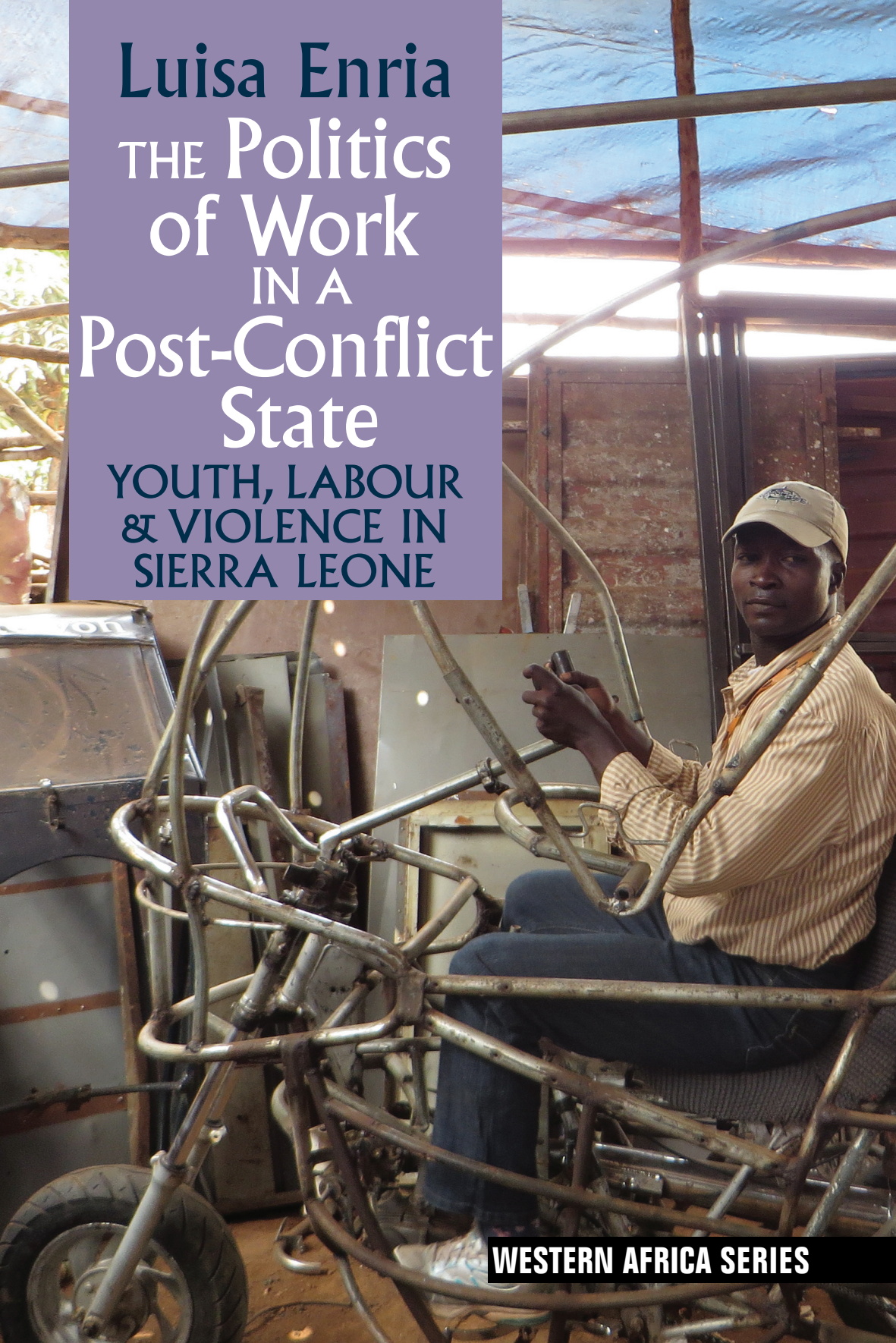
Luisa Enria

THE Politics of Work IN A Post-Conflict State

YOUTH, LABOUR & VIOLENCE IN SIERRA LEONE



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To Busta and Emperor, for/despite everything

In memory of Professor A.R. Mustapha

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List of Illustrations

List of Abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
ASTA	Abacha Street Traders' Association
BRU	Bike Riders' Union
BSA	Belgium Sellers' Association
CDF	Civil Defence Forces
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MOFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
MLSS	Ministry of Labour and Social Security
MYA	Ministry of Youth Affairs
MYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
NAYCOM	National Youth Commission
NDMC	National Diamond Mining Corporation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
OSD	Operational Support Division
PBC	Peacebuilding Commission
PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSRU	Public Sector Reform Unit

RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLBC	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Company
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLST	Sierra Leone Selection Trust
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIPSIL	United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission to Sierra Leone
WASSCE	West African Senior School Certificate Examination
WID	Waste Management, Improvement of the Roads and Decongestion
WSB	West Side Boys

Glossary

Krio spellings are taken from Thompson and Koroma (2014)

af-af biznɛs	different types of business
attaya	Chinese gunpowder tea
badat	maliciousness
Bondo	female secret society
dreg	'hustle' or day-to-day survival on the margins of society
fityay	disrespectful
gɛt maynd	being brave
hustler	sex worker
jamba	marijuana
jewman (*pl. jewman dɛm*)	youth who sell items (e.g. phones) for a small commission
kola	beginning of the bride price
kombra	parent (Temne language)
kukri	street food
krao	the burnt rice at the bottom of the pot
make gladi	cheer and sing party anthems for politicians during political campaigns
okada	commercial bike
pas dɛn gee di big wan dɛm	they just give to the big ones (literally: unless they give to the big ones)
pass pass	moving around
pikin	child
rarray boy/girl	street criminal
sababu	benevolence/a personal connection
sidɔm	sitting down

uman dɛm way nor gɛt wok	women who do not work
watch fes	discrimination
wok (ar nor gɛt wok/youthman dɛm we nor gɛt wok)	work (I don't have work/unemployed youth)

Introduction

On 17 December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian vegetable seller set himself on fire after a police officer confiscated his van, slapped him and spat on him. Bouazizi's extreme reaction to this humiliation sparked a revolution in his country and was the catalyst for the Arab Spring, the beginning of huge political upheaval across North Africa and the Middle East. The vegetable vendor's self-immolation, however, also became powerfully symbolic because of the ways in which his struggles to find decent employment, and his dejection rendered ultimately unbearable by a police officer's affront, resonated across borders. The images of young people's struggles from Tunisia to Egypt appeared on the screens all over the globe and stirred imaginations in vastly different contexts. The momentous events that Bouazizi's act set in motion signalled how deeply felt this shared alienation was, as well as laying bare the explosive potential of young people's frustration. A few years later, when the emancipatory possibilities of the Arab Spring were put in question by complex political power struggles, I sat in a crowded Sierra Leonean market as young traders still remembered the actions of their peers across the Arab world and envied what they saw as bravery in protesting a predicament they understood well. 'An idle mind is the devil's workshop', they argued, hinting at the destructive capacity of those whose aspirations remain unfulfilled. This book is an exploration of the power of the stories we tell about unemployment, the frustrated aspirations of those out of work in Sierra Leone and what they might tell us about the incendiary consequences of exclusionary labour markets in different places.

★ ★ ★

Youth unemployment has increasingly come centre stage in policy discussions across the world. Economic adversity and a lack of jobs have placed young people in limbo, the symbol of a generation in crisis, varyingly characterised as 'waithood' (Honwana 2012: 3), 'blocked transitions to adult life' (Utas 2003: 6), 'timepass' (Jeffrey 2010: 5) or even 'social death' (Vigh 2006b: 104). Unemployment has been presented as an 'epidemic' (RTI International 2016) and is listed in the World Economic Forum's (2016) risk landscape as leading to increased polarisation within societies. The need to create employment is thus portrayed as necessary to quell a perceived risk to social stability presented by un- or underemployed youth. A 2005 report by the United Nations Office for West Africa argues that: 'current levels of unemployment among young men and women in West Africa are a ticking time bomb for the region and also beyond' (UNOWA 2005: 5). Young people are thus a 'security demographic' (Cincotta et al. 2003), in line with popular theories about the risk that a 'youth bulge' might pose in terms of the likelihood of civil war (Alfy 2016; Farzanegan & Witthuhn 2016; Sommers 2011; Urdal 2004). These theories have been especially prominent in countries on the brink of or just emerging from civil war, where the unemployed are presented as an explosive mixture for state stability. Underlying these portrayals of the unemployed as 'ticking bombs'[1] is the assumption of a direct connection between labour market participation and the nature of young people's political engagement. This book challenges this assumption, not by denying that the connection exists, but by suggesting that we need a much better, grounded understanding of how the two are related. Focusing on the experiences of marginal youth in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, the book aims to unpack the relationship between labour market experiences and young people's patterns of political mobilisation in a post-conflict country. The lives of young Sierra Leoneans navigating the post-war economy tell us something important about the country's predicament at the end of a long civil war, but they also show us how we might go about studying the relationship between unemployment and instability in so-called 'fragile' contexts and, most importantly, how the framework put forward in this book can suggest alternative solutions to the problems posed by the 'security demographic'.

Sierra Leone was in many ways the unfortunate poster child of the 'ticking bomb' narrative as applied to post-conflict countries. Its civil war, taking place between 1991 and 2002, was framed as a 'crisis of youth', with young people's prominence in all combating

[1] Interview with Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) official, Freetown, 7 August 2010.

factions strongly linked to their lack of economic opportunities, and especially jobs, in the years leading up to the war (Abdullah 1998a; Fanthorpe & Maconachie 2010; Mitton 2013; Peters 2011; Richards 1996). Amongst the debris of war, Sierra Leoneans, their government and its international partners attempted to make sense of what had happened and considered how to prevent conflict from erupting again. Sierra Leone was one of the first cases of the United Nations' Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which, together with the Government of Sierra Leone and various development and security partners, identified youth employment as one of the crucial target areas in a strategy to avoid relapse and ensure durable peace (PBC 2007a). Despite a dearth of reliable data, unemployment was feared to be dangerously close to pre-war levels (UNDP 2013; PBC 2011). Youth engagement in, primarily election-related, political violence has also stoked fears of further conflict and unrest (ARI 2011; CCG 2011; Christensen & Utas 2008). These trends threatened Sierra Leone's reputation as having had an exceptionally successful post-war transition, as an 'ever-growing army of unemployed, socially alienated youth [posed] a perennial threat to security' (ICG 2008: i). Employment was consequently not only a development priority but also a necessity to ensure the sustenance of a peaceful polity.

The narratives that posit the unemployed as a potential spoiler for Sierra Leone's attempt to avoid relapse into war are however reductive and tell us little about the processes that connect labour market experiences to young people's involvement in political violence. They may tell compelling aggregate stories – although even the statistical data on the relationship between the two is in fact inconclusive, and patterns difficult to ascertain (Cramer 2011a) – yet they do not explain the micro-level mechanisms of the relationship or how some people starting from the same economic position might engage in different forms of political action. The imprecision of this narrative is immediately clear if we consider that 'unemployment' itself is in fact inadequate in its ability to capture the complexity of young people's experiences of labour market dynamics in developing countries. In contexts like Sierra Leone, in fact, the lack of social security nets makes the idle masses of the unemployed a fiction (Hart 1973; Ranis & Gollin 2014; Stewart 2012, 2015). Consequently, the 'unemployed' are by necessity actively engaged in different forms of work, primarily precarious and casualised activities in the informal economy (Overå 2007). We must therefore broaden our lens to focus on young people's experiences of marginal work.

More fundamentally, the transmission mechanisms from unemployment to the potential for violence remain little understood, as

we still know too little about the connection between labour market experiences and avenues of politicisation. As Cramer (2011a, 2011b) has compellingly argued, this requires serious engagement with labour markets as social institutions, in order to understand how the socially embedded experience of surviving on the margins of the formal economy and of being excluded from stable and decent employment influences patterns of political engagement. This means understanding both how labour market experiences translate into political violence and how they influence other potential avenues for political engagement. I suggest that this requires looking beyond the numbers, or beyond what Urdal (2004: 1) has termed the 'devil in the demographics', to how the 'ticking bomb' narrative relates to the lives of the young people it purports to describe. Presenting a more complex picture of the relationship between youth, violence and the post-war state is important not only to advance our understanding of these processes but also to counter the blanket securitisation of unemployment. The portrayal of the unemployed as a threat per se risks painting a whole generation as a security risk and, short of full employment, precludes creative interventions to counter exclusion and its potentially violent outcomes.

This book thus sets out to explore how labour market experiences influence political mobilisation through the experiences of young people precariously engaged in Freetown's post-war informal economy. Charting these young men and women's trajectories from labour market exclusion to different forms of political engagement, I attempt to offer a more nuanced depiction of how the 'ticking bombs' mobilise in the aftermath of war. The Sierra Leonean case study offers a window into broader questions about the relationship between economic and political spheres, showing the ways in which African informal economies shape political identities as well as opportunities and barriers to collective organisation. Through a focus on Freetown youths' experiential accounts, the book analyses the social life of labour markets – outlining the multifaceted nature of economic motives and their interaction with socio-political factors in determining the nature of young people's politicisation. Despite the bold claims made about the political consequences of unemployment, in fact, labour markets have been largely neglected or only indirectly addressed (Cramer 2011b). In addition to a more systematic focus on labour market experiences, the book aims to expand on the rich literature on youth participation in violence to consider the time beyond the silencing of the guns, to probe more directly the claims made about the destabilising effects that youth are posited to have in the aftermath of war. This also includes taking

into account the opportunities and barriers to the other, non-violent, forms of mobilisation that are often hidden from view. While the answers will be specific to the lives of young Freetonians and post-war contexts, the questions set out in this book put forward a way of grappling with these issues across contexts. The threat of the unemployed is a powerful narrative, one that captures the popular imagination through the images of youthful gangs and youngsters at risk of radicalisation. Yet, until we look explicitly into labour market dynamics and question the mechanisms that link them to violence, it will remain difficult to address the source of the problem.

Makers or breakers? Youth unemployment and its political outcomes

THE POST-CONFLICT MOMENT: RECONSTRUCTION AND 'SURPLUS POPULATIONS'

The explosive potential of youth became especially salient for Sierra Leone in its post-conflict period. It is therefore important to situate the notion that unemployed youth as a security risk in the context of reconstruction efforts aimed at rebuilding a viable and peaceful state and society. While Chapter 2 looks in depth at how the 'ticking bomb' narrative has developed in ways that are specific to the Sierra Leonean reconstruction environment, defining the broad contours of the post-conflict moment as understood in contemporary scholarship offers a key point of departure.

The end of the Cold War saw a marked increase in internal conflicts across the world, a phenomenon that was matched by an unprecedented level of international active engagement within states torn apart by civil war (Caplan 2005; Chesterman 2004; Harbom & Wallensteen 2010). In particular, as the United Nations (UN) increased its peacekeeping presence, it quickly became clear that durable recovery required more than simply ensuring the end of hostilities (von Billerbeck 2011). This was further bolstered by a new interventionist doctrine that depicted internal problems such as civil war, poverty or disease as of interest to the international community due to the threat that these occurrences pose to other countries in an interconnected world (Blair 1999; Duffield 2007; Yannis 2002). As Galtung (1969) had long advocated, therefore, peace came to be understood more positively as a deeper process of transformation. This was firstly and most eminently captured in 1992 by then Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda*

for Peace, which added the notion of peacebuilding to the UN's toolkit. In it, Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as 'an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict' (Boutros-Ghali 1992: para. 21). Without addressing and reforming those institutions and societal tensions that had brought about conflict, in other words, peace was unlikely to be sustainable.

In the post-war moment, then, conflict-affected states were to undergo transformation so as to address the root causes of war to avoid relapse. This however begs the question of what such a transformation would require. The practical implementation of peacebuilding measures starkly mirrored the normative assumptions of the international community, as a common reconstruction blueprint guided interventions across different operations. This blueprint has been characterised by scholars as 'liberal peacebuilding' as it included a matrix of measures essentially aimed at building liberal market democracies (Newman et al. 2009). Interventions thus included support to the reforming of institutions of governance, including the holding of elections and bolstering of rule of law, while also delineating these institutions' role in the process of economic reconstruction. This reflects the assumption that 'certain kinds of (liberally constituted) societies will tend to be more peaceful, both in their domestic affairs and their international relations, than illiberal states are' (ibid.: 11). This has been seen as a manifestation of a certain narcissism as Western powers that are often at the forefront of these interventions attempt to remake states emerging from war in their own image (Ignatieff 2003; Mustapha 2010; Rampton & Nadarajah 2016).

As understandings of what constitutes peace expanded to include the radical restructuring of state and society, development came to play a significant role in peacebuilding discourse. Reconstruction blueprints have included a prominent focus on economic transformation, and the newly erected structures of governance are expected to deliver on socio-economic development. Of course reconstruction does not really mean restoring pre-war conditions, and instead carries with it normative assumptions about the preferable direction of economic governance and, given these interventions' liberal mould, they have primarily promoted marketisation, liberalisation of trade and a minimalist regulatory role for the state (Paris 2002). This variant of Western narcissism has been widely and prolifically criticised both by those denouncing its neocolonial tendencies and from the point of view of its content, focusing on the likely detrimental impact on the economies and societies emerging from war

(Chandler 2006; Chopra 2000; Paris 2004; Rampton & Nadarajah 2016; Richmond 2015; Richmond and Franks 2009). These models nevertheless proved impressively resilient as moulds for intervention, especially in the context of post-Cold War conflicts in the Global South.[2] Furthermore, what is especially significant for our purposes is that in expanding the notion of peace, these approaches have also widened the pool of what is seen as a threat to the stability of the post-war state. The focus on root causes and their eradication, in other words, has led to the designation of an increasing number of phenomena as security threats. Specifically, the inclusion of development in the realm of conflict prevention relies on the conviction that underdevelopment is a likely source of violent strife.

Mark Duffield (2001:1, 2007, 2010) has written extensively on these interventionist assumptions of a 'circular complementarity' between development and security and the securitisation of development policy. He analyses how Western governments have justified development aid as a way to avert the risk of collapse in developing countries by relying on the idea that it would pose international threats in the form of refugee flows, the spread of disease and the rise of global terrorist movements. This trend is only heightened by recent shifts away from liberal interventionist doctrines, towards a justification of spending abroad in terms of national interests. Most recently, the British Department for International Development's (DFID 2016: 1) *Building Stability Framework* argued for 50 per cent of British foreign aid spending to go towards addressing conflict and building stability because '[t]he UK cannot sit back and wait for international problems to arrive on our shores'. As Duffield compellingly argues, such discourses summon the image of a 'surplus population', which he characterises as 'a condition of existence that, but for the changes, adaptations or opportunities that progress either demands or presents, would otherwise remain effectively useless, irrelevant or *dangerous*' (Duffield 2007: 9; emphasis added). Development interventions constitute such an opportunity for progress. Duffield's framework relies on Foucault's notion of bio-politics as a technology of government centred on the 'administration of the processes of life at the aggregate level of the population' (ibid.: 7). Development, in this framework, is thus a means to control and discipline surplus populations. In other words, in the visions of liberal peacebuilders, development appears as a form of pacification for sections of the population seen to present a threat.

Unemployment is the perfect example of this, as the 'ticking

[2] The lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan and recent dramatic geopolitical shifts have led to significant reconfigurations in Western interventionism, as the protracted conflict in Syria has shown.

bomb' narrative manifests. The 2011 World Development Report highlights a large population out of work as a key 'stress factor' increasing the risk of violence (World Bank 2011: 74). Similarly, as we have seen, youth bulges in developing countries' demographics are thought to increase the likelihood of civil war erupting (Urdal 2004). According to the PBC, these threats persist in the post-war period as countries are at risk of relapse, given that 'youth unemployment in many post-conflict countries has the potential to act as a conflict driver' (PBC 2010: 1). A significant corollary of this is the notion that employment can turn around the role of youth in these countries, or change them from 'breakers' into 'makers' to borrow Honwana and de Boeck's (2005) dichotomy. Employment according to the PBC, can transform youth into 'an agent of change and economic development if their potentials are harnessed with timely intervention' (PBC 2010: 1). In Duffield's (2007) terms, the unemployed are a 'surplus population' that, through intervention, can be steered away from their dangerous potential. This has consequently made youth an important aid-recipient category in post-war states (Lindberg 2014).

The problematisation of youth is by no means a recent phenomenon, or one that is restricted to war and post-war circumstances. Young people have been long portrayed dichotomously as 'makers' or 'breakers' (Honwana & de Boeck 2005), 'vandals' or 'vanguard' (Abbink 2005). These images encompass their historical prominence as leaders of anti-colonial struggles or young entrepreneurs on the one hand, and child soldiers and idle criminals on the other. Youth, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2005: 20) have aptly summarised, 'stands for many things: for the terrors of the present, the errors of the past, the prospect of a future'. Going further back, the portrayal of youth as a potentially problematic category was also a key component of colonial strategies of control. The long-standing concern with youth defiance alarmed officials in colonial Africa and, as unemployment became a key characteristic of poverty in the colonies, idle youth were identified as delinquents and as a threat to the 'late colonial "modernising state"' (Waller 2006: 86). Young men in particular were often framed as sexual predators, as McCulloch (2000) shows in her study of the 'Black Peril' in Southern Rhodesia between 1906 and 1916. During that time, the marked escalation in perceptions of the sexual danger posed to white women by black men gave rise to a series of measures such as the Immorality and Indecency Suppression Ordinance, which allowed for stronger control over colonised men (as well as over white women). These accounts not only reflect the long history of the youth problematic, but also highlight its

gendered nature, which also pervades contemporary 'ticking bomb' narratives. As we shall see, the effective erasure of young female fighters from accounts of civil wars like that in Sierra Leone has contributed to a post-war emphasis on the dangers of male youth (Macdonald 2008).

What is nevertheless distinctive about the securitisation of youth in the contemporary post-war moment is, firstly, the specific set of assumptions that link unemployment to the likelihood of unrest. Secondly, and relatedly, it is the specifically political nature of the threat that youthful populations are envisioned to pose. While economic exclusion has been linked to a variety of social ills, from interpersonal and sexual to gang violence,[3] the 'ticking bomb' narrative discussed here focuses particularly on the risks that the unemployed pose to post-war political stability. As the next section elucidates, the unemployed feature in discussions of conflict and the possibilities of post-war instability as likely recruits in rebelling factions or keen foot soldiers in the schemes of entrepreneurs of violence.

There are undoubtedly considerable concerns to be raised regarding the securitisation of employment in and of itself, and many have pointed not only to its limitations but also its potentially counterproductive consequences (Abrahamsen 2005; Enria 2012; Munive Rincon 2010). However, for our current purposes, we must dig deeper into these theoretical assumptions that underlie these securitising narratives. How have different schools of thought characterised the relationship between young people and violence? What makes, according to these scholars, the unemployed a threatening demographic? A first, and influential set of theories offers an interpretation based on neoclassical economic assumptions.

ECONOMIC THEORIES OF WAR AND RELAPSE

The direct association of unemployment with the threat of instability finds its starkest interpretation in economic theories of conflict, one that has been vigorously embraced by policy-makers in post-war countries (see for example Collier et al. 2003, World Bank 2011). These theories, most prominently put forward by economists such as Hirshleifer (2001) and Collier (2000, 2007, 2009), present an alternative to interpretations that emphasise the grievances of combatants as a means to explain the occurrence of civil war. Rather than focusing on groups' identities and political reasons, these

[3] See for example Bourgois (2003) on gang-violence and Groes-Green (2009) or Silberschmidt (2001) on sexual violence.

economists suggest that we centre our attention on combatants' economic motivations. The perennial collective action problem lies at the foundation of these debates, as it invites analysts to explain how individuals can be motivated to behave collectively to achieve some form of public good (e.g. regime change) when they might instead free-ride on others' actions (see Olson 1965). These readings have gained significant traction in contexts like Sierra Leone, as we shall see in Chapters 1 and 2. There, the prominence of looting and struggles to control natural resources combined with the fact that combating factions on all sides of the conflict drew from the same pool of poor and marginalised youth have seemed to confirm the model's assumptions.

Before turning to a discussion of economic models it is however important to place them in the context of the large body of literature on the role of group grievances in explaining political violence. Collier (2000) categorises these types of explanations for collective violence into four strands that attribute the incidence of war to: ethnic or religious hatred; economic inequality; lack of political rights; and governments' economic incompetence. At the foundation of these theories is the assumption that violent mobilisation is a result of frustrations and perceptions of injustice, either against the government or another group. The role of identities such as ethnicity in stimulating conflict has been put forward in various guises. Primordialist accounts, or 'clash of civilisation' explanations, for example postulate a mobilisation advantage of deep-rooted and easily identifiable collective identities (Huntington 1996). These accounts presume identities to be fairly monolithic and in essential opposition to each other, favouring readings of motivations based on visceral hatred (Fletcher 2007). In contrast, studies such as that of Kalyvas (2008) present a more nuanced view of the instrumental role that ethnicity can play, the changeable nature of identity and its interaction with other motives. The salience and function of ethnicity in different conflicts remain a matter of debate, and the statistical evidence on the relevance of ethnic fractionalisation as a predictor of internal warfare remains contested (Denny & Walter 2014; Fearon & Laitin 2003; Kalyvas 2009; Wucherpfennig et al. 2012).

Another interpretation that focuses on group differences and collective grievances, but that comes closer to economists' analysis of economic motives, emphasises 'horizontal inequalities' (Langer et al. 2012; Stewart 2008). This school of thought suggests that 'inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups' present the potential for violent

mobilisation (Stewart 2008: 3). Divisions between groups, in other words, gain salience when they are demarcated by inequalities such as differential access to political rights or to economic opportunities such as public sector employment. A focus on horizontal inequalities, therefore, suggests that group identities become liable to mobilisation when strong grievances exist along ethnic lines (or other salient group lines). The relationship between horizontal inequalities and conflict is however not presumed to be automatic, rather, conflict potential is exacerbated when different forms of horizontal inequalities are consistent and in the same direction, as well as by a set of political, economic and cultural demography conditions that can either diffuse or exacerbate conflict (Langer 2008). While Stewart (2008: 7) suggests that personal motivation undoubtedly plays a part, she adds that: 'in many conflicts people are primarily motivated by their group identity'. Based on this understanding of how conflict occurs, Langer et al. (2012: 3) note that 'gaps in addressing what are often deeply entrenched forms of group-based discrimination and deprivation and marginalisation' endanger post-war reconstruction efforts as lingering discontent threatens relapse.

Economic models offer an alternative reading that shifts the lens from the group to the individual. Collier and Hoeffler's (1998, 2001) 'greed'[4] model for civil war, relies for example on the basic assumptions that the individual is the most significant unit of analysis and that individuals' motivations are driven by rational choice frameworks aimed at maximising self-interest. Methodologically, this implies that motivations ought to be arrived at through observed behaviour rather than through discussions with combatants, as the latter would have incentives to either be untruthful or to paint their actions in a favourable light (Collier 2000).[5] These assumptions are characteristic of what Cramer (2006: 125) terms 'economic imperialism', namely, the 'confidence amongst neoclassical economists in their ability to explain an increasingly wide range of social experience in terms of axioms and logic of this form of economics'. Collier's in fact is only the most popularly acclaimed version of what is a large literature on the economic incentives for violence. Based on the criminological insights of scholars such as Becker (1968), these theories posit that poverty and the attraction of profits lowers the costs of collective action and, more specifically, the opportunity costs of collective violence, in a way that ethnic hatred and frustration against injustice cannot do. In other words, while injustice

[4] In later versions, the model was adapted to look at the 'feasibility' of civil war, though retaining the emphasis on individual economic agendas as opposed to grievances (see Keen 2012).

[5] See McGovern (2011a) for a direct discussion of this methodological assertion.

and identity grievances are plagued by the free rider problem in the neoclassical framework, the individual pursuit of profit through war avoids this.

Collier (2000: 93) uses several proxies for capturing these economic incentives, including the share of primary commodity exports so as to model the 'availability of lootable resources'. One of the most significant variables, at least for the initial greed model, is the 'proportion of young men in a society'. This demographic observation, he argues, offers a way to study 'the cost of attracting recruits to the rebellion'. In order to understand what the cost of violent labour is, Collier puts forward that unemployed youth are more likely to join a rebellion, as their opportunity cost for engaging in violence will be lower than those with better life prospects. Because of the paucity of reliable unemployment statistics, Collier assumes that the relative opportunity for accessing income-generating activities can be proxied by levels of education. Other studies have also highlighted the interaction between poverty and unemployment and the ability to make profits out of war, for example through looting or gaining control of natural resources (Hirshleifer 2001; Humphreys & Weinstein 2008; Verwimp 2005).

It is important to tease out even more explicitly what these theories tell us about the greater propensity of the unemployed for engaging in destabilising violence. These interpretations share the unspoken but chilling assumption that the risk of being killed in combat is preferable to a life of poverty; in other words 'the poor engage in war because life is cheap' (Cramer 2006: 136). Consequently, the poor are more likely to either choose collective violence or to be more easily recruited by violence entrepreneurs. This distinction between young people's collective violence 'from below' and their recruitment 'from above' is important because it helps us make more concrete the kinds of political threats that unemployed men are expected to pose.

These assumptions also extend to the post-war period, with small alterations. According to Collier (2007), countries that have experienced conflict are not, per se, more likely to relapse. The likelihood of relapse is however increased by the inability to address the root causes of war as identified by these economic approaches. Specifically, economic reconstruction that fails to adequately raise the opportunity costs of violence for young men sets countries onto a path for renewed violence. Collier's work has been central to the popularisation of the development-security nexus, through his suggestion that poverty throws countries into vicious cycles of violence (Keen 2012; see DFID 2016; World Bank 2011; UN 2004).

These assumptions continue to shape the contours of youth employment policy in post-war contexts, more than a decade on.

Approaches like Collier's have however been energetically and voluminously challenged. These challenges form the springboard for this book. A number of critiques have targeted Collier's use of proxies, and in particular the assumption that unemployment can be captured through education statistics (Cramer 2006; McGovern 2011a). This is no small matter as it leads us to question the prominence of the notion of unemployment in explaining the economic situation of fighters. As discussed above, in most of the developing and conflict-affected settings that these theories address, unemployment is not a viable option for the poor. Indeed, Cramer's (2011a) review finds that, even where evidence is available, a conclusive pattern relating unemployment to violence is not evident. This does not mean that the relationship is not there, or that labour market dynamics do not matter for understanding violence. Rather it suggests two things: that the relationship is unlikely to be mechanistic and needs further explanation with a particular view to the interaction of different factors; and that we need to extend our focus to different kinds of marginal labour market experiences (e.g. underemployment or precarious labour) – how do these experiences relate to violence, if at all?

These suggestions for further, contextual, study also emerge from another important set of concerns with economic theories of war: those that relate to economists' assumptions about human nature, their interpretations of motives and, most importantly, the way they conceptualise how labour market experiences might have political outcomes. These challenges, importantly, need not amount to a rejection of economic motives as a lens through which to study political violence. Instead they push us towards a less reductive analysis of how political and economic motives might become intertwined.

Indeed, the neat separation and juxtaposition of grievance and economic incentives is largely artificial, and there are good reasons to suggest that motives may be inseparable and that specific indicators may not in fact tell us the mechanism linking it to the conflict at hand. For example, we may equally interpret unemployment as an objective marker of individuals' cost-benefit matrix, or we may view unemployment as a source of frustration with unjust exclusion from labour markets. The suggestion that economic incentives and political grievances are mutually exclusive forecloses a multi-causal interpretation of violence that can accommodate for a variety of reasons for individuals' decision to join (Humphreys and Weinstein

2008; Stewart 2008). McGovern's (2011a: 350) critique of Collier's work is illustrative from this point of view as he argues that: 'the emotive and even perverse dynamics that micro studies tend to point out suggests that participants in violent politics are operating according to rational and irrational choice models at once'.

This more nuanced view is evident in McGovern's (2011b: 3) meticulous study on political violence in Côte d'Ivoire, where he suggests that 'the political, the economic and the rhetorical, the tactical and the strategic, the conscious and semi-conscious motivations of actors in the Ivorian conflict (and many others) often coexist, even while they are at odds with one another'. It is such micro studies, discussed in the next section, that can help us gain a more rounded understanding of how labour markets might be linked to violent politics in practice. Such studies are necessary to offer an alternative to neoclassical assumptions, not least because the latter fail to take us very far in gaining a better insight into the circumstances under which the 'ticking bombs' might explode. Although, as we shall see, more nuanced, contextually rooted and multi-causal studies of youth engagement in violence have yet to address head-on the question of labour, they offer an important backdrop for such an endeavour. These theories in fact focus on combatants' economic positions and motives without lapsing into reductive or deterministic assumptions, taking grievances seriously while emphasising the significance and complexity of individual motivations.

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVES

This rich literature articulates the complex interactions between economic motives and mobilisation, making space both for political and historical circumstances as well as acknowledging the socially situated meanings attached to economic relations. These readings make the detachment of greed and grievance difficult and helpfully foreground this book's attempt to understand unemployment as a social rather than simply economic phenomenon, so as to unpack its political implications.

A first set of theories in this direction is led by scholars who frame economic motives in a broader political economy analysis. In so doing, they explain how economic calculations, historical and political circumstances, and individual or collective articulations of injustice and resentment can reinforce each other at critical junctures. Keen's (2000, 2002, 2005) theoretical and empirical work is illustrative, as he has explicitly made the argument against a facile