

DIAMONDS AND WAR IN SIERRA LEONE: CULTURAL
STRATEGIES FOR COMMERCIAL ADAPTATION TO ENDEMIC
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

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PREFACE

Although this thesis is the product of a structured PhD programme undertaken at University College, London, from 1994-1998, it builds upon my own experience of the West African diamond industry gained between mid-1992 and mid-1994. During this period I was employed by a small Anglo-Nigerian mining company that hoped to operate in southeastern Sierra Leone. My responsibilities in this capacity were varied and included the management of hardware and prospecting and mining supervision. This experience provided a valuable insight into the mechanics of the industry and the sociopolitical environment within which it functions. Doing business was neither easy for me nor for the company for which I worked. We had arrived in the immediate aftermath of a military coup and in the midst of a bitter internal war. A large proportion of the internal population had been displaced and the economy was on the verge of collapse. In the interior, rebel insurgents waged an unpredictable guerrilla war – there was no front line, merely shifting foci of attacks on predominantly civilian targets. My employers had gambled the success of their venture on the ability of an authoritarian, militarised regime to strategically and tactically counter what was, at the time, considered to be nothing more than a rag-tag, politically-confused band of disaffected and marginalised drop-outs. As time progressed and internal security steadily deteriorated in the face of the half-hearted efforts of the government army, it became clear to me that both my company and the state had gravely misjudged the situation. Throughout 1993, the insurgency gained ground and began to directly threaten the area in which my company worked. Investors grew nervous and the flow of operating capital so vital to any business began to dry up. By the beginning of the following year the business rapidly descended into insolvency and in February 1994 ceased trading.

Shortly afterwards, I returned to the United Kingdom somewhat preoccupied with my lack of understanding of events in Sierra Leone. What was the war about and who exactly was fighting it? These questions, in time, came to be answered by scholars with specialist knowledge of the history and sociopolitics of the country and, in particular, Professor Paul Richards, whose bold and provocative book *Fighting for the Rain Forest* (1995) became the axis of academic debate concerning

the context and dynamics of the conflict. I was fortunate to meet him shortly after returning to the United Kingdom and we were soon in agreement as to the highly important role of diamonds in the war. As a former diamontaire, another question continued to perplex me. How were some people, even in the midst of high insecurity, able to continue successfully trading diamonds, while others, my company included, failed? Rather unexpectedly, Professor Richards proposed that this question form the focus of a doctoral thesis. After some encouragement, for which I am indebted, I accepted the kind offer of his supervision and assistance.

The work began with a consolidation of my knowledge about the diamond industry in Sierra Leone and how it ties into the global market. Although well-versed in the technicalities of extraction and the day-to-day running of a small open-cast mine, there were significant gaps in my understanding of what Janet MacGaffey calls the "real economy" of the industry or, in other words, the true articulation of its official and parallel aspects. I decided that a good starting point would be to create some sort of portrait of participants, in order to establish exactly which groups are involved and how they interact with each other. I knew that in effect, small foreign ventures like my own were probably of negligible importance in relation to annual national production. It was also apparent that this group of participants suffered the greatest failure rate. What I knew from my own experience of mining in Sierra Leone was that the core of the industry was controlled by highly politicised and ethnicised local groups and alliances of capital-holding Lebanese diaspora. Clearly identifying these distinct sets of players would provide a foundation for the construction of a multi-site ethnography.

During the compilation of a working bibliography, I discovered that many West Africanist scholars often tended to group the Lebanese diaspora together as a single unified community. I knew this was a mistake -- I had met both Muslim and Christian Lebanese in the diamond fields and had noticed significant differences in sociocultural characteristics. I was, of course, not the first to have done so. H.L. van der Laan, writing in the 1960s and 1970s, conducted research into the make up of the Lebanese community in Sierra Leone as part of detailed studies of the economics of country and diamond industry at the time.

Van der Laan's work has been an important primary source for this thesis. As a lecturer in Economic Organisation at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, from 1959 to 1971, he became interested in the role of the Lebanese in the economy of Sierra Leone. In 1965 he completed *The Sierra Leone Diamonds: an economic study covering the years 1952-1961*, an account of the diamond rush following the deregulation of the industry in 1956. Between 1969 and 1971 he undertook research for a second book that aimed to study Lebanese commercial activity "not in isolation but against the backdrop of the economy of Sierra Leone as a whole". Although an economic analysis, the book, *The Lebanese traders in Sierra Leone*, published in 1975, provides, in part, a valuable ethnographic description of the various distinct communities that *en masse* constitute the "Lebanese diaspora". I used these data as a starting point for an examination of their social and political articulation in relation to the diamond trade. Van der Laan's fieldwork, like mine, consisted of systematic observation and interviews. Further details of my methodology will be given below.

I then focused on the identification of the principal groups of land-possessing local elites who, in the course of time since the discovery of diamonds in Sierra Leone, have controlled varying degrees of access to potential mining sites. It is around these chiefly hierarchies and their relationship with the State and Lebanese diaspora groups that the industry operates. This highly dynamic articulation, in constant flux, is a central theme of the thesis.

With a research strategy in mind, I returned to Sierra Leone in November 1996. Fieldwork was generously funded by the Overseas Development Administration. My arrival coincided with a cease-fire between government and insurgents, but this was short-lived. In consequence, research was carried-out in war-time conditions which, not surprisingly, imposed certain constraints on movement and access to individuals and information. However, although the security conditions under which data were collected were unpredictable, the research plan was more or less adhered to. On return from the field, shortly after the May 1997 coup, neither I, nor my supervisor, felt that data were lacking in any specific area.

The work is a multi-site ethnography and required a high degree of mobility. This was achieved by local air transport and, conflict permitting, bush taxi. The research was arranged around a series of many round-trips, continually moving between various regional settings and social groups. This was necessary to create an accurate picture of industry and commerce in the highly adverse circumstances of a peace process degenerating into all-out civil war. In respect of this, it should be remembered that the work is intended to provide a contextualised overview and analysis of a specific period of industrial history.

Systematic observation and interview formed the basis of the fieldwork. Interviews were conducted in both informal and formal settings. Because of the nature of the environment in which work was carried out, and the continued conflict in Sierra Leone, it has been necessary to preserve the anonymity of many of my informants. In other instances pseudonyms have been used. In most cases, formalised interviews were noted long-hand *in situ*, typed-up and faxed back to the United Kingdom as quickly as possible. The original copies were then destroyed to preserve confidentiality. In some cases, a dictaphone was used. Where this is the case, complete transcripts of conversations are reproduced in full. Typically, these conversations were of a less sensitive or less traceable nature and were thus unlikely to compromise the personal safety of individuals had they been misappropriated. In informal situations where valuable information was passed on to me in confidence, I had no alternative other than to commit facts to memory for reproduction as accurately as possible at the earliest opportunity. Again, these would be faxed back to the United Kingdom and the originals destroyed.

A wide variety of informants were interviewed. In the mines, forty eight labourers and their foremen were questioned in a total of twelve different sites. In the diamond buying offices of east and southeastern Sierra Leone twenty two diamond dealers were formally interviewed. At least twice this number were engaged in informal conversations and chats throughout Sierra Leone and later, during my evacuation, in Monrovia, Liberia. Twenty seven formal interviews were conducted with local, diamond mining elites in a number of locations and again, many more insightful conversations took place on *ad hoc* bases. Another eighteen interviews took place with a range of individuals with

interests in the industry, including politicians, exporters, civil servants, members of the armed forces and expatriates. The assistance of expatriate relief and development workers was also greatly valued. Without the help, hospitality, openness and friendship of these crucial informants the work would not have been feasible.

Finally, all that remains is to express my gratitude to all those that have helped and encouraged me with this project. In particular, the support and encouragement of family has been a great source of inspiration. Professor Paul Richards (UCL) assisted by Dr Barrie Sharpe (UCL) and Professor Phil Burnham have been of enormous assistance and their input is greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank all the other friends and academic colleagues who have helped me for the duration of my work and it is to them, and the people of Sierra Leone, that I dedicate this thesis.

Caspar Fithen 1999

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ABSTRACT

West African trade is highly ethnicised to ensure commercial success in the face of adverse environmental conditions and lack of basic institutions. The maintenance of trust and the enforcement of contracts are, as elsewhere, key elements in the pursuit of sustainable enterprise. Building on core literature that examines both the use of ethnicity in trade and the nature of African clandestine trade, the thesis addresses the ways in which social groups construct solutions to problems that arise in high-risk settings. The work focuses on the Sierra Leone diamond industry and is organised in chapters that describe the major market players and their tactical approaches. There is particular emphasis on how these systems have changed over time, identifying the gambits used to extract diamonds.

Beginning with the introduction of the 1956 Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme, the thesis traces the emergence of Lebanese Shi'ite and Maronite competition in the Sierra Leone diamond trade, and extends through the period following the 1991 Revolutionary United Front incursion. In the face of political turmoil and virtual State collapse, industrial participants have been obliged to formulate flexible, locally-specific strategies to ensure commercial success. As diamonds have become scarcer and more dangerous to find, the sectarian Shi'ites have shown greater effectiveness in weathering adversity than their rivals.

The thesis then examines the strategies of local-born players in the trade. As Kono, the principal diamond field, has become overworked, the market axis has recently shifted to the more southerly, Mende controlled, Tongo and Zimmi regions. Competition in these areas between a coalition of northern-based soldiery and youth, and the Mende-aligned *kamajoisia* militia, has been the cause of protracted conflict since mid-1997. *Kamajoisia* fighters, under social obligation to mine without the prospect of immediate pay, have succeeded in maintaining production for elite groups when investment capital has been non-existent. This militia domination has radically altered the industrial landscape. Lebanese participation has become highly condensed while militaristic multi-nationals have failed to expand to their expected potential.

Threats to the present *status quo* remain from those excluded from both society and from legitimate access to resources. Reconstructed ideologies that address local grievances will continue to attract support as regional imbalances of wealth and poverty increase with time. Politically powerful networks of non-Mende elites will also seek to undermine diamond-related power in the south. Duplicitous in affiliation and seeking their own portion of a global market they are likely to pursue disruption at all levels, condemning Sierra Leone to a foreseeable future of sporadic violence.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADMS	Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme
AFRC	Armed Forces Ruling Council
APC	All People's Congress
CAST	Consolidated African Selection Trust
CCMS	Co-operative Contract Mining Scheme
CDF	Civil Defence Force
CPC	Consolidation of Peace Commission
CSO	Central Selling Organisation
DDR	Disarmament Demobilisation and Resettlement
ECOMOG	(ECOWAS) Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EO	Executive Outcomes
GGDO	Government Gold and Diamond Office
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MADA	Mining Area Development Association
MNRRR	Ministry of National Reconciliation Rehabilitation and Reconstruction
NDMC	National Diamond Mining Corporation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
NUP	National Unity Party
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
PA	People's Army
PEER	Public Emergency Economic Regulations
RSLMF	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SIEROMCO	Sierra Leone Ore and Metal Company
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLST	Sierra Leone Selection Trust
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNPP	United National People's Party

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE AIM OF THE THESIS

This thesis is a study of recent developments in the Sierra Leone diamond trade. Specifically, it examines the ways in which sociocultural resources are utilised by groups in the pursuit of economic advantage under conditions of high insecurity. Since independence in 1962, political, social and economic conditions in Sierra Leone have steadily deteriorated. In 1991, a new phase of post-post-colonial turmoil began. A violent insurgency by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) commenced in that year, and continues to the present day, crippling institutions and infrastructure and displacing a significant proportion of the national population. Described as a “complex political emergency” by aid and relief organisations (Bradbury, 1995), the crisis shows little sign of abating. Sierra Leone has a history of violence traceable to the slave trade. Cross-border raiding and smuggling episodes have built upon that legacy in more recent times (Richards, 1996). Other factors underpinning the violence include the capitalist exploitation of natural resources rooted in the colonial period (Reno, 1995, 1998; Zack-Williams, 1995), the subsequent emergence of a post-colonial one party system of patrimonial government (Hayward, 1989; Luke & Riley, 1989) and the effects of kleptocratic military autocracy (Kandeh, 1996; Richards, 1996; Reno, 1995, 1998). An unprecedented, if not unique pattern of endemic conflict has built up in this climate of extreme political dereliction (Riley, 1996, 1997).

The pattern of violence in Sierra Leone has followed a meandering course, often contradicting theoretically-grounded understanding of small wars (see Nordstrom, 1992; Foltz & Bienen, 1985). Initially, the RUF, led by former soldier and political activist, Corporal Foday Sankoh, sought to confront the stultifying political patrimonialism of the All People’s Congress (APC) one party state (see Fyle, 1994). Early RUF activity was quite clearly politically driven. But in the course of the conflict, transitions in motivation have taken place. Richards (1996/8) has argued that after the movement became embroiled on the Liberian border in 1993, the RUF began to develop a “secular sectarianism” and take on some of the character of an “enclave” (cf. Douglas, 1993). Most recently, political factors have begun to contribute an ethnic dimension, and patterns of violence have begun to show alarming similarities to the Liberian civil war (Ellis, 1995; Huband, 1998). An imperfect electoral process in

1996 brought to power an ethnically-aligned Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). A peace accord between this administration and the RUF was signed in November 1996. However, the uncontrolled expansion of an SLPP-loyal militia, reflecting the party's ethnic and regional support base, and the increased marginalisation of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) from the peace process, assured its failure. Rapid ethnicisation of the political arena, and the violence generated by this in consequence, culminated in the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) coup d'état of 25th May 1997 (Riley, 1997). The results of this event were catastrophic for the country. The capital, Freetown, and many provincial centres were sacked, as an alliance of the RUF and AFRC-loyal elements of the military waged war on the SLPP heartland of the south and SLPP-associated militia, the Civil Defence Force.¹

It is against the back-drop of this world in uproar that research was undertaken and it would be impossible to understand recent patterns of development in diamond commerce without trying to understand the war. The central aim of this thesis, in fact, is to understand how different commercial groups fare in the midst of these incredibly adverse circumstances, and how they continue to conduct business, not only among themselves, but also with the outside world. Diamond mining in Sierra Leone began under colonial government authority in the late-1930s [see Chapter Two], but since the introduction of the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme (ADMS) in 1956, legitimate private mining has been permitted to greater and lesser degrees. The onset of war in 1991 disrupted this enterprise, but as successive governments and regimes have come and gone, the output of diamonds through both illicit and legitimate channels has continued. This study examines how the industrial process has been sustained (remarkably) through this period of great insecurity and socio-economic hardship.

The diamond industry is maintained by four principal groups of players. There are currently three principal diamond fields in the country which attract major interest [see Map 1: p.15]. In the east of

¹ The CDF began as a series of locally-organised civil defence groups using tactics associated with local hunters (*kamajo*, pl. *Kamajoisia*, lit. "master of mysteries" in Mende). The newly-elected SLPP dominated government converted these defensive groups into an irregular force to carry the fight to the RUF while peace negotiations were taking place. Having made large inroads into RUF defences, the force was reorganised as a quasi-official national civil defence militia at the end of 1996. The CDF includes "hunter" groups from non-Mende speaking regions, but the earlier damage to the RUF was done by units formed and recruited in the Mende-speaking south and east of the country.

Sierra Leone, Kono is the largest and most well-known. The area is the homeland of the Kono people, who have played a leading role in the exploitation of the region. In the south-east of Sierra Leone are the Tongo and Zimmi fields, both areas situated in territory controlled historically by Mende-speaking groups. Joining these two land-owning groups as major players are two diaspora communities, both of Lebanese origin. The Shi'ite Muslims and the Maronite Christians have filled roles of urban-based traders since their arrival in Sierra Leone at the turn of the century. These two capital-holding groups have been heavily involved in the trade and export of diamonds since their discovery.²

The four groups under examination constitute diamond-controlling elites. However, the levels of control that each of these exercise over the industry have been by no means stable. Influence over deposits and access to international and domestic markets is continually contested by competitors. In consequence, political and economic relationships between the groups are in a constant state of flux. The thesis will show that key historical and contemporary factors all contribute to the complex fabric of current industrial articulation in Sierra Leone.

Mining and trade undertaken by the Kono and Mende ethnic groups is organised principally by chiefly patrimonies. The foundation for this substantial degree of hierarchical authority is the durability of traditional elite hegemonic jurisdiction over key aspects of land tenure and inheritance. For both groups, crucial distinctions between the "ownership" and "holdership" of land determine an individual's right of access to potential mineral deposits. Typically, "ownership", and thus the right to mine and dispense concessions, is limited to the relatively few elite lineages able to demonstrate (or invent) a plausible historical role in the clearance and settlement of land (cf. Bledsoe & Murphy in Kopytoff ed., 1987). These land-owning families are usually either the acknowledged ruling houses of chiefdoms or the descendants of pre-colonial, militarily successful warrior castes. Using land as a currency of patronage, these elites support a dependant class of "land holders", a much larger social group that engages primarily in agriculture and subsistence farming. In general terms, the relationship between land holders and land is limited by customary law to cultivation. Although under lease, which may often be hereditary, the land and minerals that it may contain remain the property of the owner. In this respect,

² Involvement has been both legitimate and clandestine.

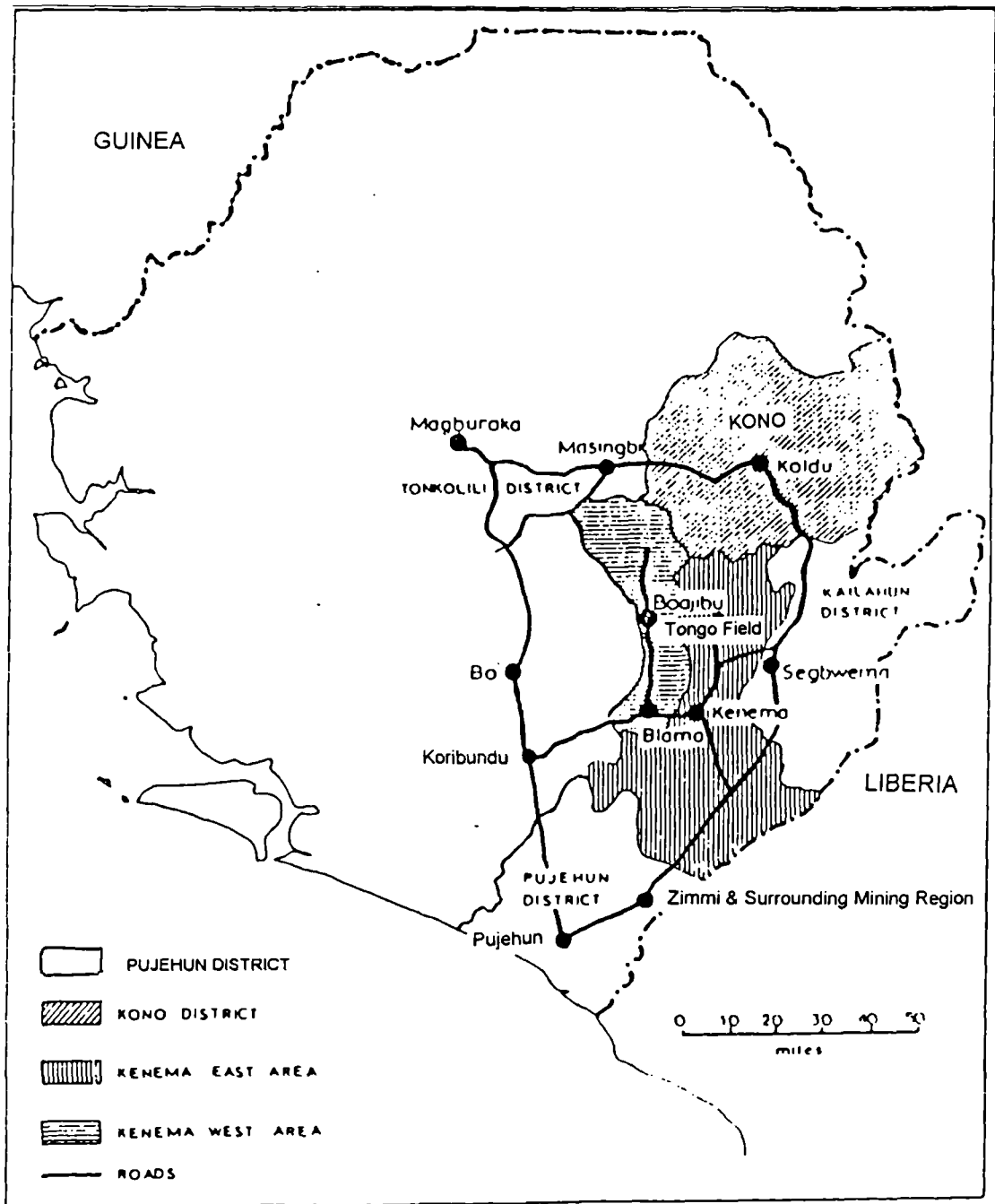
the socio-economic power of elites is preserved, contributing to the maintenance of their role as regional administrators, thus generating important political links to colonial and post-colonial state institutions. A more complete examination of the oscillation of these relationships will be made in Chapters Five and Six.

Operating in conjunction with these land-owning groups are the two Lebanese diaspora. The Maronites and Shi'ites, through largely successful produce enterprises during the early part of this century, developed international trade networks and amassed adequate merchant capital to enter the nascent diamond industry in the mid-1950s on competitive terms. Their role has essentially focused on financially "supporting" mining and marketing production. Over time, both groups have attempted progressively to increase their domination over vital, yet highly exclusive, access to the global diamond market. The extension of this economic influence has directly empowered both communities politically, particularly during the post-colonial period. This empowerment has afforded each group the capability to pursue various proactive, community-oriented agenda in their countries of settlement and origin.

The thesis centres on relations between these four distinct groups of diamond players, looking in particular at the gambits used to extract diamonds. The particular focus is on how communal ties are used to construct or patch together solutions to problems that arise in the high-risk settings outlined above. As this analysis unfolds, it will become clear what particular combinations of political and sociocultural factors each group tries to exploit to yield success. The resultant complex inter-communal system operates at different levels of economic interaction, and is rationalised in a variety of ways by individuals as well as by social groups. At micro level, a "small-time" diamond digger might struggle to protect personal and family financial interests, but at macro level, entire diaspora communities compete in wider (geo)political manoeuvres. Solution-finding, by drawing upon resources of communal identity, is a dynamic process and there will be particular emphasis on how various strategies relevant to diamond extraction and trade change over time. In view of this, the study builds on literature that examines both ethnicity in trade and the nature of African clandestine trade in historical and contemporary senses.

MAP 1

SIERRA LEONE SHOWING LOCATIONS OF PRINCIPAL
DIAMOND FIELDS



1.3 THE APPROACH

Understanding how humans solve the daily problems of social interaction is (or should be) a main target for social analysis (Boissevain, 1974). The resulting patterns of interaction are not, of course, limited to individuals, but extend also to partnerships, alliances and communities. Each social unit is faced with obstacles that require careful negotiation and analysis -- life for people in contemporary Sierra Leone under the harrowing conditions described is no exception. In any war-ravaged society, simple, everyday problems in peace-time can become critical matters of life and death. Making choices is central to solving problems. These choices are made with reference to the available information to which the choice-maker has access. In effect, particularly in adverse circumstances, every shred of information -- environmental and cultural, tangible and abstract -- has to be combed for relevant content.

This study is concerned with how choices and solutions present themselves in everyday life in a war zone. The approach is ethnographic. The thesis approaches the data from social, economic and political perspectives, but culture remains the contextual core. In considering the world of diamonds in Sierra Leone, and associated environmental flux, analysis draws up several, theoretically related, sets of ideas. Choice, and ideas about choice, provide the foundation for analysis.

1.4 RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

In any form of commerce, material transaction cannot be separated from social interaction. Deals may be made with friends and partners, but deals are also made with complete strangers, the deal itself being the basis for a social relationship. Deals between individuals in a regular social relationship may be characterised as a reciprocal exchange of rights and obligations within a rigidly defined framework of moral sanction, but by no means always. Confidence tricksters play on the false security that social relations generate, using the unilateral assumption of moral sanction as a vehicle for exploitation. In other words, people get "stung" by others they think they can trust. In an analysis of trade, and particularly an analysis of trade in an environment of war, assumptions that individuals act in strict

accordance with the rules and values of their society is theoretical folly. For diamonds in Sierra Leone, at least, theoretical considerations are less than “street wise”.

When asked for a definition of business, a Maronite informant laughingly replied, “that’s easy, it’s just one man ripping off another”. This may sound simplistic, but, in the “attack trades”³ associated with war-zone commercial adventurism, it has a stark reality. War-zones have no Small Claims Courts. A smooth commercial career is determined by the ability of an individual or group to implement “common sense”, “common sense” being (retrospectively considered) the derivation of the maximum benefit from the minimum input of resources. Rational choice theory is an analytical model concerned with “common sense”, treating social constituents as particularistic entrepreneurs manipulating environmental and cultural factors for their own benefit.

The theoretical origins of rational choice theory can be traced to the asocial assumptions of neo-classical economics. Adopted by economic anthropology in an attempt to understand economic decision making in pre-capitalist societies, it was criticised for lacking the social context in which material transaction always occurs. However, as this debate extended, Firth (1967) and the formalists defended neo-classical economic theory, arguing that, with adequate modification, it was sufficient for the analysis and interpretation of all economies on the basis of the universal influence of market forces. Opposing this position, the substantivists, like Polanyi (1968), questioned the applicability of broad economic laws concerned with advanced capitalist and post-capitalist economies to pre-capitalist formations. By the early-1970s though, the argument began to lose momentum rapidly as anthropologists studying trade and commerce (see Cohen, 1971; Meillassoux, 1971; Curtin; 1971 et. al.) emphasised the importance of the social context in which economics functions. Instead of seeking distinct heuristic devices for application to separate types of economy, theoretical direction moved towards the development of a conceptual framework for the analysis of the complex mesh that interconnects economies with societies. For this reason, rational choice theory, with its association with asocial neo-classical economics has been largely rejected by anthropology as a useful analytical model. Ultimately, it was accepted by anthropologists (but not necessarily by economists) that these linkages exist in an extremely wide

³ The phrase comes from the Biafran conflict (cf. Richards, 1996/8)

variety of contexts, and that all economic activity is deeply embedded in sociocultural and political foundations, exerting a complete range of forces that lie outside the market domain.

These non-market forces are, of course, the rights and obligations exchanged within the rigidly defined framework of moral sanction that has been described above. But what happens when this framework undergoes extremely sudden change? The onset of war, in societal terms, gives rise to this kind of transition almost instantaneously, leaving individuals and groups no alternative other than improvisation in the context of environmental interpretation. It is in this kind of social turmoil that “common sense” suddenly becomes a matter of, quite literally, life and death. In view of this, the thesis considers the merits of rational choice theory for understanding the mechanics of critical decision making in war-zones. Although considered by many to be obsolete, rational choice theory was not entirely abandoned by anthropology, and some culture-based reworkings of the model were made. Boissevain (1974) used rational choice as the basis for a critique of structural-functionalism, arguing that structural-functional models of society failed adequately to describe the harsh realities of self interested human behaviour. He writes (1974: 9):

“Instead of looking at man as a member of groups and institutional complexes passively obedient to their norms and pressures, it is important to try to see him as an entrepreneur who tries to manipulate norms and relationships for his own social and psychological benefit. ... Social configurations such as coalitions, groups, institutions and society must be seen as networks of choice-making persons competing for scarce and valued resources. Neither interdependent individuals nor the particular configurations which they form can be considered separately from each other. The interrelation between the two is dynamic, and forms a process with an inherent momentum and development of its own. Pattern, process and momentum must be viewed as the cumulative result of decisions made by persons interacting with each other who are faced by similar constraints.”

This thesis uses Boissevain’s “interactive” view of rational choice as a potential starting point. It is acknowledged from the outset that the traditional, economic version of rational choice is inadequate for anything approaching a full analysis of the reality of commerce in West African internal conflicts. And

it will be shown that the pervasive influence of culture cannot be ignored, and that culture is more than just another marketable asset. But rational choice still has utility as an heuristic device. There is a sense -- it will be suggested -- in which trade under high levels of socio-economic insecurity and political unpredictability is so volatile and rapidly evolving that participants are "thrown back" on bare essentials of rational choice from which they are always seeking to rise to richer and more culturally embedded modes of interaction.

1.5 CULTURE THEORY

Rational choice tells us that essentially self-interested agents use "common sense" to exploit networks favourably to achieve goals. This in itself is a useful heuristic insight for the purposes of this study, but on its own leaves many questions unanswered. There is no absolute definition of what "common sense" is, but most people in the world I examine would probably agree to apply the label to whatever brings the user the maximum possible benefit from a decision making process. Questions remain, however, as to the nature of this decision making process. What, for instance, are the influences and constraints that shape the way choices are presented? And do these choices belong to a single continuum or a series of definite stages or spheres requiring, under detailed examination, different sets of analytical tools?

Common sense is clearly a cultural phenomenon, but processes of analysis from which common sense is derived vary enormously from society to society. Latour (1987) illustrates this point with the story of a post-PhD party in the Ivory Coast that goes horribly wrong. The party takes place on a beach, and the Ivorien host warns revellers not to venture into the sea because of the unforgiving rip curl that habitually claims lives. A French anthropologist ignores this advice, goes swimming and quickly gets into trouble. The Ivorien host dashes into the water, manages to save the French drunk, but the moment the anthropologist is saved, the rescuer is dragged back out to sea and drowned. Latour, not surprisingly, is furious with the anthropologist and his lack of common sense and holds him entirely responsible for the tragedy. The anthropologist is stricken by guilt at the realisation of his foolishness. Elders from the drowned Ivorien's village arrive and begin an analysis of events. Questions are asked of the Frenchman and of the corpse, which by now has washed up. Latour quickly realises that the elders

have absolutely no interest in the foolishness of his colleague but, instead, after exhaustive enquiry, pin the blame on a distant aunt of the victim. She stands out in their analysis as a constant weak link and malice is suspected. This, of course, is also complete common sense. The matter is closed but this judgement is of little solace either to Latour or the anthropologist.

The examination of numerous anomalies of this nature has given rise to a range of social science theories about how to relate probabilistic events via chains of “cause” and “effect” Beginning with the infrastructural determinism of Marx and Engels (Selsam and Martel, 1963), a materialistic trend has unfolded through a variety of analytical areas like dialectical materialism (see Harris, 1980), and, importantly, ecological determinism. A separate line, often traced through Durkheim, attempts to demonstrate that cultural phenomena obey identifiable and discoverable sets of laws directly related to determining social factors (Douglas, 1986, 1987). In the context of this study, and picking up on the story above, this kind of cultural determinism has its origins in key and specific elements of social organisation and the constraints and influences that varying forms of social organisation exert upon individuals. Indeed, it is a claim of neo-Durkheimian theory that the “individual” is a product of society and not the other way around. These critical components, or “systematic features” (Richards, 1996/8) directly influence the ways in which individuals and communities assess their environment, construct ideational systems and evaluate opportunities and threats (see Douglas, Gasper, Ney & Thompson, 1998).

In the context of the present study, there will be specific analysis of the way in which features of social organisation shape cultural strategies for dealing with specific problems that arise when diamonds are mined and traded in circumstances of high insecurity. Much of the action described in the study takes place in the “bazaar-style” economy described by Geertz (1979). In a discussion of this work, Appadurai (1986: 42) notes that:

“Much of the institutional structure and cultural form of the bazaar is double-edged, making reliable knowledge hard to get and also facilitating the search for it. It is tempting to conclude that such complex and culturally organised information mazes are a special feature of bazaar-style economies,

and are absent in non-market, simple economies as well as industrial ones...bazaar-style information searches are likely to characterise any exchange setting where the quality and appropriate valuation of goods are not standardised.”⁴

Markets like this are commercial mine-fields. If considerations of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, along with classifications and perceptions are shaped and influenced by determining factors of social organisation, how are choices made and problems solved in the streets and diamond pits of Sierra Leone? And what happens when all these factors combined are simply not advantageous in this environment? In business, as the Maronite informant said, there are winners and losers, the losers being the people who make the wrong decisions. Thus (as stated) the proposed strategy of the thesis is to examine how far in the radically “simplified” conditions of “hit-and-run” war zone diamond trade we find ourselves returning to the idealised simplicities of rational choice. But, as we shall discover, losers belong to sides and factions. “Winning” and “losing” reflects cultural as well as individual fortune. So even in war, culture and community play a part, and quickly reassert themselves after the most damaging reduction to basics. However, even cultural theory does not cover all aspects. There are also “tacit” -- unspoken -- dimensions to what works and what does not. To grasp the tacit we must enter the particularistic context of practice.

1.6 PRACTICE THEORY

The individual is likely to operate within a certain, culturally determined framework. This framework, however, must be linked to specific tangible problems that individuals experience. It is in the complex and intricate linkage between action, values and operation that we need to understand problem resolution. Practice theorists (cf. Bourdieu, 1979) argue that the mechanics of this process depend as much on the context of specific situations and the action generated by the solution-finding process as on the influence of experience and cognition. Hardin (1993) sees this as “an examination of what individuals do, the choices they make and the rationale for their choices. Looking at individuals in this

⁴ Diamonds are not a homogenous commodity. De Beers sort rough diamonds into about 8000 different categories, each with its own price in dollars per carat. Making money in diamonds requires this knowledge and the skill to “move” stones between categories, thus increasing profits. In the Sierra Leonean bush, diamonds are traded as parcels – a variety of stones sold as one lot. The value of the parcel is determined by an average price, giving substantial room for price negotiation and profiteering.

way reveals the process by which change occurs over time in at least two ways: when tensions between individual interests and socially held values are resolved and rationalised in the contingencies of everyday situations, and when individual interpretations of situations change.” Essentially, the process “self-references” with the culturally determined features discussed above and acts through procedure and routine rather than by careful adherence to explicit and external programmes (see Giddens, 1976, 1989).

Richards (1996/8) sees practice as a process that is kinetic rather than formalistic and believes that the “mental maps we accumulate moving through environments serve as a kind of abacus for our practical operations”. There are many applications of this idea in the bazaar-style economy operating in the Sierra Leonean diamond industry. Individuals may not be able to describe a cross-town route by street names, junctions and roundabouts, but when undertaking the journey themselves they identify points of reference like a certain tree or house that holds important significance in their own cartographic interpretations of direction. Decisions are made in the same way and are often undertaken in ways that defy conventional descriptions, but this not to say that they are in any sense “irrational” or “ineffective”.

Culture theory and practice theory, therefore, are important additional components in any full theory of agency in trade incorporating rational choice, and in combination with the “rational choice theory” known to economists, gives us a potentially adequate framework for the analysis of trade strategies. However, we must always understand that “rational choice” enlarged with cultural and practical understanding is no infallible guarantee of success. War is an intense flux. Mistakes will be made, even by the best informed and may not be the fault of the individual choice-maker, but instead result from inherent weaknesses in choice-making processes. In other words, when things go wrong for individuals and communities, the problem may really lie deep at the heart of their interactive and discursive cultural understandings. As the thesis will show, Christian Maronites have lost ground in the diamond fields not because they are bad or “irrational” businessmen, poor at making market decisions, but because vital features of the organisation of their community are no longer suited to, or effective in, the environment in which they operate. This has greatly affected their ability to compete in Sierra Leone. If long-term community interests are in conflict with short-term profit, it may be time to move on.

1.7 GLOBALIZATION

Practice theory shows how, by relating context and action, we can attain a more plausible understanding of how culturally determined factors shape the formulation of decisions and solutions. But can these two elements, context and action, be further expanded? In the uncertainty and unpredictability of a recession-weakened state like Sierra Leone, the influences of globalization (Waters, 1995) and creolization (Hannerz, 1987, 1982) form a significant part of context and constitute important theories in their own right. The international diamond market is truly global in nature, functioning as a vast network linking a high point of Western retail consumerism (the jewellery trade) with markets and industrial activity in areas of peripheral and clandestine commerce. In Sierra Leone, market players negotiate with teenage guerrillas in remote regions before jetting into sophisticated European cities to trade their goods. For the more successful, life is split between the dust and dangers of denuded scrubland and five-star hotels in Antwerp -- these traders claim to feel equally comfortable in either location. For those at the bottom of the industrial ladder, access to the wonderland of Bollywood remains readily available even when state services and institutions have almost entirely ceased to function⁵. In the insalubrious mining capitals of Eastern Province, Sierra Leone, African diamond dealers arrive for business, having travelled thousands of miles by road from Angola. Trips such as these are made regularly to chase particular types of diamonds for which there is market demand⁶. Richards (1996/8) has described the effects of globalization in the Sierra Leonean conflict at length. These themes will be picked up and reiterated specifically in the context of diamond industry and market-place.

1.8 PERFORMANCE

Finally, the general framework for the study requires some comment on social performance. Attention to performance is especially significant in settings where institutions are weak, or where there is no

⁵ see Richards (1996/8, Ch. 5) and Daniels (1992)

⁶ Information is passed between these so-called "Maraka" traders on market developments from Zaire to Guinea. Traders group together, buy a car and utilise impressive levels of geographical knowledge to move from one mining region to the next. Diamonds and cash may be hidden in vehicles or buried in secret locations to retrieve on return journeys (Interview, Kono, 26/02/97). "Maraka" is an ethnonym employed in Sierra Leone to designate long-distance, Manding-speaking West African traders mainly from the Senegambian region (cf. Dyula).

settled institutional architecture. Competence in performance is key in the diamond industry, indeed, as it is in Sierra Leone more generally (Cohen, 1981; Hardin, 1993; Richards, 1996/8). Widespread understanding of the dramaturgy of power certainly shapes the way in which many individuals operate and make decisions. Roles are played out to the end, often with disastrous results -- living beyond one's means and conspicuous consumption is typical behaviour in diamond mining communities, with rising debts written off against "tomorrow's" finds (see van der Laan, 1975).

Dramaturgical concerns are by no means limited to the political elite. Among indigenous social groups in Sierra Leone, "big-manship" is a closely observed art; action and behaviour are as carefully stylised in village performance as in a Masonic Lodge (cf. Cohen, 1981). With the rise of the civil militias in the diamond districts, new forms of performance have emerged. An example points the way. At the beginning of fieldwork in Sierra Leone in 1996, it was noted that members of the Mende hunters' militia, the *kamajoisia*, utterly refused to be photographed in their colourful and distinctive tunics for fear that magical amulets sewn into the garment would be rendered powerless. However, by mid-1997, after the militia had won several victories over both the RUF and the RSLMF, the merest hint of a camera would have *kamajoisia* arranging themselves football team-style,⁷ brandishing weapons like Rambo, frowning menacingly (in a dramatic sense) and demanding several "snaps".

1.9 THE LITERATURE: THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SETTING -- SUB-REGIONAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Contemporary forms of West African trade have their origins in two distinct spheres. Meillassoux (1971), identifies an Atlantic trade and an interior trade. The Atlantic trade was primarily predatory in nature, directly serving Europe and the New World in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Goods, produce and raw materials were mined, hunted, collected and captured for direct export. Slaves were traded as a commodity for immediate capital realisation on delivery abroad. The interior trade, however, was more complex, requiring the transport of merchandise over wide areas of geographical, political and economic space. Linking the Maghreb with the West African sub-region, trans-Saharan trade

⁷ This is also an obvious example of the effects of globalization.

routes were the basis for a vibrant exchange. The states of the interior utilised enslavement as a means of production, rather than merely as a means to procure a potential trade item. Warfare between rival political entities enabled agrarian classes to amass surplus for trade, because as shown by Fage (1978), this form of domestic slavery had its greatest economic impact on heads of households rather than on kings. Early European travellers like Park (1799;1969) noted that a large proportion of all production, other than that which fell within caste monopolies, was undertaken by slave labour in the Niger River region towards the turn of the nineteenth century.

The subsequent collapse of the Atlantic slave trade in the first half of the nineteenth century had an enormous impact on the social, political and economic structure of the region. Warrior elites, deprived of their sole source of income, experienced a decline in their power as networks of Muslim Marabout traders quickly filled the commercial vacuum. Islam, exported from the Maghreb (Cohen, 1971) gave entry into a vast network that provided physical support and logical explanations for new environments. Producing-class support for the new traders grew as Islam offered the foundations for an alternative trade-oriented social system removed from the direct authority of traditional elites. The Holy Wars conducted by Samory and El Haj Umar during the mid-nineteenth century cleared the way for an infrastructure of trading networks in the interior which compensated for the economic drop-off of the Atlantic slave trade (Davidson, 1964). Coastal states hitherto reliant on this market were compelled either to radically shift their commercial-orientation or face decline. For example, the Kingdom of Dahomey made a successful transition from the export of slaves to an Atlantic trade in palm oil. By using slaves as a means of production, rather than as produce, the elite *status quo* was maintained. Similarly, the Ashanti state was forced to expel Hausa kola traders in a protectionist policy to preserve state controlled trade routes to the Sahel (Meillassoux, 1971). In general, however, important social and political change was inevitable as the balance of interdependent relationships between slavery and production changed radically. Economic demands for cost effective and more specialised labour helped spark off an increased level of social integration throughout much of West Africa.

In the forest societies of the Upper Guinea Forest zone as described e.g. by Richards (1996/8), Hardin (1993) and Little (1967) the relationships between village communities, slavery and production have

been central to the dispersal and settlement patterns of various ethnic groups. The labour-intensive requirements of the Western Forest zone staple, rice, lead to an emphasis on articulation of co-operative labour by young people under the authority of village elders, somewhat independently of family and lineage. These key elders -- often leading officials of so-called "secret" societies -- who are neither family heads nor chiefs, typically exert significant control over political resources in village communities, and have tended to block the kind of effective trade in commodities found in the forest zone to the east. Finding alternatives to Atlantic slavery under these conditions has not been easy and the strong influence of institutions of secrecy remains marked in rural areas today. But if the "hidden" rural elite have tended to hold back the kind of cash crop production that developed, in say, Ghana, their institutions of secrecy tend to be rather well "pre-adapted" to the more shadowy world of diamonds.

1.10 STRATEGIES FOR LONG-DISTANCE TRADE IN TIMES OF WAR AND INSECURITY

Scholars have identified several key modes of trade functioning in West Africa. Systems tend to be enduring, each tracing its origins to the period of pre-colonial uncertainty described above. This is perhaps why systems have adapted well to the political and economic turmoil besetting the sub-region in the post-colonial period. Perhaps the simplest example of this are the trading "expeditions", initially observed as arising during the Biafran War in the late-1960s, known as the "attack trade" (see Richards, 1996/8). This style of trade often emerges in situations of conflict when produce and trade-items are particularly scarce. "Amateurs", like petty-trading women, skilfully exploit their status as probable non-combatants to exchange key goods across front-lines. Immediate cash profits are not generally calculated in advance. Instead, bartering and cash transactions take place in improvised market-places -- rates of exchange are determined on the spot, load for load, reflecting an opportunistic orientation. But even in the most extreme environments of social upheaval, common trading ethics will often be upheld to preserve future potential markets for the mutual benefit of those concerned. But if some attack trade can be seen as a constructive adaptation to crisis (Richards, 1996/8), the asset-stripping "sell game" between rebel and government soldier in Sierra Leone described by Keen (1995) constitutes a clearly predatory variation. Meillassoux (1971) suggested a distinct trade existed in the

exchange of materials required for the production of export goods. This direct exchange becomes the source of manufacturing profit. On the basis of this model, war can be viewed as an extreme form of trade, in which goods like diamonds are exchanged internationally for merchandise like arms and narcotics. During 1997, a secret flight linking Kenema, the Mendeland diamond capital, with Bamako, was laid on once a month for this purpose.⁸ Tongo Field diamond barons, bank-rolling the arms and ammunition supply to the anti-RUF *kamajoisia* militia, made night-time flights to trade with Mandingo arms traders in Mali. Similar cross-border enterprises between the RUF and Liberian militias ULIMO⁹ and NPFL¹⁰ have continued unhindered throughout the course of the conflict.

“True” commerce, however, occurs when goods are traded for an exchange-value allowing the generation of a profit which may be converted into capital. Thus we might perceive two distinct variants of the attack trade, distinguished by transactional form, namely barter and purchase. Attack trade involving purchase requires sophisticated webs of economic intelligence gathering and highly organised systems of transport, distribution and storage, whether legitimate or clandestine in character. Merchandise is controlled directly by merchants or agents, and the flow of goods passes through “networks” or “relays”. Relays are identified by the subordination of trade to transport requirements, limiting traders to different “ecological” environments (Meillassoux, 1971; Curtin, 1971). Agents located along the length of a trading route distribute goods deposited at market stages by a continuous flow of merchants.

Networks are more complex and may incorporate relays into the process of distribution. Individual merchants specialising in specific trade-items convey goods along their own unique trading networks, establishing staging posts along the way. At these locations agents acting on behalf of the principal merchant take up distribution, often employing relays to do so. A suitable example in the context of this study is the role of major Shi’ite exporters transporting diamonds to Antwerp for other Lebanese diaspora producers. The diamonds may be destined for different markets, in this instance any of the hundreds of buying offices in the Belgian market-centre, so a Shi’ite shipper may be met at Antwerp

⁸ Personal observation, Kenema, 01-05/97

⁹ United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy

¹⁰ National Patriotic Front of Liberia

airport by several agents or brokers acting on behalf of clients who remain in Sierra Leone. Distribution will then take place to relevant market destinations. It should be remembered that agents are usually experienced local operators, whereas the merchant, by definition, is “alien and cosmopolitan” (see Mitchell, 1962). Vitaly important at all stages of these trade systems, are the preservation of trust and obligation, often achieved through kinship, affinity or clientage, and the maintenance of flexible credit facilities to encourage and sustain long-term economic growth in trade and production. This thesis will develop the notion of an elaborated, exchange-value dependent form of attack trade for diamonds, with apparent high durability, and one factor in the protracted nature of the Sierra Leone crisis.

In the greatly varying circumstances of the market-place there are four forms of transaction. Producers may trade goods with producers on the basis of use-value alone¹¹. Militia fighters who have illicitly dug diamonds will pass this merchandise onto a specialised trader (a diamond dealer).¹² This producer-to-trader transaction gives the diamonds immediate exchange-value, and the potential for profit and conversion to capital. The diamond dealer may sell these goods on to an exporter, thus preserving the exchange-value and increasing profit and capital potential. Between militia fighters and jewellers there will be a myriad of trader-to-trader transactions as the goods pass through a series of wholesale, manufacture and retail markets. The jeweller, the final link in the trading network, will sell to the consumer, and at this point the diamonds regain a use-value, as an item of adornment (see Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986).¹³

Material culture debates about the nature of commoditisation have some relevance in an understanding of the nature of transaction and trade in the Sierra Leonean diamond industry (e.g. Mintz, 1986). But as noted, however, this study is primarily ethnographic in orientation and is focused on an examination of the ways in which people organise themselves to exploit and trade diamonds. In this respect, it should be remembered that the thesis is principally concerned with the socio-political “mechanics” of industry and commerce and not the cognitive and cultural practice of producing a marked, valued commodity.

¹¹ Straight-forward attack-trading – common in border regions suffering conflict [see examples of RUF/ULIMO trade above].

¹² After heavy fighting for control of Tongo Field, renegade RSLMF troops sold illicitly dug diamonds to Shi'ite dealers in Kono [see Chapter Six].

¹³ See Chapter Two for a detailed description of the global diamond network.

No doubt further research into a material culture of diamonds, addressing the interrelationships between local and global notions of aesthetics, symbolism and culturally acquired value, is definitely needed, but is set aside for the time being. The priority of this thesis is to describe how the attack trade for diamonds has evolved and how it works under conflict conditions in Sierra Leone since the RUF invasion was launched on March 23rd 1991.

1.11 ELEMENTARY ASPECTS OF DIASPORA ORGANISATION

This study undertakes a detailed examination of two trading diaspora of Lebanese origin: Shi'ite Muslims and Christian Maronites. In Sierra Leone both social groups have traditionally participated in long-distance trade, importing goods from Europe and the Levant and exporting natural resources, in particular diamonds, to market foci in Europe, the United States and the Middle East. Characteristically, diasporas are culturally and socially distinct from their society of origin and the societies in which they have settled. Cohen (1971) writes that "diaspora organisation combines stability of structure but allows a high degree of mobility of personnel. It has an informal political organisation of its own which takes care of stability of order within the one community, and the co-ordination of the activities of its various member communities in their perpetual struggle against external pressure. It tends to be autonomous in its judicial organisation. Its members form a moral community which constrains the behaviour of the individual and ensures a large measure of conformity with common values and principles. It also has its own institutions of general welfare and social security. In short, a diaspora is a nation of socially interdependent, but spatially dispersed, communities."

It should be remembered that the organisation of efficient relays and networks for the successful conduct of long-distance trade requires finding solutions to a series of technical problems: "the regular exchange of information about the conditions of supply and demand between traders; the speedy dispatch and transport of goods, particularly those that are perishable; the creation and maintenance of relations of trust between the large numbers of traders and intermediaries who are involved in the chain of the trade and the creation of regular credit arrangements without which the trade will not flow; the organisation of an efficient system of arbitration and adjudication in business disputes; and the

development and maintenance of an authority structure which is backed by sufficient power to enforce order and respect for contract and for judicial decisions” (Cohen 1971; see Meillassoux, 1971). Cohen (1971) and Curtin (1984), see the ethnicisation of long-distance trade as the most effective means of overcoming these immediate problems, agreeing that the development of a high degree of ethnic control can only be achieved through successful and continued competition with other social groups. In Sierra Leone, Shi’ites and Maronites have shared trade and resources, but as global recession has exerted pressure on the political-economy of Sierra Leone, competition has developed between the two groups, especially in the diamond sector, which has been overworked and under-regulated by successive clientelist regimes. In line with other societies engaging in external trade, relations between Lebanese diaspora groups and ruling elites in Sierra Leone have often been contractual and occasionally conflicting. Network access to external markets and the ability to distribute has, in the post-colonial period, greatly empowered sections of both trading groups and, on occasion, tempted community trading-figures to make direct interventions in the political process in Sierra Leone (see Reno, 1995; van der Laan, 1975).¹⁴ As transitions in politics of demand have occurred, tensions between indigenous political elites and the two “alien and cosmopolitan” trading diasporas have often been extreme. This thesis updates the work of Cohen and others on trading diasporas in Sierra Leone and elsewhere in West Africa by asking, “how well do diaspora values work in conditions of war?”

1.12 THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

The thesis thus concerns itself with contemporary diamond mining in Sierra Leone. The action takes place in an environment more unstable and unpredictable than at any other time this century. The means of trade has been historically shaped, both by indigenous groups and diaspora, and adaptations have been made to cope with changing markets and commercial settings. The environments in which mining and trade take place today have been misrepresented in some quarters (cf. Kaplan, 1994) as regions of political and economic chaos – a peripheral limbo far beyond comprehension in the Developed World. Richards (1996/8) refers to this willing incomprehension as New Barbarism (supporting a neo-Malthusian world picture). New Barbarism may play well on the news stands as the

¹⁴ See Chapter Five.

Millennium approaches, but it passes up the opportunity to understand the core mechanisms of crisis. The ancient Chinese were wiser; for them, crisis was the union of two separate and distinct concepts -- change and opportunity¹⁵.

The nature of today's diamond mining in Sierra Leone has been shaped by a dynamic, political and economic continuum, constantly testing the adaptive and competitive skills of its participants.¹⁶ However, some of the primary forces that have driven these commercial transitions have their origins in fundamental aspects of sub-Saharan post-colonial state formation. The growth of the clientelist state has been central to a pervasive rationale of commerce, relating directly and reflexively to the exercise of power itself. Admittedly, in the post-colonial universe, political power tends to precede economic power, but the latter soon becomes a highly effective means of preserving and maintaining the former.

The deterioration of official, regulated post-colonial political economies has been rapid (see Gilbert & Gugler, 1982; Medard, 1982; Sandbrook, 1982). Their decline has seen the emergence of huge parallel political economies -- misappropriation, under-development and economic decline have been the driving forces for vibrant economies that remain invisible from official scrutiny and record. In the late-1980s, the IMF estimated that only 3% of internal ECOWAS¹⁷ trade was documented, the rest occurring in informal transactions far outside state control. Importantly, however, this economic domain must not be seen as a separate entity from official activity. Instead, the two are intrinsically linked, functioning in symbiosis to create income-generating opportunities for individuals and entire populations (Hart, 1973). This is no "marginal" informal sector, but the lifeblood which sustains even the most dysfunctional of states.

So here, the term "parallel" economy is preferred to informal sector. Parallel economies serve political elites well, not only in areas of their own financial activity but also in their control of subordinate social groups. Schatzburg (1988) has shown that much of this elite control has been oppressive, generated by a

¹⁵ See Sun T'zu, *The Art of War*, Wordsworth, 1995. Written around 400 BC, the work served as the theoretical foundation for Clausewitz's thesis *On War*

¹⁶ A detailed country-specific analysis of these processes is made in Chapter Two.

¹⁷ Economic Community of West African States.

dialectic of resource scarcity and economic insecurity, determined by a triple helix relationship of state, class and ethnicity. This triple helix is a contextual variable -- a social field in which political and economic actors elaborate and implement strategies of access and dominance in bids to develop control over the means of production and consumption. The tenure of administrative and bureaucratic positions in government are often short-term contracts between favoured individuals and political groups, giving rise to the "politics of the belly" described by Bayart (1993: 238): "[T]he celebration of the 'cargo cult' of the post-colonial State, which is by definition inegalitarian, affords the dominant actors the means of vociferously defending their material interests whilst at the same time laying claim to the highest ideals of development and public order. In this sense the 'politics of the belly' is truly a matter of life and death. Life -- if one succeeds in taking one's part of the 'national cake' without being taken oneself. Death -- if one is forced to make do with a hypothetical salary that will only feed the family for the first three days of the month."

In essence, this forms the origins of a kind of new political economy of post-modernity. The work of Bayart and Schatzburg, however, describes a post-colonial Africa that has now entered a phase of often devastating upheaval. The old Zaires, Rwandas, Burundis and even Sierra Leones appear now to be historical oases of stability and calm. In the conclusion to his *The State in Africa*, Bayart tentatively forecasts an impending trans-continental hurricane by asking whether "one may also wonder whether Black Africa isn't on the point of changing register and entering one of those periods of upheaval around which history is woven from millennium to millennium." With the benefit of hindsight, in this case less than a decade, these were prophetic words, made in full appreciation of the implications of the end of the Cold War for sub-Saharan Africa. Post-colonial states were able to maintain an approximation to Weberian notions of modern statehood, but today, in many places, this is no longer the case. Secession, fragmentation and enclavism are socio-political forms that have expanded to fill vacuums created by annually shrinking budgets, reduced aid packages and the mire of debt. It seems that at times an increasingly cynical West is prepared to support any leader, regardless of character, affiliation or ambition, merely to preserve some kind of financial if not moral accountability. When the dead skin of the post-colonial state is sloughed, radical replacements often confound United Nations or World Bank notions of economic and political credibility. In some desperation, or inability to

comprehend, military intervention becomes the last resort. Operation Restore Hope, an attempt to force stasis upon Somalian inter-clan conflict, ended in failure for the United Nations, and as a débâcle for the United States military. The world's most sophisticated army was forced to dig in on a beach, tentatively venturing out to patrol the central streets of Mogadishu. The subsequent deaths of a relatively few US servicemen nevertheless shifted American public opinion against any further interventions in Africa. More recently, alleged British Government complicity in the "Sandline Affair"¹⁸ has led to intensive public enquiry, threatening the credibility of politicians and civil servants alike. Richards (1996/8) has noted that Kaplan's polemic was required reading for US Embassies around the world, the roots of a great misunderstanding that continues to endure -- a failure to comprehend crisis and a pervasive fear of something called chaos. Diamond mining in Sierra Leone is undertaken against this very post-modern background. Certainly, there is a crisis of society but as this thesis will suggest it is not necessarily chaos. Bayart clearly demonstrates that in Africa, politics are as fundamentally banal and explicable as anywhere else, exclaiming "let exoticism be damned". This is also the standpoint adopted in this thesis. In diamonds, in Sierra Leone, and surrounded by war, traders profit, cope, compete, diversify or fail. What is of interest is to understand how.

1.13 CLANDESTINE TRADE

In all studies concerned with the social realities of modern and post-modern Africa, economic survival and individual or group advancement remain core themes. To fully understand economic activity undertaken by individuals, partnerships and alliances, a "real" or holistic perspective must be adopted. A "real" economy encompasses realms otherwise considered illegitimate as well as legitimate. Thus we try and deal here with White, Grey and Black sub-economies to produce a fully textured picture (cf. the important, pioneering work of J. MacGaffey, 1991). It was noted above that in African states, small, decaying official economies are shored up by often vibrant parallel economies perhaps far exceeding the

¹⁸ The Sandline Affair was a serious cause of embarrassment to the British government after allegations were made suggesting that elements of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office assisted in the organisation of mercenary operations on behalf of the ousted Sierra Leone government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. Initially surfacing in the national press in mid-April 1998, the issue persisted for some weeks and was eventually subjected to a full Parliamentary Enquiry conducted by an appointed member of the bar. The enquiry subsequently became "The Legg Report". After exhaustive analysis, the House of Commons accepted that there had been failures in communications between the FCO and diplomatic staff in Freetown and Conakry (see British Press, various, May – June 1998).

formal sphere in size (Hart, 1974). Important activities, often completely unrecorded in national accounts, are commonly overlooked or disregarded in conventional economics. MacGaffey (1991) argues for an inclusion of these activities consisting of: “i) legal production of goods and services concealed to avoid taxes or other charges; ii) production of illegal goods and services; iii) concealed income in kind, which includes the profits of barter; iv) other income opportunities that are illegal or in some ways deprive the state of revenue.”

Commercial activity in the Sierra Leonean diamond industry falls into all four of MacGaffey’s categories and thus is properly considered a flourishing clandestine economy. No more than 15% of annual diamond production passes through official export channels, and much of this production will have been illicit anyway¹⁹. The parallel networks and relays through which diamonds flow are maintained by a complex and integrated sector of commercial roles that facilitate the exploitation, trade and movement of this commodity. MacGaffey (1991:157) sees many African States as “mercantilist” meaning states in which the economy is governed by politics not by markets, and where entry to the market is restricted not free. De Soto (1989) says of Peru: ‘The *raison d’être* of the mercantilist state was to redistribute wealth according to its fiscal and political interests and thus to encourage, discourage or prohibit different economic activities or agents’²⁰. This is certainly true of Sierra Leone. A central factor in the evolution of the mercantilist post-colonial Sierra Leone state is the issue of access to, and dominance of, the clandestine diamond sector (Reno, 1995, 1998; Richards, 1996/8; Zack-Williams, 1995). Mercantilism is by definition political. A mercantilist state that is predominantly diamond-based will tend, inevitably, to reflect aspects of the way the global diamond market is organised. In this market, access at all levels is restricted, making access, both legitimate and clandestine, a commodity in itself. But it is a commodity with political implications; indeed, political dimensions. “Access” is what political elites in Sierra Leone peddle. State licence (open or covert) is the basis on which political power rests. Diamond mining in alluvial deposits in Sierra Leone is technically simple. The commodity itself could not be simpler to handle physically (a pocketable, tiny piece of “broken glass”). What is complicated is how to manoeuvre in a complex moral landscape to gain the right to open a hole in the ground, and retain control of what it yields.

¹⁹ Interview with informant from Government Gold and Diamond Office (GGDO), Freetown (31/01/97).

1.14 WAR IN SIERRA LEONE

Since March 23rd 1991, the Sierra Leonean diamond industry has functioned in an environment of low-intensity conflict. This section examines the history of the war as a background for commercial activity. The early part of the war is now relatively well documented (Riley, 1996; Bradbury, 1995; Richards, 1995, 1996; Atkinson et.al., 1992). A résumé of this period is given below, followed by a summary of events occurring after the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord in November 1996 witnessed during research. These latter data are, in effect, a chronology of the failure of the peace process and collapse in trust and faith between the RUF and the democratically-elected SLPP. My ethnographic observations thus relate to the functioning of the diamond industry during a period in which the war revived after a temporary lull. The fragility of the political process, revealed by its collapse, has been fundamental in changing the shape of business and decisively altering the social landscape for those involved in diamonds.

On the 23rd March 1991, a group of 30-40 Sierra Leonean dissidents, supported by Liberian and Burkinabe mercenaries, crossed over the border into Sierra Leone from Liberia. Their point of entry was Bomaru,²⁰ Kailahun District. Another party entered some days later over the Mano River Bridge²¹ from Bo Waterside, pushing up into Pujehun District²². The RUF/SL, as the movement described itself, received material and financial support from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) as part of the warlord's long-term strategy of creating a Greater Liberia, a territory that would encompass south-eastern Sierra Leone's mineral and forest resources.²³ The expressed intentions of the movement were to overthrow the APC government of J.S. Momoh and stem the perceived patrimonial asset-stripping of the nation's natural resources. The influence of foreign cadres²⁴ favoured Renamo-

²⁰ Malema Chiefdom

²¹ Sorogbema Chiefdom

²² Towards Potoru, Bari Chiefdom

²³ Taylor also hoped that the destabilisation of Sierra Leone would preclude further activity by the RSLMF section of the ECOMOG contingent in Liberia (see Riley, *Liberia and Sierra Leone, Anarchy or Peace in West Africa?*, in *Conflict Studies*, No. 287, February 1996 and Ellis, *Liberia 1989-1994, A Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence* in *African Affairs*, 1995, 94, 165-197.

²⁴ Liberian and Burkinabe mercenaries – see Brehun, *Liberia: The war of horror*, 1991

style guerrilla tactics²⁵, coercing local support through arbitrary torture and killings.²⁶ The conflict rapidly descended into abject brutality as the RSLMF quickly adopted a “no prisoners” policy towards all those suspected of RUF membership. Ultimately, the merciless attitude of the government forces had the counter-effect of encouraging many brutalised and disgruntled youths to throw in their lot with the RUF (Richards, 1996/8). Sporadic violence was directed at remote rural settlements and the burning and looting of villages became commonplace, creating a problem of internal displacement as civilians sought sanctuary from the fighting (see Bradbury, 1995).

Nigeria’s General Babangida, a personal friend of J.S. Momoh, dispatched two mechanised infantry battalions to Sierra Leone, forming the basis of an ECOMOG contingent, similar to that operating in Liberia. Overall command of this force was placed in the hands of the Nigerian field commander in Monrovia. These troops were joined by a small number of Gambians and a larger force of Guineans sent by President Lansana Conte. Conakry grew increasingly concerned about the threat of the incursion spreading to the diamond fields around Kankan, Kissidougou and N’Zérékoré. As the war progressed and gained momentum, this initial corps was substantially reinforced. At its fullest strength, the ECOMOG contingent numbered around 14,000 personnel. Nigerian and Guinean troops remain active in the country today, and make a significant contribution to SLPP state authority.

The spokesman of the RUF made himself known through Taylor’s satellite telephone to the BBC World Service. Foday Sankoh, a northerner from Magburaka in Tonkolili District, and ex-Signals Section RSLMF corporal, had been implicated in a coup against President Siaka Stevens in 1971. Imprisoned for seven years, he began a small photographic business on release. He worked both in Bo, and in Segbwema, Kailahun District, taking advantage of business opportunities in the diamond fields. It seems that during this period, Sankoh continued to harbour political ambitions influenced by student Pan-African movements like PANAFU. It is known that Sankoh took some part in a Bo-based reading group studying Colonel Gaddafi’s Green Book. At some point during the early-1980s Sankoh travelled

²⁵ See K.B. Wilson, *Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence in Mozambique*, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.18, No.3, Sept. 1992.

²⁶ See Amnesty International Report, *Sierra Leone, Human rights abuses in a war against civilians*, 13/09/95.

to Libya to receive guerrilla training in Benghazi (Richards, 1996/8). There is a possibility that he may have met Taylor during this visit. Sankoh underwent training in North Africa at a time when political disaffection with the APC in south-eastern Sierra Leone was peaking. A local rebellion, the *ndogboyosoi* movement, was launched in response to local political oppression perpetrated by senior members of the Momoh government against Mende opposition [see Chapter Four]. The movement was violently put down by the army, but as Richards suggests, dispersed elements were still drifting in the bush as the RUF entered Sierra Leone in 1991. Some of these individuals made not unwilling recruits, even though RUF stock-in-trade was to coerce abductees.

The RUF grew rapidly and made more daring forays into the interior. Young fighters, encouraged by promises of a Gaddafi intervention,²⁷ gained ground against the under-trained and unmotivated RSLMF. By early-1992, the position of the APC in Freetown was deteriorating. Rampant clientelism and administrative inefficiency made the position of those RSLMF troops actually engaging the RUF increasingly difficult. Low morale plumbed to new depths and discipline began to break down. On April 25th 1992, a delegation of junior officers returned to Freetown to protest at conditions at the front. Whether through confusion or intention, the soldiers found themselves launching a coup. Momoh fled. Appointing Captain Valentine Strasser as their Chairman, they declared themselves the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) and suspended the constitution (see Zack-Williams & Riley, 1993).

To consolidate its position, the NPRC adopted political arguments borrowed from the RUF in its initial campaign in the interior. It endeavoured to appeal to a youth support-base and in its early phase was largely successful. Young people were recruited to take part in clean-up campaigns of Freetown and major provincial centres; road maintenance was undertaken by volunteers and a proposed rehabilitation of the health and education sectors was directly supervised by the Supreme Council of State.²⁸ However, the position of the RUF remained unchanged. Initially, it was widely believed that a peace agreement might be negotiated, but powerful elements in the Freetown community, backing Strasser, the first ever Krio head of state, urged the NPRC to crush the rebellion. RUF excesses of violence against civilians

²⁷ Gaddafi, according to recent press reports, bank-rolled the RUF.

²⁸ Opala, J.A. 1993. *Ecstatic renovation!: street art celebrating Sierra Leone's 1992 revolution*. Freetown.

effectively excluded it from any power-sharing agreement. The NPRC, now assisted by the Taylor-opposed, Liberian refugee-based militia, ULIMO, greatly expanded and reequipped the army, seeking a decisive military solution to the crisis. The expansion of the army involved drawing in elements of the urban youth underclass that might have otherwise looked to the RUF. Strasser invested in military hardware as the RSLMF tried to launch a series of offensives against the RUF. The RUF reacted by attacking the Kono diamond fields in eastern Sierra Leone. The strategy was a clear attempt at depriving Freetown of potential diamond revenue that would be invested in the NPRC war-machine. Kono fell to the rebels in September 1992 and was only recaptured by the government after two months of bitter fighting. Under RUF control, Kono was sacked and much of its industrial plant destroyed.

In Freetown, the NPRC was under enormous pressure from the continued threat of a counter-coup. Political survival became a day-to-day struggle and culminated in early-1993 with the extra-judicial execution of an estimated 29 former APC figures.²⁹ Imprisoned at the time, they were accused of being the ring-leaders of an alleged counter-coup and charged with treason. This act alienated the Strasser regime from the international community after an initial “honeymoon” and, in an act of contrition, the Vice Chairman, S.A.J. Musa was relieved of office and sent to Britain to study International Relations at the University of Wales. During this period of political crisis, the RUF regained ground in the east and by late-1993 had re-captured Koindu, Kailahun and Pendembu, securing a strategically valuable territory that spanned the borders of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. From here it could control a lively trade in smuggled and looted goods, generating vital capital. In Kono, elements of the RSLMF outside the NPRC circle of patronage began diamond mining in earnest. The mining centres of Sefadu, Koidu Town and Yengema were cleared of civilians and, it is said, entire regiments started to dig. Once again, army morale and discipline began to fall apart – under-trained troops recruited from the slums of Freetown were reluctant to take the fight to the enemy in the bush. Before his enforced departure, Musa had created units of specialist trackers and scouts to harry RUF encampments and patrols. Raised from the specialist Koranko hunting societies of Kabala, Koinadugu District, these paramilitary groups became one element in the wider emergence of civil defence forces reflecting

²⁹ Some accounts suggest there may have been as many as 40 people executed by firing squad at Hamilton Beach after cursory tribunal hearings.

RSLMF failure to protect the rural public and its property [see Chapter Six]. Seemingly, RUF penetration into diamond-rich Kono in late-1992 showed some degree of collusion by Momoh-loyalists in the RSLMF, with both groups engaging in a strategic stand-off to facilitate diamond mining, in the one case to support the revolutionary struggle, in the other to ensure the personal enrichment of officers threatened by loss of Momoh patronage.

By early-1994, the NPRC was failing to deliver on political and economic promises made in the aftermath of the coup. Disgruntled RSLMF battalions were abandoning their barracks for the potential riches that lay in the bush. The NPRC had also been rocked by a series of financial scandals, the majority of which concerned illegal shipments of diamonds.³⁰ The RUF was quiet for much of 1994, recovering its strength and changing tactics, but it started to expand from secure forest camps in the early dry season 1994/95, launching a series of hit-and-run raids all over the country. Units based in the Kangari and Malal Hills attacked roads between Freetown and the east. In November, two British VSO workers were taken hostage during a raid on Kabala, bringing international notoriety for the rebels. In December 1994/January 1995, a fresh RUF offensive was launched on towns in the north and west: Makeni, Bombali District; Mile 91, Tonkolili District; Bo and Kambia were all attacked. Local leaders were murdered and children kidnapped to be trained as fighters. The situation was becoming desperate for the NPRC. The RUF had grown substantially in size and had established at least six permanent bush camps throughout the south and east from which it could launch raids. Multi-national bauxite and rutile mining sites were destroyed and Freetown came directly under sustained threat.

Informal contacts between the NPRC and the RUF were brokered by ICRC³¹ early in 1995 during negotiations for the release of expatriate hostages. The conflict resolution organisation, International Alert, then became involved in mediation and noted that the RUF might be amenable to peace terms. However, this would take time and the fighting continued unabated. The NPRC had meanwhile contracted Gurkha mercenaries led by an American Vietnam veteran, Colonel Robert MacKenzie, to stem RUF attacks panicking Freetown. The operation was a fiasco. During one of its first patrols, the

³⁰ Chairman Strasser was photographed by a Swedish newspaper arriving at Stockholm Airport, allegedly *en route* to sell diamonds thought to be worth several million dollars.

³¹ International Committee of the Red Cross

Gurkhas were challenged by RUF units operating in the vicinity of the Mile 47 road junction and were cut down by concentrated fire; Colonel MacKenzie's tattooed arm was cut off by the RUF group to prove his death and identity. The NPRC was now in crisis; a possible date for a return to democracy was announced in an attempt to bring the RUF to the negotiating table. The RUF, however, felt sure that they could take Freetown in a matter of months. This may well have been the case had a party of South African businessmen not arrived in Freetown to make Strasser an offer which he could in no way refuse. Executive Outcomes (EO), a mining-oriented South African security firm, guaranteed to reverse the fortunes of the war -- for a price (see Harding, 1997; Reno, 1998). That price seems to have been a US\$30 million kimberlite mining concession in Kono, shares in Sieromco and Sierrarutile³² and US\$1 million/month expenses, to be paid from IMF crisis loans. The deal was struck and within a month personnel and hardware were arriving by sea and air³³. Equipped with Russian helicopter gunships, the battle-hardened veterans of Angola, Namibia and Mozambique were effective against RUF fighters advancing as far as Waterloo on the outskirts of Freetown. The rebels took heavy losses, forward camps were destroyed and units driven back to secure bases. The EO action was concerted and ruthless. Aside from direct combat, the organisation also assisted with the training of elite RSLMF³⁴ and civil defence units (Richards, 1996/8).

The RUF was now ready to talk. In November 1995, it sent a delegation to Abidjan to begin negotiations. Talks began slowly as NPRC and RUF representatives vied for advantage. However, on the 16th January 1996, Strasser was toppled in an internal army coup and replaced by his Vice Chairman, Julius Maada Bio³⁵. The reasons for the coup are thought to have been Strasser's desire to stand as the National Unity Party (NUP) presidential candidate. With the protection of the South Africans, he felt that he could cut a deal directly with EO and remain in power as long as the organisation mined diamonds in Sierra Leone. This prospect of a commerce-based, puppet regime alarmed elements in the NPRC hierarchy and the Supreme Council of State. After an apparently violent struggle in the cabinet room of Military Headquarters, Strasser was bound, put in a helicopter and

³² Multi-nationalised bauxite and rutile mining concessions.

³³ Focus on Sierra Leone, Vol. 2 No. 1, December 1995–January 1996.

³⁴ Two counter-insurgency units, the Cobra and Scorpion battalions, were formed and trained.

³⁵ Focus on Sierra Leone, Vol. 2 No. 1, December 1995–January 1996.

unceremoniously dumped over the border in Guinea. It is rumoured that he was lucky not to have been shot.

Under enormous internal and international political pressure, Bio pressed on with negotiations and a programme of democratic transition. Elections were finally held on the 26th February 1996. After a second “play-off” round of voting, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the southern-oriented, Mende-aligned SLPP defeated his rival Dr John Karefa Smart of the northern-oriented UNPP (Riley, 1996). On the 29th March 1996, the NPRC handed over power to Kabbah. The SLPP electioneering slogan had been “The Only Way Out”, and the new government declared that its first priority was peace. Further rounds of talks with the RUF were scheduled and Sankoh was flown by the ICRC to Abidjan. Plans were drawn-up for commissions to deal with demobilisation, resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes. The RUF demanded the withdrawal of EO and amnesty for all fighters. On the 30th November 1996, the Abidjan Peace Accord was signed by Foday Sankoh and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. The war it seemed, had come to an end.

1.15 THE RESEARCH SETTING -- THE FAILURE OF THE ABIDJAN PEACE ACCORD

Successful implementation of the Abidjan Peace Accord hinged on a variety of factors. A Consolidation of Peace Commission (CPC) consisting of Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) and RUF delegates was intended to advise on, and oversee the activities of a new Ministry for National Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation (MNRRR). Further sub-ministries for the communication of policy and, most importantly, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Resettlement (DDR) were also created to deal with the immediate issues generated by a cessation of hostilities. However, by the end of January 1997, little progress had been made. Of three proposed reception centres for ex-combatants, only one, at Kenema, had been tentatively prepared. A derelict hotel in Kenema, Eastern Province, had received a few hundred internally displaced rural inhabitants with no evidence of fighters among their number³⁶ -- by the beginning of February, only two weapons had been decommissioned³⁷. Some “enforced”

³⁶ Personal observation, Kambui Hotel, 15/01/97.

³⁷ Interview, ODA TCO, DDR, 03/02/97.

demobilisation took place -- suspected fighters captured in the bush were removed by either RSLMF or civil defence forces to unknown fates.

Local civil defence groups had begun to emerge from late-1992, in response to the uncertainty of the ability of the RSLMF to protect rural areas in the south and east from the RUF. Following the election of the SLPP to office in 1996, these groups were linked into a national (though predominantly Mende) civil defence force by Deputy Defence Minister S.H. Norman. In effect, Norman changed their role from defence to offence. Supported by EO and specialist loyal RSLMF units (see Reno, 1998), civil defence units attacked key RUF bases under the "cover" of cease-fire agreements negotiated to facilitate the Abidjan peace talks. Major successes were recorded in September/October 1996, culminating in the sacking of Sankoh's HQ base camp in, or adjacent to, the Gola East Forest reserve close to the Liberian border. Sankoh very reluctantly signed the Abidjan Accord, perhaps already certain that many of his followers would be eliminated.

Problems with the process soon became compounded as momentum was steadily lost. At governmental level, the RUF was failing to agree upon a final list of delegates and whether or not to sanction the possibility of a UN peace-keeping/monitoring force. This indecision prevented both UNDP and British ODA from releasing further funds for the establishment of extra reception centres at Bo and Mile 38, Port Loko District. Up to 3000 refugees and ex-combatants awaited repatriation in Bopulu, Liberia³⁸. Plans were made for this undertaking but not effectively carried out. This group was to engage in further conflict later in the year. Communicating terms to fighters spread throughout the bush proved almost impossible -- transmitting a message of "good will", amnesty and instructions for demobilisation was unsuccessfully implemented³⁹.

The RUF was in control of a large labour pool, principally used to transport looted goods and to mine diamonds (Richards, 1996/8). Many of these non-combatant, RUF affiliates were sent into provincial

³⁸ Interview, UNHACU representative, 22/01/97.

³⁹ There was in fact an MNRRR sub-directorate created to deal with this task. It was hoped that "Land Rover Cinemas" would convey the message to the interior. Funding from UNDP for this project was not forthcoming (interview with MNRRR director, 18/12/96).

towns to “test the water”. A significant proportion were apprehended on the outskirts of settlements by *kamajoisia* (Mende civil defence force fighters) and summarily executed.⁴⁰ News of these CDF atrocities soon made its way back RUF field commanders. More alarmingly, in southern and eastern Sierra Leone, mobilisation of the CDF was continuing at an increased rate. Mass initiations of young men, organised along chiefdom-lines, became common place.⁴¹ On the 17th January 1997, the Bo and Kenema *kamajoisia* launched a large-scale offensive into the RUF stronghold of North Kailahun, killing senior RUF commander, “Zino” Tarawallie, in the process. Three ULIMO (K) officers were also captured during the fighting, suggesting a common-interest trade alliance between the two groups.⁴² Official complaints were lodged by the American Embassy⁴³ but these were largely ignored by the GoSL. Vice President Joe Demby, a Mende, travelled to his constituency heartland to make an appraisal of the situation. No action was taken against local politicians or traditional leaders. Foday Sankoh complained that aggressive action, at the behest of a Mende-oriented SLPP, had been directed at an inactive, encamped army. He accused the President of personally ordering the cease-fire violation. Without warning, on 6th March 1997, in mysterious circumstances, Sankoh was arrested at Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos. Philip Palmer, a long-term RUF field commander and CPC member based in Freetown, named himself as successor. But in the field, Sam “Maskita” Bockarie assumed command of all RUF fighters.

Unchecked *kamajoisia* mobilisation and military activity seriously concerned not only the RUF leadership, but also the RSLMF command, traditionally “northern” in orientation and sympathy. The army began to see the *kamajoisia* as a major threat to national stability and to its own state-sanctioned, mandated role. In March 1997, after a series of *kamajoisia* encroachments outside its ethnically-defined sphere of operation, the Army Chief of Staff, Brigadier Hassan Conteh, issued “shoot-to-kill” orders to soldiers encountering *kamajoisia* in certain areas of conflicting interests.⁴⁴ Throughout the interior, the RUF was stepping-up its level of activity -- roads, towns and villages were attacked on a daily basis. Skirmishing between RSLMF troops and *kamajoisia* also became more common-place -- a “hot-spot”

⁴⁰ This was openly talked about in Kenema during the early part of 1997.

⁴¹ Initiation ceremonies were observed with greater frequency as 1997 progressed [see Chapter Six].

⁴² Source: ICRC Kenema

⁴³ Complaints were lodged by US Ambassador John Hirsch.

⁴⁴ Reported Freetown *Expo Times*, 14/03/97.

developed in and around Kenema and stretched up into the diamond fields of Tongo. The area was host to a RSLMF Brigade HQ as well as a huge *kamajoisia* force. Tension between the two groups grew intense.

Failures in MNRRR implementation came under increased scrutiny from parts of the international community and the Freetown press which concentrated on the ethnic polarisation that was perceived to be sweeping the country. Shortly after Sankoh's arrest, the CPC ceased to function when several key members, both RUF and GoSL⁴⁵ were abducted in the field during negotiations with Bockarie in Kailahun. With the RUF seemingly in disarray, ("[T]he snake has lost its head"),⁴⁶ tension between the RSLMF and *kamajoisia* reached crisis point on the 22nd March 1997⁴⁷. Heavy fighting broke out between Kenema *kamajoisia* and about 850 army stragglers illegally mining in Tongo. Control for the area was bitterly contested and casualties were widespread. A large number of civilians were displaced and ethnically-selective atrocities were perpetrated by the *kamajoisia*. A fuller account of this violence is given later in the thesis.⁴⁸

The soldiers eventually left Tongo but dispersed into Temne territory further north. By April 9th, renegade RSLMF troops were in control of many villages east of the strategic Mile 91 road junction. It is highly likely that improvised negotiations took place between soldiers and rebels in these settings, with agreements being forged to consolidate forces for the purposes of *kamajoisia* confrontation. Throughout northern Sierra Leone, mass army desertion set in -- soldiers roamed the bush committing widespread acts of banditry. An increasingly desperate GoSL sought the assistance of ECOMOG. Nigeria dispatched another 1500 soldiers to Freetown to help protect the capital⁴⁹. Even at this late stage, GoSL was keen to show that the DDR process was still on course. Handfuls of supposedly RUF

⁴⁵ Philip Palmer and Fayia Musa, both RUF members of the CPC, were abducted along with the Sierra Leonean ambassador to Guinea on 04/04/97.

⁴⁶ Headline concerning Sankoh's arrest; Freetown Daily Mail, 06/03/97.

⁴⁷ Resentful soldiers typically exclaimed, "Where were the '*kamajors*' during the war? Why should they get all the glory?"

⁴⁸ See Chapter Six.

⁴⁹ Their disembarkation was heavily covered on national television (SLBS), perhaps as a deterrent to those considering radical political action.

ex-combatants were paraded on national television in an attempt to suggest that all was well. For the population at large, cynicism and a sense of foreboding had, by now, taken hold.

On the 1st May 1997, heavy fighting broke out between *kamajoisia* and RSLMF troops on the outskirts of Kenema. Soldiers had attempted to block the wedding procession of a *kamajoisia* leader from entering the town. The incident quickly descended into bloodshed, turning central Kenema into a battlefield for five days. The main thoroughfare, Hangha Road, was transformed into a front-line as 3rd Brigade HQ fought the Kenema *kamajoisia* for control of the town. About 150 combatants and civilians were killed⁵⁰ in some of the most heavy fighting of the war. Shops and property were looted by both sides and the intensity of cross-fire⁵¹ made evacuation for the town's residents impossible.⁵² To confuse the situation further, Nigerian and Guinean ECOMOG also entered the fray, often directing fire at each other in "friendly-fire" incidents.

Incredibly, for the first time since the conflict began in 1991, the RUF had become almost overshadowed by events as the country appeared to slip uncontrollably towards a full-scale civil war. Ethnicity was now the over-riding factor as the *kamajoisia*, once a minor element, defending communities using traditional hunter techniques were turned into a well-armed militia force, more resembling the Rwandan Interahamwe. For the next three weeks, a shroud of murky unpredictability descended on Sierra Leone. Numerous attacks and raids were carried out all over the interior but presented little in the way of a clear pattern to the violence. Hard news was sparse -- nobody, it seemed, knew who was burning, "chopping"⁵³ and looting villages from Kambia District in the north to Pujehun in the south-east and Bomaru and Baiwala in the east. The fighting moved westwards towards Freetown with Gbinti, Port Loko District falling to "armed men" on the 20th May. Finally, in the small hours of Sunday 25th May 1997, the capital was awoken by sustained gunfire -- a coup was being attempted. As elements of the army, supported by escaped prisoners from Pademba Road Central Prison, fought for

⁵⁰ Personal observation, 01-05/05/97

⁵¹ RPGs were widely employed to pierce the steel plate doors of Lebanese businesses in order to facilitate looting.

⁵² Many grudge killings were perpetrated against civilians during the *mêlée*. Several Lebanese shop owners were also murdered.

⁵³ Amputating limbs

control of key installations, units raced into Freetown to throw in their lot with Johnny Paul Koroma and disgruntled, unpaid RSLMF soldiers⁵⁴. Within hours, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and many of his ministers had fled to Conakry. The coup leaders declared themselves the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) and once again suspended the constitution. They then invited the RUF to suspend their struggle and end the war by joining a government of national unity. Sankoh signalled his approval by telephone from Nigeria. RSLMF soldiers loyal to the new junta and the RUF fighters became the People's Army (PA). Together, the AFRC and the PA embarked upon the systematic plunder of the city, killing all those who stood in their way.

For the next nine months, Sierra Leone effectively ceased to be a nation state, cut off from the outside world by an almost total trade embargo. ECOMOG troops struggled to defend their positions around the capital, while in the interior, AFRC/PA forces skirmished with *kamajoisia* for control of the Tongo and Zimmi diamond fields. NPRC outcasts like S.A.J. Musa returned to Sierra Leone to take leading positions in the new junta, utilising their appeal as youth icons. In Kono, multi-national mining operations ceased production, evacuating engineering staff and leaving plant under the protection of heavily armed South African private security forces. Mende elites too, pursued a policy of asset and resource protection, using the *kamajoisia* as their own "EO" and, in some areas, even resuming diamond production to generate revenue for the further mobilisation and equipping of the CDF. The practicalities will be discussed later in the thesis.

The lengthy phase of the war prior to the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord had placed monumental economic pressure on the Lebanese diaspora community. For many hard-hit traders, the peace process came as a reprieve in financial terms -- a chance to take advantage of an immediate post-war boom in trade, rehabilitate businesses and repair property. The optimism, however, was short-lived. For many Shi'ite and Maronite families, the catastrophic damage inflicted on enterprises during *kamajoisia* and RSLMF fighting in March and April 1997, and the widespread destruction that followed the coup, was simply too much to recover from in the foreseeable future. The majority of the diaspora population

⁵⁴ The SLPP had foolishly cut the RSLMF rice ration only a week before.

evacuated to Lebanon in the days immediately following the coup⁵⁵. At the time of writing, information suggests that many have failed to return to Sierra Leone, preferring instead to enjoy the stability and economic opportunities that now exist in their country of origin. A few, however, have ventured back and, indeed, some never left. These businessmen, the vast majority Shi'ites, continue to undertake diamond trading, utilising their power of access to global markets to exercise control over the industry. What enables and motivates them to do this is dealt with at length later in the thesis and concerns core aspects of their cultural capital, politicisation, local agency and social organisation.

1.16 THESIS SYNOPSIS

In order to study the ways in which the diamond industry functions in the midst of the social, political and economic upheavals described above, the thesis is organised in chapters that primarily describe the major market players and their tactical approaches.

Chapter Two presents a broad overview of the realities of diamond extraction and trade, demonstrating the networks that link a localised primary industry with the peculiarities of a vast, monopolised, global market.

Chapter Three introduces and discusses the historical origins of the two distinct social groups that form the Lebanese diaspora community. It questions the fundamental differences between the two groups and, by examining historical roles of each confession, identifies important political networks that have determined loyalties and ties to associated groups in Lebanon in the latter half of the twentieth century. Patterns of social organisation and group aspiration are also established to gain an insight into the potential strengths and weaknesses of each group for coping with the adverse commercial environment of Sierra Leone at war.

Chapter Four is an observation of Maronite and Shi'ite players in action – both in Freetown and the interior during the run-up to the 1997 AFRC coup. Beginning with a synopsis of each community's

⁵⁵ A large Lebanese convoy left Kenema for Monrovia on 30/05/97. Freetown Lebanese were evacuated by aeroplane from Lungi Airport and flown directly to Beirut. The Lebanese Government organised the evacuation.

arrival in Sierra Leone, it traces the emergence of inter-group competition and the struggle for access to increasingly scarce resources. It also considers the relationships between Maronite and Shi'ite activity in Sierra Leone and political developments in Lebanon during the last thirty years.

Chapter Five explores the historical and contemporary role of industry players from the indigenous Kono ethnic group. Traditionally the local controllers of Sierra Leone's largest diamond field, the fortunes of this commercial group have changed dramatically over the last ten years. Building on core, ethnographic considerations of social organisation, an appraisal is made of Kono political and economic interaction. Data are presented to demonstrate Kono decline in the diamond industry and enforced adaptation to alternative roles in legitimate and clandestine activity.

Chapter Six follows the rise of powerful new local players in today's diamond industry, explicitly using their Mende ethnicity to further business aims. With the flagging fortunes of the Kono fields, rich deposits remain in Mende-controlled south-eastern Sierra Leone. Faced with endemic low-intensity conflict, the group has implemented strategies to protect and exploit its natural resources by re-working traditional cultural elements concerning authority, land tenure and social obligation. These Mende business elites have thereby found ways to maintain levels of production to finance an aggressive, mercantilist agenda centred on the consolidation of the SLPP in "democratic" politics.

Chapter Seven is a summary of the main body of data and evidence presented in the thesis. It identifies the groups that will continue to participate in Sierra Leone's diamond industry and asks whether the strategies employed by these groups are sustainable in the long-term. Examining strengths and weaknesses, it identifies possible ways in which some new (but old) ways of mining diamonds might succeed or fail.

Chapter Eight, the conclusion, discusses prospects for future economic and political stability in Sierra Leone. Diamonds, one way or another, represent the destiny of the country. When ECOMOG troops re-took Kono from AFRC/PA forces in 1998 they were met by a graffito – "diamonds are a curse!" Is this



true? Will they continue to attract those prepared to wage war from inside and outside Sierra Leone or could diamond mining become a key to a vibrant peace-time economy?

CHAPTER TWO: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE VARIOUS MODES OF PRODUCTION AND TRADE OF SIERRA LEONEAN DIAMONDS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE GLOBAL MARKET.

2.1 MINING, TRADE AND AGENCY

A medium-sized diamond mining operation, starting from scratch, will pass through the entire diamond and diamond-related network in Sierra Leone before it becomes in any way established in a place like Koidu-Sefadu in Kono District or Tongo Field, Kenema District. A new company will have to import the majority of its equipment into the country, and this will have to be done in 40-foot containers to avoid theft and damage. The aim of a company or individual will be to set up an operation, somewhere on one of the country's diamondiferous rivers [see plates 1 & 2: pages 60 & 61], much the same as hundreds of other Levantine and foreign owned mines that are dotted throughout the bush of the Southern and Eastern Provinces of Sierra Leone.

New companies are obliged to begin in Freetown, in order to establish some sort of a base from which to co-ordinate operations, and in particular to handle the clearance of vehicles and equipment. Whilst in town, company operatives are wise to frequent bars and bistros used by other "diamond-men" to pick up information and tips concerning the diamond industry. In any kind of "frontier" primary industry there is a clear distinction between the experienced and established, and the unhabituated heading for assured disaster; diamond mining in Sierra Leone is no exception. It is a high risk industry and thorough preparation is vital to success. The principal objective must be to find and exploit a rich alluvial deposit of diamondiferous gravel and export the rough diamonds that it contains to sell for profit. This, of course, is far easier said than done, and any company will have to adapt very quickly to not only an unstable political environment, but also to the difficulties associated with trying to enter and function within a highly exclusive network, regulated by its own sets of formal and informal constraints.

Containers arriving at Freetown harbour must be cleared as quickly as possible to avoid difficulties with bureaucracy and security. The Government of Sierra Leone, or rather the customs officials who control

the port area as their own fiefdom, will immediately attempt to charge the shipper 100% import duty on all the merchandise entering the country. Duty on imported items varies from nothing to 100%, and there are doubtless volumes of statutes that explain how duty ought to be charged in a hypothetical, ideal port. However, Queen Elizabeth II Quay in Freetown falls slightly short of this ideal and has adapted to an economic climate for which regulations were not designed. Import and export in Sierra Leone is intrinsically linked to the diamond industry through the role that diamonds play in local-to-hard currency exchange. This process facilitates the purchase of nearly all foreign imports to maintain the markets in building materials and luxury goods. Customs and Excise, therefore, presents itself as the most obvious example of a section of the real, diamond-based economy in action.

Customs officials in Sierra Leone and, indeed, most of West Africa, tend to be conspicuously well groomed in relation to other uniformed civil servants. Typically, they wear tailored uniforms and sport glittering braid around their cuffs. Flashy watches and Mercedes cars are *de rigueur* for any senior ranking officer. This is a highly exclusive franchise that does not concern itself with small change at check points for failing routine road-worthiness examinations; it is a full-scale enterprise that taps the major veins and arteries of the national import-export economy. Unfortunately for prospective mining companies, any suspicion of "*daimon bisness*" by the port authorities will almost certainly incur maximum duty. Customs officers are well aware of the level of foreign investment in the country's diamond fields, and will expect something to supplement their meagre official incomes, which are generally insufficient to keep the average family supplied with rice. The 100% duty, however, is entirely negotiable; ultimately it would benefit only the state exchequer and would most likely be misappropriated by another party. Negotiations take place informally, and are done so in a way that has become an institutionalised process. In late 1992, during the stabilisation of the NPRC regime, Customs opened its own bar-restaurant in the port area specifically for this purpose. Customs officers are entertained in their own restaurant by shippers, and "contracts" for parallel clearance agreements are drawn up. Bills of lading are skilfully altered in order to create areas of exemption and discount for specific items. Water pumps for diamond mines can be redesignated as agricultural implements for irrigation purposes and generators can be given humanitarian status for clinics in the provinces. The Customs Chief sends down the rubber stamped clearance papers (after taking his own "agent's" fee),

and the container is free to leave the harbour.¹ This happens for almost every commercial container entering Sierra Leone. For first-time commercial operators in the country it is an invaluable lesson in real economics, agency and patronage.

2.2 LEASES, CONCESSIONS, LAND TENURE AND RECENT TRENDS

There is a well established procedure for obtaining mining concessions in Sierra Leone. Generally, negotiations begin with the owner or the holder² of the land which is thought to be favourable for exploitation. Often the land will be held on trust by one of the paramount chiefs of the relevant chiefdoms within the diamond-field, but much land is held as concessions on long-leases by individuals and families. Obtaining concessions in the immediate Koidu-Sefadu-Yengema area in Kono District can be more complicated. The area has been subject to much greater State control since the land was worked by the Sierra Leone Selection Trust³, and generally controlled through patrimonially-orientated concessions distribution by successive governmental administrations since 1962. However, privately-held chiefdom leases are still available in the Kono area today, particularly in more outlying areas. Usually, a potential investor is required to enter into partnership with the landholder or landowner who essentially takes on a “sleeping” role in the operation. The investor is expected to provide labour and equipment for the entire extraction process. The profits of any given mine are then split between the two principal parties. The division of profits is agreed upon in relation to the methods of labour organisation and payment, the estimated yield of the mine, and the general political, economic and security climate in force at the time.

During early 1997, it was clear that the protracted conflict in Sierra Leone had taken its toll on the industry, and many of the smaller leaseholders in the Tongo and Zimmi fields were desperate to attract outside capital to begin mining areas of land. Kono was enjoying the benefits of the presence of heavily armed security companies which had some effect in boosting confidence. However, both Tongo, with growing tension between Mende civil defence fighters and RSLMF personnel, and Zimmi, due to its proximity to the Liberian border, remained deeply insecure. Theoretically, this should have increased

¹ Personal experience, January 1992

² Chapter Five discusses aspects of land tenure in greater detail.

³ See Reno (1995)

demand for Kono concessions and made them extremely scarce, but in reality the reverse happened -- there was a slow but steady increase in the amount of land that was available for exploitation in the Kono area. This may appear to have been advantageous for those who were hoping to begin work in Kono District, but the actuality was an increase in the level of potential commercial danger. In the past, land here had been very difficult to obtain; often land holders and land owners preferred to leave potential concessions dormant as investments for the future. In the immediate post-Abidjan Peace Accord period (i.e. December 1996 onwards) it appeared that the industry might undergo a minor boom under increasingly secure conditions. Kono had been sacked three times by the RUF in the previous five years, leaving many players in the industry critically short of capital. Salvation was expected to be long-term foreign investment in the area, and there had been a small influx of Eastern Europeans⁴ looking for Levantine business partners. Supporters interviewed in early 1997 all hoped that there would be a rapid increase of foreign investment in the wake of the arrival of multi-nationals like Diamondworks, Rex and Am-Can Mining⁵. However, as the security situation began once again to deteriorate, hope of rapid industrial revival faded. Potential foreign investors were scared off by increasingly negative risk analyses and the prohibitive costs of adequate security arrangements. Clearly, there were safer places to make money, much to the dismay of the Lebanese community, who began to grow despondent.

By the end of February 1997, most members of the Lebanese community were well aware that the country was drifting into some kind of internal security crisis. In the evenings, after work, Lebanese men gather at each other's houses to eat *mezze* and drink whisky. In this kind of informal environment the talk often focused on the unstable political atmosphere. I was told by one of my hosts that for the first time since the Lebanese diaspora arrived in Sierra Leone, there was talk of loss-cutting and voluntary repatriation to the Lebanon. In order to do this, however, assets would have to be realised and capital accumulated. The manifestations of these concerns had unexpected effects on the commercial atmosphere of the area. Inexperienced foreign investors failed to see the warning signs and allowed

⁴ Several small companies in Koidu-Sefadu were set up by Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians. Aside from mining, legitimate businesses in aviation and medicine were also started. Also, security concerns prompted a demand for firearms in Kono, the importation of which became a successful Russian owned enterprise.

⁵ All three companies employed the services of armed, expatriate security operations.

themselves to be led into a false sense of security. To them, without the benefits of access to the Lebanese “*radio-maglis*”,⁶ there was the appearance that the post-war “mini-boom” had begun, the evidence for this being the intensification of Lebanese mining activity. The “mini-boom”, however, was an economic “emergency procedure”, implemented to maximise profits and realise investments before the advent of expected political crisis. This desperation led to many of the Lebanese taking large, uncharacteristic risks which, under normal conditions would never have been considered. For some this proved to be financially costly. An informant reported one particular incident:

“The son of a friend of mine had some capital he wanted to invest in a mine -- it was about US \$9000. One of his foremen told him that he had an old uncle with a plot up in Kayima. Apparently the plot had been worked as an illegal site in the 1960s and had proved to be very rich. It got shut down and he sat on it ever since. The uncle (who was a local town chief) made a lot of money on another much larger site in partnership with an APC big-wig in the late 1970s, and has worked some other good sites since then. Anyway, the Lebanese investor approached the chief and proposed a deal -- subject to testing some gravel samples from the site. The Lebanese wanted to work fast as he had been hearing all the rumours of a possible attack on Kono⁷, so he travelled with the land holder to the site where they dug up some gravel to take back to his office in Koidu. Here, he and the chief could take a look at it and maybe do a deal. Anyhow, during the journey, while the Lebanese was driving, the chief mixed a small amount of garnets, quartzites and corundums into the gravel -- he also added two small pieces of diamond. When they got to the office, the Lebanese went through the gravel and of course found all the bits and pieces that the chief had mixed in -- as a sample it looked very promising -- so they cut a deal. My friend’s son invested the entire \$9000 in the pit, thinking he was going to make a nice profit -- he found nothing”.

The informant continues:

⁶ The informal information network utilised by the Lebanese community.

⁷ During late February 1997, there was a suspicion that the RUF had plans to break out of Kailahun and move north through Guinea and then to cross the Meli River into Gbane Kando, Mofindo and Soa chiefdoms situated back over the border in Eastern Province, Sierra Leone. The aim would be to launch a surprise attack on Kono from the east.

“The land holder was short of money -- he had a plot, but he had no idea whether it would yield or not -- so he took a gamble with someone else’s money⁸. My friend’s son only found out three months later when someone who had a grudge against the chief told him what had happened -- there was nothing he could do -- he couldn’t prove anything, and the chief has got connections ... ”⁹

Individuals were not the only victims. There is very reliable evidence to show that one of the largest multi-national operations in the Koidu-Sefadu belt was duped into leasing an already overworked deposit on the outskirts of Yengema.¹⁰ It was a large area of land that had been initially worked by the National Diamond Mining Company (NDMC) in the 1970s. The company concerned had hired ex-NDMC employees to assist them in directing the excavation of “tailings”.¹¹ As it turned out the ex-NDMC employees had been bribed by a notoriously sharp Kono player to lead the company in the wrong direction. Work went on for about six months and the company failed to recoup even 20% of its initial investment. The “block” [see below] was deemed by all to be totally worked out and barren. The value of the lease dropped to almost nothing, whereupon the Sierra Leonean operator snapped it up from the company, dug in the opposite direction and almost immediately hit a rich seam. The foreign company lost about \$1 million.¹²

The unwary and inexperienced can become victims very quickly in a world dominated by knowledge disseminated through closed networks where remarkable efforts are required to maintain access. Those involved must keep continually abreast of current developments, and diamond mining in Sierra Leone is often described by them as “gambling”.¹³ There is certainly an informal “form”¹⁴ that is followed by participants. For the Lebanese, life is a constant round of parlours and offices, discussing the latest finds, available concessions, successes and failures. For the Sierra Leoneans involved at this level of the

⁸ This type of swindle was known by the Lebanese community as the “Blama Plan”, after a small town east of Kenema in Small Bo Chiefdom where it was first successfully used against a Maronite supporter.

⁹ Interview, 27/02/1997.

¹⁰ Interview, 25/02/1997.

¹¹ “Tailings” are partially or badly washed gravel, left behind by previous mining operations. They can often produce a high yield when processed by more modern and sensitive washing plant. Early plant often failed to distinguish between heavy, worthless pebbles and large diamonds.

¹² Interview, 10/03/1997.

¹³ see van der Laan, (1975:178, 205, 246)

¹⁴ In a horse racing sense.

industry, life is much the same, and there is a controlled symbiosis between the two groups. Each group has skills and contacts that are useful to the other. For the outsider, joining this society is an extremely difficult task. Many of the Lebanese who work in the Koidu-Sefadu area are third-generation diaspora, and were born in local chiefdoms; they have local cultural capital beyond the reach of the Europeans and Americans who come to the area in search of fortune.

Once a prospective operator has found a concession, and an agreement with the land owner or land holder has been made, the next step is to secure a mining licence from the Ministry of Mines and Resources in Freetown. The cost of this varies according to the status of the applicant -- for citizens of Sierra Leone the cost is relatively low -- for overseas investors the cost is about US \$10,000. Once this has been obtained, mining can begin and usually starts around the end of September with the dry season approaching. If the mine is in the Koidu-Sefadu area, lodgings for the operators will have to be found in town. This is no easy task; Koidu-Sefadu is hugely overcrowded with no running water, electricity or telephones. A house that might cost US \$5000 *per annum* to rent in Freetown will cost US \$40,000 *per annum* to rent in Koidu Town. Houses must be heavily grilled and fortified, due to the increased risk of armed robbery for those involved in mining since the beginning of the conflict.

2.3 MODES OF PRODUCTION AND MINING TECHNIQUES

Mining techniques vary in relation to the nature of deposits. The vast majority of operations do, however, fall into the general alluvial open-cast category. This technique is almost always used when the deposit lies in an alluvial outwash plain, and is the simplest to undertake [see plate 3: p.61]. In this situation, the diamonds lie loose in a stratum of sedimentary gravel which in turn is beneath a stratum of mature sand deposits (locally known as *san-san*), and laterite overburden (locally known as *ballop*)¹⁵. The *san-san* and *ballop* are dug out using terracing to prevent slumping and rotational slip. This is done using either manpower or machinery or a combination of both, depending on the size of the pit and the amount of capital being invested. At the time of research the rental cost of a Caterpillar D8¹⁶ in Kono District was about \$1000/day. It is quite usual for the strata of diamondiferous gravel to be below

¹⁵ See George Harlow, ed. *The Nature of Diamonds*, 1998, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁶ A large, tracked excavator.

the water table, and so pumps are employed to facilitate digging. These must run continuously once the pit has been opened up, again to prevent rotational slip. Digging proceeds right through the dry season, with gravel being stored securely until the beginning of the rains in June. The rains then raise the water table dramatically, making digging almost impossible in most areas. The cost of pumping at this time of the year generally precludes mining activity. Once the season's gravel has been collected, washing begins. Automated washing plant¹⁷ is designed to exploit the specific density of diamond and thus concentrate the ore into manageable amounts that can then be examined by hand. Rotary washers and riffles are employed to remove all but the heaviest minerals [see plate 4: p.62]. In this super-concentrate will lie gold, quartz, cinnabar, corundum, citrines and diamonds. Diamonds shed water but attract grease; exploiting this chemical property, the material is washed over greasebelts, leaving an embedded crust which is then scraped off and boiled. The hot, viscous and oleaginous grease floats to the surface, leaving the heavier material to drop to the bottom of the drum. This residue is then dried and emptied onto large, white sheets where it is searched by eye, in an atmosphere of great excitement, for diamonds and nuggets of gold [see plate 5: p.62]. Smaller "bush" mining operations still use the traditional nineteenth century *panning* method, utilising centrifugal force to some effect [see plate 6: p.63].¹⁸

Outwash plain deposits are only part of the overall mineral landscape. Riverine mining often produces the greatest concentration of diamonds in gravel. These deposits have the added advantage of not being situated under a laterite overburden; the overlying sand deposits are generally also much lighter. Exploiting river beds can be done in two different ways. Firstly, if the deposits are spread out along the course of a river, the best method tends to be what is known as *air-lifting*. With this technique, pontoon rafts are constructed to carry a high-powered, wide-bore, sand/water solution pump. The gravel is literally sucked directly off the river bed and collected in smaller boats following the raft. The gravel, already in a high state of concentration is then ready for minimal washing and sifting. This mobile plant is then free to drift downstream exploiting all the most likely areas of deposition. It is a relatively cheap way to mine diamonds, but in Sierra Leone there is something of a Lebanese monopoly on not

¹⁷ The washing plant was specially designed for Sierra Leonean alluvial deposits by a South African engineer in the early 1960s. They are compact, mobile units which have been undergoing continuous improvement over the decades, hence the interest in old tailings. The key to successful washing is in the precise setting of the machine's sensitivity.

¹⁸ See Wilks & Wilks, (1995). *The Properties and Applications of Diamond*. Butterworth –Heinemann, Mass.

only the equipment but also the river concessions, which of course become re-enriched during every rainy season while the rivers are in spate.¹⁹

At particular river features, such as waterfalls, it can be expected that there will be extremely rich deposits of diamonds and gold lodged within the areas of deposition. In March 1997, a particularly ambitious project was visited on the Bafi River which involved the construction of huge *coffer-dams*, and the diversion of the river's course.²⁰ A project of this size had never been attempted before, the main objective being to expose a network of small caves and pot-holes that lay in the area of the waterfall's tumultuous stoppers. Over 200 labourers were employed on a set daily rate. Dams were constructed with bulldozers and dredging began to clear off the layer of sand that covered the geological features. Gravel, in a high state of concentration was then extracted and found to contain a large proportion of diamonds. Incredibly, the larger caves were also found to contain almost a dozen complete skeletons of divers who, over the years had found themselves dragged down by the dangerous currents of the river as they swam down to grab handfuls of the rich gravel.²¹ Cofferdam operations, by the very nature of their engineering complexity, are employed only by the largest of the private Lebanese operators and the multi-nationals.²²

Sometimes, during the rains, mining takes place on ancient upland deposits that remain unaffected by the rising water table. This method is known as "high-terrace" and is seldom seen in operation, purely for the reason that upland deposits are almost never prospected for and are quite often found either by accident or on hunches. Upland areas are stripped of the overburden to expose sand and gravel deposits underneath. Terracing is used to prevent slumping. Operations of this nature tend to be small and are usually employed to cover washing and running costs during the rainy season.

¹⁹ For an elegant description of the processes of riverine gold deposition see Primo Levi (1985). *The Periodic Table*. London: Abacus.

²⁰ Undertaken by a leading Shi'ite supporter.

²¹ Again see Levi (1985) on lead.

²² A Ukrainian/Belorussian operation was engaging in coffer-dam mining on the Bafi River in March 1997.

The final method of extraction does not concern alluvial deposits, but their source, the kimberlite dykes. This is hard rock mining and requires huge capital investment to ensure profitable return.²³ The black kimberlite rock (also known as *blue ground*) must be blasted and bulldozed out and then subjected to costly treatments of crushing and grading in order to free the diamonds. It is this type of mining that is in operation in the huge deep-cast mines of Southern Africa. However, once a dyke or pipe has been located, quite accurate predictions can be made as to long-term yields. This is done by working out volumes of exploitable kimberlite and multiplying by average carats of diamond per metric tonne of ore. These methods are employed by only the largest of the multi-nationals operating in Sierra Leone. Kimberlite concessions are generally negotiated directly with the government and the Ministry of Mines and Resources

PLATE 1

SEWA RIVER, GORAMA MENDE CHIEFDOM, EASTERN PROVINCE



²³ See J.E. Glover & P.E. Harris (1984) *Kimberlite Occurrence and Origin. A Basis for Conceptual Models in Exploration*. U W A , Perth

PLATE 2

A TRIBUTARY OF THE BAFI RIVER, SANDO CHIEFDOM, EASTERN PROVINCE



PLATE 3

A TYPICAL LEBANESE-SUPPORTED OPEN-CAST DIAMOND MINE, SANDO CHIEFDOM, EASTERN PROVINCE



PLATE 4

A LEBANESE-OWNED WASHING PLANT



PLATE 5

ROUGH DIAMONDS, SHOWING OCTAHEDRON, DODECAHEDRON, CUBE AND "FLAT MACLE"

CRYSTALLOGRAPHIC FORMATIONS



PLATE 6

PANNING, WOA RIVER, TONGO FIELD (NOTE "SECURITY" WATCHING EVERY MOVE)



2.4 LABOUR ORGANISATION AND PAYMENT

Labour organisation in the Sierra Leonean mining industry varies according to general social, economic and political conditions on the ground at the time. The supporter and his foreman must make a thorough appraisal of the site, the nature of the deposit, the amount of capital input available and estimate the yield of the mine. It will then be determined what is required in the way of hardware and fuel. Manpower must then be recruited and a decision made as to the methods of labour organisation and payment. There are three principal methods of payment for labour, and during fieldwork it became apparent that the established notions of “tributor” and “supporter” had changed somewhat since the beginning of the conflict.

Zack-Williams (1995) has shown that the tributors have their origins in the early gold and platinum industry of Sierra Leone. Gold production during the 1930s followed a classic bell-curve in terms of output, and it was the second half of this curve, namely the decline in production towards the mid-1940s, that led to the emergence of the tributor system (Zack-Williams, 1995). Exploitation of alluvial gold deposits in Sierra Leone was swift and systematic (the process was linked to the overall repayment of costs incurred by Britain during the Great War), and it was not until the twilight of the enterprise that African participation was encouraged. In other words, by the time indigenous entrepreneurs became involved to any great extent, gold deposits were fundamentally poor. As merchant capital entered the industry, players knew that the relationship between labour and finance had to be re-evaluated. The answer to this problem was for supporters to pay labourers according to the success of their toil, and not merely according to the clock. In this way, waged-labour became accountable for its own profitability, in a purely market-rational response to the overall quality of concession land.

The first diamond in Sierra Leone was discovered by the British Geological Survey in Kono District in January 1930 and exploited by the Consolidated African Selection Trust (CAST), who were granted a Special Exclusive Prospecting Licence to clarify the nature of deposits in the area. This process took some time but, by the middle of 1935, it became apparent that the ninety mile radius of land around Yengema probably contained the richest alluvial diamond deposit in the world. A year prior to this

official statement, CAST formed the Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST) with the sole intention of creating a mining monopoly in the country. A long lease was obtained for this purpose, and Kono, with the assistance of local paramount chiefs and the deployment of state police (see Zack-Williams, 1995),²⁴ was fairly effectively sealed off from the rest of Sierra Leone.²⁵

During this stage of production, the SLST was primarily employing migrant and 'target' workers (see e.g. Freund, 1981).²⁶ Zack-Williams shows that, as such, these employees did not constitute an actual wage-earning group. This situation continued up to the beginning of the Second World War and continued through to the end of hostilities. Diamonds were vital to the munitions industry and production was viewed as an operation of strategic importance.²⁷ During the 1950s, the mining sector saw the introduction of the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme (ADMS). The diamond fields saw increased illegal activity during this time, with pirate diggers invading the areas to profit from the late-colonial decline in state authority in remote areas. The ADMS was seen as a way of protecting the concessions of the SLST, by allowing the introduction of merchant capital into the sector. The pattern seen in the gold industry was to re-emerge, with entrepreneurs quickly adopting the tributor system to maintain profit margins in lower-yielding concessions. This rapid evolution of the diamond industry shaped the modes of production existing until very recently. These modes of production, well described in van der Laan (1964) and Zack-Williams (1995), are currently being reshaped in response to the changing economic climate under conditions of war. The ADMS had succeeded in empowering local landlords, and effectively placed security of the mines in their hands.

Research in both the Kono and Tongo areas has shown that the term *tributor* has come to mean simply a paid labourer, particularly among the Lebanese.²⁸ At least six sites²⁹ were visited where Lebanese supporters were questioned about labour organisation. All were adamant that waged labourers earning

²⁴ This was the first instance of state police deployment (as distinct from chiefdom police) in the provinces.

²⁵ See also Reno (1995)

²⁶ Workers earning money for a specific purpose such as a wedding dowry.

²⁷ See Graham Greene's novel *The Heart of the Matter*. Penguin, London. Greene was a wartime secret service agent in Sierra Leone.

²⁸ Paul Richards (personal communication) tells me that this was the *de facto* use of the term in clandestine sites in and around the Gola Forest on the eve of war.

²⁹ Enquiries were made at different sites on both the Bafi and Sewa Rivers both north and south of Njaiama-Sewafe, Kayima, Bagbema and Bambakalema.

between Le 2-3,000/day constitute the *tributing* group. Some supporters chose to feed these employees and others did not. This was curious, as it seemed that the definitions of various types of labour had at some point changed, and later the reasons for this will be made clearer.

Zack-Williams's research into the diamond industry was carried out before the onset of RUF hostilities and the NPRC coup of April 29th 1992. By the late 1980s, the APC regime was reaching a climax of dysfunctionality, and the complexities of clientelism within the diamond industry were beginning to create inherent and increasingly unmanageable instability in the social and political articulation of this sector of the economy. Global recession was adding to the problems generated by the oil price rises of the 1970s and, as a result, the amount of merchant capital available for investment in mining was beginning to drop. The once large deposits of Kono District were gradually becoming worked-out and those that remained were largely controlled through a rather tight political patronage (Reno, 1995). By 1991, RUF incursion into the south and east of the country directly threatened the security of the diamond fields. In consequence, there was a further drop in faith in an already battered market system, causing production to decline still further. This was a downward spiral -- disaffected and redundant miners began to swell the ranks of the RUF and may have been instrumental in directing strategy towards control of the diamond fields as a means of sustaining the insurgency.³⁰

As the war progressed, the industry struggled to remain in production. The NPRC had its own clientelist structure to support, and the diamond industry was clearly destined to play a major part in its maintenance. Long-term, hard-core industry players had to devise some *modus operandi* in this altered political and economic environment. New strategies for the organisation of labour began to emerge to cope with the adverse conditions in both Tongo Field and Kono. The first of these adaptations was what became known as the *two-pile system*.

³⁰ RUF plans originally were to advance rapidly upon the provincial centre of Bo, with a view to creating a civic focus for the movement (like Gbarnga in Liberia for Taylor's NPFL), pending an all-out assault on the state. RUF interest in controlling the Kono diamond fields began as a reaction to its failure to take Bo (cf. Richards 1995;1996/8).

Unlike Tongo, large tracts of concessions in Kono had been under government control since the days of the APC. The concessions were divided up into “blocks” which were usually each about 1 km² in size. Every block was then subdivided into “areas”, each one perhaps a hectare in size. It was these area concessions that were handed out as rewards to the politically faithful.³¹ When the NPRC seized power, the blocks and areas naturally fell under their control and in due course the concessions were re-allotted mainly to NPRC-leaning officers of the RSLMF. However, a lack of merchant capital to invest in the mining process was a major problem for commanders who wished to enrich themselves. The answer was the recruitment of labourers (usually private soldiers) to do the digging and take a proportion of production in payment. It was soon realised, though, that it would be extremely difficult to divide up the diamonds between a large workforce fairly, and there was a likelihood that this could well lead to conflict between the supporting officers and the labouring other ranks. Rebellion in the ranks was obviously something that the NPRC was keen to avoid, and so a solution was found in the division of gravel. As each bucket of gravel came out of the pit it was deposited on one of two piles alternately. One was for the officer and the other was for the men. At the end of the extraction process each digger would receive a few buckets of gravel which he could then go off and wash himself; whatever he found was his to keep. The element of luck involved was central as a driving force for this system. Every now and then, some lowly conscript would find a 20 carat diamond in his bucket and promptly desert to Guinea;³² but for every lucky soldier there were 100 who found nothing and were forced to supplement their income by more anti-social means.³³ In terms of statistics and probability, the supporting officer stood to do quite well out of the arrangement, particularly as he had no labour overheads and his fuel and machinery were probably requisitioned or looted anyway.³⁴ Although unpopular with the older diamond supporters the two-pile system has endured due to its suitability to harsh political and economic conditions. Recent reports from the diamond districts indicate that the method was readily adopted by AFRC elements in their own attempts to secure personal wealth from diamonds. In September 1997, Chief Secretary of State, Capt. S.A.J. Musa accused government soldiers and RUF fighters of defying AFRC orders to desist from all further diamond mining in the Kono area. He

³¹ See Reno (1995)

³² Having first sold the stone to a Lebanese dealer, probably for a fraction of its true market value.

³³ Hence, perhaps, the emergence of the “sobel” – soldier/digger by day, rebel/bandit by night.

³⁴ See Keen, D. (1995).

claimed that many had joined together in “active connivance” to operate illegal mining operations. He added that “some of the security personnel had taken over whole chiefdoms and were selling bogus tickets for mining plots and licences”.³⁵

The *Kabadu* system of labour organisation was introduced by the Lebanese community as security began to stabilise after the arrival of South African security specialists, Executive Outcomes, in Kono District in mid 1995 (Reno, 1998). It is essentially a modified *two-pile* system, but taken a stage further through the negotiation of the value of the diamonds recovered after the washing process. In this case, the supporter is obliged to cover all the costs of the mine, including food and rudimentary medical care for the labourers. When the “*run-of-mine*” (the entire diamond production for a single pit) has been valued, the supporter “buys them back” from the diggers for between 10% and 15 %³⁶ of their market value. The “market” context is obviously the Sierra Leonean bush and not an Antwerp buying-office.³⁷ The diggers are probably only aware of the Kono or Tongo Field value of the stones and the supporter is likely to drive a hard bargain anyway. This total value is then shared out among the diggers on the basis of position in the pit hierarchy. Essentially, this means that all the diggers get something in the way of payment and the supporter does not run the risk of losing a good stone during the allocation of buckets. Most diggers questioned considered this system to be fairer. They tended to be of the general opinion that, whatever happened, they at least got fed and were looked after medically. They also receive a daily palm wine, tobacco and *jamba*³⁸ ration that helps to alleviate some of the boredom of continual labouring. If diamonds are found there is usually a cash bonus for everybody working in the mine. For many diggers, the only alternative work over the last six years would have been either membership of the army or the RUF.³⁹

³⁵ Source: United Nations IRIN West Africa Bulletin.

³⁶ These figures, however, vary from region to region and are determined by socio-political factors [see Chapters Five and Six].

³⁷ Diggers in the Gola Forest told Richards (personal communication) that dealers “bid down” the price of stones that lacked the provenance of production under a known supporter. Dealers would often threaten to inform security services if the diggers failed to negotiate favourably.

³⁸ Marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*)

³⁹ Although, clearly, some have benefited from participation in all three.

Towards the end of April 1997, it was noted that further adaptations of the *tributor* organisation of labour had taken place in the diamond fields. By this time, the security situation had deteriorated very badly. There were constant RUF ambushes on the three roads leading into Kono, and Tongo Field had been the scene of bitter conflict between the RSLMF and Mende civil defence forces. Most people could see that the political situation was reaching breaking point and many of the Lebanese were beginning to move their families out of the diamond districts altogether. It has already been shown that mining intensified during this period in much the same way as farmers hurry to finish their harvest when thunder clouds appear on the horizon. Many supporters were reluctant to invest any capital in mining whatsoever, but realised that *two-pile* operations, solely reliant on manual labour, were far too slow to make the very quick returns that were hoped for prior to a possible evacuation of the mining districts. As individuals began to take greater risks with concessions, they found a solution to their problems by constructing hybrid systems of labour organisation out of those that already existed. For instance, one operation observed⁴⁰ was managed in the following way: the supporter had taken a risky concession but had had no time to make the usual preliminary analyses of potential yield, geological setting and so forth. He brought in a front-loader⁴¹ and a team of labourers to take off the overburden and paid them a flat daily rate. He paid small target-bonuses to ensure that work went quickly. When the gravel was exposed he was able to make some predictions as to what the yield might be. In this particular case he turned out to be unlucky -- deposit pre-cursors were of poor quality. In desperation he was forced to cut the capital outlay of the daily rate and go into an immediate *two-pile* system of operation. This way he hoped just about to break-even and cover his costs. However, had the deposit been rich, the supporter claimed that he would have immediately changed over to a *kabadu* system in order to maximise his own profits, and make sure that his boys finished up with some cash in their pockets to help them in the event of a security crisis. If the deposit had looked average in nature, he would almost certainly have continued paying a flat-rate. After operation and labour costs had been deducted, he might have made a small profit on his initial outlay.

⁴⁰ Small pit, north bank, Bafi River, 5km east of Bagbema.

⁴¹ Excavator

2.5 MULTI-NATIONAL MINING OPERATIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

Diamondworks, a Vancouver-based company, bought a majority stake-holding in the previously established Branch Energy in 1996. Branch Energy⁴² entered the Sierra Leonean mining sector in 1995, in conjunction with the South African security organisation, Executive Outcomes. Executive Outcomes were contracted by Valentine Strasser's National Provisional Ruling Council to intervene at a critical stage of the war against the RUF. Their involvement undoubtedly helped to change the military balance within the country in a period of three months. With them came helicopter gun-ships, light tanks and considerable experience of African bush warfare. Their operations, sometimes in conjunction with RSLMF and the civil defence forces, were efficient and largely successful.⁴³ The RUF soon found themselves pushed out of all but the most inaccessible and remote areas. It was partly as a result of this intervention that the RUF was forced to the negotiating table.

Part of the payment deal for Executive Outcomes' strategic service is said to have included potentially rich kimberlite and alluvial deposits in the Koidu-Sefadu-Yengema belt,⁴⁴ which would subsequently be exploited by Branch Energy (Reno, 1998). The two organisations were closely linked, and after the withdrawal of Executive Outcomes from Sierra Leone in early 1997 (required by the Abidjan Peace Accord), a suitable buyer was found for the Branch Energy concessions, in part to clean up the image of the operation. Tight security around the Diamondworks sites was considered to be of paramount importance to successful mining, and this was duly provided by Lifeguard, a specialist subsidiary of Executive Outcomes.⁴⁵

The REX Diamond Mining Corporation, registered on the Toronto Stock Exchange, was formed in late 1995 and began operations in Sierra Leone in 1996. The company also has interests in South Africa and is currently mining three kimberlite fissures there. In Sierra Leone, the company's primary concern was a kimberlite dyke in the Koidu-Sefadu-Yengema belt, but plans exist to expand into both the Tongo and

⁴² Registered in the Isle of Man

⁴³ Some commentators hold up the EO operation in Sierra Leone as a model of what private-sector security can achieve in African conflict. But how much is owed to EO operatives and how much to "patriotic" elements in the RSLMF and CDFs remains yet to be fully determined. EO was involved in re-training many NPRC-recruited RSLMF irregulars already strongly committed to reversing RUF advances (cf. Peters and Richards, 1998).

⁴⁴ Valued at around US \$30 million (full details of this contract have never been made clear).

⁴⁵ Many of the EO contingent were re-employed on this basis.

Zimmi fields. The company had suffered widespread criticism in the Sierra Leonean press for allegedly engaging in corrupt activities with the Kabbah Government's Mines Minister, Dr. Prince Harding.⁴⁶ REX employed its own security team, but was thought also to subscribe to the umbrella cover provided by Lifeguard.

Many of the larger multi-nationals suffered badly from the AFRC coup. Both REX and Diamondworks were forced to employ Executive Outcomes helicopters to evacuate engineering staff from their sites. Mining activity was suspended and hardware remained idle in heavily guarded depots for about a year. Having earlier built political patronage links with the SLPP regime, these companies were unable easily to develop commercial relations with the AFRC junta even had they wanted to. Mining companies were left with grave concerns about the long-term validity of their contracts, fearing that the AFRC/PA might remain in power for a long period of time.

Two other large-scale multi-national mineral extraction operations also suffered as a result of the last six years of the conflict in Sierra Leone. Production at the Sierra Rutile and Sieromco plants was suspended indefinitely after RUF attacks in early 1995. In 1993, Sierra Rutile (producing 160,000 tonnes of high grade titanium dioxide *per annum*), contributed a substantial proportion⁴⁷ of Sierra Leone's foreign income earnings of US\$ 108 million. It also employed a workforce of over 1500 people. The company estimated that US\$ 25 million of damage was done to the production plant by RUF raids. It had intended to re-open the plant in May 1997 at a cost of over US\$ 80 million. Security was provided by Lifeguard, but that organisation reportedly moved to Kono in the wake of the AFRC coup, consolidating operators and personnel around diamond investments.⁴⁸

Alusuisse, the European owners of the Sieromco bauxite mine, which opened in 1964 and employed a workforce of 700 decided, in December 1996, that the reopening of the mine was no longer financially viable. Assets of US\$ 30 million were lost in successive RUF attacks. Just prior to the AFRC coup,

⁴⁶ Freetown Expo Times, 14/02/1997

⁴⁷ About 40%

⁴⁸ The parent company of Sierra Rutile has recently undergone restructuring, having decided that current security conditions are possibly good enough to contemplate a resumption of mining sometime in 1999.

moves were made to sell the remaining assets to an American minerals trading group. The deal subsequently collapsed.

Any regulation of the diamond sector that existed before the coup has collapsed. The commercial and political unpredictability currently prevailing, favours bands of armed men controlling bucket-and-spade operations in the bush. During the AFRC/PA regime illicit mining was reported to be rampant, particularly in the Tongo Field and Zimmi areas. Valuable concessions, previously owned by registered companies, have fallen prey to opportunists and the power of the gun.

2.6 THE SANDLINE AFFAIR

On August 1st, 1997, the Toronto *Globe and Mail* ran a story that exposed a plot by the ousted Kabbah government to use mercenaries to overthrow the AFRC/PA junta. The *Globe* obtained documents showing that Momodu Koroma, ex-Minister of Presidential Affairs, had approached an exiled and discredited Thai businessman to obtain the services of Sandline International, a subsidiary or off-shoot of Executive Outcomes. Sandline hit the headlines in the United Kingdom in March 1998, when the organisation was hired by the government of Papua New Guinea to crush a rebellion on the island of Bougainville in order to facilitate the re-opening of a RTZ-CRA copper mine. The incident caused an international scandal, and a mutiny within the PNG Defence Force followed quickly⁴⁹. Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan was forced to resign shortly afterwards over allegations of insider share dealing in RTZ stocks.

Thai contacts had presented a proposal to Sandline that would seek to overthrow the Koroma-led AFRC/PA junta, and acquire diamond mining concessions in the Kono area for Far Eastern investors. The link between the two networks was the chairman of Sandline who was also a principal shareholder in Diamondworks. It seems the plan was for Sandline personnel to train and equip the civil defence forces with the objective of turning them into an efficient fighting group to oppose the AFRC/PA.

⁴⁹ PNG Special Commission, Sandline Enquiry, June 1996

However, a major breach in security was to prove catastrophic for the proposed venture, threatening the international reputations of the GoSL and the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office.⁵⁰

2.7 BUYING AND SELLING DIAMONDS

The market for diamonds begins almost on site. In both Koidu Town and Kenema, buying offices abound and are advertised by brightly painted murals depicting wads of dollars and polished diamonds. During research I was fortunate enough to be granted regular access to the buying office of the largest private diamond dealer in Sierra Leone. The office was run in conjunction with the buyer's eldest son. Father and son each occupied a separate room; one leading into the other. Buying offices are not just centres of commercial activity, but are also important areas of social interaction and are perpetually full of individuals discussing mining, local and national politics, football and life in the diamond districts. A typical office⁵¹ is a series of sanctums, through which clients gradually progress, as their relationship with the family develops over time. Here, there are three principal inter-connecting rooms, each representing a particular stage in social and commercial relations with the family business. The first room is essentially a waiting room. In here wait the first-time sellers, fresh from the bush, with their diamonds. With them are assorted clients of the family: policemen, soldiers, drivers and other individuals waiting to be paid or hoping for some favour or assistance from the boss. The banter in the room is the kind that one might expect to find in a bar frequented by regulars, focusing on the Africa Nations Cup or the latest BBC bulletin concerning Sierra Leone or Liberia, perhaps. Small-time miners with a low grade parcel of diamonds may often be dealt with here by one of the boss's assistants. A cursory eye over the goods is enough to establish an average price per carat. There will be some minor haggling of one or two dollars up and down and the deal will be sealed. The transaction will be made in local currency and the first-timers will depart -- for them this is strange territory; they have no need to hang around the premises -- nor will they be encouraged to.

Through the next door the scene is markedly different. The boss's son sits behind a desk covered with the accoutrements of his trade. There is a special diamond lamp, scales, magnifying loupes and scoops.

⁵⁰ See British Press, various, April-July 1998 and The Legg Commission of Enquiry (1998), HMSO, London.

⁵¹ The office described belonged to a major Shi'ite player in Koidu Town.

The walls of the shabby office are covered with photographs of the local football side sponsored by, and named after the boss; the son is the team manager. There are often senior police and army officers in the room along with more established miners. The miners are predominantly Sierra Leonean -- members of the Kono, Mende and Temne ethnic groups. There are also Mandingos from Guinea and Marakas and Dioulas from further north and east. The atmosphere is far more relaxed. Lebanese coffee and cigarettes are liberally consumed and there is constant laughter and joking. When haggling takes place there is some degree of participation from the others in the room; loud exclamations accompany mock fighting, jostling, and plenty of bad language. Everyone seems to be clutching a wad of cash in one hand and chain-smoking with the other. When a deal is completed an assistant is sent out to a back-room to fetch the required cash. Each parcel of diamonds is wrapped in white paper and the price paid noted on it⁵². It is then deposited in a safe. The client may feel disposed to remain in the office, and hang-out for the rest of the morning, watching business and meeting friends. It is clear that this is actively encouraged by both the boss and his son in an attempt to establish patron-client relations and loyalty.

The inner sanctum is the boss's office. Again the scene is different. It is here that the bigger deals take place and arrangements are made for supporting mining operations. The boss is also the elected head of the Lebanese community in Kono, and as such is the "real" chief of the town. He essentially controls and directs the majority of mining among the Lebanese, controls the export of diamonds out of the area and liaises between the various social, political and economic factions with interests in Kono diamonds. Here the atmosphere is more mature and reserved. There is a feeling of respect for the boss's position and his network of clients is huge. The office in appearance is much the same as the son's, but the visitors' chairs are more luxurious. Again, the room is continually full, but the individuals are much more important members of the Kono diamond world: there are senior Lebanese business associates -- supporters and buyers, powerful Sierra Leonean diamond chiefs and politicians. Coffee and Marlboro are the order of the day and are constantly supplied by a servant to all those present in the office. More care is taken over the transactions because the parcels are often bigger and much more valuable than

⁵² Interestingly, much the same kind of business transaction is found in the Diamond Clubs of Antwerp. If brokers are trying to sell goods for their own clients, the boss will make his offer and then seal the parcel while he awaits a reply. He will not consider buying the parcel if the seal has been tampered with.

those changing hands in the other rooms. The boss obviously loves diamonds and is in his element when dealing with them. For him, they clearly have an aesthetic appeal which is often lost on those who see the business as just another way of making money. Each stone is discussed at some length with the client and other buyers in the room are invited to have a look if the specimen is a particularly fine one. Once the parcel has been examined the boss moves all the stones together in a group and with a final glance begins the haggling with the lowest possible price. The client goes high and tries to drag the boss up. This is not just straight forward bargaining; various factors have to be taken into account. The client has reached a position of some privilege in his business dealings with the boss and does not wish to jeopardise this relationship over one particular parcel of stones -- to be relegated to the son's office would put his trade in full view of lesser players and would be most undesirable in terms of his own standing in the Kono hierarchy. On the other hand, the boss wishes to avoid losing the client to another competing buyer, which he would almost certainly do if there was any change in the relationship that he and the client presently enjoyed. The result is a complex negotiation of power relations alongside the commercial transaction.⁵³ If the client remains particularly stubborn over the value of his diamonds, other Lebanese buyers in the office may interject in support of the boss, attempting to re-assure the client of his unlikelihood of finding a better price elsewhere. It is usually at this point that the client backs down and some compromise is found. In order to soften the blow the boss might throw in a contribution to the week's running costs of the client's mine and a couple of bottles of "Black Label" whisky as a symbol of good will. However, on some occasions these mechanisms fail and a deal collapses. It then remains to be seen how the relationship will fare at the next meeting. On at least two occasions observed, clear threats of "relegation" were made to particularly stubborn clients who refused to budge. They were dubbed as "time-wasters" after they had left the office and the general consensus was to give them one last chance.

The ethnicity of clients is quite varied and the big buyers make distinctions between the *locals* and the *itinerants*. The Kono mining area attracts young diggers from all over the Mano River Belt and, if one looks, it is relatively easy to find representatives of trading diaspora from all over the sub-region. Commonly the bigger Sierra Leonean supporters tend to be either Kono or Mende but there is no hard

⁵³ See Appadurai, A. and Kopytoff, I. in Appadurai ed. (1986), *The social life of things*, Cambridge University Press.

and fast rule to this. Political relationships over the last fifty years have ensured a rich ethnic diversity in the area that is very unlike the make-up of Tongo. Tongo spans eight Mende chiefdoms⁵⁴ and remains very much a Mende asset. The reasons for this have been outlined earlier and concern the lesser degree of governmental involvement in the field over the years. It seemed that until the 1980s, the Kono deposits were so rich that the APC was unconcerned with anywhere else [see Chapters Five and Six]. This suited the Mende chiefs very well; they could quietly attend to their mining and sell to the smaller Lebanese buyers in Kenema. It was a much quieter market and far removed from the more intense political clientelism pervasive in Kono.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Sierra Leone long-distance diamond traders and supporters have begun to emerge in the market-place and have found particular niches within which to prosper. Maraka traders have long been present in both Tongo Field and Kono, but over the last five years they have become far more involved in the industry. Several Lebanese supporters stated that Marakas had been involved in diamonds for some time, but traditionally had travelled down to Central Africa and operated in C.A.R., Zaire and even as far south as Angola.⁵⁵ Market conditions in these countries no longer offered advantageous compensation for the long journeys that these traders made by road, and consequently they were starting to find that Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia were more favourable markets in which to do business. The instability in Sierra Leone and Liberia was manageable for individuals with their cultural capital and experience, and made diamonds in the bush cheaper to buy. They operate in a flexible manner and are prepared to exploit other markets for commodities like gold and platinum. They travel continuously trying to keep up with market trends and have little in the way of overheads. Several of the larger Kono and Kenema Lebanese buyers have started to operate cash transfer systems, whereby money for diamonds is paid directly into bank accounts in Banjul and Dakar. This attracts new clients for the buyers, and ensures that these long-distance travellers are not forced to carry large amounts of cash. It is a more mutually advantageous arrangement between buyer and seller and has developed a new network of trade in the market.

⁵⁴ Bambara, Nongowa, Badja, Simbaru, Dodo, Kandu-Lekpeyama, Wando, Komboya chiefdoms.

⁵⁵ Various interviews, Jan – April, 1997.

2.8 EXPORTING DIAMONDS ABROAD

Theoretically, the Government of Sierra Leone should see the majority of its revenue from the diamond industry generated by export taxation. Diamond exporters (of which there are relatively few), must be legally in possession of an export licence which costs about US \$200,000 *per annum*. For serious exporters this is not a particularly large expenditure when one considers that some buyers are turning over US \$175,000 *per diem* just in buying terms, and probably half as much again on supporting. All legitimate diamond shipments out of Sierra Leone travel through the Government Gold and Diamond Office (GGDO), where the shipment is valued by independent consultants so that an accurate 2½% duty can be levied on the goods for export.⁵⁶ In theory, the process ought to work well. The consultants are highly experienced and De Beers-trained and the tax is handled by the Ministry of Finance. The problem of course, is that the office only sees about 15% of annual national production with the rest being smuggled out of the country. The destination for most of the diamonds is usually Antwerp, but some go to Israel, India and the United States.

Under war conditions in Sierra Leone and Liberia, diamonds played a major role as a suitable extra-national currency to be traded for small arms and other materiel (including drugs). Cross-border guerrilla organisations like ULIMO and the RUF have become adept at this kind of commerce. Old “Mande” trade routes were reconstituted as networks for shipping arms from Burkina Faso and Mali, in turn connected as far afield as China. Indeed, many of the small-arms that have found their way into these wars were decommissioned 1960s vintage AK47s and RPG 7s, of which the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has millions in stock. The PLA has hugely powerful control over Chinese industry, so a link between arms export and industrially-destined diamond imports seems highly plausible.

It is in this way that Kono, Tongo Field and Zimmi diamonds finally begin to enter the slipstream of the global economy. The first stop for many of the smuggled diamonds is often Conakry, where stones have held their price rather better than in Guinea’s two southern neighbours. Control of the global diamond

⁵⁶ Some legitimate exporters set themselves up as clandestine “export agents”, collecting the 2½% – 3% tax from supporters and buyers unable or unprepared to purchase expensive GGDO export licences of their own. This also removes some of the inherent risks for “mules” and traders during the smuggling of large shipments to Europe.

trade is undertaken by De Beers through numerous subsidiaries which deal with specific aspects of the trade. This complex constellation of companies operates what has come to be known as “the policy of international co-operation”.⁵⁷ The majority of those involved in the world market have come to accept this policy as a kind of benevolent economic autocracy which ultimately benefits all those concerned, that is to say, the primary producers, the governments of mining countries, the diamond market, the jewellery trade and the consumer. The origins of this scheme began with Cecil Rhodes’s take-over of the South African Kimberley diamond fields in 1890. Rhodes saw that there was a necessity to create some stability in the price of diamonds, “being keenly aware that overproduction in a market that was slow to expand and was sensitive to any recession or depression of trade in general, would have a severe effect on the mines and miners” (Bruton, 1978). In other words, market security lay in equating supply to demand. This process was refined over the next three decades, and by the time Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, through his holdings in the Anglo-American Corporation and Consolidated Diamond Mines, became chairman of De Beers in 1929, it was felt that the best means of achieving this was through one single channel, which became known as the Diamond Corporation.⁵⁸

This process became formalised in the mid 1930s by the creation of a diarchy consisting of the Diamond Trading Company which would control sales, and the Diamond Producers Association which would formulate policy, set quotas and make marketing agreements with “outside” producers through the Diamond Corporation. By the 1960s, the increased agglomeration of these once separate entities formed the nucleus of the Central Selling Organisation (CSO) which currently controls 75% to 80% of global diamond production. The CSO is essentially a group of marketing companies through which the majority of the principal diamond producers sell diamonds on a co-operative basis. When diamonds arrive at the CSO they are divided into gem, near-gem and industrial categories – each of which is sold through different organisations.

⁵⁷ See Legrand, J. (1980) *Diamonds: Myth, Magic and Reality*, Crown, New York.

⁵⁸ Oppenheimer had also noticed that the diamond trade was subject to slumps, averaging one every eight years. The discovery of diamonds in German South West Africa in the mid 1920s was beginning to cause market saturation and aggravate the situation.

The gem and near-gem market is handled by the Diamond Trading Company. Diamonds are sorted into individual parcels and sold to invited clients called *sight-holders* at sales or *sights* held ten times a year⁵⁹. There are just over 200 *sight-holders* in the world and they tend to be mainly manufacturers, but some are wholesalers. The *sight-holder* is permitted to request quantities, sizes and shapes of the goods that he requires, but is not permitted to make selections. Each diamond is valued twice before arriving at its final valuation. The ultimate prices are fixed and there is absolutely no element of bargaining. Each individual parcel is a complete entity and can in no way be partially altered according to needs of the buyer. The *sight-holder* is obliged to purchase the full range of goods that is offered for sale. It is his responsibility to sell on, if he can, any diamonds that he does not require. *Sight-holders* who are manufacturers will have to sub-divide each parcel into those goods that are to be kept and those that are to be re-sold. Merchant wholesalers must re-sort parcels into smaller sets corresponding with the manufacturing needs of customers.

There is a similar process for industrial diamonds, but obviously a different set of clients who supply an entirely different network of industrial-hardware manufacturers. The trade is handled by Industrial Distributors (Sales) Ltd which is part of the CSO. Although the financial turnover of the market is much smaller, the large volume and strategic importance of industrial goods makes it a high profile market in its own right. Both Zaire and Australia are the principal suppliers to the world market. “*Drillers*” and “*dressers*”, special categories of well-formed, but heavily coloured diamonds are used in the drill-bits that are employed in oil wells and deep-cast diamond mines.

2.9 THE SYSTEM OF PRICE CONTROL

The system of price control is designed not to force unwanted rough diamonds on helpless buyers, but to maintain an artificial market value for diamonds. A high market demand for diamonds ensures that *sight-holders* are able to re-sell unwanted goods with ease. At certain points in market fluctuation, demand becomes so high that *sight-holders* begin to raise the price of unwanted rough. Once this pattern is noticed by the CSO it is likely to provoke the organisation to make a price rise at *sight* level,

⁵⁹ The five week period running up to each *sight* is known as a *programme*. It is during this period that the goods for each *sight* are sorted and valued.

thus stabilising demand. During troughs in the market, the opposite happens. If there is a general trend among *sight-holders* to take fewer goods in response to a flagging market, the CSO will immediately stockpile to protect prices. In the event of catastrophic market conditions, the cartel is empowered to allocate sales quotas to each of the producing members and limit purchases reflexively to re-enforce control over market supply. During the recession of the 1930s, the situation became so bad that entire mines were mothballed. The control base is designed to be broad, so minor fluctuations are ignored. At times diamonds are sold by the organisation for less than their open-market value, and *vice versa*. The main objective is to maintain generally the artificial market value of diamond, and ensure that there is no fluctuation in price – only steady inflation.

Majority control over global production is the key to the successful implementation of this system. State contracts with major producing nations like Namibia, Botswana and Russia are not enough to keep the organisation above the 75% of market control level. To maintain this hegemony De Beers personnel must buy diamonds that slip through the net on the open market. This means establishing buying offices in places where state control of the diamond industry is limited, and it is into this group that Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and to a certain extent, Angola, fall. If diamonds are permitted to fall into the hands of competitors there will be inevitably, over time, an erosion of the market control that De Beers enjoys. The Angolan civil war, for instance, led to a massive flow of illicitly dug diamonds onto the global market and seriously threatened the stability of prices. De Beers were forced to establish buying offices along the Angola--Zaire border and negotiate direct purchasing contracts with both UNITA and the MPLA to stem the tide. This cost the organisation \$250 million/month for a period of several years.

Some rough diamonds, however, do escape CSO control and are traded on the open market in Antwerp, the manufacturing⁶⁰ capital of the world. Belgium realised the importance of its diamond industry long ago, and in order to prevent it from moving elsewhere has been forced to adopt a completely *laissez-faire*, no questions asked, attitude to the market. At the turn of the century, the manufacturing industry had been based in London, but the introduction of duty on imported rough drove many of the larger

⁶⁰ Diamond polishing

operators to Amsterdam, where they remained until the Dutch government introduced similar constraints on trade. Antwerp was the next location and the Belgian parliament has become aware that any undue restriction of diamond business is likely to have the same negative effect. There is no import duty for rough diamonds entering the country, but revenue is generated by taxing the production of manufactured diamonds which is something that can be done far more effectively in terms of accountability. Most rough diamond buying offices still perform transactions in cash, so theoretically a buyer from the bush in Sierra Leone can fly direct into Belgium,⁶¹ sell his diamonds, deposit his money in a European bank and be back in the bush within 48 hours.

2.10 TRADE IN MANUFACTURED (POLISHED) DIAMONDS

Polished diamonds are bought and sold in their own specialist market and the trade is centred around the diamond clubs and bourses of Antwerp, New York, Tel Aviv, London, Amsterdam, Bangkok and Bombay. These market-places are located in huge rooms with tall windows facing away from the sun. Rows of long rectangular tables and benches are situated at right-angles to the windows so as to benefit from the entry of passive light. Buyers, sellers and brokers sit in groups examining parcels of diamonds and bargaining over prices [see plate 7: p.83]. Sometimes sellers are brokers and are, therefore, trading the goods for another individual. The buyer will examine the goods, make an offer and then seal the diamonds in a specially folded paper envelope.⁶² The broker will then relay the offer to the owner who will decide whether to accept or not. The seal is sacrosanct and can only be broken by the potential buyer, even if his offer is rejected.⁶³ If the offer is accepted a date of payment is verbally agreed and the goods are then taken to the bourse or club office where the weight of the diamonds and the date of the transaction is officially recorded. The parcel is then sealed in a new envelope, to be kept in the Club safe until the day of payment. Any disputes in the process are handled by a Board of Arbitrators who are empowered with disciplinary measures should they be needed.

⁶¹ Some independent buying companies have set up offices actually inside Antwerp Airport.

⁶² A more refined version of the method of transaction used in the Kono buying offices.

⁶³ This ensures that there can be no misunderstandings concerning the natural "termination" of any potential deal (whether successful or not).

Like any exclusive society membership is by invitation only, and bourses and clubs world-wide are affiliated to the World Federation of Diamond Bourses. Membership is governed by strict regulations and there are rules of etiquette concerning transactions. Credit and trust are vital to the dynamism of the trade, and violators face swift exclusion in order to protect other members. The Federation circulates the names of debtors, defaulters and bankrupts on “green slips” to every affiliated club and bourse in the world. These are posted on prominent notice boards for other members to see, and generally spell commercial death for the unfortunate *diamontaire*. It is a very closed network, not only in terms of trade, but also of ethnicity. The polished diamond market has been historically dominated by Orthodox and Hassidic Jewry, which superimposes a religion-oriented ethical and moral framework on the conduct of business.

PLATE 7

THE TRADING HALL OF THE ANTWERP DIAMOND BOURSE



CHAPTER THREE: SHI'ITES AND MARONITES -- AN ETHNO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE LEBANESE DIASPORA COMMUNITY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two showed that the global diamond trade can be sub-divided into distinct and separate areas dominated by different groups of players. Diaspora communities play a large role in the diamond world and these players are typically bound together by complex social, cultural, political and ethnic ties. The industry in Sierra Leone is no exception. This chapter and the next are an analysis of two key groups in the Sierra Leonean industry; both from Lebanon. In the past, academic study of Sierra Leone has tended to group them together as one entity, with one national identity. Given Lebanon's violent and fragmented history, particularly over the last thirty years, the back-drop of Levantine confessionalist sectarianism demands rather more accurate analysis. The continued conflict in Lebanon, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, has had far reaching effects on the West African diamond trade. Both Shi'ite and Maronite diaspora communities have suffered the consequences of general political destabilisation in the countries in which they have settled as well as in their country of origin. The two groups are radically different in terms of social and economic organisation and, throughout recent history, events in both the Middle East and the Mano River Belt have tested their cultural and commercial capital to the limit. Both groups entered the Sierra Leonean diamond industry on a level footing in the 1950s, after the introduction of the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme (ADMS), and since then they have been in competition for industrial hegemony. During this period of time, fortunes have varied. Over the past ten years the Shi'ites have been more successful. The first part of this chapter will examine the contexts, both Levantine and Sierra Leonean, in which the Shi'ites have established themselves as a successful, but often pressurised trading diaspora.

3.2 DIASPORAS, POWER ELITES AND MARKET HEGEMONIES

I first travelled to West Africa in 1992, journeying to Sierra Leone via Nigeria. While in Nigeria, I was fortunate enough to have time to travel north from Lagos to Ilorin, stopping at Ogbomoso and Abeokuta along the way. Lagos has a large Levantine diaspora community, but it was not until my visits to Ogun, Ondo and Kwara states that I began to learn something of its historical depth. The initial cause of my interest had been the strange word that children were shouting at me upon my arrival at villages *en route*. In Lagos, the standard colloquial term for any European is *Òyinbó*¹, but in the heart of Yorubaland I found myself being called *Kóra*. I was aware that the word was not Yoruba and after some enquiry, my travelling companion, an elderly Yoruba chief, was able to enlighten me. He explained to me that, at the turn of the century, Levantine traders would travel into the interior, north of the Lagos Territory, in order to trade certain commodities in villages and towns. They would often announce their arrival with a *pidgin* cry of “*kóra kóra*”, or literally “coral coral”. Coral was an important trade-item used for personal adornment, and these traders, bringing it from the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, soon established control over the market. For some reason, seller and wares became synonymous and the term has endured to the present day, even though Levantine merchants have long since discovered far more lucrative ways of making a living. *Kóra*, of course, is a colloquial, generic term for a diaspora group consisting of Shi’ite Moslems, Maronites and a small percentage of Druze Moslems and Greek Orthodox Christians.² In the context of the Sierra Leonean diamond industry, it is the Shi’ites and the Maronites who are the principal participants. At the time of research there were perhaps only five Druze families living in Sierra Leone and none is directly involved in the diamond trade.

3.3 SHI’A ISLAM IN CONTEXT: THE ORIGINS OF SHI’A ISLAM

With the death of the Prophet Mohammed in 632AD, the Moslem community (known as the *Umma*) found itself with a leadership crisis. The Prophet had no sons to succeed him and the majority of his followers believed that he did not name a successor as Caliph before his death. However, a minority sect

¹ Yoruba: literally “peel-skin” – See *A dictionary of the Yoruba language*, 1971, O.U.P.

² See van der Laan (1975)

(the Shi'a)³ believed that he had named his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as Caliph. Ali, was married to Mohammed's oldest daughter Fatima. The *Umma* majority wished to resolve the *inter-regnum* as quickly as possible, and decided that an election would be the best course of action. The majority group (who would later become the *Sunni*) duly elected Abu Bakarr, who was to lead the community for two years until his death in 634AD. There were two other Caliphs, until Ali finally took his turn, more than twenty years after the death of Mohammed. After five years in the Caliphate, Ali was murdered, and was briefly succeeded by his eldest son Hassan. Hassan was under pressure to stand down in favour of Mu'awiya, the militarily-powerful governor of Syria, who had previously challenged Ali's right to the Caliphate. Hassan was subsequently murdered by the supporters of Mu'awiya; Hussein, Ali's younger son was forced to flee with the Shi'ites to Kufa, located in the area that is today southern Iraq.

In 680AD, Hussein, with a small group of about 70 supporters, left Kufa with the intention of overthrowing Mu'awiya's successors, the *Ummayad* dynasty of Damascus. On a desert plain near the village of Karbala,⁴ Hussein and his men were surrounded by *Ummayad'iyin* fighters. They held out for ten days, from the first day of *Muharram* to the tenth day (known as *Ashura*), with little water, refusing to acknowledge the right of the *Ummayad* to the Caliphate. They were finally slaughtered and Hussein's head was taken to Caliph Yazid in Damascus.

"Quite soon after his death the battlefield became a place of veneration and pilgrimage to the Shi'a and over time this lamentable enterprise was transformed in the imagination of the Shi'a into an event of incalculable importance. Hussein's refusal to capitulate to overwhelming odds was interpreted as a voluntary self-sacrifice, and through his suffering and obedience to the will of God it is believed that he was given the exclusive privilege of making intercession for believers to enter Paradise" . Gustav Thaiss (1979)

³ Literally "Sect"

⁴ In present day southern Iraq

3.4 SHI'A ISLAM TODAY

Like Sunni Islam, Shi'a Islam is no longer a homogenous movement. The sect began as a sectarian political protest movement, and these militant origins have given rise to a religious cosmology that differs greatly from Sunni orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Heterogeneity of Shi'a Islam has developed through time as a direct consequence of the doctrine of *taqiya* or "concealment". In circumstances of religious persecution, the Shi'ites are permitted to hide their true beliefs if it is thought that exposure would physically endanger either individuals or communities. The origins of this practice can be found with Ali's concealment of the belief that he and his descendants were right to claim succession from Mohammed. This concept has enabled dispersed populations within the sect to absorb aspects of other regional religions, creating hybrid sub-sects that Sunni and other Shi'ite observers have often maintained to be not truly Islamic. The Alawi and the Druze may be considered examples of this, both being able to trace descendancy from the Shi'a schism. Halm (1992), points out that Shi'a Islam tends towards "rationalism" rather than the tradition-bound "authoritarianism" of Sunni Islam.

From the eighth century onwards, Shi'a Islam has experienced continual metamorphosis as disparate groups, without the control of a central hierarchy, break away from the core orthodoxy of the sect. Today there are four main sub-sects which are considered truly Shi'a⁵:

Zaidi

Doctrinally, the Zaidi are closest to the Sunni. The group is mainly situated in the Yemeni region of the Arabian Peninsula, and has developed a system of leadership structured around elected descendants of Ali; this has led to dynasticism. Sometimes known as the Fivers, the sect believes in five legitimate Imams descended from Ali. The Zaidi were the first to split from the main body of the Shi'a in 713 AD.

⁵ The Druze are closely related to the Shi'ites, and in particular the Alawi. The Druze are considered to be an heretical Muslim sect and were founded in the late tenth century by Caliph Hakim of the Shi'ite dynasty of the Egyptian Fatimids. "They believe in emanations of the Deity and transmigration of the soul. ...The Druze do not proselytise." Randall (1983:p38)

Ismaili

The Ismailis, also known as the Seveners, split with the Imamis (the Twelvers) in 765AD. Originally, the group were extremist in nature, and included the Nizari Assassins and the Fatimid Caliphate of early medieval Egypt. Since the thirteenth century, the sub-sect has become increasingly moderate. Today, most members of the sect are to be found in the Indian sub-continent, Afghanistan and the West. The sect is led by the dynastic Aga Khans.

Alawi

The Alawis are predominantly located in Syria and Turkey. The sub-sect split from the Ismailis in 1021.⁶ Alawism contains elements of mysticism and gnosticism, yet also remains closely related to Ismailism.

Imami

The Imamis, also known as the Twelvers, are the largest body of Shi'ites. Imami Shi'ites are located in Iran (where it has been the state religion since 1501), Iraq (the Islamic majority nationally, but politically dominated by Tikriti Sunni Ba'athists) and South Lebanon. The Imamis believe in twelve legitimate Imams of the Islamic community beginning with Ali. It is believed that the Imams possess all the charismatic qualities of the prophet himself, except prophecy, and one Imam remains "hidden", ready to return and "redress injustices and return the Muslim community to its proper course"⁷.

There are three clerical ranks within Shi'a Islam, but none is obtained on the basis of formal appointment in the context of a structured hierarchy. Each position requires a degree of popular support and consensus to reinforce the credibility of leadership.⁸ Among the Imami of Iran and South Lebanon, village mosques have an associated *Mullah* who is charged with the delivery of sermons and the general religious guidance of the congregation. Above this position are the *Mujtahid*-s, clerical scholars devoted to the study and interpretation of the *Qu'ran*. Most have pupils and may be supported financially by a

⁶ The Alawis broke away with the Druze and then further sub-divided.

⁷ Eickelman, (1989:275)

⁸ See Gilsenen, M. (1982) *Recognising Islam*, London and Sydney: Croom Helm.

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network of patrons. These positions are almost never salaried, thus tuition is often the only means of self-support for the holders. Finally, there are the *Ayatullah-s*,⁹ a small group of clerics who are widely regarded by the Shi'ite community to be authorities in contemporary intellectual and religious discourse, and paragons of piety. There are several centres of Shi'ite scholarship; the most respected is currently situated in the Iranian city of Qum. Qum attracts students from all over the Shi'ite world, encouraging the exchange of thoughts and ideas, and ensuring the continued evolutionary development of the religion. Leading clerics may not necessarily return to their country of origin to practice, but instead may migrate to other Shi'ite communities around the Middle East.¹⁰

Religious leadership, therefore, can be seen as entirely dependent on the level of popular support that exists for particular clerics at any one time. However, although the formal structure appears to be weak, the informal nature of Shi'ite leadership is characteristically extremely pervasive in Shi'ite societies. This pervasiveness has often been underestimated by political and religious opponents in the past and, when coupled with the secrecy of *taqiya*, it can become an incredibly powerful vehicle for social mobilisation, the most recent and obvious examples of this being the 1979 Iranian revolution and the rise of Hizb Allah in South Lebanon.

3.5 THE SHI'A IN SOUTH LEBANON

In order to explore the role of Lebanese Shi'ite diaspora in the Sierra Leonean diamond industry it is necessary fully to contextualise the group in terms of wider political economy. Events in Lebanon over the last twenty years have done much to influence the way in which the Shi'ites of the diamond fields express themselves both politically and economically. The diaspora and their co-religionists in Lebanon are closely linked and strong ties are maintained between the groups [see below]. During the internal migration, from the al-Janub region in the far south of Lebanon to Beirut during the early part of this century, the newly urbanised Shi'ites were forced to maintain political relations with their villages of origin. The established patron-client political structure was unable to adapt in the face of population movements and shifts, obliging individuals to preserve traditional, and political, points of reference. It

⁹ Literally translated as "sign of God".

¹⁰ Centres of Shi'ite education are located in both Iran and Lebanon – there is some specialisation of curricula.

seems that the same has happened for diaspora living in West Africa -- regional, political and economic loyalties still exist and, in certain instances, have become stronger in the face of conflict and social upheaval. Certainly, the power of the old political bosses has faded, becoming irrelevant in the context of the complexities of modern Lebanese society, but new, populist leaders, like Imam Musa al-Sadr and (Sierra Leone born) Nabih Berri, have taken their place to empower and project the interests of new, political, constituencies. This section outlines some of the recent history of Lebanon, and how events have motivated social and political mobilisation of the Shi'ites. Relationships exist between this mobilisation and diaspora communities, with recent far-reaching consequences for the Sierra Leonean diamond trade and its participants.

The last Lebanese census took place in 1932 and since then there have been marked changes in the demography of the country. In 1932, the Maronites were the largest community in the country, followed by the Sunnis and then the Shi'ites. Over the last sixty years, there has been a steady population shift, leaving the Shi'ites by far the largest community, probably accounting for more than 30%¹¹ of the entire population. Although this change has taken place, the Shi'ites have continued to be denied the benefits of development and increased political representation. Indeed, aside from the migration of large proportions of the other confessions, it is this general lack of development that seems to have kept the Shi'ite birth rate high. The increased affluence of the Sunnis and the Christians has seen their birth rates drop dramatically. Without a doubt the Shi'ites remain the most disadvantaged group in the Lebanon. Shi'ite family incomes are typically 30% lower than the national average; they are the most poorly educated, with 50% of the Shi'ite population having had no schooling whatsoever. The south suffers from general underdevelopment of infrastructure; the roads are poorly maintained, there is still a lack of running water in some areas, electricity supply is minimal outside the larger towns, sanitation is absent from most areas and healthcare is minimal.¹²

¹¹ "Taken together the Muslims (Shi'ites, Sunnis and Druze) represent 60% of Lebanon's population". (Norton, 1987). Calculations for the early 1970s suggest that the average Shi'ite family size was nine members, compared to between five and six for Christians.

¹² Norton (1987)

Well over 55% of the Shi'ite population is to be found in the rural areas of the al-Janub and al-Biqa' regions, where many have traditionally lived and worked as small-holders, often labouring as a second job. For most of this century, the agrarian sector has experienced a steady decline. This has led to an increase in internal migration, especially among Shi'ites, who began to move off the land in the south and drift towards the industrial sectors of Tyre and Beirut. The proletarian and sub-proletarian slums expanded, with even greater levels of deprivation than associated with the agrarian inertia of the south. This had some effect on encouraging external migration which, typically for the Shi'ites, was to the Gulf or West Africa. This choice of destination is important as Norton (1987) shows:

“Significantly, all of the Lebanese communities in Africa are led by the Shi'is. Unlike earlier waves of Lebanese emigrants who relocated permanently in the Americas and Europe, the Shi'a found themselves in societies in which barriers of color or nationality ensured that they would eventually return to Lebanon. Thus, the overseas Shi'i population was not cut off from Lebanon, but instead maintained close ties to home. One result of these persistent ties was that the migrants became an important source of funds for political movements that would recognise and preserve their newly achieved socio-economic status.”

By the early 1950s, a new problem was developing for those Shi'ites who remained in the south. Large numbers of Palestinian refugees were settling in the area, putting added strain on the already woefully poor infrastructure. In 1970, the Palestinian civilians were joined by the *fida'iyyin*,¹³ thousands of defeated but armed Palestinian fighters who had been expelled from Jordan. This influx was to be a key factor in the social and political mobilisation of the Shi'ites in South Lebanon. The presence of a large body of armed Palestinians effectively destabilised the south and was highly detrimental to the already ailing position of the Shi'ites. In time this Palestinian, and predominantly Sunni resistance force, would attract Israeli incursions into the al-Janub region, often catching Shi'ites in the crossfire. The position of the Shi'ites was now critical, but there was to be no assistance for the Shi'ite community from the Palestinian leadership or the Beirut ruling elites who continued to ignore the situation. It was the dire nature of this situation that ultimately led to the political mobilisation of the Shi'ites.

¹³ Palestinian liberationists

3.6 SHI'ITE POLITICAL MOBILISATION

Like many other Mediterranean Rim societies, power in Lebanon had traditionally rested with key political families, wielded on a patrimonial basis (see Gellner, 1977). The organisation of these families in the national context was regional and confessional, and for well over a century the success of the individual was largely dependent on the support given by these political patrons, known as *zu'ama* (sing. *za'im*). For the Shi'ites of the south there were six influential *zu'ama*, led by the al-Sa'ad family, passing political power from one generation to the next. However, in comparison to the Maronite and Druze *zu'ama*, these families were in a relatively weak position, primarily because the Shi'ites remained a marginal group and under-represented in parliament. The position of Speaker,¹⁴ however, was held by the Shi'ite *za'im* Kamil al-As'ad, who was to jealously guard what traditional control he had over his southern constituency against the seductive attractions of emerging populist movements.

The origins of social mobilisation, leading to political mobilisation, can be traced back to the early 1960s, when secular political groups began to realise the potential power that had so far lain untapped in the Shi'ite constituency. The Communist Party and the Communist Action Group were the first to make attempts at the recruitment of Shi'ite support on the basis of working towards regional reform for the south. The communists were soon rivalled by others, particularly the Arab Nationalists, the Arab Liberation Front and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. These secular organisations, while attempting to undermine the power of the traditional *zu'ama*, also created uneasiness among many Shi'ites who felt the community was becoming vulnerable to possible exploitation at the hands of political groups, with essentially little concern for the well-being of the Shi'ites and Shi'ite culture. The result was a new form of specific sectarianism, concentrating solely on the plight of the Shi'ites themselves and their rights and position in a democratic Lebanese state. This emergent sectarian movement was led by Imam Musa al-Sadr.

¹⁴Since the 1943 liberation of Lebanon from Vichy control, the President's office was controlled by the Maronites, that of Prime Minister by the Druze and that of Speaker by the Shi'ites.

3.7 MUSA AL-SADR AND THE FOUNDATION OF HARAKAT AMAL

Musa al-Sadr was born into an important religious family in the Iranian centre of religious learning, Qum, in 1928. After an initially secular education, he was steered towards religion by his family and entered a religious school to study Islamic jurisprudence. Here he became the editor of a well known Islamic periodical, before travelling to a Shi'ite university in southern Iraq to continue with his Islamic education. In 1960, he was invited by the Shi'ite community of Tyre to take up the post of chief *mufti*¹⁵ following the death of the position's previous incumbent. On arrival in Tyre, he immediately established a vocational school for Shi'ite students and became politically active in the call for regional reform. It soon became clear to Shi'ites in the south that it was his intention to become a unifying leader, a job for which he seemed well suited: "a physically imposing man of intelligence, courage, personal charm, and enormous energy -- one of his former assistants claims that he frequently worked twenty hours a day -- al-Sadr attracted a wide array of supporters, ranging from Shi'i merchants making their fortunes in West Africa to petit-bourgeois youth" (Norton, 1987). Al-Sadr exploited diaspora connections for financial and economic support. In 1967 he made a well-publicised visit to Sierra Leone, touring Freetown and the interior to establish firm relations with leading figures of the Shi'ite community. He also encouraged local South Lebanese imams to visit Sierra Leone and other parts of West Africa as well in order to develop a strong sense of mutual support and obligation.¹⁶

Under the leadership and example of Musa al-Sadr, new ideas about the benefits of sectarianism flourished. He was undoubtedly extremely skilful in the use of religious symbolism and allegory to emphasise political points, often drawing upon the events of the Karbala Martyrdom to illustrate the suffering, and indomitable spirit of the Shi'ite community. Martyrdom in the face of corrupt tyranny became a recurrent theme in his writings and speeches, as he criticised the *zu'ama*, the government and the Israelis. As the Lebanese political situation deteriorated, he began to attack others, creating new adversaries. It was the dynamic nature of Lebanese politics at the time, and its rapidly evolving combinations of conflict and alliance, that would eventually lead to the foundation of Harakat al-

¹⁵ A *mufti* is an expounder of Islamic law.

¹⁶ van der Laan (1975: 356)

Mahrumin¹⁷ and the subsequent metamorphosis of the movement into Harakat Amal,¹⁸ a more militant and radical sectarian organisation arising from the frustrations born of the failures of the Lebanese government to act on the deteriorating social, political and security situation in the south.

The influx of defeated *fiida'iyin* fighters from Jordan had a profound effect on the development of the movement. Musa al-Sadr saw the risk of an autonomous Palestinian state in South Lebanon. The heavily armed fighters had become the *de facto* authority and were organising extortion and protection rackets, all at the expense of the Shi'ite population. The Lebanese government remained powerless to assist in any way -- the national army was ineffective and reluctant to risk conflict with the *fiida'iyin*, while throughout the country the gradual but inevitable growth of extralegal militias was well under way. There were now few options for the Shi'ites, other than taking up arms to protect themselves and their property.

Al-Sadr's rhetoric became progressively more militant as Israeli cross-border raiding intensified and Shi'ite casualties mounted. By 1973, he was calling for armed revolution to bring civil rights or martyrdom, and by 1974 the risk of a civil uprising seemed imminent. It never happened; a bloody, factionalised civil war commenced as the government collapsed. The Shi'ites found themselves allied with the (predominantly Druze) Lebanese National Movement and, briefly, the Palestinians. In response to the conflict, and the general increase in insecurity, Harakat al-Mahrumin formed an organised and co-ordinated militia, which was called the *Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniya*.¹⁹ Ironically, the militia was trained by elements of the PLO leadership of Fatah, who would later be forced to face it in battle. To the Shi'ites it became known by its acronym -- Amal -- the Arabic for "Hope".

The beginning of 1976 saw some small progress towards reform in the south; at least on paper. However, Amal, which now became the umbrella term for the entire movement, civil and military, was still rivalled in terms of Shi'ite support by the Lebanese National Movement and Palestinian groups. It was the 1978 Israeli invasion of South Lebanon that would change this. The Israelis had decided to embark upon a far more aggressive policy towards the Palestinian presence located just over their

¹⁷ Movement of the Deprived

¹⁸ Movement for Hope

¹⁹ Lebanese Resistance Movement

northern border. Successive attacks pushed the Palestinians and their supporters underground, leaving the Shi'ites free from the yoke of the *fida'iyin*. Amal began to organise security and civil defence forces to prevent their return and soon came to be regarded by the Israelis as allies (albeit unlikely ones), keeping the sensitive border region clear of the *fida'iyin*. Norton (1987) notes that by the late 1970s the Shi'ites in the south had become fervently anti-Palestinian and held them entirely responsible (as opposed to the Israelis) for the socio-economic problems they faced. This political process led to increased Shi'ite isolation, particularly in relation to pro-Palestinian members of the Sunni Arab world.

In late August 1978, Musa al-Sadr, along with three leading aides travelled to Libya for what was ostensibly a semi-official visit to discuss contemporary political developments in Lebanon. The invitation had been extended by Colonel Gadaffi himself, and was to be the final stop-over after a general tour that included Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Algeria. Neither al-Sadr or any of his entourage were ever seen again. The Libyans claim that al-Sadr and his party left on a flight for Rome, but this has been flatly denied by supporters who believe that impostors may have taken their places on the aeroplane. It is generally accepted that they were murdered, but responsibility for the act has never been attributed. There are several theories to answer the question of who was involved, including assassination by the Shah's secret police, but by far the most credible and partly substantiated explanation²⁰ is that Gadaffi disposed of him in reaction to his increasingly anti-Palestinian rhetoric. Gadaffi, fiercely anti-Israeli and a principal supporter of the PLO, was concerned at the way the Shi'ites were effectively abetting Israeli action in South Lebanon. It is probable that an attempt was made to put pressure on al-Sadr to cease and desist from this policy, and when he refused he was murdered. It is also believed that Arafat had been targeted for the same fate²¹ in reaction to his increased moderation in regard to the Israeli position. In reality, there may have been several reasons for the murders involving different Middle Eastern parties, but it seems almost certain it was Gadaffi who gave the order that in effect hit out at Amal's anti-Palestinian sentiment.

²⁰ Aziz Umar al-Shunaib, a defected Libyan diplomat, has presented substantial evidence suggesting that Gadaffi gave the order for al-Sadr's execution. (Norton, 1987:55).

²¹ Norton (1987:55)

3.8 AMAL AFTER AL-SADR

The murderers of al-Sadr may well have reconsidered his assassination had they fully realised the true extent of the ramifications brought about by his death. Amalist recruitment had reached something of a plateau, levelling out in relation to other political groups operating in South Lebanon. As news spread of his disappearance, al-Sadr took on the status of a great martyr in an especially Shi'ite context, where historically, as is typical of "enclave" religions, martyrs are key figures (Douglas, 1993; Baumgarten, 1996). Amal's appeal became cultish, particularly to Shi'ite youth who flocked to join its ranks, attracted by increasingly youth-oriented religious and political symbolism. The martyrdom had created a new "Hidden Imam", predestined to guide the oppressed and egalitarian Shi'ite sect, while providing a role model capturing some of the essentials and ideals of the Shi'ite religion.

The Lebanese Shi'ites were greatly influenced by the success of the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution. Successive leaders of Amal have declared their respect for the actions taken by Khomeini and his supporters, and have hailed it as an example of what can be done with successful popular mobilisation. However, although this respect exists, Amal and the Tehran leadership have remained uneasy associates. Amal has consistently maintained that it seeks a reformed Shi'ite homeland, fully represented within the context of a Lebanese democracy. The idea of participation in the establishment of an Islamic republic, ruled by the *Sharia*,²² is anathema to what is essentially a relatively moderate, temporal, sectarian movement. Amalists have no aspirations to live under the constraints of what they see as a religious autocracy, and this has effectively precluded much potential financial assistance from Tehran. Indeed, the Iranians would eventually assist with the creation of a new organisation, Hizb Allah,²³ committed to extolling the benefits of fundamentalism, with a view to the creation of an autonomous Shi'ite Islamic Republic. By the late 1980s, Amal and Hizb Allah had begun to engage in bitter sectarian fighting, resulting eventually in the deaths of over 2000 Shi'ites.²⁴

²² Islamic Law

²³ Party of God

²⁴ Georges Corm, in D. Collings ed, (1994: p225)

3.9 THE ACCESSION OF NABIH IBN MUSTAPHA BERRI TO THE LEADERSHIP OF AMAL.

Anti-fida 'iyin sentiment continued with the 1980 election of Nabih Berri to the leadership of Amal. It was an appointment that was to have far reaching consequences for not only the Shi'ites of Lebanon, but also the diaspora communities of West Africa, and particularly those of the Mano River Belt. Much of the early support for al-Sadr and the nascent Amal movement came from the increasingly successful West African diaspora communities. The support, mainly political in the late 1960s had, by the 1980s become progressively more material. In many ways, the appointment of Berri to the leadership reflected the importance of this input, and can be viewed in relation to the importance of diaspora funding for a movement increasingly isolated politically.

Berri was born in Sierra Leone to a family typical of the Shi'ite trading diaspora. His father had been a trader in the mould of hundreds of leaders of other families who had gone to the country to escape the economic and social decline of South Lebanon in the 1920s and 1930s. As a child his family had returned to Tibnin in the al-Janub region, somewhat wealthier than they had been when they left, but by no means rich. Berri attended the Lebanese University and studied law, graduating in 1963. He was a successful student and won a post-graduate scholarship to the Sorbonne. On the completion of his studies in France he moved to West Africa for several years, trading in Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Gambia. Towards the end of the 1960s, he returned to Lebanon and began practising as a lawyer. As a young professional working in Beirut he soon became exposed to the political climate of the time. Initially, he was recruited into a pro-Syrian Ba'athist organisation, but in 1974 he met Musa al-Sadr and was deeply influenced by his ideas. Shortly after this, Berri joined Harakat al-Mahrumin.

After his disappearance, al-Sadr was replaced by the parliamentary deputy, Hussein al-Hussein, who later resigned in 1980, making way for the accession of Berri. Berri's popularity was to grow rapidly, particularly in the aftermath of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and his support base was to expand from South Lebanon into the suburbs of Beirut. However, it was not only the Israeli threat that was to consolidate Shi'ite support for Amal. In Beirut, fighting between PLO aligned militias and Amal was intensifying to such an extent that Arafat was forced to personally negotiate a cease-fire. It is important to point out here that although Amal could demonstrate a large support base, direct

leadership over fighters was never really possible. Norton (1987) emphasises this point and cites a leading Amal activist: "Remember that Amal is a movement. Thus, direct orders can often not be given. Instead leadership must be a combination of persuasion, moral example, and the like".²⁵

Local differences of opinion within the general Amal "membership" were to remain a constant problem for the movement right the way through the 1980s. This is a key point to bear in mind, and says a great deal about the range of beliefs among the Shi'ites as a whole. Localised groups continually make decisions with reference to their immediate environment, and this process is no less important for Amal fighters than it is for Shi'ite diamond miners in the Sierra Leonean bush. Berri and senior members of the Amal movement have claimed²⁶ that had Israel not invaded in 1982, an all-out conflict would have developed between Amalists and the *fida'iyin* for control of South Lebanon and key Beirut suburbs. As it was, this kind of skirmishing continued to the extent, once again, that Arab observers began to become deeply suspicious of the true relationship between Amal and Tel Aviv. The reality of the situation was pragmatic and localised -- Berri along with the rest of the Amal leadership was compelled to sympathise with the Palestinian situation, but since the early 1970s, the Shi'ites had grown tired of the suffering that the *fida'iyin* had brought them. During Israeli preparations for their invasion, Shin Bet²⁷ had made contact with Amalist groups in the south, who assisted with the provision of information concerning *fida'iyin* positions and logistics, but it now seems clear that this was done on the understanding that the invasion was to be essentially an anti-PLO blitzkrieg, followed by an immediate withdrawal. What followed instead was a lengthy embroilment which displayed fully the weaknesses in the Amal command structure. In the south, the Israelis were tolerated for their anti-Palestinian action. In the Biqa' Valley, however, the local Shi'ite militias engaged the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) in bitter fighting and put up some of the most intense resistance the Israelis were to face. In the South Beirut area, Amal engaged pro-Iraqi²⁸ Sunni militias who expressed vehement anti-Iranian sentiments. It can be seen, therefore, that there was no simple pattern to Amal's strategic considerations, but that decisions taken in the Amal heartland (namely al-Janub) were held by many

²⁵ Thus reflecting clerical systems of authority [see above].

²⁶ Norton, 1987: 66.

²⁷ Israeli military intelligence

²⁸ Even prior to the Israeli invasion, the vast majority of the Amal leadership was beginning to identify both Iraq and Libya as enemy regimes. (Norton, 1987:66)

(particularly in the Sunni Arab world) to be indicative of the true sentiments of the Shi'ites -- that is to say anti-*fida'iyin* and pro collaboration with Israel.

The idea of Shi'ite collaboration with Israel was not limited to Amal. The far south of al-Janub was controlled by a predominantly Shi'ite militia led by Sa'ad Haddad, a renegade former Lebanese army officer. The militia was basically a border guard controlled, armed and trained by the Israeli security services, and became notorious both for its brutality and its particularly mercenary attitude towards the general Lebanese situation. In the immediate post-invasion period, Israel made significant attempts to merge Haddad's militia and Amal, with a view to creating a unified Shi'ite army, over which Tel Aviv would have influence. The move failed, not least because of the general contempt in which the Shi'ites of the *Haddad'iyin* were held by the vast majority of their South Lebanese co-confessionists.

The assassination of the Maronite President-elect, Bashir Gemayel, on September 14th, 1982, sent Lebanon into turmoil. He was killed in the Ashrafieh branch of the Phalange Party by a massive car bomb detonated by remote control. It was initially thought that the killing had been carried out by a rival Maronite group, in retaliation for the murder of their own leader, Tony Franjeh, by pro-Gemayel supporters in 1978. In fact, the principal perpetrator was a young Greek Orthodox Christian, Habib Chartouny, an activist member of the Syrian People's Party,²⁹ traditional rivals of the Phalange. Many others would be implicated in Chartouny's manipulation, but it was to be the Palestinians who would become convenient scapegoats for the assassination.

Four days later, armed men entered the Shatila and Sabra refugee camps, in West Beirut, under the watchful gaze of the IDF and proceeded to massacre the inhabitants. Over a thirty-six hour period, several hundred refugees were murdered. The majority of the killers were pro-Gemayel Maronite Phalangists but, very importantly, there is good evidence to suggest that some were Shi'ite *Haddad'iyin*. Randall (1983) writes: "[S]ome of Haddad's men were also involved. Survivors told of men speaking with a South Lebanese accent and calling each other Ani and Abbas, typical names for Shi'a Moslems, who made up the bulk of his troops. But these militiamen were evidently free-lancing without orders

²⁹ The S.P.P. was dedicated to reuniting Orthodox Christians in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus and Jordan in a "greater" Syrian state. (Randall 1983:47)

from their commander. In any case, Haddad was scarcely on good enough terms with the Lebanese Forces to participate formally in such a sensitive operation.”

The “operation” was seen by the Arab world as a blatant Israeli attempt finally to purge the camps of a *fida'iyyin* presence. In fact, the intoxicated murderers, high on hysteria surrounding the assassination of Gemayel, mainly slaughtered innocent civilians. The implication of Shi'ite involvement was to intensify external criticism, particularly from Libya and Iraq, of Amal (although not responsible) and the Shi'ites in general. Haddad's men certainly had nothing in common with Amal. It also transpired that many of the Shatila victims were South Lebanese Shi'ites taking refuge from the fighting in West Beirut.

3.10 AMAL AND THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1982 ISRAELI INVASION.

The mid-1980s saw continued conflict between Amal and the Palestinians. By 1984, Amal had taken control of most of West Beirut and began to exert pressure on what was left of the *fida'iyyin* to leave the country, culminating in the 1985 beginning of the “War of the Camps”. The Amal militia surrounded the Shatila and Sabra refugee camps and held a lengthy siege. Pro-Arafat factions of the PLO continued to strike at Amal in successive attempts at breaking the blockade of the camps. This part of the conflict was finally brought to an end by Syrian intervention, in the face of increased international condemnation in 1987.

A moderate policy towards Israel, and its aggressively anti-*fida'iyyin* stance had made Amal few friends in the Arab world. Tehran remained disappointed with the secular nature of the movement, and in particular its lack of interest in the establishment of a Shi'ite Islamic Republic in South Lebanon. In the early 1980s, fundamental elements of Amal broke away and approached Iran for support for the foundation of Hizb Allah, a new, radical and *Sharia*-oriented movement. Tehran was immediately interested and believed that a fundamentalist movement would do much to alleviate some of the animosity that the Lebanese Shi'ites drew from a range of Arab states. Hizb Allah would compete with Amal for the Shi'ite constituency, and would effectively declare war on Israel, in support of the Palestinians.

Iran gave massive support to the new organisation³⁰ and, by 1988, clashes between Amal and Hizb Allah commenced for control of Beirut's southern suburbs. The fighting was intense and bloody as both factions battled not only for territory, but for the "hearts and minds" of the Shi'ite confession. The civil war had sapped Amal's financial reserves, and the movement found it difficult to implement promised social reform policies in the south. This led to a steady drain of Amal membership to Hizb Allah. Once again, further demands would be placed on the diaspora community to assist with the financial maintenance of the organisation. Intra-Shi'ite conflict continued until 1991, regardless of the signing of the general Ta'if Accord in 1989 and a Syrian and Iranian brokered peace deal signed between Amal and Hizb Allah in 1990. By the end of 1991, Hizb Allah was launching attacks on Israel from South Lebanon and inter-resistance conflict flared sporadically through 1992.³¹

Politically, Amal showed its continued support for Berri by re-electing him as leader. His Hizb Allah rival, Sheikh Abbas Musawi, was assassinated by the Israelis in mid-1992. Between the end of August and the beginning of September 1992, Lebanon held its first parliamentary elections since 1972. Both Amal and Hizb Allah³² made sweeping gains in the south, each calling for regional reform. Relations between the Islamists and Amalists improved and, between the two movements, twenty-seven of the 128 parliamentary seats went to the Shi'ites. In view of this Shi'ite success, Nabih Berri was elected Speaker of Parliament, ensuring that Amal was effectively still the political master of South Lebanon.

3.11 THE MARONITES IN CONTEXT

The second part of this chapter deals with a people described by Moosa (1986) as follows:

"The Maronites today suffer from a serious identity problem. They have not been able to decide whether they are descendants of an ancient people called the Marada (Mardaites), or Arabs, or of Syriac-Aramaic stock. Unless the Maronites solve this identity problem their conflicts with other minority religious groups in Lebanon will never be remedied."

³⁰ "After 1982, the budget of the Iranian embassy in Lebanon surpassed \$100 million per year to pay militiamen recruited by Hizb Allah." Corm (1994: p218).

³¹ See Appendix C in Collings ed. 1994.

³² The Ministry of the Interior granted Hizb Allah a license to become a political party in 1992. (Collings ed. 1994: p320)

The origins of the people later to become known as the Maronites can be traced back to fourth century southern Arabia, in the area that today constitutes Yemen. In this rugged environment small, semi-nomadic groups of the *Qaysi* people began to join a small sect practising a simple, early form of Christianity. Recognisably Christian churches were emerging throughout the region, each, however, making distinct and separate interpretations of the will and nature of Christ. In 451 AD the Council of Chalcedon was held to establish a true Christian orthodoxy for churches in the East. Essentially, the Apostolic See maintains that Christ possessed two wills -- the celestial and the terrestrial, which although combined in Himself, remained distinct and separate. However, some eastern churches took the view that Christ possessed only one will, and this important distinction was made by Dawud, writing in the tenth century:

“Now if we hold this belief of Him, then, we do not anymore maintain that he is two persons, two Christs, two wills or two actions (operations). Never! We believe that he is one Jesus Christ, the Son of God who for us became man, one person with two rational essences, one will and one operation.” (Ex Vatican Library MS 133, as cited in Moosa 1986)

For many of the small churches represented at Chalcedon, the orthodoxy of the Church of Rome was over-complex, unnecessary and unacceptable -- thus were created the concepts of monothelitism and monophysitism.³³ The social and political environment of the Middle and Near Eastern regions was to ensure the survival of these churches over the centuries as Rome became more preoccupied with Islam. But monothelites and monophysites were to remain heretics in the eyes of the Apostolic See.

3.12 THE ORIGINS OF TRUE MARONITISM

The stigma of heresy seems to have obliged the early monothelites to lead a quietist existence. Unlike many other Near and Middle Eastern Christian communities, the Maronites suffer a dearth of early historical texts concerning the origins of their Church and its name. The earliest references can be

³³ Monophysites took the reduction one step further, claiming that Christ possessed only one “nature” as opposed to one “will”.

found in ninth century Arabic sources, but this material makes only passing comment on the community and its monothelitic beliefs, in the context of generalised regional surveys. What is clear is that during the immediate post-Council of Chalcedon period, the Eastern Church of Antioch, a sort of holding body for many other smaller Christian movements, became factionalised as a result of the directives of orthodoxy. The Malkites, following the doctrine of the Apostolic See, split with the Jacobites (monophysites who later became the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Iraqi Nestorians) at some point during the sixth century. Historical analysis of early ecclesiastical documents, mainly inter-patriarchal correspondence, now suggests that the Maronite Church finally appeared, as a result of schism with the Jacobites, around the middle of the eighth century, presumably as a result of the incompatibility of monothelitic and monophysitic theologies.

3.13 THE MARONITES AND CONTACT WITH THE WEST

Formal Maronite associations with Europe began around the eleventh century. Conflict between Christendom and the Islamic world was rapidly developing as both parties sought religious hegemony and regional political domination. In the 1160s, Maronite patriarchs approached William of Tyre, a Roman Catholic Bishop appointed by King Baldwin,³⁴ to offer their submission to Rome. Their reasons were purely political – the security of the community was at grave risk from both the Egyptian Fatimids and the Saljuk Turks, and it was thought that Rome could offer military protection through the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Principality of Antioch, and the Counties of Edessa and Tripoli. In other words, submission to the Apostolic See would bring the confidence of security that came with citizenship of the Crusader States. This contract appears, however, to have been made at a time of intense political and strategic crisis, and it would seem that, in essence, the agreement was a hastily concocted arrangement that disregarded matters of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Just over a century later, this relationship was to receive the full scrutiny of the Holy See. Pope Innocent III had embarked upon a policy to extend the influence of the Roman Catholic Church eastwards, consolidating control and authority over those churches that had some relationship with the orthodoxy

³⁴ King Baldwin of Jerusalem of the House of Boulogne.

of Chalcedon and, therefore, the Apostolic See. This was to be a long-term programme and would require full appraisals of the doctrinal conditions of the churches concerned and the introduction of measures to “shepherd wandering sheep”.³⁵ The Maronite Church was seen as a suitable starting-point, particularly in light of its earlier submission through William of Tyre. Rome had hoped that the Maronite project would be straight-forward; there was no reason to suspect otherwise. Small matters of the Latinisation of the Syriac Rite would complete the process of making the church fully uniate with Rome. The reality, of course, was very different. The papal legates and inspectors found what amounted to a large, ritually deviant, heretical denomination. First and foremost, Maronitism was still monothelitic and in some areas significant proportions of its membership were undergoing re-conversion to monophysitism. In terms of praxis, complete-immersion baptisms (performed thrice for each individual), mixed-sex monasteries, elaborate chrisms³⁶ and the use of wooden chalices were all contrary to Papal *dictat*.

The Cardinal Inspector was ordered by the Pope to return, with the Patriarch, Irmia al-Amshiti, to Rome. Over the next three years, al-Amshiti underwent intensive reconditioning in matters of theology and doctrine. Rome, however, remained keen that the Maronites should be encouraged to realise the benefits of full submission without having to resort to duress. The Patriarch was awarded many ecclesiastical privileges and in 1215 was invited to take part in the Lateran Council. In short, the exercise was not merely a refresher course for a wayward church leader, operating on the periphery of Christendom, but the beginning of a great induction for the Maronite Church into the grand scheme of Rome. As the Patriarch was granted leave to sit at the right of, but slightly behind the Pope, so the Maronites took their position in the vast hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.³⁷

Patriarch al-Amshiti returned to Tripoli in March 1216, and was accompanied by a Roman Catholic Cardinal to oversee the initial reforms. It is not known how quickly Pope Innocent III expected change to occur, but what is demonstrated by the historical data that has been preserved is that successive Popes all found it necessary to place continued pressure on the Maronite Church in order to avoid doctrinal

³⁵ Note the more liberal approach of the pre-Holy Inquisition Church.

³⁶ Anointing rites

³⁷ See Salibi, K. (1990). *A House of Many Mansions*, Los Angeles, University of California Press.

relapse. For the next three hundred years formalised submission was maintained, but the real objective, at least on the part of Rome, was full ultramontaniam.³⁸ Achieving ultramontaniam would require complete Latinisation of the church, effectively demanding that all future, senior Maronite clergy be educated and ordained at the Holy See. In 1584, a Maronite School was founded in Rome, essentially for this purpose, but also as an institution for the generation of a new, revisionist, doctrinally correct, ecclesiastical history.

3.14 THE MARONITE SCHOOL: REVISIONISM AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PAST

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the Maronite School produced several notable scholars. Much of the work that they produced was concerned with the origins of Maronitism, the community, its leaders and the church itself. There was much debate on lesser matters of the true identities of particular individuals thought to be of importance to the ecclesiastical history of the church, but the theological content of the general discourse was unanimously directed at the charge of monothelism, as Moosa (1986) states:

“...some Maronite scholars have attempted to attribute the origin of the name of their church and community to at least two Maruns, one an early-fifth century ascetic and saint, the other a late-seventh-century monk surnamed Yuhanna (John) Marun who became their first patriarch. They further claim that the Maronites were called Mardaites but dropped this name in the seventh century in favour of the name Maronites. Others claim that their name derives from a monastery named after a fifth century Marun. Al-Dibs, on the other hand, believes that the Maronites were called by this name from the fifth century but, because they rebelled against the Byzantine state in the seventh century, they were called Mardaites or Marada. All claim that the Maronites adhered to the “Catholic” faith, the faith of the Church of Rome.these claims have no historical foundation.”

Through ultramontaniam came new benefits for the greater Maronite community and Maronite scholars saw their revisionist role as vital to the development of favourable relations with Europe.³⁹ John Marun

³⁸ The doctrine of absolute papal supremacy.

³⁹ See Ayoub in Collings ed. (1994)

(there were probably several in historical reality) was to take on a new persona as a kind of religious and military hero epitomising the contemporary aspirations of late-Renaissance and early-Enlightenment Maronitism. The trend began with the claim that Marun was of Frankish origin and by the mid-seventeenth century it was being argued by Maronite historians that he was of Carolingian descent. Historical records suggest that this kind of spurious conjecture was actively encouraged by the Papal authorities; indeed, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the mythical founder of the denomination had become a close nephew of Charlemagne. The truth is evidently very different. The term Maronite may well have come from the name of the Monastery of Marun, located in the Orontes Valley in Syria, which housed an order of monothelitic friars in the late-first millennium, but its true origins are still by no means certain (Moosa, 1986).

This revisionism had two central purposes: firstly, Marun's Frankish origins supported the School's assertions that, in doctrinal terms, Maronitism had always upheld the directives of the Council of Chalcedon and had, therefore, always been an integral part of the Roman Catholic faith in the East. The Papacy viewed the revisionism as a construction of theological constraints by the Maronites themselves, thus ensuring the maintenance of an approved orthodoxy within the context of a rationalised (though invented) ecclesiastical history. Secondly, the Carolingian lineage was sufficiently developed to demonstrate a close relationship between the ancient "Roman Catholic" Maronites and France. Once this official history had received Papal approbation, France would be obliged to act as the European guardian of the Maronite community. Formalised protection commenced in 1649 with the exchange of ambassadors between France and the Maronite Church, followed shortly by the establishment of Franciscan hospitals and Jesuit schools.

3.15 THE MARONITES; CHURCH, COMMUNITY AND POST-ULTRAMONTANISM

"The secret of the Maronite Church's early success was a hierarchical system leading from the humblest monk to the Pope in Rome". (Randall, 1983)

Ultramontanism, and the advantages of full union with the Roman Catholic Church, brought about a steady consolidation of Maronite power in Lebanon. Trade relations with Europe increased, ensuring the development of a strong commercial base from which the Maronites were able to accumulate capital as a group. This economic activity was soon noticed by the Druze al-Ma'ni⁴⁰ Amir, Fakhr al-Din II, who encouraged the community to migrate south from their strongholds on the slopes of Mount Lebanon in order to create a wider market from which he would benefit through taxation. The community pushed into Kisrewan, forcing the local Shi'ite population off their lands and down into the Biq'a Valley. The land, under the guidance and instruction of the patriarchy, was cleared and terraced for intensive agricultural exploitation. The new power of the Maronite Church was symbolically expressed in the rapid foundation of churches and monasteries, the latter, in particular, providing technical expertise for the land-cultivating peasantry. By the early eighteenth century, Kisrewan was under almost complete Maronite control and the Church had become the most powerful and wealthy institution in the Mount Lebanon area. Amir al-Din quickly reaped the rewards of a pro-Maronite policy that was to endure for the length of his family's dynastic rule. Indeed, it seems that he found the commercially based loyalties of the Maronites more predictable than the political instability endemic among his Druze *zu'ama* rivals; Maronite regiments became the core of his army and the Church provided valued counsel in matters of state.

The benign rule of the al-Ma'ni Amirs was of fundamental importance to the Maronite achievement of a commercial hegemony by establishing a thriving silk industry capable of dominating the European and Near Eastern markets. This economic growth gave the Maronites real political power and enabled the community to expand geographically. Under the protection of the al-Ma'ni Amirs, the Maronite community proceeded to expel the Shi'ite Hamadis⁴¹, and their subjects, not only from Kisrawan, but also Jubayl and al-Batrum, thus dominating much of the north of Lebanon.

In 1697, the last al-Mani Amir died without an heir. The Druze, under the guidance of the Ottomans, replaced the extinct dynasty with the al-Shihabi family who continued to recognise the economic

⁴⁰ The ruling dynastic house.

⁴¹ Hereditary land-owning barons.

success and political power of the Maronites. This recognition subsequently developed into something much more for, in 1754, the Amir Ali al-Shihabi, along with the majority of his supporters, converted to Maronitism, effectively transforming the entire Shihabi principality into a Maronite province. The Maronite Church was quick to identify the real possibility of the creation of a Maronite state and set to work engendering a nationalistic Maronite ethos and ideology.⁴² Ottoman authority, extended from Damascus, via a governorship in Tripoli, was becoming weakened by imperialist ventures against the Bonapartist French in Egypt. The Shihabis, by now *de facto* Maronite princes, attempted to increase their autonomy, but in doing so incurred the opposition of the pro-Ottoman Druze which would consequently lead to sporadic but continued conflict between the two groups for fifty years. After decades of inter-confessional skirmishing, widespread and intense violence erupted in the early 1840s, leading to the massacre of thousands of Maronites who had migrated to traditionally Druze areas within Lebanon.

The Ottoman Empire attempted an intervention, deposing the Shihabi Amir and dividing Lebanon into two confessional districts -- the north under Maronite governorship and the south under the control of the Druze. In reality, the Ottomans had succeeded in no more than drawing up the battle lines for a civil war that commenced in April 1845, further exacerbated by political and social tensions between landlords and peasantry on both sides. This pattern continued with varying degrees of aggravation until a second, full-scale civil war commenced in 1860. This time the legacy of twenty years of bitterness left 16,000 Maronites dead in Lebanon and a further 6,000 murdered in Damascus pogroms. The Ottoman garrisons did little to prevent the slaughter. The war had begun with the Maronites in a position of numerical and technological superiority, but had ended in catastrophe as a result of poor leadership, intra-Maronite factional squabbling and rural, inter-class, land-tenure conflicts. Records show that Druze discipline, unity and morale were decisive factors in their victory.

The conflict of 1860 was to end with a political settlement drawn up between the Druze, the Maronites and the Ottoman Empire. The new state, or *Mutasarrifiyya*, was to be controlled by an independent,

⁴² See Anawati, G.C. (1969) "The Roman Catholic Church and Churches in Communion with Rome," in Arberry, A.J. (ed.) *Religion in the Middle East* vol. 1. Cambridge University Press.

non-Lebanese governor (the *Mutasarrif*), who would be appointed by the Ottoman Sultan, and would be assisted by an elected council of state that represented the diversity of the country's denominations. However, in a twist of fortunes, French influence and political pressure was to secure a semi-autonomous Mount Lebanon district for the Maronites. Having suffered such dreadful losses on the battlefield, the Maronites were presented with the most advantageous terms under the new administration. It should be remembered that the majority of the Maronite victims were landless peasantry attempting to drive the Druze and Shi'ite off their traditionally settled rural areas. The Maronite elite remained in possession of the Mount Lebanon region and enjoyed a greater degree of self-determination than ever before.

The Great War led to temporary occupation by Turkey, but the allied victory in 1918, and the subsequent peace agreement of 1919, laid the foundations for the modern Lebanese state. Once again the Maronites benefited from French protectionist policy and were afforded considerable control over the new French-mandated Greater Lebanon, which was to include the predominantly Muslim ports of Sidon and Tyre (the Sunni populations of which tended towards union with Syria). By the mid-1930s, popular national opinion, both Muslim and Christian, began to call for independence. The patriarchy of the Maronite Church led the opposition against the French mandate in the hope that complete independence would finally create harmony between both the Christian and Muslim communities. Confessions would be proportionally represented in a national parliament (although accurate data concerning the denominational demographic shift in the country would be conveniently ignored in favour of a Maronite population that was decreasing as a result of emigration), and key positions of state would come under expressed and respected confessional control. Anti-French sentiment on the part of the Church was to bring some Papal scrutiny of the patriarchal elective procedures – the Roman Catholic Church sought more direct control over the appointment of the Patriarch, thus ensuring influence over Maronite political expression. Traditionally, appointments had been made solely from within the community of Maronite bishops and the Vatican was keen to put the decision firmly in the hands of the Pope. Evidently, the Vatican had little to offer in return and the bid failed, not least because of the typically selective diocesan assertions of ecclesiastical independence.

Both the Christians and the Muslims were to achieve their political objectives in 1943, with the overthrow of the Vichy administration by the allies. Independence came through the National Pact signed in the same year, the basis of which was to be that “they [the Maronites] abandoned formal Western (French) protection and agreed that Lebanon should have an “Arab side.” The Sunnis, in turn, abandoned their dream of becoming part of a Greater Syria or of including Lebanon in any other predominantly Moslem pan-Arab entity” (Randall, 1983). The National Pact was a political agreement that attempted to placate both Muslim and Christian constituencies and establish the concept of confessional possession of state offices. Again, the Maronites successfully disguised demographic reality. The last census conducted in Lebanon had taken place in 1932 [see above] and since then there had been marked changes in the demography of the country. In particular, the family sizes of the more affluent Maronites and Sunnis were steadily falling whilst those of the impoverished and politically excluded Shi’ites remained high. Other factors like emigration were also playing a major role in this process, but throughout the ratification of the pact the Maronites consistently maintained that they constituted up to 30% of the national population, thus ensuring the “possession” of the presidency and the command of the armed forces. Indeed, with hindsight the State was doomed to collapse from its very inception, the arrangement merely favouring and consolidating the power of the *zu’ama* and, encouraging the development of intra-confessional factionalisation between key families and individuals for the control of the allocated political offices. It would take only thirty years for the entire structure of the system to reach crisis, and the unfolding of this crisis in the longer-term would tend to favour those who, traditionally, in the process of government, had been marginalised.

3.16 THE MARONITES IN THE LATE-TWENTIETH CENTURY

During the post-National Pact period, from 1943 to the late 1980s, the Maronite political sphere was dominated by three rival families, each of which became characterised by particular styles of political leadership. This rivalry has frequently been personalised and bloody and has manifested itself as a litany of inter-factional conflict and widespread assassination. The Gemayels, Franjies⁴³ and Chamouns have continually struggled for control of the office of President and its associated

⁴³ The name Franjeh is said to be indicative of the Frankish origins of the family which claims to be able to trace direct descendency from King Baldwin.

commercial opportunities. As a story of inter-clan conflict perpetrated by hereditary, hierarchical lineage-based power structures it shows many traits that have been apparent in similar struggles in the latter half of this century. From the Caucasus to the Horn of Africa, political action has been the vehicle by which group identities and ethos become, often violently, linked to the control of legitimate and clandestine trade. These three families have adopted varying political strategies in an attempt to exploit the support of the Christian and, Maronite constituencies in particular. For the Franjiehs, the process has been one of traditional clan authority, presided over by family patriarchs who have commanded the loyalty of the Maronite middle- and working-classes in the far north of Lebanon (see Gellner, 1977). Alternatively, the Gemayels have used the mechanism of the proto-fascist Phalange Party to appeal to the nationalist sentiments of dis-empowered Maronite internal-migrants opposed to the social constraints of clan politics, whilst the Chamounists have opted for an intermediate path, combining traditional patronage with contemporary political aspirations. All three successfully established militias with which to extend their diplomacy, maintain discipline among their support base and consolidate potential assets.

The history of post-Second World War Maronite politics has been an articulation of these three socio-political organisational structures around the shifting sympathies of the Maronite Church, itself internally schismatic. Political agendas of all three groups have concerned the future of Maronite influence in Lebanon and the shape that this influence should have in relation to the nation's other confessions. External loyalties have become the key to this discourse as rival factions have considered the benefits of alliance with either Israel, Syria or both. Towards the end of the 1980s, Iraq also played a hand in the sponsorship of inter-factional violence as Baghdad sought to demonstrate its role as vanguard for Ba'athism to Damascus. In short, modern Maronitism and its political expression has been determined by cults of personality and the control of illegitimate trade. During the Lebanese Civil War, power may well have come from the barrel of a gun, but guns had to be bought. For the Franjiehs and Gemayels access to arms came from "ownership" of clandestine smuggling ports, importing cigarettes and alcohol from Mediterranean Rim sources, while administrating the world-wide export of Lebanon's hashish production. This crop, traditionally farmed by impoverished Shi'ites for Maronite *zu'ama*, is

estimated to be worth well over US \$1 billion per annum⁴⁴ to a Maronite diaspora acting as middle-tier distributors.

3.17 MARONITE MILITIAS AND CLANDESTINE HEGEMONY OVER THE ECONOMY

Tension between the principal Maronite factions has existed for the last fifty years, but by the mid-1970s, reckless ambition and rivalry between the younger generation of presidential aspirants took a more ruthless and cynical turn. The Maronites had long prided themselves on their Christian morality and notions of honour,⁴⁵ but on the 13th June 1978, the old ways of doing things were smashed with the assassination of the northern clan's heir apparent, Tony Franjieh, his young family and over thirty supporters.⁴⁶ The murders were carried out by forces loyal to the young, ascendant, Phalangist, Bashir Gemayel. The motives were clear enough; the Franjiehs represented a credible and powerful rival political group and were successfully preventing the expansion of Phalangism to the northern districts, running from the environs of Tripoli to the Syrian border. More importantly, however, the act demonstrated a variety of self- and group-conceptions extant within the Maronite community. Primarily, the Phalangists presented themselves as a party with a Westernised ethos and pro-Israeli sympathies.⁴⁷ Conversely, the Franjiehs represented the alter-ego of Maronitism; they symbolised the archaic authority of political families,⁴⁸ while promoting their Arabic/Syriac traditions and deriding the European obsessions of the Phalangists. Derived from this were loyalties to Syria and a consistently anti-Israeli stance, often verging on sympathy towards the Palestinian cause.

The assassination was undoubtedly one of the most important events in late-twentieth century Maronite politics. The crime was considered by many to be so heinous that Phalangism became indelibly tainted. However, the real cost was to be extended internecine conflict and vendettas that weakened the Maronite cause in the longer term. Popular opinion would eventually force the Chamounists to abandon their "third way" and throw in their lot with their historical rivals, the Franjiehs. To both groups,

⁴⁴ George Corm in Collings ed.1994, p.218.

⁴⁵ Randall, 1983: p.130.

⁴⁶ Moosa, 1986: p.300.

⁴⁷ The Israelis became the major sponsors of the Phalange Party to encourage an anti-Syrian position.

⁴⁸ Justified through genealogical links with the Crusader States.

Phalangism equated to an erosion of Maronite values that weakened the very foundation of their socio-religious polity. The community was polarised, even creating division within the church; the patriarchy was obliged to show support for the old *zu'ama* of the Franjeh-Chamoun *entente-cordiale*, while the powerful, land-owning Order of Maronite Monks, bitterly opposed to Syrian political and military influence, enthusiastically rallied to the Phalangist cause.^{49 50}

The stage was set for a pattern of self-interested conflict that became characteristic of the war in Lebanon. Aside from fighting the Palestinians, the Druze, the Shi'ites and the Sunnis, the Maronites clashed with each other continuously from the mid-1970s to the signing of the Ta'if Accord⁵¹ in 1989 and beyond. The Franjiehs, with their Marada⁵² militia, protected their traditional stronghold in the north, while both the Chamounist "Tigers" and the Phalangist Lebanese Forces operated further south, drawing much support from itinerant Maronites in the working-class suburbs of East Beirut. All three militias were forced to depend heavily on the revenues drawn from industry and local trade to supplement the donations from external supporters like Israel, Syria and Iraq. For varying periods throughout the duration of the war the Franjiehs controlled the port of Chekka, including its important cement and roofing material manufacturing plant [see Chapter Four]. Interestingly, at a time when little construction was taking place in the country -- quite the contrary -- cement production remained constant as large amounts were shipped to West Africa, and elsewhere, at the behest of Maronite diaspora involved in import-export and civil construction. Duty was paid on these shipments to the Marada.⁵³

The Phalange maintained control of several ports, both legitimate and illegitimate, in an attempt to limit the export activities of the Franjiehs. The avoidance of duty on smuggled Gulf-produced cigarettes,

⁴⁹ Randall, 1983: p.113

⁵⁰ So enthusiastic was this support, that cassocked Maronite monks armed themselves with assault rifles as monasteries became arsenals and warehouses for Phalange contraband. (Ayoub in Collings ed., 1994)

⁵¹ The signing of the Ta'if Accord (the Document of National Understanding) was not the end of inter-Christian fighting which was to continue into 1991 with the final destruction of General Aoun's army in widespread atrocities,(see Joseph Mailla in Collings ed., 1994: pp.31-44)

⁵² Literally "Giants". Note the historical reference to the Mardaites, mercenary fighters employed by Byzantium and mythical ancestors of the Maronites.

⁵³ Interview, Freetown 14/02/97.

tobacco and Southern European liquor greatly reduced revenue to Lebanon⁵⁴ in the late-1980s, such was the scale of smuggling. The purpose for this activity was two-fold: raising revenues for the payment of fighters and the acquisition of munitions and economic warfare directed at the marginally governing State during the early- and late-stages of the war. All three militias levied taxes on luxury expenditure, including fuel, restaurants, bars and real-estate sales. Essentially, these economic fiefdoms were nothing more than straight-forward extortion and protection rackets and bore many of the hallmarks of Italian- or American-style Mafia operations (see Lewis, 1978). Even semi-legitimate insurance and investment mechanisms were established, but ultimately all depended on the intimidatory tactics of the militia. What stands out most dramatically is the permanence and infallibility of the faction leaderships -- leaving absolutely no room for dissent within controlled areas. It is most unlikely that these kinds of personalised gang-run mini-states would have been tolerated by any other confession; the Shi'ites in particular made the dismantling of *zu'ama* authority a principal objective. The Phalange, however, continually tried to export this *modus operandi*, attempting more than once to impose its rule on the Lebanese Armenian community⁵⁵ who were thought to be a potentially lucrative source of income. The Armenians, desperate to preserve their own neutrality, were forced to fight bitterly in order to maintain it.

As the 1980s drew to a close, new players emerged to lead rival Maronite factions which continued to be divided by the Israel/Syria question. The ambitious and ruthless Bashir Gemayel had finally secured the presidency in 1982 in a less than fair general election,⁵⁶ but was promptly killed by a massive car-bomb less than one month later [see above]. He was succeeded by his older brother, Amin, who remained nominally president until 1988. As his term came to a close he transferred power to the Maronite commander-in-chief of the Lebanese Army, by now seeking to control large tracts of a Christian East Beirut continually contested in fierce street battles with the militia of Samir Geagea, Bashir Gemayel's loyal deputy and Tony Franjeh's assassin. And thus the intricate and cyclical pattern of intra-Maronite factionalism continued. The final implementation of the Ta'if Accord was obstructed by the Maronite diarchy that controlled Beirut in the last stages of the war; in the East was General

⁵⁴ Tobacco and alcohol duty was the principal state revenue earner.

⁵⁵ Interview, Lakka 10/03/98

⁵⁶ Israel was especially instrumental in his victory; the final vote of deputies took place in an IDF barracks.

Aoun of the Lebanese Army and, in the West, Elias Hrawi, the elected president. The outcome was an inevitable bloody and final fight. It seemed that at last the Maronite hair could be split no further and Aoun was forced to flee to France. Of the three original factions, all were to lose their presidential aspirants; Tony Franjieh, Bashir Gemayel and Danny Chamoun each died in assassinations carried out by rival Christian groups.

For the Maronites, unsure of their past and in fear for their future, political consolidation during the present period has been an extremely difficult task. In the last twenty years, the unity of the community has been severely disrupted by conflicting perceptions of the cultural impact of globalization. As Waters (1995) argues, “material exchanges localize, political exchanges internationalize and symbolic exchanges globalize”. In the melting pot of the Mediterranean Basin the inevitability and dynamism of these processes have continued unabated since long before the commercial dominance of the Phoenicians, the Ancient World’s greatest cultural exporters, and a people from whom many Maronites incorrectly claim descent. In essence, structural weaknesses within the Maronite polity have been exacerbated by a rise of reactionism towards social and political change, brought about by demographic and socio-economic transitions. For constituents, there has only been a limited choice of ways forward. For seventy years, key issues concerning power and identity have been distilled into a struggle between Mafia-style clans and 1930s fascist-inspired Phalangism, dreamt up by a young, impressionable and politically ambitious “Sheikh” Pierre Gemayel, as he witnessed the Berlin Olympics in 1936. As fulcrum for this rather volatile balancing act, the Maronite Church has flirted with both parties in a manner that reflects Spanish and Italian Churches of the 1920s and 1930s. Prior to the end of Lebanese hostilities in 1993, Church, militias and patrimonialism, as a foundation for social progress, offered little scope for advancement. However, the Ta’if Accord has maintained the Maronite possession of the Lebanese Presidency, but this has come about more as a result of the fears that Saudi Arabia displays towards Shi’a Islam than the diplomatic and military efforts of the Maronites since the 1970s. The presentation of further material will show how the ramifications of this turbulent history of inter-clan rivalries and transient allegiances have had far-reaching implications for the achievement of Maronite diaspora ambitions in Sierra Leone.

In the following chapter, an examination will be made of the activities of Shi'ite and Maronite diaspora groups in Sierra Leone and the relationships and networks that link these polities to their co-religionists in Lebanon. Particular attention will be given to patterns of socio-political competition and commercial adaptation to the environment in which they operate.

CHAPTER FOUR: LEBANESE DIASPORA COMMUNITIES IN SIERRA LEONE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Levantine immigrants began to arrive in Sierra Leone in 1895. Their early history in the country is sketchy, but political events during the course of the Great War, and Creole animosity towards the community in its aftermath, brought the “Syrians” to the forefront of Sierra Leonean commerce. As *de jure* Turkish citizens competing with the Creoles for control of produce markets they became the victims of a xenophobic trend that sought to dislodge them from their increasingly powerful economic position. Although the British administration accepted their opposition to Turkish imperialism, rice shortages in 1919 led to anti-Syrian riots in both the Colony and the Protectorate. London moved quickly to secure the position of Levantine diaspora residents in the country and took measures to reimburse the community for losses of property. With a secure position and positive future, more Levantine immigrants joined their compatriots to establish a firm economic base. In the 1920s, their population expanded greatly, more than doubling in size and, by the beginning of the Second World War, with encouragement from the colonial administration, the community had come to control a significant proportion of the national economy. The import of luxury goods and the export of local agricultural produce was central to this process. It should be noted that during this period, Levantine traders actively avoided competition with European concerns and instead concentrated on the development of their own exclusive markets. It was this strategy that ultimately created the capital for future investment in the diamond trade, both clandestine and legitimate.

4.2 THE LEBANESE COMMUNITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Van der Laan (1975: 234) identifies five key Lebanese socio-religious groups forming the diaspora community as a whole. The data for this survey was collected prior to 1975 but the picture he provides remained fairly accurate right up to the eve of the AFRC/PA coup of 1997. Many of the key families van der Laan mentions remained resident and well-known in Sierra Leone at the time of my research. Figureheads of clans may have departed after changes in political fortunes, but closely related members of principal families remained. The Lebanese civil war brought a new wave of immigration in the

1980s, the majority being South Lebanese and West Beirut Shi'ites; as will be shown later, many younger generation Maronites have chosen not to pursue business in Sierra Leone. This has resulted in a shift of demographic balance between component groups, but van der Laan's basic characterisation remains applicable.

In Sierra Leone, Muslims form the majority of the Lebanese community (van der Laan, 1975). About 90% of Muslims are Shi'ites from Tyre and South Lebanon. Van der Laan names six leading families¹ from this sub-community, all of whom were directly involved in diamond mining and trading during my research. There is also a small group of Sunni Muslims from Tripoli in North Lebanon. The two families² mentioned by van der Laan (1975) were both based in Freetown during 1997, and operated as importers of luxury goods, in particular, cars and supermarket groceries.

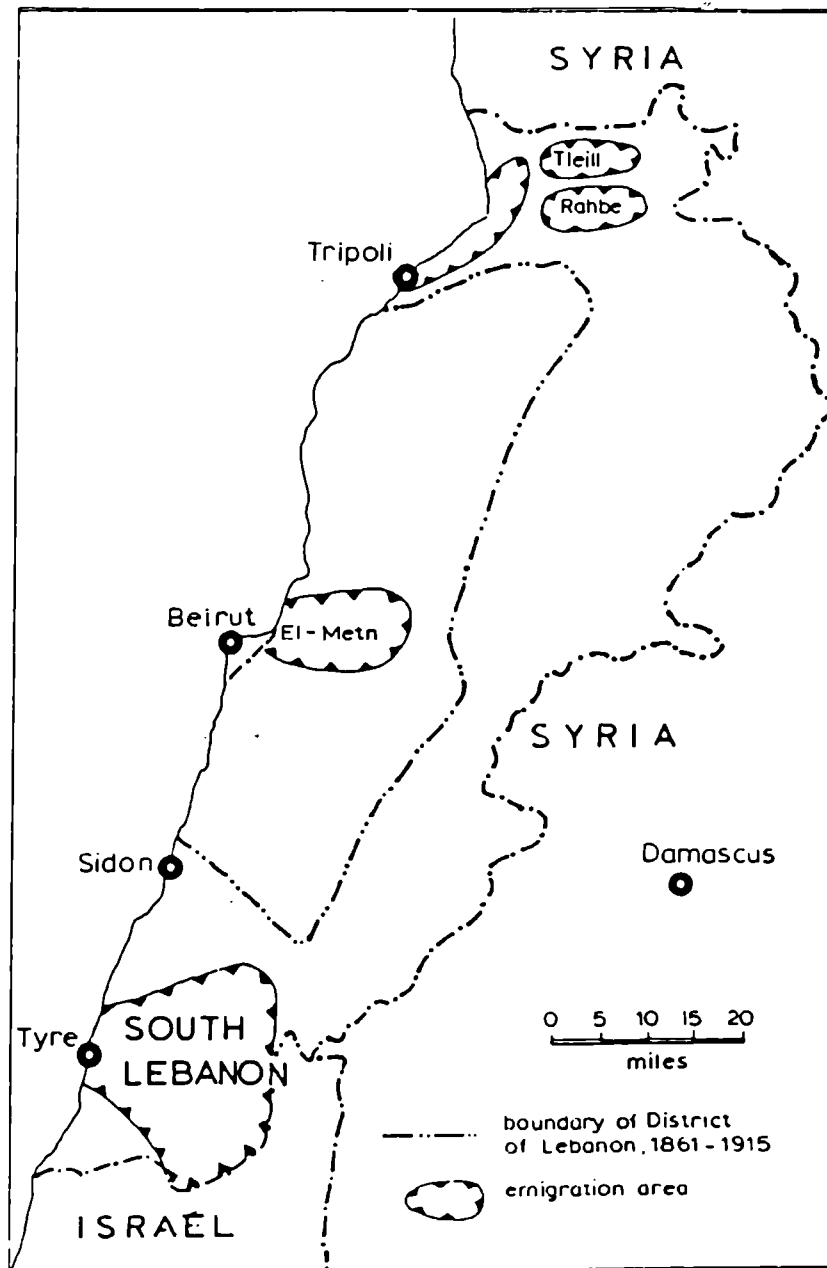
The Christian community comprises three principal clans; two from North Lebanon and one from an area north-east of Beirut. Of the North Lebanese groups, the Maronite Tleill clan is the largest and has traditionally been led by the Aboud family. The very small Rahbe group is Greek Orthodox by confession and its two principal families, the Blells and the Koussas are well known Freetown produce traders, buying in the interior for export abroad. The leading Christian group, however, is the Maronite El-Metn clan originating from central Lebanese towns like Bikfaya and Jounieh, deep in the heart of what has come to be popularly known as "Marounistan". The El-Metn clan has been very powerful in the past, particularly during the Siaka Stevens era in Sierra Leone. Families like the Yazbecks, Milhems and Zaidans were heavily engaged in the APC "shadow state" economy (Reno, 1995) and exercised considerable influence over the diamond industry in the 1970s and early-1980s. Apart from Freetown and the mining districts, the El-Metn clan is also well represented in Bo.

¹ Basma, Jaward, Hashim, Mourtada, Morowah, Halloway

² Hallaby, Hamawe

MAP 3

LEBANON, SHOWING AREAS OF MIGRATION TO SIERRA LEONE



4.3 THE SOUTH LEBANESE SHI'ITES -- THE CONSOLIDATION OF A DIASPORA

At the turn of the century, the al-Janub province, home for the majority of South Lebanese Shi'ites, was suffering from considerable agrarian inertia. As Beirut began to expand, and the silk industry³ of Mount Lebanon gained momentum, the South was largely ignored by the country's Ottoman governors. The area sank deeper into poverty, hopelessly trapped between two colonial administrations. At this time, the Shi'ites were a minority, their population being smaller than that of the Maronites and the Sunnis. As a group, their only political voice was through the Druze *zu'ama*,⁴ who had little concern for their Shi'ite constituents. These economic conditions became a driving force for a process of external and internal migration, which eventually would shift the demographic balance of the country, and fill the *bidonvilles*⁵ of Beirut. For those emigrating there were options, and while the majority of the petit-bourgeois and peasant Shi'ites headed for the hardships of the West African coast, many Jesuit-educated Maronites⁶ travelled to Egypt and Sudan to become doctors, lawyers and civil servants under the British colonial administration.

For the Shi'ites, Sierra Leone (and the rest of coastal West Africa) presented new opportunities, far removed from the stultifying economic conditions of South Lebanon. Maronites were arriving at the same time, destined to compete as traders, but West Africa was to present an egalitarian commercial environment, far removed from the social and cultural constraints of the Levant's complex confessionalist political system. By travelling around the country selling coral, cheap jewellery and ironware the Lebanese were able to make a thorough, commercially-minded appraisal of the interior of Sierra Leone. Soon they were establishing themselves in provincial towns, opening shops, expanding their businesses and creating firm foundations for economic success. As this happened, two-way financial flows began to emerge, with produce being bought in the interior, and transported back to the capital and abroad. As time progressed, word of the success of these pioneers would travel back to Tyre,

³ Supplying the Lyons silk industry (see Gilsenen, 1982).

⁴ Political patrons

⁵ Slum quarters

⁶ see Ayoub (in Collings ed, 1994:p243)

a

the Litani River and the southern Biqa' Valley. A pattern of emigration was established that would continue until the 1980s.⁷

4.4 SHI'ITE BUSINESS PATTERNS

There is a definite structure in the way that Levantine business is done in West Africa. The big problem for everyone, and this is continually reiterated by every trader engaged in conversation, is the trustworthiness of extra-familial employees. This general consensus has seen the development of business strategies that are designed to cope with the unpredictable nature of commercial activity in the hum-drum of the West African market-place. It would be tempting to say that the methods used are merely extensions of those that have been employed in the Levant for thousands of years, and undeniably the influence is there, but it has to be remembered that the majority of Shi'ites, in particular, who arrived in Sierra Leone from South Lebanon had little experience of trade. Many were migrant workers, labourers and artisans, eking out livings on Orthodox Christian- and Maronite-owned citrus plantations around the Litani River, so the way that businesses are now run in the main streets of Freetown and the diamond offices of Bo, is something that has emerged and evolved through the commercial and legal conditions of British colonialism, the boom and recession of post-colonialism, and the insecurity, risk and unpredictability of the present.⁸ What has become clear over the last ten years is that the Shi'ites have weathered this transitional process rather better than other diaspora and indigenous groups operating in the same markets. To understand why this has happened, a central aspect of this thesis, an examination needs to be made of Shi'ite strategies, set against cultural, social, political, economic and historical contexts.

4.5 COMMERCIAL IMITATION AND ADAPTATION

If, as Hannerz (1987: 546-559) argues, the world is in a state of continual and dynamic creolisation, the Shi'ites have been quick to profit from the commercial benefits of this process of cultural hybridisation - in Sierra Leone, their unique social position provides access to a plethora of social, political and economic resources. To the observer, Shi'ite businessmen are often able to display a number of

⁷ The conflict of the 1980s also acted as a driving force for emigration.

⁸ cf. Cohen, A. (1971)

identities that assist everyday economic activity. For those Shi'ites heavily involved in the diamond industry, there will invariably be recourse to several levels of social presentation, be it the tough-talking boss in the pits, or the rather more suave international jet-setting entrepreneur. While dealing with the Maraka trader, the Shi'ite diamond man will take on the persona of the Muslim brother and, in negotiation with a Maronite, he will adopt the guise of the community-minded Lebanese compatriot. On the surface, this may not appear different from businessmen all over the world, but Shi'ite men display a definite flair in this art, drawing upon a repertoire typically wider than that of much of their competition.

Coupled with these interactive skills are an array of business techniques. For Lebanese diaspora, whether Shi'ite or Maronite, tactical imitation has played a major role in the development of commercial strategies. This process began with the arrival of the Levantine immigrants in Sierra Leone and van der Laan (1975:231) demonstrates that Lebanese entrepreneurs were quick to learn from the techniques used in colonial capitalist operations. Creole businesses were also cloned, especially in the produce markets that extended from the coast inland. Both groups came eventually to resent this imitation and the added competition that it produced. However, Levantine traders soon found that this aptitude for trade through imitation, dextrously managed to provide situation-specific business strategies, was more than adequate to deal with commercial eventualities as they pushed further into the interior. Inland, the diaspora found less competition from coastal trading elites, and this combination of skills, married to a degree of Eastern Mediterranean trading élan, soon became the basis of their own economic ascendancy.

4.6 THE SIERRA LEONEAN SHI'ITES AND COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE

Shi'ite business is almost always run within the family unit. As extended Shi'ite families tend to be quite large, enterprises are typically run by brothers, often having inherited firms from fathers some years ago. This kind of arrangement invariably provides enough manpower to create a middle management of sons. Typically, the Shi'ites are less concerned with a formalised Western-style education than other diaspora groups. In Freetown and the large provincial towns there are Lebanese

schools, but often local grammar schools are considered adequate for tuition up to (Secondary) School Certificate level; good numeracy, however, is considered to be vital for a life in trade. Unlike the Maronites, the Shi'ites rarely educate children abroad, but interestingly, two young Shi'ite diamond dealers⁹ were interviewed who had been sent to military academies in the United States. At first this seemed curious, but each claimed that some of the more wealthy diamond families had developed an interest in this type of education, agreeing that it offered not only the usual academic tuition, but taught also self-discipline, a knowledge of mechanics, the ability to operate HF radio sets and a familiarity with weapons, all of which are useful skills in the diamond industry. Many of the larger Shi'ite families had relations working in the New York diamond trade, well situated to find places for nephews and cousins in the military academies of New England.

In the capital and the provincial towns, trade revolves around the import and export of commodities – both luxury and utilitarian. Building materials, cars, pharmaceuticals, and everything else that is required by the general population are imported, whilst agricultural produce and diamonds are exported. The relationships created by an economy based on this formula have been discussed in Chapter Two. From a core leadership at the centre of the family, commercial concerns can be co-ordinated to encompass different aspects of national and international markets. Nephews and cousins are brought in to run small produce-buying, or supply-trading businesses in sleepy chiefdom headquarters towns deep in the interior. In some instances, strategies have been created for exploiting even the most remote and often insecure cross-border areas of the south-east: in villages¹⁰ along the Liberian border it is not uncommon to see Afro-Lebanese produce-buyers running small cottage enterprises and providing an accessible market for small farmers from the bush. It is well known to both Lebanese diaspora and Sierra Leoneans that many of these individuals are the illegitimate offspring of Lebanese diamond supporters who were once operating in these areas. There are certainly parallels with the use of *mulatto* overseers on nineteenth century plantations in the Americas; the Shi'ites have

⁹ Both the young men were twenty and were still learning their trade from an uncle in Kono. They used the aliases “Charlie” and “Mike” – their radio call-signs. (Freetown, 22-23/12/96)

¹⁰ Afro-Lebanese produce buyers were observed operating in Baiwala (Dia Chiefdom), Jojoima and Madina (Malema Chiefdom). May 1997.

realised the value of cultural capital in this kind of commercial environment.¹¹ These Afro-Lebanese traders are typically raised by local women in fluid and insecure border areas, and thus are well equipped to deal with the inherent dangers of this kind of life. As buyers, they enjoy a standard of living that puts them in some standing in the local community, while maintaining a link, however tenuous in real terms, with a financial elite. They form a critically important interface between the realities of the bush and the competition of the market-place. The Shi'ites have become extremely efficient at creating these kinds of commercial "nets", ensuring that little in the way of economic opportunity escapes them, while enabling themselves as a group to reach even further into areas of profit that are well beyond the grasp of other competitive parties.

From an early age boys are encouraged to assist in the everyday tasks of running a shop or generally lending a hand with business. Often it is the boss or grandfather who "mans the fort", drinking Lebanese coffee and receiving friends, while the other male members of the family are generally out and about trading. Passers-by drop in for some light conversation, and so the process serves as a useful means of collecting and passing on important information concerning business and politics. It seems very different from the European notion that work is essentially an adult domain and often entirely separate from family life. Children are able to observe business in action and consequently develop an understanding and feel for it very quickly; the transition from childhood into trade is often imperceptible. Most Shi'ite families will have a shop, or a close relative with a shop, that provides this kind of education. Indeed, the retail outlet is vital in times of hardship; straight-forward commodity trading remains the official business of even the most economically powerful of Shi'ite businessmen, and is considered to be not only a vital fall-back position in the event of severe mining losses, incurred through unlucky investment, but also as a means of generating potential investment capital for mining, and for subsistence during periods of political insecurity.

In Sierra Leone, there are wide variations in levels of prosperity among the individual families that together make up the Shi'ite community. There are certainly very rich Shi'ites, to be found living in the

¹¹ Afro-Lebanese overseers were employed on several mining operations in the Bafi River area, visited in February and March, 1997. Their bosses were major Shi'ite players based in Koidu Town and Sefadu.

diplomatic districts of Freetown, but there are also petit-bourgeois trading Shi'ites located throughout the country in the provincial towns. In Freetown, the majority of Shi'ites live fairly inconspicuous lives in the East End of town. The Kissy Road suburb is a culturally diverse area located around the beginning of the main Freetown to Masiaka trunk road. Culturally, it is fair to say that there is little to distinguish between the lifestyles of these Shi'ites and their co-religionists living in the interior; they have little in common with the metropolitan elites and their expatriate lifestyles. Once, whilst driving through the Kissy Road area with the son of a wealthy Maronite importer, I remarked on the concentration of "Lebanese" in the area: "Ah, them", he replied, "Kissy Road bush-Lebs (he laughed) -- they're different -- you see how rough they live -- like West Beirut -- cheap housing surrounded by Africans, they even like to eat *plasas*¹² -- I could never live like that!".

This kind of attitude towards the Shi'ites is common among the Maronites of Sierra Leone. Its origins, of course, are ancient and derive from continued interventions by European powers aligned with Christian groups against Moslems for control of the Lebanese state. In the Sierra Leonean context, however, it also reflects ideas about function and economies of lifestyle, central to operating in a socially and politically unpredictable environment. Shi'ite houses are not on the whole chosen or designed for their exterior aesthetic appeal, but instead for far more practical considerations like security. Usually they are solid, unattractive, multi-storey concrete buildings, with ample space for large families, vehicles and the storage of stock and supplies. In contrast, the Maronites, typically with much smaller families, opt for grander, Romanesque-style villas, more suited to the business of entertaining the Freetown elite. At the time of the young Maronite's remark, it was clear that the Shi'ites, as a group, were by far the more secure, particularly in view of the general political deterioration of the country. In confirmation of this, the AFRC coup was immediately followed by widespread and often aggravated looting, and it was the ornate and luxurious Maronite and expatriate residences that were primarily targeted for robbery. It is well known that Shi'ite property is particularly difficult to force entry. Single entrances, steel plate doors, narrow stair wells and invariably armed occupants are generally enough to deter even the most determined of thieves.¹³

¹² *Plasas* is a local dish made with palm oil and cassava leaf or sweet potato leaf, served with rice.

¹³ One Shi'ite explained the architectural logic that lay in the design of his Freetown residence. Entry to a narrow stair well was by steel door, as was entry to each of the four floors of the building off the well. An

The majority of Shi'ites in Sierra Leone live relatively modest lives in comparison with other diaspora and expatriate groups, and this has certain advantages from which the Shi'ites benefit. A newcomer to Freetown might well make the assumption that the apparently more affluent Maronites have enjoyed greater economic success than their Shi'ite rivals. Closer examination of the evidence, however, offers a different perspective, one of consolidation and strength, focused on the preservation and protection of assets and the successful exploitation of new and existing markets. A low profile that avoids ostentation and a reputation for bellicosity can be highly advantageous during periods of social crisis and commercial prosperity alike. One Koidu Town Shi'ite explained his commercial and social philosophy:

“You see, as a Shi'a, all I want to do is get on with my business, support my family and help my brothers. I lead a quiet life -- of course, I like to have a drink with friends, but I'm not interested in all this Freetown social life, you know, like going to Lagoonda,¹⁴ drinking cocktails with British and Americans and having parties. I am a diamond man, I dig and I buy -- that's it. I treat people straight, but if someone steps on my toe then I will step on his head -- that is our way -- my father taught me that. Ask any Shi'a man and he will tell you the same -- if you are not strong you cannot survive here. People know I am like this and they come back to do business with me -- fair and square!”¹⁵

4.7 THE SHI'ITES IN THE PROVINCES

Mohammed's family arrived in Sierra Leone in the late-1920s. Mohammed was born in Kayima Chiefdom, Kono District in the late-1950s, and he currently lives alone in Koidu Town, Kono District. He was educated locally in the chiefdom, and received extra instruction in reading and writing Arabic from a local Fula Sunni *Imam*.¹⁶ He and his wife were married as teenagers, and had their first child

RPG would be capable of downing the first door, but the narrow stair well ensured that anyone firing the weapon against an internal door would himself be killed by the confined blast.

¹⁴ A popular but expensive night-club/casino in Freetown.

¹⁵ Interview, Yengema Airport, 25/02/1997

¹⁶ In this case the extra instruction was fairly rudimentary. Van der Laan (1975:250) states that "...there was a lack of determination to find recognition among their fellow Muslims, in particular on the side of the Shi'ite Lebanese. Very few Lebanese attend the communal prayers on Eid-el-Fitri and Eid-el-Adha. Joint public worship is further discouraged by the absence of central mosques in most towns. Only one Lebanese has been invited by African Muslims to act as Imam in one of their mosques, and even he is in fact a Sunnite refugee from Palestine.”

within two years. His extended family is large; grandfathers on both sides of his family were polygynous. Like Mohammed, the majority of his brothers are engaged in diamond mining. They live close to one another in the same quarter of Koidu Town and are also involved in importing and selling building materials and luxury goods. He lives in one of the few three storey houses in the town and has his shop located on the ground floor. When not visiting mining sites he is usually to be found sitting at his desk, drinking strong Lebanese coffee and generally watching the world go by. Visitors come and go; often small miners seeking support money for illegal *kabadu*¹⁷ operations in the bush. Sometimes, if he is familiar with the individuals he will oblige them, encouraging them to return with diamonds should they find any, but usually he will move them on, often suggesting some expatriate operation half jokingly.

On most days during the season, he will drive in his Mercedes up to his sites on the Bafi and Bagbe Rivers,¹⁸ where his team of diggers will be hard at work. The diggers had worked under the leadership of a trusted Sierra Leonean foreman, but at the time of research in early 1997, Mohammed was deeply upset by the capture of his “main-man” by the RUF. Mohammed had adopted Saidu as teenager, and had taught him many of the skills required to be a competent mining foreman. By the age of twenty, Saidu had shown himself to be a tough street-wise leader and fully capable of running a medium-sized pit in Mohammed’s absence. He was trustworthy, loyal and appreciative of Mohammed for taking him off the streets; he was an orphan and had no family.¹⁹ He also showed an aptitude for digging and understood some of the basics of geology and engineering that are necessary to prevent in-fills and accidents. For Mohammed his disappearance was a severe loss in both human and commercial terms. Mohammed believed that he had been “ear-marked” for capture because of his skills and was probably running a mine, under duress, over the border.²⁰ His only relief was knowing that he would be more valuable to the RUF alive than dead.

¹⁷ see Chapter Two

¹⁸ Mainly located in Sando and Nimiyema Chiefdoms

¹⁹ Saidu had originally come from Kambia District, 200 miles away in the north-west of Sierra Leone.

²⁰ Mohammed felt that Saidu was most likely to be in Lofa County, Liberia in the area north of Mt. Wuteve that lies between Vahun, Kolahun and Mendekoma close to the source of the Moro River.

Because of the loss of Saidu, it was necessary for Mohammed to make daily trips to the mines to supervise proceedings. Payment deals have to be worked out delicately, not just to suit the diggers and supporter, but to give incentive for hard work. Arguments are common place and one gets the impression of a constant antagonistic relationship between Mohammed and the diggers. There is, however, little overt animosity within these industrial relations; the banter is generally good humoured and light hearted.

Mohammed had also embarked on a "farming project", something his Shi'ite associates considered him to be slightly mad for doing:

"You see I had this site, about six hectares, that I started to mine, but it soon turned out to be useless. I had a long lease on it so I thought, "What can I do with it?" So I got some old men and younger boys to plant it with cassava, yams, and rice around the small lake -- it was going well -- I kept some produce for myself -- some went to the farmers and the rest to the diggers -- and then the rebels came and "scattered" it! So I have to start again, but I think it is worth it -- why not? -- people should start using the old mining sites for agriculture."

In the evening he returns to his house and sits out on the balcony. This gives him a good vantage point to call down to individuals that he needs to talk to -- often diggers he is supporting. The houseboys prepare mezze, perfect for feeding Shi'ite friends who tend to just drop in. By 7.30 p.m., the whisky drinking is well underway. Cousins arrive to bemoan losses that they have incurred on pits, and friends with their wives turn up to eat and drink. Conversation is generally about mining, but when women are present the men try to make an effort to talk about something else -- often trips abroad to sell diamonds.

Mohammed has made occasional trips to Antwerp to trade diamonds, but now sells most of his goods directly to other larger Shi'ite exporters. He was not in possession of an export licence and saw little reason to have one at a time when the industry was suffering. As a respected member of the Shi'ite community,²¹ he was given good prices for his goods by other exporters. He has made several trips to

²¹ Mohammed had been the elected head of the Shi'ite community in Kono District for two years.

America and the United Kingdom (mostly during the 1980s), but no longer has the financial means to do so. The war has put added pressure on all the diamond dealers and supporters working in the area, and most have suffered looting at the hands of the RUF three or four times. As a consequence, residences in Kono are very bare, containing only the essentials for everyday living. As the security situation worsened in the east of Sierra Leone, Mohammed and his associates all expected further RUF attacks on Koidu Town.²²

Because of the security situation, Mohammed's wife remained in Freetown with their children, who were being educated at the Lebanese school there. The entire family had lived in Koidu Town, but in 1993 the RUF had looted their house and destroyed the school. Mohammed was happier with them in the safer environment of the capital and was pleased that there were more things for his children to do. Two of his older sons were learning karate²³, something that would be impossible in Kono.

During the conflict in Lebanon, some of the Sierra Leonean Shi'ites returned to Beirut, often to look after female relatives who had lost menfolk in the fighting. Mohammed spent 1982-1984 there, visiting and providing for his mother (who had retired to Beirut)²⁴ and members of her family, but others returned for other reasons, particularly to fight with Shi'ite militias in Beirut and the South. Although Mohammed was not involved in the fighting, he was candid that many he knew were. This Shi'ite militancy was certainly not confined to Beirut and al-Janub, either:

"In addition, the militias were very active overseas, producing informational pamphlets, making political contacts, and raising funds, as well as infiltrating and monitoring expatriate Lebanese communities. All activities of Lebanese emigres were closely watched, and intimidation or diversion techniques were employed whenever dissent opinions began to gain ground." (Corm, in Collings ed. 1994:221)

²² All kept "Jerry" cans of fuel in the boots of their cars in case a rapid evacuation became necessary.

²³ Karate is popular among Shi'ite youth who are instructed in the martial art at the Shi'ite owned Youth Sports Club, Wilkinson Road, Freetown.

²⁴ Elder members of the Shi'ite community commonly retired to Lebanon.

Mohammed also confided that there were moves afoot to create a predominantly Shi'ite civil defence force to protect Koidu Town, Yengema and Sefadu. However, the GoSL had specifically prohibited a large-scale acquisition of automatic weapons by the community.²⁵ Mohammed believed that the wealth of "combat experience" in the community was more than sufficient to deal with the threat posed by the RUF. Others, however, had their doubts. A Maronite supporter remarked:

"Can you blame them [the GoSL] -- this is the only wise decision they have ever made.²⁶ There are a lot of crazy bastards up here [Kono] -- if you start giving them 47s and 58s²⁷ there will be trouble sooner or later. Only last week a fight broke out at a wedding [attended by both Maronites and Shi'ites] and shots were fired -- people are too tense -- it only takes one small thing and the young guys will start shooting. Leave security to the South Africans for Christ's sake or Koidu will end up like the Green Line."²⁸

In 1996-1997, it was not uncommon to see Amal calendars and pennants hanging in Shi'ite-owned shops in Kono, but less likely in Freetown. By the late-1980s, much of the Kono industry had come to be dominated by the Shi'ite community, and this position was further reinforced under the NPRC regime.²⁹ Overt political affiliation of this nature would suggest that the decline in Maronite influence over the diamond economy could, in part, be measured against the rise of Shi'ite sectarian militancy. Support for Berri's populist and secular Amal is, therefore, voiced relatively openly. During interview, a Kenema Shi'ite who maintains close links with family in Beirut, explained how Amal support mechanisms operated in the past:

"Maybe every two or three months or so, [a Kenema community leader] would call small groups³⁰ of us round to his house. Firstly, he would give us a report on how things were going for Amal back in

²⁵ All Shi'ite men carry hand-guns in the diamond districts and some possess AK 47s, but clearly there was a desire for a more comprehensive equipping of the community.

²⁶ Apparently at the request of the South Africans.

²⁷ A Soviet assault rifle combined with a grenade launcher.

²⁸ The Maronite did not elaborate further, but it is presumed that he was referring to the risk of personal vendettas erupting between young "hot-heads" rather than any latent political tensions.

²⁹ Skilful Shi'ite dealers were able to interlocate themselves between Strasser/RSLMF mining operations and clandestine diamond markets abroad, successfully exploiting a commercially indispensable and potentially politically powerful niche. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

³⁰ Often groups of related businessmen

Lebanon, you know, what Berri was doing and whether ground was being lost or gained. Then we would all sit down and talk about contributions -- everyone pretty well knows how everyone is doing -- so [the community leader] knew how much everyone could afford. It was just a small percentage of monthly earnings -- if people were in the shit they didn't have to pay -- it was no problem. You know, nobody ever complained, in fact everyone I knew was happy to help -- it was for our people back in Lebanon and we all wanted them looked after. I just used to send parcels,³¹ what happened to them I don't know -- either they were sold for cash in Antwerp or Lebanon or Israel or whatever, it wasn't my problem -- I knew that the matter was in good hands. It's just the same now -- we get a visit³² and we make a contribution, or they could make trouble for us. The only difference is, none of us want to give money to those assholes."³³

It will be remembered that Amal originated as a progressive movement seeking social justice and regional development. Its military extension was a reaction to a complex series of social and political events [see Chapter Three]. Hizb Allah, however, is somewhat different. The ultra-militant, pro-Iranian, fundamentalist organisation pursues direct confrontation with a perceived Zionist enemy. Undoubtedly, support for Hizb Allah does exist within the Sierra Leonean Shi'ite community, but any radical, religio-political extremism remains shrouded by the Shi'ite doctrine of *taqiya*, the "concealment" so central to Shi'ite orthodoxy. Informants quite prepared to discuss diaspora support for Amal and the role of its militia during the Lebanese civil war were very reluctant to discuss community links with Hizb Allah. The organisation had been in bitter conflict with Amal from 1988 until a Syrian-brokered peace-deal signed by both groups towards the end of 1990 [see Chapter Three]. Much of the fighting was for territorial control of southern Beirut suburbs and their constituent populations and clearly this intra-Shi'ite schism is a delicate matter in diaspora politics. The reasons for secrecy lie in the great importance attached to the projection of an image of unity -- intra-community divisions could well be interpreted as a weakness and exploited by rival groups. Hizb Allah is currently active in South Lebanon, launching sporadic strikes against Israeli border positions, and these operations remain a highly sensitive issue. Amalists in Sierra Leone fear that this kind of militaristic aggression can, in the

³¹ Packets of rough diamonds

³² The "visits" the informant refers to were from SLPP cabinet ministers.

³³ Interview: Kenema, 25/03/1997

long term, achieve little against such a powerful opponent, other than the continued suffering of civilian populations in the contested regions.³⁴ One Shi'ite informant confided:

“We supported Amal because it was for the good of our people -- Imam al-Sadr and Nabih Berri worked to improve the lives of the Shi'ites in the South and Beirut. But look what is happening now -- all this Iranian fundamentalist business will do nothing except to bring more trouble to al-Janub -- it is like kicking a sleeping dog. We Shi'a here [Sierra Leone] have nothing in common with these crazies³⁵ -- we drink whisky, gamble and enjoy life -- it's just a few young idiots and some deal-makers who should know better.³⁶ Why should we want to fight the Jews? Because Tehran tells us to? Who the hell do they [Tehran] think we are selling our diamonds to? Last week I have two *Hassidim* from Antwerp stay here in my house [in Kono], and I treat them as any friends!”

4.8 THE SHI'ITES IN SIERRA LEONE-- A SYNOPSIS

Over the last fifteen years, the Shi'ite diaspora community in Sierra Leone has remained focused on a long-term strategy that seeks to consolidate social and economic position whilst maintaining close relations with increasingly powerful constituencies in South Lebanon and West Beirut. The foundations of firmly established networks of trade and sociocultural discourse were laid in the late-1960s through the agency of primary political actors. Imam Musa al-Sadr, by visiting Sierra Leone in 1967, demonstrated the importance he attributed to the role of diaspora support in the social, economic and political progression of the Shi'ites in Lebanon. The commercial stability of West African diaspora groups offered a loyal and independent source of financial and political patronage, relatively removed from the influences of rival Middle Eastern Islamic polities.

Al-Sadr's assassination brought about a new era of even closer association. The mantle of an increasingly radicalised and sectarian Amal was taken up by Nabih Berri, the son of a Port Loko³⁷

³⁴ Essentially al-Janub Province

³⁵ Hizb Allah

³⁶ It was intimated that some Shi'ite businessmen were arranging favourable contracts (in oil, rice and fishing) through Freetown's Iranian embassy. In return, some degree of pro-Hizb Allah proselytising and support was expected. This suggests that, in reality, pure commercialism might have played as much of a role in Hizb Allah militancy as ideology.

³⁷ Northern Province, Sierra Leone

trading family, and thus a man with deep connections to the diaspora in Sierra Leone. As Lebanon descended into civil war, the Shi'ite community in Sierra Leone offered clandestine financial assistance to Amal through a supply of rough diamonds which were almost certainly realised in the bourses of Tel Aviv. Some young, community-conscious diaspora men went so far as to return to al-Janub and West Beirut to fight, motivated by notions of social and religious obligation and ethnicity.

This sense of social responsibility, in part reflecting long-established sectarian/egalitarian tendencies in Shi'ite communities, provides some of the cultural momentum driving ambitions of the Shi'ite diaspora in the diamond districts of Kono and Kenema. What became evident during research was the eagerness of young Shi'ites to continue in the footsteps of their fathers. There seems to be a genuine desire by many to work towards an ideal of the respected diamond man -- driving a hard bargain but at the same time displaying generosity towards community members in need. None holds any illusions about the realities of this kind of life; in Koidu Town and Sefadu, teenage Shi'ite boys, undertaking errands for family members will typically carry concealed weapons, knowing when and how to use them.³⁸ These skills are learnt at a relatively early age and are unremarkable when one considers the age of some front-line RUF combatants.³⁹ For Shi'ites, it is merely a part of the equipment (both material and social) required for the secure and successful pursuit of trade in an unpredictable environment. Even though "Charlie" and "Mike" had experienced the sophistication of the East Coast of the United States and had interacted with contemporary American teenagers, both enthused about the excitement of "real" business at the sharp-end. As they proudly displayed the small revolvers they wore holstered to their ankles, it was difficult to imagine either subscribing to the "nine to five" regime of "yuppiedom", everyday office politics and an institutionalised struggle to accumulate the symbols of sophisticated metropolitan affluence.

This minor detail relating to youthful aspiration is not unimportant, and may be central to understanding the modern, bazaar economy -- peripheral trade requires peripheral players, prepared for, and able to cope with, any eventuality. But knowledge is only part of the route to success. In the

³⁸ Personal observation, Jan – May, 1997

³⁹ See Richards (1995), Riley (1996), Ellis (1995)

introduction to this thesis, it was mentioned that ideas about performance and globalisation would also be considered. For the young Shi'ites there is clearly a need to "act out" their life through the re-appropriation of Hollywood-influenced stylised modes of behaviour. The diamond pits become "The Street", with potential danger on every corner. Bluff and front are employed to gain or reinforce power over subordinates, in subtle imitation of the actions and mannerisms of the Los Angeles gangster. Richards (1996) has argued the importance of the Rambo character from the film "First Blood" as a model for "socially excluded" youth in Sierra Leone, and RUF fighters in particular. Hollywood influence is everywhere, from the style affected by S.A.J. Musa and the NPRC Supreme Council of State, to the new generation of Shi'ite diggers, driving their Mercedes to the accompaniment of blaring rap music.

These comments on the importance of "global style" and poise in such a chancy and insubstantial world as the diamond trade should also alert us to the possibility that informant invocations of Hizb Allah tell us as much about "attitude" as substance. Without gainsaying that some Lebanese in Sierra Leone are serious in grasping the issues of social security and social change faced by Shi'ite communities in Lebanon, the idea of a Tehran-inspired fundamentalism sweeping through the Shi'ite diaspora of West Africa seems most unlikely. Bar commercial opportunists and a handful of frustrated extremists, the Shi'ite community in Sierra Leone remains firmly united. In Sierra Leone, recent events and diaspora distillation have served to buttress this commitment not to fundamentalism but to a syncretism that is truly global in its reach.

4.9 THE MARONITES IN SIERRA LEONE

The Maronites, like the Shi'ites began to arrive in the Colony at the end of the last century, travelling on one-way tickets and transported by British and French steam-packets. The Tleill and El-Metn Maronites form by far the largest proportion of the Christian community. There is in addition a small group of Greek Orthodox from the Rahbe area of North Lebanon. The Greek Orthodox community in Sierra Leone has traditionally focused on the export of agricultural produce and has had no direct involvement with the diamond trade. That is not to say, however, that the Greek Orthodox have not

used diamonds as a convenient means of exchanging local for hard currencies, but in terms of actual participation in extraction and day-to-day diamond trade they have preferred to consolidate their own market niche. For this reason, this section will concentrate on the Maronite majority and its lengthy participation (both in illicit pre-ADMS enterprise and legitimate post-ADMS enterprise) in the Sierra Leonean diamond industry.

Prior to the Great War, the Maronites outnumbered the Shi'ites as settlers in the Colony. The subsequent threat of Turkish conscription was an important impetus for Shi'ite emigration from 1914-1918 (van der Laan, 1975:238). Maronite motives for leaving Lebanon differed greatly from those of the Shi'ites; on the whole, although not wealthy, the Maronites had historically enjoyed the benefits of membership of a politically and economically powerful confession, but some of this prestige had been lost after the brutal conflicts with the Druze in the 1840s and 1860s. Catholic education, organised by the many Holy Orders⁴⁰ resident in Lebanon, had enlarged a professional class to such an extent that job opportunities within the civil services and elsewhere came under increasing competition. Much of the overspill from this employment market began to move itself to larger colonial administrations in North and East Africa and the Middle East, where Maronites were favoured for their professional skills and their Christianity. At first, this process took them to Egypt and Sudan, but soon migration extended along the West African Coast to the Anglophone and Francophone dependencies. Here, some Maronites were taken on by the administrative authorities in the limited capacities of lowly civil service posts, but most soon desired to expand into trade and commerce (Moosa 1986). As word spread of the economic opportunities, more Maronites, typically related, and originating from the same geographical regions of Lebanon, arrived with the sole intention of trading as the commercial influence of their community on the West Coast grew. The industrial infrastructure of countries like Sierra Leone was especially poor, demanding that commodities required by the expatriate communities be imported from Europe, the Near and Middle East. As coastal capitals enlarged, the demand for building materials grew. At first, this was limited to nails and tools, but soon the trade was to include more sophisticated items like corrugated iron and, eventually, cement – all of which were being manufactured in the Levant, and offered easy profits for those involved in the importation of these goods. Chekka, ten miles south of

⁴⁰ The Jesuits and Benedictines in particular (Moosa 1986)

Tripoli and deep in the Maronite heartland, has long been the centre of the Lebanese cement and roofing industry⁴¹. Both El-Metn and Tleill diaspora groups have close commercial links with this town, although Maronite factionalisation in Lebanon during the mid-1980s made trade difficult for both Sierra Leonean clans.

As the twentieth century progressed, the Maronites were slowly able to establish themselves, finding a niche in a social hierarchy that lay somewhere between the indigenous African population and the European administration. Along with the Krios, they formed a useful middle-class, encouraging a vibrant market whilst filling positions in the medical profession and the service industry. They were soon able to establish a presence in the central business district of Freetown, beginning with First Street which backed down on to the wharves at the mouth of the Sierra Leone River. Here imported goods could be quickly off-loaded from ships and, with the minimum of transport, taken straight to warehouses and shops for sale. The movement of goods rapidly became two way and the Maronites were instrumental in the initial forays into the export of bananas, coffee, palm oil and ground nuts, all of which were in demand in the Mediterranean and Europe. Much of the capital from this trade was invested in the "Europeanisation" of the Maronite community. Maronites saw the colonial expatriate community as a suitable role model to aspire to, and subsequently set about a process of cultural imitation.

As a Christian diaspora group, close contact with Europeans in West Africa was inevitable. It is reasonable to suggest that Maronite diaspora became closely involved with British and French expatriates in ways that would have been impossible in Lebanon. The lack of a proper Maronite church in Freetown obliged them to congregate at Roman Catholic churches, of which there are several. Through this religious activity, contacts were made with Irish priests and, prior to 1922, Irish Roman Catholic members of the colonial administration. This association evidently blossomed and reaped the rewards of not only Catholic education in Sierra Leone but, more importantly, abroad, and in particular

⁴¹ The building materials industry of Chekka became an important Maronite racket during the Lebanese civil war. Control of the town was bitterly fought over by Franjieh's Marada militia and Gemayel's Phalangists.

in the British Isles,⁴² greatly enlarging the Maronites' universe. The long-term results would be university-educated Maronites qualified to engage in professions like law and medicine. These skills tended to favour them over similarly qualified Europeans; for those born in West Africa, some acquired immunity to malaria, and a fund of local cultural knowledge, afforded considerable advantages over Englishmen prone to sickness and fever and reluctant to reside in the interior. In 1955, Khalil Garnem, an El-Metn Maronite, was elected mayor of Bo Town Council. His fluent Mende⁴³ helped with a second election victory in 1957. In 1964, Edmond Moukarzel was appointed as a member of the Economic Advisory Committee and, in 1967, Tleill Maronite Edward Aboud became Second Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce. In time, some prominent professional and trading Maronites were invited to join the Masonic Lodges of Bo and Freetown (van der Laan, 1975:358) [see below].

Training in engineering and agriculture was keenly sought. Some Maronites during the 1930s established banana plantations and other agricultural projects so successfully that the economies of West Indian islands were thought to face direct threat, requiring colonial protection [see below]. In the field of engineering, Maronites played important roles in both civil and manufacturing developments in the country. Maronite construction firms built many of the schools and hospitals in the country over the last forty years. In the 1950s, the Milhems, El-Metn Maronites, assisted Dr. Milton Margai with the construction of a clinic in Bo. Elias Bamin, a Maronite with close family connections to Liverpool, advanced money to veteran radical I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson to save his newspaper *The African Standard* (van der Laan, 1975:356).

In more recent times, well known Maronite businessmen like A.A. Yazbeck have been largely responsible for the development of a (albeit short-lived) tourist industry, building large hotels, restaurants, night-clubs and casinos, and exploiting beaches along the Freetown Peninsula. Much of the investment capital raised for these projects was diamond-based and put forward by leading members of

⁴² In 1997, many young Maronites interviewed had followed their fathers and had been educated at Blackrock College, Dublin; Stoneyhurst School, Lancashire; and Douai School, Woolhampton. All three are Jesuit institutions.

⁴³ Ganem was born in Mandu, Valunia Chiefdom, where his father traded palm produce; raised as a "village boy" (including society initiation) the young Khalil Garnem could pass as Mende, apart from skin colour.

the APC patrimonial elite (Reno 1995). It was initially hoped that a vibrant tourist industry would generate substantial reserves of foreign currency, providing a highly satisfactory mechanism for currency exchange by the elite [see Chapter Five].

4.10 PROCESSES OF INTEGRATION WITH THE EUROPEAN EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY

The Maronite community was quick to adapt to its new environment and was adept at establishing itself within the colonial hierarchy. By the 1940s, young Maronite men, educated abroad, were intermarrying with Europeans,⁴⁴ bringing the group closer to a perceived Western ideal. As time progressed the Maronites were able to further consolidate their relationship with the British colonial administration. The pattern of marriage to Europeans and Americans has undoubtedly aided this movement towards integration to such an extent that key Maronite families in contemporary Freetown are often, in terms of recent genealogy, more “British” than Lebanese, particularly within the younger generations. Many are full British citizens, some even having recently served in the British Army,⁴⁵ before returning to assist with family enterprises in the capital. During fieldwork, many young Maronites who had been educated abroad, often to tertiary level, were interviewed. All were in agreement that overseas education had undoubtedly broadened their horizons immensely and as a consequence many felt that Sierra Leone, in its present state, had little to offer in the way of opportunities beyond the traditional, recession-weakened trading sphere. Nearly all were very reluctant to live in the interior away from the social circuit of Freetown.⁴⁶

Maronite families are typically “European” in structure, but tended to approach a Catholic “norm” of perhaps four children as opposed to a more typical Protestant average of 2.5. But importantly, in the past, marriage has traditionally occurred at quite an early age, (although this practice is rapidly disappearing), creating patrilineal household groups spanning up to five generations. This generational span produces a spectrum running from strong “Lebaneseness” at the senior end to Anglicisation and

⁴⁴ Four well known Freetown Maronite families, the Bamins, the Courbans, the Toufics and the Rekabs, each saw several sons marry British wives before returning to Sierra Leone to pursue careers in trade and the professions.

⁴⁵ During research, a young Freetown Maronite had recently returned from seven years service with the Queens Regiment, British Army. He left in the rank of sergeant to enter the family building supplies trade.

⁴⁶ Various interviews.

Americanisation at the more junior. The patrilocality of senior male lineage members is often important in exhibiting a strong Maronite heritage for many families. Elderly womenfolk also exemplify cultural trends through several generations – while teenagers may wear the latest transatlantic fashions, a widowed grandmother will typically wear the “mourning black” traditional for Eastern Mediterranean Christians and Arabs alike. Even in the minds of the most Westernised Maronites, such dress code distinctiveness in the older generation maintains awareness of the gap between the identities of Western European expatriates and their own Syriac social identities.

4.11 PROCESSES OF AFRICANISATION

Aspects of dress and social courtesy are not the only evidence for cultural distinctiveness: Maronite diaspora culture has become significantly Africanised in ways that would not be true for, say, British business expatriates in Sierra Leone. In linguistic terms, all Maronites tend to display an elegant fluency in *Krio* uncommon among the Shi'ites⁴⁷ and certainly among expatriate Europeans. Interaction with Freetown Creole elites is probably the basis for this skill. A few Sierra Leonean Maronites today are able to speak Arabic [see below]. Others may have some understanding of the language, but not usually of the heavy, South Lebanese dialect spoken by Shi'ites. The El-Metn Maronites, originally from central French Mandated Lebanon, spoke French on arrival in Sierra Leone, while the North Lebanese Tleill Maronites arrived speaking a Syrian dialect of Arabic. Many of the more senior members of these families are still able to converse in either of these two languages. However, English, the language of administration in the Colony and the Protectorate, soon became a necessity for understanding the bureaucracy of business and the law. The official language, though, was not entirely adequate. In the early half of this century, the Creoles⁴⁸ still controlled a major proportion of the Colony's export facilities in Freetown and, for Maronites shipping produce abroad, *Krio* became the

⁴⁷ This is not to say that the Shi'ites are bad communicators – more that their style of *Krio* is far more pragmatic and simple. For the Shi'ites, *Krio* is simply a way of getting things done – and the simpler the better – particularly as communication, in the diamond districts, is often with other *Krio* semi-speakers like Temne, Mende and Kono diggers. Indeed, it was noted that Maronites operating in Kono typically simplified their *Krio* when dealing with local diggers. Diamond district *Krio* is at times more like a Pidgin (i.e. a functional trade language) and sometimes termed “*Kangbe Krio*” (*Kangbe* – Mandinka, “clear language”).

⁴⁸ The descendants of nineteenth century “recaptive” slaves who settled on the Freetown Peninsula. (See Fyle & Jones, 1980; Fyfe, 1962, 1964; Richards, 1996/8)

language of commerce. It was these early business links that consolidated the relationship between the Christian Creoles and Maronites, two groups with similar aspirations. In the long-term, however, this relationship may not have fulfilled its true potential – the political peripherisation of the Creole community in the post-colonial period and its subsequent economic decline, largely removed it from Maronite spheres of social interaction after 1960. Put bluntly, a majority of even elite Creoles was unable to afford the maintenance of social relations with the Maronites and other newer elites in society and trade. *Krio* has remained the *lingua franca* of trade, but in the diamond districts for the last thirty years, the Maronites have conversed with Konos, Mendes and Mandingos, the vast majority of whom speak only a very simplified but functional form of the language. Maronite metropolitan flair for *Krio* has a historical and very African foundation, initially developed while the Creoles still represented a major economic and trading force.

4.12 MARONITE USAGE OF ARABIC

The use of Arabic is also interesting. It has been shown in earlier sections of this chapter that in Lebanon, different Maronite political groupings have conflicting attitudes to the subject of “Arabness”. For the old-guard of the northern clans, Arabic heritage has been something to treasure, and has served an important role in cementing relationships with Syria. For the Chamounists and pro-Israeli Phalangists of central Lebanon and the suburbs of East Beirut, issues of Arab descent have been skilfully camouflaged by developing the mythology of the Frankish origin of Maronitism and consequently its logical relationship with France and the Apostolic See. In Lebanon, Arabic usage has strong political connotations as Randall (1983) points out:

“In theory a knowledge of Arabic was compulsory for secondary-school graduation in the official Lebanese curriculum. I know many upper-class Maronite women who were allowed to skip the requirement. During the 1975-76 fighting, less well-educated Maronites took to speaking French while the upper classes dusted off their often shaky notions of Arabic to show solidarity with the young men from the mountains and working-class suburbs doing the actual shooting.”

For the Maronites of Freetown, Arabic is simply not an issue, either historically or politically; there are certainly some with the ability to speak it, but by far the greater proportion claim that they have only a very partial understanding. In the buying offices of Kono, it is not uncommon for Shi'ite dealers to converse in Arabic for some time before turning to a Maronite associate and exclaiming, "Hey, sorry for the language, eh!". Apologies of this nature are commonplace and are generally greeted with a non-committal, "no problem". In circumstances of both trade and socialisation, communication between Shi'ites, with a less fluent grasp of English, and Maronites will generally be undertaken in a form of broken English. However, typically *Krio* phrases and elements of *Krio* vocabulary familiar to both parties will be incorporated, enabling a perfectly adequate level of expression and understanding.

4.13 THE MARONITES AND CULTURAL CREOLIZATION

Over the last century, the Maronites in Sierra Leone have been greatly affected by a process of cultural (as well as linguistic) creolization⁴⁹ that has been rather different from, and more intense than the equivalent processes affecting the Shi'ite community. Access to the advantages of a sophisticated Catholic education and the cultural expansion and assimilation that this has afforded have assisted in sustaining a social group more than capable of performing professional, commercial and administrative roles, while enjoying a high degree of recognition for these skills from the British colonial administration. Admittedly, this process was only to gain full momentum after the Second World War, but these increased opportunities, coupled with greater degrees of social interaction, were to lay the foundations for the profitable achievements of the community in the immediate post-colonial period. By the 1950s, the Maronites had become indispensable participants in day-to-day commercial intercourse mediated by the late-colonial state. This vital contribution was symbolically expressed by the community through an increased acquisition of the trappings of "elite" culture. In Sierra Leone, and elsewhere in West Africa, elite recreational and social activity is generally focused around membership of exclusive, high-status clubs and societies, many catering for pastimes like golf, power-boating, bridge, but also, importantly, including Freemasonry. The residences of Maronite doctors and dentists openly display portraits of the owners in full Masonic garb,⁵⁰ and it is understood that at least one of the

⁴⁹ Hannerz, U. (1987)

⁵⁰ Personal observation in the homes of several Maronite informants and associates.

more prestigious Freetown lodges has traditionally welcomed Maronite membership for some time.⁵¹ This would suggest that, in the past, Freemasonry was clearly an important forum for a triangular interaction involving Maronites, Creoles and European expatriates. Cohen (1981: p.37) suggests that contemporary Freemasonry in Sierra Leone is an almost exclusively Creole domain and makes no mention of the participation of other ethnic groups. Evidence from informal association in Freetown would indicate that, on the contrary, Maronites and Afro-Maronites form a significant minority within the membership. This is important, as it says much about the historical similarities of the long-term social aspirations of these two essentially urban-based elites. Cohen (1987:67), discusses the importance of Freemasonry in the educational careers of Creole men; membership of the fraternity is thought to have obvious advantages in the establishment of contacts overseas and securing accommodation. It is certainly possible that Maronite Masons have enjoyed similar benefits in the post-Second World War period although, for many, the experience of significant independent wealth in the 1970s-1980s may have resulted in neglect of some of these international networks.⁵²

4.14 THE MARONITES AND DIAMONDS

Maronite involvement in the diamond industry began with the introduction of the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme in 1956. Financially, Maronite traders and professionals were in a good position to invest, and did so readily. Excess capital accumulated through the export of agricultural produce and the import of luxury goods and building supplies was used to secure diamond concessions from paramount chiefs in the interior.⁵³ Politically and socially well-connected to both the British and to the Creoles (although increasingly politically weakened), the Maronites made rapid progress in the new industry, which came at a time when Maronite trade-based capital production was beginning to level out (Zack-Williams, 1995; Reno, 1995). Diamonds were to revive flagging fortunes and guarantee the continued high-status of the community for some time to come. During this period the Kono diamond

⁵¹ The lodge, originally founded by the British at the end of the last century is of the English Constitution and has been granted "Royal Arch" status, thus lending extra privileges to its members. (See Cohen, A. 1981: p.113)

⁵² Some Maronites in the 25 - 35 year old age group had been educated at major Roman Catholic public schools in the United Kingdom, and progressed to receive full university education through the usual administrative channels. It is thought, therefore, that these Masonic connections may have been more important for previous generations who were of more modest means and had less experience of the structure of British education.

⁵³ See Zack-Williams, A. (1995). Appendix IV c: 224-225.

field was still regarded as one of the richest alluvial diamond deposits in the world and Maronite fortunes were made quickly. Much of this money was used for further Maronite aggrandisement, maintaining the position of the group as an important elite in Sierra Leonean and, more especially, Freetown society. The conditions for this enterprise were very favourable; surplus investment capital, coupled with the protection and encouragement of the colonial government ensured short- to medium-term success. The Maronites, therefore, accelerated their ascent of the social ladder, buying-up land in the smartest districts of Freetown and building resplendent villas with materials manufactured in Lebanon that they themselves had imported [see above]. As the country progressed towards independence their elite status was assured. Mining production generated further capital to be reinvested back in the industry and so provide surplus for facilities and accoutrements of a cosmopolitan existence in a metropolitan environment.

Many Sierra Leonean Maronites acted as principal, pace-setting, commercial players from the late-1950s to the late-1980s (Reno, 1995; van der Laan, 1965, 1975). For them the transition into the post-colonial period was relatively smooth. Their well-established networks and position within the hierarchy of the State had become entrenched long before the British left the country. The full spectrum of Sierra Leonean politics was obliged, often begrudgingly, to realise their importance to the future economic and social infrastructure of the country. Socially and culturally articulate, they made perfectly adaptable agents for the immediate post-independence period, often guiding the expanding economic structure of the nation. The Maronite community felt that, as big wheels of the economy under the British and with success under-pinned by educational and religious heritage, they were among the most qualified group to lead the way after the deregulation of the diamond industry and so shape the future of Sierra Leone's trade. Older Maronites still voice this opinion today, insisting that had they been afforded greater control of the economy, Sierra Leone would be a very different place. This view is quite common among more senior Maronite diamond men.⁵⁴ This is a two-edged sword. Given that during the late-1950s and 1960s, the Maronite community took upon itself a great deal of economic authority it was inevitable that, as the economy began to fall apart, a significant proportion of the blame would be directed at Maronite Lebanese and the Lebanese diaspora community in general (Reno, 1995).

⁵⁴ Various personal communications in Freetown, Kono and Kenema, Jan - May 1997.

The diamond industry provided an opportune short-cut to a position of social, political and economic power. Commercially, it also provided the means to diversify, even to the extent of creating entirely new industries which could be monopolised.⁵⁵ For a time, diamonds served their purpose, but the industry started to lose its appeal for those who enjoyed the new, cosmopolitan-style of life for which many of the Maronites had acquired a taste. Diamond work requires complete personal involvement and is very much a hands-on business. As Kono grew ever more over-populated and dilapidated the prospect of long-periods spent pit-side in the full heat of the dry-season sun was a way of life that many Maronites simply did not relish. One thirty-year-old Maronite supermarket manager, with strong family connections to Manchester, expressed the following view:

“Look, why the Hell would I want to go to Kono? Here,⁵⁶ I’ve got a nice flat and everything that I want. I earn plenty of money importing and running “-----”⁵⁷ – I work eight to five and party with friends all night at Alex’s⁵⁸ and the Spanish Bar.⁵⁹ Kono’s a dump and it’s dangerous! It’s just too much grief - - all those heavy Shi’ites muscling in on each other’s action – no way! My wife has just left me and has gone back to her family in Manchester,⁶⁰ so I’m happy staying here while the divorce goes through. If things here go bad though, I’ll be on the first plane back to the UK, probably for good.”

Another young Maronite, Sam, worked in East Street, Freetown, in his father’s building supply shop. During early-1997, security in Kono was stabilising and many of the Shi’ite *diamontaires* were repairing war damaged property. Sam’s father was considering opening a branch of his shop in Koidu Town, with Sam as its manager. Sam was horrified at the prospect:

⁵⁵ In particular, tourism, shipping and large-scale fishing (see Reno, 1995 and various reports 1987 –1994, Maritime Protection Services Ltd)

⁵⁶ He lived on Wilkinson Road, Freetown, an up-market area popular with the wealthier Lebanese.

⁵⁷ A prestigious Freetown supermarket.

⁵⁸ A fashionable Maronite-owned beach bar/restaurant.

⁵⁹ Also Maronite owned.

⁶⁰ The informant, with his own family connections to the Manchester Maronite community, met his Maronite wife there. He was in possession of a British Passport. Interview 12-04-1997.

“What can I do about it? My older brother has just come back from the UK and is managing the store in Freetown -- I’ll have to go. The place is a nightmare -- I’ve only been once, and that was enough. There aren’t even any decent bars -- just gangs of bearded bush-Lebs⁶¹ talking diamonds, diamonds, diamonds, all bloody day and all bloody night.”⁶²

Both these opinions of the diamond industry and its environment were typical of the views of young Freetown Maronites during fieldwork. The last fifteen to twenty years has seen many drop out of the business, most preferring to invest capital in Maronite tourism-development consortiums, import-export operations, super-markets, shipping and general construction.⁶³ The majority of these enterprises have been relatively successful, but the global recession of the last ten years and changes in political fortunes have struck hard. At the time of writing, both these informants had left Sierra Leone during the AFRC/PA coup and were residing in the United Kingdom.

4.15 THE HARSH REALITIES OF BUSINESS AND MINING

Bashir, a Maronite, was born in Freetown in 1937. His family has lived in the country since 1910 and originally made their business exporting bananas. From the end of the Great War to the eve of the Second World War, Bashir’s father developed the largest banana plantation in Sierra Leone⁶⁴ and was beginning to compete successfully with neighbouring West African countries for export contracts, particularly to Britain, which developed into his largest market. The family had grown rich enough to send Bashir and his three sisters to schools in the United Kingdom; Bashir attended a Jesuit boarding school near Manchester and the girls were sent to convents in the Home Counties. An older brother was educated in Dublin. On the completion of his studies Bashir returned to Sierra Leone in preparation to take-over his father’s business, but on arrival found that the banana industry in Sierra Leone had taken a downturn; a result of protectionist import policy⁶⁵ introduced by the British and designed to assist the development of certain islands in the West Indies. By 1955 his father was in a bad way financially and

⁶¹ A reference to Shi’ite supporters.

⁶² Interview, Lakka, 09-03-1997.

⁶³ Interviews with young Maronite men working in these businesses in Freetown. (Dec 1996 – May 1997)

⁶⁴ Based at Songo, 30 miles East of Freetown (a station on the former government railway line). .

⁶⁵ Indeed, one large shipment of bananas was prevented from leaving Freetown by the British authorities on the orders of the Colonial Office. The crop rotted in the hold of the ship.

all that Bashir was able to start with was a broken-down banana lorry and a small gang of redundant banana pickers.⁶⁶

Bashir had noticed that firewood in Freetown remained expensive in relation to its price in the interior, and decided to start collecting it in the bush and transporting it to the capital. This he did successfully and rapidly amassed capital. He continued this business for some time and then decided to try his hand at diamonds two years after the introduction of the ADMS⁶⁷. His first pit was a disaster; all his capital was lost on a mine that yielded nothing and, consequently, he was forced to spend another year transporting firewood. With his second attempt at diamond mining he bought two pontoons and employed divers to collect gravel on the Bafi River⁶⁸. This time he was far more lucky. The river gravels were so richly concentrated that he started to become a wealthy man very quickly, expanding operations to exploit outwash plains and selling the goods in both London⁶⁹ and directly to SLST⁷⁰ buying staff in Yengema. During the rainy season he was able to travel to Britain, where he bought a house and generally enjoyed life in Europe. Bashir's family became sophisticated members of Freetown society, but his new found wealth enabled him to take his experiences a stage further and become a member of the international jet-set, which he did with relish. Over the last thirty-five years he has travelled to most of the larger capitals of the diamond world on business, and has developed a definite taste for the finer things in life.

His sister married an influential member of the Maronite community well connected to the APC regime of President J.S. Momoh and, in particular, the Vice President, Francis Minna. This association aided Bashir enormously in business and he was able to expand into the property sector, financially supporting many of the new developments springing up along the coast of the Freetown Peninsula. Much of his diamond wealth was invested in this way, using his brother-in-law as a channel for his financial operations. However, by the early-1980s, the relationship between the Lebanese community and the APC began to be tested as the global recession took its hold on the country and repayments on

⁶⁶ His father had also attempted to farm pigs and poultry, but this enterprise also failed.

⁶⁷ Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme

⁶⁸ Nimikoro Chiefdom

⁶⁹ At this time Hatton Garden was still a world centre for independent rough diamond buyers.

⁷⁰ Sierra Leone Selection Trust, a subsidiary of the De Beers owned Consolidated African Selection Trust.

development loans fell dramatically behind [see Chapter Five]. At the same time, internal security in the south-east of the country began to deteriorate considerably with the onset of the *Ndogboyosoi* rebellion in Pujehun District, a crisis which Minna had helped provoke. Much of the power-politics in Pujehun District at the time concerned the control of diamond smuggling to Liberia -- a proportion of the revenues from which were being reinvested in complex property deals in and around the capital.⁷¹ In 1987, Minna was implicated in a coup attempt against Momoh. He was tried, found guilty of misprision of treason, and hanged (Richards, 1996; Reno, 1995). Bashir's brother-in-law was at grave risk by association and was forced to flee to Banjul, where he has remained ever since. His Sierra Leonean assets were frozen and his Freetown properties confiscated, resulting in a financial catastrophe from which Bashir has never recovered. Within three years the RUF incursion began, making diamond mining a far more hazardous enterprise than ever before.

Bashir's main problem was his lack of capital -- that he is a highly experienced miner and prospector and extremely skilled in negotiating concessions is disputed by nobody. He is well acquainted with the majority of Mende and Kono paramount chiefs and enjoys a reputation for straight-forwardness and honesty. The arrival of Executive Outcomes in 1995 offered some respite from his financial misfortune. He acted as a "fixer" for the organisation as it started to consolidate assets after establishing itself strategically. Firstly, Bashir secured property belonging to his older brother for the use of directors and mining engineers. In Kono, he was able to locate a large, well-positioned house that came to act as a barracks for EO personnel operating in the bush and, more importantly, as his relationship with the organisation strengthened, he played the role of mediator between the town's community and the mining company connected to EO, Branch Energy. There has been much debate as to the actual relationship between this company and the security organisation. It seems that intricate share swapping mechanisms existed to link the outfits closely together through the agency of key individuals (see Reno, 1998). Bashir's relationship with this multi-national operation was to open the door to many new opportunities. With money that he earned for his services, combined with what he had generated since the investment debacle of the late-1980s, Bashir could think about embarking on new ventures with the objective of making a second fortune.

⁷¹ Interview, 25-03-97.

By the end of 1996, things were generally looking up. At the end of November, the civilian government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah had signed the Abidjan Peace Accord with Foday Sankoh, the leader of the RUF. In the diamond mining community there was an air of optimism. The fields of Kono and Tongo would be opened up to foreign operators and the Lebanese supporters could expand their industry. Zimmi, too, was ripe for exploitation and Belgian, Israeli and South African companies raced to secure the best concessions on the Maho, Moro and Mano rivers. Bashir became heavily involved with a South African firm that had strong connections with the recently departed EO. He was instrumental in obtaining a large (50 km²) area of alluvial outwash plain that, after preliminary geological survey, appeared to be very promising. For these services he was paid well in US dollars and with this money he went into partnership with a local Kono section chief and a young Maronite relative who had returned from the United States toy industry to seek his fortune. They managed to lease a rough, old town house in the centre of Koidu from which to launch the operation; by February 1997 it was well underway. Because of the poor local conditions in Koidu, Bashir spent much of his time in Freetown with his wife, travelling to Kono for a few days each fortnight to inspect progress – it seemed that everything was going well for the business when the security environment began, once again, to deteriorate. There were sporadic attacks on the main roads by unidentified gunmen and the incidence of armed robbery in the Kono area was rising. Both Bashir and his partners began to suspect that the long-term prognosis was not good and thus set about intensifying their mining to maximise profits before a potential political collapse. This, of course, required more money and after some analytical projection it was agreed that further investment was vital. Mining continued in earnest for the next eight weeks. Further south in Mende country, the civil defence militia were increasing their activity, directed by Deputy Minister of Defence, Chief Sam Hinga Norman, himself an influential Mende chief. Overseas investors in the diamond industry now began to take fright and many decided to withdraw. The Shi'ite supporters scaled down mining activities, adjusted financial strategies to the political and economic climate, and prepared themselves for the worst.

Bashir, although highly experienced, had failed to notice certain inconsistencies in the progress of the mine in relation to the input of extra capital. This was understandable; he was spending a large amount

of time in Freetown preparing the way for the South African company to exploit the Zimmi concession. Through his negotiations he had managed to add an old, unexploited concession of his own to the final deal, promising to make him a percentage partner of the overall enterprise -- he believed that it was this business that would ultimately make him, once again, a rich man. However, this distraction was eventually to prove calamitous. He had failed to see that the likelihood of the Zimmi mine going ahead was decreasing with every village raid in the east of the country. The South Africans may have had links to EO, but an expensive, intensive, security operation would be well over the originally planned budget. In their view, there would just be too much at stake in a highly unpredictable situation. With the benefit of hindsight Bashir admitted that he should have taken a far more "Shi'ite" attitude to the prevailing conditions on the ground -- concentrating on the realities of the "today" rather than the possibilities of the "tomorrow". It was to end in disaster. as intensive localised conflicts began to break out between RSLMF soldiers and civil defence militia in the diamond fields of Zimmi and Tongo, Bashir returned to Kono to collect his return on the mine. What he found was, even for him, unbelievable, and totally unexpected. Instead of expanding the pit with the added financial input, his young relative had used much of the money to fund an expensive cocaine habit which, unbeknown to friends and family, he had arrived with from the United States. After four days of uncontrolled rage, Bashir made an examination of the run-of-mine.⁷² Mercifully, it was better than expected and was valued at about US \$45,000.

Tragically, on the very night of the valuation, four soldiers, on the run since a battle with civil defence militia for control of Tongo Field [see Chapter Six], raided the house. At gunpoint, Bashir and his young relative were beaten and robbed of everything. It was a fiasco of unprecedented proportions and Bashir held himself entirely responsible for everything that had happened. As he said on his return to Freetown:

"...we must have been the only Lebanese house in Kono without a gun -- I just simply didn't bother to take it -- why, I do not know! Probably because I have never been robbed before -- in forty years! But then if I'd had one I would probably have got us both killed -- you just never know how these situations

⁷² The total diamond yield of the mine.

will turn out! It must have been one of the boys at the pit passing on information that we had just washed the gravel. Instead of flying straight back to Freetown with the goods, I spent four days yelling at this asshole [his young relation], trying to figure out what he had and hadn't done. Now I'm really in deep shit!"⁷³

In less than three weeks the SLPP were overthrown by Johnny Paul Koroma's AFRC. Bashir and his wife fled to The Gambia where they have stayed with relatives ever since.

As an example of Maronite woes in contemporary Sierra Leone this is obviously an especially bad one, but it clearly shows how, in a very unpredictable commercial environment, sets of factors can become dangerously compounded in ways that are often both beyond the control of, and invisible to, the victim. For Bashir these factors took a decade to reach the final critical point, but by then there was little he could do to avert disaster. The threat of going bust in a place like Sierra Leone, with all the ramifications and stigma attached to the consequences, often leads individuals to embark on desperate and extremely high-risk courses of business.⁷⁴ For Bashir the stakes were particularly high; as a respected member of an old, well established Maronite family, bankruptcy was unthinkable -- the loss of status being harder to bear than the material loss. Freetown is a village, and word travels extremely fast. It has been shown that Maronites often live at the limits of their financial capabilities, which in turn makes the support mechanisms within the local group weak -- when failures occur, community safety-nets may be inadequate.

In Bashir's case, however, it could have been far worse. He had married the daughter of a wealthy family of London Maronites thirty years ago and they have three children, all of whom were educated in the United Kingdom and are now working as professionals in the United States. He has a good relationship with many family members living in Europe, America, the Canary Islands and elsewhere on the West African Coast (although, understandably, relations with the parents of the young, erstwhile

⁷³ [Interview: Freetown, 05-06-1997]

⁷⁴ The gambling mentality is rife throughout Lebanese diaspora male society. Indeed, van der Laan (1975) writes, "[g]ambling has been the bane of the community." Van der Laan (1975) also notes that Saadé (1956:270) describes gambling as a "deadly illness".

diamond miner have cooled). In the long-term, he will almost certainly survive both socially and financially, but for a man of sixty-one, prospects and opportunities are dwindling fast. It is unlikely that he will ever return to Sierra Leone.

4.16 THE MARONITES IN SIERRA LEONE – A SYNOPSIS

In Sierra Leone, social, economic and linguistic evidence suggests that although the Maronite diaspora community does not publicly exhibit any specific sympathies towards particular Maronite groupings in Lebanon, individual loyalties among the older generation may still exist. The regional basis of Lebanese politics generally permeates into diaspora communities, but younger generation Maronites today have little desire to remain either in Sierra Leone or in Lebanon, preferring the opportunities of Western Europe and the United States instead. In the past, however, tension and rivalry between the El-Metn and Tleill Maronites may have been a contributing factor in the decline of the community. Van der Laan (1975:245) writes:

“The Maronites told the Catholic Priests about the quarrels within the El-Metn and Tleill groups, but the priests found it difficult to settle these conflicts. One of the main tasks of the Lebanese diplomatic representatives after 1960 has been to arbitrate these disputes.”

It should be remembered that the El-Metn Maronites originate from the pro-Israeli Phalangist heartland directly east of Beirut, whereas the Tleill group hails from the pro-Syrian, pro-Franjeh, region in the far north of Lebanon. Family connections with these areas would almost certainly have required diaspora clans to take sides, in both financial and political terms, during the Lebanese Civil War. The Phalangist assassination of Tony Franjeh in 1978 would have placed added pressure on the relationship between the two Sierra Leonean groups (Randall, 1983:118-125).

Although this old enmity is no longer evident or even discussed, it significantly affected Maronite cohesion in the 1970s and 1980s, thus damaging the community's unity. On two occasions during research, Maronite informants admitted that Sierra Leone diaspora community members had been

murdered during political and financial disputes and that the phrase, “he’s gone to Beirut”, became a euphemism for this during the 1970s. Not displaying disunity in public may well be a lesson that the Shi’ites have learned from the Maronites,⁷⁵ and would explain secrecy concerning support by a minority for Hizb Allah. Today, however, young Sierra Leonean Maronites feel little affinity with the “old-style” inter-clan bloodshed of northern and central Lebanon. For a Westernised generation, largely educated abroad and more interested in information technology than Crusader State genealogy, the subject was often viewed as *infra dig*, the violence being the domain of “crazy mountain peasants”, with whom they have little in common, other than religious orientation.

However, Maronite diaspora in Sierra Leone have maintained important links with Lebanon in other ways, primarily in the commercial sphere [see above]. This network has been in existence since the arrival of Maronite immigrants in the country and has been fundamentally important in the establishment of an import-export trade. Luxury goods and building materials have been traditionally purchased in Beirut and its satellite towns with surplus revenues generated by the Sierra Leonean diamond industry. The same networks played a key role in the movement of diamonds during the introductory period for the ADMS during the mid-1950s, particularly with regard to the clandestine shipment of gems *en route* to European markets. As Zack-Williams (1995: 192-203) shows, both Lebanon and Liberia became, for a time, the favoured smuggling routes for a large proportion of Kono and Tongo production, but that “[C]utters were quick to realise that the route via the Lebanon was too long and involved too many middlemen. One way out of this problem was to send buyers near to the source of production. At this time, Liberia was most suited for this kind of operation.” In essence, established links with Lebanon in the context of the global diamond trade were to slowly evaporate for the Maronites, but new networks were created with other groups of Maronite diaspora who were resident in Monrovia and places like Antwerp. It was this process of transposition of shipment routes that ultimately led to violent political competition for control of vitally important cross-border bush-tracks into Liberia. The *Ndogboyosoi* rebellion (Richards, 1996:22), in part provoked by strong-arm tactics to control cross-border trade, and the subsequent events surrounding the 1987 coup attempt,

⁷⁵ As well as from the doctrine of “concealment”, *taqiya* (see Gilsenen, 1982).

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leading to Minna's execution, were the beginning of the end for many Maronite businessmen involved with the increasingly unstable patrimonialism of the All People's Congress (Reno, 1995:160).

During the last decade or so of the moribund APC regime, many Maronite businessmen continued to co-invest rashly with increasingly discredited politicians (some associated with the Momoh "kitchen cabinet" known as *Ekutay*), in evermore complex property, construction and currency deals. These deals would signal financial suicide in the event of political collapse. As the economic stakes were raised in an environment of global recession, Maronite speculators coasted dangerously close to the political wind, in misjudged attempts to protect investment capital, thus further incriminating themselves as principal participants in high-level state corruption (Reno, 1995:130-160). Without a doubt, the final *coup de grace* came with the NPRC coup on April 29th 1992. Young, battle-front soldiers announced their take-over of the state with rhetoric drawn from Sankara and Rawlings (Opala, 1993). Made explicit from the start was their intended prosecution of all those implicated in the corruption associated with the previous government, regardless of nationality and ethnicity. For many leading Maronite entrepreneurs, whose families had enjoyed the fruits of an affluent cosmopolitan existence, it was time to leave.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTERNATIONAL ENTERPRISE, INDIGENOUS PLAYERS AND SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL PROBLEMS – KONO DISTRICT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Undeniably, the social, political and economic interaction of Shi'ite and Maronite diaspora groups has been central to the dynamic of the Sierra Leonean diamond industry. However, it would be incorrect to assume that these two groups alone are responsible for the overall nature of this commerce. There are many other key individuals and groups involved, in some instances acting in direct competition and, in others, in mutually beneficial association in areas of extraction and trade. The majority of these individuals and parties are Sierra Leonean. Those acting outside the domain of the State are predominantly members of the Kono¹ and Mende² ethnic groups. In many ways, it is these people who preserve the structural, environmental and social characteristics of the industry, in the face of perpetual political and economic flux. Territorial control has been determined by the historical facts of settlement involving these ethnic groups. The laws of land tenure, the exercise of local authority and the preservation of local public security are parameters within which multi-nationals, Lebanese diaspora and even the State must operate; in the present fragile political climate of Sierra Leone, transgressions invariably engender intense conflict.

This and the next chapter show how variations in cultural repertoire help orientate modes of commercial and economic activity along area-specific lines. In other words, the chapters will address the question of why business is done in different ways in different places. A newcomer to Sierra Leone might well make the assumption that, all in all, Tongo Field is pretty similar to Kono and, therefore, there is reason to suppose that the general *kultur* prevails in each place. The world of diamond mining in Sierra Leone, however, is not isotropic, and the industry's numerous commercial victims tend to be those who believe that it is. Without a survival kit well stocked with cultural capital, long-distance Maraka entrepreneurs are as vulnerable as American investors armed with voluminous business plans. Risky commercial environments like Kono and Tongo Field are shaped by highly intricate processes

¹ Associated with the Kono diamond field.

² Associated with the Tongo and Zimmi diamond fields.

that refract globalization as much more locally grounded cross-cultural interaction.³ Developments depend on influences at all levels from the local to the geo-political.

For those involved, much of life revolves around developing strategies to solve problems arising in the course of mining and selling diamonds. Local difficulties, like matters of security, will often be overcome by tapping into traditional, cultural resources and modifying them to suit specific sets of conditions, but others, particularly those facing individuals in areas like finance, may require a degree of ingenuity, risk and international mobility to out-manoeuvre others acting in competition. The two principal ethnic groups concerned are each confronted with different core sets of impediments hampering industrial activity and operational characteristics reflect this. For instance, over the 1996-1997 period, security in Kono became less of a concern with the arrival of foreign security firms,⁴ but their presence did little to abate a steadily rising, after-dark, urban crime wave. Conversely, in Tongo Field, robbery has not been a particular problem, but violent incursions by the RSLMF, AFRC and the RUF have done enormous damage to the already weakened civic and industrial infrastructures. As a solution to this problem, Mende elites have raised locally a sizeable civil defence force (CDF)⁵ in which membership is determined exclusively by ethnicity. The Tongo CDF also provides a trustworthy and accountable workforce prepared to mine on a “dig now, pay later” basis, circumventing problems of scarcity of investment capital brought about by endemic conflict in the area. During fieldwork, European expatriate and Lebanese diaspora investment was non-existent in Tongo Field, due to fear of insecurity allied to popular misconceptions about the contagiousness of Lassa Fever,⁶ from which the area was suffering a major epidemic. Surprisingly, the Zimmi region, located precariously close to the Liberian border and potentially even more volatile in security terms⁷ was attracting some outside interest, but those involved were known to be proceeding with the utmost caution -- none of the mining proposals had passed the concession acquisition stage by the time of the AFRC coup of May 25th 1997.⁸

³ On globalization of social and cultural processes see Waters, (1995).

⁴ In particular Lifeguard, an operation with close links to EO.

⁵ By the end of April 1997, it is arguable that the *kamajoisia* CDF had developed into a fully fledged militia in the sense that its role had become “offensive”.

⁶ A viral haemorrhagic fever (class *Areno*) primarily vectored by the small (multimammate) bush rat *Mastomys natalensis*. (Merlin bi-monthly situation reports February – May, 1997).

⁷ ULIMO was still operating in this area in the Liberian pre-election period. Alhaji Kromah’s intentions were still unclear in the event of an election victory by Charles Taylor.

⁸ South African and American companies were hoping to move into the area in May 1997.

For the Kono, commercial constraints had become largely financial. For Kono networks with long-term APC links, the reality of being squeezed out of their own market was becoming rapidly apparent. Certainly, the paramount chiefs remained in a relatively prosperous position, but smaller operators, along with their Lebanese counterparts, were forced to watch available concessions snapped up by European expatriate operations through mechanisms of SLPP patronage. Of the available concessions remaining, the majority were of poor quality, often already heavily worked and typically requiring deep, expensive methods of extraction. It will be shown that for some Kono, prospects for success had declined to such an extent that involvement in the industry was becoming, almost unbelievably, financially unviable. The competition to invest in ethnically-oriented mining opportunities is relentless and ruthless, requiring enormous effort to maintain social relations in a complex and fluid system of state and clan patronage. For many prospective supporters and operators trying to do business in an ever decreasing sphere of industrial possibility, the cultural, political and economic cost of involvement has risen to prohibitive levels. The Kono, once front-runners of the diamond industry, have been forced to accept the prospects of increased commercial exclusion, gradually succumbing to an unfavourable political climate and to geophysical conditions unsuited to their investment capabilities.

5.2 THE KONO: ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Before examining regional industrial history and individual case histories it is necessary to situate Kono commercial activity in the context of a broader ethnographic framework. The Kono are part of the northern Mande-speaking ethnic group occupying about 4,000 km² of the Eastern Province. Kono-speaking groups have farmed in the area for at least 500 years, but a general lack of oral history in depth makes any conclusion hazardous. Kono notions of history extend about five or six generations back, and time before this is usually described as the “warrior age” or “of the ancestors” in rough translation. Hardin (1993: 41) states that, “[P]eople [the Kono] interpret the past in terms of what is available to them and what they aspire to in the present. These interpretations, if accepted by others, validate a person’s rights to what they achieve in the present and allow evaluations of personal style and charisma to enter into the construction of identity.”

Kono socio-political articulation in the diamond sector reflects established cultural norms grounded in agriculturally oriented social organisation. It will be remembered that the Kono region has been a diamond centre only since the 1930s and that private participation began even more recently (only with the introduction of the ADMS⁹ in the mid-1950s). The power of the Kono elite has fluctuated¹⁰ over the past sixty years, but at all times the group has managed some degree of mining whether illicit, formal or informal. The conduct of much of this individual enterprise has been directly controlled by juridical procedures traditionally concerned with issues of inheritance and land tenure in the farming sector. These systems, functioning concurrently with state mechanisms of mineral resource management, have provided the basis for commercial competition between ethnic Kono factions manipulating vibrant rival patrimonies.

5.3 THE KONO: SOCIAL ORGANISATION AND KINSHIP

This section will examine some of the basic elements of Kono kinship and notions of identity, demonstrating the role of these social and cultural factors in determining the methods employed by the Kono to secure concessions and mine diamonds, particularly since the ADMS. It will be shown that Kono intra-lineage politics have had a direct bearing on the style of individual relations that developed within what Reno (1995) terms the APC “shadow state”.¹¹ It will also chart the subsequent decline of Kono power in the face of recent socio-political crisis and rampant, unregulated digging.

The Kono have a clan structure sub-divided into lineages. All lineages are exogamous whereas clans are not. Clan membership is defined by shared prohibition of certain foods (*tana*) inherited through the patrilineage (see Hardin, 1993:48). In rural settlements, men are afforded rights to farmland through membership of patrilineages and in rare instances women may also be allocated farmland for the same reason. According to Hardin, men should theoretically receive land that has been worked by their ancestors, but in reality this is often not the case. Typically, village and town elders will make decisions

⁹ Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme

¹⁰ See Reno (1995) and Zack-Williams (1992)

¹¹ Reno (1995)

about which individuals work specific areas of land, often taking into account practical considerations of allotment proximity and access. This process functions well for the allocation of small-holdings, but when relatively elementary procedures of rural cultural practice are transposed into the dispensation of diamond concessions a clear politicisation of elite action is greatly magnified.

The British created hereditary chiefdoms in Kono society in the 1890s. During colonially-managed capitalist production in the diamond fields during the 1940s and 1950s, the Kono chiefs were afforded considerable power by their European overlords. Well-equipped Chiefdom Police to maintain security in the district, and special extensions of local authority, were all part of a package of benefits and privileges that maximised the efficiency of SLST operations. With the ADMS, the chiefs became the “oil sheikhs” of Sierra Leone, acting as the custodians of former SLST mining land, collecting “surface rents” and awarding leases on a patron/client basis.¹² During this early ADMS period, the Kono paramount chiefs utilised established patrilineages as structural mechanisms for the allocation of concessions. This ethnicised access to diamonds, generated wealth and increased status. In expression of this, Kono chiefs took many wives, creating huge clans.¹³

5.4 LAND TENURE AND INHERITANCE

The relationship that exists between social identity and the allocation of land is of great importance. The identity of a Kono man is a conjunction of his patrilineage and matrilineage, embodying a series of intricate relationships between historical and contemporary time, respectively.

“While the Kono utilize patrilineal ties to assign specific jurally sanctioned rights and capacities to individuals, connections to a father and his lineage provide only that part of an individual’s identity that deals with citizenship, inheritance and succession. Access to the rights and capacities established by patrilineal ties rests on the interpretation of an individual’s place in historical time. In contrast, matrifilial ties are used to manipulate the identity resources available in contemporary time and to judge

¹² Zack-Williams (1995)

¹³ Hardin (1993)

which affiliations are most likely to bring the best results for the individual. Thus, matrilineal ties, while less apparent than patrilineal ties, are an equally important facet of identity.” (Hardin, 1993: 57)

The (hidden) importance of matrilineage is a factor with fundamental implications for Kono participation in the diamond industry. Wealthy diamond-chiefs, obliged to take large numbers of wives from the families of friends, supporters and clients have produced sizeable patrilineages in which large numbers of men, theoretically, have legitimate claims to mining concessions. During fieldwork in 1997, a Kono man was encountered who had recently inherited a Gbense chieftaincy; this man had well over 100 siblings. But it is not only agnates who share rights to potential land. Male consanguines with matrilineal links to the chief were also entitled to enter claims for land. Some individuals, therefore, are in the enviable position to “beg” concessions bilaterally. Whether they enjoy such an advantage over male relatives will depend on the status of the mother’s family. Quite simply, there is not enough good quality diamondiferous land for everybody and this creates problems. Hardin (1993: 56) shows that, “[e]mbedded within the structures that relate brothers, half-brothers, stepbrothers to each other are potentially disruptive forces, such as jealousy and potential loss of inheritance, that can split a lineage apart”. Some of the most effective movers within the diamond economy are those Kono miners with well-born mothers, who can side-step patrilineal rifts and acquire concessions through their matrilineal links.

In a large rural patrilineage primarily concerned with farming, younger sons of landholder’s junior wives will traditionally be allotted distant, unclaimed land. The same is true within the diamond industry, but in each situation there are occasional anomalies. Hardin (1993) shows that in large families, the youngest sons may develop closer and more informal relations with fathers who have become socially and politically more confident with age. However, most commonly, youngest sons will be faced with a series of hard choices that may have implications for the stability of their own position within a patrilineage. The potentials that matrilineal ties offer must be a primary consideration in the negotiation of a concession. It is certainly not uncommon for a greater degree of success to be achieved in strategies that follow less obvious courses, even if this amounts to seeking the patronage of a less closely related “bigman”. It seems that on the whole, the hustlers without the obvious benefits of

seniority within a patrilineage must get themselves noticed if they are to have any chance whatsoever of receiving land. Charisma, personal style and performance all play key roles to this end and are certainly cultivated. In Koidu Town and Sefadu, it is younger sons of chiefs who often have reputations for being brash and larger than life. Interestingly, however, these reputations typically are not established *in situ*. Hanging around Kono and pestering chiefs for a concession is not a generally good idea, and will usually end in failure. For moderately well connected younger sons who can afford it, a spell abroad making money is a far better strategy. Returning as an established “businessman” with some capital to invest is likely to attract the attention of those with the power to allocate land. As one particularly colourful Kono *diamontaire* explained, “in Koidu, the chiefs like the smell of dollars -- to them it is the smell of success -- if a man has been lucky before he will be lucky again.”

5.5 KONO -- VARIATIONS IN SYSTEMS OF PATRONAGE FROM INDUSTRIAL GENESIS TO THE PRESENT DAY.

With the discovery of Kono’s diamonds in 1927, the British colonial administration assumed all rights immediately. The Colonial Office, concerned with the long-term viability of the Protectorate,¹⁴ issued orders that concerted exploitation should begin immediately. Subsidiaries of De Beers were already operating in the Gold Coast; the company was invited to tender for a ninety-nine year lease, with extraction to be undertaken by a derivative of the Consolidated African Selection Trust (CAST). In 1932, the Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST) began operations. The Freetown government was to receive 27.5% of net profit and, to encourage the company to stay longer, lease conditions were expanded to include the entire country. It was a simple strategy: the engagement of an established and respected South African firm would ensure fiscal security for the colony.

By the late-1930s, local resentment towards this multi-nationalised state monopoly was increasing. The administration was keen that tension between SLST and the political class of Kono was avoided, but this *pax* became increasingly difficult to preserve. Chiefs and the local population soon came to resent their exclusion from a mineral resource market to which both groups felt they had a right of access.

¹⁴ It should be remembered that the Colonial Office was working to a programme that saw the advent of independence for many African possessions beginning in the early twenty-first century.

Exacerbating this situation was the continued encouragement by local chiefs of “stranger”¹⁵ settlement in the Kono area. Traditionally, Kono chiefs and, indeed, chiefs throughout Sierra Leone, offered protection and trade rights to “strangers” within their jurisdiction, in order to generate income from taxation. This represented a substantial portion of chieftom income in the 1930s, but also presented a clash of interests as far as SLST was concerned. By now, it was apparent that illicit mining was emerging as a significant problem, depriving the colonial capitalist sector of substantial quantities of diamonds. Immunity from harassment in areas controlled by Chieftom Police was guaranteed by paramount chiefs in return for bribes and diamonds. SLST and the colonial government were powerless to prevent this parallel economy which attracted capital-holding Lebanese, Fula and Mandingo. The Lebanese, in particular, were in an economic position to finance both buying and mining operations, working rich pits deep in the bush, far from the interference of the British-led Colonial Police.¹⁶

This pattern existed for about twenty years; a colonial capitalist mode operating in parallel with an indigenous market controlled by political elites and exploited by a financially powerful diaspora. During this period, all attempts at preventing parallel activity failed. Indeed, much of the policy implemented by both Freetown and SLST achieved the reverse, giving Kono elites the opportunity to encourage more “stranger” capital investment in illicit mining. Shaken by anti-SLST rioting, the legitimate authorities opted to introduce the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme (ADMS) in 1956.¹⁷ By allowing private investors to exploit certain areas of SLST concessions, and establishing a State and De Beers run Government Gold and Diamond Office (GGDO) to buy production from licensed dealers, it was hoped that order would be restored to the mining districts. Essentially, Freetown was placing more authority in the hands of the chiefs. Paramount chiefs would collect and receive surface rents for concessions, award mining licences and maintain security, which was in their interests to do as efficiently as possible. The net-result was commercial consolidation by both Lebanese and wealthy African “strangers”. The political and financial standing of the Kono chiefs grew enormously, creating a powerful body capable, in the future, of challenging Freetown policy.

¹⁵ Originally the term “stranger” was used to describe Mandingo and Fula traders, but the category came to include Lebanese settlers as well.

¹⁶ See Reno (1995)

¹⁷ Zack-Williams (1995)

The ADMS was accompanied by the Mining Area Development Association (MADA), a programme designed visibly to improve conditions in regions that felt little benefit from the resource-based economic contribution that was being made to the State treasury. Not surprisingly, within two to three years, MADA underwent a high degree of metamorphosis. Financial resources destined for district development became central to the mechanisms of misappropriation through which both chiefs and local bureaucrats substantially supplemented incomes and official wages. The process soon became institutionalised; any attempt by the colonial authorities to rectify the situation was met by thinly disguised threats of future non-co-operation with SLST and Freetown. In effect, MADA was little more than the protection that Kono chiefs and their supporters traditionally offered “stranger” traders operating in the area, but now, in a modern context, the system served to bring stability and political allegiance to British-favoured political parties like the SLPP.

5.6 DIAMONDS AND THE EMERGENCE OF ALL PEOPLE’S CONGRESS HEGEMONY

“Elections, at least multiparty ones, and elite hegemony do not mix well.” (Reno, 1995: 79)

The RSLMF counter-coup of 1968 brought Siaka Stevens’s All People’s Congress (APC) to power in Freetown, but it would be some time before this authority was extended to the diamond fields of Kono. SLPP influence was still strong in the area, and in some instances backed up by aggressive bands of armed men, more than prepared to take the law into their own hands. Stevens was fully aware that the bulk of the political task that lay before him principally concerned restructuring the Kono elite, creating new sets of pro-APC and APC-sympathetic clients. Control of the diamond economy would have to be placed firmly in the hands of the ruling party. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to undermine the power of independent Kono chiefs. Restoration of local power would then be undertaken gradually, but involving only those traditional rulers and their support networks prepared to display commitment to the Freetown regime. For the Stevens-led faction of the APC, failure to achieve this objective would lead inevitably to a collapse of APC political power. Rival groups, wielding the coercive power of

diamond wealth, would be more than capable of creating grass-roots bases of popular support to oppose any exercise of power by non-Kono elements in the diamond-fields.

Kono had already become the patrimonial coffer of the post-colonial political arena, but this role received further impetus under Stevens. Often violent factional in-fighting was common in the late-1960s as the APC struggled to establish its supremacy over the SLPP in the mêlée of local politics. APC loyalists hoped to draw support from Kono diggers by criticising the continued power of the pro-SLPP SLST. For many the SLST represented the old elite of chiefs and bureaucrats, misappropriating MADA funds with little concern for the welfare of the Kono population. It was precisely this system that Stevens sought to subvert, diverting control from the local to the governmental and, in time, to the presidential domain. The tactic was largely successful in electioneering terms, but the *coup de grace* for the old order came with a sudden termination of the SLST contract.¹⁸ In a pseudo-nationalist guise, Stevens created the National Diamond Mining Company (NDMC). Needless to say, the new NDMC was to be staffed by loyal clients of the Stevens clique, ensuring revenues from the mines travelled directly to Freetown, by-passing any largely anti-APC Kono bureaucrats and chiefdom officials. Most importantly, the Ministry of Mines became completely responsible for administration, placing issuance of dealer licences firmly in the gift of the ruling party. The patron/client machinery for long-term preservation of APC power was now firmly established, even if the mechanics of the system were still to require some fine-tuning.

Stevens was keen to recruit a loyal cadre prepared to use violence against those who obstructed the exercise of presidential power through patronage. Much key support came from officials and civil servants with a Limba background,¹⁹ like Inspector General of Police Bambay Kamara. The objective was systematic suppression of Mende-based SLPP power in the south of the country. Stevens and his supporters were quick to realise the potential benefits of dismantling southern infrastructure, thereby limiting Mende trade and commercial opportunity. The first target of this offensive action was the

¹⁸ Reno (1995), Zack-Williams (1995)

¹⁹ An ethnic group concentrated in northern and northwestern Sierra Leone. Stevens claimed some Limba ancestry, though born in the southern town of Moyamba to a Mende mother. According to other sources his paternal ancestry traced back to Nigeria via the West African Frontier Force. The Limba were well represented in the RSLMF.

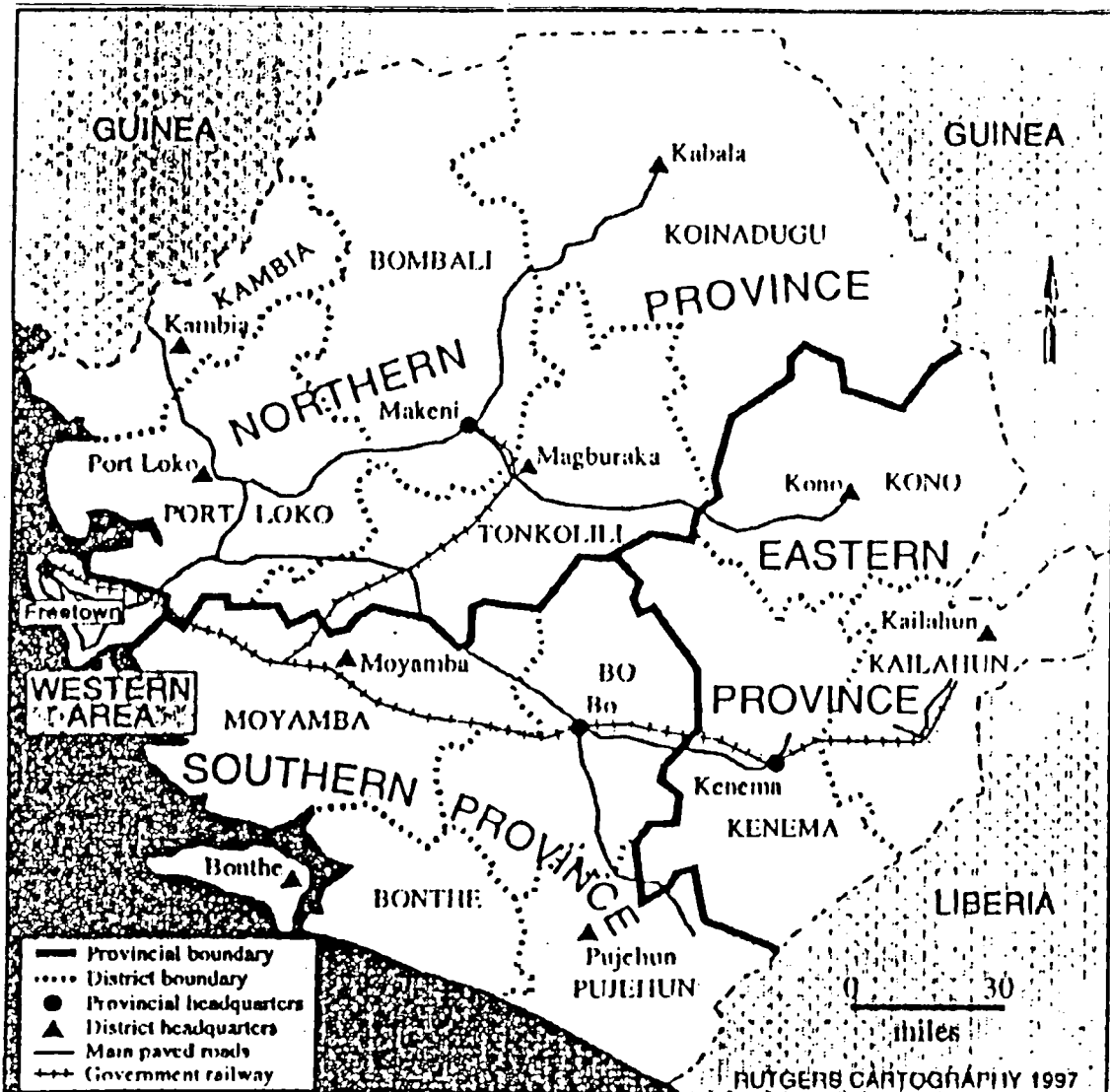
railway, a vital artery linking the south with Freetown and the important diamond centre at Kenema [see Map 4:p.165]. The railway had been running at a loss for some time, but many saw it as an important factor of national cohesion, providing a crucial line of social and political communication. Perhaps showing lack of political awareness, the international donor community fell in with the plan by questioning the viability of even a modernised railway, thus providing the APC with an excuse to scrap it entirely. A new road was built direct to Kono through the northern town of Makeni and an extensive German-supported bus service was introduced. In the late-1960s Stevens unceremoniously scrapped the railway network; the track was allegedly sold to scrap metal dealers for several million dollars and the revenue misappropriated.

The ramifications of decommissioning the railway have been far-reaching (Richards 1996). The national bus service worked quite well for a time but was later undermined by corruption, inefficiency and bad road maintenance. Transport prices for southern produce soared: as road traffic increased, roads began to fall apart more rapidly. Pot-holes made vehicle maintenance more costly. Post-1974 fuel prices rose as the Leone began to devalue in the early 1980s. Effectively, southern and southeastern Sierra Leone (which as far as the Stevens government was concerned amounted to Mendeland and the SLPP support base) became less well integrated with the rest of the country. Access to Kono from Freetown was no longer through the east but now, through the heartland of APC support in the Northern Province. Transport to the Eastern Province and the Kono mines came much more into the hands of Temne and Limba hauliers, further hampering southern commercial participation in internal commodity and produce trade. Stevens had dealt a considerable blow to SLPP southern hegemony as exercised under the Margai's premierships.

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MAP 4

SIERRA LEONE SHOWING RAILWAY NETWORK PRIOR TO
DECOMMISSIONING



5.7 LATER DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PATRIMONIAL SYSTEM

As Stevens's power began to increase there were new opportunities for the further expansion of the patrimonial tree.²⁰ But stubborn political opposition remained in Kono District. Through the NDMC network, the Stevens faction of the APC was able to extend its influence by offering immunity for illegal digging to loyal supporters. The NDMC security apparatus came under the President's control, providing an outlet for patronage to grassroots clients and the development of an APC youth wing. In time, this youth wing would become an important source of political power, threat of violence being sufficient to control not only anti-APC activists but also APC elements who threatened to create their own client bases. Aside from localised machinations, there also remained the issue of how to maintain powerful national elites who required more than midnight-digging and petty-trading for their continued political loyalty. Reno (1995) shows that the distinctions between official, parallel and real economies blurred towards the mid-1970s, as the cost of running this patron/client structure rapidly overtook all considerations for the further development of State infrastructure. Indeed, for the system to work, ministries and secretariats were systematically deprived of the means to achieve positive improvements in the day-to-day running of the country, thereby removing the risk of independent political personalities gaining favour from grateful sections of the population.

In 1973, Stevens introduced more measures through the NDMC to curry favour with potential rivals. The introduction of the Co-operative Contract Mining Scheme (CCMS) came at a time when disaffection with State control of resources was growing once again. The new programme was mooted as a means with which to offer private digging companies an opportunity to participate directly in the exploitation of some of the best, previously NDMC-leased, plots. Property was slowly divided into a series of "blocks" and "areas", for theoretical "first-come-first-served" distribution to investors with sufficient capital. In reality, the CCMS was developed to reward high-ranking permanent secretaries, ministers and cabinet members for supporting the party. Those in favour were presented with gift-wrapped diamond mines to be worked-out with hardware from the Ministry of Works while labourers

²⁰ Or perhaps, to shift biological analogy, the rhizome state, as described by Bayart (1993).

were paid with rice misappropriated from the Ministry of Agriculture.²¹ Vast profits were made from primary industry that required little in terms of personal financial investment. In setting this trend, Stevens encouraged elite expectations that continue to limit political and economic development to the present day.

Prior to the introduction of the CCMS, all legitimate overseas marketing of diamonds had been carried out by DICOR, a subsidiary of the De Beers Central Selling Organisation. The system had been set up along with the ADMS in 1956 and officially nothing had changed -- legitimate export remained the sole prerogative of the CSO and shipments left Sierra Leone directly for London. This presented a problem for political elites who were compelled to sell a proportion of goods through official De Beers channels - - all sales, as part of the CSO contract, were conducted in Leones, making currency exchange difficult. Coupled with this was a strong likelihood that the Leone would decrease in value in relation to the Dollar and Sterling. Without warning, Stevens terminated the De Beers monopoly and made 20% of annual production available for export by private operators. The exporters, of course, were all hand-picked by Stevens himself -- an assortment of major business personalities with mostly Lebanese or Afro-Lebanese origins. These participants were chosen for clear reasons: they legitimised access to overseas diamond markets outside CSO control and provided Levant-based credit facilities while simultaneously operating a currency exchange mechanism for the government and its clients. In political terms, any attempt to usurp APC power was out of the question -- as a minority diaspora with limited nationality status, their rational concern was the continued success of the export venture and the preservation of their patron's position (Reno, 1995).

5.8 KONO -- AN ESTABLISHED POLITICAL STRATEGY

With the successful introduction of NDMC, CCMS and the issuance of export licenses, Stevens's APC faction now found itself with a greater degree of control. As the influence of the SLPP withered in Kono, there was a general consolidation of economic activity in the district. Buying and dealing operations amalgamated as the major Lebanese exporters absorbed the buying operations of smaller

²¹Interview, Sefadu, 28/02/97.

African dealers. Once troublesome Kono chiefs, cabinet members and parliamentarians were bought off with large NDMC tracts in return for new found fealty. As access to these assets became more available, Stevens's personal position began to stabilise. Internal conflict between factions seeking market access quickly detracted from the effectiveness of opposition towards the party leader. By the late-1970s, the patrimony was functioning relatively smoothly. Lebanese exporters secured substantial amounts of credit for further investment by the APC. The symbiosis between Levantine traders and principal political figures proved to be highly lucrative in the short-term. In Lebanon, the early stages of the Lebanese civil war had little effect on the political relationship between Maronites and Shi'ite business. Initially at least, both groups remained eager to co-operate in a high profit activity with a very accommodating African regime.

5.9 TRANSITION AND CHANGE -- THE CAKE GETS SMALLER

Stevens's patrimonial system endured until his retirement in 1985. The legacy he left his personally-chosen successor, Major General J.S. Momoh, was an economic system almost entirely dependent on Lebanese credit. For the APC, this dependency had unexpected and undesirable results. Shi'ite and Maronite businessmen, with banking connections in Beirut, were acquiring significant, independent political power, establishing their own networks of patronage through the dissemination of private loans secured on Kono diamonds. On his appointment to the Presidency, Momoh set about trying to bring an end to this growing economic and political domination by Lebanese financiers. By now, it was not uncommon for Lebanese players to pursue violent vendettas against local politicians who questioned the validity of their role in the nation's finances.²²

Initial steps by Momoh to re-assert control were received positively by the IMF and the World Bank. Perceiving positive developments in policy formulation, both organisations agreed to assist Sierra Leone with further loans (essential if growing Lebanese financial power over the economy was to be curtailed). The reality of the situation, however, was that Momoh utilised development funds to restructure what remained of Stevens's patrimony, realigning support among loyal followers and squeezing out those

²² Interview (27/03/97) and Reno (1995).

considered to be a threat. The high degree of political influence wielded by Stevens's Lebanese intermediaries was unabated and reached alarming proportions, (one Afro-Lebanese was second-guessing the Minister of Finance, and said to be demanding a cabinet position). Momoh's intention was to reformalise at least a major part of the diamond industry while simultaneously seeking to diminish the Lebanese-controlled informal economy. Advisors from donor organisations suggested that foreign mining investors would bring a greater degree of exclusive fiscal control over Kono simplifying revenue transfers from mine to treasury. With this in mind, Momoh searched for willing risk-takers.

5.10 LARGE-SCALE FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND THE OVERSEAS MINING COMPANY -- A NEW INDUSTRIAL PATTERN

It would be some time before the true multi-national arrived in Kono. The first arrivals were colourful commercial adventurers unconstrained by many of the ethical considerations that come with registered public companies answerable to shareholders. In 1986, a one-man operation called LIAT entered the market; Shaptai Kalmanowitch, an Israeli, entered Kono with considerable amounts of capital (Reno, 1995). While exporting diamonds, he was able to assist Momoh with the requisition and importation of rice and oil, by-passing the networks of Stevens's Lebanese middlemen. Initially the system worked well, diamond money found its way into the treasury and payments were made on IMF arrears. Politically, Momoh was able to operate outside old networks, but the presence of such a high profile Israeli in the diamond fields caused bitter resentment among many of the Lebanese and Sierra Leonean players who suffered a significant erosion of their commercial interests. Determined to exert pressure on rival informal markets, Momoh introduced the Public Emergency Economic Regulations (PEER), enforced by Bambay Kamara²³ with some degree of draconian zeal. Examples were made of unfortunate, unconnected traders and miners who fell outside the new laws. By 1987, opposition to the Momoh/Kalmanowitch partnership reached cabinet ranks.

Senior members of the government, including Vice President Francis Minna, were meanwhile continuing to operate informal networks with Lebanese traders directly in contravention of PEER.

²³ The Inspector General of Police -- one of Momoh's Binkolo cronies.

Diamond smuggling from Kono to the buying offices of Monrovia provided a coveted source of foreign exchange for well placed individuals. PEER enforcement by Kamara appears to have run headlong into an “anti-smuggling” force controlling this prosperous trade in the interests of the Vice President’s Lebanese-supported Pujehun clique.²⁴ With stakes as high as these, it was only a matter of time before the inevitable happened – Kamara uncovered a coup plot that involved well known Lebanese business figures and members of the government. The plot appears to have been real, but Minna was probably involved only by association and knowledge. Under great pressure from an increasingly paranoid Kamara, a reluctant Momoh sent his Vice President to the gallows for the arcane crime of “misprision of treason” (knowledge of treasonable activity not reported to the authorities).

In the mean time, Kalmanowitch had left Sierra Leone on a business trip and fallen foul of Interpol. As a result of this he left the picture for some years. Momoh’s display of ruthless authority did little to improve levels of financial legitimacy in government. New personalities filled the vacuum left by those who had fled the country or had been hanged. Informality soon took hold again whilst the treasury was steadily drained. Donors and lenders wanted results and a new principal investor was found: a “wheeler-dealer” cast from much the same mould as his predecessor. With the arrival of Israeli Nir Guaz’s SCIPA company, Momoh put PEER II into action. While Guaz attempted to take control of Kono and the economy, PEER II placed even greater restrictions on those contemplating participation in the diamond industry. NDMC was given far-reaching powers to limit severely any potential operations of licence holders and Kamara stepped up security. Following the new pattern, rice and oil were imported outside the usual Lebanese-controlled informal channels, theoretically to extend a greater degree of control over the Kono diamond fields. In practice, however, corrupt Ministry of Mines and NDMC officials continued to allow extensive illicit mining.

Not surprisingly, Momoh soon found that as time progressed, he became as dependent on Guaz as Stevens had been on the Lebanese. Guaz was also growing powerful enough to construct his own informal networks with Momoh’s rivals, thus undermining Presidential power. This rocky relationship continued until Momoh, advised by IMF officials, secured the services of more credible and accountable

²⁴ See Richards (1996/8)

companies to exploit the Kono deposits. There were discussions with American multi-nationals and in 1990, one last ditch attempt by Kamara was undertaken to clean up illicit digging in Kono. Operation Clean Slate violently evicted 15,000 illegal miners into the bush. Some of these individuals, dispossessed and bitter at their lack of opportunity, were recruited easily by the RUF in the following year. Momoh's attempts to regulate Kono for the benefit of State coffers destroyed his management credibility – the RUF incursion would finally finish him politically.

5.11 THE NPRC, DIAMONDS AND THE WAR

By the time the NPRC seized power in 1992,²⁵ the formal State was bankrupt and on the verge of collapse. The RUF incursion was steadily gaining momentum but the State treasury could not cope with problems of unpaid soldiers and empty stores. Chairman Strasser hoped to block rebel advances with a greatly expanded army, and began widespread recruitment drives in the slums of Freetown and other regional capitals. The ranks swelled with very young, ill-equipped and under-trained troops. In the years prior to the beginning of the war, the standing army of Sierra Leone amounted to about 1200 men in total.²⁶ By the end of Strasser's second year in power there were 5,000 men in uniform plus assorted auxiliaries. Some of these auxiliaries were ULIMO stragglers breaking off from the main force now engaging the NPFL in Liberia, and others were chosen for "special duties".²⁷ This war machine desperately needed small-arms and rice, much of which was supplied by Eastern Europeans in exchange for rough diamonds.²⁸

Securing Kono was paramount to NPRC survival, apparently seen by some advisers close to Strasser as little more than the defence of Freetown and the Peninsula. Raiding and atrocities continued unabated in the interior, but Freetonians, living in the reassuring shadow of Military Headquarters and State House could talk about the war as if it was being conducted in another country. Freetown started to become overcrowded with the internally displaced (perhaps the result of an RUF strategy to pressurise social services and an inexperienced government), and the demand for staples grew. Initially the NPRC

²⁵ See Zack-Williams, A. B. and Riley, S. 1993. "Sierra Leone: the coup and its consequences", *Review of African Political Economy* 56.

²⁶ Its function was primarily ceremonial.

²⁷ For example, young women given the task of extra-judicially executing prisoners.

²⁸ Principally traders from Ukraine and Belarus

made good progress against the RUF, pinning it down into a small enclave in Nomo Chiefdom on the Liberian border in 1993. But the RUF changed tactics and opted to become a forest insurgency using only light weapons and bush tactics. As the war progressed, it soon became clear that the RSLMF was incapable of defending Kono completely, and the area changed hands several times. Typically, civilian morale would reach its lowest ebb whenever Kono fell, since the general population in Sierra Leone is more than aware of its importance as a source of payment for rice and fuel imports. As life grew harder for the capital and provincial cities like Bo and Kenema, NPRC popularity waned.

For the Strasser clique there was also the risk of a palace coup. Loyalties within the officer class were by no means certain and Kono was developed as an insurance policy for the “boys”. Suspect officers, or at least those reluctant to express the “revolutionary” fervour of radicals like Musa, Nyuma and others fighting a political war to fill the space coveted by the RUF, were given Kono as a fiefdom in return for some financial contribution towards the up-keep of what remained of the State. Busy digging diamonds and defending their lucrative territory, the less ideological soldiers would have little time for sedition (it was supposed).²⁹ Draconian punishments following drum-head courts martial for errant soldiers became less commonplace. In the early days of the regime, NPRC personalities courted popularity with a radicalised urban-based youth by funding urban renewal as described by Opala (1995). Soon, however, it became clear to an increasingly cynical population that corruption was rife all the way to the top. Questions were asked about Strasser’s wife’s frequent shopping trips to Europe and the facade was finally shattered when the Chairman himself was photographed in Sweden, allegedly smuggling diamonds. Thus, the Supreme Council of State sent a message to the rest of the army: political endeavours were, in the long-term hopeless, and now was the time to provide for either retirement or exile.

This was a regime that clearly was aware of its gross failings. The RUF revived with weapons acquired mainly from RSLMF sources, and the army became less and less capable of achieving victory in the

²⁹ What they did have was time for was intrigue with rebel forces. Deals were struck with the RUF to abandon RSLMF positions and leave war materiel behind, perhaps in return for RUF diamonds. Some of the initial infiltration of Kono by the RUF in August – September 1992 appears to have involved such deals by APC-loyalists within the RSLMF. The RUF openly admits most of its weapons came from RSLMF sources (RUF/SL 1995).

field. Nor was the NPRC able to maintain discipline within its ranks and proved incapable of improving the lives of Sierra Leoneans. The performance and posturing of a leadership that modelled itself on the “gangsta” culture of American ghettos became a double-edged sword. In Freetown and the war-ravaged interior, this image came to symbolise not the dynamic sophistication of international urban cool, but instead, a vulgar criminality more interested in the high-life than selfless salvation of the State. It is interesting to note that The Gambia’s Capt. Yaya Jammeh learnt from these early NPRC mistakes. After seizing power himself in the wake of the Sierra Leone coup, his initial persona was that of the mirror-shaded Rambo with revolver and walkie-talkie accessories. However, after a series of ruthless and blatant internecine killings, fiscal misappropriation, and a financially motivated vassalage to Col. Gaddafi, Jammeh reinvented himself as a pious and statesmanlike al-Hadji in the run-up to his unopposed election (see Kandeh, 1996).

As the NPRC lost its mantle of propriety, Kono descended into a totally unregulated, pre-industrial, militarised free-for-all. Officers who once evaded combat duties on the Liberian border unexpectedly began to volunteer with a new-found self-sacrifice and patriotism. Entire infantry battalions swapped their assault rifles for shovels and started to dig, often with little concern for the danger created by the abandonment of their professional duties. On more than one occasion, diamond-frenzied RSLMF units fell prey to marauding RUF guerrillas. Officers of the Engineers, previously generally redundant, suddenly found themselves new roles of Superintendents of Mines. Their once run-down compound, located at Wilberforce Barracks in Freetown, rapidly gentrified as officers quarters were repainted and Mercedes cars began to occupy driveways.³⁰

There were other winners too; adventurous Shi’ite buyers profited handsomely from the market ignorance of their new soldier clients, but these experienced diamond-men knew that this “rush” could not continue for ever. The unregulated “wildfire” exploitation left many parts of Kono “worked-out” and a dangerous precedent had been set: mining as patronage was no longer the preserve of elites. Instead, the NPRC had extended patrimonial *carte blanche* to chosen sections of a largely illiterate soldiery. Of course, officers received by far the largest proportion of concession land, but some “other

³⁰ Personal observations, March – June 1993

ranks” also got rich. Recently this overworking has shifted the regional emphasis in mining southwards away from Kono, introducing new political and economic pressures to regions that previously played second fiddle in the Sierra Leonean industry. This self-perceived, military right of access to diamonds, has emerged as the rallying cry of deserters and the demobbed throughout Sierra Leone. It was undoubtedly a key factor in generating support for the AFRC/PA coup in 1997, and remained the main force of cohesion for the ten months while this abysmal coalition asset-stripped the nation.

5.12 EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES, ARM SEC AND OTHERS -- THE INDUSTRY AND WAR.

Chapter One showed that NPRC flirtation with private security firms began in late-1994 with the arrival of Gurkha Security Guards Ltd, contracted to secure the Sierra Rutile mining site near Moyamba, Southern Province (Reno, 1998). This operation was a disaster, but the organisation was quickly replaced by the much larger Executive Outcomes. EO emerged in 1989, first working as a security force in the Angolan Civil War. Two oil companies³¹ contracted EO to secure and defend petrochemical installations in Western Angola. In 1993, the organisation assisted in the recapture from UNITA of a key oil complex located at Soyo. The success of this operation is thought to have earned EO an estimated US \$40 million contract from the ruling MPLA to participate in further attacks on UNITA positions throughout the country.³² Within a year, UNITA’s 80% holding of Angolan territory had been substantially eroded. Two years after the arrival of EO, UNITA was left with a mere 15%.

On May 10th 1995, the NPRC announced to the Freetown diplomatic community that EO had been contracted to train counter-insurgency units of the RSLMF. The organisation entered Sierra Leone in partnership with the mining engineering company Branch Energy. Branch Energy was to handle the engineering co-ordination of the assets that the partnership received in part payment for the implementation of security services. These included a US \$30 million kimberlite pipe in Kono and shares in Sierra Rutile and Sieromco. Fronted by a former British diplomat, the group proceeded to consolidate its commercial interests. EO received a further US \$1million per month expenses derived by

³¹ Ranger Oil and Heritage Oil

³² In particular, in Uige and Huambo

the NPRC directly from IMF and World Bank crisis loans. An ex-De Beers figure played an important role in the overseas marketing of diamond and metal ore production.

EO acted extremely quickly, deploying several hundred troops of mainly South African and Namibian origin and introducing hi-tech equipment to the battlefield. The use of Soviet helicopter gunships was decisive in the “search and destroy” missions that were launched against RUF positions in the interior.³³ RUF camps in Eastern and Southern Provinces were assaulted from the air with heavy machine gun and rocket fire. Ground troops would then systematically clear the area using techniques developed by the SADF in Angola, Mozambique and Namibia. Kono and the ore mining sites were the first to be liberated; garrisons of EO personnel were left in each location to maintain security and allow mining operations to commence. The expensive and technologically sophisticated equipment required to exploit kimberlite igneous intrusions³⁴ was delivered to Sierra Leone by ship and transported directly to the Branch Energies concessions in Kono. Mining sites were given added protection by local, EO-trained, CDFs, initially the *Do Soa* in Kono and later the Mende *Kamajoisia*.³⁵ Battalions of the RSLMF were trained as “shock-troops” for deep-penetration operations into the interior.³⁶ The efficacy of these units as cohesive bodies, capable of achieving military objectives, was questionable.³⁷

As part of the terms of the Abidjan Peace Accord, EO were required by the RUF to leave Sierra Leone. The organisation had come under increasing scrutiny from the Freetown press³⁸ who dubbed the South Africans “apartheid attack dogs” and the international community who were concerned at the drain of IMF and World Bank funding. The Branch Energy concessions were sold off to Diamondworks, itself a company with close connections to the EO/Sandline constellation of subsidiaries (Reno, 1998). Security in Kono and Sierra Rutile was undertaken by Lifeguard which contracted many of the former EO veterans as employees. Both Diamondworks and Lifeguard remain in Sierra Leone to the present day.

³³ Peyeima Camp (Upper Bambara Chiefdom), Camp Lion (Jong Chiefdom), White Jungle (Kaiyamba Chiefdom) and Ford-Ford (Kongbora Chiefdom)

³⁴ Pipes, sills and dykes

³⁵ See Chapter Six

³⁶ Cobra and Scorpion Battalions.

³⁷ See Keen (1995)

³⁸ In particular, see various items appearing in the paper *Fo di people*

Mining activity was suspended during the AFRC/PA period; Lifeguard secured and protected valuable hardware.

Other multi-national companies operated in Sierra Leone at the same time, most involved in the high investment exploitation of kimberlite igneous intrusions. AmCan, a company listed on the Vancouver Stock Exchange exploited a kimberlite sill on the Bafi River at Sandia.³⁹ Acutely aware of the general security situation, the company brought in ARM SEC, a South African/American security firm with links to EO. Again many of its employees, in the post-Abidjan Peace Accord period, were EO veterans re-contracted. British security firms like Cape Security were contracted by smaller operations exploiting both diamond and gold seams across the Eastern and Northern Provinces. In 1997, many of these companies were hoping to expand into the Zimmi region, and exploit rich alluvial deposits along the Maho and Moa Rivers.⁴⁰

5.13 KONO AND DEMOCRACY -- THE SLPP AND ELITE PATRONAGE.

Once the SLPP coalition government came to power in early 1996, replacing the NPRC, it wasted little time in exploiting what remained of GoSL Kono concessions.⁴¹ There was little doubt in the minds of Kono residents, both Lebanese and African, that the SLPP intended to use its new found possessions in much the same way as the APC had. In other words, concessions were to be employed as instruments of patronage. GoSL Minister of Mines, Prince Harding, and his Kono agent, Femi Kamara, set about the redistribution of land throughout 1996 and 1997. The model for this pattern of re-allocation was pure APC -- "blocks" were passed-off to political elites, their relatives and friends, with little concern for the potential "fall-out" that this overt clientelism might have for the delicate post-war balance of power. To many observers, this appeared as greedy as it were unwise⁴² -- the majority of those who benefited were Mende, and also had access to areas of family-held diamondiferous land in the Tongo Field and Zimmi areas to the south. As the SLPP government headed towards collapse at the end of March 1997 this resentment began to be directed at Tongo Field by disgruntled RSLMF officers, and quickly led to direct

³⁹ Sando Chiefdom, Kono District

⁴⁰ Various interviews, Feb.–May, 1997

⁴¹ Former NDMC areas and blocks

⁴² Various interviews, Feb.–March, 1997

confrontation with the SLPP-aligned *kamajoisia*, thus helping to ignite the flames of the AFRC coup. This process will be examined in detail in Chapter Six.

Taxes on run-of-mine production were also imposed on the Lebanese community and local Kono miners.⁴³ The frequency of Presidential, First Lady and Ministerial visits to Kono was greatly out of proportion to those made to less economically vibrant regions in other parts of the country. The announcement of any official visit would inevitably draw groans from across the mining community and would require several days of careful organisation by market leaders to collect donations of diamonds to be presented as “gifts”.⁴⁴ Preparations for transactions of this nature were observed on two separate occasions.⁴⁵ Supporters of various ethnic origins would meet to present fairly significant parcels of diamonds to a representative of the Kono community. It was felt by those involved that failure to volunteer such a tithe would lead to unnecessary ministerial and official scrutiny of economic activity both in Sierra Leone and abroad.

5.14 THE ARMED FORCES REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL/PEOPLE’S ARMY (AFRC/PA) AND KONO

The AFRC mutiny took place 25th May 1997. Kabbah and senior SLPP figures fled to Conakry. The central areas of Kono, namely those few but still-yielding NDMC blocks around Sefadu, Yengema and Koidu Town, were immediately placed under the control of key AFRC/PA loyalists and worked. These were essentially the confiscated concessions of the SLPP patrimony.⁴⁶ These concessions are very close to the multi-national kimberlite interests held by Diamondworks and others, and guarded by the companies’ respective security organisations. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that some degree of negotiation took place between the AFRC/PA leadership and their well-armed, highly-experienced expatriate neighbours. It is doubtful that either side relished the prospect of a pitched battle for complete control of Kono and what developed was an equilibrium of mutual toleration. Multi-national sites and equipment were left unmolested while AFRC/PA elites undertook to extract those diamonds that were

⁴³ Personal observation, 22/02/97

⁴⁴ See Chapter Four

⁴⁵ In Kenema and Koidu Town, Kono District

⁴⁶ Conciliation Resources West Africa Information Network (CR WAIN), various dates July – Oct. 1997.

left by the SLPP. Aside from this, it is highly unlikely that the AFRC/PA had the necessary engineering skills to exploit igneous intrusions. Thus a tentative *pax commercius* emerged to last the period of AFRC/PA rule. Multi-nationals preferred or were unable actually to engage in mining, (they might then have become quickly vulnerable to AFRC/PA exactions) and thus opted for a more sensible strategy of “wait-and-see”.⁴⁷

However, stasis in Kono generated problems for other mining regions in Sierra Leone. The lumpen soldiery of the People’s Army operated on a “pay-yourself” basis. Having developed a taste for diamond mining during the NPRC years, and having relatively successfully raided the “pump station” washing plant area of Tongo Field in March 1997, a *sobel* force once again focused its attention on the potential wealth in Mendeland. For the second half of 1997, AFRC/PA units battled continually with *kamajoisia* for control of Tongo Field and the Zimmi area⁴⁸ [see Chapter Six].

5.15 PAST AND PRESENT

The section above has shown that transition in the regional focus of mining has occurred recently. This shift in the fortunes of Kono was brought about by the unregulated exploitation of alluvial deposits by the NPRC, and further exacerbated by RUF raids, overt clientelism of the SLPP and depredations of the AFRC. But to charge these groups with the sole responsibility for wrecking the Kono field would be wrong -- like all mineral deposits the alluvial reserves of Kono are finite. The process of exhaustion begins with discovery. However, rebels and soldiers have certainly accelerated the inevitable, and the dearth of Kono diamonds in the face of increased and unchecked demand could not have come at a worse time. To understand what this sudden depletion of the Kono reserves means, it will help to examine the fortunes of Kono through the activities of locally-born Kono players living and working the Kono diamonds. The interview and case history below provide a snapshot of everyday business and the types of networks and strategies that previously succeeded, and highlight what is at the heart of the industry that has now begun to fail. Firstly, a well known Kono chief gives a brief account of the

⁴⁷ Diamondworks see kimberlite exploitation as an on-going 30 year project. (New Citizen, Freetown, 18/12/95)

⁴⁸ CR WAIN various.

industrial and market situation that existed in February 1997. Mining was underway in Kono as supporters tried to take advantage of the peace following the Abidjan Accord.

5.16 INTERVIEW WITH CHIEF K. – KOIDU TOWN, 24TH FEBRUARY 1997

Chief K. is a capable Kono chief. Now in his early fifties, he was born into the ruling house of S. Chiefdom, Kono District. His family is extremely large, his father having had about twenty wives. When in his early twenties he left Sierra Leone for Britain, where he remained until about ten years ago. In London, he worked in various capacities, but spent the last fifteen years running a mini-cab business in North London. During this time he made regular visits back to Kono to visit his family and keep abreast of local politics. As one of the most senior members of his lineage, he was nominated by his father as a possible successor to rule the chiefdom. Developing an ambition to do so, it was necessary for him to begin building a local support-base of followers, which he was able to do relatively successfully by using capital amassed over the years in Britain. By doing this, he made clear his intentions, not only to his father, but to rival siblings, thus entering an intense competition for paternal favour. As time progressed, he extended his stays in the mining districts, generally networking and establishing contacts not only with other Konos but also with members of the Lebanese community. As one of his father's most senior sons, he was in a good position and showed himself to be an astute businessman, negotiator and arbitrator. His efforts were successful, and his father's court soon came to view him as a rightful and responsible heir. On the death of his father, he was appointed to the position of chief. He has lived permanently in Kono ever since, managing his family's mining assets and arbitrating chiefdom disputes concerning land tenure and domestic matters.

CF. What are the local dispute resolution mechanisms that are in place in Kono?

C.K. I have some authority over smaller disputes about land, farming, compound problems and that kind of thing. The GoSL Mines Office, a sub-directorate of the Ministry of Mines has the "last word" on all concession disputes. At the moment the position is held by Femi Kamara -- but there is a process of appeal. If necessary boundaries can be surveyed accurately and "master-plans" can be matched to

accurate readings. The people who do this are the Geological Survey Division, based at New England [Freetown], but they have permanent representatives in Yengema. If there's a problem, they come out and officiate.

CF. How do the old NDMC Blocks, like Block 7, Block 4 and Block 9 get allocated ? [These were still viable GoSL-controlled concessions allocated patrimonially].

C.K. [Laughs] Well you know, that all depends on who is in power -- with these Blocks -- you know how it is -- the chef⁴⁹ decides what goes into the soup of the day! [Laughs]

CF. What are the prospects for increased multi-nationalisation in the diamond industry?

C.K. Well, apart from the kimberlite, which is negotiated directly with the government, foreign investors who want to dig alluvials must go into business with us [local Kono land-holders] or the [nationalised] Lebanese [49%-51%], otherwise they cannot make the operation work -- we know how to get things done, they don't. If they try without our help, they will get into serious trouble financially -- they must -- look at that British firm -- in the end they had to pay out \$500,000 [in bribes and payments to government officials] just to get up and running and even then they started to dig in the wrong place! Kono is a difficult place to do business, it is very easy to lose money here.

CF. As a land-holding chief, how do you decide who to allocate concessions to?

C.K. Well, I have to take many different factors into account. Firstly, if I am going into business with someone, I want to make sure that he knows what he is doing -- there are too many fools up here -- everyone thinks they are an expert, even if they have never mined before. If you get involved with these idiots, they will get you into trouble. Also I need to trust them -- after all they are working my land -- I

⁴⁹ By the "chef", the chief means the President and/or the Minister of Mines.

can't be everywhere at once -- if I can't trust them they will *tij*⁵⁰ my diamonds -- you know -- they will bribe my representative and not tell me what they are winning [finding].

CF. Do you favour family over others?

C.K. I have obligations to my family. It is very big. I must provide for them, but they can't all be diamond diggers [laughs]! I have Lebanese partners as well -- mostly old friends, that's fine because they know what they are doing -- you see, that is the most important thing -- even my best brother, if he is a fool, I do not really want him wasting everybody's time. In the old days, a chief could give land to everybody, but now there is *small*⁵¹ diamond land compared to then -- there is just not enough in my chieftdom to go around to everyone that wants it.

CF. What is the general pattern of export for Kono diamonds?

C.K. A lot of our diamonds go to Antwerp. Some of the larger ones now go to Tel Aviv -- you see those Jewish men in the black come to Yengema. Abass [a Shi'ite associate] told me there is a small market in Beirut now, it has been developing for a few years now. In the beginning, this market was for goods that mainly came from Zaire and Angola -- now diamonds from Sierra Leone go there as well. You know the process -- it all has to go through GGDO to be taxed before export, but I'm sure you know, a lot doesn't [laughs]. Of course, some of the big buyers round here give good prices if you know them well -- as a land holder, I am not too bothered about always exporting -- my profit margins are good.

CF. What is the current situation with smuggling?

C.K. I should say not too bad [laughs], but you know the reality -- I'm sure plenty have told you. It is the same as usual -- GGDO sees about -- I don't know --15 or 20%. The rest just vanishes into the air! It has been like this for a long time now -- no one will stop it -- the war has made things worse.

⁵⁰ Steal

⁵¹ Far less

CF. Of the Lebanese supporters here in Kono, how many are “Sierra Leonean” Lebanese?

C.K. I think it is about 80 or 90% -- others have come from Lebanon, of course, and now also Zaire and Angola, because of the trouble in these places.

CF. How is the security situation in Kono?

C.K. We have the *Do Soa* [a CDF] that helps the South Africans -- so now it is OK.

CF. What does it cost to start mining a small pit?

C.K. Nowadays, for me, a small operation, with maybe 30 diggers, will cost about \$7,000 to work with any chance of success. You know, this is a proper mine, not some bush pit.

CF. Are there any agricultural initiatives in place in the Kono area?

C.K. There were some before the war, but they have all been badly disrupted. Before the war there had been some investment as produce trading is always profitable. This was limited, of course, around here, floating capital tends to go on mining! Managing mines and a farm at the same time is also quite difficult.

5.17 A CASE HISTORY OF A KONO DIAMOND MAN: JOHNNY -- A JACK OF ALL TRADES

Johnny is typical of many of the quick-witted Kono supporters who compete with the Lebanese diaspora in the Kono area. Johnny was born at some time during the early 1940s -- but he is unsure exactly when. Whilst applying for a passport in the 1960s he was obliged to invent a date of birth which he celebrates each year with a notorious degree of excess. His father was one of the several Kono paramount chiefs who benefited from the discovery of diamonds in the late-1930s and the subsequent

introduction of the ADMS in 1956 (van der Laan, 1965; Zack-Williams, 1995). His immediate family is very large; he can count over sixty brothers and sisters who are the children of his father's sixteen wives.

Unlike the Lebanese, family-centred operations, many Sierra Leonean supporters act alone and are sometimes called *lepet*⁵² reflecting their solitary participation in the industry. Two main reasons are often offered for this common *modus operandi*: firstly, on several occasions, informants drew attention to the intensity of family politics and mentioned the common lack of mutual trust between competing siblings which may continue into later life. Secondly, partnerships with others can often disrupt the delicate diplomacy required to secure patronage on a governmental level, a process fraught with social, political and economic danger and requiring a constant awareness of one's exact position in these three areas. The problems associated with this tricky cultural navigation can suffer further complications when partnerships are obliged to figure a plurality of social networks into the equation being negotiated. In this kind of world, the unknown associations of an individual's own allies may be held against the individual when clientship is desired -- usually without explanation or the opportunity for appeal.

In effect, these kinds of constraints often result in a punctuated mining career with participants constantly adapting to varying circumstances of clientship. For Kono like Johnny, the close proximity to the machinery of both local and national political activity often dictates a sporadic pattern of industrial involvement -- in other words, supporters must make hay while the sun of patronage shines. The historical position of the Kono in the mechanism of state patronage implies constant flux in mining rights and concessions, particularly on the "areas" and "blocks"⁵³ that really count. Coupled with these conditions is a greater scarcity of capital available for investment; typically a Kono supporter will not be engaged in other lucrative businesses in the area or in Freetown, unlike their Lebanese counterparts. Instead, what has often emerged over the last twenty-five years, at least with the larger players, is an interesting pattern of diversification overseas into related clandestine markets. As a participant in this sort of highly adaptable activity, Johnny is a particularly good example and his commercial biography

⁵² Literally "leopard" (*Krio*).

⁵³ See Chapter Two

will be detailed below. Other leading Kono operators were interviewed who had engaged in businesses as diverse as mini-cab driving in North London [see above] and salesmen in the United States. These “wilderness years” precede an invitation from paramount chiefs to return to Kono to mine, on what is usually a “dead men’s shoes” basis. Time away also ensures that capital is accumulated by individuals to invest on their return. It should be remembered that the Kono mining area must be shared with a wide range of other participants -- the Lebanese, expatriate operators, the State, multi-nationals and the army, and thus in reality the Kono themselves have access to a much smaller proportion of the cake than might be expected. These periods of diversification, therefore, are essential to build up capital to buy into a clan-oriented commercial franchise.

During research, it transpired that enormous competition exists between Kono individuals to perform this task of capital accumulation as quickly as possible, as land is often allocated for allotment to qualifying members on what amounts to a lineage age-set basis. Speed, therefore, is of the essence. Each generation gets its chance only once and there is no catching up by the slow to prepare. In Johnny’s case, illicit commercial activity in Europe paid off and he was ready for his chance in mining at an earlier age than many others. He had decided in the mid-1970s that, on balance, involvement with contacts engaged in clandestine economic activity was a path worth pursuing (and a risk worth taking) in an attempt to generate a capital base rapidly. On this basis he began a very interesting business in a completely unlikely field at the height of the Cold War. Indeed, the conditions of the Cold War proved to be an ideal environment for an enterprise that linked a young ambitious Kono with the peculiarities of some of the more peripheral elements of East/West patronage in West Africa.

During a visit to Conakry, possibly as a diamond courier, Johnny had stayed with a Mandingo-Kono relation who had recently been given a diplomatic post in East Berlin by the Sekou Touré regime⁵⁴. At the time, Guinea also maintained a consulate in Bonn and, as an obvious consequence of this, there was some diplomatic transit between the two missions. Johnny was invited to stay with his relative in East Berlin to attend a technical college at a much smaller financial cost than would have been possible in

⁵⁴ East Germany was the main training ground for Stevens-loyal APC “*apparatchiks*” after the introduction of the One-Party constitution in 1978.

Western Europe. During this period of study, Johnny was taken on in some kind of junior, part-time position at the Guinean Embassy and was afforded diplomatic immunity. A communist-leaning West African state like Guinea was of great use to the underworld (presumably involving the state secret police) in the covert movement of commodities across the Berlin Wall and, fairly soon, both Johnny and his relative were engaged in the shipment of Eastern Orthodox icons to buyers in the West. The business was highly successful and before long Johnny was able to start buying and selling himself. It was an enterprise that he was to pursue for almost a decade and ultimately put him in an extremely strong position to return to the fray of Kono. He was also to become a regular visitor to Sweden, Stockholm apparently being something of central market for smuggled icons. It was here that he was to meet and marry his Swedish wife and obtain citizenship in the process. They became estranged in the late 1980s, but not before having three children; she never visited Sierra Leone.

In the early 1980s, Johnny returned to Kono with enough capital to enter the industry. He was relatively successful and soon commanded respect within the community among both his own people and the Lebanese. He was able to expand his political connections and established stronger relations with the leadership of the APC. All this served to confirm his increased status as a leading player in the industry, thus establishing his position as a member of the Kono elite. He became wealthy enough to have a property in Freetown, along with a separate office in the central business district. Over time, he expanded his operations into buying and became sufficiently well connected to smuggle diamonds to Antwerp. Some of his workings along the Bagbe River also yielded a high proportion of gold, which his favourite girlfriend dutifully shipped to a Mandingo associate in Banjul, The Gambia, once a month. Banjul remains the heart of the West African gold market to this day.

The RUF incursion and the collapse of the APC, however, was to radically change market conditions. Johnny's house in Kono was destroyed in the first attack on Koidu Town and many of his more permanent diggers became either scattered in the bush or were forced to join the rebels. Production dropped dramatically and valuable equipment was stolen, which would take time and money to replace. It was the first of many mining seasons that were to be disrupted, highly effectively, by the RUF. This

pattern of rapid industrial decline -- common to all participants -- has been documented in previous chapters.

Relations with Johnny were first established in 1993. At this time his business activity had been reduced solely to buying.⁵⁵ There had been some problems with the NPRC concerning his relationship with the previous government⁵⁶, but they were not particularly serious -- provided he maintained a low profile. When Kono was sporadically "liberated", it was only very powerful Lebanese players and army officers who continued to engage in mining. Many Kono were obliged to sit back and begrudgingly watch the State help itself to their plots; something to which they were not altogether unused. Johnny and others immediately saw the need to diversify in order to avoid capital erosion in the event of a protracted conflict. Unusually, these circumstances obliged a cohesion of resources in an attempt to avert catastrophe. Almost overnight, preparations and contacts were being made to embark on clandestine schemes that appeared initially to an outside observer to be dangerous and utterly foolhardy. What became apparent, however, was that businessmen like Johnny and his new partner Paul, had in their grasp an incredibly rich and diverse array of global contacts and an ability to transform theoretical financial strategies into functioning mechanisms with great speed.

Connections with the Guinean military presented an opportunity to make contact with Nigerian field commanders, who at this stage of the war were keen to begin shipping looted goods from the "sell-game" (cf. Keen, 1995) at the war front. A proposal was formulated to employ the services of a small, dry-cargo coaster that was lying redundant at the harbour in Freetown. Both Johnny and Paul were acquainted with members of the mixed Nigerian and Sierra Leone crew, and the necessary arrangements went ahead with few problems, the only major one being an up-front payment for the bunkering of the vessel. Once everything was organised the crew were instructed to board the ship and await further instruction. According to the ship's engineer, after loading, the eight man crew were obliged to sit tight for some days before a sudden rush of activity in the small hours of the selected day of departure.

⁵⁵ Johnny established a small buying office in Freetown.

⁵⁶ During the immediate post-NPRC coup period, some leading Konos were arrested and imprisoned on corruption and smuggling charges. Most were later released.

The initial events, in fact, established a pattern that was to continue for nearly two years, in a profitable enterprise that served the leadership of the ECOMOG contingent in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. It seems that, typically, the Port Authorities would be instructed to vacate the area by a certain time on a certain date, on the grounds that the Nigerians were moving sensitive military hardware from Freetown to Monrovia, or *vice versa*. The rear Cline Town⁵⁷ entrance of the harbour would be opened to allow trucks loaded with contraband to enter the port area, while the perimeters were secured by heavily armed Nigerian infantrymen. Abu, the engineer, recalls the professional, military precision of these operations which were carried out as often as once every two months. Evidently, the Nigerians were aware of the sensitivity of their export business and were keen to avoid any problems with both the NPRC and the press. It should be remembered that in Liberia, in the total absence of any legitimate state authority, ECOMOG had become an acronym for "Every Car Or Moving Object Gone". Interestingly, in Sierra Leone, ECOMOG became the Freetown slang for higher-grade marijuana, saying much about a key aspect of the import side of Nigerian Army attack trade⁵⁸.

Once cars, domestic hardware and produce had been loaded on board and the skipper had been furnished with detailed instructions, the ship would put to sea without further ado. Throughout this initial period, the spoils of war remained richest in Liberia and the coaster often left Freetown only partially laden. The vessel would head south-east along the coast, into Liberian waters, but would then veer suddenly due-West out into the Atlantic as it approached Monrovia, until it was about twenty-five miles off-shore; here it would lie and wait. Before leaving Freetown the skipper would be advised by the Nigerian ECOMOG officers when Monrovia harbour would be under the sole control of "friendly" troops -- failure to observe these "windows" would result in the operation being compromised by the Ghanaian Army, notorious for their strict and inconvenient adherence to regulations. Ghanaian military police would almost certainly impound the vessel and arrest the crew once the nature of the cargo had been ascertained.

⁵⁷ See Chapter Two.

⁵⁸ Transshipments and the distribution of drugs were allegedly organised and controlled by a Yoruba Alhaja, based in the Kissi area of the capital, on behalf of her ECOMOG contingent bosses. Cartoon references to her, and her "special" relationship with the Commissioner of Police, were frequently made in the Freetown tabloids. The allegations were confirmed by a worldly informant [05-04-97].

According to plan, the ship would creep into the harbour and the Liberian contraband would be loaded aboard in much the same circumstances as the Freetown operation. The vessel would then put back out to sea and make for Nigeria. The overseas Nigerian peacekeeping contingents had arrangements with certain smaller jetties and harbours along the Nigerian coast, located between Badagri and Lagos – the larger harbours were avoided in order to minimise the scrutiny of cargoes and circumvent complex “spread” bribery, often necessary for the clearance of goods with the less than naive Federal Nigerian Port Authorities who would expect “a piece of the action” even from the military; after all, Apapa remains the greatest customs fiefdom on the Western seaboard of the African continent, with the position of Director of Customs, Excise and Duty, Lagos, being one of the most coveted posts in the grand hierarchy of the Federal Republic.

The enterprise continued successfully for some time until the rainy season of 1996, when disaster struck. The ship, excessively over-loaded in Monrovia, foundered and sank in heavy seas off the coast of La Côte d’Ivoire. Tragically, all hands were lost. Abu, the engineer, escaped only by missing the trip; a bad bout of malaria had prevented him from sailing. Sadly, the fate of this ship was mirrored in other accidents caused by over-eager plundering -- at least two Nigerian transport aeroplanes crashed for the same reason, each with great loss of life⁵⁹. But these incidents serve to highlight the enormous volume of systematic looting, and the kind of clandestine logistics involved to transport goods across international boundaries.

For Johnny and his associate Paul, there was no way forward. Moving back into Kono in any sort of viable way was now out of the question. Concessions that they had once worked had been cleaned out by either the army or the RUF. What remained was still under the control of senior military figures or powerful and wealthy Shi’ite operators who had managed to work their way into the new patrimony as indispensable links to overseas markets. There were newcomers too, who were in a position to exploit the deep kimberlite deposits that lay beyond the reach of even bulldozers.

⁵⁹ Focus on Africa, March 26th, 1997.

With EO had come Branch Energy, laying claim to huge concessions throughout Kono District as part of the payment package for military action against the RUF. EO had succeeded in securing Kono for its own purposes, but over-mining, geological conditions and successive sets of governmental patronage left little room for operators like Johnny. To make matters worse, promised multi-party elections would almost certainly usher in a new era of SLPP government and new Mende patron-client networks. After Strasser fell in a palace coup to Julius Maada Bio, and these predictions started to come true, Johnny left Sierra Leone to rejoin his estranged wife in Sweden in 1996. He has not returned to Sierra Leone since.

5.18 CONCLUSION

Johnny's story is typical of the fate of many ethnic Kono operators who once enjoyed the advantages of their ethnicity in both traditional and state patrimonies. The socio-economic turmoil of the war and, the subsequent radicalisation of the political process found many unprepared. Senior members of the Kono elite with strong APC connections were victimised as the military moved in to claim Kono as its own asset. For Sierra Leone, the implications of this shift in the control of the Kono diamond fields has been enormous; in a period of only five years the entire commercial culture of the region has changed dramatically. It still remains an enclave but the methods of exploitation, deployed by colonial capitalists and plundering post-colonial operators alike, have now given way to deep-caste mining multi-nationals operating in conjunction with security firms. These companies have little to fear from competition: larger, high-profile multi-nationals are subject to ethical constraints that limit their involvement in such scenarios and the fire-power that security operatives are able to deploy in the event of attack is usually sufficient to deter bands of ill-disciplined teenagers. It is perhaps possible to detect, in manoeuvrings within the reconstituted Kabbah regime, the potential of a new national, as opposed to ethnic, elite, preparing itself for a new era of more formal accountable mining operations. But whether this will really prove to be in the national interest remains to be seen.

CHAPTER SIX: INTERNATIONAL ENTERPRISE, INDIGENOUS PLAYERS AND SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL PROBLEMS -- TONGO FIELD AND ZIMMI

6.1 INTRODUCTION:

The last chapter showed that large concession-leasing organisations like Executive Outcomes have partly achieved what Momoh desired for so long. But what are the ramifications for the rest of Sierra Leone? The emphasis of private mining has clearly moved from Kono to the south-east, in fact, to the areas that Stevens tried to weaken, politically, by scrapping the railway. Tongo Field and Zimmi are both the terrain of Mende-speaking, land-owning groups. Tongo Field is under-exploited and Zimmi, in mining terms, is practically untouched. The deposits are alluvial, rich and shallow but not the kimberlite pipes that make multi-national exploitation viable. For this reason, mining has to follow old ways -- gangs of boys working the privately held concessions of a Mende land-holding elite. Foreign security is not a viable option in two regions that are very attractive to illicit diggers, (including the RUF and the remnants of the AFRC), now that Kono has been sealed off by heavily armed and experienced security operations. The proximity of both Tongo Field and Zimmi to the unstable Liberian border also attracts a marauding, peripheral element from Liberia. There are economic problems too: a Mende elite, hoping to exploit this valuable asset for political ends, currently suffers a severe shortage of investment capital. The battle to restore the SLPP regime has drained reserves that might otherwise be mobilised for mining. Thus although mineral resources are plentiful, immediate prospects for mining them seem poor. Even if money was available, prospects of continued conflict and local instability pose intractable problems. What looks a poor bet on paper, however, is much more promising in reality. Drawing heavily on cultural resources to protect and manage mineral resources, a Mende elite has managed to impose a surprising degree of security within their two territories, and mining of diamonds has gone ahead with negligible capital outlay, and an aggressive political agenda has been set. This chapter examines how this has been achieved and whether the short-term successes are in any way sustainable. Does democracy plus ethnicity plus civil defence amount to a successful formula for creating the kind of locally-based mining hegemony once enjoyed by Kono chiefs?

6.2 THE MENDE -- ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Like the Kono, Mende land-holding lineages tend to claim descent from warrior bands invading Sierra Leone from the Eastern Forests from the sixteenth century (Little, 1967; Richards, 1995). Linguistically, Mende is a member of the south-west Mande family and is closely related to Gbande, a language spoken in the northern Liberian border region, and Loko, a dialect of Gbande spoken in north-western Sierra Leone. The Mende-speaking chiefdoms occupy 19,500 km². Most Mende are found in south-eastern Sierra Leone, but there is a small group of Mende in northern Liberia. In terms of vegetation, Mende country is now predominantly a mixture of “high bush” and “low bush”, but forest may have once been more extensive. Primary tropical rainforest is found in the Gola reserves occupying the middle third of the border with Liberia. This area mainly comprises eastern parts of Makpele, Tunkia, Nomo and Malema chiefdoms in Sierra Leone and the Gola National Forest of western Grand Cape Mount and Lofa counties in Liberia.

6.3 THE MENDE -- SOCIAL ORGANISATION AND KINSHIP

In contemporary Mende society, polygyny is most common in rural settings and among chiefly land owning families. In particular, Mende elites involved in the diamond industries in Zimmi and Tongo Field are typically polygynous, this having a direct socio-political bearing on important matters of land tenure and concession distribution [see below]. However, in the larger regional capitals of Mendeland today, monogamy is more normal among younger, urban-based generations.

Historically, the structure of Mende society is based on the household unit called the *mawε*. The *mawε* was originally a farmstead, usually founded by a warrior who used slaves captured in war to clear bush for cultivation. Over time, as the number of a warrior's blood relatives, affines and slaves grew, additional settlements were founded, typically by sons, although there are well documented cases of this process being undertaken by senior wives. Little (1967), shows that the system worked in a patriarchal way, with sons acting as heads of *mawε* being under direct patriarchal control. Fully grown sons will

rarely share a single *mawε*, this being considered incompatible with their status as free and individual citizens.

In patterns of descent, the Mende share some similarities with the Kono. Little (1967:98) writes:

“The Mende do not confine themselves with using a unilineal principle. A man’s heirs are primarily his brothers in order of age, but custom traditionally includes cognatic as well as agnatic descent in certain circumstances. For example, the present-day household is still, broadly speaking, both patrilineal and patrilocal. In other words, inheritance of the *mawε* itself, as a form of property, follows the male line ... [m]embership of the *mawε*, today, is not, however, confined by any means merely to male agnates and their immediate families. The tendency is for affinal relatives, as well as close female relatives of the head of the household, to compose part of the unit and even help manage its affairs. Perhaps this is because the *mawε* has primary significance as a farming rather than kinship institution. Nowadays, the organising factor is not kinship itself, but common residence combined with genealogical connection.”

Geographical sets of *mawεsia* form a larger collective social entity called the *kuwui*. The heads of individual *mawεsia* are subordinate to the authority of this larger group and in particular, its chief, the *kuloko*. These heads of *mawεsia* represent key, consanguineal units through which matters of descent and inheritance are traced. This is important in view of the flexible structure of many modern households. Although essentially patrilineal and patrifocal, cognatic and affinal relationships between household inhabitants are common. Thus, key patrilineages are maintained by the over-riding structure and authority of the *kuwui*. Members of these *mawεsia* patrilineages are called *ndehun-bla* or literally “family people”. In certain instances, especially when a suitable male member of the *ndehun-bla* is unavailable, a woman may serve as *kuloko*.

The *kuloko*, as head of a group of *mawεsia*, has authority over a compound of several households. Indeed, the literal translation of *kuloko* means, “the one in whose hands the compound is” (Little,

1967). His principal roles are the arbitration of family disputes, the maintenance of compound fabric and sanitation and the organisation of labour for the benefit of the compound as a whole. He achieves this through his authority over the heads of the *mawɛsia* constituting the *kuwui*. He is also responsible for the relationship between his *kuwui* and the rest of the community, carrying out this task as a member of a council of *kulokoisia* under the control of the Town Chief. The *kuloko* is empowered to collect compound taxes and, historically, was expected to raise and lead warriors to fight in wars. Today, this duty has been performed to assist with the recruitment of *kamajoisia* [see below].

Little (1967) shows that Mende settlements then tend to form a group, often linked by marriage ties among the main families. A series of towns or larger villages, each under the social and political jurisdiction of a Town Chief, conglomerate to form a Section, with several sections forming a Chiefdom. Not surprisingly, each section falls under the authority of a Section Chief directly serving the Paramount Chief of the Chiefdom. The Paramount Chief resides in the Chiefdom Headquarters Town. Rather like a Bishop and his Diocese, the Chiefdom Headquarters Town may come under the direct authority of a Town or Section Chief acting in the role of Dean. This relieves the Paramount Chief of immediate local administrative demands.

6.4 LAND TENURE AND INHERITANCE

As Little (1967) has demonstrated, agricultural concerns, in the form of land distribution and division of labour, are central to the development of Mende social organisation. *Kuwuisia* tend to hold and farm land as a “block” and there is a relationship between the “minifundia” of the *kuwui* and the “latifundia” (large tracts of territory) controlled by ruling Mende elites (i.e. the main families within a chiefdom from among which the Paramount Chief is chosen). In contemporary terms, this has a direct bearing on the industrial organisation in the Mende diamond fields, (namely Tongo Field and Zimmi), and also of former diamondiferous areas around Bo which have now been more comprehensively exploited (the Sewa trench in particular). Mende society has two classes of person in relation to land and two forms of land tenure. The principal class is the ruling chiefs and their families, and the families and descendants of warriors and hunters settling land in the past. The second class comprises subsequent settlers,

members of other ethnic groups absorbed by the Mende, and descendants of domestic slaves (typically these were the war captives of the ruling families).

There is a key difference between the concept of “land owner” and “land holder” among the Mende, and the distinction constitutes two separate areas of land tenure. The land owner is in full possession of the respective land and will often have inherited it. He, in turn, will pass it on to members of his immediate family following a rule of patrilineal succession (or succession from more senior to more junior brothers). The land holder, on the contrary, enjoys none of these social privileges and his rights over land are far more limited, in effect, to “personal occupation and use”. For farming purposes land may also be “begged” off either a land holder or land owner. In this situation, land will usually only be “begged” for a year or growing season. Land may also be obtained through settlement. This tenure is similar to land holding, but occurs in specific instances where a “settling” family group enjoys the patronage of a particular land owning ruling house. The land is held on “permanent loan” and this arrangement may well pass down patrilineally. No formal applications are required for renewal of contracts between such special holders and the owner of the land. Lesser forms of temporary tenure also exist: land may be pledged for a small number of years to pay off debts. Land may also be awarded by owners to individuals (including strangers), in return for agricultural or even military service (Little, 1967).

6.5 IMPORTANT TRANSITIONS IN LAND OWNERSHIP

The land owner’s rights, protected by the authority of the relevant paramount chiefdom, are extensive, and permit the individual to exploit the land (whatever size it may be) in any way that he sees fit. In mining terms the owner may exploit the land himself, or lease the territory to an outside investor. This might mean another Mende “diamond man”, a Lebanese supporter or even a foreign multi-national, so long as the arrangement technically conforms with the customary laws of the chiefdom and is approved by the chiefdom hierarchy. Traditionally a man’s immediate inheritors are his brothers, followed then by his sons and finally by his daughters, but British Colonial Government introduced complications to

this system. These complications have had a fundamental effect on power relations within Mende society and have played an important part in recent Mende social mobilisation .

In trying to simplify matters of inheritance and introduce a colonial norm, the British attempted to bring traditional Protectorate systems in line with the English Law of the Colony (Little, 1967: 85). Little extends this observation to show that some European-educated sons¹ of deceased chiefs made land claims directly to District Commissioners who, failing to understand the customary law of the Native Authorities, upheld these claims. Islam also played an important role in the introduction of this system, favouring the inheritance of property by sons rather than brothers. After all, an inheritance dispute has played a central role in shaping Islam since the death of the Prophet. However, the customary law of the Mende has also endured, giving rise to a hybrid system, where no one form dominates. Little leaves the issue here, but in contemporary Mendeland, sons now vie with their father's brothers for control of the deceased's land. In other words, land tenure disputes are endemic, covering the full range of property from half-acre rice fields to sixty square mile mining concessions. And now that the British have left and Krio civil lawyers from Freetown are viewed with suspicion, recourse to chiefly arbitration is the only alternative, particularly for less wealthy plaintiffs in Mende society.

One may well think that this state of affairs is rather unsatisfactory, not least for the chiefs who are obliged to sort out the mess. Two systems function along side each other, each with merits and faults, and neither is in a position of legal dominance. But this situation regarding laws of inheritance has deep social ramifications directly influencing power relations between the Mende elite and the rest of Mende society. The crucial issue concerns the independence that chiefly elites exercise in flexibly interpreting and assessing each specific land inheritance case. The simple reality is that judgement on any individual case from *kuloko* to paramount chief level has become vulnerable to the influence of patronage; the law is no longer clearly defined or absolute. The outcome, therefore, has been an increase of reliance on patrimonial ties from the bottom to the top of Mende society. The independence of the small land owner has been substantially eroded. Since the 1960s at least, small farming communities

¹ Probably Old Boys of the British-founded Bo School for Boys, built to educate the sons of Mende chiefs. A popular song in the 1960s claimed that "*Bo School nah the Eton of West Africa*".

live in a social environment of some uncertainty. This affects not only the welfare of the family and the dependants of a minor land-owning individual after his death, but also the potential for social conflict that may arise thereafter. For heads of *mawε* and *kuwui*, any attempt to influence these matters favourably must depend on client relations with powerful individuals at higher levels of social jurisdiction.

Thus, elite power has unwittingly been increased by inefficient colonial bureaucracy and those members of society at the bottom of the ladder, at least in land-owning and land holding-terms, find themselves increasingly the clients and dependants of senior members of chiefly houses, who have now, in the post-colonial and post-post-colonial periods, developed greater political and coercive powers over their subjects. What is interesting, however, is that this power, until very recently, has remained largely latent. But when threatened by critical political and economic problems, Mende elites have realised some of this power very effectively, finding solutions that reinforce their positions through rapid social mobilisation.

6.6 TONGO FIELD – THE MENDE AND THEIR DIAMONDS

Tongo Field is a large expanse of alluvial diamondiferous deposits running south-west from the far southern border of Kono. The entire field lies within a series of Mende chiefdoms constituting the north-eastern sector of Mendeland. The surrounding countryside is hilly and predominantly covered with secondary forest and bush. The area has suffered under the RUF incursion, serving often as a base for operations by particular RUF units.² Tongo is remote and has far less of the industrial and commercial hubbub prevalent in Kono. Roads in and out of Tongo Field are unmetalled and in an appalling condition; during the rains most become impassable to all but the sturdiest and most reliable of four-wheel-drive vehicles. To Europeans and Levantines, the climate is oppressively humid – life here for any length of time is hard and the risk of disease is great. The general standard of accommodation in the local villages is very basic. Most of what remains today has been badly damaged both by repeated RUF attacks and “scorched-earth” tactics during withdrawals. Graffiti on walls bear

² Peyeiama Camp; See Richards, 1996/8: p.39

testimony to each settlement's militia itinerants -- "Cobra Death Squad" and the "Scorpions", (both NPRC Special Forces units) and, of course, the RUF themselves. On arrival, each group seems to have participated in *ad hoc* mining before either moving or being moved on. During the early months of 1997, grisly gibbets greeted visitors on the approach tracks, many adorned with the body-parts of suspected rebels and bandits. Often, skulls and bones are painted in bright colours to add drama to objects that have become so commonplace they lack symbolic impact. Without a doubt, Tongo Field is a very different place to Kono. There are no Mercedes cars and air conditioning units and, after dark, the noise of generators remains eerily absent -- almost all having been stolen and carted off into Northern Kailahun District, often to be sold in diamond mining centres like Kankan and Nzérékoré over the Guinean border.

Since the decline of the SLST and the NDMC, the Government of Sierra Leone has largely left the area to its own devices. The collapse of State control over the diamond industry was orchestrated by the APC as it sought to consolidate Shadow State power through clandestine distribution of diamond-based financial reserves [see Chapter Five]. Both Stevens and Momoh elected to focus their attentions on Kono for logical reasons. Firstly, Kono had been subject to comprehensive State intervention since the foundation of the SLST and the relationship rested on a basis of a relatively well developed infrastructure: roads and housing were adequate and the local bureaucracies eventually came to be controlled by those who were clients of the APC. Kono was also the largest and richest deposit, with high levels of industrial activity creating an effective smoke-screen for patrimonial concessioning. As the centre of the West African diamond trade it attracted international interest and substantial investment -- in short, it was where the action was.

Chapter Five showed how APC patronage developed through the introduction of the "block" and "area" schemes in Kono, which served as a currency to fund the Limba/Temne "*ekutay*" alliance. Concessions, exploited by principal members of the government on their own behalf, were also awarded to loyal supporters of the APC. Indeed, as a mechanism for redistribution of political resources the concession system functioned adequately well. Kono chiefs were taken into the fold of a greater "Northern" alliance and were thus obliged to accept the financial and industrial *status quo* thrust upon them.

There were other reasons too, favouring the political focus on Kono. As an ethnic group, the Kono are a relatively small group and were never in a position numerically to threaten the APC establishment. But in the South, the situation has always been different. An APC-sanctioned annexation of Tongo Field, politically and economically encroaching deep into Mendeland, would have appeared as an attempt to hijack Mende-claimed mineral reserves with a view to maintaining the Stevens/Momoh patrimonial machine and the political longevity of the APC. This “outside encroachment” scenario has remained a consistent threat to State cohesion ever since. Thus, by established political custom, Tongo Field and now Zimmi, have been left to the Mende to administer and work as their own, helping to preserve a delicate equilibrium of (ethnicised) political tension. As one Mende mining supporter claimed in May 1997, “We have always had Tongo -- it keeps us busy -- and as you know, the Devil makes work for idle hands”.³

It will be shown below that to some extent the Devil has not been inactive, politically speaking, in Tongo and Zimmi. Kono is in decline for all but the most powerful Shi’ite supporters and multi-nationals. Both Tongo Field and Zimmi have large areas of rich and easily accessible deposits, making them vulnerable to the illicit exploitation of outsiders. The immediate future is likely to bring increased instability to both Tongo Field and Zimmi, as those without prospects in Kono begin to look elsewhere. This pressure will be exerted by a wide range of individuals and parties -- from bushboys with buckets and spades, to the army, the State and even politicised groups from neighbouring countries.⁴

6.7 A TONGO PLAYER

C. is one of many Mende town and section chiefs who administer the sprawling Tongo Field mining settlement in central Eastern Province.⁵ During April 1997, the population was about 20,000 and was expected to rise to 80,000 had production not been interrupted by the AFRC coup. In the centre of the area is a large market place catering for the diggers and their dependants. Here, produce, cheap clothing

³Interview, “Mobil Spot”, Kenema, March, 1997.

⁴Disaffected elements of both ULIMO and NPFL remain a threat to these areas.

⁵“Greater” Tongo Field consists of the following villages and townships: Pujehun, Ngiehun, Lalehun, Taiama, Bumpeh, Kpandebu, Sandaeyaema, Toktombu II, Buima, Tongoa, Semewabu, Palima, Bomie, Lanudoma, Giema, Njagbahun, Toktombu I, Vemima, Saina and Pelewahun.

and hardware are sold for both money and diamonds. The settlement, other than the market, has no real core. It would be incorrect to describe the place as a town in the true sense of the word -- it does not exist as one on maps, rather as a hotchpotch of about twenty randomly scattered villages that have grown and blurred together as mining has attracted migrant workers from throughout the region. There are a few small bars with dancing areas and, at night, a proliferation of "chop spots" where meat and vegetables are cooked and sold. This central area lies in a depression, and the artesian boreholes for the settlement are situated close to the main fish market area. On the surrounding ridges are a vast rubbish tip and a graveyard; during the rains, detritus from both is washed into the water supply. It is a public-health disaster and consequently the incidence of malaria and water-borne diseases is a major and continual problem. At the time of research, Tongo Field was suffering the largest Lassa Fever epidemic on record, exacerbated by enforced population movements during the conflict. Health agencies monitoring the locality also feared an imminent cholera epidemic⁶.

The Lebanese and European expatriates are conspicuous by their absence; life here is immensely hard for everybody. Occasionally, if a big stone is found, Lebanese buyers may rush in from Kenema or Kono to catch a bargain, but regular journeys would destroy a Mercedes very quickly. On the whole, Lebanese buyers wait for goods to find their way to their offices on Hangha Road in downtown Kenema.⁷ In general, there is less day to day urgency in Tongo Field than in Kono. Chiefs like C. would welcome outside investment to boost the mining economy but are at the same time reluctant to see Tongo Field develop into another Kono. The greatest fear is a loss of control, with the accompanying political, economic and social problems this would bring. What is apparent is that the Mende elite seem content with a long-term strategy regarding their diamond assets and have little faith in the short-term "get-rich-quick" attitude evident elsewhere. However, although Europeans and Lebanese were absent from mining activity during research, Africans from all over the sub-region were present. C. was able to point out Hausa, Ewe, Dioula, Wolof and the ubiquitous Maraka. He claimed that buyers from as far south as Angola visited the area when mining was in full production.

⁶ ICRC quarterly report, January – March, 1997.

⁷In the past, Lebanese buyers sent trusted African agents to Tongo from Kono and Kenema on their behalf. This system (or possibly the trust on which it depended) seems to have broken down over the last seven years.

C. is about 40 years old and bears his huge responsibilities as a Section Chief with a heavy heart. He claims that on the occasion of his appointment, he retired to “weep for three days”. He is married to at least ten wives and is often obliged to take new ones as part of the maintenance of a complex network of alliances with other powerful local families. He is unsure as to the number of children he has, but somewhere around thirty is probably likely. Members of his own father’s family are spread throughout the Eastern Province, and there are some living abroad. In particular, he has an influential older brother who works for the Incorporated Diamond Traders⁸ on 47th Street in New York. This is an extremely important connection as it provides a trusted outlet for rough diamond production leaving Tongo Field. It also places C. in a position of some power in the industrial hierarchy, not only as an operator, but also as a principal participant in the export market. Importantly, these kinds of connections abroad assist Mende supporters and land holders to circumvent clumsy, governmental bureaucratic procedure, and what is evident is that specific processes were constructed to avoid friction and rivalries with APC networks under the Stevens and Momoh regimes; these “avoidance” procedures have been adapted to accommodate the changing commercial environments associated with successive governments.⁹ General trade flows freely between Tongo Field, Kenema, Zimmi and Monrovia, suggesting that a large proportion of Mende-supported production makes its way to the United States, and elsewhere, via Liberia.¹⁰

As in Kono, the 1996-1997 season promised to be the first stable period of mining since Tongo Field first fell into rebel hands in 1992. But unfortunately this was not to be the case. Interviews with local, knowledgeable informants [see below], show that the presence of a large volume¹¹ of extracted gravel concentrate, the property of a consortium of elite Mende miners, proved too much of a temptation for a sizeable band of mutinous, marauding, government soldiers. It will be shown that the ensuing crisis degenerated into a violent ethnic brawl that played a major part in provoking the coup of May 25th 1997. Specifically, this battle for the Tongo gravel, being the first of its kind pitting government forces

⁸ A well known private diamond trading company owned by a consortium of diamond market players (see Chapter Two).

⁹ See Zack-Williams (1995) and Reno (1995).

¹⁰ The journey from Kenema to Monrovia can be undertaken without too much difficulty by road, even with a saloon car.

¹¹ Several metric tonnes

directly against *kamajoisia*, was instrumental in forcing a complex tripartite struggle of political wills out into the open. This violence stripped away much of an intricate facade erected to conceal the strategic realities of the war. In clarifying the true political positions of the participants, the Tongo violence made the AFRC coup a near certainty and the country has yet to recover from the shock of facing up to the stark ethnic rivalries revealed in this particular tussle.

6.8 COPING WITH CONFLICT -- THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGY

For the diamond industry throughout Sierra Leone, an air of optimism greeted the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord in November 1996. Mining had been disrupted severely since the onset of hostilities in 1991, and it was hoped that at least half a season's digging might at least take place through the first half of 1997. For the first three months of the new year, mining began in earnest, but problems of security remained. Sporadic fighting between the RUF, the army and the rapidly growing CDFs continued. Cross border raiding by elements of ULIMO (K)¹² also caused problems in areas in the far South and East of Sierra Leone. Resettlement of refugees and the internally displaced remained a priority for many chiefdoms, particularly in the Zimmi region, where illicit digging was rife. In view of these difficulties, some sections of the Mende elite elected to enforce a temporary ban on all mining in certain areas around Pujehun and Zimmi. During a formal on-the-record interview, Chief Victor Kebbie MP outlined the reasons for taking this decision, but an important sub-text, concerning matters of industrial investment and *kamajoisia* recruitment also accompanied his logic.

INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR KEBBIE, PARAMOUNT CHIEF OF PANGA-KAPONDE CHIEFDOM, PUJEHUN DISTRICT. FRIDAY MARCH 13TH 1997, (PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE)

CF. Why was mining activity suspended in Pujehun District?

¹² The "K" signifies the militia's leadership by Alhaji Kromah. ULIMO (J) is led by Roosevelt Johnson.

V.K. Mining was suspended to encourage the local populous to “brush” their farms and carry out repairs to the villages before the rains. Many of the villages in our area have been badly damaged during the war, and many have been deserted for some years. The buildings are shot-up, the villages are overgrown and there is a big problem with rats. The village farms are also in the same condition. Brushing [clearing] and planting needs to take place quickly.

CF. What are the local resolution mechanisms in place to deal with land tenure disputes?

V.K. All matters concerning both mining and agricultural activity are dealt with at Chiefdom level. Jurisdiction begins at Town Chief level and extends through Section Chief level to the Paramount Chief. The Paramount Chief has the final word on all disputes. The Government of Sierra Leone has recently ratified this legal process. Pujehun and Zimmi differ greatly from Kono, in that all land is family owned -- there are no “blocks”, “areas”, or any of that business.

CF. What is the current security situation in Pujehun and Zimmi?

V.K. Security at the moment is OK, when one considers the situation elsewhere. We have the Kamajors¹³ in the area – security considerations will be made before the decision to resume mining operations is undertaken. The border area still remains a concern to us.

CF. What is the current structure of the political hierarchy in Zimmi at the moment?

V.K. The current Zimmi Section Chiefdom is vacant due to the death of the last chief two years ago. The caretaker is C.C. Rogers. A successor is still awaiting approval from the general council.

CF. Which mining techniques are generally used in the area?

¹³ Colloquialism

V.K. The methods are generally the same as Kono, but in the Zimmi area there is no air-lift or kimberlite. We do not do “two-pile”.

CF. Why do you not do “two-pile”?

V.K. Well, it is because we do not need to. We employ local boys to dig -- we can all trust each other. Often we pay them at the end.

CF. Who is involved in mining in Zimmi?

V.K. It is the chiefs, the rightful landowners and their “customers” [clients].

This interview suggests that the Mende chiefs in the Zimmi and Pujehun area, despite concerns about the possible spread of Lassa Fever, were successfully dealing with the problems they faced, namely the resettlement of the displaced and the rehabilitation of farms and villages. Field visits were made to two large villages¹⁴ in early-1997 to observe this mobilisation. However, the findings were unexpected, and it soon became clear that another process was developing. Women were entirely absent from the villages for the first three months of the year. The men who congregated in the ruins made no effort whatsoever to effect any repairs to property or to undertake agricultural work. Instead, their time was largely spent receiving instruction and training for initiation into the *kamajoisia*. On each successive field visit to the villages, it was noted that the number of men in each was steadily increasing. The villages, in effect, were serving as barracks for a rapidly growing CDF, and made suitable and well known points of muster. The recruitment activity could then be disguised as community-minded resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The men, many of whom were in possession of ICRC food cards, were being fed on bulgar wheat and corn soya blend (CSB) emergency relief supplies distributed by the ICRC Zimmi mission. Further inquiries with ICRC showed that a clandestine trade in food cards, both real and forged, was thriving in the area. The elite-imposed mining ban thus facilitated, in part, this

¹⁴ Gorahun and Taninahun, both in Tunkia Chiefdom, 16 km north of Zimmi

mobilisation, encouraging men, who might otherwise have remained digging in the bush, to make themselves available for recruitment.

A Kenema Shi'ite operator was also questioned¹⁵ about mining developments in the area. He was sceptical about the alleged motives for the suspension of digging. At the time, members of the Shi'ite community were hoping to acquire concessions in the Zimmi area, and it was felt that the suspension was contributing to significant inflation in the local mining economy. In order to persuade the local elites to lift the ban, the Shi'ites were forced to offer significant financial incentives, not only to important land owners but also to local Mende diggers who, it was hoped, might be able to lobby for a resumption of mining activity. At the time of research in Kono, diggers were receiving 15% of the market value of mined diamonds under the terms of a *kabadu* system of payment [see Chapter Two]. In the Zimmi area, when mining finally did commence, local Mende diggers were demanding 25% from Shi'ite supporters, presumably with the blessing of local Mende elites, who themselves were receiving substantially larger proportions of production than their Kono counterparts. The Shi'ite informant also claimed that the majority of local labourers provided by Zimmi and Pujehun chiefs were *kamajoisia* members. This was a consequence, he believed, of weaknesses of authority created by a vacant chieftom seat¹⁶ that had been exploited by militant elements of the local elite with strong loyalties to the *kamajoisia* hierarchy, and to a policy of transforming the organisation from civil defence into a militia with strong offensive capabilities, and an ambition to replace the national defence force (RSLMF).

6.9 THE KAMAJOISIA AND TONGO FIELD

In Tongo Field, the speed at which the *Kamajoisia* grew had much to do with the organisational and administrative skills of local Town and Section Chiefs. From the end of March 1997 onwards, one was continually aware of an overt, large-scale, mobilisation of men of fighting age, initiated within the jurisdiction of the Kenema *kamajoisia*. The Tongo Field leadership was determined not to suffer the loss of more lives or gravel, as had happened earlier in the month, and thus set about implementing measures to prevent resource plundering. A local District Officer expressed the classical view that, "...in

¹⁵ Interview, Kenema 27/03/97

¹⁶ See Chief V. Kebbie interview above.

time of peace prepare for war”, which would suggest that the Mende elite was fully expecting an impending political crisis. In April 1997, C. spoke to his village in the court *barri*:¹⁷ “The *kamajoisia* are to defend us. They are the civil militia, to defend us and mining at Tongo, but we are not going to use police. There are police at Tongo [but] the *kamajoisia* are armed, and will confound the police. We won’t rely on SSD at all – we have our own police, and will use them”.¹⁸ The small detachment of paramilitary Special Security Detachment police present in Tongo were in effect an exemplification of the defunct authority of the State, powerless to do anything without the express instruction of the Mende diamond barons. Resource- and land-protection mechanisms through the deployment of civil defence forces has been a notable factor in the gradual fragmentation of Sierra Leone into mineral-based, ethnically aligned, enclaves. Indeed, Mende barons and *kamajoisia* forces were only a late manifestation of a trend that began in the North of the country as far back as 1993, with the mobilisation of predominantly Koranko *tamaboros* by the NPRC to assist with the border war against the RUF.¹⁹ However, it would be wrong to suggest that the Tongo Field chiefs were in total control of their own territorial destiny, simply on account of tenure over diamond deposits. In fact, C. and his peers have continually to interact with a range of secret society hierarchs within their own ethnic terrain in order to maintain their standing in relation to the *kamajoisia*.

6.10 MILITIAS AND CIVIL DEFENCE FORCES IN CONTEXT

The development of an ethnically-aligned civil defence force, derivative of traditions associated with a guild of hunters is not unique to the Mende. Indeed, it is a concept that the Mende were slow to adapt, based on a trend beginning in the early years of the RUF incursion. The following section outlines the nature of some of these other organisations before examining the structure and form of the *kamajoisia* in greater detail. The context in which my information on this topic was collected should be here noted. Between February and May 1997, relationships between local militia groups and the armed forces varied enormously from mutual assistance to outright and violent hostility.

¹⁷ Assembly hall

¹⁸ Lalehun, 25/04/97.

¹⁹ The *tamaboro* were especially relevant, since as specialist professional hunters (rather than miners) many knew the Gola Forest region at first hand. Few, if any, *kamajo* recruits (despite the name and initiation ritual) are full time or specialist hunters (but many have knowledge of mining).

6.11 THE TAMABORO

The RUF incursion initially met little resistance from an unprepared and inexperienced RSLMF. Government soldiers of predominantly urban origin were reluctant to venture off roads and engage their enemy in the bush. Although Sierra Leoneans were successful jungle warfare specialists during the Burma campaign of the Second World War, the army had long since lost its capacity in this area; attempts at probing patrols along the countless bush-paths that criss-cross the interior often resulted in ambush and heavy losses. RUF ambushes, though at times haphazard, were often effective against poorly-led troops with a tendency to cluster for moral support when faced with a disconcerting environment of which they had little understanding.

Capt. S.A.J. Musa sought to address these problems by implementing a centuries-old military solution. Highly experienced Koranko hunters, known as *tamaboro*, were recruited to act as guides and trackers, bringing a sense of greater security to the units with which they served.²⁰ The *tamaboro* are more than merely a guild of hunters; guardians of arcane secrets concerning the ways of the bush, they participate in a lucrative trade in monkey meat to Liberian markets in Gbarnga and Monrovia.²¹ Equipped with well maintained and efficient shot-guns, they are known to be crack-shots, creeping up on their quarry as close as possible (assisted by a range of invisibility medicines) before opening fire. Professional hunters throughout the world concentrate on a low “cartridge-to-kill” ratio, not to emulate the vanity of the golfer but for the maintenance of profit margins. These, however, are not the only capabilities of the *tamaboro*. Members of the group are initiated at puberty and spend much of their early apprenticeship learning combinations of paths in order to travel from one place in the interior to another. Unlike Mende part-time hunters, they are not limited to local terrain, but instead are expected to have an in-depth knowledge of all country in which they operate. Indeed, it seems this early learning serves, in terms of initiation, much as the period London black cab drivers spend in acquiring “The Knowledge”. Without the advantage of topographic interpretation the entire process of the *pursuit of game* becomes

²⁰ See “Juju triumphs in Sierra Leone war”, *New African*, July, 1993.

²¹ Heavy demand among a largely Christian and Animist population has led to hunting out many of the larger, more profitable species such as the Red Colobus (*procolobus*) in Liberia. With a predominantly Muslim population, Sierra Leone’s limited areas of forest still contain monkey stocks. *Tamaboro* operated quite extensively in and around the Gola Forest (a main refuge for the RUF) before the war.

pointless and unviable. Monkeys and other uncommon but mobile species (chimpanzees, for example, long supplied from Sierra Leone for medical research) must be tracked over miles of secondary and primary forest. The arts of camouflage and musketry come into play only for the last few metres of chase and kill.

The arts of the final stages of the hunt are those learnt last during the process of initiation. Money must also be invested in medicine to enable an individual to become invisible, or assume the shape of wild animals. The cost of acquiring these powers is highly prohibitive, ensuring that only the truly gifted and committed ever seek to acquire such esoteric privileges. In Sierra Leone, there is magic and magic -- that of a young Mende *kamajo* drafted in to make up numbers in a local militia can in no way be compared to that of a mature and powerful *tamaboro*.

The appearance of the *tamaboro* in 1993 was met with something of a sensation in the Freetown and Bo press. Stories addressed the quality of *tamaboro* medicine, and several examples of the annihilation of RUF units were described. Typically, *tamaboro* would shape-shift into leopards or chimpanzees and enter RUF camps at night -- unsuspecting rebels would be tied and then savagely mauled to death. Most interestingly, unlike other secret hunting societies, some positions in the *tamaboro* hierarchy are occupied by women, who also participate in combat. It appears that such women act as priestesses of the society's rituals and are empowered to choose young girls for initiation. Much of the early press photographic coverage of *tamaboro* activities featured women members practising magic and patrolling with weapons. The group is not usually garbed in traditional regalia, unlike larger ethnically-based organisations to the south. Instead, attire was often an improvisation on standard military fatigues worn in conjunction with amulets and other ornaments.

The total number of *tamaboro* is small. There might, in all, be one or two thousand such special hunters in the country.²² Kabala is the main Koranko town in northern Sierra Leone and, therefore, the focus of *tamaboro* operations during periods of conflict. RUF attacks on Kabala in 1994 were launched to kill

²² Richards (pers. comm.) tells me that there were never more than two or three such northern (or Guinean) special hunters operating out of the villages on the edge of the Gola Forest he knew at first hand on the eve of the RUF insurgency. Some were immediately active against RUF groups, acting on their own initiative.

key members of the *tamaboro* leadership, suggesting that *tamaboro* successes in the field were causing RUF field commanders some concern.²³ In November 1994, RUF commandos from the Kangari Hills were successful in their endeavour -- a prominent *tamaboro* was murdered in a lightning assault in which two VSO workers were kidnapped. Sankoh made much propaganda out of the apparent inability of *tamaboro* "juju" to affect his fighters, but many remained unconvinced of the superiority of modernity over tradition. Importantly, however, it should be remembered that the *tamaboro* has never been a militia in the true sense of the word. Instead, it should be viewed as an *ad hoc* auxiliary, with numbers reflecting the availability of special hunters with local knowledge. Organisational structure is loosely arranged around sections, wards and villages with a secular and spiritual hierarchy over which the Paramount Chief presides.²⁴

6.12 THE KOROMOKO (COLL.: CAPRAS)

Temne ruling houses of Bai Kafiri Samira, Taqi and Taneki have encouraged the development of the *koromoko* to protect the gold fields of Paki Masabong and Kafe Simira chiefdoms.²⁵ Organisational units tend to be concentrated around Magburaka, Matatoka and Yele, where in 1997 they played an important role in the control of eastern and south-eastern road routes which connected Freetown with Bo/Kenema and Kono. This strategic location has brought *koromoko* groups into continual conflict with rogue army/ULIMO units and RUF battalions that have periodically encamped in the Malal and Kangari Hills.

Koromoko were observed in April 1997 during negotiations for the release of RUF forced-labourers. The group numbered about three hundred and acted under the joint command of Paramount Chief Alimany Kanu II of Kunike Barina Chiefdom and Paramount Chief Bai Sumtumba Osara III of Bonkolenken Chiefdom. The group was holding a number of ex-RUF personnel, the majority non-combatant, who had surrendered to Chief Alimany Bangura II of Kafe Simira Chiefdom. The situation was interesting; the Temne *koromoko* were, at the time, being led by Mohammed Tarawallie, a

²³ It should also be noted that there were many Koranko NCOs in the RSLMF, some of whom were left to bear the brunt of RUF attacks at the war front. Employing their locally-knowledgeable fellow countrymen as guides and scouts must have made sense.

²⁴ Interview with *tamaboro* special hunter, 10/01/97, Freetown

²⁵ Interview, 27/12/96, Freetown

seconded Mende *kamajo* field commander from Bo. There was evidence that some *Koromoko* had previously been in the ranks of the RUF: one young prisoner was able to identify several former RUF combatants he had served with in the Kangari Hills among his captors. The *koromoko* were encamped at Moyampe, 12 miles south of Matatoka.²⁶ The prisoners were all boys under the age of seventeen. There was, however, one exception; a thirty-five year old woman called Jami Tamba. When interviewed, she claimed to have been captured in Manowa, North Kailahun in 1991 and had been taken as a wife by Tamba Kellie, an RUF adjutant.

On this occasion the *koromoko* group appeared extremely well equipped. Dressed in matching ceremonial *ronko* (brown warrior jacket) uniforms, their weapons were the most sophisticated of any observed in use by CDFs and militias during fieldwork. An assortment of good quality assault rifles and RPGs were on display, suggesting that this group was receiving substantial external support from individuals or groups with overseas contacts in the arms trade. The command structure rose to paramount chiefs at its apex and there was no apparent “spiritual” dimension to leadership. The organisation is less of a “hunting society” and more of a guild of traditional warriors in possession of very modern weaponry. As the coup rapidly approached, *koromoko* expansion reflected an increased level of Temne introspection – a clear consolidation of chiefly, localised power²⁷ in the face of an apparent recession of SLPP hegemony. Once again, traditionalism was being mobilised to secure an ethnically-delimited homeland, but in this case the cultural reaction appears to have been linked to an instability inherent in Mende mobilisation, as evident in the rapid increase in numbers of *kamajoisia*.

6.13 THE DO SOA (COLL.: KONGOTOM)

The *Do*, from Soa Chiefdom in Kono, are a small, but powerful civil defence militia that expanded to assist with the protection of the diamond fields. They have operated extensively with expatriate security firms and received some professional training. They are not a hunting society and Hardin (1992) writes:

²⁶ Located on the border between Tane and Bonkolenken Chiefdoms

²⁷ See Wylie, K.C., 1977, *The Political Kingdoms of the Temne*, Africana Publishing Company, New York, London.

“I know very little about another initiation society in the Kono area that is called *Do* (pronounced dô, and which translates “to join”), except that the medicine associated with it, which is called *yaa* or lion, sometimes appears at the funerals of chiefdom elders. *Do* is a society that is specific to Soa chiefdom and may have been present before Poro was introduced.”

As an organisation they are wealthy and relatively well equipped, being funded by both the Kono chiefs and the Lebanese community, whose confidence they enjoy. Soviet-made weaponry has been supplied to them by Russian and Ukrainian businessmen operating in the district. There is no equivalent of a *Kamor* [see below] but the *Kongotom* has a War Council chaired by veteran APC MP Randolph Fili Faboi. Other than straight-forward security activities, they maintain a “plain-clothes” intelligence network that reports on pirate-digging, smuggling and theft. In conjunction with the South African security firm, Executive Outcomes, the *Do Soa* achieved several successes against renegade army units that were habitually raiding digging pits. In one specific instance they were able to provide proof of involvement by RSLMF officers in local armed robberies.²⁸

6.14 KAMAJOISIA OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE, POLITICAL HIERARCHY AND RESOURCES.

Kamajoisia were observed in several different chiefdoms²⁹ and although the general *modus operandi* remained basically the same, regional variations in characteristics were noted. The main body of research into the group was conducted in and around the Kenema area, encompassing Tongo Field and stretching east through Daru,³⁰ Segbwema,³¹ Pendembu,³² Jojoima³³ and Faiama.³⁴ In the far South, groups were observed in and around Zimmi, and further north into the Pujehun area.

²⁸ Interviews, 24/02/97, Koidu Town, Kono

²⁹ Nongowa, Dama, Mandu, Dia, Malema, Bambara, Small Bo, Upper Bambara, Malegohun, Pejewa and Jaluahun Chiefdoms

³⁰ Jawi Chiefdom

³¹ Jaluahun Chiefdom

³² Upper Bambara Chiefdom

³³ Malema Chiefdom

³⁴ Nomo Chiefdom

6.15 KENEMA KAMAJOISIA

The Kenema *kamajoisia* swear allegiance to their paramount leader, Alhaji Brima Bangura. He is the custodian of *kamajo* lore and represents a spiritual and moral zenith within the organisation. At parades and musters of the group, the fighters enter into a dramaturgy of subservience to demonstrate their unfaltering loyalty to his word. This is done by a series of genuflections and exaggerated salutes in a performance of parade-ground militaristic pomp. In accordance with this ritualised drill, the *Kamor* remains stern and aloof, presenting his hand to be kissed by commanders. The effect of this is to demonstrate a level of discipline and loyalty that is perceived to be lacking in both the RUF and the RSLMF. The message is one of moral duty, self-sacrifice and tradition which is typically echoed as a theme by the majority of civil defence militias in Sierra Leone. The intention is to show the power of historically-established cultural capital and its role in shaping an ordered and just society against a backdrop of unpredictable social turmoil.

Immediately beneath the *Kamor* in the hierarchy is the Kenema *kamajoisia* District War Council. This consists of a Chairman and several members. They exist primarily to monitor the overall security situation in the operational sector and make tactical decisions regarding movement and operations of fighters in the area. The majority of their regional intelligence is received from town chiefs and section chiefs who are expected to travel to Kenema and report on a regular basis. For C. [the Section Chief described above], this was a weekly obligation. Tactical decisions are subject to the final approval of the *Kamor* himself. The members of the War Council are all senior *kamajoisia* and generally elderly men of some financial means. The source of this wealth is almost always diamond mining and during lulls in operations many of the younger *kamajoisia* will work as diggers for their patrons. This is a fine arrangement for both parties: the patrons get relatively trustworthy Mende labour and mine security in one neat package that is easily monitored, the diggers receive the going-rate in terms of salaries, but also gain prestige from their position and are given better general care as a direct benefit of their *kamajoisia* membership. It is, however, a symbiotic relationship and, a great deal more than profitable diamond mining depends on the successful implementation of this specialised mode of production. The failure of a level of trust in the process could ultimately lead to a failure of the cohesive forces that bind

and structure the *kamajoisia*. Conversely, the trust that fighters place in the ability of their leaders would be lost in situations of labour exploitation, leading to a catastrophic failure of command and authority downwards through the hierarchy. One experienced *kamajo* opined that, “if you lose trustworthiness, the lore will be ruined”.³⁵ The lure of riches in easily stolen diamonds threatens most relations of trust sooner or later. Whether it is wise to invest so much cultural capital in such an *alaki* (morally worthless) commodity, Mende leaders may yet learn to their cost.

The War Council passes orders to the Organisational Commanders. The duty of the OCs is to plan any operation tactically, taking into account not only offensive aspects but also those of logistical support, intelligence and communications. Logistical support is comprised of transport, rice rations and ammunition supply. Transport is arranged with civilian haulage firms who have local connections with the militia. They will offer fuelled trucks to carry fighters and rice to the battle front and, in the case of the Kenema *kamajoisia*, will return wounded to the hospitals at Daru³⁶ and Kenema. Ammunition supply is arranged by quartermasters who stockpile captured RUF and RSLMF supplies. The more experienced combatants receive the more technologically sophisticated weaponry and are used as shocktroops in combat. Some of these *kamajoisia* have received training in counter-insurgency techniques by European expatriate security operators through the agency of Deputy Minister of Defence, Chief Sam Hinga Norman. Communications, however, remain poor, but the general level of communication among both the army and the RUF is also very bad, leaving the *kamajoisia* at no particular disadvantage.

The Organisational Commanders in turn brief the Senior Commander and his Field Commanders on any specific operation. These are the leaders who will actually manage the fighters in combat. They are in the best position to make tactical refinements concerning the best methods of engaging the enemy. The commanders have a reputation for leading from the front and generally hold the respect of the rank and file. Many have been reported killed in operations - especially during the first major assault on RUF positions in northern Kailahun in January 1997. Commanders are rotated for specific situations - each

³⁵Interview, Segbwema, 21/05/1997.

³⁶ However, during the battle for Tongo Field in late-March 1997, the Nixon Military Hospital at Daru refused to treat wounded *kamajoisia* (Source: ICRC Kenema).

one having a specialist knowledge of a particular area (often that in which he was born and initiated). In this way, the lack of maps is compensated for by the accurate local knowledge of those in command. It must be remembered that the role of the *kamajoisia* is primarily defensive, protecting their own ethnically-determined territory to give them an advantage as an organisation.

Aside from the main group of fighters, there are other assorted 'officers' with specific tasks to perform. The *kamajoisia* maintain their own police force, identified by a red 'KP' brassard on the shoulder in the style of the Military Police. Their duty is to maintain general discipline on the battlefield as well as preventing abuses of the 'lore' such as the drinking of alcohol and the smoking of '*jamba*'. The Kenema *kamajoisia* are more orthodox in these matters than other observed groups and consider it not to be an issue for over-zealousness, but more one of cautious self-preservation. There is a genuine concern that younger recruits who succumb to the temptations of youth may pay for these weaknesses with their lives during combat.³⁷

Along with the KPs are Operational Drivers, Section Leaders, ammunition carriers, cooks and initiators who organise recruitment. The initiators act on a fairly *ad hoc* basis, working on the recommendations of other *kamajoisia* and seeking out possible impersonators who may perform acts of banditry in *kamajoi* guise. Ritual displays of the uncovering of impersonators and "kamabels" are often made at parades.³⁸ The punishment of dismemberment is graphically portrayed as a warning. The maintenance of public support is taken very seriously by the senior members of the *kamajoisia* and it was generally agreed by all *kamajoisia* interviewed that a breakdown in discipline would lead to the loss of this support very rapidly.

6.16 BO KAMAJOISIA

The Bo *kamajoisia* have some noticeably different characteristics from their Kenema counterparts, although the organisational structure is similar. The organisation also has its own Kamor, Eddy

³⁷ Failure to observe aspects of the lore is believed by many to decrease the efficacy of the "bullet-proofing" and invisibility of the individual before battle.

³⁸ The acting-out of dismemberment was observed at a full Kenema *kamajoisia* parade, central Kenema, Saturday, 17th May, 1997.

Massalley. In the past, there has been some animosity between the two groups, much of it concerning the true orthodoxy of the rite, and in certain instances this has degenerated into conflict over resources and spoils. In January 1997,³⁹ there was fighting between the two groups over an RUF diamond cache, which left several *kamajoisia* dead. The diamonds, thought to have originated in Tongo Field, were eventually seized by the Bo *kamajoisia*, leaving the Kenema leadership deeply bitter about their perceived loss. Both groups have continued to view one another with some suspicion.⁴⁰

Doctrinal distinctions between the two groups are often identified by the public when discussing the two groups. The Bo *kamajoisia* are widely reputed to be the more powerful in terms of the supernatural. During interviews, several older members of the Kenema general public stated this to be the case. Stories were often told regarding the distortion of RPG trajectories, the control of bee swarms for flushing out enemies and shape-shifting.⁴¹ Interestingly, the Bo *kamajoisia* are widely perceived as acolytes of a far less rigorous 'lore' and, commonly, many of the senior figures enjoy projecting themselves as big drinkers, *jamba* smokers and *swityays*⁴², all of which was anathema to the more conservative followers of the Kenema rite. One leading Bo *kamajo*, an Organisational Commander, was interviewed in a Kenema bar immediately after the battle for Tongo Field, where he was also a mining supporter. Both he and an associate went out of their way to portray a kind of "Bush Lad" image, bragging about numerous girlfriends and lengthy drinking sessions, certainly contrary to cultural expectations of chastity, abstinence and piety. For the Bo *kamajoisia*, at least, there seems to be a process of symbolic expression which has much in common with the myth and reality of the mediaeval Knights Templar.⁴³

Throughout the early half of 1997, the Bo *kamajoisia* frequently appeared to be generally better equipped than their Kenema counterparts. A greater proportion of fighters were dressed in the traditional *ronko*⁴⁴ cloth tunics, which in the context of the *kamajo* lore, invest the wearer with the

³⁹ Source: Freetown Daily Mail, 25/01/97.

⁴⁰ See Chapter One

⁴¹ Incidents of shape-shifting were reported by Mohammed Gibril (a member of the medical staff at Kenema Govt. Hospital), Tom Tiffa (District Officer for Kenema), Kenneh Charles Lansana (Section Chief of Toktombo Town).

⁴² "Ladies'-men"

⁴³ see Lawrence, C.H. 1984. *Medieval Monasticism*, Longman: pp. 208-211

⁴⁴ A coarse, earthy, locally woven cloth.

supernatural powers outlined above. Younger Kenema *kamajoisia* initiates were often uniformed in plain green, blue and even yellow smocks, without amulets, cowries and charms which are believed to be the receptacles of magical powers [see plates 8 & 9: p.216]. These differences may reflect the extra political and financial assistance given to the Bo *kamajoisia* by their paramount leader, Deputy Defence Minister, Sam Hinga Norman. Norman is believed to have substantial gold and diamond mining interests⁴⁵ in Bagbe, Baoma and Valunia Chiefdoms, although he has remained consistently reluctant to advertise his personal involvement with the industry.⁴⁶ At the time of research, Kenema *kamajoisia* had embarked upon a mass recruitment drive to boost membership of the more junior ranks -- their less ornate dress was presumably dictated by the forces of demand simply outstretching the local, cottage-woven production of *ronko* fabric.

⁴⁵ Interview, 18/01/97

⁴⁶ Much of his personal activity in mining is undertaken in conjunction with expatriate finance (personal communication).

PLATES 8 & 9

KAMAJOISIA ROLL-CALL AND INITIATION BEFORE OFFENSIVE INTO NORTHERN KAILAHUN,

LALEHUN, 20/05/97 (NOTE RECENT INITIATES IN YELLOW CEREMONIAL TUNICS)



6.17 KAMAJOISIA AND SOJA-BOYS-- RESOURCE-RELATED CONFLICT

On the night of 22nd March 1997, violence erupted with an outbreak of intense fighting between 850 RSLMF stragglers illegally encamped in Tongo Field and the Kenema *kamajoisia*. The violence was characteristically 'diamond related' and heavy casualties were taken by both sides. Interestingly, the fighting was much more intense than that which one might expect in a typical RUF / RSLMF contact, particularly in view of what is now known about the intricate sets of relations that developed with the appearance of "sobels" and the subsequent murkiness surrounding loyalty.⁴⁷ The event was essentially a pitched battle over commercially valuable territory providing a Mende elite with much of the economic strength it needs for its political agenda. Interview research was undertaken in Kenema and Mano Junction, 13 miles to the north-east. Many of the data from internally displaced people were understandably confused and often contradictory: the stream of miners and their dependants out of the Tongo area was constant for several days; the centre of Kenema becoming packed full of people with nowhere to go, hundreds of them being forced to sleep rough on the streets until the fighting abated.⁴⁸ On the outskirts of the town, sporadic skirmishing between *kamajoisia* and RSLMF continued for some time. The most complete and credible interview, much of which was later corroborated by another eyewitness, came from a young Mende "outreach" health worker. Employed at the newly opened clinic in the central Tongo area, he was an eye witness to key events.

SK: The whole thing started on Saturday⁴⁹ evening. They had a dance at the "Independent" [a bar in the central market area] where the Kamajors [sic] were running the security. At the end of the dance two soldiers who were there were beaten to death after being accused of theft. In the morning, the matter was reported to the authorities and some of the respective chiefs and elders came to make sure that the situation was calm. That was at about 12 o'clock. I was with this party as a representative from the health centre - we had dealt with the dead soldiers. First we met with the Kamajors at their HQ and then proceeded to the [RSLMF] HQ as there was to be a meeting between both leaderships. Suddenly, at

⁴⁷ See Keen (1995)

⁴⁸ Personal observation, 23/03/97

⁴⁹ 22/03/97

about 1.25 PM the brief meeting was broken up by rapid firing which was very serious [AK & RPG] in the centre of the town. It was a battle between the Kamajors and the soldiers. In the initial exchange of fire, the Kamajors took the heaviest casualties and were forced to retreat to the outskirts of Tongolo. Later under the orders of Lt. Col Conte, I personally supervised the burial of 25 Kamajors as they were beginning to decompose in the heat of the day. Around the area I also found some bodies of soldiers - I counted five - but the fighting went on all day around the town and into the night. During the night, after about 10.00 p.m., we saw some soldiers, down by some trees behind their base, digging graves - the following morning I went down to have a look and saw some fresh soil - a lot; they could have been mass graves.

During this time the army were looting houses, breaking into shops and carting off their loot. Because of the increasing danger and continued fighting around town, I decided to try and make my way back to Kenema. I went down to Lalehun and spent the night with the town chief. In the morning a Kamajor vehicle arrived in Lalehun. The town chief asked them to take me to Kenema as I was not a soldier, just an "NGO". At first they said no, but then agreed that they would, for all my money [Le 8000].

In the course of my journey we came across eight Kamajor checkpoints - they controlled all the road between Tongo and Mano Junction. At each checkpoint they would ask you whether you were a soldier and ask for ID. In fact, they would only speak Mende to you, in order to "baffle" you if you were not Mende by tribe. They were also robbing people of their belongings. Foday Dauda, the son of the Sandema section chief lost all his things, even though he had documentation to prove that he owned all of it. At one of the checkpoints some women were killed after being found to be wives of soldiers. At another checkpoint, to my greatest horror, I came across another problem that involved tribalism. They would ask you whether you were a Mende or Temne or whatever tribe. If you were a Temne by tribe then surely, I am afraid, they would just take care of you.

CF: What do you mean "just take care of you"?

SK: I mean that they would kill you. This is what I found while travelling and I thought it was really terrible.

CF: Did you hear of any Temnes being killed?

SK: Yes. I talked to a boy whose brother was killed. At the checkpoint at the village of Pujehun we found some aggressive arguments involving tribalism. Fortunately, the Temne boy that I spoke to was able to speak good Mende and this saved him. His brother was not able to and this is why he was killed. At the last checkpoint at Lago I met a girl by the name of Haja who had been 'trapped' by Kamajors. They told me that she was the wife of a soldier. They were being really rough with her so I tried to find a Kamajor who had some "experience of education". I told him that she was just a peaceful citizen, an innocent civilian - why should she be killed? It is the husband that is a soldier, she is just a wife to the husband. During this conversation they came to realise that I was an "outreach" worker. As a result of this they said, "OK, we're going to let her go - we don't want you going down to Kenema and telling everyone that we're killing people". All this time I was thinking "Eh, I know that you have been doing that - I have travelled on the road and seen what is going on. I've got information and been through the checkpoints. I know that you are keeping this girl here waiting for the right moment to kill her. Why don't you just let her come with me?" So this is what happened and I brought her with me.

CF: What do you think the soldiers and the Kamajors were fighting over?

SK: Well it might be the "heart" of two things. One, according to what I saw with my own eyes, it looked as if the soldiers wanted to enrich themselves after having not much for a long time. For example, the diamond area (Tongo Field). Here there is a place called "Pump Station" where there are a lot of diamonds. During the peace process the mining operations there have become very *large* [emphasis]. The people have pulled up a lot of gravel, a huge amount which is very productive and full of diamonds. I think this is one of the reasons that they decided to get involved in this battle.

The next reason, I think, is that they really want to try to know each other, who is who -- who is the more powerful -- I think that might be the second reason. During the battle you could hear the

soldiers shouting “Come out if you are man enough, come out!”, and the Kamajors were doing the same. These are the reasons. INTERVIEW ENDS⁵⁰.

This interview took place on the 27th March 1997. The soldiers remained in control of Tongo Field until the night of the 29th March 1997, when they left under the cover of darkness, heading north along an old feeder road towards Kono. From the initial firefight on the 23rd March to the time of their withdrawal they managed to wash nearly all the gravel around the Pump Station area. They left very little behind. Another Mende informant, from central Tongo, was interviewed on the 21st April 1997. He reported that the actual number of RSLMF casualties after the event was found to be much higher – probably over 40 – which would explain the secret night-time burials. Emmanuel, a Tongo-based Mende trader and miner, was able to clarify local views concerning the causes of this specific violent incident. He also displayed popular Mende attitudes towards the activities of an uncontrolled RSLMF and expressed some support for the *kamajoisia*. Interestingly, he also considers the role of the GoSL in the pattern of violence and in doing so, makes a short appraisal of the events in question and goes so far as to suggest an increased risk of a military coup. As events after the date of this interview showed, his analysis of the general political situation and its subsequent developments proved to be fairly accurate:

CF. So how is Tongo now?

E. It is quiet. The area is being controlled by the kamajors [sic] and the SSDs.

CF. Is mining going on in the area at the moment?

E. No -- there has been a temporary suspension of all mining activity by the local authorities until the situation has completely stabilised.

CF. After the incident of the 23rd to the 29th of March, what was left in the way of property and gravel in the area?

⁵⁰ Translated from Krio.

E. Nothing -- the soldiers looted everything. They were able to control the area until they had washed all the gravel. When the kamajors finally re-entered the area all the gravel had been washed around the "pump-station" area.

CF. So where did the soldiers go?

E. They left during the night of the 29th March and moved along the old feeder road to Kono. Here some were rounded up by the SSDs and the South Africans, but others got away and made their way towards the Mile 91 -- Masiaka area. Here there was more looting -- there were some attacks on gold mines.

CF. Where are these soldiers now?

E. Since the fighting between the soldiers and the kamajors on the 17th April, the kamajors are in control of Mile 91. There is a military compound just outside where the soldiers are camped -- they cannot go out. If any of the two groups meet they will fight.

CF. How did the incident of the 17th April begin?

E. The soldiers controlling one of the village check-points between Masiaka and Mile 91 caught three kamajors on a track and proceeded to beat them. One kamajor escaped into the bush and returned with a kamajor unit. Some soldiers were killed. It was after this incident that the soldiers withdrew to the compound outside Mile 91.

CF. After the incident at Tongo, how many casualties was the CHO⁵¹ aware of?

E. There were 29 kamajors dead but over 40 soldiers.

⁵¹ Community Health Officer

CF. Forty [!], I understood that there were no more than ten.

E. No, that is not true -- the soldiers hid and buried their dead at night. They did not want the public knowing that they had taken heavy casualties.

CF. So what do you think the solution to this current problem is?

E. There is only one -- the government must order all the soldiers back to barracks and disarm them.

CF. But this is easier said than done -- the soldiers know that they can get rich through banditry.

E. Then the fighting will continue -- the kamajors will continue to kill the bad soldiers so their numbers will gradually decrease. Perhaps this is what the GoSL really wants -- all those soldiers are armed and dangerous, they bear grudges and feel that they have been unfairly treated. They did well out of their "games"⁵² with the rebels -- they got a taste of riches. If they all went back to barracks they could organise and overthrow Kabbah. Maybe Freetown prefers them wild in the bush.

CF. So what about the large growth in the number of *kamajors*?

E. It is for the chiefs to control them -- they are Mende people protecting their land. Many of the soldiers are other "nationalities".⁵³ INTERVIEW ENDS

It seems that the army was keen for the *kamajors* not to be aware of the actual number of fatalities sustained, in an attempt to present themselves as a superior fighting force. Total *kamajors* dead were put at 29. There are no reliable figures for civilians murdered on the roads, although medical relief agencies⁵⁴ treated civilian casualties. At least two women were admitted with serious knife wounds,

⁵² See Keen (1995)

⁵³ Ethnic groups

⁵⁴ ICRC [Svante Yngrot, Relief Delegate] and Merlin [Dr. Simon Mardel, Medical Director]

which were dismissed by local police as shrapnel wounds – one of these women later died in post-surgical recovery. There is clear evidence that (ethnically-related) murders were taking place and that the majority of the soldiers appear to have been assumed by the *kamajoisia* to be Temne, Limba and Koranko or, perhaps, just “Northerners”. Atrocities committed against women dispel any notion that the Tongo conflict was fought over strategic objectives; much of the motivation was undoubtedly coloured by the way that ethnicity is mobilised (and has been since Siaka Stevens) for the pursuit of diamonds.

The entire episode was symptomatic of a conflict waiting to happen between discredited elements of the RSLMF and the Mende-oriented *kamajoisia*. The Tongo Field supporters lost a season’s gravel and were unable to resume production before the AFRC coup on 25th May 1997. Indeed, the sole beneficiaries of this action seem to have been the Lebanese buyers located in Kono. After being driven out of Tongo Field, many of the soldiers made their way towards Sefadu and were permitted to camp at one of the old, disused NDMC compounds there. The majority, who had little experience of diamond sales, were persuaded to part with their goods for a fraction of the market value by wily buyers. The bitterness felt by the Mende leadership towards the RSLMF degenerated into a full-scale *kamajoisia* assault on Brigade Headquarters in Kenema on May 3rd 1997;⁵⁵ the incident began with the disruption of the Kenema *kamajoisia* Kamor’s wedding by elements of the RSLMF.

6.18 CONCLUSION

Chapters Five and Six have brought out the extent to which the diamond industry in Sierra Leone depends on the activity and agency of indigenous Sierra Leoneans. Basic structure and continuity is greatly dependent on these local players, even though the landscape is in a continual state of dynamic change. Recently, the general diamond mining environment in Kono, Zimmi and Tongo Field has become politically and economically more highly dangerous for industrial and market participants. Complex and protracted endemic conflict, initially motivated by political and economic concerns, has begun alarmingly to encompass issues of ethnicity. The problem is not limited to the experiences of the outreach worker on the road to Kenema, but threatens to envelop others who have commercial interests

⁵⁵ Personally witnessed.

in this mineral-rich, high-stakes world. During the height of the fighting in Kenema, soldiers sought to target members of the Lebanese community. A significant amount of Lebanese property in the centre of town was extremely badly damaged and some individuals were dragged from their residences and murdered.⁵⁶ The same pattern of violence was repeated in Freetown during the course of the bloody AFRC coup of May 25th, 1997.⁵⁷

However, the fact remains that some people will continue to seek to conduct trade in these regions, regardless of the significant level of personal risk. Individuals and groups involved have no alternative other than to develop strategies that will afford protection for the assets and lives of those who are engaged in the activity. The simple problem is that more and more people are interested in fewer and fewer diamonds; Kono no longer offers the same opportunities for prospective miners. A Tongo Field Mende chief believes that “it is difficult to make money there [in Kono] now, you have to dig very deep and that is an expensive expat operation. In Tongo there are shallow and rich deposits, much easier to mine.”⁵⁸ Thus geological conditions, coupled with pressures from the economy, and the economic catastrophe contrived by successive governments and regimes in Sierra Leone, have combined to establish a fragile and highly volatile socio-political setting. Indeed, much of the AFRC/PA/*kamajoisia* conflict of late-1997 and early-1998 was focused on attempts to seize control of Tongo Field and, in the course of several months, the area changed hands many times. The rag-tag forces of Johnny Paul Koroma and Sam “Maskita” Bockarie were keen to extract their share of the riches that lie beneath “Pump Station”, whilst Chief Sam Hinga Norman and the combined forces of the Mende *kamajoisia* tried desperately to prevent them from doing so. The cost in civilian lives of these actions remains unclear, but is thought by relief agencies to be high⁵⁹.

For the time being, at least, the security prognosis for rural Sierra Leone remains decidedly poor, but without a doubt, diamonds will continue to be mined and sold. In Kono, less than reputable expatriate security firms will enforce a degree of stability in a region slowly becoming dominated by small,

⁵⁶ At least three Lebanese were killed during the fighting – according to my sources all Maronite shopkeepers (interview, 10/05/97).

⁵⁷ One of the victims was the eldest son of Afro-Lebanese entrepreneur Jamil Said Mohammed.

⁵⁸ Lalehun, 24/04/97.

⁵⁹ Conciliation Resources, Inter-agency Reports, various, July-October, 1997.

shadowy multi-nationals and powerful, street-wise Shi'ite supporters operating networks of trusted friends and family to oversee their enterprises. It is a moot point whether the industrial world succeeding towards the working out of Kono's alluvial diamonds will ever move towards Tongo Field and Zimmi. In these other two diamond fields it is more likely that we will see further development of a newly apparent pattern in which, in the absence of security and more orthodox capital, a Mende land-owning elite attempts to draw upon local "cultural capital" to structure a quasi-militarised diamond-digging fraternity modelled on the *kamajoisia*. Whether diamonds will corrupt and corrode local values to the detriment of community cohesion remains to be seen, but the risk is high. This brings us to the question, "is use of cultural values to structure a risky and volatile trade opportunistic or sustainable?" Cultural values may underpin commerce, but for rural Mende, commerce is not the sum of life. How all four communities examined in this thesis handle the risks and opportunities opened up where culture and diamonds converge is the topic of a final chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SURVIVING IN DIAMONDS: CAN CULTURE HELP?

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Far-reaching social, geographical and technical transformations have been occurring in the Sierra Leonean diamond industry since the ADMS introduced private participation, but the most marked and radical changes have been very recent, and the process is as yet very incomplete. Low-intensity conflict now endemic in the diamond fields has had great implications for the conduct of contemporary trade, placing intense strategic and tactical demands on all those involved. This chapter is an attempt to draw together the numerous factors contributing to the current political and economic positions of the groups described in earlier chapters, with some consideration of the impact of multi-national ingression on the industrial format. An underlying concern is with the major question posed at the outset. Are there alternatives to a stripped-down “devil take the hindmost” rational choice approach to exploiting diamonds? Do the social arrangements and cultural values of the land owners and trading diaspora count for anything, or will “get rich quick” opportunities corrode all long-term objectives?

7.2 KONO AND THE LEBANESE

Central to the processes of industrial and commercial transformation in Kono has been the emergence of competition between the Shi'ite and Maronite diaspora communities, brought about as much by historical factors and cultural orientation as by increased scarcity of resources. These transformations have been unfolding for some time, but the collapse of the APC patrimony and the failure of successive administrations responsibly to manage alluvial deposits has resulted in an accelerated relocation of trade and industrial centres (see Reno 1995). Maronite influence in Kono has declined significantly, to the extent that the diaspora community is no longer in a position to invest in any future generations of supporters and dealers. Young, highly educated Maronites, disillusioned by a lack of suitable professional opportunity and low availability of consumer items with which to fulfil their refined material aspirations, have chosen to quit Sierra Leone in search of more sophisticated and cosmopolitan lifestyles. Meanwhile, elements of the Shi'ite community have weathered recent conflict and recession relatively better, improving their hold over the industry by doggedly pursuing a politically-oriented

longer-term strategy. Some attempt is now made to relate these transitions to some current anthropological ideas about the cultural orientation of enclaves and groups oriented to individualist or hierarchical social values.

7.3 CULTURAL THEORY -- ENCLAVE AND HIERARCHY

Douglas (1993) describes an enclave as a social unit “which maintains a strong boundary but unlike the hierarchy it tends to be egalitarian, and so to have a weakly articulated structure”. Wildavsky (1984) refers to the enclave as an “egalitarian group” and Rayner (1982) uses the term “egalitarian collective”. These social theorists stress the sectarian nature of the enclave, noting that characteristically, the group is typically a dissenting minority, principally concerned with protecting itself from perceived external threats to its fragile authority. In religious terms, enclavists are usually monotheistic, and Douglas (1993), in an examination of postexilic ancient Jewish communities,¹ notes a tendency towards millenarianism. Richards (1996) has argued the youthful incipient “society” formed within RUF forest camps also has some “enclave” features (e.g. attracting and maintaining members through egalitarian redistribution of commodities). Communal sharing of goods minimises jealousy and distinction between individual members of the group.

Enclave societies often display tendencies towards factionalisation and Rayner (1982) has noted that contemporary and historical collectives show a propensity to sub-divide from the parent group into brother enclaves. Importantly, Douglas adds that these schisms are often acrimonious, and that “enclaves tend to have more anger against their separated brethren than against the outside enemy”, with each faction attacking the moral position of the other. Enclave groups are also aniconic by definition, viewing magic and magical images with suspicion and disdain. This antipathy is derived from the looseness and ambiguity of internal authority structures, fundamentally vulnerable to fragmentation and the desertion of members. The power of godhead transcends any mundane tangible, artificial representation. Thus, the individual enclave member is unable to expect the miraculous intervention of a supreme being on his exclusive behalf. Instead, worship is selfless, focusing on the

¹ Prior to the destruction of the Second Temple

well-being and preservation of the group as a whole. Aversion to idolatry is a means of avoiding the rise of rival cults internally and acts as a control mechanism to prevent subversion of fragile authority.

If the RUF is “enclavist” in tendency, there are various possibilities why this is so. It may be circumstantial, even accidental (Richards, 1998). But as we have seen, diamonds are an important part of the story of the war in Sierra Leone. Could it be the case that diamonds are “selective” of enclave dispositions? Like Judaism, Shi’a Islam enfolds within its history a strong element of enclave organisation and values. Could the contingencies of diamonds select for some of these organisational characteristics, explaining the greater potential of Shi’a diamond groups (not to mention the RUF) as mining communities. Historically, the sect emerged as a dissident, political protest movement, opposed to the spiritual and temporal authoritarianism of the Sunni *Umma* hierarchy. The martyrdom of Hussein at Karbala in 680 AD is the key point of historical reference for the enormous value Shi’ites attribute to self-sacrifice on behalf of the greater community. Monotheistic and aniconic, the characteristic heterogeneity of Shi’a Islam has been encouraged and facilitated by the doctrine of “concealment” or *taqiya*. Under persecution, Shi’ites are permitted to disguise their beliefs if it is thought that exposure could lead to the physical endangerment of either community or individual. This survival strategy has enabled dispersed Shi’ite populations to embrace aspects of local, non-Islamic religions, creating hybrid sub-sects often viewed by Sunnis and other Shi’ites as heretical (see Chapter Three). Interestingly, however, this is dialectical to the methods employed by the RUF to maintain membership of its own community and undermines others. The movement expands by sending out infiltrators and spies to live in villages or towns for considerable periods, while carefully disguising their beliefs. Richards (1996) has shown that in the case of RUF child combatants, the routine tattooing and branding of recruits is a highly effective means of preventing defection in a conflict in which appalling atrocities are committed by all participants. Indeed, it is this indelible badge that declares and consolidates their defection from the “corrupt” hierarchy of patrimonial society to the “honest” egalitarian enclave. The process is designed to be irreversible – typically, violent punishment at the hands of both hierarchy and enclave awaits any who attempt to renege on this transition.²

² Creating mechanisms to facilitate the reversal of these processes is the core issue for the rehabilitation of young fighters.

Although there are three clerical ranks within Shi'ism, none is obtained on the basis of formal appointment in the context of a structured hierarchy. The tenure of positions requires a level of credibility that can only be derived from popular support and consensus. Whether *Mullah*, *Mujtahid* or *Ayatollah*, the unsalaried individual must generate financial sponsorship from networks of patrons, pupils and supporters in order to pursue further learning at centres of religious study. As with all enclave groups, the formal structures appear to be weak. However, the informal nature of religious organisation and leadership is characteristically very pervasive in Shi'a societies. This essentially political influence, expressed in conjunction with *taqiya*, can be operated as an extremely powerful vehicle for social mobilisation.

The Imami Twelvers, to which the South Lebanese Shi'ites and their diaspora belong, hold the millenarian belief in the "Hidden Imam", a charismatic, otiose cleric poised to reappear in the community and "redress injustices and return the Muslim community to its proper course" (Eickelman, 1989). For the South Lebanese Imamis, and their Sierra Leone diaspora, Imam al-Sadr has embodied this notion of community-serving self-sacrifice and continues to lead by the prestige derived from the mythologisation of his own mysterious and contentious disappearance. Although essentially secular, the Amal political movement founded by the Imam has sought to achieve social justice and civil rights for the Shi'ite community in Lebanon, and does so with the continued assistance of community-minded diaspora. Reflecting the religious organisation of its membership, Amal is a highly politicised egalitarian collective, fundamentally millenarian in expectation and demarcated by a rigid boundary of ethnicity to protect its membership from exploitation by the Lebanese State, Israel and the *fiida'iyyin* (Norton, 1987). As Rayner (1982) and Douglas (1993) predict for enclaves in general, the South Lebanese Shi'ites have become factionalised; a proportion of the Amal membership has deserted the movement to join the pro-Iranian, *Sharia*-oriented Hizb Allah. Chapter Three demonstrated the structural weaknesses of authority within Amal; political and military decisions are often undertaken in locally-specific contexts and can be contradictory (Norton, 1987). But there may be reason to suppose

that the inwardness and self-reliance associated with “enclave” training are quite highly functional to “surviving” in the “dog-eat-dog” world of the alluvial diamond trade.³

7.4 THE MARONITES AND HIERARCHICAL SOCIETY

Douglas (1993) describes the hierarchy as a “potentially stable cultural type. It produces a strong boundary round its population, and a strongly articulated, self-repeating structure, with distinctive subdivisions.” In essence, the hierarchy exists as an encompassing whole, accommodating its members who characteristically make collective claims on one another and emphasise the vital importance of defending their mutual collectivity. As with enclave societies, hierarchical community claims are afforded priority over the individual. The hierarchy is based on social stratification, making provision for all levels of membership. The constant threat of internal and external exclusion acts as a coercive and cohesive force at the centre of the social group. It is through this stratification that stability is achieved; a central core binds and consolidates the group, accumulating resources and generating power. These elements act as incentives for members to remain part of the group whilst simultaneously attracting new membership to be compartmentalised and assimilated into the hierarchical structure (Douglas, 1993).

The hierarchy is also prone to internal factionalisation and acute rivalry as sub-groups coalesce to compete for resources and power. Mars (1982) notes that this competition often gives rise to anti-social activity as established notions of morality are forsaken by individuals in search of material gain and social advancement. Rayner (1982) demonstrates that hierarchies are obliged by their encompassing nature to tolerate ineffective members as well as social parasitism.⁴ They must for, typically, individual membership of the group is invariably permanent. Not surprisingly, hierarchical religions tend to focus on celebrating the renewal of the hierarchical social fabric, acknowledging the continued progression of members through the cultural framework. These processes are expressed richly through complex

³ In work-in-progress (Fithen & Richards, 1999) an attempt is being made to suggest that the RUF is a quite systematic attempt to learn some of the lessons of Shi'a differential effectiveness in the world of diamonds, and that RUF leader Foday Sankoh sees himself as some kind of secular “Hidden Imam” breaking free of the tribal factionalism of the land owners.

⁴ By contrast, the “enclave” stresses “mechanical” solidarity (in Durkeimian terms) in which every member must play a full part; one RUF cadre member has spoken on record about his defection in terms of not being able “to keep up” with group demands (Peters & Richards, 1998).

symbolism and iconography. Individuals are able to decipher intricate texts concerning power relations and group expectations of those in positions of authority. So powerful and entrenched are these cultural institutions that social theorists have remarked on the unique occurrence of self-mockery that exists in hierarchy. The function of authority depends heavily on communications that run between the top and bottom of the social structure. Failures of authority invariably correlate with failures of communication.

7.5 THE MARONITES AS HIERARCHY

The fifth century Council of Chalcedon was an attempt by the early Eastern churches to establish theological orthodoxy through hierarchical control. Although the Maronite Church did not completely emerge until the eighth century, the influence of Rome in the region was already growing. By the twelfth century, the Maronite Church, increasingly threatened by the Egyptian Fatimids and the Saljuk Turks, was forced to sacrifice some of its independence in return for Crusader State protection. This necessary submission to the Apostolic See initiated a long process towards formalised union with Rome, culminating in full ultramontanism towards the beginning of the seventeenth century. Theological scholarship at the Papal-sponsored Maronite school sought to revise the historical position of the church and contributed to the establishment of elite lineages that claimed descent from Frankish and Carolingian origins (Moosa, 1986). Rome and the Maronite patriarchy approbated this official history which was presented as a basis that obliged French protection of the community. Diplomatic ties between the Maronites and Paris brought increased Roman Catholic influence; religious orders established schools and hospitals in the Mount Lebanon region from which successive generations of the community have benefited.

Trade links with Europe and the protection of the Druze al-Mani Amirs consolidated the economic position of the Maronites who were encouraged to expand their geographical territory. This was achieved largely through the political agency of the Maronite Church. The conversion to Maronitism by the Shihabi dynasty reinforced the political hierarchy and further enlarged the domain of the community. The inter-confessional conflicts of the 1840s and 1860s led to an Ottoman-brokered peace settlement that favoured considerably the Maronite community (Randall, 1983). Maronite elites

remained in possession of Mount Lebanon, governing a large population of Maronite peasantry. Ottoman political reforms greatly increased the powers of these elites and generated competition by rival clans for control of land and resources. The end of the Great War brought the Maronite *zu'ama* considerable control over a French-mandated Lebanon and the valuable trade networks that passed through the key ports of Sidon and Tyre. After the Second World War, the combined efforts of Church and elite authority secured important political influence in the nascent independent state. French support during the formulation of the 1943 National Pact ensured Maronite control over key governmental positions but laid the foundations for long-term inter-clan rivalry that has endured to the present day (Moosa, 1986).

The beginning of the Lebanese Civil war in 1975 saw these rivalries intensify as clans of varying political opinion and affiliation fought bloody feuds to secure the overall leadership of the community. Elite clans, wielding substantial patrimonial power, fought bitterly for territorial and constituent control. In the midst of this internecine conflict, the Church too, found itself split between a tradition-bound, northern clan-supporting Patriarchy and the politically radical Phalangist Order of Maronite Monks (Randall, 1983). These secular and religious schisms throughout the hierarchy of the Maronite community proved to be highly damaging to the long-term political strategy of the community. This factionalisation has been reflected in diaspora communities throughout West Africa. Van der Laan (1975) shows that rivalries and conflicts between the El-Metn and Tleill clans in Sierra Leone have, in the past, required external intervention and arbitration. It is interesting to note here that both groups will occasionally intermarry with the Rahbe Greek Orthodox clan, but not usually with each other (van der Laan, 1975). The organisation of Maronite clans is very close to the Mediterranean "model" of patrilineal hierarchy described by Gellner (1977).

7.6 THE CURRENT IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL TYPOLOGY FOR THE SIERRA LEONEAN DIAMOND INDUSTRY.

7.6a THE SHI'ITES

From evidence collected during fieldwork, it is clear that the networks existing between South Lebanese Shi'ites and the Shi'ite diaspora community in Sierra Leone have been maintained and cultivated. In overall form they have changed little over the last twenty years. Indeed, it is apparent that these relationships have been strengthened by the Amal struggle during the Lebanese Civil War.⁵ Interviews show that Shi'ites in the diamond fields are fully aware of their social obligations and, for the most part, are keen to assist their people in any way that they can. This community spirit is a theme that is continually emphasised and reiterated, much in line with cultural theory's claims about the "mechanical" solidarity of enclave groups. Proactive links between Amal and Sierra Leonean Shi'ite diaspora were formalised with Imam al-Sadr's visit to Freetown in 1967. This level of religious and political communication has been sustained by subsequent visits by other clerical activists over the years, affirming the importance afforded to the diaspora community by the spiritual side of the Amal leadership (van der Laan, 1975).

The succession of Nabih Berri to the leadership of the movement has served to reinforce this coalition of like-minded segments among the Shi'ite diaspora. Born in Sierra Leone, many key figures in the Sierra Leonean Shi'ite community are familiar with his family. This association has played an enormously important role in the acquisition of funds for Amal during periods of political and economic crisis. Diaspora support during the Lebanese Civil War assisted greatly with resource accumulation, both for the support of civilian populations and the maintenance of militias. Importantly, this intra-Shi'ite economic flow freed Amal from the control and influence of external Arab sponsorship (Norton and Schwedler, 1994). Without a doubt, this degree of flexibility has been a significant factor in Amal's success as a moderate, populist, reform-oriented organisation. As a result of this, Amal has been able to

⁵ See Chapter Four

choose its friends with some care, avoiding submission to the unwanted manipulations of regional benefactors.

Inevitably, however, this level of self-determination generated conflict within the Amal leadership and the Shi'ite community at large. Primarily, the rift has occurred between the pro-Syrian Berri-led secular moderates and pro-Iranian fundamentalist militants (Norton and Schwedler, 1994). The Amalist desideration for rightful Shi'ite representation in a pluralist Lebanese democracy has been met with disappointment and opposition in Tehran. The Iranian Revolutionary Council has consistently urged the South Lebanese Shi'ites to opt for an independent Islamic Republic, ruled by the *Sharia* (Norton, 1987). Amal's refusal to adopt this stance led to the foundation of the break-away Hizb Allah in the early-1980s. Hizb Allah have consistently attempted to usurp Amalist influence in South Lebanon through the implementation of Iranian-financed reform programmes. These have been well funded and have placed enormous pressure on Amal's resources to compete. Although much of this competition has focused on the "hearts and minds" of potential followers, Amal and Hizb Allah militias have engaged in heavy fighting for territorial control. This conflict, extending through the late-1980s into the early-1990s, was finally brought to an end by a Syrian-brokered peace agreement, but rivalries in the sphere of regional reform continue. Hizb Allah offensives into the Israeli Security Zone have only succeeded in bringing retaliatory strikes on Shi'ite settlements in South Lebanon.⁶

The evidence presented in Chapter Four suggests that the loyalties of the Sierra Leonean diaspora remain with Amal. The characteristically liberal nature of the community precludes mainstream fundamentalist support. It would seem that prior to the AFRC coup, material assistance to Amal had been scaled down but, nevertheless, Amalist support for Berri's populism has remained overt in the businesses and residences of Kono and Kenema. With respect to this, it is reasonable to suppose that any networks of financial support that exist currently serve to resist the growth of pro-Iranian fundamentalism within the Lebanese Shi'ite community. The purpose of this support will be to preserve the Amalist political position in South Lebanon by offering reformist incentives in attempts to prevent the defection of socially vulnerable members to Hizb Allah.

⁶ See Appendix C in Collings ed. (1994)

For the Sierra Leonean Shi'ite diaspora, the moderate Amalst position towards Israel has been beneficial in trade terms. Any swing by the community towards pro-Iranian fundamentalism would be incompatible with the trade contacts that link Shi'ite diamond men and the predominantly Orthodox Jewish market to which they sell in Antwerp and the United States. Business relations between these two diaspora groups are acknowledged mutually to be good.⁷ Long-established business contacts are considered valuable and are carefully maintained and preserved. Without the trust and credit central to these partnerships, the diamond industry would be unable to function effectively. Although the principal strata of the global market are highly ethnicised, commercial and social interaction at interfaces must take place. Ethnic and political tolerance is vital to the organisation of these types of relayed trade networks.⁸ Although the details must await later exposition (Fithen & Richards, forthcoming), in theoretical terms we might conclude that both Orthodox Jews and Shi'ite diamond families in Kono have found ways of stabilising their "enclave" organisation and values so that they can continue to function in a complex and untrusting world. Introverting social values makes much sense in a world of violent opportunism. In diamonds (as perhaps in drugs and arms) sectarianism works.

7.6b THE MARONITES

The Maronites in Sierra Leone can be sub-divided into two rival hierarchies (van der Laan, 1975). The Tleill group, whose origins lie in the far North of Lebanon, have been linked to the pro-Syrian hierarchical clans that have traditionally controlled territory north-east of Tripoli. Conversely, the El-Metn group, with origins in the Beirut region, have favoured the pro-Israeli, Phalangist politics of the Gemayels. The Lebanese Civil War certainly strained relations between these two diaspora.⁹ This lack of unity has prevented the formulation of a consolidated Maronite strategy in Sierra Leone. Inter-clan conflict has been problematic since independence and has, at times, required the intervention of Lebanese Maronite diplomacy. On occasion, these disputes have degenerated into violence, reflecting the intensity of political feeling that has existed in Lebanon.¹⁰

⁷ Various interviews (Kono and Kenema, Feb.–May 1997; London, June 1998)

⁸ Meillassoux, Cohen, Curtin et. al. in Meillassoux ed. (1971).

⁹ See Chapter Four

¹⁰ Randall (1983), van der Laan (1975) and various interviews, Jan– May 1997.

Maronite decline in Sierra Leone has been a rapid process brought about by falling levels of community investment capital and disrupted markets. Although the community has been heavily involved in mining, flirtations with other areas of trade and industry have been economically disastrous for many major Maronite players (Reno, 1995). These failures have curbed the ability of Maronite elites to maintain lesser Maronite clients (an essential aspect of their hierarchy), leading in turn to increased weaknesses in the socio-economic fortunes of the community. Investment loss and the resultant spiral of debt has greatly affected patterns of potential Maronite investment in the diamond sector. This situation has been exacerbated by the RUF incursion. Maronite capital generated by mining successes in the late-1960s and 1970s was squandered in over-ambitious attempts to create a region-leading tourist industry. Hotel construction and resort development was largely financed with capital moved from the diamond sector and reinforced with loans from Beirut-based investment banks (Reno, 1995). Much of this business was undertaken in partnership with politically insecure members of the moribund APC government. The attempted coup to oust J.S. Momoh severely destabilised the elite commercial equilibrium as many key investors fell from patrimonial favour. Investment capital pledged for the development of the tourist industry failed to materialise and the many half-built villas and complexes that litter the coastline bear testimony to this. Increased levels of RUF violence and the excesses of the NPRC were fatal blows for tourism. Holiday-makers stayed away and by 1993 most hotels were unable to remain trading.

Maronite players had expected the tourist industry to be a genuine success, generating millions of dollars of foreign currency which could then be reinvested in the diamond sector. Construction programmes would invigorate secondary trades in building materials and luxury consumables, the import of which was predominantly controlled by the community anyway.¹¹ In effect, it was a strategy to see off Shi'ite competition focused essentially on produce-trade and mining. Backed up by significant capital fluidity, the Maronites would once again be able to exert their influence over the diamond fields. However, inter-clan competition and the "cheating" that Douglas (1993) shows to be endemic in

¹¹ See Chapter Four

hierarchical societies ensured that the long-term plan was deeply flawed and vulnerable to external threats.¹²

It was, perhaps, the cosmopolitan aspirations of the Maronite community that encouraged the vision of Sierra Leone as a fashionable tourist destination, complete with casinos, clubs and expensive European restaurants. Had the venture been a success, younger generation Maronites might well have wished to stay and enjoy life in very agreeable surroundings. In the early 1990s, there was evidence that this had been considered by some as a viable and potentially lucrative option. Many small enterprises that catered for a wealthy French clientele were established around some of the more up-market hotels. Offering scuba diving, sailing and in-land safaris, these seasonal businesses were relatively successful, encouraging some young Maronite entrepreneurs to return to Sierra Leone from Europe and take advantage of the economic opportunities and the attractive life-style. However, as each rainy season passed and the political situation deteriorated, fewer tourists and fewer tour operators returned.¹³

Chapter Four demonstrated the reluctance of young, European-educated Maronites to pursue careers in the diamond industry, deterred by the dangers and hardships of life in the bush and increased Shi'ite market domination. Diamonds no longer offer the guaranteed returns that were once easily earned; instead, ruthless competition for profit through highly skilled market-knowledge and negotiation have become the prerequisites for commercial success. It is a very much "hands-on" enterprise demanding a level of personal commitment that is often beyond those who have become accustomed to more sophisticated and secure ways of living.

7.7 LEBANESE DIASPORA COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY IN KONO DISTRICT IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE AFRC COUP.

It is argued that Maronite activity in the Kono diamond industry has been in decline since the early-1980s. This process has been accelerated by ill-considered community outlay on construction and tourism projects, leading to a dearth of available Maronite investment capital for reinvestment in the

¹² In this case, political and economic

¹³ Interviews, Lakka Feb.–May 1997.

diamond sector. As this process has unfolded, Shi'ite consolidation has occurred quickly, taking advantage of Maronite socio-economic weaknesses. Using pressurisation and out-bidding tactics to secure concessions, the Shi'ites have also embarked on ambitious feats of engineering to exploit riverine deposits that were previously inaccessible. In Kono during early-1997, Shi'ite supporters outnumbered Maronites considerably, the demographic shift being far more apparent than it had been four years previously.¹⁴ Principal Shi'ite players, supported by extended family groups, control the majority of the market and make executive decisions concerning commercial strategy. These individuals maintain large local networks from their own ethnic group, whilst simultaneously drawing in patrimonies of Maronites and Africans to secure trading opportunities and reinforce market position.¹⁵

The AFRC coup in 1997, and the internal security crisis that followed, had severe implications for many Shi'ites in the diamond industry. Lebanese property suffered widespread damage and financial loss was enormous. As it became clear that no immediate Nigerian solution was forthcoming, the vast majority of Shi'ites and Maronites were evacuated, often at great expense. Many of the families who boarded the airliners bound for Beirut were in extremely vulnerable financial circumstances. A recession-weakened economy, losses incurred during the course of the war and the costs of evacuation have ruined less-wealthy Maronites and Shi'ites alike.¹⁶ As security conditions in the interior have since failed to improve significantly, it is likely that many of these families will not return to Sierra Leone. In post-civil war Lebanon, opportunities to start new lives are more enticing.

Incredibly, however, some Shi'ites in Kono remained where they were for the duration of the AFRC/PA regime.¹⁷ These market leaders dispatched their dependants to safety, assessed their environment, considered possible threats and opportunities and formulated rational strategies to exploit the situation in which they found themselves. The Shi'ites in Kono have become greatly condensed, with those that remain forming a group of particularly adventurous and skilful marketeers and negotiators. Living under the umbrella protection of South African security firms and amenable local officials, Shi'ite

¹⁴Personal observation, Kono 1993.

¹⁵ See Chapter Two

¹⁶ CR WAIN, various July–Oct., 1997.

¹⁷ Personal communications, June 1997–Feb. 1998.

dealers were able to buy up diamonds dug and looted by AFRC/PA personnel from abandoned mines with commandeered plant. Sources claim that Shi'ite players made arrangements for hard currency to enter the country overland, passing through the porous border with Guinea.¹⁸ This money is used to purchase illicitly produced diamonds at a fraction of their market value. For these Shi'ite buyers, the conditions were perfect: they constituted the only real access to international markets; their clients had little practical knowledge concerning the true value of diamonds and ECOMOG had conveniently blockaded the country to keep out all but the most determined of foreign competitors.¹⁹

The profits made by those that stayed behind are likely to have been great, establishing them as the new core of a radically-changed, post-AFRC market-place. In a Kono desperately short of available concessions, this highly distilled group possesses sufficient financial and cultural capital to pool resources and invest privately in high-return operations like riverine coffer dam extraction.²⁰ These expensive, but potentially high-yielding projects were previously the preserve of foreign companies and a few of the leading Lebanese players. Viable industrial participation today, and in the future, will require substantial capital reserves and expert knowledge of the business. The days of the small, independent miner in Kono are over, but the hard core of Shi'ite enclavist introversion and "mechanical" solidarity appears to have helped keep in being a group of diaspora diamond traders where all others have fled an incomprehensible "anarchy". In later work we hope to show how it takes an enclavist to know an enclavist. It seems the Shi'ites in Kono may have some inkling where the RUF is coming from.

7.8 KONO AND THE MULTI-NATIONALS

Other than a condensed core of predominantly Shi'ite supporters and buyers who continue to be based in Kono, multi-national companies are set to remain in the area for some time to come. The form of multi-nationals now operating in Kono has changed somewhat since the arrival of SCIPA and LIAT²¹ in the 1980s (Reno, 1995), although during fieldwork, "one-man-band" foreign-owned businesses were

¹⁸ Personal communication, 02/12/97.

¹⁹ Most of whom had connections with the foreign security firms that remained to protect plant.

²⁰ It is likely that ethnicity will facilitate these strategies.

²¹ See Chapter Five

still engaged in mining in the Kono region.²² These businesses were generally small, privately owned and usually of Eastern European or Israeli origin.

Branch Energy and its supporting security firm, Executive Outcomes, began a new trend in the mid-1990s. The emphasis was on multi-million dollar industry that could be efficiently organised and managed by highly qualified expatriate engineers. Exploitation has been directed at the “hard-rock”²³ kimberlite intrusions that require sophisticated techniques of extraction and processing. Although projects of this nature are well beyond the means of the Lebanese community, they present a viable commercial opportunity for the multi-national. From the careful survey of kimberlite concessions, geologists are able to accurately predict potential diamond yields in carats per tonne of ore and assess whether investment is worthwhile. These cautious preparations are far safer financially than those available to alluvial miners faced with unpredictable variations in mineral deposition. Mining systems are highly automated and efficient, greatly reducing the risk of theft and minimising work-force size.²⁴ For the GoSL, these types of multi-nationals offer an important source of “accountable” revenue. By this it is meant that the GoSL is in a good position to make calculated financial demands on companies relative to predicted levels of production.²⁵ This system, however, does not guarantee the legitimate appropriation of collected revenue, but is likely to be viewed favourably by international monetary organisations (whose political naivety should never be underestimated).²⁶

Branch Energy, Diamondworks and AmCan have identified market niches in areas of political instability. These small multi-nationals, typically registered in tax-havens and listed on low-profile stock exchanges²⁷ have a degree of ethical flexibility that is denied to larger, higher-profile companies operating in the same sector (Reno, 1998). Security considerations for sites, plant and engineering personnel have been undertaken by closely associated private security companies which in some instances display all the trappings of a mercenary army. Experienced, disciplined and well-equipped,

²² Unable to cope with the recent industrial inertia, many of these are now thought to have left Sierra Leone.

²³ Igneous

²⁴ See Levinson in Harlow ed. (1997)

²⁵ Aspects of production and export taxation are handled by GGDO. Matters of licensing are dealt with by the Ministry of Mines and Resources (see Chapter Two).

²⁶ In particular, the World Bank and the IMF.

²⁷ Typically Vancouver or Toronto.

these organisations have proved capable and adaptable to specific situations, scaling operations to suit either defensive commercial roles or even offensive political ones. Recent security of the Kono kimberlite concessions has been in the charge of Lifeguard, an organisation with close links to Executive Outcomes.²⁸ Lifeguard remained in Kono after the AFRC coup protecting sites and plant for the duration of the regime. Mining, however, was suspended and engineering staff evacuated and repatriated. In the context of the company's twenty-five year operating proposal, which will almost certainly be a financial success in the long-term, this nine month mothballing has been relatively insignificant. The Kono security companies have also shown themselves to be more than capable of defending the Kono kimberlite concessions against poorly-trained renegade soldiers and guerrillas (Reno, 1998).

7.9 KONO DISTRICT AND THE KONO

Although operating against a framework of chiefly hierarchy, independent players like "Johnny" are better characterised as individualists, expanding personal networks to maximise potential profit. Individualism "allows options for negotiating contracts or choosing allies and in consequence it also allows for individual mobility up and down whatever the current scale of prestige and influence" (Douglas, 1993). The geological conditions now prevalent in Kono District require substantial financial input to achieve any degree of viability [see above]. Remaining deposits are either extremely deep, needing costly mechanised gravel extraction, or riverine, necessitating coffer dam and air-lift mining engineering. The expense of these operations is prohibitive for the privateer. Increased scarcity of potential concessions has made their acquisition more politicised than ever before, greatly intensifying intra-lineage competition. The collapse of the APC and the ethnic-orientation of the SLPP has complicated the processes of available concession allocation. "Blocks" and "areas" that were once distributed to loyal APC ministers and their clients (Reno, 1995) are now under the control of a predominantly Mende SLPP political elite. This shift in political and industrial power relations, combined with capital shortage, allows little scope for inclusion of minor, financially weak and unconnected players.

²⁸ Africa Confidential July/August 1997.

Some major Kono paramount chiefs will weather the current political and economic instability. Their significant land-holdings and their ability to market their resource will continue to affirm their positions as players in the industry. Their clients will be wealthy and powerful Lebanese supporters and foreign investors, acting in partnership and offering access to external markets with currency conversion and banking services. However, given the present geological conditions (with few if any easy pickings remaining), these Kono chiefs are likely to adopt a more passive role in the market-place, operating as “sleeping-partners” to capitalised investors. It is probable that although related members will continue to seek concession land, few will be able to provide the economic input required for the extraction of awkwardly situated minerals. As traditional rulers, with established links to parliament, the chiefly elite offer not only land, but also routes through much of the bureaucracy that governs the award of mining, dealing and export licenses. To foreign investors and multi-nationals, this skill at handling patrimonial hurdles is a very valuable commodity, and now includes the ability to organise security via local CDFs²⁹ and liaison between investors and potentially troublesome elements of the national security services.³⁰

7.10 TONGO FIELD AND THE MENDE

In Tongo Field, diamonds are still relatively plentiful and easy to extract. The deposits are alluvial, widespread and shallow, lying well within the scope of extraction by man-power alone. With the assistance of bulldozers and drag-lines, sizeable, high-yielding pits can be excavated remarkably quickly. Geologically, it seems as if the Tongo Field deposits have been washed downstream from the Kono kimberlite intrusions over millions of years. At present, there are not thought to be any major pipes in the area, but one or two sills are known to exist. SLST and NDMC surveys undertaken in the 1970s mark these positions.³¹

Tongo Field is controlled predominantly by one of two rival factions of the Mende patrimonial elite. The group in charge has historical links with the land in which the diamond deposits lie and claims

²⁹ In the case of Kono, the *Do Soa* society [see Chapter Six]

³⁰ Successful liaison between foreign investors and local military forces is likely to be an important feature of future industrial activity in Kono.

³¹ Source: Cartographic Section, Geological Survey Division, New England, Freetown.

Kenema as its principal headquarters town. Kenema serves as the venue typically chosen for meetings and councils of the many paramount chiefs and section chiefs with authority in the area. Since the introduction of the ADMS, Kenema has acted as the primary market for Tongo Field diamond production, competed over by both Maronite and Shi'ite dealers. The Tongo Field chiefly elite is traditionalist and moderate and is largely concerned with the preservation and protection of population, property and resources. It is represented in the current SLPP GoSL by Vice President Joe Demby. Demby is a member of one of the leading Kenema chiefly families and has personal concession holdings in Tongo Field. As a senior member of the government, he and members of his family have also been recipients of key Kono "blocks".³²

The Tongo Field elite have adapted to the present internal security crisis by building on traditional hunting culture for the purposes of militia recruitment (the Kenema *kamajoisia*).³³ The organisation is led by the Kenema *Kamor*, Brima Bangura, an elderly figure of some influence in the community. Not surprisingly, he has significant interests in the Tongo Field diamond industry. The organisation has grown rapidly, and is equipped with weapons and ammunition bought abroad with diamonds via Mandingo contacts.³⁴ The Kenema *kamajoisia* have clashed repeatedly with both RSLMF and RUF forces in defence of Tongo Field and surrounding rural and urban settlements.

Much of the war has taken place in the South and East of the country and the Mende have suffered greatly. Many villages and small towns have been completely destroyed leaving a large number of Mende people internally displaced or seeking refuge over the border in Liberia.³⁵ Industrial and agricultural disruption has been highly detrimental to the general condition of the Mende economy, and levels of investment capital in the mining sector have dwindled sharply. Latent powers over land tenure and inheritance have been successfully utilised by elites as the incentives necessary for social mobilisation within the context of a patrimonial hierarchy. Initially focused on beating out the RUF, *kamajoisia* mobilisation using cultural resources has had far reaching implications for diamond

³² Personal communication, Kono, 25/02/1997

³³ See Chapter Six.

³⁴ See Chapter One

³⁵ See Bradbury (1995); CR WAIN various.

production. Elites have been able to employ *kamajoisia* fighters as trusted diggers, creating a socially-obligated workforce prepared to labour in return for future remuneration. This system has enabled production to continue through periods of almost complete economic breakdown. Capital generated from deploying armed *kamajoisia* has been reinvested in mining, thus generating more diamonds and further potential for *kamajoisia* recruitment.

The Tongo Field elites are also fortunate to have some access to external diamond markets, making reliance on Levantine traders less necessary. Indeed, Mende diamond producers have a wide range of options for marketing their commodity. Lebanese traders who have remained in either Kono or Kenema remain the first potential outlet. Overseas markets in Europe and the United States are also attainable, utilising expatriate Mende contacts operating in diamond and political networks. Aside from these choices, the ethnic group controls the overland route to Monrovia. Now that Liberia is at peace, this city is liable to develop, once again, into a thriving diamond market. It is unlikely that Charles Taylor will overlook this commercial opportunity. The majority of Mende diamonds, therefore, are unlikely to pass through Freetown or the hands of the GGDO, being exported instead to world-wide markets via Monrovia and Abidjan.

As a strategy, the recent exploitation of Tongo Field through “seed-corn” production by the *kamajoisia* seems to have worked quite well. If the system has generated sufficient capital there is no reason to suppose that this method of production will not continue for some time to come. So long as Tongo Field remains vulnerable to low-intensity conflict, it may prove to be the only viable method of industry available to local elites. Tongo Field deposits are alluvial and are average in quality by Sierra Leonean standards, and thus offer little to multi-national investment. Although shallow, the deposits are widely scattered and this means that security considerations will always put foreign money at risk. Remote locations, insalubrious conditions and the constant danger of attack have already deterred many potential investors. Lebanese players are, for the time being, content to take peripheral buying positions and offer attractive prices for production. There is also evidence to suggest that the elites in control of the area are content with this state of affairs. Seen as a long-term asset, the local elite is aware of the danger of losing control of Tongo Field in the way that the Kono have lost Kono District. As Douglas,

Rayner et. al. show, incentives are vital to the maintenance of vibrant hierarchies. Tongo Field might fuel a significant part of the Mende patrimonial structure for years to come. Distributing land to strangers and highest bidders is only likely to generate social disquiet. In this respect, the Mende have learnt from the mistakes of others. Douglas argues that the “most destructive weakness for a hierarchy is forgetting that leaders depend on the led” and that the led require good reason to accept leadership. For the Mende, land and resources form the basis of this contractual articulation.

7.11 ZIMMI -- A NEW FRONTIER

The Zimmi region is located roughly in the area surrounding the south-easterly confluences of the Moa and Mano Rivers. Zimmi Town lies less than eight miles from the Liberian border. The diamondiferous deposits stretch north towards Pujehun and the region south of Potoru where an RUF camp was based for much of the war. The high level of instability that the area has suffered reflects its peripheral geographical location. RUF activity has been intense, but marauding elements from the Liberian Civil War have also used the region as a cross-border regrouping point. The region has been subjected to heavy fighting between various parties, the most recent conflicts being between *kamajoisia* and AFRC/PA forces.

Zimmi as a mining centre has never been systematically exploited. In the past, Kono and Tongo Field have attracted the bulk of industrial interest, but now that Kono is in decline and Tongo Field is firmly in the grip of a local elite, attention is turning to the potential large-scale extraction of the Zimmi diamonds. Zimmi is particularly appealing to potential supporters because of the lie and quality of its diamond deposits identified during pre-incursion prospecting surveys. The seams are very shallow, most situated under no more than two or three metres of laterite overburden. Astonishingly, initial findings show deposits to be an impressive 75% -- 85% gem quality, making them, carat for dollar, among the most valuable alluvial concessions in the world. In addition, there has been ~~there~~ found to be an exceedingly high proportion of “fancy colours”, which on the open market fetch up to tenfold premiums. One expert believes that whoever emerges as the dominant Zimmi exporter will be

established as a major player in the global “fancy colours” market. In other words, Zimmi is an extremely viable proposition for many different groups of people; the potential profits are huge.

The area is controlled by a powerful faction of Southern Province Mende elites. This group has close commercial and political links with the regional capital, Bo. The mining area is governed by a network of paramount and section chiefs based in the towns of Zimmi and Pujehun. Since 1996 this coalition has pursued an aggressive political agenda, largely directed against non-Mende elements in Sierra Leone politics. The faction is led in the SLPP by Deputy Minister of Defence, Sam Hinga Norman, a Mende chief with substantial mining interests. Initially, the policies of this group were directed against RUF activity in the area, but have since come to encompass RSLMF and certain northern elites. It seems that the faction is in competition with the Kenema group for the overall leadership of the Mende element in contemporary Sierra Leonean politics. In what might be characterised as a struggle between radicalism and traditionalism, rival groups of *kamajoisia* have clashed in the Zimmi region on several occasions. Most typically, the cause of this intra-militia conflict has been the contested ownership of recovered diamonds looted by the RUF [see Chapter Six]. These financial assets assist elites greatly with the construction and maintenance of support networks vital to the successful implementation of their political strategies.

The chiefly hierarchy controlling the Zimmi mining region has opted for a different course of exploitation from its Tongo Field counterparts. The faction has political objectives which it seeks to pursue in the short-term, and to do so requires sufficient quantities of capital. The group has chosen to attract external, foreign investment, and has had its governmental level associate, S.H. Norman, conduct negotiations to this effect. Norman, a former RSLMF officer and anti-APC activist was trained at the R.M.A. Sandhurst in the United Kingdom and served with the Sierra Leone Regiment prior to independence. His anti-Stevens position during the events following the contested 1967 election led to a period of imprisonment and exile before he was able to return to Sierra Leone, eventually to assume a position in the Kabbah government. Norman’s influence at governmental level has been a primary factor in the rapid and unchecked growth of the CDF, and ultimately to direct conflict with the RSLMF. As Deputy Minister of Defence, Norman liaised with the leadership of Executive Outcomes, and with

associated mining operation, Branch Energy. These contacts were used to secure overseas investment for the Zimmi concessions. Before private commercial arrangements were made, Norman also engaged the services of the security company to train select units of *kamajoisia* in position-holding and counter-insurgency techniques. These groups were equipped with automatic weapons in place of antiquated shotguns and were deployed in joint operations with EO and RSLMF forces against the RUF prior to the AFRC coup (Reno, 1998).

Executive Outcomes left Sierra Leone as part of the terms of the Abidjan Peace Accord and the Branch Energy concessions were sold off to Diamondworks, a closely related company. Norman had made important contacts with figures in the commercial world of private security and high-risk mining enterprises. Senior South African figures from EO who maintained links with Sierra Leone through Lifeguard³⁶ became interested in Zimmi as a result. For EO, a deal looked very attractive. The alluvial, shallow, and extremely valuable, deposits could be systematically exploited without need for partnership with mining engineering companies to undertake the physical process of diamond extraction. The entire operation would be feasible through deployment of South African veterans alone. Straight-forward open-cast mining would be carried out in an area secured and protected by their own personnel. The Zimmi area is remote and has none of the itinerant, migrant labouring populations found in Kono and Tongo Field; it is widely acknowledged to be these unaccountable strangers who pursue the majority of illicit mining. Their absence in Zimmi would facilitate the task of maintaining local security.

For the Zimmi political group, such an arrangement promised efficient exploitation of the region's mineral resources, and a far more accountable and predictable flow of revenue. The South Africans would also be formidable allies, maintaining security and stability in the area and deterring peripheral elements from Liberia crossing the border to engage in illicit mining and banditry. The local *kamajoisia* would receive comprehensive military training to prepare them for an effective role in the protection of the area. Future South African involvement in the region will undoubtedly deny many local people the opportunity to mine diamonds, but some feel that this may have the positive effect of encouraging agricultural activity in an otherwise unstable region of the country.

³⁶ Handling security for Sierra Rutile as well as Kono kimberlite concessions.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This thesis has focused on cultural strategies for commercial adaptation to endemic low-intensity conflict and has addressed the ways in which four principal social groups have tried to construct solutions to problems that arise in the high-risk setting of the Sierra Leone diamond industry. It has been shown that trade in West African diamonds is highly ethnicised to ensure commercial success in the face of adverse environmental conditions and lack of basic institutions. The work has built on literature discussing the role of ethnicity in trade, and how both legitimate and clandestine trade are organised, and has demonstrated how the maintenance of networks of trust and coercion have become key elements in the pursuit of advantageous enterprise.

Principally, the work has traced developments in the diamond industry beginning with the colonial capitalist production system operated by the SLST. The introduction of the ADMS in 1956 began a new era of private commercial competition, which over time has led to the unregulated depletion of alluvial deposits and the intensification of inter-ethnic rivalries in the struggle for market hegemony. This process has been accelerated by the protracted RUF conflict which began in 1991. In the face of this political, social and economic turmoil and the virtual collapse of the State, industrial participants have been obliged to formulate flexible, locally-specific strategies to ensure the sustainability of mining and trading ventures. These systems are highly dynamic and the gambits used to extract diamonds are continually reshaped in response to micro and macro environmental factors.

Historically, the four commercially-oriented groups concerned have played varied roles, determined by their status as either indigenous or diaspora communities. The Kono and Mende have operated as politicised, resource-holding factions, distributing access to diamonds both to secure patrimonial advantage and to induce financial investment. The Lebanese Shi'ite Muslims and Christian Maronites have utilised the fluidity of merchant capital and access to international markets to control aspects of industrial input and output. As governmental mismanagement has resulted in increased scarcity of

diamonds, these groups have been forced to engage in greater levels of economic antagonism, as they compete and coalesce in attempts to outmanoeuvre opposition.

Over the last ten years, the Sierra Leonean diamond industry has undergone major transformations brought about by a variety of critical factors. Central to this process has been the failure of successive state administrations to control and regulate mining in Kono, the principal diamond field. This situation has been greatly compounded by the effects of the war and the political transitions that have accompanied it. The patrimonialism of the APC and now more recently the SLPP, interrupted by the asset-stripping kleptocracies of the NPRC and the AFRC, have brought about an accelerated decline of the region. The types of predatory industrial activity that these governments have encouraged have caused irreversible changes in the local resource base. Kono has been laid bare by the ravages of pre-industrial excess. Alluvial reserves of diamonds in the district have been systematically depleted with little benefit to the State. All that is left today are kimberlite intrusions, requiring costly, multi-national exploitation, and underwater riverine deposits, now the sole preserve of wealthy, suitably-equipped Levantine supporters. The remains of the once-rich NDMC concession-leases have come under the general control of influential GoSL elites.

As industrial inertia has spread through the Kono diamond field, it has impacted forcefully on the traditional balance of participant groups. The emergence of commercial competition between Shi'ites and Maronites can largely be attributed to this process. Since 1991, the RUF incursion has greatly weakened the Sierra Leonean state, increasing levels of socio-political and economic insecurity. It has been shown that in these problematic conditions the sociocultural characteristics of "sectarian" Shi'ite Muslims are better pre-adapted to improvised solutions. Shi'ite impetus to succeed is underlain by spiritual and temporal notions concerning duties of self-sacrifice and support not only for the specific diaspora but also for the Lebanese Shi'ite community in its entirety. Thus, ultimately political ends are pursued through strategic economic means.

It has been argued that Shi'ite enclavist values erect a durable boundary that has offered significant protection from the dynamic and unpredictable milieu of Sierra Leonean politics. Focusing on diamond and produce trade, the community has predominantly eschewed involvement in the high-risk and

diverse areas of speculation that have been so detrimental to the finances of the more cosmopolitan Maronites. Although certain Shi'ite players have undertaken enterprise in conjunction with indigenous political elites, these commercial patterns do not compare with Maronite accommodations of Sierra Leonean ruling elites. Maronite metropolitan values -- more typically hierarchical -- have tended to foster a far greater degree of interaction with those at the centre of political power in Sierra Leone. Maronite strategy was largely effective in the contexts of the British colonial administration and the APC, but ended abruptly with the NPRC coup in 1992. Maronite political and financial investment through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s proved to be ill-adapted to APC dilapidation and schism, and the beginning of the RUF incursion. As the influence of trusted patrons waned and the effects of war and global recession gripped the national economy, Maronite hopes of securing returns on outlayed capital faded rapidly. Intra-Maronite factionalisation was exacerbated by notorious events in the Lebanese Civil War. A resultant failure of trust between key Maronite players prevented the community from expressing a common political and economic intention. This lack of unity, occurring at a time when instability and insecurity were quickly becoming a normal condition of life in Sierra Leone, has major ramifications for the long-term future of the Maronite diaspora. NPRC threats of retribution against all those closely involved with Momoh and his government were sufficient to cause a significant dispersal of leading Maronite players even before the end of 1992. Those remaining have neither the financial capability nor the community vision necessary to compete with the more determined and resolute Shi'ites.

The dearth of diamonds in Kono District has had equally dramatic implications for the two groups of indigenous players at the centre of the industry. For the Kono ethnic group, traditionally the guardians and holders of the deposits in the region, the effects on structures of patrimonialism have been enormous. For three decades, socially and politically connected Konos could expect to negotiate access to diamonds with some degree of ease. Local chiefs distributed concessions to family and clients in return for political support and fealty. When deposits were rich and potential mining sites plentiful, even small-time supporters profited handsomely, selling their goods on to Lebanese buyers and engaging in conspicuous consumption locally. The money was earned quickly and, on the whole, even more quickly spent. Little provision was made for long-term financial security. The prevailing

consensus was that an inexhaustible supply of diamonds lay under the laterite of eastern Sierra Leone, and that once initial entry to the business was secured, future opportunities to acquire concessions would continue to present themselves. This belief was short-lived; as the local industry declined, petty supporters and operators were the first to suffer market exclusion. As they fell away, so did their labour, creating a small army of disgruntled youths some of whom were later to fill the ranks of the RUF. Since the late 1980s, limitations on the access to diamondiferous land have been gradually increased by Kono elites. Seeing the onset of industrial dereliction, Kono paramount chiefs have been forced to reappraise their own strategies for the management of the resources in their charge. Relying more on the financial and engineering capabilities of successful Shi'ite supporters, Kono elites in possession of viable alluvial deposits have shifted the industrial emphasis towards more large-scale and cost-effective extraction. The pervasive patronage that existed within the Kono ethnic group during the APC years has little relevance to the Sierra Leone of today. The power of the old guard of Kono paramount chiefs was effectively destroyed by a vengeful NPRC and it is unlikely to be restored by a southern-oriented SLPP. Politically powerless elites have little need to maintain an extensive support base and so land-holders are freer to renegotiate concession contracts on altogether more realistic terms.

This distillation of industrial activity in Kono has led to the emergence of new players in the marketplace. The long-term exploitation of kimberlite intrusions is beyond the means of even the most wealthy of Levantine coalitions. Instead, adverse geological and political conditions have encouraged the arrival of security-cum-mineral multi-nationals, equipped to deal with any eventuality that the local environment may produce. These multi-million dollar operations bear some resemblance to the pre-colonial concession companies of the late nineteenth century. Employing militarised security forces like Executive Outcomes and Lifeguard, mining companies such as Branch Energy and Diamondworks feel secure enough to make substantial investments in highly mechanised operations of ore extraction and on-site processing. Helicopter gunships and armour provide a considerable advantage over potential foes like the RUF and *sobel*s. The overt presence of such organisations in Kono has doubtless provided some security for the district, but was not sufficient to maintain multi-national production during the acute instability that followed the AFRC coup in 1997. Although South African and Namibian personnel remained in the area to secure mining sites and hardware, it appears that civilian mining

engineers were not expected to continue working. This suggests, therefore, that the commercial niches these enterprises attempt to exploit are quite narrowly defined. Areas lacking sufficient instability are likely to attract the attentions of higher-profile, financially more powerful multi-nationals. In environments of extreme danger, however, civilian technicians working for more adventurous and independent companies are reluctant to risk their lives on a daily basis. Once instability gets out of hand and violence becomes unpredictable, then even the new militarised mining companies are at a loss.

Increased security and changes in geological conditions have had the cumulative effect of moving the focus of the diamond industry on to Tongo Field and the Zimmi region. These areas still offer rich alluvial deposits close to the surface and are easily exploited. Unlike Kono today, successful extraction may still be undertaken using the most rudimentary of methods. This is a distinct opportunity, but for local elites to seize this opportunity they have also to address issues of regional security. To date, there has been little multi-national activity in these parts of eastern and south-eastern Sierra Leone, although some organisations have expressed an intention to exploit untapped and valuable seams. Any organisation wishing to do so will be required to make extensive provision for the maintenance of security in inhospitable locations. The relative abundance of diamonds in these places has, not surprisingly, attracted the attentions of the RUF, renegade soldiery and opportunist elements from the Liberian conflict. These socially excluded groups increasingly try to legitimate themselves as an ethnicised opposition to what is perceived as a Mende-dominated resource-hegemony. As a consequence, low-intensity conflict has become endemic in Tongo Field over the last ten years, with the level of violence peaking in 1997, as disgruntled, northern-oriented, elements of the RSLMF attempted to seize control of these assets. It was the intensification of this conflict that led to the AFRC coup and the military's accommodation of the RUF in an opportunistic attempt to form an anti-SLPP, anti-Mende coalition.

Responses by a core group of regionally-based political elements in the SLPP to these external threats have centred on a programme of militarised social mobilisation. Processes of cultural creativity and creolization have been drawn upon by elites to transform rural-based hunters and their apprentices into a sizeable, offensive militia. In the course of this transition, the *kamajoisia* has been skilfully presented

as a potentially nationalist civil defence force in an attempt to allay Northern fears of an increasingly belligerent South. As a distinct Mende political agenda became more conspicuous towards the end of 1996, non-Mende groups in Sierra Leonean politics soon came to interpret the *kamajoisia* as an instrument of ethnicised aggression. For a Mende elite with diamondiferous land, however, the *kamajoisia* was not just a civil defence. The militia offered the added potential of deployment as a relatively trustworthy and accountable ethnically-aligned work force. In many ways, this dual role is the continuation of an industrial strategy introduced to Sierra Leone by Branch Energy and Executive Outcomes, namely that of the militaristic digging “company”. This is not surprising; leading members of the Mende hierarchy enjoying office in the SLPP government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah were regularly interacting with the leadership of EO in both political and commercial contexts. By 1997, *kamajoisia* were regularly employed by elite land holders as armed, security conscious labour in the diamond pits of Tongo Field and Zimmi. Protracted war with the RUF had depleted local reserves of investment capital for mining, but *kamajo* “hunter” institutional culture has proved sufficiently strong to give members the confidence or obligation to mine diamonds without the prospect of immediate pay. This has apparently worked successfully as a means to maintain production in environments of high insecurity and instability in circumstances where even EO/Diamondworks kinds of investment have proved impossible. Profits from this enterprise have then been reinvested in the further expansion and equipping of the militia, thus increasing the political power and territorial control of a tradition-oriented Mende chiefly elite. Access to international markets has been provided by predominantly Shi’ite exporters taking advantage of political and economic conditions in the region, and via Mende diaspora players with links to the global diamond trade.

This current pattern of territorial control by an ethnically-oriented, diamond mining *kamajoisia* is likely to remain an important factor for the foreseeable future since it is functionally durable. Under Norman’s leadership, the militia was largely effective in protecting Mende resources even during the worst instability associated with AFRC rule. Although Tongo Field and Zimmi changed hands several times during that phase of the conflict, the *kamajoisia* were able to minimise systematic AFRC-sanctioned mining. This spoiling role, backed by Guinean and Nigerian ECOMOG units, undoubtedly contributed to the eventual downfall of the Koroma junta, unable to tap sufficient diamonds to stabilise its own army

and militia factions, or win friends overseas. This demonstration of force, both as a means to mine diamonds and prevent others from doing so, is part of the mandate for continuation of SLPP governance. In this respect, the political agenda of Mende elites has been highly successful over the last three years. Continued declarations of commitment to the democratic process have earned the southern-oriented SLPP valuable international support, whilst at the same time the continued mobilisation of the militant and ethnicised *kamajoisia* has secured mineral resources that are seen by all as now being firmly in Mende hands. Mende elements in the SLPP leadership have also gained access to what remains of the Kono deposits. Old NDMC plots are now gifts within SLPP patronage, while kimberlite concessions and multi-national contracts will bring significant revenue into the GoSL treasury where, realistically, it is likely to be vulnerable to misappropriation by SLPP political elites.

Kamajoisia control of Tongo Field and, particularly, Zimmi, is likely to open the way for later multi-national involvement in these areas as SLPP rule becomes consolidated. It is highly probable that South African and other foreign operations will seek to exploit the “fancy” coloured reserves of diamonds in south-eastern Sierra Leone. The potential profits in this market are extremely large. The presence of multi-national mining activity is likely to be supported by associated expatriate security organisations to establish specific industrial projects, while augmenting the authority of Mende political elites in the region. Because of the nature of land tenure in these locations, contractual agreements will be forged directly between foreign investors and local chiefs, further enhancing the political and economic capabilities of the latter.

Recent news emerging from Sierra Leone suggests that the reinstated SLPP GoSL hopes to reinforce the relationships between political elites and multi-nationalisation via new legislation aimed at reducing the independent room for manoeuvre of Lebanese elements. Kono, and its government-controlled deposits, is likely to be increasingly developed as a kind of “forbidden” industrial enclave. The legislation (June 1998) indicates that access to the area will become far more tightly controlled. In view of the pre-ADMS SLST experience, this sounds unrealistic, but it must be remembered that security capabilities of the early-1950s did not include highly experienced expatriate personnel and helicopter gunships. Lifeguard and experienced associated organisations are more than capable of this task and now have

considerable combat experience against local insurgents. A condensed core of locally-born Levantine players are also expected to be permitted to continue work in the area, in respect of their naturalised status. Their participation is likely to be limited to the exploitation of remaining alluvial and riverine deposits and the provision of access to international markets. Sweeping expulsions of many living in the district appears likely. This displacement will create, once again, inevitable problems for other parts of the country.

Recent reports from Sierra Leone also suggest that the reinstated SLPP government has eliminated much of its opposition in the armed forces. Significant numbers of military personnel who supported the AFRC have been tried for treason and executed. A number of civilians look likely to suffer the same fate. It is probable that future restructuring of the RSLMF will involve a “southernisation” of the officer corps, bringing army allegiance in line with the regional-orientation of the government. This rapid expansion of southern-oriented power, however, may well suffer the factionalisation that commonly occurs within extensive hierarchies. It is reasonable to suppose that although power now lies with a Mende-led South, internal political schism and intrigue typical of patrimonial hierarchy, and characterising the Stevens APC patrimony, will persist. It is, of course, far too early to predict how these divisions will occur, but power structures of this type are generally subject to the development of political, economic and social rivalries.

Finally, and importantly, the role of the RUF in Sierra Leone’s future should not be underestimated. The thesis has shown that enormous changes have occurred in the structure of the diamond industry, but these transitions currently exclude a greater proportion of the national populous from access to minerals than ever before. In the political arena, new patrimonies have simply replaced old ones, but the techniques employed by elites to protect and manage resources have been made vastly more efficient. Uniquely, the entire industry is now under the complete control of a so-far relatively homogenous ethnic elite, an achievement that eluded even Stevens at the height of his power. Ethnically driven social exclusion can only serve to engender further grievances among young citizens denied legitimate access to the economic benefits generated by these national assets.

Facing a trial that only makes reference to his involvement in the AFRC coup, Sankoh may well be out of the political picture. It seems that civil society expects that his probable execution at the hands of the SLPP will be the end for the RUF. The movement has displayed many of the characteristics of a sectarian, millenarian personality cult. But it may be wrong to suppose the movement is highly vulnerable to the loss of its leader. The RUF remained active during Sankoh's incarceration in Nigeria and may be strengthened by his possible "martyrdom". Other charismatic figures may step up to replace him. Indeed, S.A.J. Musa may well prove to be highly effective at mobilising a movement of socially excluded youth to continue Sankoh's struggle against patrimonial hegemony. With clearances in Kono, demobilised northern soldiery, lack of social opportunities and overt Mende nepotism, Musa is unlikely to be short of willing recruits hoping to find riches in the bush. His efficacy as role model was demonstrated in the early days of the NPRC regime. Dubbed "Action Man", he has a reputation for uncompromising fearlessness and effective field craft. Time is also on his side; aware that he can remain in mountainous regions of north-eastern Sierra Leone almost indefinitely, he may well bide his time until the withdrawal of ECOMOG forces. A period of regrouping will offer the opportunity to reconstitute a political ethos that exploits the inevitable local grievances that will arise over time in an increasingly frustrated North.

The RUF, unless accommodated in a credible process of peace, reconciliation and governmental participation is likely to continue fighting in one form or another for some time to come. At present, its exclusion from southern Sierra Leone, and thus access to major diamond resources, will have severely depleted the financial capability of the organisation to wage war (though mining of scattered, smaller diamond resources in the North is still taking place). However, any changes in the current military status quo of the interior that present the RUF with an advantage are likely to be seized as an opportunity to raid the mines of Zimmi, Tongo Field and Kono. There is also the possibility that the RUF may receive external sponsorship from exiled non-Mende elites and other enemies of the SLPP patrimony keen to gain access to diamonds. Regional opportunists like Charles Taylor have long held interests in the natural resources of Sierra Leone; he may well decide to redevelop his relationship with the RUF and consider further destabilisation of the border with Mendeland to be to his political advantage.

Thus, unfortunately, the long-term prognosis for national stability looks bleak. The *kamajoisia* and expatriate security organisations may be able to preserve “islands” of relative security, but the peripheries of these islands will be continually under threat from the many groups seeking to usurp southern control of the diamond industry. For citizens outside these resource-based enclaves, the future is even worse. Lacking adequate military protection, it is their material possessions and agricultural production that will be seized to sustain those who seek illegitimate access to diamonds, and so, while the diamonds remain, violence will never be far away.

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