Neopatrimonial State and
Lumpenproletariat: The Poetics of
Ideology and Revolutionary Identity In
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1 – INTRODUCTION

What I will discuss in this essay is the importance of the use of the concept of class as an analytic tool when studying specific socio-political moments. The way I will do that is by investigating class structures as agents of ideology. Ideology is in a continuous negotiation with identity and they are constructing each other through socio-cultural processes. The state, being an ideology (Abrams 1977), reproduces itself but always as a vehicle of the dominant classes and in this way the neopatrimonial state is being used by the African elites. The failure though of the elites of Sierra Leone to redistribute vertically the capital they were accumulating brought large numbers of people in the margins of the state (Abdullah 2005); especially young uneducated, unemployed and petty criminals, what Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin called the lumpenproletariat (Thoburn 2002). When the rage of those people found its expression through the revolutionary left-wing ideologies that came in contact with them through the university students, the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL) started to formulate. In this way RUF/SL became the vehicle of the lumpenproletariat and conflicted with the ideology of state. Furthermore, an argument of this paper is that conflicts must be viewed in socially and culturally specific context from which they arose. I am particularly interested in this conflict because it was the anger against class oppression rather than ethnic hatred that became the focus of the war in Sierra Leone, giving it a non-ethnic character an unusual motive by African standards (Richards 2008: 545).

I will first begin with a theoretical discussion on the state by Philip Abrams (1977) and Louis Althusser (1971) in order to try to understand better the nature of the state. A detailed analysis of the State is important at this point for the reason that I cannot enter a criticism of state formations without uncovering it. I find this discussion relevant to the analysis of class formation before, during and after the civil war in Sierra Leone for two reasons. Firstly, it is the State apparatuses that reproduce the ideologies of the dominant class and are therefore responsible for the exclusion and marginalization of specific individuals that in their turn formulate resisting ideologies in the margins. Secondly, it is the reason that a lot of the empirical data gathered from combatants and ex-combatants depict as a motivation for their participation in the war the failure of the state (Christensen & Utas 2008; Krijn & Richards 1998; Richards 1996). But how can we investigate the failure of the state if we do not discuss the nature of the state itself first? I believe that we cannot do that and therefore I am starting this paper with a discussion on some key analytical points on the state by Abrams (1977) and Althusser (1971).
In the second chapter I will move a step further and turn the focus of my investigation on the functions of neopatrimonial state and specifically, its role in the vast material inequalities experienced in Africa.

Thirdly, I will present a history of the civil war in Sierra Leone and its agrarian background based on research done by Paul Richards.

In the next chapter I will speak about one of the most important elements in the poetics of a revolutionary identity and ideology in Sierra Leone; the violent youth culture of the Rarray Boys that Abdullah(2005) characterizes as lumpenproletariats. In the same chapter I will also investigate the cultural context in which this marginalized group of people operated. As Hoffman wrote:

“The history of the anthropology of war has, however, been a history of refuting exactly this kind of decontextualized readings of communal violence” (2007: 646).

In this way, as Scott did, I will try to redirect the attention to subordinated groups and oppressed social classes and their “weapons of the weak” (Scott in Joseph and Nugent 1994: 12).

Before concluding, based on empirical data, I will analyze how the agents of the ideology of the neopatrimonial state are also participating in the construction of a revolutionary identity by being not willing to negotiate the redistribution of capital or the reorganization of the society even after a civil war that claimed the lives of thousands of people.

2 - THE STATE AND STATE THEORY

Abrams wrote on 1977 a very influential paper called: Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State. In this work he suggests that ‘the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing of political practice as it is’ (1977: 1). He uses the metaphor of the state as a mask in order to criticize the investigation of the state as an object itself and to indicate that the state is a subject shaped by ideology carried by political actors and it is not the state that shapes the ideology but the other way around.
In a similar manner Joseph and Nugent argue that:

“whether the state is taken to be an institution or a human community, the problem remains with each of these formulations that they are still wedded in a notion of the state as a material object that can be studied. It is precisely this contention that needs to be challenged” (1994: 19).

The state, an abstract term, cannot be studied without first studying the ideology that is carried by the individuals that have seized the monopoly of legitimate power (Weber in Abrams 1977) through democratic or other processes. Abrams goes even further to argue that even on a methodological level the state has “blocked” our ability to investigate it. More specifically he writes:

“The presumption, and its effective implementation, that the ‘public sector’ is in fact a private sector about which knowledge must not be made public is all too obviously the principal immediate obstacle to any serious study of the state. The implementation of the claim takes a variety of ingenious forms. One of the most familiar is the combination of bland public assurances that the state agencies would welcome ‘good’ research into themselves, coupled with the apologetic but quite effective mutilation of vetoing of almost all actual research proposals on grounds of defective or inappropriate methodology or other ‘technical’ considerations. It is a nicely disabling technique of knowledge control to claim that it is the procedural defects of the proposed investigation rather than its object that justifies the refusal of access. Nor can there be many who have been through this type of experience who doubt that ‘good’ in such contexts means supportive […]” (Abrams 1977: 61).

The problem therefore is not only theoretical but also practical. Not only one cannot detect the state on a theoretical level but also on a practical one when the researcher approaches the high-ranking officials of the state she/he finds herself/himself either being denied access to the information or receiving only ‘comfortable’ information that do not provide a platform for an in-depth critical analysis of the state as an institution. And one of the reasons for this concealment of officials’ secrets is that “the real official secret […] is the secret of the non-existence of the state (Abrams 1977: 77).

Therefore, if we accept Abrams’s rather convincing argument on the non-existence of the state as an object and the impossibility of studying it, it would seem reasonable to stop trying to locate and study the state as such. Instead it could be more helpful to try to locate the
in institutional networks of the state and the reproduction of ideology that drives the formation of the state as an idea in the minds of the people subordinated by its force. The resulting problem from the realization of this non-existence of the state as such but at the same time its existence as a network of people that are agents and actors of its violence, as identified by Poulantzas, is “the nature and function of the state is to be resolved through analysis of the relations of the state to the field of class struggle by way of an unmasking of the autonomy of the former and the isolation of the latter” (Poulantzas in Abrams 1977: 59). Since my aim is to make a relativist Marxist analysis of the civil war in Sierra Leone, I find Poulantzas’ approach very interesting, because in order to investigate this socio-cultural event I will have to explore the connection and negotiation between state and class struggle.

Abrams is taking his argument further. He is proposing that we should go a step beyond Hegel, Marx and Weber “from the analysis of the state to a concern with the actualities of social subordination” (Abrams 1977: 63). Summing up his argument Abrams tells us:

"we should take seriously the remark of Engels – one of the few classical sources of the Marxist theory of the state not cited in *Political Power and Social Classes*, incidentally – to the effect that, ‘the state presents itself to us as the first ideological power over man’. Or the notion presented so forcibly in *The German Ideology* that the most important single characteristic of the state is that it constitutes the ‘illusory common interest’ of a society; the crucial word here being ‘illusory’” (Abrams 1977: 64).

I find the use of the word illusory as an explanatory term for the investigation of the state very helpful in order to make a step towards a more holistic approach. The word ‘illusory’ as used by Engels connotes subordination from an unreal idea. This unreal idea can be an ideology. Indeed, an ideology, a subjective thing, as the explanation for the justification of the existence of the state creates an illusion of common interests that is hiding the social reality of inequality of distribution of capital in a society. Therefore the function of the state can be explained as being a ‘vehicle’ for the reproduction and imposition of the subjective ideology of the dominant class over the ones that it has interest to keep under dependence. From this basis we have the creation of what we call objectivity; objectivity is nothing more than the subjectivity of the dominant actors in a society. However, I am not going to continue the discussion on objectivism and subjectivism but what I will keep from this analysis is that the state exists only as subjective ideology trying to convince that it exists as a thing in itself in order for the dominant actors to continue exercising their power with a violence that can be
considered legitimate by the others. It exactly what Michael Taussig expresses with his poetic way in his article State Fetishism:

“Nothing could be more obvious than the State, with its big S rearing, uses the sweet talk of reason and reasonable rules as its velvet glove around the fist of steel” (Taussig 1992: 115).

Subsequently, if we want to continue investigating the state, the next step should be to study it in two connected fields. Firstly, as an ideological subject (its content and its ways of reproduction) and secondly, the conflicting ideologies and material interests expressed as class struggles. Abrams is putting things in to perspective:

“In other words the state emerges […] as an ideological thing. It can be understood as the device in terms of which subjection is legitimated; and as an ideological thing it can actually be shown to work like that. It presents politically institutionalized power to us in a form that is at once integrated and isolated and by satisfying both these conditions it creates for our sort of society an acceptable basis for acquiescence. It gives an account of political institutions in terms of cohesion, purpose, independence, common interest and morality without necessarily telling us anything about the actual nature, meaning or functions of political institutions. We are in the world of myth” (Abrams 1977: 68).

In other words, the state does not exist as such. The state is an idea and our effort to study it as a thing will only lead us to the perseverance of the illusion that the state is an object. Another way of studying the myth of the state is proposed by Hansen and Stepputat:

“Another way of studying the myth of the state is to regard it as a form of “social fantasy” circulating among citizens and communities. This fantasy is produced and reproduced by numerous encounters, everyday forms of defiance and obedience, ranging from fantasies of the mighty and evil state hatching hyperrational designs (a genre popular among radical groups on the left as well as on the far right) to popular genres of conspiracy theories that often impute almost superhuman omniscience and omnipresence to political leaders and agencies of the state” (2001: 10)

I have shown with strong arguments that the state is first of all an idea. How can something be unreal but in the same time so real? This is because the state is not only an idea: the state is also a network of institutions that claim to be the state (Althusser 1971: 137). It
was the Italian Marxist philosopher and politician, Antonio Gramsci, that influenced Althusser to formulate his idea of the state. He maintained that class power is realized in the form of the state: ‘the historical unity of the ruling classes is realized in the State and their history is essentially the history of States... the subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a ‘State’” (Gramsci in Hansen & Stepputat 2001: 2). In other words what Gramsci tried to do was to denaturalize the state by leading us to its essentially political, and therefore unstable and always violent character. Those institutions that reproduce the state idea and convince us for the necessity and the legality of this idea are the legislative authorities. Those institutions are for example the police, the army, religious institutions, bureaucratic institutions, educational institutions and others. The point of those institutions is to keep control of the monopoly of violence within the borders of the state, nevertheless, this is not only achieved with physical force as some might possibly think, but with non-physical force as well. Just like in the past the church was responsible for convincing the people that the king is chosen by God in the same way today educational institutions are convincing us for the inevitability of stratified society, providing us extremely specialized knowledge so we can take our role as workers, petty-bourgeois, agents of exploitation, agents of repression or professional ideologists (Althusser 1971: 155), in a world of extremely specialized production. Hansen & Stepputat argue that the military, the police, the system of prisons and correctional institutions are almost self-governing within the state. Although a state might be “weak” specific apparatuses might not be weak but the contrary (2001: 16). At this point I will signify that the networks of institutions that claim to be the state and reproduce the ideology of the state are divided in two groups.

This division that I am presenting was done by Althusser in 1971. There are:

1) Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs)

2) Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)

I will continue by explaining this more thoroughly. Louis Althusser in his article: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation) takes our understanding of the state a step further than Abrams does. By adopting a more clear Marxist approach he is telling us that indeed the state is an ideological thing but in order to secure its existence it is
not enough only to continue an economic production within a capitalistic or socialistic or whatever context but to “reproduce the conditions of production” (Althusser 1971: 127) and therefore to secure the “reproduction of the relations of production” (Althusser 1971: 148). To do that it uses physical force in order to suppress the deviant behaviors and to maintain its monopoly of violence but also non-physical force in order to convince us to voluntarily subordinate to the interests of the ruling classes and that those interests are to be preserved for our own ‘good’. This ‘good’ of course, as being a completely subjective term as anthropology has been demonstrating, changes according to the one that dominates and through the ISAs it ‘naturalizes’, the norms that rule in a society. Althusser, when speaking about devoted school teachers and the role that the state has given them in order to reproduce its ideological apparatus, says:

“So little do they suspect it that their own devotion contributes to the maintenance and nourishment of this ideological representation of the School, which makes the School today as ‘natural’, indispensable-useful and even beneficial for our contemporaries as the Church was ‘natural’, indispensable and generous for our ancestors a few centuries ago. In fact, the Church has been replaced today in its role as a dominant Ideological State Apparatus by the School.” (Althusser 1971: 157)

Gramsci, long before Althusser wrote his article, did a commentary for the situation mentioned above. He said: ‘the ruling classes rule not only directly, through force and the threat of force, but for the reason that their ideas have come to be accepted by the subordinate classes’ (classi subalterni)’ (Gramsci in Burke 2008: 25). For the reason that ideology has a material existence (Althusser 1971: 165) it is bounded to have material ends. So if ideology has material ends then this means that it is related to different material interests and consequently, class struggle occurs. In order to make this more clear I believe it is relevant to refer here to Althusser’s analysis on the rise of the bourgeoisie that replaced the aristocracy in France through the French Revolution because of the inability of the other to foresee or negotiate the distribution of state power (Althusser 1971: 153); in England though the situation was different, the aristocracy saw the inevitable rise of the bourgeoisie after the Industrial Revolution and instead of fighting them, they chose to ally with them and share the state power and therefore keeping many of the privileges they had from the past. But what is more important here is not which social class was able to dominate but the way they were reproducing the relations of production through ideology; the way they were and are
reproducing the ideological state apparatuses. During the pre-capitalist period the most significant ISA was the Church:

“The foremost objective and achievement of the French Revolution was not just to transfer State power from the feudal aristocracy to the merchant-capitalist bourgeoisie, to break part of the former repressive State apparatus and replace it with a new one (e.g., the national popular Army) – but also to attack the number-one Ideological State Apparatus: the Church” (Althusser 1971: 151-152).

Althusser then goes explaining that the social class of the bourgeoisie in order to reproduce its ideology and consequently its domination, created the ideological apparatus of the School. In a similar spirit Bourdieu argues that what he calls “cultural reproduction” is:

“a process by which a group such as the French bourgeoisie maintains its position in society via an educational system that appears to be autonomous and impartial, while in fact selecting for higher education students with the qualities inculcated from birth in that group” (Bourdieu in Burke 2008: 58).

Therefore, Althusser by using this interpretation of historical processes that took place in Europe during the late 18th and 19th century, is backing up his main argument that can be summed up in the following way and I personally find it very helpful for the analysis I want to make for the civil conflict in Sierra Leone. As I have mentioned earlier he suggests that the state has two apparatuses; the repressive and the ideological. The repressive (police, army etc.) exist in order to enforce the ‘just’, the ‘ethical’, the ‘good’ the ‘right’ and so on; for these concepts do not exist as objects, but are bounded by subjective interpretations of the world, are for that reason connected with ideology. For this reason the dominant social classes create the ideological state apparatuses that their function is to reproduce the relations of production; in our society the capitalist relations of exploitation. I have to briefly mention here, Foucault who spoke of the disciplinary institutions that aim of which is to enforce discipline within the society. I find Foucault’s approach on the disciplinary institutions very close to the one presented by Althusser for the ISA. The disciplinary institutions as presented in Foucault’s book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* are the prison, the hospital and other institutions that were created after the French Revolution and are responsible for enforcing discipline.
“Discipline” may be identified neither with an institution neither with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a “physics” or an “anatomy” of power, a technology” (Foucault in Rabinow 1991: 206).

In this way the bourgeoisie can continue to exploit the work of the rest of the members of a Western society by convincing them to be exploited voluntarily for it is “just” and “ethical”, in the same way that the neopatrimonial networks exploit the rest of the society in which they exist in Sierra Leone and other places.

3 - THE NEOPATRIMONIAL STATE AND ITS PROBLEMATICS

3.1 – Introduction to the concept of the neopatrimonial state

After speaking about the state on a theoretical level, I find it important to focus on the realities faced by the people of Sierra Leone. My investigation on the civil war in Sierra Leone has led me to the conclusion that, in order to understand the socio-cultural conditions that led to this conflict, we have to study the form of organization of this specific society and consequently the apparatuses of this specific form of this organization. This is essential because it is through the apparatuses that the mainstream information is being reproduced, for example through school, as Althusser argues, but also through media and other institutions. In this part of my essay I will investigate a form of state that has dominated African politics in the post-colonial era. This form of the state has been characterized by many as neopatrimonial. This term however has been criticized (Erdman & Engel 2006) but in general it denotes a system were “patrons” use state resources in order to keep the loyalty of their “clients”. To be more context specific, by “patrons” I mean the local elites and by “clients” all those participating within those networks of mutual but unequal and hierarchical mode of exchange. As William Reno mentions:

“a key element of the patronage-based strategy of rule lay in the fact that over time high officials found it in their interests to undermine the formal institutions of the state itself” (2003: 50).
Even though this type of organization has a long tradition in Africa, after the decolonisation and the establishment of the nation-state powerful patrimonial networks, often also called “clientelist” networks (Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 1999: 4), took over the control of the state either through democratic procedures or by military coups. The same notion is addressed by Transparency International simply as “corruption”. More accurately, in their web-site it is written: “Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain” (extracted by http://www.transparency.org/about_us on 01/04/2010). However, “we cannot over-emphasize the fact that the problem of what is commonly called ‘corruption’ is in no way unique to Africa” (Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 1999: 8).

As defined by Richards, patrimonialism involves redistributing resources as favors to followers that respond with loyalty to the leader (1996: 34-35). As I will make clear, the historical root of the neopatrimonial state in Western Africa lie in the colonial era. The reason why I believe this is because it was during this phase that the traditionalistic patrimonial networks came into contact with the legal-rational bureaucratic institutions introduced by the colonial powers and therefore created what we call new patrimonialism or neopatrimonialism (Erdmann & Engel 2006: 19). The type of state that was established was not modern but instead, one could say, a rather traditional one with imperial characteristics. The state apparatuses were concentrated at the colonial capital and they were accessible only to the populations of European decent and to specific and small immigrant groups. The vast majority of the population was under indirect rule, governed by intercessory authority. Indirect rule was favored mainly to keep administrative costs low (Chauveau & Richards 2008: 537). It is also noted by the same authors that the nationalist classes helped to shape indirect rule since it was a system they knew how to manage in an otherwise unfamiliar political scenery (2008: 538).

This was the colonial state; the realm of patrimonial rule, of chiefs, and elders. It was only after the World War II (during the “second colonial occupation”) (Low & Lonsdale in Erdmann & Engel 2006: 19) that the colonial powers made some effort to develop a legal-rational bureaucracy that included up to a certain degree the African populations inhabiting there. The period that those projects lasted were too short and the resources too small for there to have been a major change and a lasting move to an “autonomous” legal-rational bureaucratic culture. After the liberation, with the Africanisation of the bureaucracy and the establishment of authoritarian or other rule, the bureaucracy was extended and at the same
time challenged or negotiated and subsequently invaded from above and below by all types of informal relationships. Thus, the state in Africa has always been a hybrid one, a mixture of patrimonial and legal-rational domination (Erdmann & Engel 2006: 19 - 20). From their definition “neopatrimonialism is understood as a true mix of patrimonial and legal-rational rule” (Erdmann & Engel 2006: 22). An opportunity arose for the African elites after the end of colonialism and the subsequent decentralization of power:

“regional elites reorganized their power base, an improved climate for the development of neopatrimonialism, further criminalization of the state bureaucracy, and the political reinvention of (post-) colonial discourses on tradition” (Bubandt 2006: 427).

In the first part of my essay during the theoretical examination of the state, I spoke about the Ideological State Apparatuses. This type of state that is the mix of patrimonial and legal-rational rule needs to reproduce ideology in order to continue its production and reproduction. As I will explain more thoroughly in the next pages, neopatrimonialism is a type of political domination which is characterized by insecurity about the behavior and role of state institutions and agents. This insecurity structures the necessary ideology for the reproduction of the system. Therefore, I will briefly describe what Erdmann & Engel identify as the three main ways in which the system reproduces itself through this feeling of insecurity that is fundamental for the shaping of revolutionary identity:

- Actions of state institutions or by state agents are not calculable – probably apart for the head of the state.
- Within such a pattern of social and political relations, formal state institutions cannot fulfill their universalistic purpose of public welfare. Instead, politics and policies are determined by particularistic interests and orientations.
- Political informality has gained such a dimension that one can even speak of institutionalized informality (2006: 19).

3.2 – The Neopatrimonial state and its failure

An important factor responsible for the economic and political conditions in Western Africa is the fact that the neopatrimonial networks are involved into a clientelist system themselves. This “tradition” has its roots even before the colonial era and it is a “tradition” that goes on today and for example “includes rents derived from diplomatic and military alliances, from
the control of exports of agricultural goods and oil and of imports of all kinds, as well as from the management of external financing and aid” (Bayart, Ellis& Hibou 1999: xvi). Bøås argues that those relationships shouldn’t be described as traditional but as neo-traditional in the sense that they easily adapt to contemporary formal political structures (2001: 700). This system of rents is partly responsible for the continuously increasing social inequalities in Western Africa and permitted the rise of nationalist elites that had interests in promoting the idea of the nation-state in Africa. Hereby, it is necessary to mention, however briefly, the issue of development, for the reason that it is the rationale behind large influx of money in Western Africa and has a critical role in the shaping of nationalism, ruling classes and therefore identity in Africa the last few decades. In *Thinking About Developmental States in Africa*, Thandika Mkandawire ([http://www.unu.edu/hq/academic/Pg_area4/Mkandawire.html 25/03/2010](http://www.unu.edu/hq/academic/Pg_area4/Mkandawire.html)) says: “The main force behind the developmentalist ideology has usually been nationalism, inducing nations to seek to “catch up” with countries considered as more developed, to firm the resource base for national defense and security, etc. It is essential to stress these ideological underpinnings of state policies for it is these that provide the rationale for some of the “policies” and give legitimacy to otherwise unpalatable “sacrifices”, not only because they serve as the “opium of the masses”, but also because they knead together the ruling class.” In fewer words, the ideology that the ruling class chooses to reproduce in order to convince the citizens of the state for their legitimate rule is called “developmentalism”.

As I mentioned above, those elites have been deriving for decades their incomes from this system, in the form of rents (Bayart, Ellis& Hibou 1999: 5). It would be a mistake though to think that the establishment of those neopatrimonial networks as necessarily effecting negatively the position of Africa in the international system. On the contrary its debt, natural resources, institutional and especially financial relations with the industrialized world keep Africa highly incorporated in the system. I give emphasis on its international financial relations because:

“the formulation of external economic policy, the result of complex conflicts and compromises between various actors, is one of the most important instruments in economic and political life and has a determining effect on the process of social stratification, the formation of clientelist networks, and the penalization or co-optation of political opponents” (Bayart, Ellis& Hibou 1999: 4).
In an environment where “the African economies were characterized by uncertainty, by the struggle of survival, and the existence of powerful external constraints” (Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 1999: 111), the rich elites became richer and the events of war increased in number. The dominant classes managed to establish themselves through the neopatrimonial networks that helped them to accumulate capital and the main modes of production, primarily land. According to Bøås (2001: 698) “the lack of institutionalized constraints, and the fact that the essence of politics is distribution of scarce resources, entail that politics in Africa are more basic in character than elsewhere. The lack of institutional constraints has made politics in Africa open to personal and factional struggle aimed at controlling the state apparatus may it be repressive or ideological. This situation naturally creates great uncertainty for the general public. That has been the gloomy reality in Africa during last few decades. It is no coincidence then that “armed insurrection has become one of the dominant features of the African political landscape” (Bøås & Dunn 2007: 9).

It is interesting to think how quickly the optimism of the liberation from the colonial powers was replaced by pessimism for the future of the African states. A state ruled by a network of people, providing for themselves through legitimate or illegitimate ways, promotion of neoliberal agendas dictated from outside in the name of development and large populations in conditions of poverty. The state failed for it failed the expectations of its citizens; and it is these citizens, or some of them, that decided to choose an alternative strategy for survival. Morten Bøås and Kevin Dunn in their article: *African Guerilla Politics: Raging Against the Machine?* concentrated more in the notion of the failed state as the reason for the conflicts that spread out in Western Africa. They viewed the contemporary guerilla movements as expressions of rage against the dysfunctional neopatrimonial state and as way for people to provide themselves for political opportunities as well as an alternative way of survival.

The end of the Cold War changed the scenery dramatically both for the African states but also for the guerilla movements fighting against them. The ‘superpowers lost much of their interests in weak states with the end of the Cold War. Aid comes with more conditions attached, including demands to make bureaucracies more efficient and promote political and economic liberalization’ (Reno 1997: 166). In fact, in order for the “weak states” not to succumb to this paradigm, the ruling elites chose to re-work their ties with the outsiders, especially their clandestine commercial ties, in an effort to manipulate the demands of the superpowers (Reno 1997: 166), I will return in this motive of illicit trade later on. Furthermore, many armed groups that had lined up with the Americans or the Soviets, such as
UNITA (Uniao Nacional para Independencia Total de Angola) or RENAMO (Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana) lost their support overnight when the Soviet Union collapsed and the U.S.A remained the lone superpower (Bøås & Dunn 2007: 18). Another side-effect of the collapse of the Soviet block was that a large number of small arms became available. That meant that whoever was in control of the mineral-rich areas of West Africa could spend his capital on weaponry and equip large numbers of men. The African states have been making efforts to follow liberal economic reforms after their liberation from the colonial powers. An economical consequence of this was that people engaged a form of trade that could be described, from a Euro-American perspective, as illicit. Different forms of this kind of trade would include various types of trafficking, dumping of toxic waste, unregulated extraction of natural resources such as minerals, oil and wildlife resources:

“[…] in many African countries, if not the majority of them, large groups of the population, and sometimes the entire state apparatus, owe their survival to semiofficial, often illegal, flows of trade, capital, and services that go across national boundaries” (Bøås & Dunn 2007: 23).

On a political level this meant radical privatization of the state, the involvement of power-holding political personalities in illegal activities and therefore their criminalization (Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 1999: xiv). I support that this illegal state apparatus played an important role in the shaping of guerilla politics in Sierra Leone since the state became connected with actions that are at the same time declared illegal by the same institution. This very relativistic approach to economics that was adopted would probably not be understood by Western investors since its procedures were not only illegitimate in a moral way but also in a legal one. Apparently, the reasons for such a different approach of the political elites to economics are cultural:

“The rise in Africa of activities officially classed as criminal is aided by the existence of moral and political codes of behavior, especially those of ethnicity, kinship and even religion, and of cultural representations, notably of the invisible, of trickery as a social value, of certain prestigious styles of life, even of an aesthetic, whose capacity to legitimize certain types of behavior is considerable” (Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 1999: 15).

Furthermore, there are numerous implications on the privatization of the state. Bøås and Dunn (2007: 22) identify three main consequences of the privatization of the public:
- Political-administrative power, instead of having the impersonal and abstract character of legal-rational domination specific to the bureaucratic state, is transformed to personalized power.

- Politics becomes a kind of business, for it is political resources that provide access to economic resources and vice versa.

- Mass politics are structured around vertical client relationships.

Another event that has affected the conflicts in Africa is definitely the “war on terror” that was declared after the events of 9/11 2001. The fact that an underground Islamic organization was able to launch an attack in the heart of the USA organized in the safe refuge of Afghanistan made Western policy makers to discuss the notion of the “failed state” (Bayart, Ellis& Hibou 1999). This notion from an anthropological perspective is not acceptable. It objectifies the functions of a state and sets them in a spectrum from good to bad without taking in to consideration the local particularities. It only takes into account the idea of safety and civil order and puts on the table of international politics a strictly European and American oriented discourse. Nevertheless, the African elites have taken advantage of this new trend of the “war on terror” and have either cooperated or provided support with the USA in their invasion in Iraq and Afghanistan with the exchange of favors. A good example of this case is the time when the USA lifted the embargo, they had set on Sudan in 1996 when Omar al-Bashir, who had established a one-party Islamic republic, decided to actively cooperate with the USA after the events of 9/11. Furthermore, some African elites are using the “war on terror” as another ideological tool, additional to developmentalism. This ideological dualism reproduced by the ISAs sets them in the minds of the people in an alliance either with the “developed/good West” against the “primitive/evil East” or vice versa and furthermore, it is a useful weapon when fighting their own domestic rebel groups. For example:

“Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni frequently situates his government’s war with the LRA in the larger “war on terror” context” (Bøås & Dunn 2007: 20).

I will go on with the discussion of the neopatrimonial state, what is often referred to by Euroamerican analysts, as the “failed state”. After the liberation of Africa from the colonial powers, the African elites inherited a so-called Westphalian state sovereign model (Bøås & Dunn 2007: 21) that they adjusted in their own needs through the prevailing neopatrimonial logic. The individuals in the top of the neopatrimonial networks rules in cooperation with other individuals on the top of other networks or they can rule alone but they have to ensure
the support of key individuals or other “big men”. The reason for someone to seek political power is not the survival of the people under him but the well-being of his own group. In what Bøås and Dunn (2007: 26) call a “crisis of modernity” they identify three expressions of it. The first one is the Westphalian state system that has been heavily criticized and challenged as it was exported in the rest of the world. Secondly, the local attempts to reinterpret and reorganize the Westphalian state, in its neopatrimonial form has proved to be dysfunctional. Thirdly, traditional local structures of power are failing to work. Therefore, apparently there has been a crisis regarding the state in Sierra Leone, as well, and this crisis has multiple reasons, such as the increasing marginalization of Africa in the world economy or the shrinking of the central government because of neoliberal reforms such as the privatization of state institutions, reforms that have been imposed from external forces. But still, even if this type of state cannot monopolize violence and is described by the point of view of political economy and international relations as “choiceless” or “failed” but it is still “from the perspective of its inhabitants this institution is still the main medium to negotiate order and social organization” (Bøås & Dunn 2007: 21).

Earlier I noted that the state can be considered as “failed” when it is failing the expectations of its citizens. The neopatrimonial state-system is basically relying on the fact that the dominant class is going to respect the patron-client relation on which it has been established and that the capital is not going to be accumulated for personal use only but that it is going to be redistributed downwards as well. What is happening to the state in many African neopatrimonial states is that they are failing to redistribute the resources vertically as it is expected:

“As a result, there emerges both a crisis of legitimacy for the ruling elites and a perceived bankruptcy of the established system” (Bøås & Dunn 2007: 23).

However, it is not enough for resources to be distributed in order to guarantee a clientelistic relation between patron and client but this have to be combined with the reproduction of ideologies from the ISAs. Those ideologies reproduced by the state are an important factor in the shaping of identities such as the: “subjectification of power” (Bøås 2001: 702) and loyalty can be secured: “through socially constructed images of self and other (the enemy)” (Bøås 2001: 702).
Consequently, the rebellious processes that took place in Sierra Leone are vertical expressions of anger from the client to the patron. The lumpenproletariat, mostly consisting by uneducated youth with lack of opportunities, were searching for different survival strategies, organized themselves in rebellious movements and sought for the destruction of the dysfunctional neopatrimonial state. If not the destruction, the African rebels of militant movements such as the RUF/SL sought the redistribution of capital that had been accumulated by a small elite sitting on the top of those networks. The dysfunctional neopatrimonial state is fundamental in the shaping of a revolutionary identity. Particularly, in the Sierra Leonean case we see a parallel of state failure with community failure that led to the eruption of the civil conflict. When the ISAs fail to reproduce the dominant ideology or fail to convince the less fortunate for the just rule of the minority then a reactionary identity is being shaped. The expression of this revolutionary identity was RUF/SL.

4 - SHORT HISTORY OF THE SIERRA LEONE CIVIL WAR

4.1 – Agrarian background

Richards in his article: *To Fight or to Farm? Agrarian Dimensions of the Mano River Conflicts (Liberia and Sierra Leone)*, claims that the origins of the civil war go back to the pre-colonial era. In Sierra Leone, strict patrimonial networks controlled the young men even after the abolition of slavery in 1927. Institutions such as polygyny for the elites, forced labor and ‘pawning of young dependents for debt’ continued to exist (John Grace in Richards 2005: 583). Parents gave their daughters to marry rich men because they were unable to pay back their debts and then young men in their turn were unable to marry themselves. Elites therefore had a monopoly not only in labor but also in sex. Furthermore, any young man ‘tempted to interfere with the wife of a chief could expect a hefty fine in a court run by representatives of the ruling elite. These fines were readily commuted to farm labor, which was, in effect, bride service after the event’ (Richards 2005: 584). Regular fining kept young cultivators in poverty and dependency:

“rural chiefs intensified control over marriage and reproduction to a point where many young people felt they no longer had any stake in society” (Chauveau & Richards 2008: 520).
The elites used this surplus labor in order to send their own children to become educated. Only the children of chiefs had full rights (Chauveau & Richards 2008: 538). The offspring of the poor had no other choice but to stay in the village, doing ‘community labor’ such as roads and other things mainly benefiting the ruling classes. In other words, an underclass was created, without any ownership, used by the elites to make plantations or roads for the chief. The ones that did not want to remain trapped in this situation were the ones that joined the war. Richards (2005: 585) tells us:

“Abandoned by the state and exploited of their labor through local marriage rules, they were ripe for militia recruitment. They consider the subsequent violence needs no other explanation. Social solidarity collapsed around a forced division of labor”.

In a survey cited by Richards (2005: 575) he tells us that 27% of all fighters that participated in the civil war were farmers and an overall of 85% were rural in background (Chauveau & Richards 2008: 515).

4.2 – Events of the civil war

I will now continue with a short summary of the events of the civil war in Sierra Leone. The first act of the civil war in Sierra Leone took place on the 23rd of March 1991 when RUF/SL entered the Kailahun District from Liberia (Abdullah 1998: 204). This is relevant if we see that Abdullah claims that there was an agreement that Sankoh and his group would help Charles Taylor liberate Liberia and then Foday Sankoh could use Liberia as a base for his struggle (Abdullah 1998: 220). RUF/SL led by Sankoh mobilized the socially excluded youth and formulated a ‘people’s army’ with the objective to overthrow the All-party Congress regime headed by Joseph Momoh. During the 1980’s the RUF/SL enjoyed the patronage of Muammar Gaddafi. The Green Book became the main text among students supporting a popular revolution, it became an equivalent of the Little Red Book among Maoist students in Europe in the 1960’s (Abdullah 1998: 209; Richards 1996: 54; Richards 2005: 572; Richards 2008: 535). Other readings of the RUF/SL were Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and some Marx and Lenin (Abdullah 1998: 209). Muammar Gaddafi’s Green Book is the most relevant since many of the lumpen youth that participated in the war claim that they had received training in Benghazi, Libya.
Opposed to the RUF/SL was the government army (Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force or RSLMF) that was ill-trained and ill-equipped. The RUF/SL used the method of abduction in order to increase the numbers of its members. Some of the abductees participated in the fight only to save their lives but others were intrigued by the movement’s objectives and participated willingly. Soon after the break-out of the war the government army realized that in order to survive this warfare they had to adopt guerilla tactics similar to RUF/SL including recruiting through abduction (Peters & Richards 1998: 184).

In April 1992 a faction of RSLMF consisted by junior war-front officers overthrew President Momoh through a coup. The coup-makers created the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). The objective of the NPRC was to end the war, revamp the economy and put the country to a path towards parliamentary elections (Abdullah 1998: 204). The officers that consisted the NPRC were also part of the same social class that consisted the RUF/SL and both followed a revolutionary agenda. The RUF/SL hoped that the war-front would have radicalized the young officers and that the NPRC would call them to negotiations for an establishment of a government of national unity. Pressures by urban elites on the chairman of NPRC, Captain Valentine Strasser, made him to abandon any ideas for negotiation. In the contrary he was convinced to increase the fighting force of the RSLMF from 2,500 to 15,000 by recruiting many from the social ‘underclass’ that RUF/SL was aiming for its recruits (Peters & Richards 1998: 184). Soon this large force went off the control of NPRC and there have been reports of soldiers and official engaging in the mining of diamonds, the country’s main resource. There have even been reports of RSLMF officers trying to sell weapons to RUF/SL in exchange for diamonds (Keen in Peters & Richards 1998: 185). However, militarily the RSLMF was successful and by December 1993 it managed to isolate the RUF/SL to the borders with Liberia. The RUF/SL had then no other choice but to continue its struggle, now not a fight for power but about survival. With its refute to surrender, RUF/SL, shifted the attention back to the unresolved contradictions of neopatrimonialism and problems faced in the rural slums that had emerged in Sierra Leone’s mining districts (Richards 1996: 52). NPRC’s failure to rethink neopatrimonialism presented for RUF/SL a strategic opportunity (Richards 1996: 52).

After reports of the RSLMF raiding villages in a similar manner as the RUF/SL, local population formulated the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) with most notable the Kamajo that were using traditional hunting ambush techniques in order to fight back both the RSLMG and the RUF/SL. According to Hoffman (2007: 654) it was rather frequent that captured RUF/SL
combatants would get integrated into the CDF. According to the same author the CDF is better thought as the militarization of a particular network of social relations (Hoffman 2007: 656).

By late 1994 the RUF/SL continued its advance by doing hit-and-run raids in order to weaken the economic conditions of the government, to advertise its program and to abduct new recruits. In November 1994 the RUF/SL abducted two British volunteer workers, and the resolution of that hostage case brought them wider publicity and began the process for peace negotiations. In a coup Strasser was replaced by Captain Julius Maada Bio and elections were soon declared. In the meanwhile Bio and Sankoh began discussions in order to achieve peace. In the parliamentary elections the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) won and in the presidential elections their candidate Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah was declared president. Kabbah continued working towards peace with Sankoh. Sankoh and Kabbah signed the peace agreement on the 30th of November 1996.

The RSLMF started demobilizing under-age combatants but RUF/SL and Kamajo were still fighting in the forests of south-eastern Sierra Leone. On February 1997, Sankoh, visited Nigeria, apparently in order to by weapons, but was detained by Nigerian authorities (Peters & Richards 1998: 186). A major event for the continuation of the war took place on 25 May 1997; RSLMF soldiers bombed the main prison of the country’s capital Freetown and freed a number of soldiers that participated in an earlier attempted coup. President Kabbah fled to Guinea and: “the RSLMF mutineers promptly invited the surviving cadres of the RUF/SL to join a new regime headed by RSLMF Major Johnny-Paul Koroma. Sankoh signaled ‘yes’ to the proposal, whereupon several thousand RUF/SL cadres were bussed into Freetown, to begin training and arming urban underclass recruits to a ‘people’s army’ (Peters & Richards 1998: 186)”.

Furthermore the RUF/SL and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) formed a new military regime in Sierra Leone. The AFRC regime survived until February 1998 when the Nigerian-led intervention force (ECOMOG) took over the capital. RUF then returned back to the forest of the Liberian border. Peace was signed between President Kabbah and Sankoh on the 7th of July 1999. When the ECOMOG forces departed in April 2000 the RUF began violating the peace agreement but only until Great Britain intervened in May 2000. The British intervention was a catalyst for the ending of the war.
5 – THE RARRAY BOYS AS SIERRA LEONE’S LUMPENPROLETARIAT

5.1 - Definition of lumpenproletariat and the history of class organization in Sierra Leone

Contrary to Kaplan’s (‘New Barbarism’) essentialist approach who insisted that ‘what was occurring in Sierra Leone was a reversion to underlying primitivisms that are part of these cultures’ (Kaplan in Denney 2009: 154) I believe and I will argue more extensively later on that the reasons for the conflict in Sierra Leone are socially, culturally and historically specific and they would not make any sense outside the context of Western Africa. In this part of the essay I will speak about the shaping of identity of the Sierra Leonean guerillas through social exclusion and class solidarity. Unfortunately, it is not often that one meets the concept of class in the analysis of the civil war in Sierra Leone. However, I tend to agree with Ibrahim Abdullah (Abdullah 1998a; Abdullah 1998b; Abdullah 2005) that the procedures that took place through class structures were fundamental in the shaping of a revolutionary identity. The neopatrimonial state unintentionally created spaces of social exclusion and marginalization for the uneducated and the educated but unemployed youth, then in those spaces their anger found expression and the formation of RUF/SL was on its way.

Firstly I will begin with an analysis of the term lumpenproletariat in order to make clear what I mean when I use it. For Marx the term lumpenproletariat was used in order to cleanse the working class (proletariat) from its marginal and criminal elements. The arguments that Marx uses in order to discredit the lumpenproletariat are usually of moral nature so Thoburn (2002: 439) believes that in order to avoid bourgeois criticism of the proletariat he used the prefix lumpen in order to describe a social underclass what the French call la bohème (Marx 1978: 73). He considered them as a declassed group since they do not participate in any sort of production but are withdrawn in illegal activities (Thoburn 2002: 435). For Marx the most important element that distinguishes the lumpenproletariat from the proletariat is the lack of any productive activity (Thoburn 2002: 443). In this sense for him the “financial aristocracy is nothing but the lumpenproletariat reborn in the pinnacle of bourgeois society” (Marx 1973a 38-39). Engels and Marx consider them as a potential revolutionary force but their relation to the revolution is ambivalent. Engels in his book *The Peasant War in Germany* “suggests that each day of the revolution sees them change positions and is prone to reaction, usually offering their services to the highest bidder. But they can also find themselves involved in revolution, as their lack of stability leaves them easily swept un into revolutionary fervour”
Engels in Thoburn 2002: 444). Marx comments in this aspect of the lumpenproletariat as well “(the lumpenproletariat) was capable of the greatest acts of heroism and the most exalted self-sacrifice as well as, of course, the lowest forms of banditry and the foulest corruption” (Marx 1973a 52-53). In the translations from German to English that Engels did himself, he translates the term as □social scum’, □dangerous classes’, ragged proletariat’, □ragamuffin’, □swell-mob’ and □mob’ (Thoburn 2002: 440). In the other hand the anarchist political philosopher Bakunin regards the lumpenproletariat as a primary revolutionary force. Even though many support that the split between Marx and Bakunin that happened during the First International was because of their disagreement in the conflict of statism/anti-statism (Thoburn 2002: 445). This is partly wrong for the reason that another very important issue was than Bakunin had high expectations from the lumpenproletariat and considered as a class that should be regarded alongside the peasants as the main agents of revolution. Thoburn characteristically tells us:

“Whereas Marx [...] sees the emergence of the revolutionary proletariat as immanent capitalist social relations, Bakunin considers workers’ integration in capital as destructive of more primary revolutionary forces. For Bakunin, the revolutionary archetype is found in peasant milieu (which is presented as having long-standing insurrectionary traditions [...] and among educated unemployed youth, assorted □marginals□ from all classes, brigands, robbers, the impoverished masses, and those in the margins of society who have escaped, been excluded from, or not yet subsumed in the discipline of emerging industrial work – in short, all those whom Marx sought to include in the category of the lumpenproletariat” (2002: 445).

Someone reading this part of my essay might consider my use of class descriptions in an essay regarding a civil conflict in Western Africa as eurocentric. For this reason before entering a more detailed discussion on the position of the lumpenproletariat in the civil war in Sierra Leone, and the role of this position in the shaping of the revolutionary identity, I will engage in a short presentation of the history of the working class in Sierra Leone. Abdullah in his article: Rethinking African Labour and Working-Class History: The Artisan Origins of the Sierra Leonean Working Class presents how a group of workers in the late 19th century Freetown established a union called the Mechanic Alliance and established a journal The Artisan that was published between 1884 and 1888. The journal of the union adopted a radical language of class and promoted values such as liberty and equality (Abdullah 1998: 80). In
other words, what Abdullah tells us is that there is a working-class history prior to the establishment of the colonial state. The reason for the establishment of this union was that the state was unable to fight unemployment for workers and artisans and so people with conflicting interests, in order to protect their means of survival, organizes themselves in the basis of class (Abdullah 1998: 87). In this point Abdullah makes a very interesting notice:

“The fact that citizens of Freetown organized themselves along class lines – as opposed to community lines – indicates the level of development of class contradictions. Consciousness and organization are generally recognized as important signposts in class formation” (Abdullah 1998: 87).

This can be supported further by a colonial officer called J.R. Fenton that Richards (2005: 582) references. This colonial officer in a document on Sierra Leonean customary law describes the Sierra Leonean society as ‘a two-class society comprising several leading families descended from warrior chiefs and enjoying land rights at first comers, ruling over a mass of ‘farmers, strangers and other accretions.’”

The strikes and riots in the iron ore mines in 1950, the demand of the miners for higher wages in 1952 (Abdullah 1998: 208) also point towards this direction; the organization of citizens along class lines to meet their demands is not a new phenomenon in Sierra Leone’s history.

5.2 - The Rarray Boys as Sierra Leone’s lumpenproletariat and the formation of a revolutionary identity

Economist Paul Collier as referenced by Lisa Denney argues that: ‘the war in Sierra Leone took place due to a battle over access to diamonds and that it was this that the rebels ultimately sought’ (2009: 156). Undoubtedly, there is some right in the argument that economic rivalries can complicate and prolong wars but, through the data gathered with ethnographic methods of research, anthropologists have shown that violence is context specific and cannot be approached in a simplistic way (Richards 2005: 11). On the contrary, through my investigation, I have been convinced that violence is not something external to the society but instead it is something that had been underlying for many decades in Sierra Leone before it actually exploded into a civil war. For this reason I will now address to a group that until Abdullah’s publishing did not get as much attention as it probably should: this group is identified as the Rarray Boys. Most of the figures that rose as heroes or anti-
heroes during the civil war had participated in the rarray boy cultural processes. They were known for their anti-social culture: gambling, drugs (initially marijuana, now crack cocaine), petty theft and violence (Richards 1998: 208).

This group was the base of the discourses regarding the revolutionary identity of RUF/SL. They were unlettered, originally lacked political discourse, were mostly absorbed in criminal activities and are described by Abdullah in Marxist terms as the lumpenproletariat of Freetown. In the early 1950’s this culture of marginalized youths started to build up in Freetown. The rarray boy culture played a major role in the formation and emergence of a revolutionary culture in Sierra Leone. This culture in the beginning was not welcomed by the middle-class because the members of this cultural community were generally people of the working class, mostly sea-faring men, dockworkers and road transport workers, as well as some lumpens such as pickpockets and petty-criminals. Their riotous behavior alienated them from the inhabitants of Freetown and they were thought as a good-for-nothing people, best avoided (Abdullah 1998: 208).

By the ‘60s the image of the Rarray Boys was constructed and perceived as: unemployed, uneducated, violent, uncouth, crude and anti-social (Abdullad 2005: 177). This culture was organized around the odelaysi and the potesi. This group of people gathered in those events in order share experiences and speak about their problems and feel the solidarity of people that had the same problems as they did. The entry of middle-class youth in the recreational spaces of potesi and their participation in the carnivals transformed those spaces from spaces for the excluded to spaces for political socialization (Abdullah 1998: 209). Through specific processes, in time those discussions evolved in debates with political content and therefore transformed into “deadly □ weapons of the weak’ in pursuit of a fuzzy political agenda” (Richards and Reno in Abdullah 2005: 174). These communities were created around particular areas and the local masquerades worked like criminal organizations with their own rituals and initiations. Those communal class meetings had as a long-term result that the rage of the marginalized youth that was lacking opportunities to be directed against the neopatrimonial state and its apparatuses. Those class meeting were also fundamental for the creation of a collective consciousness, in the specific case, a class consciousness. Before that, the uncertainty, desperation and rage of those youngsters were expressed mostly through crime. It was through crime that they were able to survive but also to demonstrate simultaneously their deviance against the system.
The great turn on the movement came with the drug culture of the ’70s. The university students came in contact with the marginalized youth and a link for the Rarray Boys to the mainstream were the students. The students in their turn gave great respectability to the culture that was coming from below and adopted many of the rarray boy mannerisms such as specific verbal expressions. (Abdullah 2005: 179). So when this youth dynamic met in the 1970’s the educated middle or upper class college students they were provided with intellectual capital, and created a political discourse and rebellious youth culture (Abdullah 2005:180). This intellectual capital was among others Gaddafi’s Green Book. The Green Book radicalism was thriving in the ‘marijuana dealing ‘ghettos’ of east Freetown, frequented by both students and unemployed urban youth’ (Richards 2005: 572). This had as a result that when the criminal activities of a marginalized youth met with the revolutionary theories provided by the left-oriented university students and created later the RUF/SL that was the movement that operated against the Sierra Leonean government in one of the most brutal ’New Wars’ of the ’90s. In 1977 large student demonstrations led by students who were participants of this rebellious culture took place in Freetown. Those demonstrations were violently repressed by the state apparatuses:

“Armed APC youth and the Internal Security Unit (ISU), formed under presidential command, attacked University of Sierra Leone students in 1977 when they protested against the president and the start of a precipitous economic decline” (Reno 2003: 55).

It was the same year that the students intervened in the political arena with a clear agenda: to push for political reforms (Abdullah 1998: 210).Those students became the most articulate group that opposed the APC regime and called for radical change. Nonetheless, according to Abdullah, most of the students did not participate in the civil war. Richards (2005:575) contests this by telling us that 42% of RUF/SL’s intake were school pupils from rural and urban areas.

6 – THE NEOPATRIMONIAL STATE AND THE LUMPENPROLETARIAT

Class has been regularly discussed within Anthropology of Conflict and African Studies (Abdullah 1998a; Abdullah 1998b; Abdullah 2005; Mkandawire: 2008) even though,
unfortunately, it seems to be still a theoretical subject of secondary priority. In the following part of the essay I will try to provoke the interest towards that perspective of analysis because I find it extremely influential and helpful towards understanding the conditions that lead to civil conflicts. Ideology and class structures were fundamental in the shaping of the revolutionary identity of RUF/SL and therefore in this chapter I will bring together the theoretical discussion of the state with the discussion on the lumpenproletariat towards a better and more holistic understanding.

At this point, I decide to concentrate my efforts in what drew my attention from the beginning and: the rhetoric of the combatants or the ex-combatants often emphasizes a common motive. This motive is corruption, lack of institutionalized education and lack of opportunities that are the result of a non-functioning neopatrimonial state or otherwise the ‘failed state’:

“Time and again interviewees return to the theme of educational aspirations. Economic failure, political corruption and structural adjustment wreaked havoc on educational systems in Sierra Leone. Formal education has not been effective in preparing young people for the economic realities of modern life (Mokuwa in Peters & Richards 1998: 187), and both RSLMF and RUF/SL recruited extensively from the swollen ranks of educational drop-outs hustling for a living in border logging and mining camps (Richards, Reno and Zack Williams in Peters & Richards 1998: 187).

The empirical data provided by Richards and Peters shed light on the case of the ‘failed state’ as a reason for under-aged soldiers to be mobilized. Almost all of them want to return to school to study and most of them are ready to be remobilized if their position once again allows them. In other words, if these youngsters are not provided with the education or the capital in order to be able to rebuild their lives they will be ready to go back to the bush and fight if provided with the appropriate intellectual capital. But once again the state after the end of the civil war is unable to make its citizens’ expectations meet. The testimony of a demobilized youth combatant that fought against RUF/SL is representative of the situation:

“I decided to leave school and go back to my village. It is just because of problems and difficulties. My desire is to be educated. […] my career is to go to school. […] So eventually I heard about this project, and they told me that this project can assist you with school, and help you forget the war. So I was glad to come. But when I
came, and when I saw the situation, I [thought about going] back. […] Because the motive I [had in leaving] Kono was to come and be educated. […] The reason why I took part in the war was because there was no education in our headquarters. Because of the past government, the APC government, the way government maltreated people. […] And the same bad thing with education. […] Most of the rebels are students, the majority are students. […] My first wish to be educated.” (Ex-combatant 5 in Richards and Peters 1998: 196-201).

The same demobilized combatant is speaking later on about recognizing the motivations of the RUF fighters. He understands that they fight against the state for the reason that the: “government doesn’t give a helping hand. They are only bothered about themselves.” (1998: 200) and because of corruption: “If Mr. A. happens to be in the head office [top position], and you, Mr. Z, you don’t know him, there is no political influence between you and him. So when you come with your problem to him, he will not assist you. Only if you are the man who [wishes?]” (Krijn & Richards 1998: 200). This kind of empirical data support the kind of approach I have been making for the civil war in Sierra Leone. Young people belonging to the lowest social classes, have been shaping an identity that has put them in a position opposite to the choices of the neopatrimonial state and the neopatrimonial networks ruling it. Those that were not given the opportunities to participate in the processes of economical and cultural production of the society, the people that were marginalized in the name of private interests and “development”, created through collective processes in the spaces of the potes and odelays an identity of resistance, an identity of revolution towards the reclamation of the capital accumulated by the few. This identity of resistance was present also in the past (Abdullah 1998) but it took its politically violent form through the particular cultural interaction between the violent lumpenproletariat under-class and the more educated left-oriented students of Freetown.

Richards (2005: 577-578) is presenting us more empirical data that support the idea that the youth fought against the corrupt system. He presents a number of statements from anthropological studies in Sierra Leone, among them are: ‘Chiefs withhold benefits meant for the community, resulting in defiance by youths… chiefs protect their own children from doing communal work’, ‘nobody was willing to help the young men… when ministers or the paramount chief visit any village they ask us to contribute rice and money, instead of bringing development… that inspired us to fight… to have justice in the country’, ‘[we]
joined the RUF/SL willingly – seven girls and thirteen boys [in my village] … the main reason was lack of job … and lack of encouragement for youth’.

In the interviews motives of corruption and of the ‘failed’ neopatrimonial political system are visible, also after the end of the civil war, especially in Christensen’s and Utas’s article: *Mercenaries of Democracy: The ‘Politricks’ of Remobilized Combatants in the 2007 General Elections, Sierra Leone*. The article discusses how political parties remobilized ex-combatants in post-war Sierra Leone in order to be used as bodyguards or to mobilize votes (2008: 515). The youth that participated in the war is “re-marginalized, largely unemployed, with minimal possibilities of gaining structural and social security, ex-combatants are frustrated. Against this background, the election was regarded as an opportunity to benefit in ways that the end of the war never offered them” (Christensen and Utas 2008: 523).

Similarly, with no education and no alternatives provided by the state, the ex-combatant youth has no other choice than to stay in the margins of the society, organized in the so-called barracks of Freetown and Monrovia and wait to be remobilized for anyone that has enough money to pay or a good idea to propose (Hoffman 2007: 421).

7 – CONCLUSION

The state as being an ideological thing (Abrams 1977), it is susceptible to subjective interpretation and manipulation. The ideology that allows the state through its apparatuses to reproduce the conditions that are necessary for the continuation of production, is an ideology as produced and reproduced by the dominant class (Althusser 1971). The dominant class of the neopatrimonial political system is a class with interests that conflict with the interests of rest of the classes that consist of the Sierra Leonean society (Bøås 2001). For this reason they produce an ideology that justifies the unequal distribution of resources within the society. When the ISAs fail to reproduce this ideology convincingly or if there are too many contradictions, and the cultural conditions allow it, the subordinate people adopt ideologies that conflict with the dominant one in order to resist or even overcome the violence of the state (Abdullah 2005). In this sense we first have an ideological conflict of different class interests and then this conflict results in a physical war. This happens because it is ideology that comes before all action. The shaping of those ideologies take place through collective processes. In Sierra Leone, a country with a long tradition of class organization those processes took place within the potes and the odelays, places were the urban unemployed,
poor and petty criminals would meet to discuss and have a good time. When this lumpenproletariat, as Marx and Abdullah would say, started interacting with the radical university students of Freetown, the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone started forming.

Today after the war has finished, the social situation has not changed much. Eight years after the end of the civil war, Sierra Leone remains one of the poorest places on earth. The numbers are tragic: the world’s least developed country, maternal mortality rates are the world’s highest just as mortality rates for the under-five year olds, life expectancy in only a little over 40, almost two-thirds of women are illiterate and over 70% of Sierra Leoneans get by on less than 70 American cents a day (Economist 13/12/2008, Vol. 389). This data give the impression that the local elites have not changed much after the end of the conflict.

After many reversals the Repressive State Apparatus managed to control the state in Sierra Leone but unfortunately not many things have changed on a social level. The ex-combatants live marginalized in the outskirts of Freetown and Monrovia ready to go and fight when they are needed. Not necessarily for a “greater” cause or towards a radical reformation of the society they live in but instead they want to fight since it is the only way to earn a living. The state does not provide them, the society has send them to the outskirts of the cities but the networks they established or strengthened are still there, waiting to be utilized when someone has either the money or the motivation to mobilize them again. The question that comes naturally on my mind and I guess to many that are interested in African issues is whether or not there has finally come peace to this corner of the earth, after more than 75,000 people have died and 1/3 of the population of the country has been displaced. Unfortunately, in my opinion, the answer is that the fight in Sierra Leone is not finished. There are socio-cultural processes taking place in the margins, and those processes will return as an Aborigine boomerang back to the faces of those that sent those people in the edge of the society, with no future to hope for, organizing themselves in class networks.

In conclusion, I believe, that as long as the people controlling the production and reproduction of the ideology of the state, the heads of the neopatrimonial networks exercising political power in the country, continue to accumulate more than they need and fail to redistribute vertically and therefore fail to manage a relatively harmonious existence between ruling and ruled, violence will continue being expressed by those that feel excluded. This has
happened in the past and will possible happen in Sierra Leone, not only because the formal state seems to be unable to proceed in an advancement of the Westphalian legal-rational state-model, but also because the local patrimonial networks are unable to function as they are supposed to; by redistributing resources as favors to the people that respond with their loyalty to the local elites. For as long as the rural populations will be subjected to a form of informal slavery and the urban populations will have to turn to illegal activities in order to survive, always there will come a historical and cultural moment that will shape a counter-ideology, an ideology of resistance against the oppressing classes.
REFERENCES:


- Transparency International ([http://www.transparency.org/about_us extracted on 01/04/2010](http://www.transparency.org/about_us))
The discussion on Indirect Rule was not always present in Anthropology. Asad criticizes Fortes, Evans-Pritchard and Fallers by saying that “Even when later anthropologists began to refer to the colonial presence as part of the local structure they generally did so in such a way as to obscure the systematic character of colonial domination and to mask the fundamental contradictions of interest inherent in the system of Indirect Rule” (1973: 109).

“Odelays are masquerades organized by youths in specific neighbourhoods. Introduced by liberated Africans from Yorubaland in the nineteenth century, they were later appropriated by marginal youths in the mid-1940s. They are arguably the most popular form of urban leisure for Freetown’s marginal youths” (Richards 2005:173).

“The word Pote comes from the Temne – one of the two major ethnic groups in Sierra Leone – word an-pot. It was originally a place to relax after a hard day’s work. The American word, Ghetto, is now used to refer to these popular rendezvous created by rebellious youths to use drugs, listen to music, and just talk!” (Richards 2005: 173).