulation of ideas for revolution and regime change, instigating the training in Libya. Marginalised urban youths were involved in the bulk of the military training and the launch of the insurgency. Thereafter the bulk of the growing manpower of the RUF consisted of marginalised rural youths.

43. Youths who joined the RUF could be further distinguished according to those who joined voluntarily and those who were forced to join. Some of the youths who joined willingly were won over by the simplistic rhetoric of the movement and believed that their involvement would help to reform “the system” that had oppressed them for so long. They were fed up with the APC and wanted a change of government. According to a resident of Pujehun District:

“We assembled at the barray and they addressed us... “We have come to make Sierra Leone a better Sierra Leone... Sierra Leoneans are suffering... education is expensive... we have come to get rid of the APC rule”... After their address, we were happy and prepared food for them... They appointed a town commander... Some of them left after they had finished eating.”<sup>29</sup>

28 For the Commission’s comprehensive account of the pre-conflict phase and the assembly of the

armed force that launched the insurgency in Sierra Leone in 1991, see the chapter on the Military

and Political History of the Conflict in Volume Three A of this report.

29 Alusine Rogers, TRC statement recorded in Kpaka Chiefdom, Pujehun District, 22 March 2003.

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44. However, whether by choice or against their will, practically all the recruits soon adopted forms of behaviour that characterised marginalised youths – drug addiction and violence. Involvement in the rebellion itself became an alienating and marginalising process. RUF and NPFL atrocities in Sierra Leone soon drew contempt and opposition from the communities they were attempting to win over. Youths who had joined the insurgency became completely alienated from their own people, either due to acts in

which they participated personally or due to their association with the outrages perpetrated by the movement as a whole.

45. The involvement of youth in the conflict became infinitely more complicated in April 1992, when a band of youths in the Sierra Leone Army overthrew the APC in a coup and formed a military junta known as the NPRC. In an attempt to counter the insurgents at the warfront, the NPRC engaged in mass recruitment of marginalised urban youths into the Army. By 1992, therefore, almost the entire combatant population consisted of youths, on both sides of the battle.

46. It should be recalled that by the eve of the conflict most urban youth had lost all hope. They had sunk into an abyss of unemployment and disillusionment. In this state, fighting in the war seemed a viable alternative. It presented a means through which youths could possibly break out of their despair and transform their lives. Many youth aligned themselves with one or more of the factions and swiftly achieved what they considered progress: they were able to accrue “wealth” and “status” that otherwise would have been unattainable.

47. More youths joined the war when they saw how “profitable” the experience had proved for others. Instead of enduring long periods of unemployment, they looted money and goods. Rather than possessing no stake in society, no property and no hope for the future, they became “commandos” who could acquire guns, sex, food and drugs at their will. The opportunity cost of going to war was very low. War empowered them. Inevitably, such youths began to perceive personal benefits in the continuation of conflict. Across all factions they became the most vocal constituency resisting efforts to end the war.

48. Some youths joined the armed factions in order to carry out personal vendettas. Statements from Pujehun District indicate that some of the earliest recruits into the RUF on its Southern Front were militiamen who had participated in the so-called Ndorgboryosoi rebellion against the APC government in the early 1980s, but ultimately failed.<sup>30</sup> The Commission also heard testimonies from various parts of the country about youths who had been ostracised from their communities in the past, only to return during war to lead fighters into attacking their people, destroying their communities and humiliating their chiefs, elders and members of their traditional authorities.<sup>31</sup>

30 More detail on the Ndorgboryosoi rebellion in Pujehun District in the 1980s can be found in the

chapter on the Historical Antecedents to the Conflict in Volume Three A of this report. More detail

on the incorporation of former Ndorgboryosoi militiamen into the RUF in 1991 can be found in the

chapter on the Military and Political History of the Conflict, also in Volume Three A of this report.

31 See, for example, Ngolo Katta, Director of the Centre for the Co-ordination of Youth Activities

(CCYA), TRC interview conducted in Freetown, 13 August 2003.

### The Re-convergence of Youths

49. In the late 1970s and 1980s, there had been a convergence of the educated and the uneducated marginalised youths. This convergence initiated discourse on modes and means of resistance, or violence, that could be targeted at the perpetrator of their marginalisation – the APC government. Their discourse took place in the pottes, against the background of a non-conflict environment.

50. In contrast, the re-convergence of youths in the 1990s took place in the course of the actual rebellion against the state. On this occasion the youths who converged were mainly uneducated and marginalised youths who had joined the RUF or the Army. Those in the Army were largely marginalised urban youths, whilst the RUF constituted mainly rural youths. It became a convergence of all the groups from the pre-conflict period described earlier in this chapter: rarray man dem; upline savis man dem; san san boys; and njiahungbia ngornga.

51. Youths in both the Army and the RUF shared common traits of marginalisation. Most were uneducated, heavy users of drugs and had been uprooted or alienated from their pre-war communities. The rebellion and counter-insurgency seemed to promise marginalised youths that they could continue to engage in their old habits while fulfilling the ambitions that were denied to them by society.

52. Towards this end youths were encouraged by the leadership of the various military and political factions. The elites were profiteering from war in different ways from the youths, but they had a similar interest in its perpetuation. Youths in turn utilised violence not only to please their masters, but also to fulfil their yearnings for material acquisitions. In other words, the youths appropriated elite-sanctioned violence for subaltern ends.

53. Thus the eventual re-convergence of marginalised youths in the midst of the brutality that characterised the conflict was perhaps inevitable. Some commentators believe that the neologism “sobel” captures this convergence, because soldiers behaved like rebels, and vice versa.<sup>32</sup> The reality is subtly different, however, since the union of the RUF with the AFRC regime that seized power in May 1997 came about through a decision of their respective leaderships, rather than any organic merger of the two combatant cadres on the ground. Only upon their convergence did the two factions really appreciate that they were practically identical in their composition.

54. The leaders of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) came from subaltern social types (rarray man dem) who had become accustomed to deploying violence on behalf of the civilian political elites. In seizing power in their coup of 1997, these soldiers and civilians were carrying out violence towards their own ends and in doing so they made no distinction between public and private targets.<sup>33</sup>

55. When the AFRC regime was joined by the RUF, itself composed mainly of marginalised rural youths, many ordinary people suspected that it reflected years of collaboration between the two factions at the battlefield. It was very common to hear Sierra Leoneans saying that they knew that the RUF and the Army were secret lovers and that they were now publicly celebrating the marriage. It was not so much a question of

formalising an existing relationship, though, as of wondering why the two of them had failed to get together earlier.

32 See, for example, Abdullah, *Bush Path to Destruction*.

33 See Kandeh, *Elite Origins of Subaltern Terror*.

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#### Community Self-Defence and the Utilisation of Youths

56. In the mid to late 1990s, civilian communities largely lost faith in the national army and sponsored their own youths to become members of the Civil Defence Forces, a militia network dominated by Kamajors from the south and east. For many youths, joining the Kamajors was a way to earn respectability and honour. Others simply heeded the call of their elders to be initiated:

“The chieftom elders called upon the youths of all the surrounding villages and explained to us that since the situation was getting out of hand, they want some of the youths to volunteer to be initiated into the Kamajor society as a means of self-defence. Eighty people were registered for initiation.”<sup>34</sup>

57. In his statement to the Commission, another youth said he joined the Kamajors to defend his people from soldiers and the RUF:

“The government soldiers who were supposed to protect us were the very ones who were killing and harassing our people. The RUF were also killing our people and burning our houses.”<sup>35</sup>

58. The CDF militias started as a reaction to the abuses of the RUF and government soldiers. As the war progressed, though, the CDF was transformed into much more than a community defence force. This was particularly the case after the 1997 AFRC coup, when the CDF became an armed force dedicated to the restoration of the SLPP government. According to one CDF fighter:

“In addition to the carnage and destruction caused by the rebels to our people and the land, for these kind of people to rule us was a mockery and a shame... My first deployment (as a Kamajor) was to go and fight the RUF at their base in Koribundo.”<sup>36</sup>

59. As tensions flared, many Kamajor members learned to use the war for private gain. Although they were under oaths, taboos and a disciplined code of conduct that forbade them from engaging in certain acts, they nonetheless looted, raped, killed innocent civilians and conscripted children into their ranks.<sup>37</sup>

60. A farmer from Pujehun recounted his ordeal at the hands of the Kamajors:

“Eight Kamajors attacked me on my farm. They invited me to their base, but I refused to accompany them. They maltreated me and while I sat on the ground they fired shots around me. As if that was not enough, they went on to harvest my pineapple and other fruits. Finally, they looted all my property and burnt down my farmhouse.”<sup>38</sup>

61. Membership of the Kamajors was in some areas the only way of avoiding such abuses. Many youths joined the militia to seek this protective cover:

“These Kamajors intimidated us so much as civilians that I decided to join them in 1997. I did it to gain the freedom of entering and leaving our village.”<sup>39</sup>

34 Borbor Rambo Kallon, TRC statement recorded in Mano Dasse, Dasse Chiefdom, March 2003.

35 Augustine Musa, TRC statement recorded at an unspecified location, February 2003.

36 Brima Nallo, TRC statement recorded in Ngiehun, Lugbu Chiefdom, January 2003.

37 See, for example, Rugiatu Kamara, testimony to TRC public hearings, Freetown, 14 April 2003.

38 Mohamed Kebbie, TRC statement recorded in Pujehun Town, 25 February 2003.

39 Desmond Hindowa Momoh, TRC statement recorded in Tokwama village, 11 December 2002.

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Youths as Collaborators in the Conflict

62. In addition to their active combat roles, youths instigated horrific atrocities by collaborating with the factions in times of social tension or when control of a particular area changed hands. Youths were often the first residents to be sought out for information or local knowledge. By betraying the confidence of their communities and pointing fingers, sometimes without any rational basis, they caused many deaths and untold suffering:

“When the soldiers recaptured Potoru... an indigene of Potoru showed the soldiers all the houses the rebels had been dwelling in...

The houses were then burnt down by an SLA corporal...”<sup>40</sup>

63. When the war broke out in the east and the south, some young men who joined the RUF pointed out to rebel forces certain individuals they perceived as their antagonists or oppressors. Often these persons were tortured and killed. During the ousting of the junta

in 1998 by the ECOMOG intervention force, irate youths not only formed “mobs” to beat up and summarily execute civilians, they also identified suspected AFRC sympathisers or disclosed their hideouts to ECOMOG personnel and Kamajors, who dealt mercilessly with their victims. Philip Sankoh described what happened to him:

“Around 16 February 1998, a neighbour named Modupeh came with a group of Nigerian soldiers serving under ECOMOG... The soldiers attacked my friend and I... and held us at gun point ... That same night they went over to the place where I had gone to seek refuge... and harassed the people, looted their property.”<sup>41</sup>

### **The Impact of the Conflict on Youth**

64. Instead of alleviating the neglect and marginalisation believed to be the prime causes of the war, the eleven-year conflict has actually compounded the problems faced by youths and had entirely negative consequences on their development. Many youths have been left disillusioned and frustrated.

### **Youths and education**

65. A whole generation of youths lost their opportunity to advance their levels of education, which is so vital to the improvement of their status. Desmond Massaquoi recounted the circumstances that have denied him his schooling:

“I was attending Christ The King College when the war broke out; I was in form three. I went for holidays to my village Kanguma, near Serabu in the Bumpah Chiefdom. Rebels attacked my village, burnt our houses, looted our property and killed some people. Amongst those killed were my father, my sister and her husband. These people were the ones paying my school fees... I want to continue my education but there is no one to support me as my sister and her husband who supported me are dead.”<sup>42</sup>

40 Lahai Kamara, TRC statement recorded in Potoru, Pujehun District, 24 January 2003.

41 Philip Sankoh, resident of Brookfields community in Freetown, TRC interview, 16 July 2003.

42 Desmond Massaquoi, TRC statement, Bo District, 10 April 2003.

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66. Displacement of the population resulted in high levels of illiteracy and a massive drop in the standard of education. As civilians sought refuge in the big towns, overcrowding

meant that schools had to begin operating double shifts. Class sizes increased and the quality of interaction in the learning environment deteriorated. Even the few youths who were able to attend school received a lower quality of education. Many had their education halted abruptly by their enlistment into the fighting forces or abduction by the RUF.

67. In post-conflict Sierra Leone many youths who lost out on schooling believe they are now too old to return to school. They are destined to remain unskilled. Many are not just unemployed; they are unemployable. They can be seen all over the country, many of them begging and stealing in order to survive.

### **Psychosocial effects of the conflict**

68. Many youths were brutalised and transformed into killing machines. They have been deprived of the positive aspects of their youth. Some young people were abducted as children and stayed with their captors throughout the eleven-year conflict. Many others lost parents and benefactors. In general youths remain bereft of the stabilising ties of affection, intimacy and emotional support. Denied these ties, they are vulnerable to emotional and psychological insecurity.

### **Drugs**

69. Before the war, most youths consuming drugs used cannabis. During the war, they were introduced to more dangerous narcotics such as cocaine and heroin. There has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of young drug takers and the types of drugs they are addicted to.<sup>43</sup>

### **Loss of civic and social skills**

70. The breakdown of community norms and socialisation during the ten-year civil conflict created youths without civic or social skills. Those in the fighting forces were inducted into a life of burning, looting and killing. They do not possess peacetime skills and are finding it difficult to accept and accede to authority. Refugees also had their lives disrupted. Thus many among them lack the social, civic and economic skills necessary for a disciplined peacetime life.

71. Youths have become been used to violence as a means of resolving problems. Many still hold onto the belief that they should resort to violence to get what they need.<sup>44</sup> They have been used to committing violations with impunity.

43 See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, TRC interview conducted in Freetown,

12 November 2003. See also Allan Quee, Director of PRIDE, a non-governmental organisation

dedicated to the reintegration of ex-combatants, TRC interview in Freetown, 21 November 2003.

44 See Dr. Dennis Bright, Minister of Youth and Sports, TRC interview conducted in Freetown,

12 November 2003.

## APPENDIX 3

### TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION REPORT, 2004, RECOMMENDATIONS: YOUTH

“PRODUCTIVE YOUTH BUILD BETTER NATION”

Slogan from the Combat Camp Youth Committee<sup>111</sup>

304. Youths<sup>112</sup> were the driving force behind the resistance to one-party state rule in the 1980s. As students, journalists, workers and activists they exposed injustices and the bankruptcy of the ruling elite’s ideology. They also bore the brunt of the state’s repressive backlash. During the conflict, youths formed the bulk of the fighting forces in all the factions. The last twenty years of Sierra Leone’s history are, in reality, the story of Sierra Leone’s youths.

305. Many of the dire conditions that gave rise to the conflict in 1991 remain in 2004. As in the late 1980s, many young adults continue to occupy urban ghettos where they languish in a twilight zone of unemployment and despair.

#### **National Mobilisation**

306. The civil war has aggravated matters for the youth. After ten years of war, thousands of young men and women have been denied a normal education and indeed a normal life. Their childhood and youth have been squandered by years of brutal civil conflict. Many young Sierra Leoneans have lost the basic opportunities in life that young people around the world take for granted. These young people constitute Sierra Leone’s lost generation. The Commission recommends that the youth question be viewed as a national emergency that demands national mobilisation. This is an imperative recommendation.

307. The Commission has detected a certain energy and resolve among many of the youths with which it has interacted in hearings, reconciliation programmes and the National Vision for Sierra Leone. This resolve is reflected in the desire to overcome the difficulties and traumas of the past and to forge a new and proud Sierra Leone. The Commission has detected this resolve among university students, professionals, young men and women in Government and among the unemployed in the ghettos. This energy must be harnessed and channelled towards productive ends. The future of Sierra Leone depends on this.

<sup>111</sup> Slogan submitted to the National Vision for Sierra Leone, a project of the TRC.

<sup>112</sup> For the purposes of this report the age category of youths extends from 18 to 35 years.

Recommendations on “Children” are dealt with under a separate heading later in this chapter. The

18-35 category adopted by the Commission is in line with the age category employed by the Sierra

Leone Ministry of Youth. The Youth Ministry has extended the age limit of youth because it regards

the period of the conflict as “lost years” for many youths.

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#### National Youth Commission

308. The Commission recommends that Government work towards the transformation of the youth portfolio of the Ministry of Youth and Sports into a National Youth Commission. Such a Commission should be located in the Office of the President. The mission of a National Youth Commission would be to address the youth question as a fundamental priority in post-war reconstruction. Currently, the Youth Ministry is constrained by an overburdened civil service bureaucracy that prevents it from carrying out its basic tasks and functions. At present the Ministry is unable to finance its programmes in the provinces. In short, the Ministry of Youth does not have the means to address the youth question.

309. A National Youth Commission would be empowered by its ability to raise funds locally and internationally. It would be able to work meaningfully with fundraising agencies, while co-ordinating and streamlining the activities of the NGOs working in this field. A National Youth Commission ought to be responsible for the implementation of the Youth Policy as well as the National Youth Plan. The effective implementation of the Youth Policy and National Youth Plan would address the specific issues facing the youth as set out in the findings of the Commission.

310. A National Youth Commission could spearhead public-private partnerships involving youth in different sectors including tourism, agriculture, fisheries, housing and mining. Industrial sites and service centres could be earmarked for initiatives aimed at providing employment opportunities for youth. The National Youth Commission could facilitate investment in such schemes and encourage worker – owner schemes which would give young workers a stake in the initiative. Over a period of time, youthful workers could become coowners and investors in such companies. The Commission recommends that the Government of Sierra Leone work towards the fulfilment of these recommendations.

311. The Commission recommends that, every year, a “State of the Youth” report be tabled before Parliament. Pending the creation of the National Youth Commission, this should be the responsibility of Ministry of Youth and Sports. Such a report should provide an overview of the state of the youth in Sierra Leone for the preceding year. It should set out a detailed assessment of all efforts and programmes to develop the youth in the public, non-governmental and private sectors. Progress should be measured against a set of agreed indicators. This recommendation is made for the serious consideration of Government.

#### **Political Representation**

312. The denial of a meaningful political voice to the youth has had devastating consequences for Sierra Leone. More avenues for the youth to express themselves and to realise their potential need to be created. Political space should be opened up so that the youth can become involved in governance and in the decision-making process. Youths must have a stake in governance.

313. The Commission recommends that all political parties be required to ensure that at least 10% of their candidates for all public elections are youths.<sup>113</sup> This includes national elections, local government and district council elections. Legislation should be enacted to make this a legal requirement. The National Electoral Commission should be required to enforce this minimum representation. Such a stipulation will require all political parties to nurture and develop meaningful participation of the youth. This is an imperative recommendation.

314. Engagement in electoral politics should be accompanied by political responsibility. In this regard the Commission endorses the programme launched by the Ministry of Youth and Sports to cultivate political responsibility among the youth. This programme envisages the creation of elected Chieftdom Youth Committees that would send representatives to a District Youth Committee. The District Committee would act as a clearing-house for youth activities and projects. District Youth Committees would send representatives to Regional Youth Committees, which would set the agenda for a National Youth Conference. The Regional Committees would send representatives to the National Youth Conference that would elect members to a National Youth Committee.

315. Such an initiative would structure youth participation in public affairs and provide a training ground for tomorrow's leaders. The Commission supports this initiative and calls on Government to set in place the necessary legislative framework to make it work. The Commission also calls on Government and the donor community to resource this important programme.

## APPENDIX 4

### UN PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION REPORT PBC/2/SLE/1 5 07-61810

#### A. Youth employment and empowerment

10. The marginalization and political exclusion of youth was identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as one of the root causes of the civil war and is widely perceived to be a threat to peace consolidation today. The Government defines youth as persons between 15 and 35 years, who are estimated to represent approximately two million people out of a total population of about five million. Close to two thirds of those young people are considered to be unemployed or underemployed. Young people also tend to have less paid employment and fewer opportunities in the public and formal sectors. They face a number of employment constraints, such as low levels of education, limited access to land, social capital and credit. Ex-combatants, urban slum youth, poor and socially excluded youth in rural areas and youth in squatter settlements in border areas of Sierra Leone comprise key sections of marginalized young men and women requiring special measures to address their needs. The challenge of youth marginalization, however, goes beyond the issue of economic opportunities and employment. It is also necessary to ensure the full participation of young men and women in the political process and protection of their rights. Ensuring equal participation of women, especially young women, within the political process constitutes a specific challenge and requires targeted interventions, such as legislative reform and sustained capacity-building.

11. A few short- and medium-term initiatives are under way to address youth unemployment, such as the Youth Employment Scheme launched by the Government in 2006 with the aim of generating up to 135,000 short-term jobs for young people. The Government of Sierra Leone has also developed a National Youth Policy and is setting up a National Youth Commission to promote youth empowerment and greater participation in decision-making. The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund has also provided support for the Government's Youth Enterprise Development Programme. The World Bank and the Government of Sierra Leone have produced a comprehensive study on youth employment, noting the need to develop both medium- and long-term solutions to the problem.

12. The challenge of addressing youth unemployment is closely linked to the creation of long-term economic growth, reviving agricultural production and marketing, and creating an enabling environment for private-sector development and domestic, diaspora and foreign investment. A number of preconditions, such as improved availability of electricity, water and other basic infrastructure and support for entrepreneurs and the self-employed, would need to be addressed in that context. Although the importance of long-term economic growth in the context of peace consolidation is recognized as part of the present Framework, specific activities under this sector fall within the purview of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Within this Framework, a more targeted and medium-term focus on addressing youth unemployment will be prioritized, in particular in the areas of policy reform and youth empowerment through the implementation of the National Youth Policy, strengthening of the National Youth Council, District Youth Committees and the expansion of the Government's Youth Employment Scheme.

## APPENDIX 5

### LIST OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERVIEWS:

<b>Affiliation/Organisation</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Date</b>
Graduate student	Rahim	18 March 2010
Youth Employment Secretariat, Ministry of Youth and Sport	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Mr. Yusuf Kamara	23 March 2010
CCYA	National Coordinator, Mr. Ngolo Katta	23 March 2010
UNICEF	Project Officer – Child Protection, Mrs. Rosina Conteh	23 March 2010
COOPI	Programme Manager, Mr. John Saidu	24 March 2010
COOPI	Programme Manager, Mr. Robin Yoki	24 March 2010
EMERGENCY	Head of Paediatrics, Dr. Jane Babati	24 March 2010
CCYA	Programme Officer, Mr. Edward Massaquoi	25 March 2010
SLYEO	Executive Director, Mr. Charles Lahai	25 March 2010
Peacelinks	Programme Coordinator, Mr. James Hallowell	26 March 2010
AYPAD	Youth1, youth2	26 March 2010
YAPAD	National Coordinator, Mr. Bockarie Enssah	30 March 2010
WarChild	Deputy Country Director, Mr. Saidu Mansaray	31 March 2010
CAUSE Canada	Peacebuilding Project Coordinator, Mr. Daniel N'bompa-Turay	31 March 2010
SALONE YOUTH AND ADOLESCENT NETWORK	Youth 1, youth 2, youth 3, youth 4	31 March 2010
AYPAD	Executive Director, Mr. Philip Bangura	31 March 2010
ENCISS	Youth Officer, Mr. Ishmael Bash-Kamara	1 April 2010
Fourah Bay College	Ibrahim, Felix, Joseph, Mohamed, Omar	1 April 2010
PLAN International	Youth Policy Advisor, Mr. Martin Sisay Hudson	6 April 2010
National Youth Coalition,	President, Mr. Ishmail Al-Sankoh Conteh	6 April 2010

Black Street Family	Youth1, youth2, youth3, youth4, youth5, youth6, youth7, youth8, youth9, youth10	7 April 2010
iEARN	Youth1, youth2, youth3, youth4, youth5, youth6, youth7, youth8	7 April 2010
BASE, Aberdeen	Youth1, youth2, youth3, youth4, youth5, youth6	7 April 2010
GTZ	Programme Manager, Mr. Muhamed Lebbie	8 April 2010
SPW	Country President, Mr. Farai Muronzi	8 April 2010
UNIPSIL	Youth Employment and Conflict Advisor, Mr. Eldridge Adolfo	8 April 2010
Graduate student	Amin	10 April 2010
GOAL-Sierra Leone	Disadvantaged Children and Youth Project Coordinator, Mr. Michael Thompson	12 April 2010
International Youth Forum	Director, Mr. John Paul Bai	12 April 2010
CORD-SL	Executive Director, Mr. Alfred Sandi	12 April 2010
WANEP	National Coordinator, Mr. Edward Jombla	13 April 2010
iEARN	National Coordinator, Miss. Jane Peters	13 April 2010
OKADA Association	Youth 1, youth 2, youth 3	13 April 2010
Issa	Young entrepreneur	13 April 2010
Attaya base in Regent street	Youth 1, youth 2, youth 3	13 April 2010
Kissy Dockyard	Moses	14 April 2010
House of braves, youth development organisation	Philip	14 April 2010
Graduate student	Daniel	14 April 2010
Grassfield youths Association	Youth1, youth2, youth3, youth4, youth5, youth6, youth7	14 April 2010
King Jimmy	youth1, youth2, youth3	14 April 2010
Bananawater	youth1, youth2	15 April 2010
Oloshoro	youth1, youth2, youth3, youth4, youth5, youth6	15 April 2010
Congo Market	youth1, youth2, youth3, youth4	16 April 2010

## APPENDIX 6

IN 'JUNIOR SALONE TIMES', 12<sup>TH</sup>-18<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2008, 11<sup>TH</sup> EDITION:

# "Gang" Culture Taking Root In Freetown Schools



**S**omeone once said that Sierra Leoneans are good at picking out the worst parts of other cultures and emulating them.

With the heavy presence of western media (films, television programs, music) which glorify violence, revenge and general misconduct, it is frightening to think that such a statement could be true. Nevertheless, one look around the streets of Freetown should be enough to quiet any doubts. It is difficult to find walls that are

not covered with spray painted writings of names like 'Konvict', 'Death Squad', West Side Crips, Bloods and the like. To the casual passerby, this may seem like nothing more than the work of mischievous juveniles. However, anyone who is even remotely familiar with Western culture will recognize some of these names as those belonging to notorious criminal gangs in the United States and in other Western countries. American rapper 50 Cent is popular in Sierra Leone. His music, like many other rappers contains

lyrics that talk about committing violent acts against other people by "blowing" them away or "laying them out". The name of his music group "G-Unit" is one of the names most commonly spray painted on walls in Freetown.

During the rebel war, now deceased rapper Tupac Shakur was a favourite among warring factions because of his thuggish lifestyle and hate-induced lyrics. The infamous East Side-West Side gang war, which he led, no doubt inspired one of the rebel groups to

(See Pg 4)

## 'Gang' Culture Taking Root In Freetown Schools

call themselves the 'West Side Boys.'

The war is over, but still the negative aspects of Western culture continue to attract and take root in the lives of mainly school children.

The newly constructed fences of the Freetown Secondary School for Girls carry over 50 names of gang clubs. A few of them are Icon Snickers, G Squad, Death Ray, Blade Squad, Crip Niggers, May Park Gang, Split Unit, Kix Squad, Detroitix Army, and so forth.

A teacher at the Albert Academy confirmed the existence of a school gang who call themselves the 'Cemetery Squad' because of their fondness of congregating in a nearby graveyard.

Most recorded cases of school violence have taken place at the National Stadium during sports competitions. This could be due to the presence of rival gangs from different schools.

The Convention of Secondary School Principals acknowledges the existence of these groups but, so far, have nothing in their capacity

to stop them. In an interview with **Junior Salone Times**, School principal of Freetown Secondary School for Girls (FSSG), Madam Davies, described the situation as 'terrible'. According to her, the administration of FSSG is working on it. "We have advised these pupils against violence," Madam Davies said.

"We are doing our best to stop them from being violent."

Getting rid of these gangs is a difficult task for school authorities, since their mandates over the pupils end at the school gates. Once outside, the members of these gangs put on different attire or their 'gang shirts'.

Apart from each other, these gangs have been found to target female schools as well. An 18-year-old Senior Secondary School (SSS) Two pupil of Saint Joseph's Convent Secondary School (name withheld) told **Junior Salone Times** that some of these gangs 'terrify' female pupils. She said that they always hang outside their school compound during school hours, waiting to cause mischief when school is over. "When school is over, they move between us to

steal our phones," she complained. "Sometimes they



have knives and they threaten to stab us if we attempt to shout."

According to other sources, rivalry over a female student is enough to spark gang battles, which are uncomfortably reminiscent of the brutal gang wars that are often glorified in American rap lyrics.

Sierra Leonean journalist and Peace Activist Teddy Foday Musa recently arrived in Sierra Leone from Holland, where he is based. Like others, he has expressed horror at the current trend. He offers a solution. "Parents and guardians should work hand in glove with the government to address this issue. Hooliganism will not only blur our kids' future, but will turn them into hard core criminals and lawless citizens."

## APPENDIX 7

IN 'STANDARD TIMES', 5<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2008, VOL. 23, NO. 27:

# Student in weapon game

## ...Police Probe reveals

*BY ABUBAKARR KARGBO*

The Minister of Education Youths and Sports, Dr. Minkailu Bah is reportedly regretting his action to allow the past Inter Secondary School Sporting Competition held at the National Stadium on Tuesday 26th to Thursday 28th February 2008. Reports state that the sports which used to be sociable events ended up with acts of thuggery and other forms of violence perpetrated by some students. The police made several arrests including a student of the Apex International Secondary School who was arrested with a nine millimeter Chinese pistol together with a magazine with eight live rounds cartridges and also a toy pistol.

During the final day of the competition on Thursday, the reports further state that the police conducted a search on each school pupil entering the Stadium. In the process, several offensive weapons were discovered including daggers, knives, screw drivers, surgical instruments, scissors, blades, broken bottles, military fatigues and some quantities of dried leaves suspected to be cannabis sativa. The Criminal Investigations Department confirmed to this press that the student suspect is presently helping them with the investigations.

In a related event a senior secondary school pupil of the Government

nothing of the sort". William Cole pointed out that it appears as if he should I suffer like this?" Questioned the retired private soldier.



*Brima Acha Kamara*

*CONTINUED PAGE 15*

# Student in weapon game

*FROM PAGE 1*

Rokel Secondary School residing at Sumaila Town was also arrested with a tube containing a gaseous substance she used to gas her colleagues by pumping in their faces.

The Central Police Station told our reporter that a good number of students were arrested for various offences ranging from riotous conduct, unlawful possession of dangerous weapons to indecent assault and also some civilians were arrested for mobile phone snatching and unlawful possession of dried leaves suspected to be cannabis sativa.

However, ten students were charged to court on Tuesday 4th March 2008.

## APPENDIX 8

### IN 'AUREOL TORCH: THE TEACHING NEWSPAPER OF THE MASS COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT, INSLICS, FBC', JANUARY 2010, VOL. 6, NO. 1:

# AUREOL Entertainment

By Ishmael Bayoh - Former Student of the Mass Comm. Dept. and now Senior Reporter Awoko Newspaper

Nowadays if you ask most people to give a definition of "rap", they're likely to state that it's the reciting of rhymes to the best of music. But rap is a form of expression that finds its roots imbedded deep within ancient African culture and oral tradition.

Throughout history in America, there has always been some form of verbal acrobatics or jousting involving rhymes within the Afro-American community. Signifying, testifying, Shining of the Titanic, the Dozens, school yard rhymes, prison 'jail house' rhymes and double Dutch jump rope' rhymes are some of the names and ways that various forms of rap have manifested.

Modern day rap music finds its immediate roots in the toasting and dub talk over elements of reggae music. In the early 70's, a Jamaican DJ known as Kool Here moved from Kingston to NY's West Bronx. There, he attempted to incorporate his Jamaican style of Disc Jockeying which involved reciting improvised rhymes over the dub versions of his reggae records. Unfortunately, New Yorkers weren't into reggae at the time.

In those early days, young party goers initially recited popular phrases and used the slang of the day. For example, it was fashionable for a DJ to acknowledge people who were in attendance at a party. These early raps featured someone such as Here shouting over the instrumental break: 'Yo this is Kool Here in the joint-ski saying my mellow-ski Marky D is in the house'. This would usually evoke a response from the crowd, who began to call out their own names and slogans.

As this phenomenon evolved, the party shouts became more elaborate as dj in an effort to be different, began to incorporate little rhymes: 'Davey D is in the house and he'll turn it out without a doubt.' It wasn't long before people began drawing upon outdated dozens and school yard rhymes. Many would add a little twist and customize these rhymes to make them suitable for the party environment. At that time rap was not yet known as 'Rap' but called 'Emceeing'. With regards to Kool Here, as he progressed, he eventually turned his attention to the complexities of Disc Jockeying and let two friends Coke La Rock and Clark Kent handle the microphone duties. This was rap music first emcee team. They

# KAO, HIP HOP MELODY TURNED TRIGGER OF VIOLENCE

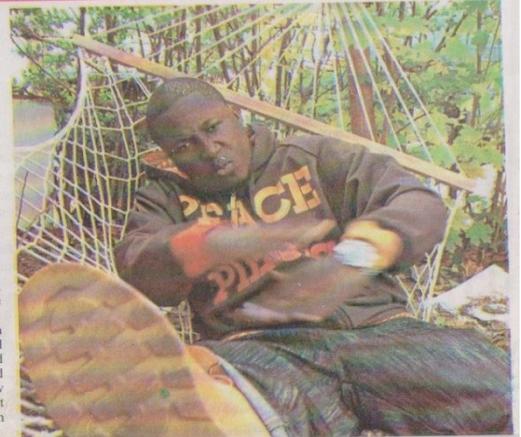
United States as rival gangs; predominantly, Death row and Bad Boy did not only involve in lyrical war but guns as part of their game. There was TUPAC Amaru Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. both ended losing their lives and since then, real violence in hip hop and hot rivalries has been minimized.

Sierra Leone has joined the rap fray but not like the radio DJs, here we have rappers who are not DJs and they started their Hip Hop out of the OG and miming contest in the 90s. During that period, a name black snoop, now Kao Denero was born (Amara Dennis Turay).

Black Leo was formed around 1998-99, the black representing the Black Skin and the Leo, representing the lion mountain. It was formed primarily to promote Hip Hop in Sierra Leone and within that period, they have five albums to their credit with many hit songs.

Hip Hop suffered a lot before rearing its head in Sierra Leone's music scene and by all indications, Kao Denero was the one that kept the game alive as he persevered and today conquered. Hip Hop has now taken the center stage with many other names fighting for supremacy.

Perhaps, one could state that what ignited violence in Hip Hop in Sierra Leone was when Kao's controversial single, 'King of Freetown'. This album provoked rhetorical questions such as: 'Who made you King and who are you ruling' from rival gangs like Dry Eye Crew and RF Cord. The 'King of Freetown' song is the catalyst for what is now referred to by music pundits, as 'beefing' in Sierra Leonean Hip Hop.



became known as Kool Here and the Herculoids.

Rap caught on because it offered young urban New Yorkers a chance to freely express themselves. This was basically the same reason why any of the aforementioned verbal/rhyme games manifested themselves in the past. More importantly, it was an art form accessible to anyone.

Rap continues to be popular among today's urban youth for the same reasons it was a draw in the early days; it is still an accessible form of self expression capable of eliciting positive affirmation from one's peers. Because rap has evolved to become such a big business, it has given many the false illusion of being a quick escape from the harshness of inner city life. There are many kids out there under the belief that all they need to do is write a few 'fresh' (good) rhymes and they're off to the good life.

For example in August of '67, Martin Luther King Jr addressed the Association of Television and Radio Broadcasters. Here he delivered an eloquent speech in which he let it be known that Black radio DJs played an intricate part in helping keep the Civil Rights Movement alive. He noted that while television and newspapers were popular and often times more effective mediums, they rarely used obscene language against each other for fear that their Black folks would not emulate them. He basically said Black folks were checking for the radio as their primary source of information.

From that culture, Hip Hop became a game so expensive in the

From that period unto date, Hip Hop has not being played decently and the traditional form of it which is lyrical war or vibes has being replaced with muscle flexing.

Tension is heightened every December of every year when Kao Denero jets in from the US to organize his annual music concert. It is believed by many that because of his presence and his seeming dominance in hip hop, the other rival groups are not happy.

The debutant in the Sierra Leonean Hip Hop is LAJ popularly referred to as 'Moni Na Bank' who has also joined in the rivalry fray. His recent hit single, which now a dance hall favourite, 'Moni Na Bank' features Kao and Pupa Baja. LA's involvement in this fight for Hip Hop hegemony is as he seems to be in clash head on with the Red Flag Movement (RFM). Apparently, when RFM came to town and realized the impact of Kao in the Sierra Leone style Hip Hop, they considered that the only way to diminish this impact was to intensify the existing beefing. There are reports of attacks and counter attacks on each others fans in some cases resulting bodily harm.

Hip Hop would be scintillating if violence is removed from it. How will this be achieved is for those in the art to



Kao...caged in the hip hop web

use their lyrics to defeat their rivals. By resorting to sheer wild West Gangsterism characterized by direct physical attacks by rival fans, and lyrical or verbal attacks on each other will send a bad image of hip hop music and perhaps cause the watering down of its very essence as a music of enjoyment. At a time when very many Sierra Leoneans are disgusted with violence as emanating from the youths, it will appear that Hip Hop is fanning the embers of violence amongst the youths. Music, despite its taste and style is part of culture any where. Hip Hop should therefore be seen as promoting that cultural aspect rather than being a menace to society. As a creative art, the music should be allowed to appear interesting, competitive and certainly educative to the youths and not one that perpetuates anti social behaviour and social upheaval among the vulnerable youths.

But this tension does not look like going away so soon. The RFM, now known as 'Red Flag' and is new in Sierra Leone's mix, has compounded the razzmatazz existing within the Hip Hop conundrum in the country, as it is in direct rivalry with another group calling itself the 'Crisp Members of 'Blue Flag'. This colour association with rival Hip Hop groups is not helping the need for peaceful co-existence among Hip Hop Artists and their fans. Problems associated with such unfortunate hostile relationships are finding its way into the Senior Secondary Schools which is why violence in those institutions is yet to subside. Before, violence sparks between school pupils on grounds of who won a certain sporting competition. Now, it is which school supports which Hip Hop group or colour and the resultant clashes have been embarrassing to government and school authorities. Even though RFM is denying being a party of the Crisp Movement, it however maintains close association with the Red Flag, and once they continue to fly that red flag they would always be considered a party to the Crisps and a party to what ever violence that emanates from any clash between Blue fans and Red fan.

A bit of explanation of how these colour flags operate; when a blue flag gang meets a red flag gang any where like in night clubs, the end result has always been an eruption of violence since each group will be engaged in actions or making remarks that are provocative of the other group all in the bid to establish their Hip Hop supremacy.

These ugly scenarios associated with Hip Hop should be discouraged by the authorities, for if left to continue, it will grow to a cancerous infection whose treatment will not be easy to come by and the fear is, it will grow into that state. The 'Rarar Boy' culture that was prevalent in the yester years of the 70s and 80's, that will not be good for Sierra Leone's vulnerable youth population as the country is looking forward to them taking up the mantle of leadership after this generation' of leaders may have gone.

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