LONG ROAD HOME:
BUILDING RECONCILIATION AND TRUST
IN POST-WAR SIERRA LEONE

by

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MA, University of British Columbia, 1998

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the
Department
of
Sociology and Anthropology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2006

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Abstract

The 1991-2002 civil war in Sierra Leone raised the bar of cruelty as high as any war in recent memory. Infamous for mass amputations and kidnapping and recruitment of children into armed forces, Sierra Leone should face severe obstacles to reconciliation between combatants and civilians or combatants from opposing sides. But this is not the case. Sierra Leoneans are strikingly willing to say they forgive and will reconcile with those responsible for ravaging their villages and their lives. Popular anger is directed instead at top government officials even though their predecessors, not they, were responsible for the corruption and mismanagement that led to the rebellion. Until Sierra Leoneans see real change in governing practices, the most important form of national reconciliation in Sierra Leone, (re)establishing popular trust in the state, will be difficult to achieve.

This research explores the multiple meanings of reconciliation after mass atrocity, the roles of transitional institutions in promoting reconciliation, and barriers to deep reconciliation. Based on field research in Sierra Leone, including observations of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings, I argue that conciliatory processes fall into two groups: those that must be evaluated on rational grounds and can be measured (described as 'coming together' or 'coming to agreement') and those that can only be felt (described as 'trust,' 'healing' and 'coming to terms' with the past). Institutional efforts to promote reconciliation strive for measurable outcomes that are too often taken as proxies for deeper, sentient forms of reconciliation. With few organized processes besides the truth commission to promote dialogue about the past, Sierra Leoneans often turn to religion or their own informal trust-building strategies to fill the gaps.

Achieving sentient reconciliation requires more than addressing war-related crimes. Problematic social structures and tensions that contributed to the war must be understood so that post-war transitional processes can avoid replicating them. The Sierra Leone TRC showed that, given a mandate to investigate the broad context of war, truth commissions can assist reconciliation by identifying these social structures and tensions and thus provide essential information for effective transitional planning.

Keywords

Dedication

To the people of Sierra Leonean,

with hope for lasting peace.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks must go to my external examiners – Dr. Handel Wright of the Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia, and Dr. James Busumtwi-Sam from SFU's Political Science Department – for their careful reading of my thesis and excellent comments and suggestions. Mickey Naisby, our graduate secretary, was extremely supportive throughout my PhD studies. Her care and assistance contributed much to my positive experience in our department. I was also greatly assisted by the generous financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and Simon Fraser University which allowed me to conduct this expensive research and work full time on my studies.

This thesis owes much to the input and support of many people. Dr. Heribert Adam, my senior supervisor, encouraged me to study in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and guided me throughout the process even after his retirement. Dr. Adam is a wonderful teacher and has been generous with his feedback and encouragement since 1997, well before I began my PhD, and has enabled me to attend many valuable forums on post-conflict transitions. I also owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Jane Pulkingham, chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. She has been a valuable committee member who engaged thoughtfully with my work and provided excellent feedback and a sympathetic ear when I needed one. Dr. Pulkingham joined my committee after Dr. Ellen Gee, my previous committee member, sadly passed away. Dr. Gee was a wise teacher and a great mentor to many people and I feel very lucky to have benefited from her guidance for the short time I knew her. I would also like to thank Dr. Curt Griffiths from the School of Criminology who served on my committee and supported me throughout this process.

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This research could not have been done without the tremendous support of many people in Sierra Leone. My research assistants, Musa Jambawai and Umaroh Sesay, were wonderful guides to the country. Musa was a wise friend first and a research assistant later and his insights and our lively discussions were important to my work. Three other dear friends and intellectual companions were Manty Dabo, Hamidu Jalloh and Shellac Sonny-Davies. Our conversations and their friendship and hospitality greatly assisted my work. I must also express my great gratitude to Zoe Dugal who was always ready to discuss ideas and support me in this effort. Without her, this research could not have taken the shape it did. I am also grateful to the people at NCDDR in Bo who facilitated my intensive research in a village in the district and to those Sierra Leoneans, who I cannot name, who generously shared their views with me or otherwise facilitated my

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List of Acronyms

APC	All People's Congress
CCP	Commission for the Consolidation of Peace
CDF	Community Defense Forces
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (process, not institution)
DfID	British Department for International Development
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
MADA	Mining Area Development Administration
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NCDDR	National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLST	Sierra Leone Selection Trust
UDP	United Democratic Party

Chapter 1:
Two in the driver's seat:
The research journey

1.1   Introduction

The taxi driver is unforgiving and unrepentant. It is March 2003 and we are in New London, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 14 months after President Tejan Kabbah announced the official end of the country's 11-year civil war. As he inches the cab through the throngs clogging the street around the old clock tower, our driver points proudly to the charred remains of the East End police station. "Do you see that building there?" he asks. "We burned that down." The whole judicial system is corrupt, he says, explaining his hatred for the police, who comprise the front line and provide the easiest targets of public frustration with government corruption. Police frequently harass motorists, he says, and while poor men can serve years in prison for minor offences, wealthy, powerful people go free after committing major crimes. The January 6th 1999 'rebel' invasion of the city – an orgy of murder, mutilation, rape and abduction – provided a chance for revenge. "The only time you could exercise your power was at that time – with the barrel" (of a gun).[1]

Our driver says his brother was killed by soldiers of the government-allied West African peacekeeping force, ECOMOG. He boasts that he transported goods for rebel forces during the war and therefore could drive unharrassed in this region. He speaks fondly of the late rebel leader, Foday Sankoh. And he boasts, "In 1,000 years, peace will not come because we will tell our children" about the war and the reasons for it. For all his bravado, his calls for generations of revenge seekers are unconvincing. It simply was not that kind of war.

But also unconvincing are declarations of 'forgiveness' and 'reconciliation' that I hear repeated like mantras across the country from people who suffered terribly during the war. "Let's forgive and forget."[2] "Leave the past behind." "Swallow the bitter pill" (of no justice for most perpetrators). "Let sleeping dogs lie." After all that Sierra Leoneans went through during this bitter war, can they really forget the past that easily, or are these the words of people resigned to no justice and determined to get on with their lives in a country rated by the United Nations

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[1] According to the International Crisis Group (2001b, p. 6), rebel Revolutionary United Front forces killed approximately one-eighth of Sierra Leone police during the war.

[2] In Krio, the word 'forget' means something similar to 'forgive' (H. Wright, personal communication, November 28, 2005).

Development Program (UNDP) as the second poorest in the world (UNDP, 2005)?[3] The path to peace and reconciliation in Sierra Leone is far more complicated than either the taxi driver's calls for revenge or popular calls for amnesia – leaving the past behind – indicate.

The war in Sierra Leone started in 1991 as an uprising by the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) against a kleptocratic government in Freetown that failed to provide basic services to the country's citizens, especially those living outside the capital. The RUF might have found sympathizers to its cause but its widespread use of terror tactics against civilians – precisely the impoverished rural people its leadership claimed to assist – quickly alienated it from the population. The rebels' practice of kidnapping villagers, especially children, and 'resocializing' them as young killers, tore families and communities apart in ways that could not be sustained in peacetime. When the war ended, most combatants and displaced villagers had to return home where they had land and support networks. RUF excombatants had to return to villages often destroyed by forces with which they were associated. And they had to find a way to live with their families and neighbours. How can people learn to trust each other again after so much blood has been shed? And how can we talk meaningfully about reconciliation in the tentative peace of post-war contexts? This research aims to answer these questions.

This research examines how we might think about reconciliation in a precise way that would be useful for post-conflict policy making. In particular it asks how we can discuss reconciliation in a way that will satisfy the needs of any given post-conflict society – in this case Sierra Leone. In assessing Sierra Leone's reconciliation needs, the research digs deep into history. It looks at the tensions that helped tear the country apart, some created by the war, but many of which are rooted in colonial practices of indirect rule and continue to this day. This historical, ideological and cultural context is integral both to the war and to people's experiences of reintegration and reconciliation. If reconciliation – a neutral term – is to be a *just* reconciliation for women, children and men of all classes and geographies, policy makers need a deep understanding of the cultural and historical context, one that goes far beyond the rifts of war.

Specifically, the research asks one theoretical and four field-based questions:

Theoretical:

- How do we need to understand and assess post-conflict reconciliation so that the concept is useful for peacebuilding policy and practice?

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[3] The UNDP human development index assesses the standard of living in 177 countries based on such indicators as average life expectancy, adult literacy and school enrolment, and GDP per capita "in purchasing power parity (PPP) US dollars" (UNDP, 2005, p. 214).

Field-based:

- What are the dominant conciliatory needs of Sierra Leone and how are these being experienced and addressed?

- How do reintegrative, truth-telling and justice institutions, especially the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, affect reintegration, reconciliation and justice in Sierra Leone and how do they affect each other?

- How do Sierra Leoneans (re)establish trust as excombatants and victims return to their communities?

- What does the Sierra Leone case study suggest about the contextual knowledge needed before a national reconciliation plan can be developed?

This research grew out of my long personal commitment to Africa and to the field of comparative peacebuilding studies. I have lived, worked and travelled in a number of African countries since 1985. My deep respect for people I met, many of whom struggled to survive amidst war, injustice and poverty, pushed me towards the fields of peacebuilding, development and human rights. My master's research on peacebuilding education in Bosnia and Croatia, my work with youth in post-war Bosnia, and courses on peacebuilding and post-conflict transitions introduced me to scholars and field workers from a wide range of post-war contexts and showed me the value of a comparative understanding of conflicts and peacebuilding.

After living in Botswana from 1991-1993 during neighbouring South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, I took a keen interest in the proceedings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The commission was said to encourage 'reconciliation' and provide 'restorative justice' for victims of apartheid-era crimes but I was not convinced that it provided either. In my view these concepts and processes had not been fully thought through. As Sierra Leone intended to have its own TRC, it seemed to offer an excellent case study for examining reconciliation and restorative justice in depth. I wanted to know how we can think of reconciliation and restorative justice so they are useful concepts for policy making in transitional societies rather than nice-sounding terms that mean everything and nothing at all.

A case study is an excellent way to probe and ground concepts used in theory and policy making. These concepts, and the assumptions they rest on, need to stand the test of real life

situations. Yet once in the field the researcher must work with what she finds. Stake (2000) writes:

> Ultimately, we may be interested in a general phenomenon or a population of cases more than in the individual case. And we cannot understand this case without knowing about other cases. But while we are studying it, our meagre resources are concentrated on trying to understand *its* complexities (p. 436).

In Sierra Leone I found little resembling restorative justice and had to adapt my research to focus exclusively on reconciliation processes. This proved to be a rich and useful area of inquiry in itself.

Sierra Leone provides an excellent opportunity to examine post-conflict reconciliation for a number of reasons. First, because the conflict was not ethnically or religiously driven and because the RUF largely obtained recruits using abductions, war rifts were unsustainable in peacetime. Most Sierra Leoneans need to reconcile and this enables the study of post-conflict reconciliation in action. The case study can also show the limits of generalizing about reconciliation.

Second, Sierra Leone is unusual because the government chose to have both a TRC and a Special Court to try those most responsible for war crimes. This provides an opportunity to study potential complementarities and conflicts between the two institutions. However, while my research touches on issues relating to the Special Court, the primary institutional focus is on the TRC.

Third, many tensions and inequities in Sierra Leone are rooted in colonial structures and processes of indirect rule. The rural-urban divisions that derive from colonial protectorate-colony relations, the use of chiefs as intermediaries, and the presence of Lebanese-Sierra Leoneans as a middle-man minority group resemble situations in many former colonies. An analysis of the war and peacebuilding that incorporates this understanding may contribute to the small but growing body of literature on post-colonial conflicts.

Fourth, the study has intrinsic value (Stake, 2000). There is a great need for research and writing on the conflict in Sierra Leone which is currently underserved in the literature. Sierra Leoneans deserve the attention, insights and discussion that good literature and research by nationals and outsiders can provide or provoke. At the same time, Sierra Leone has much to teach the rest of the world, not least because of its model of religious cosmopolitanism which contributes greatly to peace.

Sierra Leone is also an important piece in the puzzle of conflicts surrounding the Mano River region of West Africa. War is a fertile training ground for "regional warriors" (Human Rights Watch, 2005), combatants who become mercenaries in neighbouring countries. If peace is to be found in the region, we need to know much more about why combatants choose this career path and how reintegration efforts can be improved.

Finally, a framework for thinking about post-conflict reconciliation needs to satisfy every society emerging from mass atrocity. Case studies provide a good way of assessing and improving such a model which then needs to be assessed in other contexts. In this way, analysts might hone a precise and useful language around reconciliation.

This case study, therefore, has both intrinsic and instrumental value. It seeks to contribute to literature on peacebuilding in Sierra Leone and inform policy in the country and, as such, it speaks to both an academic and a Sierra Leonean audience. Equally important, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of reconciliation in transitional societies and tries to present these findings in a useful way for policy making – thus speaking to academics and policy makers. These dual goals and loyalties create a tension throughout the thesis.

1.2   The journey begins

Valentine's Day 2003. The plane from London touches down on a typical sweltering night at Lungi International Airport, just a short ride in a dilapidated military helicopter from Freetown. Once the tired passengers and I have collected our luggage and passed through customs and immigration, we are greeted by a throng of young men, clambering to assist us with our bags, guiding us through the otherwise easy process of arranging a ticket for the helicopter. Anything for a generous tip.

Welcome to Sierra Leone, a country where legions of young men and women need to find a way to support themselves and their families or, given the opportunity, they will return to the only profitable activity they know: the business of war.

That night I moved into the compound of a Krio family in Congo Town, on the more affluent west side of Freetown. The compound would be my home for the next two months and living there exposed me to the complicated interrelationships and interdependencies of people in Sierra Leone. My interviews provided my data but my day-to-day relationships with my Sierra Leonean friends, acquaintances and cohabitants provided the all-important context for my research. Through them I learned about the power and dependency relationships between men

and women, and people of different ages, classes and ethnicities that enabled and shaped this war and provides the context within which peace will be built – or lost.

In Freetown, most people get around by poda poda (a public minivan) or public taxi. Both take a set number of passengers, have set rates and go set routes, though they are not labelled. Except at the final stops, a person wanting to catch one of these poda podas needs to stand at a given but unmarked place and as the poda poda slows down, she needs to shout out where she wants to go. If the poda poda is going there – and if it has room – the driver will stop, the 'apprentice' (driver's assistant) will open the door and she can get on. If not, the poda poda will not stop and she must shout at the next one.

People say that many poda poda and taxi drivers are excombatants, trying to find a new way of surviving and perhaps save money for school. The drivers are almost all young men and apprentices sometimes look as young as 13. The taxis are usually owned by a patron who receives a share of the profits.

Being a poda poda passenger is an insider's business. You need to know where to stand, where taxis are likely to go because you must shout a stop on their route, and you need the right accent. A person shouting "Circular Road" for the university or "Girl's School" with a Canadian accent will not go far. The right version of "Sucula Road" or "Gals School" is required. Luckily Sierra Leoneans are very helpful and you can usually ask for assistance. A new arrival may have a general idea of where he wants to go but the route and stopping point, even the way of hailing a poda poda, are unclear. With time, routes and names become so familiar they feel like the most natural way of travelling.

I lived in Freetown for two months, and while I learned the poda poda routes of these young men, so influenced by war, I also learned the routes that justice, reconciliation and reintegration took in a peace process driven by fear of excombatants. I spent the first month in Freetown, interviewing NGO workers and diverse citizens to get their impressions of the TRC and Special Court and perspectives on the reintegration of excombatants and war wounded. Some of my questions were informed by my previous writing on reconciliation but they were directed by themes emerging from the interviews.

Early on, three themes arose. First, Sierra Leonean reintegration workers often espoused an ontological view that Africans need to be part of their home communities and traditional communities are always ready and willing to receive them. They contrasted this with 'Western individualism' and often cited the saying "There's no bad bush to throw away a bad child." At the

same time I was hearing about amputees, rape victims and excombatants who were having difficulty returning or did not want to return home. I needed to assess the accuracy of this 'African community' vision by asking displaced people and excombatants about their ideas of community and of returning home.

Second, Sierra Leonean NGO workers who should have been on side with the TRC tended to be highly critical and seemingly unsupportive of it. I began to ask about consultation processes preceding and following the commission's creation.

Third, people I spoke with were quick to say they forgave excombatants for war crimes and would let them return and they defined 'forgiveness' and 'reconciliation' as being willing to forego revenge. I wanted a deeper sense of how they felt, how they dealt with anger and pain and how they build trust again. I was beginning to see that people's religious beliefs strongly influenced their ideas of justice and reconciliation. I was also beginning to hear about divisions within the country that were not commonly discussed.

After a month in Freetown I knew I had to travel to the interior. I employed a Krio and Temne-speaking interpreter, Umaroh Sesay, to help me pursue themes that arose in Freetown and hear different views of the conflict, reintegration and justice. We visited a group of displaced excombatant amputees, and interviewed two elderly amputees. We then travelled to Port Loko and Makeni in northern Sierra Leone to try to meet excombatants who we heard did not want to return to their home communities in the south. We succeeded in interviewing excombatants on those trips, though the interviews were predictably superficial. Interviews with excombatants and elderly amputees would have been better done as part of an ethnographic, anthropological study where the researcher spent time in the community and earned the trust of the people she was talking to. This was not possible with the brief nature of my visits to these regions. I did, however, have good interviews with Sierra Leoneans who worked with excombatants.

Travelling in intercity poda podas also exposed me to Sierra Leoneans' ambivalent relationship with corruption and their complex relations with police who served as the state's front line. During frequent police road blocks, passengers often debated the wrongs and rights of offering bribes. Some saw it as an unfortunate but necessary way of proceeding and did not want their journey further delayed for the sake of principle; others argued that they are only contributing to a corrupt system by complying. During these trips up country I also got a taste of the danger and exhaustion of travel in regions beyond Port Loko, Freetown and Bo and some good reasons for police enforcement of laws. In the north and east of the country a taxi is not full

until the roof can carry no more and there are two in the driver's seat. In a low point in my trip, as the taxi hurtled on the bumpy road from Koindu to Bo and the driver shifted gears around my knees, that second person in the driver's seat was me.

These travels showed me that I needed to live 'up country,' away from relatively privileged, insular and expensive Freetown life. In mid-April I moved to Bo where I was based until I left Sierra Leone at the end of May. From late April until mid-May I attended TRC hearings in Freetown, Bo and Kailahun near the Liberian border. I also visited the diamond-rich town of Koidu in Kono District and conducted 11 interviews in a village in the Southern Province, which I call 'Togo,' that was attacked three times by RUF forces during the war. I was interested in 'Togo' because I heard that, after many visits from government officials, villagers reluctantly agreed to accept a top RUF commander home. I wanted to know what they felt about the process. These interviews were interpreted from Krio and Mende by Musa Jambawai who was not only an excellent interpreter but also a wise friend with whom I could discuss every aspect of my research.

1.3   The data

My field data came from three main sources: interviews; ethnographic observations; and notes from Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. During my 3 ½ months in Sierra Leone I conducted 62 formal interviews. After returning to Canada, I conducted two telephone interviews with foreigners who had worked in Sierra Leone. The interview characteristics are depicted in Table 1.1 below.

I arrived in Sierra Leone with few contacts but did not experience problems in obtaining interviews. Sierra Leoneans are very helpful and before long I had more interviews than I could keep up with. My snowball approach for getting interviews was appropriate in Sierra Leone where a system of mutual obligation prevails and people tend to introduce you to those they know. Whether one is looking for a tailor or an interview, if a person asks for guidance, a Sierra Leonean will usually take you to a family member or friend. This approach led to some fruitful interviews with people I would not otherwise have met. I was able to counter the homogenizing tendency that this interview-finding strategy might have created by expressing interest in diverse groups of people and relying on a wide range of people to make introductions.

Table 1.1 **Interview overview**

Informants interviewed as:*									
Individ 'l	Religious leader	Displaced person	Excomb	NGO local	NGO Inl./UN	Govt	Chief	TRC Staff	War injurd
31	6	2 groups	8	2	8	3	3	2	4

Location									
Freetown	Camp	Makeni	Port Loko	Bo	Village	Outside SL			
24	1	10	6	5***	14	2			

Interview language									
English	Krio	Mende	Temne						
43	10	8	2						

Gender									
Male	Female	Mixed grp							
45	16	2							

Individual or group interview									
Individ'l	Group								
58	6								

Interviewed alone** or with others present									
Alone	Others present								
45	18								
Expressed concern about confidentiality: 2									

Total interviews: 64.

* Informants were sometimes interviewed for multiple reasons. Group interviews are only counted once.

** Interpreter being present is not counted

*** There were six interviews with five people in Bo as one person was interviewed twice.

NGO local: Informant works for a local NGO and is interviewed in that capacity.

NGO Inl/UN: Informant works for an international NGO and is interviewed in that capacity.

Individ'l: Individual   **Excomb:** Excombatant   **SL** : Sierra Leone   **Injurd** : injured

In my first interviews in Freetown I asked 'ordinary' Sierra Leoneans and local and international NGO staff about integration processes, the TRC, forgiveness and reconciliation. Other themes emerged from these interviews that I taped and tried to transcribe and analyze in turn. Interview analysis involved identifying major themes that could inform the direction of future interviews and following up on past themes. However electrical shortages and time and social constraints meant I could only transcribe 40-50 percent of the interviews in the field. I prioritized transcriptions and completed the rest after returning to Canada.

I also followed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for just over two weeks of hearings in Freetown, Bo and half a day in Kailahun. I did not record the hearings but took notes. I was less interested in the events of the war than the commission's goals, dynamics between commissioners and witnesses, audience composition and responses, witnesses' expressed needs and attitudes towards reconciliation and justice, and the degree to which perpetrators took responsibility for their actions. I typed and thematically analyzed these notes.

My interviews and interview analysis took two main forms. In the first part of the interviews – and in some interviews entirely – I asked basic questions and encouraged respondents to talk without exposing my own views. During the interview, and after when analyzing the transcripts, I listened carefully and tried to pick up on respondents' words, themes and assumptions. This is an interviewer-centred approach and, while the research may indirectly benefit the respondent, it offers few immediate benefits. Analysis of these transcripts may be more systematic in nature – even quantitative at times – to identify trends and themes that might not have been noted by the researcher during the interview or recalled after it.

When respondents were interested in engaging in the subjects of peacebuilding and reconciliation, the latter part of the interview would become a dialogue in which we would both ask each other more probing questions and I would feel free to express my opinions and ideas as respondents expressed theirs. These were often very fruitful discussions that allowed us to explore issues around reintegration and reconciliation in depth. In this kind of conversational interview, relations between interviewer and interviewee are more equal. Although the interviewer still determines the general topic of discussion, both parties should benefit from it and both ask questions. In fact, one man I interviewed called me back to interview me. The data from this kind of interview may be analyzed differently than the previous kind. For example, in conversation, our language is likely to merge so data analysis focuses less on the language used and more on the deeper meanings and issues that we flesh out together.

These two aspects of my interview approach and analysis may appear to be contradictory but they are not. They are as complementary as listening and conversing. Before anyone offers an opinion on a subject and engages in conversation, he or she should first listen to and reflect on what others have to say. Then in conversation, ideas, feelings and information can be examined in depth.

My original research plan was heavily reliant on interviews and notes from TRC hearings. However the longer I stayed in Sierra Leone the more incongruities I found between what people said and my observations of their lives. I heard people espouse forgiveness and a culture of mutual support that valued children. Yet I saw workers, including children, suffering under terribly exploitative conditions, often with little or no benefit to themselves or their immediate families. If, as some people stated, Sierra Leonean communities had a place for everybody, one had to ask what the conditions of placement were and who integration benefited. Moreover, in particularly exploitative circumstances, I saw and experienced a climate of extreme secrecy and distrust. I framed deep reconciliation in terms of trust yet I was looking at its opposite.

Although I was slow to understand my work as ethnographic, my interactions with Sierra Leoneans heavily informed my analysis. I was especially influenced by deep conversations with Sierra Leonean friends, observing the relationships of people on my compounds in Freetown and Bo, and my experiences riding intercity taxis and poda podas. The dynamics on my compounds revealed complex relations of love, support, dependency, distrust, exploitation and abuse. Intercity poda poda and taxi rides exposed the front line of tension between the government and citizens, people's frustrating and ambivalent relations with corruption and the unhealed wounds of war. I took some notes about these experiences but relied more heavily on the perspective enabled by distance.

As incongruities between interview data and my participant observations became apparent I began a regular process of cross-checking between the two. When analyzing interview data during my daily transcriptions I continuously reflected on whether the sentiments expressed were consistent with the relations I observed around me. Often they were not and this spurred further inquiry, both in interviews and, informally, in field observation. Neither participant observation nor interviews alone could have provided me with the insights that such triangulation enabled.

This triangulation did not stop with the end of my field research. I left Sierra Leone more confused about the country's past than I had been when I arrived. Each day in the field seemed to bring a new angle to the war and people's struggles to reintegrate and reconcile. Much of my research occurred once I returned home as I pieced together literature on Sierra Leone history from hundreds of sources to try to make sense of what I had seen in the field. The most frustrating question was: 'Who were the rebels and what were their motivations?' I often found more generalizations than answers in accounts on the subject. It took draft chapters of the TRC report to fill in many of these gaps.

The dearth of literature on Sierra Leone contrasts sharply with the plentiful literature on Bosnia, Israel/Palestine, South Africa and Rwanda. Although some good books are available, they tend to address aspects of the war – diamonds (Hirsch, 2001), regional issues (Adebajo, 2002), for example – and do not answer the many historical questions that arose from my field research. As a result, I had to rely heavily on two works that provided credible answers: the first was William Reno's (1995) *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*; the second was the TRC report (2004). While this created an imbalance in the literature I use, I found that these two sources were invaluable in filling information gaps that otherwise stymied my attempts to write an adequate history of the war and its roots.

This research reflects my observations during a particular time – a 3 ½-month period in 2003 – in a rapidly-changing post-war environment. I often felt that I was talking to people who were still in shock after the war. Their main concern was survival, an end to war and building some hope for the future. As people become economically and physically more secure they may call more strongly for former perpetrators to be held accountable for their crimes. My findings need to be assessed with this understanding to avoid inappropriate generalizations or assumptions.

1.4   On being an outsider

I am an outsider to Sierra Leone and my role, value and limitations are in that position. As an outsider, especially one doing interview-based research, my research options are limited. I do not have a deep understanding of the worldviews, traditions and experiences of the people of Sierra Leone, the elements of society that a Sierra Leonean researcher would more likely – though not necessarily – be privy to. This may make me more inclined as a sociologist to do broader, more superficial research and to avoid commenting in depth on aspects of reconciliation that cannot be articulated or observed.

As one example, Sierra Leoneans often express their desire to forgive and reconcile in religious terms. While I interviewed a number of people at length about their religious views in relation to reconciliation, I can do no more than report what they said and the frequency with which they said it. Because religion is clearly important to many Sierra Leoneans' experiences of reconciliation, I would like deeper insights into how they experience reconciliation as influenced by their faith. However as a non-religious person I struggle to empathize. In a similar way I cannot appreciate the role of traditional secret societies in reintegration and reconciliation processes even though this is clearly important.[4] I can, however, observe culturally-entrenched relations of dependency between Sierra Leoneans that seem to contradict people's statements of reconciliation and forgiveness. As an outsider, in other words, my insights are limited to what I can observe and, perhaps, empathize with.

My outsider status, especially as I come from a dominant culture, also means that I struggle constantly with my own ethnocentrism, both in the field and when writing. Our views of who men, women and children are and how we relate to one another are socially constructed. Cross-cultural researchers need to acknowledge and engage with often profoundly conflicting perspectives and researchers from dominant groups are perhaps most inclined to be blind to their own cultural assumptions. Bell (2002) cautions that:

> if we wish to understand the ways in which people inhabit the world, we must work hard to determine what is significant from the point of view of its people. Understanding anything is always tied to its surroundings, which include language, customs, geography, iconic traditions, and especially the ordinary practices of its people (p. 1).

Similarly, I grappled with what criteria to use when discussing human rights – a concept that exists in most cultures but may not always reflect rights enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights or the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. Because elite spokespeople do not always protect the rights of those they govern and often argue for discrimination based on traditional – and sometimes religious – values, I decided to take my lead from disadvantaged Sierra Leoneans and their supporters.

For example, only one person mentioned the issue of female genital mutilation and, when I raised the subject, people did not see it as a problem. Yet many children and adults talked about the right to go to school and receive medical care and equal justice. Women also talked about the need to end legalized discrimination that affects women's ability to inherit and own property and

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[4] Long-term ethnographic research by non-Sierra Leoneans, such as that done by Hoffman (2003, 2004) and Ferme (2001, 2004) can overcome some 'outsider' obstacles.

to address attitudes towards victims of sexual violence who are often blamed for crimes committed against them. These are the human right values emphasized in this paper. This does not negate or contradict other human rights values articulated in international law. However, an outsider's efforts to address sensitive human rights issues are more persuasive, and less at risk of being counter-productive, when they build on concerns expressed by those most affected by abuses.

Conducting research across cultures, even within the same language, is susceptible to misinterpretation. When research is conducted in a language the researcher does not understand or understands poorly, chances of misinterpretation are even greater. When interpreters are involved, especially non-professionals, they may add their own biases to questions or responses. Sometimes these biases reflect the interpreter's own prejudices or perceptions; at other times interpreters, in an effort to be helpful, try to lead respondents into providing the kinds of answers they think the researcher wants to hear.

During this research, I employed three interpreters to interpret to and from Krio, Temne, Limba and Mende. None were professionals but all had university education and we learned each others' styles as we went along. Most interpreted interviews were in Krio, a mix of English and African languages. I could follow these interviews easily, though I never learned to speak the language. In Krio interviews I could catch problems with interpretation – if words were added or if the interpreter was summarizing instead of interpreting the exact words. In some cases I could translate informants' words directly from the tape. I have great confidence in the interpretations from Mende and Krio but less confidence in early interviews involving Temne and Limba.

Using interpreters has benefits too. My interpreters helped me reflect on the interviews. They offered valuable insights and background information after the interview was finished. They also introduced me to people who I would never have otherwise met and in some cases this resulted in lasting friendships. Musa was a friend first and then an interpreter and we discussed every aspect of my research. His insights and our debates were invaluable to my fieldwork.

As a white Westerner, Sierra Leoneans not only saw me as an outsider, some viewed me as a potential source of wealth, influence and assistance; others saw me as neutral, detached from the politics around them; yet others saw me as part of a neo-colonial, dominant group that imposes its will and interests on small countries like Sierra Leone, giving little in return. (The United States first bombed Iraq while I was there and this was a topic of tremendous interest in the country).

Sierra Leoneans often acknowledge that they like and trust Westerners too much. This may be largely due to the tremendous inequality of wealth between Westerners and Sierra Leoneans so that Westerners are seen as potential patrons. It may also result from the patronizing legacy of colonialism and current global undervaluing of Africans which lead many Africans – even generations after colonialism – to lose confidence in themselves and their people. Also, many aid agencies are from Europe and North America and many Sierra Leoneans have positive experiences with aid workers and volunteers who are trying to help the country and are not entrenched in clientalist structures from which many are excluded or benefit little. One elderly interviewee agreed to an interview with me because a Canadian helped him in the past. Such blind trust of Westerners is worrying, but it encourages the foreign researcher not to betray that trust.

There are also advantages to being an outsider. Processes and relations that insiders see as normal or impossible to change can be questioned by the outsider. When an insider explains these processes or relations to the outsider, she analyses them at the same time. For the first time she may ask, is this working for us? Is it just? What support do I need to heal from the crimes of the war? Is something else possible?

An outsider's perceived neutrality can benefit research. Some Sierra Leoneans may feel unsafe to talk about their feelings, fears or experiences with other community members for fear of appearing to criticize leadership or stirring up trouble. Instead, they may hide their feelings and focus on day-to-day survival. The sympathetic foreigner may be seen as a safe ear, someone with whom one can talk about these things. This makes protecting the identity of informants in such cases especially important.

A foreigner can also raise provocative questions that Sierra Leoneans cannot. For example, I was able to ask whether a top official should apologize for a statement he made during the war that angered many people. I suggested that by testifying at the TRC, he would show leadership, encouraging others to admit what they had done during the war. Sierra Leoneans may not have felt safe to state that suggestion publicly.

1.5   Ethical considerations

Conducting research in a country like Sierra Leone brings up many ethical questions, but these are far from the questions posed by university research ethics requirements. In my experience, the questions tended to be social and practical:

1. How can I make the research as useful as possible for Sierra Leone?

2. How can I make the interviews as useful as possible for those I interview?

3. How can I be as supportive as possible to people in need around me?

4. How can I avoid doing harm in my research and daily interactions?

5. And finally, consistent with university ethics concerns, how can I be sensitive to the safety needs of those I interview, including maintaining confidentiality, within a social setting that is comfortable for them?

The first four questions are as important as the last. First, my research must be useful to people on the ground. It has to be relevant to policy and address issues that are meaningful to Sierra Leoneans. To me, this obligation is especially important when doing research with vulnerable and extremely poor people in one of the poorest countries in the world. Pam Scholey (2005) of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) writes that northern researchers "tend to avoid taking on research with an explicit policy or practical bent which frequently frames Southern research interests" (p. 4). I attempted to make the research locally meaningful by deriving research themes from informants' concerns and trying to find a language and concepts surrounding reconciliation that will be useful for policy makers.

Scholey (2005) also writes that:

Most research on conflict contexts is still written by Northerners and not disseminated in Southern contexts or even back in the context from which it is derived and local actors from conflict contexts frequently need to go to Northern countries or sources to get research information on their own societies (p. 4).

I will send summaries of my findings to places known by and accessible to informants. Copies will be sent to all Sierra Leoneans I interviewed who work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A summary will also be available on the internet and I will send a copy of the full dissertation to the Department of Peace Studies library at Fourah Bay College in Freetown.

Second, I tried to make interviews as useful as possible for respondents by engaging some in mutually-beneficial dialogue (as described above) and by asking all respondents whether they had questions for me at the end of each interview. Many had concerns about the TRC and Special Court and I was able to provide some answers.

Third, being supportive of the people around me was a major concern. Young people commonly expressed a desire for education. Illiteracy is a big concern in Sierra Leone. It contributes to poverty, exploitation and dependency relations. This was a practical problem that I

could help with. I bought alphabet posters, maps, exercise books, pens and books and set up classrooms in both my homes. I spent many happy hours reading with children and doing basic literacy work with adults. I also tried unsuccessfully to pair literate family members with those wanting to learn to read.

The fourth concern was avoiding doing harm. In its easiest sense, this meant avoiding corruption. As a white, Western foreigner, I have a lot more power to refuse the occasional hint for bribes than most Sierra Leoneans. Still, even riding a poda poda or taxi in which the driver pays bribes to police can be said to contribute to corruption.

A researcher can also unintentionally do harm. When talking with young excombatants, for example, I found myself subtly reinforcing the dominant view, perpetuated by reintegration officials, that they were victims and were not responsible for their actions. While this stance is understandable, especially in the early reintegration period, it may also hinder young people's ability to come to terms with their sometimes willing complicity in violence.

Also, my daily interactions and conversations carried risks in a society in which power and dependency relationships were always important. As Tedlock (2000) writes, "Ethnographers' lives are embedded within their field experiences in such a way that all of their interactions involve moral choices" (p. 455). I was always aware that any support for people around me could threaten an established gender, class or age hierarchy with possible damaging implications for those I was seeking to assist. This was by far the most difficult part of my stay in Sierra Leone.

Finally, I had ethical concerns about not endangering my informants. Asking them to sign informed consent forms was not culturally appropriate. Instead, I broadly explained the research, its possible uses and where they can obtain a research summary. At first I told informants that all information would be kept confidential but as this statement tended to make those with less formal education uneasy, I stopped mentioning confidentiality in most interviews. All interviews, however, are kept as confidential as the interview setting permitted. Also, I always use pseudonyms when quoting respondents. With NGO workers, government officials and TRC staff I stated clearly that information would be confidential and some took advantage of opportunities to speak off the record. In two cases, informants were very concerned about disclosure of their identities and I have been extremely careful with how I use their information.

While protecting confidentiality and being sensitive to any possibilities of endangering respondents is appropriate, in some cases conventional ethical review procedures seemed inappropriate for the realities in the field. Scholey (2005) writes:

> Where signed parental consent forms for use with minors as research subjects are
> appropriate for Canada, the very definition of 'minor' is flexible and contextual
> in other locales, not to mention the actual significance of signed consent in
> contexts, or with populations, where literacy is uncommon. Finally, how
> meaningful or realistic is signed parental/guardian consent in contexts where
> interviews with armed child soldiers or trafficked children are requested? (p. 10)

Interviewing minors was not a major part of my research and while I did interview three teenage excombatants (see chapter 8.2.2), my arrangement with Simon Fraser University's ethics review board enabled me to interview them without parental consent.

I usually tried to arrange for private interviews, with only me, an interpreter if necessary, and the informant. However, as indicated in Table 1.1, 18 interviews occurred in the presence of other people – usually family members. All informants knew who was present and I felt they wanted family members or friends there and did not feel threatened by them. During other interviews informants wanted privacy.

Finally, much of my research involved participant observation and this has ethical implications. Though people around me knew I was a researcher, I did not inform them that I was learning from observing their interactions, and they thus could not give informed consent. Ethnographers distinguish between obligations to gain informed consent in public and private spaces with more need to gain consent for information gathered in private settings like the home (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). However, I learned from interactions both on my compounds and in the streets. I have dealt with this by writing more specifically about incidents in public spaces while keeping accounts based on observations from my compounds vague. More importantly, many people whose situations I learned from were vulnerable. I therefore keep references to them vague to obscure their identity. Where the person cannot be identified. I describe events involving them more precisely.

◆   ◆   ◆

This dissertation is written in four parts. Part I reviews the literature on reconciliation and offers a potential framework for discussing and analyzing conciliatory processes. Part II discusses the history of the conflict in Sierra Leone, including a chapter on the situations facing women and children. Part III reviews my findings that examined reintegrative and conciliatory institutions, especially the TRC, and people's informal ways of building trust in their communities. Part IV offers my conclusions.

Part I

Reconciliation after violent conflict:

Charting the terrain

Forward

After mass atrocity, most victims, perpetrators and bystanders must find a way to live together again, at least as fellow citizens. The term that describes this process: 'reconciliation,' is one of the most promising and contested words in post-war peacebuilding, yet it has been used so loosely that it has been rendered almost meaningless. Because of this ambiguity, practices designed to achieve reconciliation too often bear little relation to peacebuilding goals.

Broadly defined, reconciliation is a process in which individuals or groups that have had a serious conflict or abusive relations attempt to create or restore a "minimally acceptable" relationship (Kriesberg, 2001, p. 48). It implies some kind of 'coming together' of conflicting parties but what this actually looks like is heavily debated.

Past interpretations and approaches to reconciliation have tended to depend more on what 'experts' do – their particular slant – than on a coherent understanding of reconciliation and peacebuilding needs in the society concerned. But there are limits to the universal conclusions that we can draw about conciliatory processes. Atrocities and war dynamics may look strikingly similar but if we are really to reconcile the tensions that spawned the conflict and recognize paths to peace, we need to step deeply into the politics and culture that preceded the violence itself. We need to merge the skills of the comparative political and social analyst with those of the anthropologist who carefully observes ideologically-bound processes of integration and marginalization in peacetime and is sensitive to the feelings and views of ordinary people. And then, perhaps unlike the anthropologist, we need to return with these insights to the big picture and judge how to move forward.

The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report (2004) recognizes the centrality of local contexts when it states, "There is no universal model of reconciliation that can apply to all countries. Reconciliation is not a concept that can be imported to a country from abroad. It has to emerge from within the society and be owned by the society" (vol. 3b, chap. 7, ¶ 6).

Before we focus exclusively on Sierra Leone in parts two to four of this thesis, the language and concepts surrounding reconciliation need to be clarified. This language should be appropriate for analyzing multiple contexts even as reconciliation needs within those contexts differ.

Part one draws from the literature on post-conflict transitions to suggest a concrete way of discussing reconciliation that can be applied in many transitional contexts. While the term 'reconciliation' has often been dismissed as vague or meaningless outside its religious application, I argue that this need not be the case. Post-conflict reconciliation, while multifaceted and complex, can have real, practical meaning for peacebuilding in transitional societies if policy makers, programmers and planners are clear about a society's many reconciliation needs, how conciliatory activities relate to one another and how they should be assessed. Part one presents the conceptual tools needed for this planning. By discussing reconciliation needs and approaches to reconciliation in many transitional contexts, it locates reconciliation efforts in Sierra Leone conceptually and contributes to the analysis of post-conflict reconciliation in general.

A review of the literature on reconciliation leads to an interesting and useful observation: reconciliation goals fall into two distinct groups of activities that occur at different times in the peace process and need to be evaluated in completely different ways. Some kinds of reconciliation involve people coming together or coming to an agreement. These types of reconciliation tend to occur earlier in the transitional process and need to be assessed on rational grounds. Leaders may agree on a peace deal and a way of governing in the future. The peace deal may be assessed by criteria of international human rights law or national laws. People may also come to agree about past events when presented with credible testimony and evidence.

Other kinds of reconciliation involve individual healing, building trust and coming to terms with events. These kinds of reconciliation are felt – and they are the most difficult to achieve. Though they can be facilitated – using truth commissions, justice processes or material assistance – they cannot be forced. Premature efforts to encourage people to 'reconcile' and forgive' may be misleading and even damaging. The ontological perspective of restorative justice, with its focus on repairing relationships, may be best suited for understanding and facilitating this kind of reconciliation.

Chapter 2:
The geography of reconciliation

Save Sierra Leone from another war. Reconcile now. TRC can help.
Sierra Leone TRC poster

Are you willing to be reconciled, for the sake of peace? Are you ready to forgive?
Sierra Leone TRC Commissioner Jow to witness
whose children were killed by rebel-allied soldiers

Assessing reconciliation in post-conflict societies must begin with understanding the 'geography of reconciliation': clarifying major levels and types of reconciliation identified in peacebuilding literature. In this way we can locate reconciliation goals and specify their qualities and relationships with each other. This conceptual clarity is especially important in post-conflict societies to avoid demanding unnecessary sacrifices from victims and creating further disillusionment and distrust of governing processes.

Both the South African and Sierra Leonean truth commissions outlined the major levels of reconciliation in their reports but commissioners in both TRCs failed to maintain a distinction between these levels during public hearings. The most common confusion was typified by Commissioner Jow's statement, cited above, asking a victim to reconcile with perpetrators "for the sake of peace." Commissioners made no effort to explain how inter-individual reconciliation contributed to national reconciliation.

In this chapter I will outline the major levels and sublevels of post-conflict reconciliation as these are the foundations of an analysis of the subject. One type of reconciliation that is relevant to all levels is narrative reconciliation – coming to terms with the past. The latter part of this chapter will discuss three intriguing approaches to narrative reconciliation: an attempt to acknowledge the facts of the past; an attempt to create a win-win narrative; and amnesia.

2.1 Levels of reconciliation

2.1.1 Individual reconciliation

In a heart-wrenching narrative before the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a burly man in his 50s tearfully described the moment his life changed forever. Rebels wearing t-shirts that read "C. O. Cut Hand" (Commanding Officer Cut Hand) forced him to put both hands on a log and one by one they hacked them off. He talked about the difficulty of

doing even the most menial things with only hooks at the end of his arms. Even using the toilet in the middle of the night requires him to wake his wife, causing her strain and him humiliation.

From being a family leader, this man now finds himself dependent and a burden, a situation that shatters his conception of himself as a man, father, husband and community member. He must find a whole new identity and realize his strengths even in this tragically changed circumstance. Across Sierra Leone, thousands of people face similar struggles. Bereaved family members, war wounded, perpetrators and rape victims who can no longer bear the children on which their status as women and adults depends all need to come to terms with what happened to them or what they did.

This is the first of three forms of individual reconciliation: *intrapersonal reconciliation,* the process by which individuals who suffered from or conducted violence need to reconcile with themselves (Dwyer, 1999). It is often referred to as trauma 'healing,' 'coming to terms' with events or achieving 'closure.'

The individual is important in the task of reconciling a society in conflict. Peace and democracy are hindered by a traumatized and psychologically fragile population with citizens who may become ill, socially withdrawn or may release their anger on others, all responses to severe trauma (Semeniuk, 1995). Psychological healing or intrapersonal reconciliation may be important for citizens to be productive, trusting members of their communities and country and pass this security on to future generations.

Individual healing may also function as a barometer of reconciliation and justice efforts elsewhere in the society. Since, as I will discuss later, individual reconciliation is primarily *felt,* it is a fairly good measure of existing tension. While a person might say she reconciles and forgives after suffering an injury, and while she might be given every reason to trust those around her, until she can function in society with trust and without anxiety she cannot be said to have fully healed from trauma.

Intrapersonal reconciliation can be facilitated by psychosocial and medical support, counselling, spiritual guidance and traditional healing practices, by observing changes towards a more just society, and by public institutional processes such as trials and truth commissions. For victims, these institutions may affirm just norms, publicly acknowledge the perpetrator's responsibility or expose what happened to loved ones. For perpetrators they provide forums for admitting and taking responsibility for their actions. This latter view assumes that most perpetrators are hurt by the crimes they commit.

Avenues for healing perpetrators are especially important for children who committed serious crimes. In Sierra Leone, children were captured or recruited by armed forces and resocialized using fear, trauma, drugs and the thrill of power to become killers. Many children committed horrific crimes and if they are to become healthy community and family members in the future they may need to come to terms with what they did.

The second form of reconciliation is when individuals reconcile with one another. *Interpersonal reconciliation* means repairing relationships between victims and those who harmed them or their loved ones. Recent African truth commissions have tended to emphasize this form of reconciliation with no accountability for perpetrators and no clear idea of its contribution to peace. Sierra Leone TRC chairman, Bishop Humper, for example, asked the gentleman above, "If the person could be found (who chopped off your hands) would you be willing to meet and reconcile with him?" Such efforts are premature. It is as if hasty apologies and proclamations of forgiveness provide short cuts to *intrapersonal* reconciliation for victims and perpetrators. Instead, false reconciliation may hinder real healing for the victim and community. Unless victims *need* to reconcile with the perpetrator for their own healing or safety, interpersonal reconciliation has little relevance for larger peacebuilding goals.

The TRC could more appropriately offer victims and perpetrators the chance to meet, *if victims want this*, with no mention of forgiveness and reconciliation. The parties involved can be asked to agree to coexist peacefully without harming each other in any way. This is *integration* and respect for the law, not deeply-felt reconciliation. Some victims and perpetrators may want further meetings which may eventually lead to reconciliation. This approach acknowledges and respects the long process of healing after trauma which cannot be forced. It also avoids imposing unnecessary pressure on victims to 'forgive' and 'reconcile' for the sake of peace. Peace only requires the willingness to coexist without causing violence or harm to the other.

Some Sierra Leoneans expressed their desire to reconcile because of their need for peaceful coexistence. A former government soldier who testified before the TRC described an odyssey of torture when he was captured by Kamajor militiamen shortly after the 1997 coup when all government soldiers were suspect. As he and the Kamajors come from the same region, the soldier wanted to reconcile with his torturers so he could safely return home (TRC hearing, April 24, 2003). Lacking accountability, reconciliation might be the best choice in a bad situation.

A third form of individual reconciliation is less recognized in peacebuilding literature and yet may be crucial for national reconciliation in many post-conflict contexts: reconciliation

between individuals and their communities. While ethnic or religious wars divide people into self-contained blocks and those who attack an 'enemy' are often considered heroes in their own communities,[5] other conflicts tear communities and families apart. After the civil wars of Sierra Leone and Mozambique, or the state-sponsored terror of Argentina, victims, bystanders and perpetrators must live amongst each other. Individual-community reconciliation is key to the successful reintegration of the thousands who were implicated in, or suffered from, past crimes. Individual-community reconciliation is also important after ethnic or religious conflicts in which people turned against members of their own group – for example, attacks on accused collaborators in Palestine and South Africa or extremist attacks on moderates in Rwanda.

Efforts to integrate child soldiers and rape and kidnap victims back into their communities are among the best-known examples of individual-community reconciliation. In post-conflict Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Uganda, organizations that rehabilitate and reintegrate children work with local elders who perform tradition-inspired 'cleansing' ceremonies to symbolically cleanse the children's pasts and welcome them home (Verhey, 2001; Liu Institute & Gulu District NGO Forum, 2005).

Criminology provides useful insights into why individual-community reconciliation may be important for crimes committed within a community. Zehr (1990) writes that when a crime or injury has been committed, victims and offenders[6] often feel disconnected from their communities. Crime victims often feel unsafe, unacknowledged or disempowered both because of the crime and the way their communities and judicial and governing institutions address it. They need to feel secure, acknowledged and respected within their community again and this 'healing' process can be described as reconciliation. And the community needs to restore trust in offenders before they can be said to reconcile. In peaceful societies with fair judicial systems this usually occurs through judicial processes in which offenders are held accountable for their acts. In other societies community members may have to find other ways of building trust.

2.1.2   Group-level reconciliation

Like individual reconciliation, group-level reconciliation takes intragroup and intergroup forms. *Intragroup reconciliation* means a group comes to terms with its own history and culture

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[5] Individual-community reconciliation *between groups*, in other words, cannot occur until the two groups have reconciled and have developed a sense of being one community.

[6] In peacebuilding literature, those who commit or instigate serious crimes are usually described as 'perpetrators.' Criminological literature describes those who commit crimes as 'offenders.' I use both terms interchangeably, usually within the context of the literature I draw from.

which may have been based on enmity, war thinking or a fixation on 'victimization' or inherent 'superiority.' With *intergroup reconciliation,* rivals agree to move on from the past and build an interdependent future (ideally after meaningful acknowledgement of, and compensation for, past crimes). These forms of reconciliation are especially important in conflicts between ethnic or religious groups, or when one group oppresses another on ethnic or religious grounds. Both forms also occur with ideologically divided groups, often when people's paradigms or concerns shift over time.

Much NGO peacebuilding work in areas with ethnic or religious strife aims at group reconciliation. Such work challenges ethnic or religious chauvinisms or educates about universal human rights. Psychoanalysts such as Itzkowitz and Volkan (1994), who investigate unreconciled group trauma (for example the Holocaust experience of European Jews) and the way groups may incorporate unreconciled traumas and hatred for an 'enemy' group into their defining narratives, are also concerned with this level.

2.1.3 National reconciliation

A third level of reconciliation, national reconciliation, is used in two ways. The first involves building a *social consensus* on how to deal with the past and move into the future. This may involve two 'ideal' forms of narrative reconciliation. In one, citizens develop a consensus about, and ability to discuss, their shared history, values and future. In the other, citizens agree to forget the past with little public acknowledgement of, or accountability for, grievous crimes. I discuss this further in section 2.2.

The second use of national 'reconciliation' – what I call *political reconciliation* – is the concern of many legal theorists and human rights activists. Many government officials, both local and international, discuss reconciliation as if it were synonymous with (re)establishing stable, democratic government and the rule of law. I disagree. As I discuss in chapter three, political reconciliation occurs when leaders imagine sharing a common political process with their former opponents and take steps to carry out shared governance. It also occurs when, after a crisis of governance, citizens restore trust in their government and its institutions. In this latter sense, rebuilding responsible government and the rule of (just) law is inherent in political reconciliation, but only when it enables citizens to restore trust in governing institutions. These levels of reconciliation are depicted in diagram 2.1 below. Rebuilding governing institutions and the rule of law is in a separate box because it does not constitute reconciliation but only facilitates it.

Diagram 2.1 Levels of Reconciliation

- **Individual reconciliation**
  - Intrapersonal reconciliation
  - Interpersonal reconciliation
  - Individual reconciliation with community

- **Group reconciliation**
  - Intragroup reconciliation
  - Intergroup reconciliation

- **National reconciliation**
  - Consensus on how to deal with the past and how to move forward (Narrative reconciliation)
  - Political reconciliation

(Re)building institutions and rule of law

→ Restoring public confidence in the state

- Peace agreement: Vision for sharing common political process
- Implement shared political process

These three levels of reconciliation and the forms they take within each are not mutually exclusive. Reconciliation at one level can facilitate another. Inter-group or national reconciliation might enhance an individual's sense of security and his ability to recover from the past. Similarly as individuals reconcile with themselves or others they may reconcile with their communities, contributing to overall national reconciliation.

But the opposite is also true. Poorly planned conciliatory efforts at one level can hinder reconciliation at others. Hasty efforts at national reconciliation may leave individuals feeling alienated from, or unacknowledged by, their communities, especially when their experiences clash with official conciliatory narratives. This may inhibit individual reconciliation.

2.2   Reconciliation as narrative

A Sierra Leonean friend told me about a pastor from Kono who fled to Guinea with some of his parishioners during the war. At the border, Guinean soldiers arrested him, a dangerous situation as soldiers were known to summarily execute suspected collaborators. As my friend tells the story:

They tied him because at that point nobody was there to identify him. They said he was a collaborator. Even his own church members denied him... because they were afraid. They felt if they identified themselves with him they would kill them or they would torture them so everybody was silent. And so a Muslim was the one who saved him.

Somebody was grumbling by the Muslim, saying "That man, he is our pastor. How can they treat him like that?" But he did not have the zeal, the liberty to go and say that to the (soldiers). So the (Muslim) man said, "Bo, it is your pastor! Are you allowing them to torture him like that? We Muslims cannot allow that. This man is a pastor!" So he shouted that. People heard that who were torturing him. And it was only that that gave zeal to everybody to say, "Yes, he's a pastor." So that man got up. (He was released).

Interview 22, March 20, 2003

Few situations test a person more than war, genocide or state-sponsored terror. Many behave heroically, risking their lives for strangers or taking in children when they can barely feed their own. Many become rapists, murderers, torturers and looters. Still others seize opportunities the war provides or, like the parishioners above, turn their heads and deny knowledge of people or atrocities to save their own skin. People emerging from war are profoundly changed, not only because of what they experienced, but also because of what they now know about themselves, their neighbours and their society. Their story of who they and their people are must now be re-examined and retold, perhaps many times, as they gradually come to terms with what happened. Here I will discuss narrative reconciliation from the perspective of three authors: Susan Dwyer, who argues that reconciliation requires dealing honestly with the past; Robert Meister, who offers a win-win approach to history; and Andrew Rigby who discusses 'amnesia.'

2.2.1   'Reconciliation for realists'

Susan Dwyer (1999), in her essay *Reconciliation for Realists*, argues that narrative reconciliation is the only meaningful form of reconciliation. When something important happens to an individual or society or when new light is shone on past events, they need to come to terms with the new information and incorporate it into their history. The rape victim, the rapist and the parishioners who denied their pastor must all rethink who they are in light of these events – an act of intrapersonal narrative reconciliation.

Groups, too, must reconcile with their own histories. For groups that have oppressed and exploited others, this process is slow, painful and extremely threatening. Presenting a different view of a group's history – including its interpretation of its historic 'enemy' or 'slave' – may threaten people's sense of who they are as members of an ethnic or religious group. It also threatens the ideology through which they make sense of the world and justify their domination or privilege. People are strongly resistant to such change.

However, as new paradigms emerge that challenge claims of entitlement or 'Chosen People' status, or as past injustices and atrocities are documented, groups may gradually re-examine themselves and their history. Truth commissions, trials, authoritative history texts or public media may help in this process, establishing facts that are difficult to deny.

Unlike intragroup reconciliation, which can occur independently, *intergroup* narrative reconciliation is a *relational* concept. It requires conflicting groups to agree about past events and start to envisage an interdependent future – at least one of peaceful coexistence. Groups need not agree on all interpretations of the past but they must be "mutually tolerant of a limited set of

interpretations" which might involve revising previous narratives. Above all, narrative reconciliation must be "guided by normative ideals of intelligibility, coherence and understanding" (Dwyer, 1999, pp. 9, 16).

Dwyer (1999) observes that intergroup reconciliation requires conflicting groups to recognize the need for a future relationship between them. Black and white South Africans, for example, are well aware of their economic interdependency, at least in the short term, and generally accept the other's right to citizenship. Although individuals' positions in the apartheid hierarchy strongly influenced their identities and views of other groups – as 'enemy,' 'oppressor' or 'inferior' – most South Africans recognize that social narratives must change to incorporate the new reality of a more integrated society. Thus prospects of intergroup narrative reconciliation in South Africa are good.

In Serbia, on the other hand, Serb citizens, many of whom identify strongly as victims of outside aggression, may take decades or longer to recognize the atrocities they directly or passively supported in the 1990s in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo/a.⁷ In much of the former Yugoslavia, ethnic groups have become de facto segregated without daily economic interactions. For many, the war is not yet over. The necessary ingredient of envisioning a positive future relationship between groups is not present.

The South African and Serbian examples suggest that there is an order to narrative reconciliation when groups are in conflict. *Intergroup* reconciliation is unlikely to occur unless groups see themselves as having a peaceful future *relationship*. And a divided society is unlikely to support *intragroup* narrative reconciliation – perhaps facilitated by a truth commission – unless it wants *intergroup* reconciliation.

Dwyer (1999) shows that perpetrators or perpetrating groups need to reconcile as much with their own history and sense of themselves as with victims or victim groups. Two other possibilities exist. One seeks a win-win interpretation of the past in what I call 'conciliatory revisionism.' The other, amnesia, chooses to forget the past entirely.

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⁷ There are indications that this situation is changing. A Bosnian Serb commission recently identified over 17,000 individuals who participated in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre ("Bosnian Serb Panel," 2005). The fact that a Serb commission is investigating Serb crimes committed during the war in Bosnia is a marked shift from past patterns of denial.

2.2.2   Conciliatory revisionism: The survivor story

Robert Meister (1999) suggests a pragmatic form of narrative reconciliation in which all groups are seen as victims and survivors of an unjust system or experience. According to Meister, United States president Abraham Lincoln adopted this approach to reconcile Americans after the civil war. Instead of forcing Americans to:

> acknowledge the pain that slavery inflicted on those whom our nation previously treated as others, the figure of Lincoln invites all Americans to identify themselves as victims who survived the experience of slavery and the Civil War... A 'Lincolnian' view of national recovery foregrounds national trauma as a unifying experience and seeks to replace the moral logic of victim/perpetrator with the moral logic of common survivorship and collective rebirth (pp. 136-7).

This approach tries to replace "politics of representation" with "constitutional politics based on reidentification" (Meister, 1999, p. 137). According to Meister:

> For Lincoln's 'survivor story' to do its healing work, victims and perpetrators of past abuse must not regard themselves as different 'peoples' for whom independence (or secession) is one plausible path to reconciliation. Rather, the perpetrator identifies with the victim so that the victim can identify with the perpetrator. When each successfully internalises the other, the burden of guilt is shared – or perhaps, more accurately a fantasy of collective guilt is created (p. 139).

Meister (1999) identifies two versions of the Lincoln survivor story. In one, former perpetrators identify as victims so they can become survivors. Here, "healing comes through a dedication... to a higher set of principles of human equality originally embodied in the declaration of Independence" (p. 141). Thus, white South Africans might see themselves as *victims* of apartheid and a secretive and oppressive apartheid state apparatus that denied them full information and the chance to interact with black South Africans. They would agree that apartheid and state oppression is wrong and support new post-apartheid values of racial equality – though not necessarily other forms of equality.

To support this view, the new government might try a few top perpetrators who would become scapegoats, enabling the mass of former supporters and beneficiaries to claim victimhood using statements such as "We didn't know" or "We had no choice." In many ways, Sierra Leone's reconciliation process resembles this kind of conciliatory revisionism as young excombatants are reminded that they were not to blame for atrocities they committed because they were forced, drugged or too young to know better, even though many clearly enjoyed terrorizing civilians.

In the second version, former perpetrators not only "identify with their victims," they try to view themselves from the victim's perspective. Here, the "'scourge of war' atones for the national sin of slavery" (Meister, 1999, p. 140). For example, some Germans after World War II feel cleansed by their own suffering during the war.[x]

But what about the victims? Meister (1999) writes that successful conciliatory narratives represent victims as "grievously wronged" but "morally undamaged":

> If the former victim is both innocent and still capable of forgiveness, then the perpetrators and beneficiaries of the old regime might gradually abandon both hate and fear... But the fear of genocidal punishment (and the residual hate that follows from it) will be difficult to eliminate if the guilty identify themselves as equally susceptible... to victimization in the future. This is... why the guilty may fight on, and why apparently settled conflicts sometimes resume when the full extent of past atrocity is known (p. 161).

In a conciliatory revisionist approach, Meister (1999) writes, if most victims are satisfied with moral victory, beneficiaries may hold on to much of their gains and "unreconciled victims... are then marginalized as criminals or terrorists... The benefit of such reconciliation for the victims themselves is a 'fix' on history that protects them from future oppression, but only insofar as they seek little more than this" (p. 163).

Although this approach absolves perpetrators, if not the system, Meister (1999) argues that it entrenches itself in national law. Slavery, for example, is incorporated implicitly in the American constitution and will continue to influence judges' interpretations of the law. He cites the 1954 court decision Brown v. Board of Education prohibiting segregation of public schools. The Warren Court decided that the "equal protection" clause of the constitution recognized past inequality and slavery. The court overruled the previous Plessy decision "on the grounds that, as a matter of law, racial segregation is inherently stigmatising to blacks" (p. 151). Despite the lack of justice in the original crimes, future justice will not be blind to past crimes.

Meister's revisionist narratives may appeal to former perpetrators and their descendants but – especially when victims and perpetrators are ethnically or religiously distinct – they are unlikely to satisfy victims and their descendents. When crimes result in large and lingering disparities, the latter may not be satisfied with recognition of past crimes and symbolic redress. They may want accountability and compensation. Without agreement by all involved, such narratives are not conciliatory. Also, requiring that victims be 'innocent' is unrealistic and

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[x] As an example, a recent *Guardian Weekly* article on German children who grew up under Nazi rule stated that, "Germans saw themselves as victims and treated their suffering as expiation for any wrongs they may have done" (Cesarani, May 20-26, 2005, p. 27).

insulting. Who determines innocence? As Rigby (2001) observes, in times of conflict, the line between the purely 'innocent' victim and the victim who does what is necessary to keep her and her family alive is fuzzy indeed. However, as the Sierra Leone example will show, when perpetrators and victims are closely related and when that relationship allows the ambiguities of war to be acknowledged, victims may opt for a conciliatory revisionist narrative of the past.

Finally, conciliatory revisionism neglects Fletcher and Weinstein's (2002) concern that transitional societies must come to terms with, and learn from, the way ordinary citizens supported (even through inaction) or profited from violence or oppression. When individual perpetrators or instigators are tried before the courts they become scapegoats and their "individualized guilt may contribute to a myth of collective innocence" which must be contested for real social change to occur (p. 579).

2.2.3   The case for 'amnesia'

A third approach to narrative reconciliation is when societies decide not to talk about the past at all, to move on without trials or even discussing the painful truth. When a society decides to leave the past behind it is, in fact, dealing with the past. It is making the choice, the way many families and friends do who have had a falling out, that to discuss the past would be too painful and might even end their relationship. If the decision is consensual, this is one way of prioritising relationships.

Rigby (2001) writes, "The prosecution of human rights violators exercises a strong appeal for those who are convinced that there is a clear division between guilty and innocent, perpetrators and victims. But... life under repression" is more complex (p. 5). In times of occupation people make difficult choices about how far to cooperate with occupying regimes. In World War II, French and Danish leaders decided it was in the national interest to collaborate with their German invaders. When no clear group (such as a government in exile) exists to claim de jure authority:

> ...against the de facto power of the occupier, or where there are competing national factions contesting the right to instruct and advise the civilian population... people have to make their own decisions as to where to draw the line in terms of their relationship with the occupying power... In adapting to the new conditions of occupation, the majority of people did not become full-time members of resistance groups, nor did they become collaborators. Rather they concentrated on survival. This meant that as people arrived at their own balance between adaptation to and rejection of the constraints imposed by the occupying power, the boundaries between collaboration and resistance became blurred (Rigby, 2001, pp. 16-17).

Rigby (2001) challenges the prescriptive application of the "therapeutic model of trauma" that warns that groups and nations must come to terms with their traumas or "ghosts will return to haunt them, distorting their future development" (p. 39). In fact, he argues, people might justifiably choose to forget.

Mozambique, for example, chose to forego war crimes trials and public truth telling processes after its 1992 peace accord was signed and it did so with popular consent. Instead, the Mozambican parliament passed a general amnesty for "crimes against the state" and invited the Renamo rebels, who were responsible for most crimes of that brutal civil war, to engage in democratic elections. Hayner (2001) writes:

> Perhaps the idea of truth-seeking is of little interest because if people started pointing fingers, they would be pointing too close to home. It may be for this same reason that there has been no evidence of retaliation or revenge after the war ended. Robert Luis, a Mozambican development specialist... put it succinctly: "Who would retaliate against whom? There wasn't one group against another. Families and communities were put against each other (p. 189).

Célia Diniz of the African-American Institute in Mozambique described the war as a "domestic affair. It was the same families, same villages, same tribes, on both sides. At the end of the war, you can't say, 'We won't accept you anymore.' They're part of our lineage" (in Hayner, 2001, p. 189).

The rector of the University of Eduardo Mondlane, Brazão Mazula, described a politician from a new party who organized a meeting and criticized Frelimo and Renamo, the two opposing parties in the war. The crowd became angry and tried to attack him because "he was trying to stir up hatred and cause problems in the community.... This is the way that the people were saying they'd accepted the reconciliation between Frelimo and Renamo... Today, if we did a truth commission, if we opened up the issue of the past, it would be to restart the hate" (in Hayner, 2001, p. 190).

Peace has held in Mozambique but some critics fear that amnesia favours perpetrators and forces victims to keep quiet for the sake of 'democracy' and 'reconciliation,' thus placing a double burden on them. Juan Mendez, then Human Rights Watch counsel in Argentina (now the UN's special adviser on the prevention of genocide), described reconciliation as "a code word for those who wanted nothing done" (in Hayner, 2001, p. 160). Amnesia may require a national consensus to be conciliatory. This approach may not be appropriate in Argentina which is divided between those who fear that addressing the past would endanger democracy and stability and those who demand accountability and acknowledgment of past crimes.

A few questions about amnesia arise. First, what does a 'general consensus' mean? Can all citizens really agree that the past is best left behind or will the few that want 'justice' and 'acknowledgement' be branded as troublemakers, as in Japan which has not adequately addressed its military crimes of World War II?

Second, even if all citizens agree that past crimes should not be publicly addressed, if severely traumatised individuals remain in the country, can they be said to be reconciled? Reconciliation at national or intergroup levels does not mean that individual reconciliation has occurred.

Third, is 'amnesia' permanent? Nations are unlikely to forget the past forever. Deliberate forgetting implies that the trauma still exists. It is still ungrieved. The wounds are so dangerous that they are not discussed for fear that this will lead to an explosion of violence and hatred. This implies that one day either an ambitious politician will open the tinderbox and rekindle the passions of war or enough time will pass – perhaps enough generations – that citizens can begin to address the painful past, teach it in schools and incorporate it into their history, their narrative. Either way, 'amnesia' is rarely permanent.

Fourth, can we say that countries in which most citizens are implicated in crimes or did not resist, or in which the war divided heavily-interrelated communities, will (or should) choose amnesia? I think not. Sierra Leone, where families and communities were torn apart by the war, committed itself to both a truth commission and a Special Court to try war crimes and both institutions may contribute greatly to reconciliation in the country. In fact, strong interdependencies and interrelationships between those in conflict may greatly improve the chances of reconciliation and truth telling.

The Sierra Leone case study suggests that serious investigations, not only into war violence but also the underlying causes of war and social and economic factors that affect integration may always be appropriate. Without these insights and public debate around these issues the roots of the violence may be left intact, ready to re-erupt.

Many who argue for 'amnesia' say dealing with the past can stir up animosities and interfere with restoring just and democratic institutions and the rule of law. Installing and securing such institutions should be a priority for newly democratic states and this constitutes a form of reconciliation. Human rights activists, on the other hand, argue that the rule of law requires an end to impunity and meaningful reconciliation demands justice. Chapter three posits a different approach to political reconciliation.

Chapter 3:
Reconciliation or resignation:
Power, justice and political reconciliation

When a country emerges from civil war or state tyranny, the first concerns of the transitional government are to maintain the peace and (re)build institutions of responsible government, including the rule of law. Reconciliation goals must be understood within this context as they exist among many peacebuilding concerns. Most types of reconciliation are not priorities in the immediate transition from war to peace.

We might envision the priorities of a transitional government like this:

Diagram 3.1 Priorities of post-conflict transitions
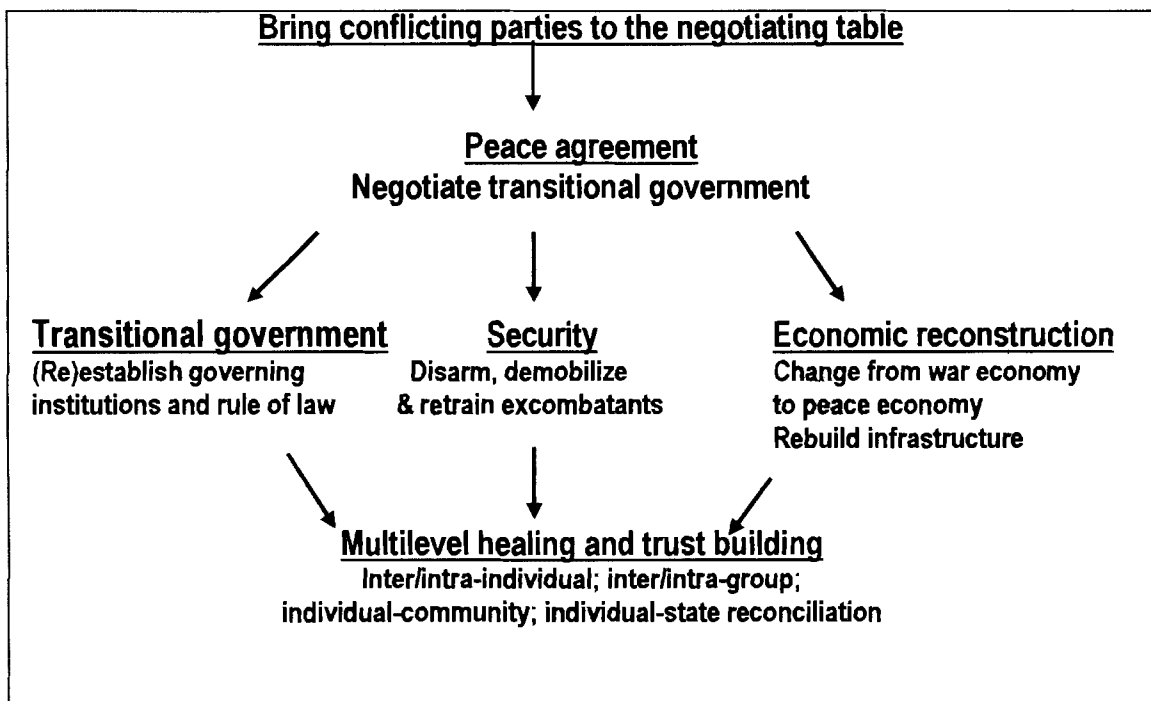
This chapter locates political and national reconciliation amongst the many concerns of transitional states. I argue that while almost all forms of reconciliation are important for long-term peace, justice and democratic governance, only two forms are relevant in the early stages of peacebuilding.

3.1 Political reconciliation as envisioning a shared political process

Long before the remarkable peaceful transition from apartheid rule to democratic governance in South Africa, the seeds of reconciliation had been planted. The African National Congress (ANC), the main organization opposed to apartheid, had always articulated an inclusive vision of South Africa where people of all ethnicities would share a political process as equals. When leaders finally negotiated a peace settlement, most South Africans could accept it because the vision had long been in place (A. du Toit, personal communication, October 18, 2004).

National political reconciliation begins with this vision. It begins before the peace agreement when leaders or representatives from conflicting groups meet and imagine a future together with a shared political process. Total war victories are rare. Most successful peace processes occur when conflicting factions negotiate a settlement and agree that they have more to gain from a shared political process than from fighting.

This vision of a shared political future, which I call stage-one political reconciliation, must be accepted both by leaders and, in most cases, the population. Knox and Quirk (2000) observe that in Northern Ireland and Palestine/Israel the divisions are popularly supported and leaders will have difficulty negotiating a sustainable settlement without democratic support. In such divided societies conciliatory efforts must help leaders and citizens imagine an interdependent future.

Jean Paul Lederach (1997) argues that reconciliation involves an encounter between people in conflict and between their social, political and economic activities. The more ties people have to one another, the more they acknowledge their interdependent past and future, the more likely they will reconcile. But are all interlinked activities conciliatory or do some only create conditions that facilitate reconciliation? Surely the economic interdependence of black and white South Africans during apartheid, with one group subservient to the other, is not reconciliation. But the two groups' *mutual* economic interdependence may lead them to seek conciliatory solutions; it is in no one's economic interest to separate.[9] We can only say that mutually interdependent activities, however problematic, may force people to acknowledge a relationship that is a precondition to political and intergroup reconciliation.

Once leaders are at the negotiating table, merely reaching an agreement is no indication that stage-one political reconciliation has occurred. Factional leaders may use negotiations to gain

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[9] This must be differentiated from one-way dependence, such as Palestinian reliance on Israeli utilities (for example, water utilities), which can be a divisive source of frustration for dependent groups.

military advantage, concessions or positions of power. National political reconciliation requires a realistic and sustainable vision for peace and legitimate governance that goes beyond leaders' personal interests to include those of citizens.

Warlords are seldom committed to sharing political office in the long term or ruling in the interests of citizens; they want to dominate government in their own interests. In such cases, no shared vision of future governance exists. Stage-one political reconciliation only occurs when conflicting factions and major interest groups, both armed and unarmed, genuinely agree to join the political process.

Does a conciliatory vision of shared governance need to consider the population? Can it just involve elites? In my view, elite accommodations are not conciliatory unless leaders have popular support, at least from within a large faction. This is more likely to occur in ethnic or religious nationalist conflicts in which each group rallies around a leader and sees the latter's success as a proxy for their own. If elites have little popular support and are only interested in gaining power and positions for themselves, a successful power-sharing deal can only be seen as an accommodation, not reconciliation.

In the lead-up to peace negotiations, parties are often enormously distrustful of one another – and with good reason. Peace negotiations are commonly used by factions for military advantage: to stall for time or gain concessions that will weaken an opponent who can then be attacked or arrested. Parties usually have experience with their opponent's duplicity or capriciousness. Trust is essential for political reconciliation.

In section 3.5 and chapter four I will discuss trust in depth, emphasising its sentient (felt), rather than rational, qualities. But building trust in peace negotiations is a rational process. Parties make commitments and must stand by their word. Past betrayals are relevant to the process of building confidence in the future. If negotiating parties are insincere, trust will be lost and stage-one political reconciliation will not occur.

Because of conflict experiences, mistrust exists even when negotiating parties sincerely want peace and democracy. This often leads to strong reactions to even small setbacks. Peace agreements need to anticipate setbacks and encompass ways to deal with them so they do not affect the peace process or the negotiated agreement (Bright, 2000). Without this, extremists such as suicide bombers or assassins can always sabotage the peace. Diagram 3.2 sums up these elements of a just stage-one reconciliation process.

Peace agreements do not require sincerity, trust or a social and political vision to succeed. Elite accommodations without popular support or hostile coexistence between groups can be sustained for long periods but they do not constitute stage-one political reconciliation. They thus provide a weak foundation on which stage-two political reconciliation – political reconciliation as a shared political process – can be built.

Diagram 3.2 Elements of just stage-one political reconciliation

Elements of just stage-one political reconciliation	
Elements:	**Must:**
• **Vision of shared governance**	• Have popular acceptance • Be realistic and sustainable
• **Sincerity of all parties**	• Involve trustbuilding
• **Just**	• Incorporate criteria of fairness • Have commitment of international community to international criteria of justice
• **Authority/legitimacy of negotiating parties**	• Have popular support (cannot be elite accommodation)
• **Represents all major interests**	• Include civilians through representatives of civil society
• **Anticipates setbacks**	

3.2 Political reconciliation as a shared political process

While reconciliation as shared vision of governance precedes the peace agreement and is honed during years of transition, political reconciliation as a shared political process occurs when that vision is made into a reality. It is embodied in the day-to-day, post-accord wrangling between political interests as they struggle together to enact a peacetime state of governance and define their roles in that political process. The constructiveness of this wrangling depends on the quality of the peace deal and the sincerity of all parties in signing it. It is also closely connected to the success of the key post-war concerns depicted in the third level of diagram 3.1: re-establishing government institutions and the rule of law; disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating combatants; and shifting from a war economy to a peace economy.

Although stage-two political reconciliation is a long process, if peace precedes democratic elections much of the initial hard work of transition can occur within a government of national unity in which all major parties are represented. This is a politically fragile stage, often fraught with political posturing, and it is a time when the quality of the peace agreement and the sincerity and authority of the signators are tested. However, it is also a time of great opportunity, when all sides shape the country's future.

In South Africa, the Government of National Unity included the dominant African National Congress and its former opponents: the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party. Though the process was often turbulent, President Mandela adopted a consensus-building model of leadership and the transitional government negotiated and drafted an interim constitution that included legislation establishing the TRC. The constitution was finalized in 1996 after democratic elections were held (Gerwel, 2000). This inclusive process could be seen as an important part of stage-two political reconciliation.

In Sierra Leone, by contrast, the difficult political transition after the Lomé Peace Accord was signed exposed the flaws in the agreement itself. As conflicting parties did not genuinely envision a shared political process, stage-two reconciliation – the enactment of that vision – had no basis on which to succeed.

After years of violence, it is tempting to endorse any agreement that will bring some kind of peace and stability. The temptation is even greater when the country is insignificant to the interests of major powers. If a warlord agrees to sign a peace agreement, perhaps in exchange for a power-sharing deal and amnesty, it is tempting to take him at his word. But when power positions are unequal what happens to justice and responsible government? Too often peace negotiations primarily involve leaders of armed groups who reach the table through violence. These leaders are more likely to negotiate deals that benefit them than sign agreements that promote justice and responsible government. Also, militarily weaker signatories to peace agreements may sign out of resignation, not reconciliation indicative of shared political aspirations. This highlights the dangers of 'reconciliation' that is really the best compromise in a bad situation.

There is, in fact, nothing inherently ethical about reconciliation. Reconciliation, in many senses of the term, simply means former enemies come together and agree, with no criteria on how this is to be done. 'Realist,' 'rational' forms of political reconciliation need outside standards

– perhaps criteria of justice outlined in international human rights law – to ensure that reconciliation is desirable.

3.3 Justice, power and reconciliation

In the summer of 2004, I was involved with a dialogue camp for Palestinian, Israeli and Jewish youth. Organizers often debated whether or not to take a stance on the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. There were good educational reasons for letting youth explore the conflict on their own without imposing a political position. However, some were uncomfortable with appearing neutral about the occupation and not acknowledging the unequal power positions between the groups. They feared that working towards reconciliation under such conditions reinforces an unjust status quo.

Almost 20 years earlier, a similar debate occurred in South Africa. It was expressed in a 1985 public statement signed by South African Christian theologians opposed to apartheid. In *The Kairos Document* (1985), the 156 signators challenged "Church Theology" that promoted reconciliation as key to conflict resolution. This may be fine for private disputes, the authors wrote, but in other conflicts:

> ...one side is right and the other wrong. There are conflicts where one side is a fully armed and violent oppressor while the other side is defenceless and oppressed... To speak of reconciling these two is not only a mistaken application of the Christian idea of reconciliation, it is a total betrayal of all that Christian faith has ever meant... We are supposed to do away with evil, injustice, oppression and sin – not come to terms with it... In our situation in South Africa today it would be totally unChristian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed (The Kairos Document, 1985, p. 10).

The Kairos Document and our youth-camp debate raise the important issue of the relationship between power, justice and reconciliation, especially political and intergroup reconciliation. Is reconciliation always a good thing? Does reconciliation sometimes feed into, or even legitimate, an unjust status quo?

The term 'justice' means both fairness and formal judicial processes – either legalistic (involving trials), restorative or traditional judicial processes. To avoid confusion I use the terms 'just' and 'justness' to connote 'fairness' in a way that incorporates widely-held human rights values and the assumption of human equality. After mass atrocity, 'justness' usually requires significant social change to address the root causes of the conflict. I use the term 'justice' to refer to formal judicial processes.

Reconciliation is not always just and cannot be divorced from power relationships. Peace settlements are always influenced by the relative strength of military factions and by external regional and global interests (Kriesberg, 2001). These are unrelated and often contrary to justness of cause, *unless* countervailing criteria are used.

As Kriesberg (2001) notes, global shifts in ideology regarding human rights and rights to self-determination over the past century have provided new opportunities for subjugated groups to argue for greater equality and recognition. If international players are committed to a just settlement, international humanitarian law and norms of democratic governance can be used as criteria guiding peace negotiations. International friends facilitating negotiations can also ensure that non-militarized interests have a major say in peace settlements.

Unfortunately settlements tend to be guided more by the national self-interest of regional and global powers – or the self-interest of their leaders. The argument above suggests three things, however: a) pushing for *political* or *intergroup* reconciliation without addressing power imbalances may be unjust; b) criteria, such as international humanitarian law and democratic norms, are needed to assess the justness of acts of political reconciliation; and c) the international community may have a role and responsibility to ensure that political agreements reflect a just reconciliation and not simply a desperate scramble for peace.

International and local humanitarian law and internationally-recognized human rights norms can also be useful guides in a second form of national reconciliation: moral reconciliation, an agreement not only on historical facts but also that past crimes were wrong. Without this, members of victim groups will never be confident that mass crimes will not be repeated. Institutions like truth commissions and courts are important in condemning past injustices, *as injustices*, not just facts that can be rationalized away.

Hayner (2001) contrasts attitudes in South Africa and Chile after their respective truth commissions. While few South Africans would now defend apartheid and the political crimes against civilians, there is no such consensus in Chile. Chileans may concur with "respecting the rules of the democratic game" (Gonzalez, in Hayner, p. 159), and they may agree on the facts of the past, but the trials of former dictator Augusto Pinochet exposed deep moral divisions among Chileans. As Hayner writes, there is "no consensus about basic facts of right or wrong in the country's past" (p. 159). Major disagreements about whether past crimes were justifiable can hinder governance as much as divisions about major facts of the past. Citizens need not agree about all crimes but, as Kriesberg (2001) writes, they need to condemn abuses that are commonly

acknowledged as wrong, including "genocidal policies, coerced unidirectional exploitation, and gross violations of human rights" (p. 62).

3.4 Mind vs. heart

In this discussion so far, we can observe two broad forms of reconciliation, each with its own measure of success. One is rational and imaginative: Reconciliation is about agreement, consensus and an imagined shared future. The other is emotional and psychological – heart felt. It is about 'coming to terms' emotionally and psychologically with events ('healing'), engaging in soul searching about one's past or the past of one's people, or re-establishing trust in people, communities or institutions. These two forms are often interdependent but they are not substitutes for one another.

Imagining a common future, reaching a peace agreement, recognizing shared historical facts (and consenting to coexist without taking revenge) involve the mind and imagination, not the emotions. They follow rules of logic, law and reasoned discussion and are assessed on those grounds. These forms of reconciliation (and, in the case of the latter, integration) are aimed at establishing sustainable *coexistence*, not deep relationships, and as such they may appear superficial. However, they may be the first steps that permit eventual emotional healing and trust building.

The other group of conciliatory processes are guided not as much by rational debate as by feelings. This sentient reconciliation is about relationships, healing or both. When the man whose hands were amputated grows to accept his new reality, when he learns to trust his community again or trust a government and army that did not protect him, these forms of reconciliation are heart felt. They may be informed by reason – new evidence of meaningful change in the government and army, for example – but rational argument is not enough. The measure of this kind of reconciliation is what he feels and his ability to trust.

Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd (2002) argue that reconciliation should not be thought of as "a final state of union, harmony, or total or lasting agreement" but rather as a mutually trusting relationship in which the people or groups involved can deal peacefully and respectfully with the ups and downs of their relationship (p. 192). Trust, then, is central to their concept of reconciliation. They define it as:

> ... an attitude of confident expectation, expectation that the person, persons, or groups trusted will act, in the context in question, in a competent and acceptably motivated way, so that despite vulnerability, the trusting person or persons will

not be harmed. To trust others is to believe, in the absence of certainty about the matter, that they are likely to act well, or decently, toward us and be reliable with respect to the issues at hand (Govier & Verwoerd, 2002, p. 185).

A conflict or abuse weakens trust, both between parties in conflict and between them and their communities. Those who have been hurt have difficulty trusting the person who injured them (Govier & Verwoerd, 2002) and may have difficulty trusting the community that could not – or did not – protect them. The abuser, too, may have difficulty trusting others as she may fear incrimination, revenge or loss of power. To deal with this, abusers may adopt strategies of denial, including rationalization and 'forgetting' (Cohen, 2001)

To Govier and Verwoerd (2002), the level and nature of trust indicative of reconciliation depends on the level and nature of the relationship. Intimate relations between family members or friends require deep trust whereas relations between co-inhabitants of a town require less. Similarly, large ethnic groups that co-exist in the same region of a country may require more trust than those that are geographically distinct, even within the same country. Thus, Quebec and English-dominated Canada may not fully trust each other politically, but French-speaking Quebecois trust English-speaking Canadians enough to know they will not use violence if they decide to separate. This trust enables the two groups to coexist peacefully and manage political differences in contrast to less reconciled countries where political differences are greeted with violence or the threat thereof. That trust does not yet exist between First Nations in Canada and the state.

Diagram 3.3 illustrates the dominant measures of reconciliation at each level and sub-level. I also include institutional efforts to facilitate reconciliation to show that these are primarily rationally based, though they may be sensitive to people's needs for trust and healing. The final form of political reconciliation centres around trust. It is the reconciliation of individuals or groups with the state, one of the most pressing conciliatory needs in Sierra Leone.

Diagram 3.3 Means of facilitating and assessing conciliatory efforts and goals

Intrapersonal reconciliation

Interpersonal reconciliation

Individual reconciliation with community

Intragroup reconciliation

Intergroup reconciliation

- **Consensus on how to deal with the past and how to move forward**

Restoring public confidence in the state

- **Peace agreement: Vision for sharing common political process**

- **Implement shared political process**

Truth telling, justness/justice, dialogue
Medical, social and economic assistance

Psychological, religious counselling, ritual

Physical reintegration, safety
Rule of law, mutual acceptance

Truth telling, justness/justice
Public discussion

Ritual, grieving

Public debate at national and community levels

(Re)building institutions and rule of law, justness

- Individual reconciliation

- Group reconciliation

- National reconciliation

- Political reconciliation

- **Assessed by rational measures**
- *Assessed by sentient measures*
- (In box): Facilitates reconciliation outcomes of interest to peacebuilding

3.5   Individual reconciliation with the state

Much discussion among liberal theorists about national reconciliation focuses on (re)establishing responsible governing institutions and the rule of law. Michael Feher (1999) divides these theorists into two groups: the "pragmatists," largely represented by representatives of local and foreign governments, who are willing to accept qualified amnesty in exchange for security and justice in the future; and the "purists," largely represented by human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, who argue for an end to impunity and accountability for war criminals, especially those most responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Both groups discuss justice and responsible governance as if they are conciliatory ends in themselves. But they are not.

As Ignatieff (1998) observes, trials are not a proxy for reconciliation. Fair judicial processes may help victims recover from crimes and assert judicial norms that respect human rights. But they may also be divisive, with those sympathetic to the accused feeling scapegoated as a product of 'victor's justice.' Former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević's trial in The Hague is a case in point.

Moving towards responsible government may also be divisive as implementing fair and transparent governing institutions that prioritise public interests may threaten some individuals and groups – downsizing the army and eliminating patronage, for example. Even when institutional changes are uncontested, they cannot be thought of as a form of reconciliation except in one sense: when a crisis of public confidence in the state and its institutions has occurred, democratization and institutional accountability are inherent in reconciliation between the citizen and the state.

In some cases, the need for reconciliation between citizens and the state is obvious. In Sierra Leone, government corruption and mismanagement are widely viewed as primary factors in the war. Despite a change of government after democratic elections in 1996 and 2002, far more public anger is directed at corrupt officials than at perpetrators of war crimes. Ending clientalist practices by government officials and establishing accountable state institutions would go far in promoting reconciliation there.

Sierra Leoneans will also have to reconcile with the institutions of the state, especially the army as soldiers proved unwilling or unable to protect civilians from rebel attacks. Worse still, many soldiers joined the rebels and participated in atrocities and looting. Much work will have to be done to build public confidence in the military.

In other contexts, such as South Africa, the new government cannot be linked to crimes of past regimes. Still, the ability of state institutions and political leadership to fairly represent all citizens is integral to national reconciliation. If black South Africans had used their democratic majority to reverse the tables with white South Africans, as Hutus did with Tutsis after the 1962 elections in Rwanda, national reconciliation would be impossible. Also, if black elites become viewed as having sold out to white economic interests without improving the lot of the poor, they may become associated with a well-remembered oppressive and unaccountable state apparatus.

3.6   National reconciliation: Imagining a nation and building consensus

Political reconciliation turns wartime divisions and the rule of violence into democratic and inclusive political participation, while restoring public confidence in the state. National reconciliation, while related, focuses instead on instilling a sense of popular ownership in a single nation – Anderson's (1991) 'imagined community.'

In Sierra Leone the idea of reconciliation in this sense is a misnomer. There never was a nation to reconcile. After decades of neglect from the Freetown government, citizens in the capital and major towns may have been the only ones who felt a relationship with the state. Many villages were inaccessible by road and were considered very isolated even if they were close to a town.[10] In the east, many people felt closer to Liberians with whom they traded and had ethnic and linguistic ties than to fellow citizens in Freetown (TRC, 2004). To many Sierra Leoneans, who were largely untouched by central government services, the prime system of governance was the chieftaincy, not the artificial colonial construction of the state. The paucity of one of the prime institutions of nation-building, the education system, is quickly shown in the high illiteracy rate among Sierra Leoneans outside the capital and it is not uncommon to meet people, even in Freetown, who cannot identify the flag or map of the country.

Closely related to the idea of national reconciliation as (re)building a single national consciousness corresponding to the state is the idea of building a national consensus around important processes, issues and decisions. Efforts to solicit public feedback in decision making and to involve citizens in public processes can be educative for both the public and decision makers. It can also instil a sense of public ownership in important processes and decisions.

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[10] However, as Ferme (2001) notes, in the fast-growing forests of Sierra Leone, it is sometimes difficult to judge how long a community has been 'isolated.' In a dangerous environment with shifting political alliances, villagers may choose to let a path or road grow in to voice displeasure at a chief or to protect themselves from outsiders. The outsider may not be able to 'read' the social history of the forest.

Returning to diagram 3.1, which illustrated transitional government priorities, we can now add our multiple reconciliation goals, italicized in diagram 3.4:

Diagram 3.4 Political and national reconciliation in post-conflict transitions

1. Bring conflicting parties to the negotiating table
(Political reconciliation as shared vision)

2. Peace agreement
Negotiate transitional government
(Political reconciliation as shared vision)

3. Transitional government
(Re)establish governing
institutions and rule of law
*(Political reconciliation as
working toward commonly-
accepted governance)*

Security
Disarm, demobilize
& retrain
excombatants

Economic reconstruction
Change from war economy
to peace economy
Rebuild infrastructure

4. Multilevel healing and trust building
*Inter/intra-individual; inter/intra-group;
individual-community; individual-state reconciliation
(Nation building and national consensus building)*

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed three forms of political reconciliation: 1) reconciliation as shared vision of governance; 2) reconciliation as shared political process; and 3) reconciliation as building trust between the individual and the state. I also introduced two broad forms of assessing conciliatory efforts. The first form, primarily linked to top-level reconciliation, aims at achieving sustainable coexistence between groups and a working relationship between political leaders. Decisions must be made on realistic judgments of circumstances, rational argument and humanitarian principles. As imbalances of power (locally, regionally and globally) strongly affect peace negotiations, this type of reconciliation has little to do with justness *unless* just criteria dictating negotiating conditions (including ensuring a strong and widely representative presence of civil society at the negotiating table) and acceptable outcomes are in place *and enforced.*

One such set of criteria might be consistency with international humanitarian law. International commitment is needed to enforce such criteria as the United Nations did in the 1999 Lomé agreement when it refused to agree to amnesty for "serious violations of international humanitarian law" (in Hirsch, 2001, p. 84).

The other form of reconciliation is less tangible but deeper. It is felt. This form relates to emotional or psychological 'healing' or 'coming to terms' with events. In intergroup or interpersonal conflicts, it centres around relationships and can be 'measured' by trust. These forms of reconciliation are difficult to discuss in the parlance of sociology and international relations because of their intangibility. Academics tend to be more comfortable with measurable outcomes. But I will argue that sentient reconciliation is the deepest measure of people's recovery from war.

Chapter 4:
A restorative approach to reconciliation

Reconciliation has two faces and two ways of knowing. One face looks out at the world and deals with it in rational terms; the other looks inward and its truths are held in the body and emotions. This latter face understands intangible intelligences – physical, spiritual and emotional – that are no less valid because they are felt. Its vocabulary centres around 'trust;' emotional and psychological 'healing' and 'coming to terms' with events, words that apply to both individuals and their relations with others.

When a person learns to trust herself, her community or someone who betrayed her, she will know that trust first in her body, in the same way that she will identify pangs of distrust. She may say she trusts, forgives or is reconciled; she may give logical reasons why someone who has harmed her can now be trusted; but the trust is *felt* and may not correspond with rational processes. A restorative approach to reconciliation deals with these intangibles. It is, above all, about healing and trust building in the context of human relationships, with all the give and take that human interdependence requires.

That give and take demands something of both offenders and the offended. To Lederach (1997) reconciliation after a conflict or injury requires an interplay of truth, justice, mercy and peace. Truth requires acknowledging wrongs and validating losses and pain. But truth is paradoxically linked to mercy, which involves accepting what happened, forgiving, "letting go, and a new beginning." Justice requires "the search for individual and group rights, for social restructuring, and for restitution" but it is connected to peace, which stresses "interdependence, well-being and security" (p. 29). In these relationships past and future are joined in processes involving reasserting just institutions and a positive peace[11] – a concept of peace that includes justice – at the national level, and accountability and personal healing at the individual and group levels.

Acknowledgement of the past but the need to forgive; justice but the need for peace and security: these elements of post-violence recovery arise time and again. Each alone is inadequate. Truth about the past without the ability to move on sentences traumatized societies to relive their nightmares and culpabilities without any prospect of healing. Pressuring victims to forgive without truth or justice places a double burden on them and cannot result in real emotional and

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[11] Kriesberg (2001, p. 48) defines positive peace as an end to war *and* "at least a minimal level of equity in the life conditions of the people in the same social system."

psychological healing. Attempts to promote justice may threaten peace and security if militarised forces retain power. Negative peace (only an end to violence) and stability with continued injustice is a minimal peace indeed.

Hannah Arendt (1958/1998) provides a useful way of understanding the role of forgiveness and justice in Lederach's model, although the two theorists have many differences. For Arendt, humans often act in ways that cause unforeseen and irreversible damage, "whose 'sins' hang like Damocles' sword over every new generation" (p. 237). She writes that forgiveness provides:

> possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility – of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing... Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever (p. 237).

Arendt (1958/1998) argues that punishment is the "alternative to forgiveness" but it is not its opposite. "Both have in common that they attempt to put an end to something that without interference could go on endlessly" (p. 241). Thus if human societies are to have any respite from their escalating errors and misdeeds, which they cannot undo, then either forgiveness or punishment or both become moral obligations. Lederach would agree with Arendt that forgiveness and an agreement to build a positive future are essential to reconciliation, but he would argue that punishment is only one form of accountability. Acknowledgement of past crimes and restitution may also serve this function and promote the individual healing on all sides that enables forgiveness.

But here Arendt (1958/1998) raises a provocative question. If forgiveness and justice (or accountability) are meant to release people and societies from harms they contributed to, are some crimes unforgivable and therefore unpunishable? She writes:

> It is therefore quite significant... that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable. This is the true hallmark of those offences which, since Kant, we call "radical evil" (p. 241).

At first this question seems academic and insulting to victims and even lesser perpetrators. It is contrary to most people's sense of justice to imply that some people – people like Milošević or Sankoh – by virtue of the extremity of their crimes, should escape accountability. But the question is relevant to considerations of reconciliation and, in particular,

restorative justice, a holistic form of justice that focuses on healing victims, perpetrators and communities after a crime, restoring relationships, and providing redress for injuries. It raises other, related questions. Are there people who cannot be reconciled with society and the individuals they have harmed? Are some crimes too horrendous to be restored?

War crimes and gross human rights violations – the most serious crimes in existence – pose the greatest challenge to ideas of forgivability and restorability inherent in restorative justice. Yet some post-conflict states have attempted to use restorative justice to deal with horrific events of the past.

In 1994, as South Africa emerged from apartheid into a new era of majority rule, the newly elected African National Congress government was challenged with the tasks of exposing apartheid-era crimes and reconciling citizens. In response they created a truth and reconciliation commission that heard testimonies of victims and perpetrators of politically-motivated crimes. The TRC exposed more about gross human rights violations than any other truth commission because perpetrators were only granted amnesty if they testified fully and publicly about their crimes. To facilitate healing and national unity, the TRC adopted a humanizing and human-centred approach to justice and reconciliation: restorative justice.

The humanizing philosophy of restorative justice makes it a natural approach for post-conflict reconciliation, where people who were once enemies need to find a way to live amongst and trust one another. However, as a complete justice approach, restorative justice faces the same problems as trial-based justice: perpetrators of serious crimes usually resist accountability no matter what form it takes. Despite claims to the contrary by some TRC commissioners and staff,[12] the South African TRC did not provide full restorative justice because it did not hold perpetrators accountable for crimes beyond public testimonies.[13] Rather than implying that justice was done, it is more accurate to say the commission drew from the philosophy implicit in restorative justice and capitalized on the strengths of this approach to promote national reconciliation and healing.

Much can and should be written about restorative justice as a way of dealing with war crimes. That is not the purpose of this chapter. Instead, I will discuss the under-theorized but implicit philosophy behind restorative justice: its ethics; how it views crime and human relationships; and how it views 'truth.' This offers an excellent starting point for discussing less tangible, sentient aspects of reconciliation.

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[12] In particular Charles Villa-Vicencio (2000) and TRC Chairman Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999).
[13] The South African TRC report (1999) noted that public admissions of guilt are a form of accountability.

4.1 Restorative justice: A humanizing paradigm for justice?

There is another kind of justice, restorative justice, which was characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence. Here the central concern is not retribution or punishment. In the spirit of ubuntu,[14] the central concern is the healing of breaches, the addressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999, p. 55)

Restorative justice is an approach to wrong-doing that is as old as the practice of making amends. When a child injures another and is encouraged to apologize and atone for the injury in a way that is acceptable to both children involved, that is a restorative process. It is the common-sense way of being responsible for one's actions that is part of growing up. It coexists with another justice approach with which most children are also familiar: justice as punishment for rule breaking.

These two approaches to justice, which coexist in most people's lives, reflect two distinct ethics. The ethic of the dominant legalistic justice system emphasises obedience to moral principles, presumed to be partly reflected in the law. It views crime as law breaking and a violation against the state, and accountability as punishment for breaking a law (Zehr, 1990). Restorative justice reflects an ethic of care that argues that people are ethically responsible for those around them with whom they have a relationship.

Seen in this light, crime is a violation of a relationship,[15] an injury inflicted on another person that harms everyone involved and the community. Accountability then means trying to repair that harm and those relationships. In emphasizing the relationship and healing needs of the perpetrator, victim and community, and in showing an ethic of care and responsibility between those involved, restorative justice is a human-centred approach to reconciliation.

Legalistic and restorative approaches to justice hold very different ontological and epistemological perspectives. Legalistic justice assumes the primacy of the state (or international legal system), which is responsible for creating and enforcing the law and is the dominant community to which a person belongs. Crimes are defined by the state (or international legal system); injuries not defined as illegal are not crimes. Individuals are considered to be both autonomous beings who, alone, are responsible for their crimes, and citizens (or visitors) who owe obedience to the state. A crime is determined by judicial experts who judge offences either

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[14] See section 4.4.

[15] Once a crime is committed, even against a stranger, victims and offenders are bound in a relationship.

by legal precedents or legal principles. Justice is viewed largely as procedural equality, equality before the law and appropriate punishment for crime as determined by the state and legal experts. By completing the sentence, the offender theoretically becomes a full and free citizen again. However, in reality, offenders maintain criminal records and may be so stigmatised that reintegration may be difficult. Stigmatization is not a problem from this perspective (Zehr, 1990).

In epistemological terms, judges are assumed to be impartial to those who appear before them,[16] taking a role analogous to the positivist 'objective' or 'neutral' researcher. In this view, truth, as the South African TRC report (1999) describes it, is "factual or forensic truth." It is "the familiar legal or scientific notion of bringing to light factual, corroborated evidence, of obtaining accurate information through reliable (impartial, objective) procedures" (p. 111).

International human rights advocates such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch stress the need for legalistic justice and refer to violations of international and state law. They advocate trying and prosecuting perpetrators to punish them for their actions, deter other potential perpetrators, (re)establish just norms in the society and reassure victims that justice was done.

Legalistic justice does not emphasize repairing relationships between individuals or their communities. Minow (1998) writes:

> Reconciliation is not the goal of criminal trials except in the most abstract sense. We reconcile with the murderer by imagining he or she is responsible to the same rules and commands that govern all of us; we agree to sit in the same room and accord the defendant a chance to speak, and a chance to fight for his or her life. But reconstruction of a relationship, seeking to heal the accused, or indeed, healing the rest of the community, are not goals in any direct sense (p. 26).

In contrast to legalistic justice, restorative justice assumes that humans are relational beings who need to live in community with others – in contrast to the ontology of legalistic justice that views individuals as autonomous. Where legalistic justice sees individuals as owing allegiance to the state, restorative justice sees them as responsible for each other and for their communities. A crime is a violation of a person, caused either deliberately or by omission of duty. In addition to hurting the victim and loved ones, a crime creates rifts between the community and both victim and offender. When a crime occurs, the victim feels less secure in the community. He needs to heal from the shock and injury and see justice and concrete change

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[16] Though judges are not considered value neutral as positivists might claim to be.

before he feels like a full community member again. The offender has lost the trust of the victim and community and has to earn that back (Zehr, 1990). Moberly argues that the community too has been injured because its "moral tone" has been lowered by the crime (in Johnstone, 2002, p. 104). All this damages individuals' relationships with their communities which, in a restorative justice ontology, is a central human need. These relationships need to be restored.

A second facet of the restorative justice ontology is the belief that people commit bad acts but they are not, in themselves, bad people. If they regret and take responsibility for their acts, they can become full members of the community again. Restorative justice is more aware than legalistic, retributive justice of the effects of stigmatising offenders as criminals and seeks accountability in a way that avoids stigmatization.[17]

I will use the adjective 'restorative' to reflect a restorative justice ontology which, I argue, is ideal for addressing aspects of reconciliation that involve trust-building, individual healing and identifying contextual information required to promote meaningful change. In this sense, I will often refer to a restorative approach to reconciliation.

Epistemologically, restorative justice values different knowledge than legalistic justice. The South African TRC (1999) report contrasts the 'forensic' and evidentiary truth of legalistic justice with "healing and restorative truth":

> (It is) the kind of truth that places facts and what they mean within the context of human relationships – both amongst citizens and between the state and its citizens... (It is) a truth that would contribute to the reparation of the damage inflicted in the past and to the prevention of the recurrence of serious abuses in the future. It was not enough simply to determine what had happened. Truth as factual, objective information cannot be divorced from the way in which this information is acquired; nor can such information be separated from the purposes it is required to serve (p. 114).

A restorative justice approach sees truth as emerging communicatively in dialogue between community members (including victims, offenders, those supporting them and other interested parties). Ideally, victim, offender and other community members are acknowledged and heard, and they help decide how the offender will redress the injury and what must happen for her

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[17] Restorative justice also defines justice differently from legalistic justice. Where the latter emphasizes due process and equal treatment before the law, restorative justice requires a flexible approach to justice that allows victims and offenders, with their community supporters, to decide the form that accountability will take. In other words, all offenders should be held accountable for their crimes, and should have to listen to victims and answer their questions but victims have different recovery needs and victims and offenders will decide on their own joint accountability solutions (Van Ness & Strong, 2002).

to be reintegrated – trusted again – into the community. Valued information may not be identical to forensic truth and it is reached discursively by humans-in-relationship.[18]

Restorative justice takes a holistic approach to crime by providing space for broad narrative, by considering social factors – not just narrowly focusing on details directly relevant to the crime as in legalistic justice – and by anticipating changes needed to avoid a repetition of the crime. As such it may address the often-problematic context that enabled the crime in the first place. Restorative justice can offer a useful approach for addressing root causes.

Braithwaite (2002) mentions the example of Hollow Water, an Ojibway community in Manitoba in the mid-1980s. The community began to hold healing circles – a process akin to restorative justice – to address what many initially considered to be an "epidemic of alcohol abuse." These circles, however, exposed:

> a deeper underlying problem, which was that they lived in a community that was sweeping the sexual abuse of children under the carpet. Through setting up a complex set of healing circles to help one individual victim and offender after another, in the end it had been discovered that a majority of the citizens were at some time in their lives victims of sexual abuse... Fifty-two adults out of a community of 600... formally admitted to criminal responsibility for sexually abusing children, 50 as a result of participating in healing circles. (p. 25)

Similarly, the Sierra Leone TRC, which contained elements of restorative justice, addressed at length the war's root causes and factors, such as 'tradition'-justified discrimination, that contributed to war suffering.

In sum, restorative justice attempts to address and balance three major concerns: the needs of the victim (including the need to reconcile with the community); the needs of the offender (reintegrative, conciliatory and addressing root causes); and the need to restore the community (Johnstone, 2002). These are depicted in diagram 4.1.

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[18] As Johnstone (2002) argues, the communicative approach of restorative justice should permeate every facet of the process. He writes, "There is no single blueprint for building a restorative system. Rather, the method of building a restorative system must itself be decided through a collaborative, participatory process in which the stakeholders in such a system determine what is to be done: 'The process of implementing restorative process must model the principles themselves'" (158, citing Christie 1977).

Diagram 4.1 Reconciliation needs addressed by restorative justice
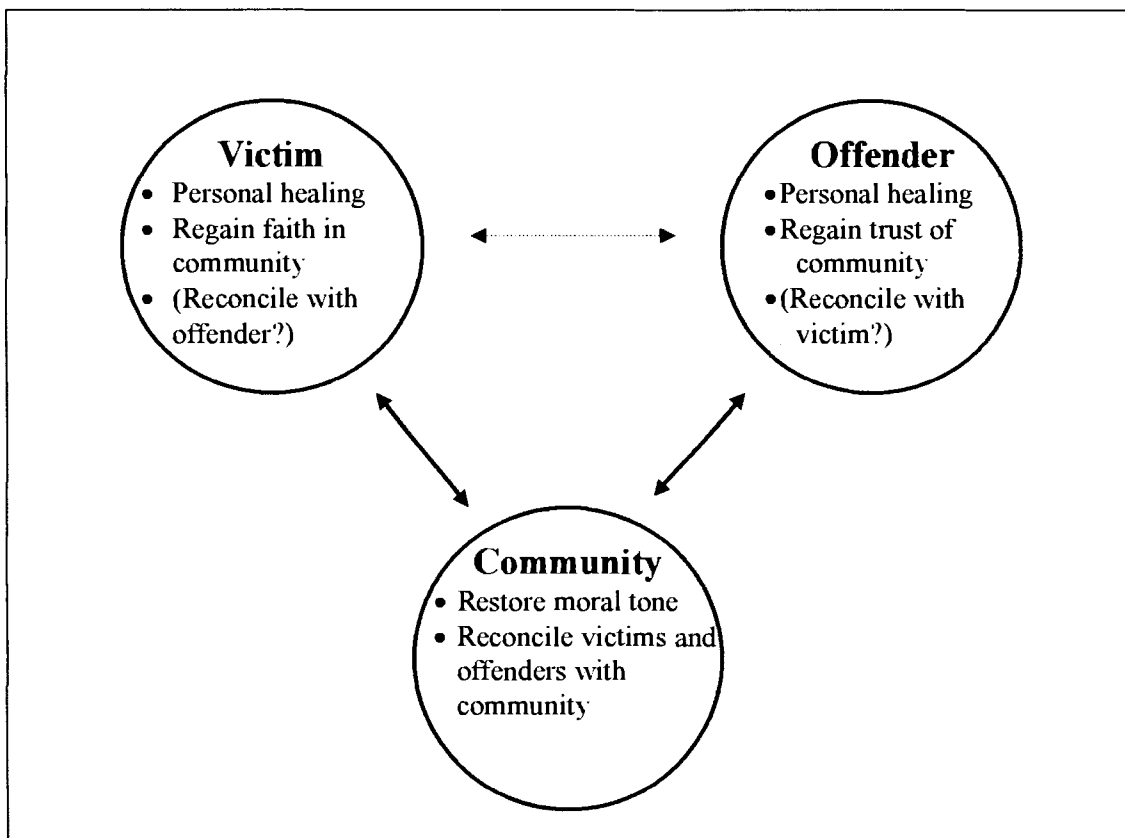
At individual levels, restorative justice tries to reconcile victims and offenders with each other and with their communities. It encourages communities and society in general to forgive offenders once they atone for their crimes and prove they deserve community trust. Intrapersonally, it tries to help victims and offenders heal emotionally and psychologically from the crime.

At intergroup, national or international levels, restorative policies may require that groups in whose names crimes were committed to recognize and atone for past injustices (through compensation and symbolic acts) and acknowledge current privilege based on those crimes. When responsibility has been taken, without maintenance of privilege or Meister's conciliatory revisionism, members of victim groups need to forgive and humanize members of former perpetrating groups so they can move on as moral equals. The field of psychology offers some insights into these processes.

4.2 Psychological contributions: Trauma and the memory trap

What does it mean for a nation to come to terms with its past? Do nations have psyches the way individuals do? Can a nation's past make a people ill as we know repressed memories sometimes make individuals ill? Conversely, can a nation or contending parts of it be reconciled to its past as individuals can, by replacing myth with fact and lies with truth?

(Ignatieff, 1998, p. 168)

A society recovering from extreme violence will have to deal with trauma at both individual and group levels. The scars are more than physical. Since World War I, trauma – and, in particular, post-traumatic stress disorder – has been recognized as a significant and damaging outcome of war and other forms of terror. Psychologists have found that people who experience or witness violence often develop psychological and physical problems – with symptoms such as flashbacks, outbursts of anger, emotional numbness and illness (Herman, 1997).

My experience with war-traumatized people suggests that psychological and emotional healing may be essential for individual reconciliation. I remember a child in Mozambique, about eight years old, who had not uttered a word since he was found abandoned in the bottom of a well during the war. He clung to my fingers with a ferocity I have only encountered with severely disturbed children. I also remember a woman in Sarajevo who was forced to flee her village and said she could not imagine ever being happy again. Her eyes were empty, exhausted. And then there was Foday Sankoh who died, insane, in prison – the perpetrator's trauma.

These very real, very personal wounds must be addressed if any meaningful intra-individual reconciliation can be said to have taken place. Indeed trauma work with individuals has become an important facet of peacebuilding in post-war regions. But people also refer to 'healing' at group and national levels. Does this make sense? Some psychologists suggest that it might.

Psychologists Itzkowitz and Volkan (1994) argue that some groups, such as Jews after the Holocaust, may experience collective traumas so severe that they cannot mourn them. Such traumas become a defining part of the group's identity. These are 'chosen traumas': unreconciled group traumas that are so powerful that, even if they occurred generations or centuries ago, they are as vivid to group members as if they had taken place yesterday. This makes traumatized groups ripe for political manipulation. Ignatieff (1998) writes of Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia:

The past continues to torment because it is not the past. These places are not living in a serial order of time, but in a simultaneous one, in which past and present are a continuous mass of fantasies, distortions, myths and lies (p. 186).

Mack (in Itzkowitz & Volkan, 1994) writes that in contexts of tit-for-tat violence, such as the former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka and Rwanda, chosen traumas can lead to the 'egoism of victimization,' in which traumatized groups may have:

little or no empathy for (their) enemy's losses, 'even if the victimization on the other side is palpably evident and comparable to or greater than one's own... The lack of empathy, the inability to identify with the anguish experienced by the members of a national group toward whom one bears hostile feelings, removes one of the central deterrents to... waging war (p. 10).

Chosen traumas carried by later generations may be especially potent because they tap into powerful and seemingly selfless human qualities: love, loyalty, sacrifice and group pride. Much war and nationalist rhetoric appeals to love of family and nation and is strongly tied to history. In Israel and the former Yugoslavia, much blood has been shed and much has been sacrificed, not only to secure a better future for those living, but also to attempt to undo or avenge past injustices to family, community members or ancestors. Grieving and reconciling chosen traumas so the past is acknowledged but accepted as in the past, part of a group's history from which members can move on (intragroup reconciliation), is therefore central to intergroup reconciliation.

In recent years, peace workers in Bosnia, Liberia and South Africa have explicitly linked trauma healing with reconciliation. Heavily influenced by Western psychological models of trauma recovery, they note that those who experience interpersonal violence often feel anger and the desire for revenge. They need to grieve their losses and heal from the trauma so they can eventually come to terms with what happened and move on.

According to this model, grieving and eventual reconciliation with events and with those seen as responsible can be facilitated by a number of processes (not necessarily in the following order). Victims need to be able to tell their stories and have them acknowledged, often publicly. They need to see some form of justice: acknowledgement and accountability by those responsible. And they need to forgive, stop being controlled by past events but rather incorporate those events into their personal narratives and look towards the future (Hart et al., 1993).

In most post-conflict contexts, public acknowledgement of crimes, opportunities to be heard and accountability by perpetrators do not all occur. At best there seems to be a trade-off between truth telling and justice. Yet victims are often pressured to forgive and reconcile. The

resentments and fears suppressed by false reconciliation risk resurfacing later as they did among Croatian Serbs whose persecution under the Ustaše regime during World War II was suppressed under Yugoslav president Tito's post-war policy of "Brotherhood and Unity."

Those who commit war crimes are also often traumatized. This is especially relevant where child soldiers are forced to witness or commit horrific acts, often against people they know. Those who cannot deal with their trauma and who are not reintegrated into their communities may be most likely to resume fighting if the opportunity arises.

The idea of commonly-experienced steps to individual trauma healing and reconciliation also applies at the group level. Similar to Itzkowitz and Volkan's (1994) notion of chosen trauma, Hart (1997) argues that identity-based groups, such as ethnic or religious groups, who have experienced targeted violence or oppression may fall into a cycle of anger and revenge, of defining who they are by a past experience of aggression against them. Peacebuilders need to help the group mourn their losses and begin to rehumanize and forgive the group they see as having wronged them. As with individual trauma, this can be helped by public acknowledgment (especially by the perpetrating group) not only that crimes and injuries were committed but that they were morally wrong. It can also be helped by "re-writing" history to acknowledge past oppression and violence and by evidence that perpetrators were held accountable.

Individual and group trauma healing can be understood as distinct but interrelated phenomena. Neither requires the other but they are mutually supportive and have some parallels. When individuals recover from trauma and if they let go of hatred for members of the 'enemy' group, they stop passing on enemy stereotypes and stories of unresolved injuries to younger generations, stories that can be tapped later by nationalist movements. When groups are able to mourn past trauma, they stop reinforcing and politicising the trauma – even inherited trauma and outrage – of individuals.

But what does national healing mean? In part it appears to mean that the emotional and psychological wounds of citizens and the chosen traumas of groups within the state begin to heal so the population begins to see itself as one community of people who are morally responsible for one another. It also seems to be used to reflect a restoration of confidence in public institutions and the rule of law over the rule of violence. That is, it is a shift toward political reconciliation. The latter kind of 'healing' is dramatically different from the former, although it also has psychological elements.

From a psychological perspective then, individual and group reconciliation after war or state-sponsored terror is really about healing from trauma. It is about healing in a relationship between former antagonists, facilitated by actions that promote accountability and mutual acknowledgement. It is also about healing alone, working through the pain and grief to accept what happened and begin to look to the future. And such healing is intimately connected with memory.

Such memory cannot only be described as narrative, in the way Dwyer uses it. For those directly suffering from trauma, it is memory that may not even be expressed but is experienced physically, emotionally and psychologically through symptoms of post-traumatic stress. For the group, it is trauma that is not simply intellectual, but has to be worked through emotionally – healed. Only once traumas have been worked through and grieved at that emotional/psychological level, do they become conciliatory narratives. And only once traumas have been grieved is there the possibility of (re)establishing a trusting relationship between former enemies.

4.3 Community dynamics of war and state-sponsored terror

War violence is meant to traumatise, but the experience of trauma and the route to healing depend in part on the war dynamics and interpretations of 'community.' Most civil wars of the past decade divided people along ethnic or religious lines. While the root cause of conflict may not be ethnic or religious competition, once armed nationalists define it this way citizens often divide into ethnically or religiously homogeneous groups for their own protection. Tit-for-tat ethnic violence and propaganda reinforce divisions, creating solid blocks or 'communities' whose members share stories of loss, fear and often feelings of hatred, anger and revenge.

State-sponsored terror is very different. Marchak (1999), drawing from Arendt's analysis of Nazi Germany, distinguishes state-sponsored terrorism from other forms of state violence. Terrorism, she writes, is "not merely force or even violence imposed by the agencies of the state." It is not even the state's "frequent resort to force" indicative of "the lack of moral authority and the breakdown of legal constraints."

> Terrorism is an instrument designed to frighten a larger population. In contrast to the violence that typically precedes it, it is not designed merely to kill political opponents; it is intended to terrify people. There is no adequate explanation for the choice of victims; fear is engendered by unpredictability. Although some potential victims recognize themselves as the probable targets..., many others who are not identified targets are caught. There are no rules. There is no

certainty about what constitutes a trespass. It seems that anyone could be in the wrong, anyone could be a victim (Marchak, 1999, p. 6).

The key elements in this definition are intention (terrorism is deliberate), creation of terror in people, and unpredictability. In state-sponsored terror a state seeks to control its population and retain control by alienating and disorganizing people and thus preventing any opposition.

As in the Dirty War in Argentina (1976-83) and Stalinist USSR, state terrorism destroys community. Nobody knows who to trust, who is a spy, whose company will endanger them. Even trust in families can sometimes be threatened. During the terror in the USSR and Nazi Germany, family members were known to report on one another to the authorities. In Argentina during the Dirty War, Marchak (1999) writes:

> Many middle-aged, middle-income parents dismissed the news of disappearances told by their teenaged children. "Left-wing propaganda," said they. Even when their children were subjected to torture, they found it impossible to believe that the "authorities" could act arbitrarily. Some disowned kidnapped children; others simply refused to believe the evidence of torture experienced by their own adult children... It was too painful for them to acknowledge that the military forces, in whom they had placed their trust, were responsible for state terrorism (p. 148).

Sierra Leone experienced another kind of terrorism that also divided communities and families and fomented distrust. In a country already known for secrecy, abuse of power and political manipulation, the war added more layers of suspicion, often with devastating results. As women and children were used as spies for the rebels and other armed groups, all civilians were suspect and could be arrested and summarily executed by government-aligned forces. People could be turned in to these forces by neighbours who might covet their property or harbour petty jealousies. Anyone found outside their home area, as Peter's story in Appendix A shows, was in real danger. This further undermined trusting relations.

How do different conflict dynamics affect community? Identity-based civil war (defined ethnically or religiously) heightens members' sense of 'community' even as it distorts its cultural traditions. In this highly polarized environment, members are labelled both by the group itself and by outsiders, reinforcing group membership. The definition of the group's culture tends to be essentialized and militarised by group hardliners with increasing persuasiveness as violence escalates. Although there is often initially a wide range of views – and self-descriptions – within the identity-based group, nationalists use an essentialized and exclusive group definition and a clear view of the 'enemy' to stifle dissent from moderates who can then be labelled as 'traitors.'

Group members come to hold an image of a well-defined 'enemy' 'community,' that is often incorporated into its cultural narratives and self-definition. Violence against that 'enemy' group is often condoned or at least seen as inevitable and justified away as 'deserving' because of acts of violence against the home group. In this case, 'community' is an ethnic or religious community, one out of at least two in the state; 'community' does not consist of all citizens within the state.

In such a context, perpetrators or instigators of war crimes are sometimes considered heroes amongst their own group. Even when community members know about their acts – as Palestinians know about suicide bombers – many attempt to justify such acts as a response to violence against their group. Similarly Milošević and the notorious warlord Arkan were regarded as national heroes by many Serbs. Their crimes were rationalized as defending Serb national interests. Since these instigators were interested in being part of a Serb community, they did not need to regret their acts. Only when their society condemns crimes conducted in their name will perpetrators need to be concerned about reintegration and community acceptance in polarized civil conflicts.

Another important and related element of ethnic or religious civil war is that groups in conflict can often survive independently of one another in peacetime. In Bosnia, Serbs, Croats and Muslims do not need to interact economically or socially, although they would likely do better economically if they did. In such situations, the need to heal rifts and interact with members of other ethnic or religious communities is weak. Offenders do not need to reconcile with the larger community and with victims from other groups, and the offender's group may not encourage them to be accountable.

Internally-driven terror, by contrast, destroys community. It alienates people and destroys trust, even amongst friends and family. A society cannot function well with such extreme atomisation so the need to rebuild trust and relationships is strong. At the same time, since community is weak and many people were complicit through their silence or cooperation with the regime, individuals have few people with whom they can safely talk about the past. In other words, in Bosnia members of a single group can discuss their mutual victimization by other groups without fear of contradiction. By contrast, in Argentina and Sierra Leone, instigators, perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders and victims are intermixed.[19] In such a situation of interdependence and given the need to re-establish trust and (re)build individual relationships, a

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[19] I write these categories for the sake of simplicity as if there are clear delineations between perpetrators, victims, collaborators and bystanders. However, people often belong to more than one of these groups.

restorative approach to reconciliation holds great promise if the population decides to address the past.

So far, I have focused on universals: elements of reconciliation relevant for many transitional contexts, given an understanding of each conflict and basic social dynamics. From a distance, analysts of transitional processes know that different conflict patterns and social interdependencies motivate people in different ways. We can also appreciate that state systems and practices shape cultures to a certain extent (Marchak, 2003). We know state terrorist regimes create cultures of fear, secrecy and atomization, while inter-communal conflicts create cultures based on enemy thinking and national aggrandizement, with increased gender differentiation and plenty of nationalist kitsch.

But many aspects of reconciliation cannot be understood from a distance. They are shaped by culture and particular to the context. Thus we shift gears from the universal to the particular – to culture and religion – and see what observations emerge. Unlike the previous sections, which were broadly comparative, the following two sections concentrate on Sierra Leone.

4.4 Culture, ideology and the 'treasure trove of custom'

Culture develops within the process of a people wrestling with their natural and social environment. They struggle with nature. They struggle with one another. They evolve a way of life embodied in their institutions and certain practices. Culture becomes the carrier of their moral, aesthetic and ethical values.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre,* **1993: 27**

When we think of reconciliation after violent conflict, we often focus on the atrocities of war and the overarching ideologies that permitted them. We may ask, like Arendt: Are some crimes too horrific to forgive? How do we deal with the horrors and losses of war. But, as Arendt (1964) also acknowledged in *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* the answers are often more mundane than that. They are tied to the day-to-day relations between people in peacetime.

The word 'reconciliation' implies a reversion to some ideal – or at least decent – relationship. But war does not emerge out of utopia. When war occurs 'within the family,' as it did in Sierra Leone, it is often because patterns of domination and dependency entrenched in 'custom' no longer meet the needs of a critical mass, and avenues for challenging these customs, which would normally allow the natural adaptation of power structures, have been cut off. When the elite or their handlers are too successful in crushing criticism amidst crisis, 'the flexibility

required for power to constantly adapt itself to changing contexts" is undermined (Ferme, 2001, p. 160).

Culture can be seen as embracing all that a people see as meaningful and beautiful in a society, with the input of many revered generations: the ancestors. Except in its self-conscious expression – in arts, design and entertainment, for example – culture is largely internalized, so that it seems natural and unquestionable. Its intellectual backbone, also internalized, is ideology, which explains who belongs, how members should relate to one another, and their roles and responsibilities in the family and community.

But the structures of political, social and economic organization that cultures incorporate are usually very unequal. It is the job of culture and ideology to explain and justify them.[20] As Marchak (2003) writes, "A culture is effective to the degree that it transforms inequalities into acceptable differences – and that task... is largely ideological" (p. 87). When inequalities are no longer tenable for a large element of the population, the society may be heading for crisis.

Societies experiencing mass atrocity are societies in crisis. Often, the crisis begins as a challenge to ruling relations and the elite's failure to adapt peacefully. In extremely hierarchical societies elites may become greedy and use their power to exploit and exclude others beyond the capacities of the culture and corresponding ideology to rationalize it. This practice may contain the seeds of the cultural system's demise or transformation. As more people, especially young men, become impoverished and marginalized from their communities they may form a growing mass of disgruntled and desperate people who can be recruited by strongmen or armed forces. Threatened elites often respond with authoritarianism and inflexibility, silencing dissent rather than listening and adapting. This creates further marginalization and the use of force undermines the elite's legitimacy, requiring it to continue using violence. In this way, pressure may build up in the system until it explodes into war or state-sponsored terror.

The key factor here is not extreme poverty; it is marginalization – a lack of connection with, and interdependence on, the community. Poverty is important in this sense primarily because it strains a society's capacity to absorb all its members. This can lead to the estrangement of some from the community.

In Sierra Leone, when impoverished rural families and communities could no longer support their children, parents sometimes sent them to live and work as wards of wealthier

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[20] One rationalization is that culture is 'custom,' 'it is how we have done it' and thus has the legitimacy of time-honoured tradition.

relatives or patrons in towns, hoping they would have more opportunities there. These children were vulnerable to abuse and some ran away to live on the streets of Freetown or seek opportunities where they could find them (Zack-Williams, 1999). Other young men left home for opportunities in the diamond fields or because of conflicts in the community. These young people – especially young men – became a source of recruits by armed forces that offered opportunities for enrichment, advancement and revenge.

But marginalization and desperation are not enough to create a serious challenge to dominant power structures. An organizing mechanism must emerge on the scene, often with its own counter-ideology. Some ideologies, like Christianity and Islam in much of Africa, coexist with and adapt to traditional cultures. While values may clash, they may pragmatically adapt to ruling structures. As these religious ideologies have their own corresponding institutions and cultures, however, they may create a space for people to manoeuvre and negotiate relations otherwise forbidden in a strict authoritarian culture.

Other political ideologies directly challenge ruling relationships and the 'customary' privileges that support them. Moammar Gadhafi's revolutionary ideology articulated in his *Green Book*, and his financial support and military training for insurgents, provided a key organizational framework for West African rebel movements in the 1990s, with devastating results. Such counter-ideologies may be taken up by frustrated middle-class youth who see no place for themselves in a corrupt and economically bankrupt state. Once the wheels of organized rebellion are set in motion, disgruntled and marginalized youth may find a place for themselves in the movement.

So far I have hinted at two of four reasons why culture is important for post-war reintegration and reconciliation. First, the tensions, injustices and marginalization that contributed to the war grew out of ruling relationships embedded in culture and its ideologies. National reconciliation and sustainable peace may need to involve open discussions of these tensions in which all citizens, not only elites, have a right to participate.

Second, systems of inequality justified by culture create vulnerabilities that affect people's war experiences and reintegration. Wars tend to hit the poor the hardest as they lack the resources to flee. Also people at the bottom of the social hierarchy may lack the power to refuse being put in dangerous situations. The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2004) observes that discriminatory attitudes towards women and children may have contributed to the prevalence of certain crimes against them during the war, including rape, forced marriage and

forced recruitment. After the war, prejudices and discrimination remain and inhibit reintegration, most notably of women and girls who were raped or were with militarized forces.

Third, culture is the lens through which people see the world and the social context in which they live. Despite cultural strains that may have contributed to the war, culture contains much that people value and see as natural. In an environment of war and insecurity, cultural patterns represent the known and the ways of ones loved ones and ancestors in better times. Though the war irrevocably changed many things, people return to many of those often-unconscious cultural patterns, including patterns of integration and attitudes towards forgiveness, inter-group relations and revenge.

In Sierra Leone, as I will discuss, people largely integrate through relationships of dependency and patronage. Any program that promotes reintegration must acknowledge this. Programmers must be aware of the benefits and pitfalls of such a dependency-based system of reintegration to avoid repeating and reinforcing relations of exploitation.

Fourth, culture is a source of ideals and processes of reconciliation, reintegration and peacebuilding. As Mamdani (2001) writes of Rwanda, even when:

> ...a particular version of history (custom) is found wanting, in this case because it builds on the authoritarian strand as if it were the entire past, this surely cannot be reason to junk the very notion of history. From a reified language fortifying a despotic authority, custom needs to be rethought as a thread of life, not only one that makes us but also one that we make. To smash one version of the past as a prison dressed in the language of custom, one needs to turn that very past – the entire treasure trove called custom, and not simply the authoritarian strands in it that colonial power welded into a 'customary' law – into a plural resource for more open futures (p. 277).

In their effort to move beyond the travesty of apartheid, South Africans dug into their 'treasure trove called custom' and found the concept of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu*, a word from the Nguni language group with equivalents in other Southern African languages, is described by TRC chairman Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) as a central feature of the African worldview:

> Africans have this thing called UBUNTU. It is about the essence of being human, it is part of the gift that Africa will give the world...We believe that a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up, inextricably with yours. When I dehumanise you, I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms and therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own belonging (Tutu, 2000).

By promoting mercy (forgiveness), acknowledging oppression and emphasizing the oneness of humanity, *ubuntu* can be used by South African leaders to acknowledge the dehumanizing impact of apartheid while discouraging vengeance.

The persuasiveness of such an ideal rests largely in its perception of being rooted in custom, yet pan-African conciliatory ideals and practices seem to be developing. Transitional countries are delving into their pasts to find *ubuntu*-like ideals and conciliatory practices such as 'traditional' cleansing ceremonies as they struggle to reintegrate combatants and war victims into their communities.[21]

In post-war societies, cultures and the ideologies entrenched in them must be the focus of debate and critical self-reflection as well as a source of ideals and inspiration. As emotional as these discussions can be, the debate must be rational and open, based on criteria of justness and free of intimidation and the wielding of power. In many ways this debate should resemble Habermas's (1981) ideal communication.

Culture also affects how people feel and their ability to trust. It provides the worldview that mediates people's relationships with others, their communities and the state. Culture is therefore also relevant to sentient aspects of reconciliation.

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[21] For an excellent exploration of the use of traditional rituals and beliefs in reintegrating excombatants in Uganda see *Roco wat i Acoli, Restoring relationships in Acholi-land: Traditional approaches to justice and reintegration.* a joint study by the Liu Institute for Global Issues and the Gulu District NGO Forum (2005).

4.5   4.5   Religion, culture and the articulation of reconciliation

March 9, 2003   Freetown

I am sitting in an outdoor restaurant in Freetown, waiting for a teacher who I met in a poda poda yesterday. A few feet away, a young woman is bending over a tin tub washing laundry and singing in a beautiful, quivering voice, "Oh Lord, I will praise your name. You are so good to me. You are so marvellous. You will take me away. No matter how long it takes. He is the King. He will rescue me from the hands of the wicked." I don't know this woman's story but she is clearly not well off and she has likely seen her share of violence during the long civil war here. How can she sing "You are so good to me" with such conviction? This lovely woman, for me, sums up my experiences so far in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone is a country of deeply spiritual people whose faith cannot be captured by statistical categories: 60% Muslim: 30% Christian: 10% animist. For one thing, most Sierra Leoneans hold animist beliefs concurrently with Muslim or Christian ones (TRC, 2004). For another, religious labels tell us little about how religions are practiced. In some societies, religion is a source of exclusivity, chauvinism and strife: in others, it acts as a bridge between people, a source of generosity and reconciliation. Religion and spirituality must be understood in light of people's cultural and political contexts as they pick and choose aspects they find meaningful.

Religion must be seriously considered in any holistic study of reconciliation in Sierra Leone for six reasons. First, like culture, religion in a highly religious society is central to people's worldview. In Sierra Leone, the difficulties and horrors of the war reinforced people's faith as they sought strength in God, Allah or spiritual forces and as they tried to make sense of why they survived when so many around them did not. In this way, religious beliefs or a sense of a protective relationship with God or other spiritual forces provided individuals with a way of reconciling narratively and emotionally with their experiences in an otherwise incomprehensible war.

Time and again, in what I began to call the 'survivor syndrome,' people told me that their survival was due to divine intervention. As one man, who had his own remarkable survival story,

said, "People went through various experiences. And the way we were able to go through that experience without losing (our) lives, (we) interpreted that to nothing but the grace of God" (interview 22).

One story, told to me by a Canadian acupuncturist who worked in camps for war wounded, exemplifies this:

> One patient, he is such an incredible person. A bullet went through his back and came here, right underneath his left nipple... He lived two months in the bush with no medical care and he should have died... I asked him how could you live?... He told me, "All I did was I prayed to God. I ate some fruits, prayed to God. I wake up in the morning and I pray and pray and pray to God." So that's I think a bit of the role of religion. So often they say, "We will forgive but later in judgement time the people who did this to us will pay." Religion is so strong for them because for him, he's a miracle (interview 10).

Even when people suffered greatly, many, like the young woman above, remarkably found it in them to be grateful. As a Sierra Leonean priest in the hard-hit north said, with disapproval:

> Some who have lost their hands. If you ask them, "How is life?" they say, "I tell God Tenki."... They look at somebody who has died, somebody who has suffered more. It's because people are helpless, they feel suppressed... And so they say, "Thank God. I thank God" (interview 36).

The appeal of religion in times of war and oppression is not surprising. People in despair are well known to gravitate towards religion as a source of strength and hope. Religion, like cultural ideologies, provides a world view, but this world view seeks explanations for inexplicable events in the unknown, the unknowable, in a supernatural relation with God or the spirits. When satisfactory answers are found – such as the 'survivor syndrome' – believers find a kind of narrative reconciliation with events.

Second, religion provides a source of therapy and comfort as people struggle to come to terms with what happened to them and others – or what they did – during the war. In the short term at least, religion facilitates intra-individual reconciliation, in a way that also affects community relations. For the injured man above who survived in the bush with little food and no medical care, religion provided a source of strength and comfort: for others, religious leaders may provide a safe and sympathetic ear and counsel in difficult and confusing times. To the extent that people find comfort and hope in religious explanations, these beliefs may contribute to a temporary psychological and emotional 'coming to terms' with events.

Third, while religious beliefs may provide short-term comfort to desperate people, they may also hinder long-term reconciliation, especially at the community and national levels. When people feel helpless and frightened they may find comfort in spiritual or religious explanations of doubtful veracity. These explanations may detract from important human realities that need to be addressed for change to occur. Similarly, reinforcing a belief in ultimate justice may dissuade people from taking revenge but it may also lead them to accept a lack of justice which is both their due and is needed to end impunity. Palliative spiritual 'healing' may be a practical response to powerlessness.

Also, during the war some forces manipulated people's belief in magic to give them a sense of invincibility and superiority. These beliefs stand in the way of reconciliation as combatants who committed crimes because of this 'magic' will be reluctant to admit their delusions. Institutions like truth commissions are valuable in such cases because they affirm just norms, humanize events and individuals, expose manipulation of beliefs, and address root causes of the war.

Fourth, religion, like culture, provides ideals, moral values and texts that can be used to promote unity, compassion and reconciliation or enmity and violence.[22] When religious leaders interpret texts to support reconciliation they can be powerful partners in peacebuilding as they have the organizational structures, authority and moral credibility to promote conciliatory ideals. In Sierra Leone, religious leaders promoted religious cooperation and inclusiveness in the country and encouraged people to accept combatants back, forgive and forego vigilante 'justice.' Similarly, Christian leaders in Mozambique used moral reasoning to persuade a family of small-scale arms manufacturers to find another way of earning a living (Wells, Tapestry, CBC Radio 1, June 19, 2005).

Fifth, we need to consider the interplay between religion and culture as they affect reconciliation and integration. In my research I observed that although Sierra Leonean Muslims and Christians *articulate* reconciliation in religious terms, they largely *enact* reintegration and some aspects of reconciliation by re-entering relations of dependency that have little to do with these new religions – though they may be justified by traditional animist beliefs.

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[22] It is therefore futile to discuss religious perspectives on reconciliation based on a survey of religious texts. It is enough to note that religious leaders in societies emerging from mass-violence use theology to support peace and reconciliation and to note how these leaders frame these concerns. For an excellent example, see *No Future Without Forgiveness* by Desmond Tutu (1999).

Also, although Islam and Christianity, as practiced in Sierra Leone, have been strongly influenced by, and incorporated into, local cultures (Ferme, 2001), they are also sites of contestation. Christians and Muslims experience an individual relationship with God, an individualism that has little space in communitarian cultures. While the powerful may co-opt religion for their own purposes, the opposite may also be true. Less powerful believers may cling to ideas of justice and equality contained in religious texts or in their own individual relations with God. Religious institutions may also provide room for social mobility, including opportunities for education and community, outside traditional social hierarchies.

Sixth, while acknowledging that religions have much to say about reconciliation we need to reject the idea that reconciliation is primarily a religious concept. The association of the two is understandable. In states emerging from mass violence, religious organizations and leaders have often been at the forefront of efforts to reconcile individuals and groups. This leadership has been recognized by the governments of South Africa and Sierra Leone when they appointed religious leaders to head their respective TRCs. The Sierra Leone TRC also chose the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone as its partner to continue its conciliatory work (TRC, 2004).

But reconciliation is not inherently religious. Making up after conflict has always been part of human existence. The etymology of the word dates back to pre-200 AD Latin: reconciliare (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2004), and my discussion so far has outlined many forms of reconciliation that have little to do with religion. Religion and culture may influence how reconciliation occurs and the reasons for its occurrence[23] but even the most vengeful societies contain mechanisms to mitigate past wrongs and reconcile people and groups in conflict.

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Though we may be clear about the many types of reconciliation and have some ideas about how they play out in different conflict settings, we cannot appreciate what reconciliation really means in a given context until we step firmly into it and watch and listen for a while. And so we now turn to the story of the war in Sierra Leone.

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[23] What may distinguish religious and some communal understandings of reconciliation from secular, individualistic interpretations is the idea of a *moral* obligation to reconcile. Religious, political or community leaders may stress the need to reconcile as a duty to God, the state or community. People outside those frameworks may feel no external obligation and may reconcile simply because they want to.

Part II

The story

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Forward:
Viewing the prism

In post-war Sierra Leone, NGOs often perform skits in villages and markets to promote discussion of social issues. In one skit about the war's causes, a man says, "I am (former president) Siaka Stevens. I did a lot for this country and I am not responsible for the war." Another man says. "I am (former president) Joseph Momoh. I did a lot for this country and I am not responsible for the war." Then former president Strasser and rebel leader Foday Sankoh follow with the same words. Finally an old man walks in with a pot of water to which he adds more water until it flows over the edges. The old man says, "You are all arguing about who is responsible, but just as a river has many sources, so the war has many sources" (interview 62, May 5, 2004). For the historian, there can be few places where this cautionary advice is more apt than Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone is like a dangling prism. At first the prism seems clear, then different colours appear, one by one, depending on how the light catches it. Red, orange, yellow... the prism turns on its thread, the sun glints off another side and each time everything looks different. Sometimes new information enhances the previous story but with another emphasis; other times a complete rethinking of past material is required. Again and again new angles appear, too often snippets of information with inadequate detail that are hard to comprehend given the paucity of literature on the war, relative to that on Bosnia or South Africa. The existing literature tends to emphasize very different angles which, like the prism, are often difficult to reconcile.

Part II is my effort to pull the story together, to highlight the war's many sources and elements that explain its dynamics. Some themes emerged during my field work – in interviews, my daily life and observations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Others emerged in later reading. All I know is that the prism is still turning; this history has many angles yet.

The war in Sierra Leone was widely labelled a 'rebel war.' But while the fighting formally began when the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) forces invaded the country from Liberia in March 1991 and rebels conducted most of the atrocities, the term 'rebel war'

reveals little about the multi-faceted conflict and the divisions that need to be reconciled for the sake of peace. A conciliatory history of the conflict, such as that written by the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, must address the multiple grievances, tensions and experiences of loss that contributed to, and were a product of, Sierra Leone's decade-long war. It must also highlight sources of peace and consensus within Sierra Leonean society as effective conciliatory efforts must build on these. Part II aims to briefly provide such a history. An accompanying chronology can be found in Appendix B.

Chapter 5:
Diamonds, greed and 'San-San boys'

A history of Sierra Leone relevant to the 1990s war might begin with ruling relations and trade among Mende, Temne, Limba, Fula and other ethnic groups in the region well before Portuguese sailor Pedro da Cintra first mapped the area in 1462 (Hirsch, 2001). It probably should discuss the slave trade, which devastated many West African communities and strengthened others as they gained weapons in exchange for the people they captured and traded, first to the Portuguese and later, by the 18th century, to the British (Shaw, 2002). These relations and the ways in which people organized to protect themselves must have influenced the recent war but are outside the scope of this thesis. I will begin with the British colonial practices of indirect rule that entrenched patrimonial government and led to a crisis of public confidence in the state and to war.

5.1   Colonialism, patrimonialism and the entrenchment of clientalist rule

In 1787, the British government banned slavery on British soil and founded the port and settlement of Freetown, to which it could 'repatriate' freed slaves from its settler colonies. Freetown also provided an administrative and trading base through which resources from the hinterland could be channelled. The ethnically diverse descendants of these repatriated slaves, known as Krios, tended to embrace British culture and valued high levels of education. They formed a vibrant commercial and administrative core of the colony of Freetown throughout the 19th century (Reno, 1995; Hirsch, 2001).

The British colonial government might have taken advantage of the ability and willingness of Krios and other African entrepreneurs to fill commercial and administrative positions in the interior. Instead, they restricted control of these informal markets to allied regional chiefs, fearing that an African entrepreneurial class might threaten the administrative status quo (Reno, 1995). Reno argues that indirect rule through local chiefs set the stage for the Sierra Leone state's later collapse.

The colonial state was continuously short of revenues and officials had to find inexpensive and politically viable ways of controlling the interior. They built alliances with loyal paramount chiefs who maintained trade and enforced colonial demands. In return, chiefs benefited from being central to all major transactions in the region (Reno, 1995). In Kono, for example:

Freetown spent a mere forty pounds annually to fulfil its commercial treaty obligations to six Kono chiefs in 1889. More valuable to these chiefs were the trade, prestige of association, and firearms the British provided. In Kono, ivory, gold, and groundnut trade came under direct chief control as traders dealt with those whom the British had deemed to be legitimate authorities in the area. Thus a precedent was started. Access to state power translated into private benefit (Reno, 1995, p. 33).

In 1896, Britain declared the interior of Sierra Leone to be a British protectorate and, in an effort to generate revenue and force Africans into the labour market, imposed a hut tax which they assumed local chiefs would collect. Some chiefs rebelled at their loss of judicial authority and "feared becoming the passive intermediaries that Freetown officials meant them to be" (Reno, 1995, p. 36). Shocked by this rebellion, the British responded with concessions to cooperative chiefs. In 1902 they officially recognized chiefs' 'customary right' to forced labour:

'Every Paramount Chief in his capacity as chief... shall have the same powers with respect to labour as they heretofore possessed.'... Chiefs used their positions as local agents of state power to translate their new legal authority into commercial advantage. Unpaid workers appeared on chiefs' farms, while colonial officials provided direct assistance to chiefs' growing commercial crops (Reno, 1995, p. 37).

The colonial government also provided chiefs with the legal authority to impose 'native law' by recognizing chiefdom courts. Chiefs could therefore penalize challengers and "enforce their decisions with little local control or accountability." Colonial administrators had no interest in questioning this power as they feared this would cause instability (Reno, 1995, p. 38).

The British colonial practice of indirect rule was far from unique to Sierra Leone. Colonial governments ruled this way in much of Africa. This practice greatly distorted and exaggerated the powers of cooperative elites and entrenched these powers as 'customary' or 'traditional.' Mamdani (2001) writes of Rwanda:

By creating a single hierarchy of chiefs (the Belgian colonial government) accentuated the despotic aspect of state administration... This despotic machinery was enabled by a highly administrative version of 'customary' law, one which sanctified as 'customary' any exercise of force by authorities simply because they too were considered 'customary' (p. 94).

Indirect rule established or strengthened a patrimonial system of governance in which chiefs were supposedly entrusted to rule in the best interests of their followers. In fact, colonial administrators were more concerned that chiefs act in British interests. Some chiefs undoubtedly did rule in the interests of their constituents and earned devotion and respect. Others ruled by power and 'tradition' alone: by virtue of their control of resources and judicial institutions. The

difference between these is that between patrimonialism – benevolent rule in which the ruler exercises power in the interests of his or her dependents – and clientalism in which power and resources are used to reward and punish followers in the ruler's interests. Both extremes of this dependency system persist today in Sierra Leone. They coexist with efforts to create neutral and transparent state institutions in which politicians and civil servants work for all citizens and are guided by universally-applied policies and laws. The flip side of a patrimonial system is that those with money or employment are expected to provide for, or find jobs for, less fortunate family members or other dependents in large extended families. The strain of this dependency can be great.[24]

5.1.1   Diamonds and a step towards democracy

In 1930 diamonds were discovered in Kono district. Colonial administrators' main concern was to control and profit from their production as a source of state revenue. Mining was to be licensed and controlled through state-allied intermediaries – all other mining was illegal. Administrators used a three-pronged approach to try to gain this control. First, they granted nominal control of the diamond sector to a succession of foreign companies or parastatals that would pay taxes and license fees to the state. In 1934, they granted a 99-year diamond mining monopoly to Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST), a subsidiary of De Beers. Second, paramount chiefs in the diamond areas were authorized to determine who could live in the region and thus who could benefit from diamond mining. This reinforced popular dependency on paramount chiefs and increased the latters' ability to reward supporters and exclude detractors. And third, the colonial administration implemented a tributary system in which, instead of wages, miners were paid a portion of the diamonds or gold they found (Hirsch, 2001).[25]

The monopoly granted to SLST was impossible to enforce. In contrast to the kimberlite pit mines that De Beers owns in countries like Botswana, Sierra Leone's plentiful alluvial diamonds – found on the surface and spread out over a large area – make mining extremely difficult to control.[26] Unlicensed mining has been a constant feature of diamond mining in the country and miners pour in from across the country and neighbouring states. Administrators in Freetown recognized that they needed the cooperation of chiefs who could control the population

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[24] All societies have a combination of patrimonial (or favouritism of family and friends) and 'neutral' structures and these are not always seen as conflicting. In North America and Europe most people feel that state structures should be neutral towards all citizens but in business and other private realms nepotism is commonly practiced.

[25] In some areas, men sift through gravel for diamonds and women go through it a second time for gold.

[26] Sierra Leone has both alluvial and kimberlite (concentrated pit) diamonds (TRC, 2004).

through clientalist relations and continue channelling mining resources to the government (Reno, 1995).

In contrast to colonial interests, miners wanted freer access to diamond fields and many resented the control of foreign companies and chiefs. This resentment led to uprisings in 1955 in Kono in which miners attacked a police station and SLST guards (Reno, 1995). The same year, protesters denounced corruption by chiefs and local officials in Pujehun, Moyamba and Port Loko (Conteh-Morgan & Dixon-Fyle, 1999).

Until 1948, the Colonial Office believed that constitutional reform would build on chiefs' powers but popular resentment of chiefs' privileges and misgovernment[27] led them to reconsider in favour of representative democracy and elected district councils. With uprisings against chiefs in Kono in 1955-1956, the government also began to seek ways to return resources to Kono communities. They created the Mining Area Development Administration (MADA) to channel this investment (Reno, 1995).

MADA was designed to provide the Kono district with conspicuous development projects independent of chiefs that the central government could claim credit for. But these policies were contradictory and ended up enhancing the powers of allied chiefs. Local officials lacked both the administrative capacity and grassroots connections needed to implement projects so they turned to loyal chiefs to administer the funds. Also, with the upcoming 1957 elections, the government wanted to increase the popular influence of chiefs loyal to the "right" political party," the conservative Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Rewarding "MADA chiefs" with community development funds enabled Freetown "not only to buy social order, but also to buy electoral support" (Reno, 1995: 65-6). This central government practice of buying political support by providing strongmen with resources and power to reward or punish followers – with rice or jobs, for example – began an electoral clientalist pattern that continues to this day.

But chiefs were not Freetown's only intermediaries. Lebanese businessmen were increasingly useful as they could provide politicians with capital and mining networks while they presented no political threat to the central government.

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[27] For example, hut taxes in Kono, which were supposed to fund public services, rose almost seven-fold between 1935 and 1956. But in 1955 "Native Authorities spent only 3 percent of revenues on education and 1.7 percent on agricultural development, while turning 30 percent over to the new district councils. Chiefs kept most of the rest" (Reno, 1995, p. 61).

5.2 Forever 'wealthy strangers': The Lebanese in Sierra Leone

The position of the Lebanese in Sierra Leone has long been defined by the insecurity of their status. They filled critical middleman roles, first as merchants and transporters, and later – in addition to these – as diamond dealers with access to imported goods, capital and mining networks. Never fully accepted as Sierra Leoneans, they lived with one foot in Africa and one in Lebanon as they were easy targets for popular discontent and government abuse. At the same time they provided government leaders with valuable foreign connections and capital.

The Lebanese[28] first arrived in Sierra Leone in the mid-1890s. Most arrived in Freetown with little money and worked as traders, selling inexpensive imported goods on the streets until they raised enough capital to rent shops. Some moved on to other towns in the interior where they began to trade in rice, kola nuts and general merchandise (Van der Laan, 1975). This led to animosity by some African businesspeople, especially Krios who, around the turn of the 20th century, were facing declining opportunities in a climate of increasing British racism (Wyse, 1990).

Wyse (1990) writes that the 19th century was a period of fairly positive relations between Krios and British colonialists. Krios valued education and sent their children to university believing there would be opportunities for them in the professions and civil service. However growing racism deflated their hopes.

> During the second half of the (19th) century the growth of racial bigotry and the onward march of the 'new imperialism' gave rise to a more discriminatory attitude by colonial rulers to educated Africans in their possessions. And in the Sierra Leone context this generally meant the Krio. They were maligned and disparaged as 'B.A.Dunelms', 'savy niggers', 'The scourge of the coast', and 'descendants of slaves.' The lapses of a few well-placed Krio elites were used as evidence to discredit the whole group (Wyse, 1990, p. 26).

In 1904, for 'health reasons' Europeans were evacuated from Freetown to an "exclusive residential area at Hill Station" thus segregating the population. Krio lawyers and doctors began to find jobs closed to them and after 1917 colonial policy dictated that Africans could no longer be hired for administrative positions because "they did not have sufficient character to be appointed as junior Administrative Officers" and Krio officers could "not command the respect of the native chiefs" (Wyse, 1990, pp. 26, 28).

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[28] Early Lebanese immigrants to Sierra Leone left the Province of Syria in the Ottoman Empire. They were known as Syrians until the province's division into Syria and Lebanon in 1920 (Van der Laan, 1975).

Krio hostility toward Lebanese trading competitors culminated in the 'rice riots' of 1919. Crop failure, war restrictions and a serious flue epidemic the previous year had caused a severe shortage of rice. High inflation due to the war exacerbated the situation. The government began to import rice but instead of selling it as planned, many traders hoarded it and sold it at high prices. This led to riots in Freetown and many other towns in the interior where Lebanese lived. The rioters only targeted Lebanese, ignoring the shops of Krios and Europeans. They beat some Lebanese and one died from his injuries but the protesters mainly attacked property (Kaniki, 1973). Kaniki writes that the riots, which were largely attributed to Krios, marked the decline of Krios and the establishment of Lebanese as fixtures in Sierra Leone business. In the riots, anti-Lebanese sentiment was expressed through violence for the first time.

> The riots could indeed be viewed as a loud protest by the Creoles against what they regarded as unfair competition... Then, the way the colonial government handled the situation shattered Creole aspirations and initiative in trade and commerce... Lastly,... the manner (in which) the Colonial Office and the colonial government suppressed the disturbances amounted to their unqualified support of the Lebanese. Indeed the Lebanese came out of the conflict stronger than before (Kaniki, 1973, p. 98)

The colonial government compensated Lebanese for their losses and this eased their insecurity by assuring them that they could stay (Kaniki, 1973). As many moved into the interior and opened general stores, they filled middleman positions between local produce sellers and British companies who bought and shipped produce to Europe.[29] In the 1950s, they also invested heavily in transport, purchasing lorries that enabled them to ship produce quickly to Freetown and general merchandise back to the interior. By 1966, 73 percent of all shops in Sierra Leone were owned by Lebanese (Reno, 1995).

Kaniki (1973) observed in 1973 that the Lebanese never integrated into Sierra Leonean society and to a large degree this is still true today. However Van der Laan (1975) notes that Lebanese who moved to the interior quickly learned to speak local languages and developed relationships with the people around them far more than the Europeans ever did. This enabled them to fill middleman roles effectively. Some Lebanese men also married Sierra Leonean women and raised families.

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[29] Produce sold to Europe – cocoa, palm oil, palm kernels, piassava, sesame seeds, coffee, ginger and peanuts – were the main sources of cash in Sierra Leone until the mid-1950s. Lebanese merchants would buy, sort and weigh small amounts of produce that farmers brought to their stores and ship them in bulk to Freetown. Investing in lorries was a natural extension of this. For a detailed look at the early Lebanese experience in Sierra Leone, read H.L. Van der Laan (1975) *The Lebanese Traders in Sierra Leone.*

Among but apart; Lebanese in Sierra Leone are always 'wealthy strangers' no matter how long their families have been in the country. Kaniki (1973) argues that the conspicuousness of Lebanese in Sierra Leone:

> ...magnified their success and crimes. Where both Sierra Leoneans and Lebanese 'profiteered' in trade the latter were singled out as exploiters, as evil-doers and targets of attack... They were always considered as 'strangers', as outsiders... Economically they were members, but morally they were not. The local population's own 'elite' might have exploited them more severely, but 'here the two parties are members of a common moral system which gives meaning and justification to the relationship'. The relationship between the Africans and the Lebanese lacked this very kind of meaning and justification (p. 113).

Mamdani (2001) provides a fascinating discussion of the impact of colonial systems of indigenous government on people considered to be non-indigenous. After independence this precipitated citizenship crises throughout Africa. Those considered non-indigenous were seen as having no claim to 'indigenous' land. Insecurity often leads non-indigenous groups to pursue power and security through private investment or government structures, buying land and businesses and filling essential roles.

In the mid-1950s, in response to the Kono riots and in an effort to undermine illegal diamond mining, the colonial government 'liberalized' the diamond industry. However, the new rules did not benefit the average miner; they favoured wealthy entrepreneurs who could pay for better allotments. From Freetown's perspective, a few 'foreigners' were easier to monitor than many local miners. This put 'wealthy strangers' such as Lebanese diamond dealers in an excellent intermediary position (Reno, 1995).

A constitutional decree in 1960 stated that those without African parents could not hold citizenship and many Lebanese applied at this time for Lebanese passports. Deprived of political status, Lebanese dealers and other businessmen were unthreatening partners for Freetown politicians (Reno, 1995). Reno writes:

> (Lebanese intermediaries') non-citizen status ensured that that they posed no independent electoral threat. Their ethnicity also prevented them from mounting populist campaigns... These insecure businessmen found that payoffs to politicians and administrators was the most effective strategy for safeguarding their interests (p. 74).

Lebanese intermediaries in diamond regions were also of interest to the political opposition because of their access to growing networks of miners. With independence in 1961, many Sierra Leoneans believed that officials would provide greater services and curtail chiefs'

privileges. However, from its beginnings in 1951, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), which won the 1957 and 1962 elections, was the party of the African elite and Freetown-based (mainly Krio) bourgeoisie.[30] The SLPP had little interest in reaching out to rural citizens in general, preferring to rule through their leaders (Reno, 1995; Cox, 1976). Cox writes:

> The SLPP never worked to construct real party machinery, manipulated traditional deference to chiefly office as a substitute for the direct political mobilization of the peasantry, and most of all, never bothered to cultivate a nationalist outlook. The SLPP became a party in the western sense only at election time (p. 49).

With its elite orientation, the SLPP dealt with political opponents from chiefly families by integrating them into the party but ignored less influential opponents. Many of the latter joined the All People's Congress party (APC), which claimed to seek greater equality among citizens and an end to chiefs' privileges (Reno, 1995).

The APC needed to establish grassroots support outside the dominant alliances between chiefs and the central government. Lebanese diamond dealers and other 'wealthy strangers' provided essential resources and contacts with miners' organizations and their role as network heads made them central to the APC's electoral strategy (Reno, 1995).

Reno (1995) estimates that, by 1967, diamond mining employed 60 percent of the workers in the money economy in Sierra Leone. The country had gone from self-sufficiency in food in the early 1950s to importing 21,000 tons of rice a decade later. This greatly increased the influence of Lebanese entrepreneurs who had access to foreign markets and financial resources. At the same time the importance of chiefs declined.

Lebanese dealers exercised great influence over miners. Reno (1995) writes:

> In the 1950s, it was reported that dealers presided over 'youth gangs structured like police riot units' with fifty or more members, who defended illicit mining operations. These 'youth gangs' were in fact miner organizations, based upon the tributor method of production... Lebanese dealers... bought food and tools for miners, made arrangements with chiefs, and 'staked' them in return for a share of the dig's finds. Many of these production units developed as societies offering social and financial support to individual miners, a survival strategy prevalent in Kono today. Societies received financial support from dealers sponsoring their production. They also became convenient vehicles for dissent (p. 75).

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[30] Cox (1976) describes SLPP rule at this time as fitting Thomas Hodgkin's description of a "party of personality" or "patron party" that is "dominated by 'personalities', who enjoy superior social status either as traditional rulers or members of ruling families, or as belonging to the higher ranks of the urban, professional elite (lawyers, doctors, etc) or on both grounds" (pp. 49-50).

In the meantime, the SLPP government focused on challenges by elites, which required that state resources be spent on chiefs and their families rather than on public services.[51] As a result, citizens saw elite politics as irrelevant except to prove "rulers' betrayal of popular desires" (Reno, 1995, p. 77). The SLPP lost the 1967 elections to the APC and in 1968 the APC took power under the leadership of Siaka Stevens.

5.3   The shadow state, diamonds and "political food"

> An illiterate man in Freetown complained to a friend that he had never received the bags of rice he had been promised if he voted for a local politician. And a group of former pro-government militiamen said to me that they had eschewed retraining programs for excombatants because an influential politician promised that they would be sent to America - again, more empty words. I asked a friend with long experience in Sierra Leone how these men could be so naïve as to believe such incredible promises. These promises are not as ridiculous as they may seem, she said. Before the war, some people really did receive such favours for loyalty (interviews 10 & 16, March 9 & 16, 2003).

What led to the situation where buying votes with rice or support with promises of trips to America seems reasonable? Colonial policies provided the roots of the clientalist system but the system took hold during Stevens's rule. Having inherited a weak state, Stevens was more concerned with eliminating political challenges than creating effective institutions. Reno (1995) describes the state under Stevens as a 'Shadow State': a parallel governing system in which politicians derive their authority, not from the strength of state institutions, but from being able to "control markets and their material rewards" (p. 3).

In a clientalist system, state resources were most valuable for securing political loyalty through the distribution of jobs and resources selectively to political supporters and excluding detractors. As these accommodations were expensive they conflicted with the provision of government services and the Stevens government quickly began losing public support. This lack of legitimacy led Stevens to secure power through even more expensive accommodations. He

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[51] In 1967, 75 percent of parliamentarians in Kono were from families of chiefs (Reno, 1995).

looked to "perpetually dependent" Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese diamond dealers to finance these (Reno, 1995, p. 89).

Like his predecessors, Stevens felt threatened by the possibility of an independent class of African businessmen as African dealers could rally the support of chiefs while Lebanese could not. Therefore the Ministry of Mines allotted most new mining licences to Lebanese (Reno, 1995). Reno writes:

> The new intermediaries were dependent upon Stevens for favourable treatment and exemption from harassment. This breaking of the link between old intermediaries and the diamond trade weakened local strongmen, thus allowing Stevens to insert Lebanese deprived of the lucrative and unregulated 'landlord-tenant' relationship (that chiefs had enjoyed) (p. 90).

In 1974, the Freetown government announced that it would end the Sierra Leone Selection Trust's monopoly over diamond exporting and granted private licences to five businessmen to export 20 percent of the country's diamonds. One of these exporters was Jamil Said Mohammed (best known as Jamil), an Afro-Lebanese diamond dealer who became a close associate of Stevens. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement for Stevens and the private exporters. Export and private mining businesses required official support to survive so they relied on Stevens's patronage. But Stevens also relied on these dealers for his own survival (Reno, 1995). Reno writes:

> Private dealers acting as exporters enabled Stevens to gain personal access to foreign exchange and control diamond sales. Already active in the informal market, dealers had overseas connections to obtain capital for purchases in Sierra Leone... Lebanese connections abroad, which politicians lacked, provided a business network to market diamonds and raise capital in the Middle East and Europe (p. 110).

As Stevens and other top politicians used their government offices to forge business relations with Lebanese 'clients,' it became difficult to differentiate state business from private profit. Instead of building state capacity to provide services and opportunities for the general population, "economic opportunity in Kono, both legal and illicit, became progressively more dependent upon one's position in Stevens's political network" (Reno, 1995, p. 111).

In 1971, Sierra Leone became a republic in law and a one-party state in practice – a status that was formalized in 1978 (Hirsch, 2001; Zack-Williams, 1999). The multi-candidate, one-party electoral format for chieftain and parliamentary elections ensured that Stevens could disqualify disfavoured candidates while maintaining competition at the local level. Popular discontent with local politicians meant that few incumbents were re-elected, ensuring that they remained insecure.

Stevens used local rivalries to control political 'clients' while avoiding criticism himself (Reno, 1995). Reno writes:

> Stevens used factional struggle to gain popular support to control his clients' activities; rival factions sought his favour as gatekeeper of resources. Use of both parliamentary and chieftain elections (by councillors) as access points to the resources of state office gave Stevens both the appearance of promoting public accountability and the benefit of a level of insecurity that limited opportunities for them to establish autonomous political bases among constituents (p. 121).

Even corruption trials strengthened Stevens's position as the president used "frequent widely publicized corruption investigations" selectively to withdraw favour and assert his power (Reno, 1995, p. 133). Again, Reno writes:

> Stevens attempted to impose discipline in a style of rule that emphasized his pre-eminence as 'Pa Shakki,' or the wily Old Man. He emphasized his personal control – demonstrating his munificence, distributing money or rice to supplicants. He legitimated his own accumulation of wealth as the personal triumph of an 'outsider,' a 'survivor' over the alien forces of bureaucracy (p. 143).

By 1980, the year Freetown spent 200 million leones hosting an annual Organization for African Unity meeting, the Sierra Leone formal state structure was hanging by a thread. Income tax collection was at a stand still, foreign investment had dropped radically, and private sales of diamonds to the central government, which in 1970 provided almost 70 percent of Freetown's revenues, had halved by 1984. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank were trying to reclaim loans and imposed austerity conditions on the state. Stevens had to look elsewhere for funds to repay creditors and maintain the clientalist state. Through Jamil and other powerful Lebanese business partners, he looked to Lebanese banks (Reno, 1995).

In the early 1980s, many European firms trading in agricultural goods left Sierra Leone and were taken over by partnerships of Lebanese businessmen and politicians, including Stevens. According to Reno (1995), "the new 'Shadow State companies' were more useful to Stevens as conduits of trade and benefits than as agricultural producers." Using foreign exchange from selling diamonds, the companies imported cheap rice which the state treasury bought, "often at the high informal-market rate." The profits were reinvested in diamond mining and Stevens had control of the government-purchased rice which he used as "political food" – as a means of expanding his power (p. 144).

With high inflation and state collapse, civil servants' salaries rapidly declined and payment was often intermittent. The government began to pay with rice. Politicians and top civil

servants also received vouchers to buy hundreds of bags of rice at highly subsidized rates (Reno, 1995). As Reno writes:

> Rice proved to be the medium through which Stevens could devolve tasks of patrimonial reward to associates while maintaining himself as exclusive head of distribution and securing the discipline necessary to keep state officials at their jobs with little or no cash payment (p. 144).

When Stevens retired in 1985, his chosen successor, Brigadier Joseph Saidu Momoh stepped into "a nearly stateless regime." Just as Stevens tried to assert his authority by finding new intermediaries and marginalizing SLPP allies, Momoh had to distance himself from Stevens's network and find new associates who could attract international credit. In 1986 he met Israeli businessman Shaptai Kalmanowitch who headed LIAT Construction and Finance Company. Momoh granted LIAT a monopoly on diamond mining and insisted in return that the company import large amounts of rice so he could control its distribution (Reno, 1995, p. 155).

Predictably, Lebanese businessmen and their allies retaliated. In 1987, Jamil and some close associates of Stevens were implicated in an unsuccessful coup attempt. Jamil escaped to England but the experience taught Momoh to tread carefully in his dealings with Lebanese dealers and their political partners. In that year also, Momoh's alliance with Kalmanowitch ended when the latter was arrested in London for fraud and forgery. With his arrest, state diamond revenues plunged, payments to the IMF ceased and the World Bank and IMF cut off funds (Reno, 1995).

By late 1987, inflation hit 170 percent. To regain IMF loans, Momoh agreed to severe austerity conditions which led to an 84.6 percent decline in subsidies, primarily affecting oil and rice, his source of social and political control and means of paying civil servants. Momoh's political authority was collapsing, a situation that "risked unleashing a deadly warfare of competition for positions among groups or individual political entrepreneurs no longer constrained by a hierarchy of obligation" (Reno, 1995, p. 161).

The president desperately sought new foreign investors who would channel revenues to the state. But the creditors and new investor, Sunshine Broulle, imposed more conditions: this time Momoh had to clear private miners – most of whom were clients of local elites – from Kono's diamond fields. In April 1990, Momoh launched "Operation Clean Slate," a military intervention involving the Sierra Leone Army and special security forces. Tens of thousands of miners were expelled but poorly-paid soldiers used the opportunity to mine for themselves along with local gangs and "APC strongmen." The attraction of government soldiers to the diamond

fields was a major feature of the upcoming civil war. Sunshine Broulle pulled out of the deal anyway (Reno, 1995, p. 85).

Sierra Leone's political and economic history reveals some of the tensions and frustrations that contributed to the war and holds cautionary notes for post-war peacebuilding. Some important frustrations are resentment over chiefs' abuses, anger at the privileges of powerful Lebanese businessmen, sometimes generalized to the whole Lebanese population, and disillusionment with the state and political process.

The clientalist system was also internalized by the population in continuous relations of dependency and patronage. Some of these relations, especially among families, are paternalistic, with better off family members feeling obliged to help less fortunate ones and the latter expecting that help. Others are clientalist, based on political or social expediency alone. These clientalist relationships of rewards for loyalty and the use of public office as a source of resources, both for private benefit and for enlisting political support (as in the use of rice as 'political food'), also explains people's expectations of rice or 'trips to America' in return for support.

Politicization of corruption trials is also significant. Stevens used these trials to keep politicians in line, not with the state but with him. Many Sierra Leoneans say that corruption was a root cause of the war but some add that blaming corruption says everything and nothing. The new Anti-Corruption Commission reports to the Attorney General, a political position, and he decides who to charge. People I interviewed noted that the only high profile cases that went to trial were of politicians in political disfavour.

5.4   Underplayed ethnic and regional divisions

The prism turns and the sun glances off another angle revealing ethnic and regional tensions that played into political animosities, if not the war. These tensions are rarely officially acknowledged but they are articulated in private by northerners who do not feel represented by the Mende-dominated SLPP government.

Divisions in Sierra Leone are often described as regional rather than ethnic as minority ethnic groups often identify with the dominant group in their region: the Temne in the north and the Mende in the south. At independence, the biggest ethnic division among African Sierra Leoneans was between Krios in Freetown and Sierra Leoneans up country. Krios, many of whom were Christians and attended university earlier than other Sierra Leoneans, "tended to deride those countrymen who, however well-educated, came from the provinces." Only small tensions

existed then between the Mende and Temne, who comprised 30.9 and 29.8 percent of the population respectively according to the 1963 census. Limbas comprised 8.4 percent of the population, and Krios and the other 14 minority ethnic groups made up the rest (Cox, 1976, p. 54).

A few differences between the north and the south should be noted. Although Muslims and Christians live throughout Sierra Leone and have excellent relations between them, the north is predominantly Muslim and most Christians live in the south. At independence most missionary and government schools were in the south so more Mendes were able to study than children in the north (Cox, 1976). The presence of missionary schools may also explain the higher proportion of Christians in the south. A Sierra Leonean informant described southern cultures as more settled and agriculturally based, whereas northerners were described as more mobile traders (interview 35).

During the 1962 election, the year after independence, people began to describe the APC as the party of the north and the SLPP as that of the south. However Cox (1976) writes that the SLPP had strong supporters in the north and attributes the APC's growing support in the 1962 election to "populist revulsion against" the abuses of chiefs (p. 55). After Albert Margai succeeded his brother, Milton Margai, as prime minister, ethnic affiliation gained importance in governance, the army was enlarged and senior officers were expected to be loyal to the SLPP. Especially towards the end of Albert Margai's rule, Mendes were promoted disproportionately in the army and senior civil service under the guise of a program of Africanization. Still, Cox observes:

> In Sierra Leone,... extensive intermarriage among provincials and generally widespread emphasis on flexibility, heterogeneity and pluralism in political behaviour has tended to mute the kind of virulent tribal antagonism found in places such as Nigeria, except perhaps during periods of hectic political campaigning (p. 66).

Despite the war, this tolerance and flexibility can still be easily observed, especially in relation to religion. The overwhelming tolerance expressed by most people obscures the tensions, frustrations and ambitions that lie just below the surface.

By the 1967 national election, Albert Margai faced accusations of corruption, a factionalized army with multiple power struggles, and widespread discontent, especially among Krios, toward his proposal to create a one-party state. The APC under Siaka Stevens won the election but a coup and counter coup prevented him from taking power until the following year.

Stevens realized that to maintain power he needed a military loyal to the APC. Between 1968 and 1969, he dismissed or retired many Mende officers and replaced them with Temnes and Limbas. The army was now thoroughly ethnicized but even with these measures, neither the army nor the party was united. In 1970 former APC supporters, under the leadership of John Karefa Smart, broke off to form the United Democratic Party (UDP). Senior officers, notably Army Force Commander John Bangura, thought to be sympathetic to the UDP were forced to retire (Cox, 1976).

In 1971, Bangura and a group of army officers were implicated in a failed coup. Among them was Foday Sankoh, a frustrated corporal who had repeatedly been "passed over for promotion on spurious clientalist grounds" during his seven years of military service. For his involvement, Sankoh was imprisoned for seven years and four officers, including Bangura, were executed. Sankoh never forgave Momoh, Bangura's successor, for what he saw as unreasonably harsh punishment of the coup plotters (Hirsch, 2001). After his release Sankoh headed for Segbwema where he worked as a photographer. In 1987 he went to Libya for military training (Abdullah, 1997).

Stevens's difficulty in controlling the army led him to secure cooperative military agreements with Guinea and form his own Cuban-trained militia, the Internal Security Unit, which was ready to turn on dissenters (Conteh-Morgan & Dixon-Fyle, 1999). Strongmen like Jamil had their own militias (Reno, 1995) and elections became increasingly violent as politicians used marginalized youth to terrorise the opposition. During the 1978 and 1982 elections entire villages were destroyed on the orders of government ministers. In 1983 villagers in Ndorgboryosoi, Pujehun, along the south-eastern border with Liberia, challenged government efforts to impose a candidate. When the government sent its security forces, havoc ensued (Kandeh, 2002). Kandeh writes:

> Thousands of peasant families were uprooted from their homes and villages; many fled to neighbouring Liberia as the entire district simmered with rage and violence. Peasant distrust of the state, especially in the southern and eastern provinces, continued to fester after this incident (p. 188).

By 1990, Sierra Leone was heading for disaster with an almost bankrupt state and few remaining government services. One of the worst hit groups was youth.

5.5   Years of rebellion: The alliance of students and marginalized youth

Freetown. You can buy anything on Garrison Street, a surging mix of people and goods and poda podas and men pushing great wooden carts of produce, all weaving, shoving and squeezing together. Stacks of bread. Rows of shoes, clothes, books in sidewalk stalls obscuring concrete shops that seem empty by comparison. Women weave through the throngs balancing trays of ground nuts or benniseed cakes on their heads. Want a typewriter? A map? Need a different size? Just you wait here. We'll get it for you. Off runs a youth, like thousands of teenage boys in the country, running errands, collecting taxi fares, doing what they can for a little school money or money just to survive. Some have families; for others, their comrades are their family, or their protectors, whoever will help them get by. Change money? Sure you'll change money. Good rate for you today. Guard your pockets. Pickpockets. A female policeman sells shoes from the shoe stall that is her real living. Throughout the city, teachers have blackboards on their balconies for private classes after hours. Petrol prices are rising. Tension's rising. It's hot and sweaty and everything is hard. In a world where most paying work occurs informally, who exactly is 'lumpen'?

5.5.1   Qualifier: The problem of 'lumpen' youth

In post-war contexts, it is useful to pay attention to what disadvantaged group elites most blame for the violence. Without buying in to stereotypes and prejudices, this group may be key to the tensions that led to the war. In Bosnia the disparaged group was rural people and I think rural-urban disparities and tensions fed a conflict that manifested itself in ethnic terms. In Sierra Leone, the blame is cast onto marginalized youth, the so-called 'lumpen' youth of the towns and 'san san boys' who worked the diamond fields. Following the Marxist concept of Lumpenproletariat, these young people are often seen as morally corrupt and easily bought off.

Marx saw Lumpenproletariat as a dangerous group of downtrodden people who lack collective awareness. According to Thoburn (2002), he wanted to free "his concept of the proletariat from the bourgeois image of a seething rabble; he transfers all the old content into the

new category of lumpenproletariat." Marx and Engels describe this underclass in Paris in distinctly moralizing middle-class tones:

> Decayed roués with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, rubbed shoulders with vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, maquereaux, brothel-keepers, porters, literati, organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars – in short, the whole of the nebulous, disintegrated mass, scattered hither and thither, which the French call bohème (in Thoburn, 2002, p. 440).

Marx and Engels thought lumpenproletariat could be easily bought out as hired 'thugs' for business and political elites (McLellan, 1971). This sense of lumpenproletariat focuses on ascribed opportunistic and mercenary qualities of this ill-defined underclass. Some Sierra Leonean academics adopt these stereotypes to explain the membership and motivations of hired political heavies and willing RUF recruits. Echoing Marx, Kandeh (2004) writes of junior soldiers who overthrew governments in West Africa:

> The degenerate propensities of subaltern ranks derive from their lumpen social background and historical alienation from popular sectors. 'Lumpenity' is textured by chronic material deprivation, social alienation, violence, thuggery, criminality, and the absence of collective consciousness or any coherent liberating discourse. The debasement of humanity that pervades the 'life world' of lumpens is often displaced onto the public domain when the militariat takes charge of the state (p. 3).

A special issue of the journal *Africa Development* (1997, vol. 22, nos. 3/4), is entitled "Lumpen Culture and Political Violence: The Sierra Leone Civil War." The articles provide much-needed insight into the role of marginalized youth and students in resisting the APC government during the 1970s and 1980s and in the formation of the RUF. But they also contribute to a disturbing silencing of those who joined the RUF.

The authors' discussion of the term 'lumpen' in the Sierra Leone context reveals its meaninglessness. Is 'lumpen' a class term, used to describe unemployed, partially employed or informally employed men and women? Is it a culture, referring only to men and women with little education who dress a certain way and hang out in *potes*? Is it synonymous with petty criminal? Does it include women? Is it an urban phenomenon or does it include socially marginalized people from the rural areas and men who work the diamond fields? The authors are undecided. In the end, this writing reveals more about their prejudices than the motivations of those who willingly joined the RUF.

Rashid (1997), for example, writes that a student and youth demonstration in Freetown in 1977 "degenerated into looting and vandalism when lumpen elements joined" (p. 28). Abdullah describes early 'rarray men' – a derogatory term for urban marginalized males – as "a good-for-nothing bunch who mainstream society believes should be best avoided" (p. 51), and Bangura (1997) refers to the RUF's "'lumpen' type of unaccountable, free-wheeling behaviour, which drugs and other anti-social behaviour-inducing mechanisms have generated or sustained among RUF fighters" (p. 130).

Abdullah (1997) writes that the predominance of 'lumpen' youth in the early rebel movement explains the brutal – and, he implies, mindless – nature of the RUF:

> What marks the RUF is the chronic lack of cadres imbued with any revolutionary ideology. Its lumpen base has made it impossible for the movement to attract support from any social group... (Both the RUF and Charles Taylor's NPFL in Liberia) are products of the same cultural milieu; their membership is recruited from the same lumpen groups; and they employ the same tactics – indiscriminate use of drugs, forced induction and violence – to further their goal of capturing power (p. 69).

Bangura (1997) refutes Richards' (1997) claim that RUF terror tactics accomplished strategic military goals, suggesting that Richards should "heed... the voices of ordinary participants and victims of such violence, who keep insisting that the rebels are 'evil people'... and 'evil thugs'" as if victims have superior insights into the minds and motivations of those who originally joined the rebel movement (p. 129).

It is Zack-Williams (Abdullah et al., 1997) who observes that the term 'lumpen':

> "connotes emptiness... Indeed, the continuous utilization only of the prefix of a much longer term (lumpenproletariat), presents us with a dilemma: do we seek to deny the fact that the term in its original use refers to those who do not have even labour power to sell or what Spivak has referred to as 'the... subtraction of the working class in the Periphery from consumerism? (p. 187)

Zack-Williams prefers the term subaltern, acknowledging the lack of voice and power of those at the lower end – or outside – of mainstream power structures. The subaltern cannot speak (Spivak, 1988). The only 'voice' the frustrated subaltern had, which some marginalized youth chose to use, was violence.

Zack-Williams (Abdullah et al., 1997) encourages us to ask "what impels urban and rural deracinated youth on to social movements such as the RUF?" For some youth, answers may lie in the "breakdown of social practices such as *mehn pikin* (wardship) and the very structure of the extended family" (p. 187). By understanding the social strains and experiences of youth who

joined the 1991 incursion and by speaking specifically of the diverse people who joined the movement, we might have better insights into the RUF.

Literature on the RUF is scarce and these articles by Sierra Leonean scholars provide much-needed insights. However their stereotypes also suggest common middle class prejudices towards the 'RUF' and marginalized people. These stereotypes silence people associated with the RUF and all those labelled 'rebels' and hinder effective analysis of rifts, motivations and reconciliation needs.

5.5.2   The call to revolution

According to Abdullah (1997) the leading forces in the RUF came from three groups of marginal youth. The first were "urban marginals (or 'rarray man dem');" the second were the illegal diamond miners, 'san-san boys;' and the third were "socially disconnected" youth in the villages, who were "contemptuous of rural authority and institutions" and "saw the war as an opportunity to settle local scores" (p. 172).

The population of marginalized youth in Freetown dates back to the rural-urban drift of the early 20th century[42] when rural people sought employment in the city during difficult economic times. By the 1960s, these youth exhibited a distinct culture with a recognizable way of dressing, talking and acting. Rashid (1997) writes, "They 'tied' their shirts and sprinkled their Krio with slang." Many hung out in *potes*: "fixed and temporary spaces set up by this underclass for smoking marijuana, gambling and planning cultural activities" (p. 23).

In the 1960s, the 'rarray boy' culture was a "male-specific oppositional sub-culture" known for violence (Abdullah, 1997, p. 50). Between 1972 and 1977 the APC hired political heavies from this group to intimidate the opposition, causing the SLPP to withdraw from the 1972 election (Rashid, 1997).

By the mid-1970s, marginalized youth began to identify more with oppositional student culture which reflected the growing youth rebellion and student activism in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time the youth population in Freetown was burgeoning to the point where "they represented possibly the largest single social group in the city." Many youth with high

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[42] Rashid (1997) writes:

> Escaped and freed rural slaves and peasants began drifting... into the city in search of employment and settling largely in peri-urban enclaves... They remained in the city providing irregular casual labour. In Krio middle class perception, the city's lumpen population became associated with all that was decadent in the society – sloth, petty crime, gambling, prostitution, drug taking and violence (p. 23).

school education were unemployed as work opportunities, especially in the civil service, declined. These youth and students – both secondary and university – began to hang out in *potes,* seeing them "not only as centres for gambling and smoking marijuana, but also (as) places of radical political discussions" (Rashid, 1997, pp. 24, 25). Rashid writes, the youth culture:

> ...with its militancy, activism and rebelliousness... resonated with the political struggles of students and youths in other parts of Africa and the world. The last, more militant stages of the U.S. civil right (sic) movements reverberated in Africa. In Ghana, the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) was challenging the military regime of General Kutu Acheampong. In Southern Africa, liberation struggles gathered momentum and the youth of Soweto openly confronted the Apartheid State. Everywhere it seemed the youth was in ferment. In this emerging culture, the youth – lumpens and students – shared a growing disillusionment with and rebelliousness toward the status quo (p. 25).

In the mid-1970s, the Libyan government became increasingly involved in Sierra Leone. It funded Green Book study groups at Fourah Bay College[33] based on Libyan president Moammar al Gadhafi's *Green Book,* which espoused a populist, revolutionary and anti-imperialist ideology. The *Green Book,* along with the Pan-African message of Ghanaian independence leader Kwame Nkrumah, was popular among radical student leaders and fed growing student rebellion between 1977 and 1985 (Rashid, 1997).

In his film *Return to Freetown* (2002) on the reintegration of children after the war, filmmaker Serius Samora describes his perspective as a student during this time:

> This is the Methodist Boys' High School in Freetown and it's where I went to school. I learned many things here and a lot of it wasn't on the school curriculum. In my day a teacher could fail you in your exams if you didn't help them form a relationship with a girl on your street they'd taken a liking to. We had our first lessons in power and how it corrupts. And for most of us who didn't have power in those days, we were all potential candidates for a revolution. When they took away free education, most of us gathered together to talk and demonstrate. Then other young people who had dropped out of school joined in. And very soon we were a movement.

In 1985, after a raucous student demonstration, Fourah Bay College student union president Alie Kabba and four others were arrested and expelled. After their release from prison, the students headed for Ghana and enrolled at the University of Ghana at Legon. Ghanaian president Jerry Rawlings was sympathetic to Gadhafi's mission to promote "revolution in West Africa" and the country provided a base for revolutionaries. During this time, Kabba made many

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[33] Fourah Bay College in Freetown is the main university in Sierra Leone.

trips to Libya and became Gadhafi's contact person with Sierra Leoneans interested in revolution (Abdullah, 1997, p. 56).

The call for armed revolution came in 1987 from the exiled students in Ghana. "Reluctantly" the student organization, the Pan-African Union (PANAFU), voted on whether they supported sending members to Libya for military training. Most dissented; the minority who favoured the adventure, including Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray, were later expelled from the student movement. In August 1987 that minority and other recruits headed for Benghazi, Libya. Among them was future rebel leader Foday Sankoh, the disgruntled corporal from the 1971 coup attempt. Five months later a group of mostly high school students followed (Abdullah, 1997, p. 62). Abdullah argues that the break with PANAFU marked the beginning of the end of an intellectual role in the rebellion:

> Politically conscious individuals were not specifically targeted as recruits. For once PANAFU had rejected the idea of participating as an organisation, the project became an individual enterprise: any man (no attempt was made to recruit women) who felt the urge to acquire insurgency training in the service of the 'revolution.' This inevitably opened the way for the recruitment of the lumpens (pp. 62, 63).

With the split with PANAFU, a leadership vacuum emerged amongst Sierra Leonean revolutionaries in Libya. According to the TRC (2004), Sankoh became group spokesman because he was the oldest, had military experience and was known as a "strategist," "manipulator" and powerful orator (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 30). The TRC states:

> Allied to a good degree of perceptiveness and human instinct, Sankoh's innate charisma appears to have been a potent tool for convincing others of the merits of his agenda, despite his somewhat idealistic tone and his tendency for grave exaggeration (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 30).

The Libyan camps trained revolutionaries from around the world. There, Sankoh and his comrades met Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor, whose NPFL forces were ready to launch an incursion into his own country to overturn President Samuel Doe. The Sierra Leoneans and Liberians agreed to support each other. The RUF would assist Taylor in his plan to "'liberate' Liberia" and he in return would "provide them with a base to launch their 'revolution'" (Abdullah, 1997, p. 67).

5.6 Regional players

The Sierra Leone war must be understood in the context of other regional conflicts and the loyalties, animosities and power struggles of regional leaders. Despite their cooperation in the

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) West African leaders are divided and some assist armed rebellions in other countries in the region. Libya (not an ECOWAS member) trained and armed 'revolutionary' movements in West Africa, including Taylor's NPFL and the RUF. Taylor was also supported by presidents Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast and Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso as well as mercenaries from Burkina Faso, Gambia and Sierra Leone (Adebajo, 2002).[34] He, in turn, sponsored incursions into Sierra Leone and Guinea and was indicted by the Sierra Leone Special Court as one of those deemed most responsible for the war.

Taylor's support for the RUF is often attributed to his desire both to control Sierra Leone's diamond regions and to claim revenge against Momoh.[35] However, the TRC (2004) persuasively argues that he did so for strategic reasons. He wanted to divide and undermine ECOMOG, the Nigeria-dominated West African military force fighting his troops in Liberia. In 1990, as the NPFL approached Monrovia and the country slid into chaos, a desperate Doe called on ECOWAS members for military help. Most francophone members dissented, preferring negotiation, but the anglophone members, along with Guinea, agreed to create the international force. Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia and, briefly, Senegal, contributed troops. ECOMOG was mandated to "restore law and order in Liberia, to create an environment that will allow humanitarian operations, and to secure a peaceful atmosphere that will facilitate cease-fire negotiations" (Khobe, 2000, p. 3).

ECOMOG was created as a peacekeeping deployment but "there was no peace to keep" (Adebajo, 2004, p. 52). Their troops came under immediate attack from NPFL forces and within a month ECOMOG changed itself to a peace enforcement mission.

Sierra Leone was active in this conflict. Adebajo (2002) writes:

Freetown had been the staging post for ECOMOG's intervention in Liberia in August 1990 and remained the rear base for Nigerian soldiers in Liberia and the base for Nigeria's Alpha jets used in bombing NPFL positions in Liberia. Taylor had promised that Sierra Leone would "taste war" for its support of ECOMOG's efforts in Liberia (p. 82).

By supporting attacks on Sierra Leone, Taylor sought to break up ECOMOG, divide its energies and compel Sierra Leone's withdrawal. He also aimed to discredit ECOMOG by showing that it could not keep peace in the region. The Sierra Leonean and Nigerian governments

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[34] In *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau*, Adekeye Adebajo (2002) describes the interconnections between West African wars and the personalized animosities. loyalties and ambitions of West African leaders that lead to support for various fighting factions.
[35] In 1988, Taylor visited Momoh in Freetown seeking his support in overthrowing Doe but instead Momoh had him arrested. When Taylor escaped from jail, he vowed revenge (Reno, 2003).

also recruited, trained and armed combatants for the United Liberian Movement of Liberia (ULIMO), formed in 1991 by Liberian politicians to fight the RUF in Sierra Leone and the NPFL in Liberia. Most recruits were Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone (Adebajo, 2002).

The TRC (2004) relates a remarkable story of how Sankoh and Taylor's NPFL forces 'recruited' Sierra Leoneans into the RUF forces in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 1989 Sankoh left Libya and joined Taylor in Liberia, acting as a senior commander in the NPFL. In 1990, as Taylor's forces captured territory, he ordered the detention of all foreigners from ECOWAS countries, especially from ECOMOG states. One captive said:

> Executions were carried out for every time the ECOMOG jet bombed their areas, even without killing anyone. I came to understand that multiple executions were carried out in all control areas throughout the country as retaliation (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 46).

Convinced they were going to die, terrified Sierra Leonean captives were easily manipulated by Sankoh, who showed up as their 'saviour.' As the TRC (2004) tells it:

> Sankoh personally accompanied members of NPFL 'hit squads' who visited some of the detention facilities... Several groups of soon-to-be 'vanguards' were exposed first to a show of mercilessness, whereby innocent fellow detainees among their number were severely beaten, molested or executed in front of them. Conspicuously, though, the Sierra Leoneans were always spared such a fate when Sankoh was present; they would be separated from the other nationalities and ushered into the hands of Sankoh by other commanders. Through a combination of conviction and compulsion, Sankoh would then proceed to conscript those he deemed he wanted into his RUF movement (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 56, 57).

Sankoh later employed this method in Sierra Leone when he 'rescued' prisoners from harsh treatment by NPFL forces and gained the prisoner's loyalty in return (TRC, 2004).

In this way, the 'vanguard' of RUF forces, some of whom remained loyal to the movement to the end, was created. These men and women cannot be dismissed as "lumpen Sierra Leoneans" (Abdullah, 1997, p. 71). They were a disparate group, of diverse ethnic backgrounds and ages. Some were highly educated professionals or members of chiefly families; others were illiterate labourers (TRC, 2004). After training at Camp Namma in Liberia, they were ready to launch their incursion.

Chapter 6:
The 'rebel' war

Forward

The war in Sierra Leone is usually portrayed as a 'rebel' war, and a war of soldiers gone bad. We are reminded of horrific crimes, of rapes, amputations, torture and murder and of the children, drugged and traumatized, who were forced to do these things. This simplistic portrayal, like the word 'corruption,' says everything and nothing. It does not begin to capture the dynamics of the war, dynamics that must be understood for reconciliation to take place. Reconciliation cannot occur when entire segments of actors are dismissed in the dehumanizing term, 'lumpen.' Thanks to the TRC report (2004), we now have a better understanding of people's motivations and strategies and the power struggles and untenable situations that people found themselves in.

6.1   The RUF insurgency

The date of March 23, 1991 is usually given for the beginning of the incursion but cross-border NPFL engagements with the Sierra Leone army began in 1990. This porous border had long been crossed for trade between Liberians and Sierra Leoneans who had more connection with Liberia than with Freetown. As the Liberian war worsened, refugees and armed supporters of President Samuel Doe crossed into Sierra Leone seeking refuge or the opportunity to regroup. Soon Taylor's NPFL forces followed them, sometimes looting and harassing locals before returning to Liberia (TRC, 2004).

After complaints by villagers of Bomaru, Kailahun District, the Sierra Leone government sent a platoon of about 30 soldiers to the area. However, soldiers began to befriend and trade with the very rebels they had been sent to deter, exchanging cigarettes and food for looted Liberian goods. The March 23 raid at Bomaru by 40 to 60 NPFL troops may have been the result of a deal that went bad with these soldiers (TRC, 2004). However, the TRC (2004) writes, the attack:

> ...served an important strategic purpose for the would-be insurgents. It demonstrated that the border crossing was effectively unprotected and that troops stationed in the territory just beyond could easily be caught off-guard. It convinced the commandos involved that they could quickly repeat the tactic and conduct further attacks in a similar vein, probing deeper and staying longer. On the whole, if Sankoh had at all been wavering as to his attacking strategy, the attack was a fillip to his confidence (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 104).

RUF leaders had not planned to attack until later that year but Taylor, who was concerned about ECOMOG and growing armed Liberian factions in Sierra Leone, spurred Sankoh to invade early. This meant relying heavily on NPFL forces who were known for their brutality and had not trained with the Sierra Leoneans.

The Sierra Leoneans were divided about the attack. Mansaray asked Sankoh, "How can you train us, prepare our minds and then allow somebody else to lead us into our own country? You are selling out the revolution!" In response Sankoh ordered Mansaray detained, preventing "one of the RUF's most committed ideologues" from joining the initial invasions which took place in the eastern and southern parts of the country in late March and early April (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 118, 120).

Abdullah (1997) writes that until the invasion, Kanu, Mansaray and Sankoh collectively led the RUF. Mansaray "was very popular and had distinguished himself as a combatant with the NPFL before 1991." Sankoh could not tolerate such a challenge and by November of the following year, both Kanu and Mansaray were dead – executed by RUF firing squads after facing "trumped up" charges of betraying the movement (p. 71).

Initial support for the RUF in the south and east of the country is unclear. Many people in these areas wanted to see an end to APC rule but violence against civilians by RUF and NPFL forces repelled potential sympathy.[36] Muana (1997) writes:

> The humane front of the RUF which involved lavishing looted goods on the captive population was soon defaced by public executions, rape, public beatings, forced labour and crass disregard for traditional norms of social propriety that had existed in that region. The public beheading of traders in Koindu and other local notables in the border districts and the public humiliation and execution of authority figures like chiefs and Imams did not reinforce the revolutionary message of the RUF that it had ostensibly launched the insurrection to overthrow the APC government (p. 79).

The TRC report (2004) divides the conflict into three phases. In Phase I, from 1991 to 1993, the RUF fought a conventional war against the Sierra Leone Army. During this time, most atrocities were carried out by Liberian NPFL forces and a few mercenaries from third countries, primarily Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast. Though the Sierra Leoneans' training had been curtailed due to the early launch of attacks, RUF leaders tried to retain their ideology in this

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[36] Currently, the question is highly politicized and few Sierra Leoneans admit to having ever sympathized with the RUF. However one thoughtful man in the south told me that there was some sympathy with the RUF in the first year after the invasion and that people were asked to donate radios and arms for the cause.

period. The leadership punished violations against civilians and Sankoh would speak to crowds of civilians, informing them about the reasons for the 'revolution.' As one RUF vanguard told recruits, "A fighter without political ideology is a criminal" (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 171).

The roughly-conceived RUF ideology was articulated in 1995 in its pamphlet, *Footpaths to Democracy*. In it, the RUF (1995) claims to fight for the "historically neglected, used and abused countryside (that) would rise up to the simple call that 'No more slave, no more master' and 'Arms to the people; power to the people and wealth to the people.'" Its populist ideology drew – at times plagiarized – from multiple sources, and espoused Pan-Africanist, cosmopolitan-religious and socialist values. Especially after 1993, RUF actions put paid to their words as the rural poor were the main targets of RUF atrocities. In particular, the statement that "We have learnt the value of treating captives and prisoners of war with utmost civility. Our ranks keep swelling daily. We have no need to conscript by force," was blatantly false (pp. 3, 4).

Interestingly, the RUF (1995) seemed to genuinely espouse a cosmopolitan outlook regarding ethnicity and religion. They chose the unifying language of Krio as their lingua franca and the *Footpaths to Democracy* declares that the RUF is:

> religiously Godly in our bearings and beliefs. We enjoy communal prayers and communication twice daily and on all occasions prayers are said both in the Islamic and Christian ways. The people, through their own initiative, have removed doctrinal differences from their way of worship. They say if there is one God/Allah then there ought to be one congregation (p. 4).

Again, while RUF actions defy religious moral conventions, their view of themselves as fundamentally religious people and without religious prejudice made them receptive to mediation by religious leaders later on.

During the early years Sankoh's speeches were often well received and convinced some young men to join the RUF. Some remained with the movement and joined the RUF party after the war. Many "willing revolutionaries" testified before the TRC (2004):

> The stereotype seems to fit a young man who had come from a lower-class background of abject poverty and whose parents had not enjoyed any favour or good fortune under the APC, despite often having worked hard in the agricultural sector. He had nonetheless been able to acquire enough education to perceive some of the blatant injustices to which he was being subjected; but at the point the RUF found him, he had lost all social bearing and was therefore open to the notion of taking up arms... A common decisive factor... was that they had been ultimately convinced to join the RUF through a public address by Foday Sankoh or one of his compatriots...

...Willing revolutionaries testified that they had seen the RUF as a means of effecting a positive change in the country, of freeing themselves from their soul-destroying socio-economic circumstances and of putting right some of the injustices that they perceived to have left them disadvantaged or marginalized in society (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 209-211).

However, as the TRC (2004) observes, the line between genuine revolutionaries and those who used the RUF for personal gain or to exercise vendettas is thin.

By late 1991, tension between NPFL forces and the RUF reached a breaking point. NPFL looting and atrocities undermined RUF legitimacy in the eyes of civilians and skirmishes erupted between the two. Sankoh appealed to Charles Taylor to recall his troops but around 90% of the NPFL forces stayed even though Taylor cut off their arms supply. Brutal attacks by these NPFL forces against the RUF and civilians only ended in September 1992 when RUF troops finally forced them to leave the country. Those who remained were trusted by the RUF and most had Sierra Leonean ancestry (TRC, 2004).

6.2   The 1992 NPRC coup

Back in Freetown, the Momoh government responded to RUF violence by hastily expanding the weak and already-divided army. In the 1970s and 1980s the military had been increasingly marginalized as the Stevens government sidelined it in favour of the paramilitary Special Services Division. When the RUF attacked, the army was, in the words of the TRC (2004), "simply a mess":

The army didn't have moveable vehicles, communication facilities were non existent, and most of the soldiers were not combat ready. They had not attended refresher courses or gone to the practice range for years. The senior officers had indulged in the good life and were therefore unwilling to go to the warfront (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 245).

According to the TRC (2004), in 1991, most officers were corrupt, often siphoning off dispensations of junior soldiers and other public goods and practicing ethnic or familial favoritism, acts that were greatly resented by junior soldiers. When the new recruits were added, this caused further division within the military.

The new recruits, who were largely marginalized youth, were given cursory training and sent to Kailahun and Kenema to fight the rebels (Kandeh, 2002). The result was disastrous. Momoh admitted (in Kandeh, 2002):

In the quest to increase numbers, training standards dropped and discipline may have subsided also, because not much time was given to screening entrants. The

result is that a large number of undesirables, waifs, strays... and bandits may now be in the nation's military uniform (p. 191).

Many new recruits, faced with low pay and morale, felt little loyalty to the army but they did not cause Momoh's downfall. On April 29, 1992, a group of junior officers revolted to protest unpaid salaries and inadequate medical assistance for injured soldiers. Fearing a violent coup, Momoh fled to Guinea (Gberie, 2000; Hirsch, 2001). The officers involved in the revolt chose 27-year-old Captain Valentine Strasser to lead the new National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) government.

Initially public enthusiasm was high. The new government seemed to promise an end to corruption and the war. People in Freetown responded by painting murals on walls and cleaning the streets.[37] The NPRC leaders were mainly in their 20s and 30s and they tapped young people's enthusiasm for change.[38]

High expectations of the NPRC were short lived, however. The young rulers began to enjoy their new power and proved as corrupt and vicious as previous regimes. The new government began to arrest political opponents and carried out 26 extrajudicial executions. A climate of fear and harassment of perceived political opponents re-emerged. NPRC vice-chairman Solomon A. J. (SAJ) Musa was especially notorious. He is alleged to have personally mutilated and tortured political opponents and, seven years later, masterminded a brutal onslaught on Freetown[39] (TRC, 2004; Hirsch, 2001).

After the NPRC coup, RUF leaders announced that they were willing to negotiate with the new government but the regime was not interested in talking. It dramatically increased its troop intake, again with scant attention to entrance criteria and training. The TRC (2004) states:

> They were taught little more than how to fire a gun, how to move in formation, how to mount offensives and how to respond to orders; the rest would be left to their instincts. Among the telling omissions then were how to react when faced with an enemy deploying guerrilla tactics and how to interact with the civilian population (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 320).

And a guerrilla war was just what the soldiers would soon face.

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[37] Young people mentioned this proudly to me and National Cleaning Day still exists.

[38] Young officers recognized the value of youth even before the coup when Captain Prince Benjamin-Hirsch, a young officer from Daru, recruited youth into civil defense militias. Richards (1996) writes, "Benjamin-Hirsch recruited youth militia in the battle zone similar to those trained and deployed by the RUF, thereby aiming to deny the rebel movement its principal resource – the youth of the diamond fields neglected by the state" (p. 10). Hirsch was killed in an ambush shortly before the coup.

[39] It is important to take allegations against SAJ Musa with a grain of salt as he died in the 1998-1998 campaign to overtake Freetown. It is easy for other culpable people to blame him for atrocities.

Unlike coups from the upper ranks of the military, which reflect intra-class power struggles and do not affect the army's basic structure, coups from the bottom turn the army on its head (Kandeh, 2004). As Kandeh writes:

> What is perhaps most distinctive about subaltern coups is the duality of the usurpations they set in motion – both the command structure of the army and broader patterns of political leadership in society are inverted when armed marginals capture state power. Restoring rank discipline under such circumstances has often turned out to be more elusive than compelling public acquiescence to subaltern military rule (pp. 1, 2).

Despite these difficulties, the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), bolstered by Guinean troops and civilian militias, achieved considerable gains against the RUF. By late 1993 they recaptured almost all RUF territory, cornering the rebels on the Liberian border which the latter dared not cross for fear of retribution from their old allies, the NPLA. Without a supply of ammunition from Taylor, the RUF looked to be "on the brink of oblivion," and perhaps the war would have ended then had the SLA troops been better trained and thus more confident and disciplined (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 377).[40]

Many Sierra Leoneans believe that the soldiers were unwilling to end the war in 1993 as they benefited from access to diamond fields and opportunities to loot property. Some also explain the resurgence of the RUF by the 'lumpen' character and lack of training of new recruits who, they say, were quick to flee battle and easily converted to rebels because they shared the same social background. While many soldiers did profit from the war and some may have worked both sides, the TRC (2004) indicates that the answer is unclear because at this point the RUF changed its tactics from conventional 'target' warfare[41] to full-fledged guerrilla war. This began Phase II of the war.

The RUF explains the shift in its *Footpaths to Democracy* (1995):

> Frankly we were beaten and were on the run but our deep sense of calling would not let us face the disgrace of crossing into Liberia as refugees or prisoners of war. We dispersed into smaller unites, whatever remained of our fighting force... We now relied on light weapons and on our feet, brains and knowledge of the countryside... to surprise, disarm and totally disorganise the offensive operations of the rebel NPRC (pp. 4, 3).

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[40] SLA forces wasted ammunition, were overly awed by the rebels, and alienated civilians by "dispensing merciless summary justice to any captive whom they suspected of even the flimsiest connection with the RUF" (TRC 2004, vol. 3b. chap. 3, ¶ 386).

[41] The TRC (2004) defines target warfare as capturing and holding a predetermined area.

And surprise, disarm and disorganize they did. The rebels shifted from direct engagements with soldiers. Instead, they sought to weaken them by dividing, encircling and terrorizing them. The commission (2004) writes:

> In its military operations just as in its attacks on civilian communities, the RUF effectively went underground: it sought to become less visible, less predictable, less consistent and less distinguishable in everything that it did. As a consequence it... drove SLA military officers lacking in ingenuity into contriving a variety of irrational responses. The war had indeed changed. It was no longer between armed groups confronting each other in battle fields. The civilian population began to bear the brunt of the war (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 416).

The rebels abandoned their revolutionary rhetoric and ideology, which would only "create unwanted paradoxes in the minds" of civilians. Their goal was to make the country ungovernable and destroy the economy. They believed that if people's lives in the provinces became unbearable, the government would have to negotiate. Lacking ideological constraints, atrocities against civilians reached horrific levels. Unlike the previous period of 'target' warfare where villagers were often warned of attacks and allowed to flee, civilians were now the prime targets of abductions, murders and other forms of terror (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 404).

With the change in government in Freetown and the beginning of guerrilla warfare, the rebels could no longer inspire popular support. They therefore needed other sources of recruits. Children are more vulnerable than adults and are viewed as excellent combatants because they are easier to manipulate. The RUF therefore targeted children, especially boys, for abduction, often forcing them to commit abuses against family members, elders and chiefs. They then took them to bush camps and resocialized them through trauma, fear and drugs to become young killers. Zack-Williams (1999) writes:

> This period of indoctrination could be quite gruesome: witnessing or participating in collective punishment, and in some cases punishing parents or near relatives, in order to bond the child to the RUF, by reducing any desire to return to his village (p. 154).

By resocializing' child fighters, providing drugs and bonding them to their units, the RUF had an army of fearless combatants capable of striking terror in the population.

The RUF also shifted from a tactic of co-opting local governments to infiltrating villages, thus creating a climate of distrust among civilians. They used large numbers of children and adults, male and female, for reconnaissance missions. These civilians gathered information from soldiers as they pretended to look for protection, sex or food (TRC, 2004). This rendered all civilian strangers suspect, often with devastating results.

The new tactics also devastated the military. The TRC (2004) writes:

> The RUF used a variety of simple but effective tactics to create a sense of pandemonium among the unsuspecting occupants of the targeted position, including shouting "war cries in hundreds of voices at the same time" and throwing a barrage of stones incessantly onto the corrugated iron roofs of the soldiers' dwellings. Upon gaining sight of a suitable target, the RPG was then launched and backed up by sparing, sporadic firing from different angles... (This convinced) soldiers, many of whom were young and panic-stricken, that they were under siege from an enormous and well-armed force. Consequently they would abandon their posts... and leave their bases, including arms stores, at the mercy of the RUF (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 446).

With a growing supply of arms, ammunition and SLA uniforms, the RUF increased their assaults, often disguised as soldiers. As a result, in 1994 soldiers were increasingly regarded with suspicion by the civilian population. The word 'sobel' – soldiers by day; rebels by night – entered the popular vocabulary. Many people who testified before the TRC stated that soldiers, who they identified by their uniforms, were complicit in attacks on their villages. As the TRC report (2004) tries to show, the identity of these 'combatants' was unclear. However, RUF efforts to create civilian distrust in the army had a devastating impact on military morale, making the army's task of defending the nation all the more difficult.

The soldiers had many weaknesses. They were largely incapable of confronting the RUF's guerrilla tactics and many abused civilians, including looting, raping and executing suspected collaborators. For unpaid or underpaid soldiers and irregulars looting provided sustenance. One must ask where the responsibility for looting lies, on the soldiers themselves or on superiors who did not pay them? Also, civilians often used soldiers to attack opponents, accusing the latter of being collaborators (TRC, 2004; Peters & Richards, 1998). The TRC writes:

> (In) some parts of the country... a soldier would be more likely to kill you than would a commando of the RUF. One reason for this was that civilians were unreasonably yet unambiguously held to be partisan to the forces among which they lived. If a civilian had failed, usually through no fault of his or her own, to escape from territory held by the RUF, then he or she would invariably be deemed to have been working with the RUF. Without clarity of thought or any means of verifying information given to them at source, soldiers were usually bound to punish anyone picked out as... a 'collaborator'... There were always individuals who were ready to point fingers, not because the person had necessarily done anything wrong, but on account of a pre-existing grudge or grievance that in all likelihood had little to do with the conflict (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 523).

Still, little attempt was made to distinguish loyal soldiers from renegades or to verify that attackers in uniform were really soldiers. By late 1995, all soldiers were suspect. The army was

not helped by the government which began to see militias as better able to fight rebels. The government manipulated the growing popular distrust of soldiers to support this shift and did nothing to defend or improve the military. Sierra Leoneans paid dearly for this political manipulation. As the TRC (2004) writes:

> In winning over the civilians on the ticket that soldiers were against them, the politicians conveyed a message to the soldiers that indeed they were the pariahs of the state. Since their best efforts would yield only derision, the soldiers took on the mantle that had been cast upon them and gradually transformed themselves into a deliberate enemy of 'democracy' (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 488).

6.3   The creation of civil defense forces (CDFs)

As the NPFL government lost faith in the army, it began to focus its energies on developing and supporting community-based militias. In 1994, a respected SLPP politician, Dr. Alpha Lavalie, helped by Mende chiefs, began to organize civil defense units in Mende regions. These militias were based on Poro societies: secret societies that traditional Mende boys must be initiated into to be recognized as adults. These were adapted so that traditional hunters in these societies – Kamajors in Mende regions – could protect their regions (Muana, 1997). Muana writes:

> (Lavalie) deployed displaced *Poro*... initiates to act as guardians of their settlements, enforce traditional Mende warfare curfews, and act as a local defence force. He also elicited support from the military junta to procure shotguns and ammunition for these militias (p. 83).

Lavalie never lived to see the fruition of his efforts. According to one informant, in 1994, when the Tongo region in Kenema District was attacked by rebels, Lavalie organized a meeting of men in Kenema, saying they should return to Tongo and retrieve their property. Within days of the meeting, the men learned that Lavalie had been killed in a landmine explosion (interview 61). The informant tells the story:

> That night the authorities in Kenema, (male) youth and elders... started this Hindo Hindo. So at night, whoever you suspect is a rebel, they pursue you. If they thought you were a rebel, they would question you and if you were a rebel you would be killed by the leaders. We, the others, would make noise around, because the rebels were all around Kenema, to scare them off. Every day we would hear that a few rebels had been killed but we don't know how (interview 61).

This local vigilantism protected Bo and Kenema from RUF infiltration and attack. People in Bo still proudly talk about RUF attacks on Bo and Kenema in December 1994 that civilians successfully repelled "with shotguns, machetes and stones" (Muana, 1997, p. 83). However, as

many civilians had to flee their home regions at this time, this vigilantism undoubtedly led to the deaths of many civilians. Because rebels used women and children for reconnaissance missions, they would not escape suspicion.

Lavalie's plan for community defense forces was replicated across the country. Militias included the Gbethes, Kapras, Tamaboros and, most famously, the Kamajors in the south, run under the leadership of Chief Hinga Norman. Kamajor training and tactics included a belief in magic powers, in particular the belief that Kamajors were invincible to bullets. Just as the RUF used terror as a war tactic, the lightly-armed Kamajors used magic and fear to increase their strength beyond their physical capacity.

Muana (1997) argues that a strict organizational hierarchy restrained Kamajor militiamen from "committing atrocities on civilians or conducting themselves in any unauthorised way" But Kamajors did commit crimes. Special Court indictments of three Kamajor leaders, including Norman,[42] accused the militias of recruiting children, looting and burning property and committing atrocities against civilians who they identified as 'collaborators' (Special Court, 2003a). The indictment against Norman reads:

> Civilians, including women and children, who were suspected to have supported, sympathized with, or simply failed to actively resist the combined RUF/AFRC forces were termed "Collaborators" and specifically targeted by the Kamajors. Once so identified, these "Collaborators" and any captured enemy combatants were unlawfully killed. Victims were often shot, hacked to death, or burned to death. Other practices included human sacrifices and cannibalism (Special Court, 2003b, p. 3).

Kamajors and excombatants with other civil defense forces see themselves as war heroes who saved the country from rebel tyranny. Indeed they were successful in fighting the rebels but many were as susceptible to power abuses as other forces.

6.4 Executive Outcomes

In addition to the militias, in April 1995, the NPRC contracted the services of the controversial South African private security firm, Executive Outcomes. Executive Outcomes had close connections with Branch Energy Ltd., a British mining company. Strasser agreed to pay Executive Outcomes $1.8 million a month and Branch Energy was granted a large diamond

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[42] The three Kamajor leaders indicted were: Chief Hinga Norman, Kamajor founder and former Minister of Internal Affairs; Allieu Kondewa, "former Kamajor High Priest and Chief Initiator of the CDF"; and Moinina Fofana, Kamajor Director of War Operations (International Crisis Group, 2003, p. 21).

concession in Kono in exchange for "five percent of the value of all diamonds extracted and 37.5 percent of net profits" (Hirsch, 2001, p. 39).

Executive Outcomes and the army set four main goals: to ensure Freetown's security, to recapture the Sierra Rutile mines, to recapture territory taken by the RUF, and to eliminate the rebel headquarters in Kailahun (Hirsch, 2001). As Hirsch writes:

> Although Executive Outcomes' presence was small – about ten Afrikaaner officers and two hundred soldiers, mostly of Cape coloured origin – they had the military advantage of air capability and the psychological advantage of being an outside force with a fierce reputation for swift and effective action. Early gains on the ground quickly created the near mythological view that Executive Outcomes was invincible (p. 39).

Working with Kamajor militias and loyal army forces, Executive Outcomes attacked RUF bases, forced the rebels from the region of Freetown and retook the Sierra Rutile mines. Though they did not succeed in taking RUF headquarters, Hirsch (2001) argues that they probably influenced the RUF leadership's decision to enter negotiations.

The government's military successes in this period were overshadowed by their inability to pay Executive Outcome's steep security bill. Continuing insecurity in Kono prevented Branch Energy from mining and thus deprived the government of revenue. By March 1996, when Tejan Kabbah was elected president, the government owed Executive Outcomes $17 million. The IMF and international donors pressured the new government to dramatically reduce public expenditures and Kabbah had to ask Executive Outcomes to leave before peacekeeping arrangements could be made. The result was disastrous. The RUF resumed fighting and the government's military advantage was lost (Hirsch, 2001).

6.5   The rise of civil society

As the fighting continued in 1994 and 1995, a small coalition of civil society groups emerged to push for democratic elections. Women's organizations led the movement, supported by paramount chiefs, academics, journalists, trade unionists and local council leaders. When James Jonah, a former UN Under-Secretary General, was appointed chairman of the Interim National Election Commission, he encouraged the coalition to work towards elections. The result was Bintumani I, a five-day meeting of 75 political and civil society representatives from around the country at the Bintumani Conference Centre near Freetown in August 1995. The delegates gathered to decide when elections should be held and how they should proceed. Most wanted elections before the year's end but Jonah persuaded them to wait until March 1996 so they could

prepare properly. A minority argued that the country needed "peace before elections" as those in rebel-occupied areas would not be able to vote. Hirsch (2001) writes that "'peace before elections' was the slogan of those who had an interest in continuation of the war and were doing well under military rule" (p. 41). Elections were set for February 26th, 1996.

Only weeks before the election, the NPRC experienced a bloodless internal coup. This was precipitated in part by a vote at the November 1995 Commonwealth Summit over the suspension of Nigeria because of President Abacha's poor human rights record. Strasser had little choice but to support the vote even though his government benefited greatly from Nigeria's assistance in ECOMOG. This caused great tension within NPRC ranks. Also, Strasser, who was "barely thirty," decided to run for president despite the constitutional requirement that the president should be at least 40. When his colleagues protested, Strasser threatened to fire them. On January 16, 1996, Strasser's NPRC colleagues arrested him and whisked him to Guinea (Hirsch, 2001, p. 41).

Strasser's successor was a 32-year-old brigadier general named Julius Maada Bio. Though the RUF had refused to engage in earlier negotiations, Bio was determined to bring them to the table and end the war. Using radio, he persuaded Sankoh to send RUF representatives to Abidjan, Ivory Coast. In mid-March Sankoh left Sierra Leone to join the talks and the negotiations began to revolve around power sharing arrangements (Hirsch, 2001). Hirsch writes:

> Maada Bio's representatives apparently had implied or promised that they would make Sankoh deputy chairman of the NPRC if the election was cancelled or postponed, or use their influence to assure him the vice presidency of a civilian government... Bio was thus apparently plotting to put off the election or making a commitment he could not keep, but the consequences were to be felt later when negotiations bogged down over Sankoh's insistence that he had been promised the vice presidency (p. 43).

While the negotiations with the RUF were being arranged, the Bio government began to explore whether elections could be postponed. It organized rallies in Freetown to support "peace before elections" and demanded another Bintumani meeting. The road to Bintumani II was far more difficult for civil society participants than Bintumani I had been. Soldiers barricaded the bridge to the conference centre and harassed delegates to discourage them from attending. Despite this harassment, delegates voted 58 to 17 to continue with the election plans (Hirsch, 2001).

Civil society resolve in favour of elections was matched by RUF determination to prevent them. The rebels carried out a brutal campaign, especially in the north and east of the country, to

discourage people from voting. Although terror tactics had long involved amputating and mutilating captives, they now carried this out on a mass scale against people of all ages as a direct threat to voters (Hirsch, 2001). Victims testifying at the TRC described the horrifying moment when a youth wearing a T-shirt labelled "C.O. Cut Hands" (Chief Officer Cut Hands) forced them to put one or even both arms on a stump to be hacked off. Some described being in a line of victims who pleaded for mercy before their hands were amputated. Many amputation victims did not survive.

Despite efforts by the RUF and Bio's NPRC government to prevent them, the elections went ahead. Hirsch (2001) describes the massive turnout in Freetown:

> People waited patiently in voting lines under the hot sun for hours. When shooting erupted at the Wilberforce Barracks in the late afternoon, voters stood their ground. On Siaka Stevens Street in the heart of downtown Freetown, soldiers trying to disrupt the elections faced a defiant public and retreated (p. 44).

Despite accusations of irregularities, especially in the south,[43] international observers pronounced the elections to be generally free and fair (Hirsch, 2001). On March 29, 1996, SLPP leader Tejan Kabbah became president of Sierra Leone.

6.6 The 1996-1997 Kabbah government and the Abidjan peace talks

Kabbah, like Bio, entered the presidency determined to end the war. Executive Outcomes and the Kamajors had gone from defending major towns to pursuing the RUF in remoter regions. Kabbah appointed Kamajor founder Chief Hinga Norman as deputy defense minister. Norman had little faith in the army and poured his efforts into supporting Kamajor campaigns against both the RUF and the SLA. According to Hirsch (2001), the Kamajors had a "take no prisoners" policy and TRC testimony indicates that the fate of captured soldiers could be brutal (p. 53). Government favoritism of the Kamajors at the expense of the army created tremendous resentment among soldiers, a resentment that would eventually lead to the downfall of Kabbah's first government.

Kamajor military successes had an impact on negotiations with the RUF. Sankoh, supported by a British NGO, International Alert,[44] and a Ghanaian journalist, Akyaaba Sebo, was

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[43] In southern Sierra Leone, the SLPP stronghold, critics charged that there were more ballots cast than registered voters (Hirsch, 2001). Others also mentioned to me that in some cases the number of people who voted for the opposition was too small to be credible.

[44] The role of International Alert in this process was problematic. Sankoh was adept at using foreigners to increase his credibility. Hirsch (2001) argues that Sebo and International Alert's secretary general, Kumar Rupesinghe, were trying to make names for themselves by resolving the conflict.

holding out for the vice presidency which he said Bio had promised him. Clearly worried about Executive Outcomes, he also demanded that all foreign troops leave the country. As his military losses escalated, Sankoh relinquished these conditions and the Abidjan Peace Agreement was signed on November 30, 1996 (Hirsch, 2001).

Most literature mentioning the Abidjan agreement describes the amnesty deal and Sankoh's desire for a top governmental position. But the accord also articulated a vision for the country, stressing the commitment of all parties to improve conditions for all citizens (Gberie, 2000). The government agreed to provide "equal opportunities to all Sierra Leoneans especially those in the countryside and the urban poor." Specifically, it promised to provide primary health care, clean drinking water and sewage systems in all towns and villages; affordable housing, compulsory and free education below senior secondary level; improved infrastructure including roads, communications and electricity in rural areas. The government also agreed to electoral reform, judicial independence and reform of the police and military (Government of Sierra Leone, 1999, Article 26ii).

Although these commitments were ambitious and some were unrealistic given the government's impoverished state and lack of international interest in the country, it is notable that a vision for the country was articulated.[45] Observers often mention that the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement built on the Abidjan accord but this national vision of equality and basic services for all was absent without note.

The Abidjan Agreement created division in the RUF. The delegation was led by Fayia Musa and Ibrahim Dean Jalloh, two captive teachers who later joined the rebel side. They and other RUF delegates negotiated in good faith and were committed to implementing the agreement but Sankoh was not. On March 6, 1997, Sankoh made a covert trip to Lagos, Nigeria and was arrested on charges of purchasing arms. He remained in Nigerian custody until July 1998 when he was returned to Sierra Leone to be tried for treason. In the meantime, Musa, Jalloh and other RUF representatives from Freetown were tricked by Sankoh's successor, Sam (Maskita) Bockerie, into travelling to Kailahun for a meeting. In Kailahun, Bockerie's forces captured and incarcerated them. Musa and Jalloh were only released in November 1999 (Hirsch, 2001).

The TRC (2004) identifies Phase III of the war, typified by power struggles between ambitious individuals, as beginning around the time of Sankoh's arrest:

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[45] This may have been an RUF attempt to portray itself as "legitimate representatives of the oppressed" (Hirsch, 2001, p. 52).

> Sierra Leoneans were displaced, pillaged, killed and subjected to all imaginable forms of torture because fellow Sierra Leoneans saw these violations as unfortunate, though (un)avoidable collateral damage in the protection or pursuit of power. Innocent, powerless civilians were targeted more than ever in the final phase of the conflict on the premise that the 'power-brokers' affiliated with them might sit up and take notice of their plight (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 624).

At this point the line between disaffected soldiers and rebels became genuinely blurred as many acts popularly attributed to rebels appear to have been carried out by disgruntled soldiers and their supporters.

6.7 The May 25th coup and the AFRC/RUF regime

The Kabbah government faced formidable challenges. Negotiating a fair and sustainable peace deal meant it had to bargain from a position of military strength. At the same time, Kabbah had been forced by donors to dismiss Executive Outcomes before forces were in place to monitor the cease-fire (Hirsch, 2001). The change to democratic government also brought the friction between the government and army to a head. The SLPP was largely associated with Sierra Leone's Mende south while soldiers came from the north. When Kabbah proposed to reduce the military and use the money to support CDFs, especially Kamajor militias, many soldiers decided to take action (TRC, 2004). As the coup's "mastermind," Sgt. Alfred Abu Sankoh (alias Zagallo) explained:

> Soldiers in the lower ranks were not paid a good salary unlike the officers... we were denied of privileges such as overseas courses... soldiers were killed at the war front and no provision was made for their families... there was the burning issue of rice allocation, our rations had been drastically reduced and many times we got them quite late... the issue of the Kamajors was another thing that finally discouraged the soldiers under the regime of the SLPP. As all this was happening there was widespread rumour in the army that the government wanted to cut down the size of the army (with inadequate retirement benefits) (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 677).

Early in the morning of May 25, 1997 a group of junior army officers led by Zagallo raided the Murray Town Barracks arsenal and broke into Pandemba Road Prison, releasing all prisoners, including Major Johnny Paul Koroma who had been jailed in connection with a previous coup attempt. Hirsch (2001) notes that all the leaders were from the Limba chiefdom that was home to former president Momoh. The putchists may have feared that the SLPP electoral victory would ensure indefinite Mende domination of government. They appointed Sandhurst-educated Koroma to be chairman of the new junta, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

Many soldiers in Freetown joined the AFRC. Senior officers loyal to the government quickly found themselves abandoned by forces who "were either not lifting their finger in support of the government or were pledging support to the coup plotters." Koroma announced the coup on state radio and invited Foday Sankoh and the RUF to join them. Sankoh, who was still in detention in Nigeria, instructed RUF fighters over the radio to "come out of the bush and join the new government." Sankoh announced that Koroma was now "Commander in Chief of the People's Army," which included the RUF." This broadcast "weakened the resistance of the remaining loyal troops" who hid for their own safety (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 689, 691, 1080).

Hirsch (2001) writes that the coup led to chaos on the streets of Freetown:

> Suddenly thousands of soldiers wearing red shirts and bandanas were roaming the city, looting, raping, and shooting at random... Before the day was over, the area around State House was a scene of devastation... Over the next several weeks gangs roamed the city at will, looting houses and killing civilians arbitrarily (p. 57).

Over the next few weeks, international negotiators tried to end the takeover, offering Koroma amnesty and safe passage to Nigeria. But once thousands of RUF forces joined the AFRC in early June there was no hope for negotiations. The RUF took over and Koroma "could not have left Freetown even if he had wanted to" (TRC, 2004; Hirsch, 2001, p. 58).

The AFRC leaders completely misjudged the public mood when they seized power. They thought they would be warmly received as the NPRC had been in 1992. But in 1992 most Sierra Leoneans had wanted a change from APC corruption. By May 1997 civilians were fed up with war and soldiers who they perceived as traitors. They had elected the Kabbah government and did not want a return to military rule. The coup leaders may also have observed their predecessors' self-enrichment while in office and the reward of overseas scholarships for leaving – a tempting outcome for junior soldiers (TRC, 2004; West Africa, Jan. 27-Feb. 2, 1997).

During this time most foreigners were evacuated and Kabbah and wealthier Sierra Leoneans, including most prominent civil society leaders, fled to Guinea. Many poorer people, however, could not afford to flee (interview 5). Leaders of the 21-union Labour Congress also remained in Freetown and organized a general strike and boycott of AFRC supporters. Bundu (2001) writes:

> Public sector employees withheld their services when fear gave way to stunning defiance and non-co-operation. Backed by their respective unions, they ignored

orders to return to work. The teachers were particularly outstanding as most
schools remained closed throughout the interregnum (pp. 154, 155).

Many businesses also joined in, remaining closed for much of the AFRC rule. Koroma's
invitation to the RUF verified the connection between soldiers and rebels in the popular
imagination, stiffening public determination to resist the new government (TRC, 2004).

The junta suffered from economic pressures. Sanctions deprived the government of
customs revenue and petroleum, private banks remained closed despite junta orders for them to
operate, and the small manufacturing sector stopped producing when the supply of raw materials
and spare parts dried up (Bundu, 2001).

The coup was a turning point in ECOMOG's role in the war. On May 25th around 900
Nigerian troops were stationed in Sierra Leone under the auspices of ECOMOG. Some of these
soldiers were injured, captured or killed during the coup and the others were forced to retreat to
Hastings and Lungi, east of the capital. In August 1997, ECOWAS foreign ministers called for a
renewal of ECOMOG which would enforce international sanctions around Freetown while
Nigeria bombed suspected rebel positions from the air and harbour (Adebajo, 2002). From then
on, ECOMOG became a major player in the war and people's war experiences.

The Kabbah government's exile in Guinea saw a growing rift between the president, who
was commander in chief of the military, and his deputy defense minister, Hinga Norman. As one
observer noted, Kabbah was a well-travelled, wealthy man who had worked with the UN. He
"was a consummate diplomat who would do anything to resolve the conflict through diplomacy."
Norman was a "born soldier who had been in the colonial army from the age of fourteen... He
saw his role as defending the country and defeating the enemy on the battleground" (TRC, 2004,
vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 708).

Norman saw CDFs, especially Kamajors, as the solution to the war and spent much time
at the ECOMOG base in Monrovia and in Kamajor bases in southern Sierra Leone. Norman and a
small group of Kamajor initiators and trainers grew to be powers unto themselves, manipulating
traditional practices for their own purposes and refusing to answer to traditional authorities or the
War Council in Exile, set up by the president to oversee CDFs. Kamajors committed many war
crimes, including recruitment of children, rape, torture, cannibalism and murder of accused
collaborators (TRC, 2004).

Economic, civilian and military pressures pushed AFRC/RUF leaders to send
representatives to Conakry for talks. In the Conakry Peace Plan, the AFRC/RUF pledged to cede

power in April 1998, but continuing skirmishes between AFRC/RUF and pro-government forces prompted the latter to support a military solution. The AFRC junta was also buying heavy weapons from Ukrainian arms dealers at this time (TRC, 2004).

On February 2, 1998, ECOMOG, supported by loyal soldiers, police and students, attacked AFRC/RUF forces and, by mid-February, expelled them from Freetown. To avoid bloodshed, ECOMOG left a route through which AFRC/RUF forces could flee the capital unharmed (TRC, 2004). This move would come back to haunt the city.[46]

The result was a severely divided country. The north and north-east of the country was occupied by most AFRC dissidents who, along with the RUF, carried out unprecedented abuses on civilians. With Sankoh in jail, the rebels reorganized under the leadership of Sam Bockarie, Dennis Mingo and Gibril Massaquoi. The south and south-east were under Kamajor control. Only the Western Province around Freetown was under ECOMOG and government control (TRC, 2004).

The ECOMOG victory should have brought peace to Freetown but instead the city was the scene of chaos and revenge. Bundu (2001) quotes a BBC correspondent during a February 14th dispatch who reported, "civilians, mostly youths, are actually going out looking for soldiers, RUF rebels and other sympathisers of the AFRC, and in most cases actually killing them on the spot" (p. 242). A local observer said:

> During that period there was mob justice around town. Killing people, putting tires on people, putting them on fire. And I was sort of saying, 'Oh my God! We were talking about these things committed by the junta and now those people who are supposed to be keeping the peace are now turning around and committing atrocities. What are we heading for?... So so many people. The prison was overcrowded. They just picked people around. 'Oh, you were junta. You were this. You were that.' Anyone was sort of dumped in Pandemba Road Prison. Including journalists (interview 45).

Rather than quelling the violence, the government-associated radio station, 98.1 FM, supervised by future information minister Julius Spencer, read lists of alleged junta collaborators over the air. Spencer received complaints that people were being killed as a result of these broadcasts, but Kabbah ordered them to continue, "effectively encourag(ing) mob justice" (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 904).

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[46] Many people mentioned that when the AFRC/RUF held Freetown, Kabbah publicly declared that all those left in Freetown were rebels or rebel sympathizers. In 1996, he made a similar statement in rebel-occupied Makeni, saying that people in Makeni owed the country an apology (Bundu, 2001). These statements still rankle and indicate that Kabbah was out of touch with ordinary Sierra Leoneans.

Some Limba informants felt that they were specifically attacked as AFRC sympathisers because of their ethnic commonality with the putschists. They described Freetown as being highly factionalized between those who supported Kabbah – the 'democrats' – and those who supported the soldiers. Simply being a friend or relative of a soldier was extremely dangerous (interviews 5, 39 and 41).

In this chaotic time, civilians who fled their homes often found themselves under suspicion and attack by many forces (see Appendix A). ECOMOG forces were notorious for executing people – often those displaced by fighting – who could not be identified by locals. Even children were suspect. Civil defense forces – whether highly organized like the Kamajors or loosely organized local vigilante forces – also killed and injured many people. Across the country, the war became a cover for the violent settling of political or personal scores or for seizing assets of wealthy entrepreneurs, including many Lebanese.

The ECOMOG recapture of Freetown marked the end of the junta-rebel alliance. Thousands of former SLA soldiers surrendered to ECOMOG, others joined the rebels, "and yet others continued nominally as the AFRC or joined splinter groups such as the West Side Boys who set up base in the Okra Hills outside Freetown"(ICG, 2001a, p. 7).

Ironically, the soldiers who remained, not the rebels, bore the brunt of SLPP punishment. Fifty-four civilians accused of being AFRC sympathizers and 34 military officers were arrested and charged with treason. On October 19th. 24 officers were summarily executed by firing squad. Foday Sankoh, who had been transferred to a Sierra Leone prison in July 1998, escaped execution and remained in jail until he was released to participate in the Lomé talks in March 1999 (Hirsch, 2001).

6.8 Diamonds: the fuel of war

Most observers agree that the war was not caused by the struggle for diamonds but there is a common Western perception that diamonds fuelled the war and provided Charles Taylor with a strong incentive to assist the RUF to control diamond revenues. This is only partly true. The TRC suggests that the focus on RUF smuggling provides a convenient cover for those who have long benefited from smuggling and continued to throughout the war.

The TRC (2004) observes that smuggling diamonds from Sierra Leone through Liberia to Belgium dates back to the 1950s. Liberia has no gem stones and its diamond deposits are

insubstantial yet, since 1988, the country exported millions of carats of diamonds to Belgium – far more than it could produce – every year except 1991.

The TRC (2004) finds that the RUF "could not have earned all the money attributed to it in official reports from conflict diamonds alone." After 1997 the RUF/AFRC did occupy major diamond areas but before that the RUF had only sporadic access to these regions (vol. 3b, chap. 1, ¶ 49). The TRC writes:

> It is likely that officials of the Sierra Leonean state have been doing business in diamonds with people in Liberia, including Charles Taylor, while he supported the pillage and plunder of Sierra Leone (vol. 3b, chap. 1, ¶ 45).

Among the major beneficiaries were diamond dealers from middleman minority populations, in particular the Lebanese, but also the Marakas (Senegalese and Gambian nationals), who have long been active in the diamond trade. This involvement continued throughout the war (TRC, 2004).

6.9   The January 6th invasion

Sierra Leoneans tell the mythical story of a Krio woman in Freetown who said, "What does a rebel look like? Does it have a tail?" The story conveys the sense that people in Freetown were cushioned from the war and did not care about suffering in the provinces. When, on January 6th, 1999, Freetown experienced horrors that Human Rights Watch (1999) describes as "simply staggering" in terms of numbers and "level of sheer brutality," the question remained: Who really is a rebel? (3)

The January 6th AFRC/RUF invasion of Freetown was monumental in its tactics, scale and horror, yet its leadership, motives and the logic of the actions have been largely misunderstood. The international press, human rights observers and most citizens characterise it as a 'rebel' attack, perhaps satisfied with lumping RUF and AFRC forces into one 'rebel' category. Though allied on occasion, the two factions had profoundly different experiences and motives. The January 6th attack was led by soldiers, not the RUF. According to the TRC (2004), it was a "violent backlash against the Government of the state led by some of the key commanders of the AFRC junta that had been overthrown in February 1998" (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 1003).

After the AFRC and their supporters fled Freetown in February 1998, they saw themselves as victims of government. They refused to acknowledge their responsibility for their lack of credibility in the eyes of the public. The soldiers resented being sidelined in favour of

ECOMOG and the militias and were bitter about the treatment of supporters and relatives, in particular those executed or imprisoned (TRC, 2004).

The January 6th attack was masterminded and led by SAJ Musa, the charismatic and notorious vice-chairman of the NPRC regime during its first two years in power. By appealing to soldiers' humiliation and sense of injustice, he gained their support for the invasion of the capital (TRC, 2004).

The operation began by abducting civilians around Kono in the east and taking them north to Koinadugu District for military training. There, in October 1998, around 2,000 fighters assembled, complete with heavy weapons acquired during junta rule. They attacked nearby Kabala then headed south and west, abducting thousands of civilians on the way and using them as human shields (TRC, 2004). The TRC writes:

> With every civilian settlement the group passed through on its path to Freetown, civilians were abducted in large numbers... The primary objective of this policy was to create such a burgeoning presence of human bodies that any defensive deployment would be at a loss to respond. First, the sheer mass of numbers was designed to create an impression that the hostile forces were larger in number than was actually the case. This impression... was enough in itself to send most defensive deployments into flux or flight... Second, by sprinkling the 'real combatants' in among a crowd comprised mostly of innocent civilians, the troops succeeded in dissolving themselves into an indistinguishable mass. This tactic proved devastatingly effective in undermining the professionally-trained and better equipped soldiers of ECOMOG because it deprived them of a clear sight of enemy targets (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 981-983).

SAJ Musa was killed in Benguema but the group carried on.

ECOMOG was unable to deal with the "chameleonic character" of Sierra Leone soldiers. When soldiers claimed to be loyal, ECOMOG accepted them back whether or not they had served with the AFRC. Many of these forces switched sides at critical moments (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶). The TRC writes:

> Since the integrity and trustworthiness of individual Sierra Leonean soldiers could not be absolutely guaranteed, ECOMOG soldiers confronted with large number of unfamiliar faces in military uniforms tended to panic. There was in fact little to distinguish the Sierra Leoneans who were with ECOMOG from the Sierra Leoneans who were their enemies (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 994).

RUF forces were not involved with planning or carrying out the first stages of this operation. They only joined in as the movement headed south to Freetown. The soldiers were also joined by "several hundred Freetonian and Provincial youths" who supported the AFRC when

they were in power and many fled with them in February 1998. As the TRC (2004) writes, "The overwhelming majority of those who entered Freetown on 6th January 1999 saw themselves as returning to their rightful homes after having been purged from the city prematurely" (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 1004).

In late December 1998, hundreds of AFRC and RUF disguised as civilians returning home for the holidays blended into the busy Freetown streets. Early in the morning of January 6th the infiltrators were ready. Approaching from the east, around 10,000 people – fighters mingled amongst terrified captives – descended on the capital and were joined by the infiltrators and Freetown allies dispersed around the city. The captives included women, children, babies and senior citizens who normally "could not conceivably pose any threat to a professional peacekeeping force like the Nigerian ECOMOG deployment, but who in the prevailing confusion and panic... constituted a deluge of hostile bodies onto the city they were supposed to be protecting" (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 1007). Human Rights Watch (HRW) (1999) states:

> As they began their march, the rebels used gunfire to create panic and produce a mass civilian exodus westward toward the city center. The rebels then mixed in with and marched behind the thousands of civilians making up the human shield. The tactic was effective for the rebels, but proved frustrating for the ECOMOG soldiers, who were unable to see and properly engage their opponents; and deadly for civilians who were in the line of fire once the fighting began (pp. 1, 2).

Reflecting their urban background – in contrast to the more rural RUF – the AFRC and their supporters "employed clinical tactics of urban warfare and were able frequently to use side streets and alternative routes to take the defensive forces by surprise and attack them at the rear" (TRC, 1999, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 1017).

Confronted with this confusion of people and demoralized and frightened by their own high losses, ECOMOG forces often executed those they suspected of being rebels or collaborators. Human Rights Watch (1999) documented more than 180 such executions:

> Prisoners taken by ECOMOG, some of whom had surrendered and many of whom were wounded, were frequently executed on the spot. Suspected rebel collaborators and sympathizers were often killed with little or no effort to establish their guilt or innocence (p. 3).

Most ECOMOG victims were men but they also executed women and children (HRW, 1999), reflecting their use as innocent-looking spies for the invading forces.

By the fourth day, when ECOMOG began to force the AFRC and their supporters into retreat, the latter began destroying everything in their wake. In scenes of phenomenal carnage, an

estimated 10,000 people were killed and 5,000 homes were destroyed. Nigerians, policemen and journalists were particularly targeted but all civilians were prey. Human rights documentation describes crimes of staggering cruelty as invaders mutilated, killed and raped civilians or burned them alive in their houses. Boys were forced to rape family members and others had to watch or sing as rebels murdered or raped their loved ones (TRC, 2004). UNICEF (http://www.ginie.org/ginie-crises-links/childsoldiers/sierraleone2.html) registered more than 4,800 missing children after the attack. It took ECOMOG more than three weeks to gain control of the heavily populated east side of the city, the scene of most atrocities (HRW, 1999).

Although ECOMOG succeeded in chasing the AFRC/RUF from Freetown, its military position in the country remained weak. The situation was complicated by the death of Nigerian military dictator Sani Abacha on June 8, 1998 and his replacement by General Abdualam Abubakr who wanted to restore civilian government in Nigeria and reduce external military commitments. Kabbah was under pressure from many sides to talk but this time the government was at a military disadvantage (Hirsch, 1999).

6.10 The Lomé Peace Accord

In chapter three I wrote that if peace agreements are to be conciliatory, they must create a shared vision of future governance that considers the relations, needs and rights of citizens. Political reconciliation requires sincerity by negotiating parties who cannot use talks simply for personal or military advantage. That sincerity is not immediately apparent between antagonists. Steps must be taken to establish inter-group trust and maintain it during the difficult transitional period. A just peace agreement must also be consistent with established criteria of fairness – international human rights and humanitarian laws offer possible guidelines. The international community has a responsibility to stand by its own laws and ensure a just peace. Without this, "might" determines "right" and we can expect to see endless battles for the military upper hand.

The Lomé Peace Agreement failed on many of these accounts. Unlike the Abidjan Agreement, it lacked a vision for Sierra Leone society and governance and exposed itself as a power-sharing deal that involved buying off RUF leaders with amnesty and prime jobs. While efforts were made to build trust between parties in the lead up to the agreement, both RUF leaders and the government made promises they were not committed to keeping and some key players were excluded from negotiations. Moreover, major international players, especially the United States, seemed more interested in finding a quick and cheap agreement than a just and sustainable one. The result was a flawed deal that only indirectly led to peace.

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In many conflicts a respected group stands out that all sides view as neutral and trustworthy. In Bosnia, Jewish leaders played this role. Jewish organizations distributed humanitarian aid when other organizations could not and Jewish leaders promoted peace between the conflicting sides. In religiously cosmopolitan Sierra Leone, all sides trusted Muslim and Christian leaders. In April 1997, these leaders formed the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRC) for the purpose of intervening in the conflict.[47] Their interventions did not immediately ease the violence but when all sides were ready to talk, the IRC was well-placed to facilitate dialogue and build trust between groups. As trusted insiders with strong moral currency they were ideal mediators.

One observer described early IRC interventions in 1998 when neither the government nor ECOMOG would talk to AFRC and RUF leaders:

> And it was then that the inter-religious (groups) came into it and said 'No listen, these are our children, they are nationals. And they went back into our traditions and brought out all these sayings that your children are your children, no matter what they do...

> So the first meeting, ECOMOG took (religious leaders) up to... the boundary (of the rebel controlled region)... And then they... got some medical supplies and stuff and gave it to them and started talking to them. 'Look. If you're going to be a military force, nobody's going to win. Let's sit down and talk this thing out. We agree to what you're fighting for. We agree that there's massive corruption. We agree that things are bad for 95% of the population. That the infrastructure is not good and the things the government says should be government responsibilities, social responsibilities hasn't come out... But the fighting's not helping anybody. Because the poor are the worst affected. The rich can fly to Guinea or Gambia or England or America. And those who are left behind are the very people you want to uplift from their poverty. And it's not happening... There will be no military winners so let's talk things out.

> And it took a couple of months but that was the first step... Because at that time the government and the rebels did not want to meet face to face. Because if either party had gone, they would have lost face. And one party would appear weak to the other. But you could go through somebody else. That's traditionally accepted. So that's what we did. We used religion and tradition to find a middle way and talk to both parties (interview 43).

After the attacks on Freetown the time for talks was ripe. Both the government and the RUF were under enormous pressure to negotiate. The war was costing Nigeria an unsustainable

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[47] The Inter-Religious Council was preceded in the 1980s by an inter-religious organization called PROCMURA (the Project for Christians and Muslims) which was created to avoid the inter-religious violence that Nigeria was experiencing (interview 46).

one million US dollars a day, and Britain, the US and the UN were footing the bill for the government-in-exile. The Kabbah government knew it had to make an effort or it would lose international sympathy and assistance (Rashid, 2000).

The AFRC and RUF also needed a way out. Although they were ahead militarily and controlled much of the north and east, Sankoh was in prison, they were divided, had suffered heavy losses and had not ousted ECOMOG. Their image was in tatters locally and internationally. Neither side was likely to achieve a military victory (Rashid, 2000).

UN Special Envoy Francis Okelo asked the IRC to facilitate dialogue between Kabbah and Sankoh and the council agreed. It organized consultative meetings with paramount chiefs, parliamentarians and tribal heads, and met separately with Kabbah and Sankoh, keeping the latter informed of events and affirming his role as a key player in negotiations (Turay, 2000). Turay writes:

> The Council demonstrated its goodwill by providing clothing, blankets, and sanitary kits to surrendered soldiers, while providing relief food to civilians. 'The IRCSL (IRC) made radio contacts with a cross-section of rebels in the bush, counselled them on the need for peace, visited and met them in their base in the bush to continue discussions on the way to peace', Alimamy P Koroma said. 'These activities helped to consolidate real confidence and thus marked the beginning of actual dialogue between the RUF and the government of Sierra Leone...' Sankoh was allowed to talk with his field commanders by radio and with the international media. Rebel field commanders responded by releasing fifty-four abducted children. Meanwhile, at the urging of the Council, the government accepted the notion of a neutral venue for eventual negotiations and more frequent meetings between government representatives and the RUF (p. 3).

Council delegates later travelled to Monrovia to meet RUF members and solicit Charles Taylor's cooperation in the peace process (Turay, 2000). Taylor agreed. His government was being threatened with international sanctions and a role as mediator promised to change his international pariah status to that of statesman.

This points to a paradox confronting early mediators such as the IRC. For parties to engage in dialogue willingly, especially those with military strength, they must be treated as legitimate spokesmen and negotiating equals. The mediating group can set the tone of negotiations by their choice of who they involve in discussions and the values they espouse. In condemning coups and crimes against civilians, the IRC was not taking sides; it was reinforcing values of democracy and human rights. But while the IRC could condemn acts, it could not

condemn individuals or it would undercut its ability to present them as legitimate negotiating partners.[48]

It is therefore up to parties such as the UN, regional and international players, and civil society to ensure that the peace deal is realistic, meets national and international criteria of justice and holds the interests of citizens at its core. This may involve providing peacekeepers with a mandate to enforce the conditions of the agreement. By weighing in favour of civilians and standing by legal and democratic processes, the international community can mitigate against outcomes determined by military victories.

This did not happen at Lomé. The US Clinton Administration, through its envoy, Reverend Jesse Jackson,[49] went out of its way to "mainstream" Taylor and Sankoh, presenting them as credible negotiating partners (House International Relations aide, in Timmerman, 2003, p. 2). According to Timmerman, rather than acknowledging Sankoh's and Taylor's responsibility for atrocities, Jackson presented Taylor to Americans as "a modern democratic leader" (p. 2).[50] He surpassed the legitimate humanizing and trust-building efforts of the Inter-Religious Council to actively prop up Sankoh and Taylor, minimizing the severity of their crimes.

With an election looming in 2000, Clinton wanted African-Americans to believe that Democrats cared about Africa while at the same time he worked to avoid confronting instigators of mass atrocities (Opala, 2000). When Britain tried to support ECOMOG financially and "implored other nations to do the same,"[51] the Clinton administration not only refused aid, it lobbied Britain to drop its offer and pressured Kabbah to enter talks (Sieff, 2001, p. 1). Despite calls to assist ECOMOG by Africa experts in the State Department, the Bureau of African Affairs neither asked Congress for more money nor spent the $39 million it had for peacekeeping operations in the region (Lizza, 2000).

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[48] The reality of peace negotiations shows the problem of deeming any person to be 'radically evil' because we often need those individuals as negotiating partners. If just peace deals require trust and sincerity, they cannot be negotiated with individuals who are viewed as incapable of these qualities. To negotiate with the 'enemy,' that 'enemy' must be humanized. Pragmatically, the only people who can be called 'radically evil' are those who are imprisoned or dead and therefore have lost their power.

[49] For a good discussion of Jackson's problematic naïve diplomacy efforts see Timmerman, R. (2002) *Shakedown: Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing).

[50] In fact, Taylor was the democratically-elected president of Liberia.

[51] In contrast to Jackson, who was declared *persona non grata* in Sierra Leone after he compared Foday Sankoh to Nelson Mandela, Tony Blair is regarded by many Sierra Leoneans as a hero. After Nigeria, the British government has been most supportive of democratic governance in Sierra Leone. Interestingly, Blair's father, Leo Blair, occasionally taught at Fourah Bay College in Freetown (Assinder, 2002).

The American government was not alone in pushing for negotiations at all costs. Some West African leaders, including ECOWAS chairman and Togolese president Gnassingbé Eyadéma, benefited from involvement in the negotiations. By hosting talks, Eyadéma hoped to detract international attention from his own problematic rule.[52] Unknown to participants, he was also related to Foday Sankoh by marriage.[53] The governments of Burkina Faso, Liberia and Libya, all of which had supported the RUF, also benefited from their mediation roles (Rashid, 2000) and the reinvention of the RUF as a legitimate political movement with Sankoh-as-credible-politician at its helm. The result was a peace deal that forwarded the ambitions of some external political leaders while achieving little for the people of Sierra Leone. The International Crisis Group (2001a) describes the Lomé Agreement as:

> ...a vain exercise motivated largely by international expediency. It attempted to elevate those responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians into statesmen even though they lacked a coherent political agenda and almost any political base (p. 3).

Sierra Leone civil society members often say that the Lomé negotiations built on the Abidjan deal with its general amnesty and resettlement provisions for combatants. But the two accords are very different. The Abidjan accord presents a concise vision of equal opportunity for all Sierra Leoneans. It outlines citizens' entitlement to basic services and equal democratic participation and calls for restructuring the police, army and electoral system. Though some of these features were mentioned at Lomé, this guiding vision was lacking.

Bright (2000) writes that the Lomé accord was meant to be a "plan of action" (p. 1) that provided a detailed schedule for demilitarization and transitional governance. The agreement provides for the creation of important peacebuilding institutions – in particular the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But the talks primarily revolved around power sharing (providing RUF leaders with top political and civil service positions), Sankoh's pardon and status, and ECOMOG's peacekeeping role. This top-down approach, which neglected the legitimate concerns of young Sierra Leoneans, inaccurately assumed that Sankoh spoke for all 'rebel' forces, including the AFRC. In other words, by addressing the personal demands of leaders, mediators assumed the rest would follow.

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[52] In 1999, Togo had had almost 30 years of single-party rule. Although independent political parties were permitted in 1991, President Eyadema had used his security forces to undermine multiparty elections which were "seriously flawed," according to Human Rights Watch (2001).

[53] Eyadéma's son was married to Sankoh's daughter (Rashid, 2000).

For many Sierra Leoneans, power sharing was the most contentious issue discussed at Lomé. After fighting so hard for democracy, many strongly opposed the imposition of illegitimate leaders. At the National Consultative Conference on the Peace Process (NCCPP) that preceded the Lomé talks, civil society representatives emphatically stated that power sharing was unacceptable (NCCPP, 1999).

Despite this and despite mass civil society protests in Freetown and Bo, a power sharing deal was struck (SLW, June 17, 1999). Sankoh was given the status of vice-president and chairmanship of the Board of the Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development – astoundingly putting him in charge of the very diamonds that fuelled the latter part of the war. The RUF was also guaranteed four cabinet positions, including one senior cabinet post, and a number of diplomatic and top parastatals positions (Lomé Peace Agreement, 1999).

For the UN, amnesty was the most problematic aspect of the agreement. After Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, protested this clause, UN envoy Francis Okelo added a caveat to the agreement stating the UN would not acknowledge amnesty for "acts of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law" (in Hirsch, 2001, p. 84).

The Lomé negotiations did little to build on the trust that the Inter-Religious Council had facilitated in the lead-up to the talks. By focusing on Sankoh as sole RUF leader and playing to the negotiating team's personal ambitions,[54] the accord may have created or exacerbated distrust between Sankoh and RUF leaders in the field. The TRC report (2004) suggests that the latter felt Sankoh had sold them out and neglected their concerns. "They saw Sankoh and a select few around him decamping to a life of luxury in Freetown while they were being asked to give up their guns, which were the only claims they had on power" (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 1069).

Moreover, Sankoh and the RUF did not represent the concerns and interests of the AFRC. Although three AFRC members were on the RUF negotiating team, they were chosen by Sankoh and most AFRC regarded them as illegitimate (TRC, 2004). Sankoh ensured that AFRC leader Johnnie Paul Koroma was not part of the team, a conspicuous absence since the former SLA had their own concerns about the government and civilians after the vigilante attacks of early 1998.

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[54] At least three members of the RUF negotiating team, Mike Lamin, Pallo Banura and former SLA member Colonel Idrissa Kamara were given ministerial positions in the power-sharing government. In the talks in Liberia leading up to Lomé, Sankoh also promised Peter Vandy a ministerial nomination. He became Minister of Lands, Housing, Country Planning and Environment (TRC, 2004).

The distrust was mutual as the SLA had a history – both real and fabricated – of changing sides in the war. These issues could not be addressed if the AFRC and RUF were lumped together as one 'rebel' group.

The style of negotiations also undermined trust. With the lack of social vision beyond that of ending the violence, and with the RUF team "reneging on compromises, reintroducing old issues..., threatening pullouts and shifting final authority" (Rashid, 2000, p. 9), there was little basis for building confidence among negotiators and between negotiators and the population. Bright (2000) observes, "If the war had really been waged on the grounds of an ideology of some sort, perhaps the agreement could have addressed substantive issues and then might have enjoyed a better destiny" (p. 7). Similarly, if the talks had revolved around a vision for the people, the groundwork for trust and reconciliation might have been laid.[55]

Both RUF and government representatives made commitments they had no intention of keeping. Though the agreement provided for "a neutral peace keeping force comprising UNOMSIL and ECOMOG (that) shall disarm all combatants" (Lomé Peace Agreement, 1999, Article XVI), the RUF leadership never accepted UNOMSIL's (later UNAMSIL) legitimacy and went out of their way to obstruct its operations – a practice that culminated in the RUF's dramatic capture of 500 peacekeepers in May 2000.

Similarly, the government did not keep its Lomé commitments by appointing RUF members to senior cabinet positions or parastatal or diplomatic posts. It also failed to set up the Council of Elders and Religious Leaders that was intended to deal with the inevitable transitional disagreements. There was therefore no effective dispute resolution mechanism during the first turbulent year after the accord was signed (Bright, 2000).

The government's ambivalent commitment to amnesty also reduced its credibility. After ECOMOG ousted the AFRC and RUF from Freetown in February 1998, Kabbah announced that the Conakry agreement's amnesty might not apply because the 'rebels' reneged on the accord. Similarly, in June 2000 Attorney-General Solomon Berewa announced that the government had "'re-assessed' its position with respect to the amnesty" due to RUF violations of the Lomé

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[55] We do not know why Kabbah agreed to the Lomé accord. Some accuse him of being weak; others say he had little choice in the face of international pressure. The government's failure to keep its commitments and willingness to renege on amnesty also suggests expeditious duplicity. Kabbah knew the importance of credible AFRC leaders in the peace process. Shortly after the Lomé deal was signed he appointed Koroma to chair the new Commission for the Consolidation of Peace. Incorporating the opposition into government is consistent with conciliatory governing strategies of many African leaders (TRC, 2004).

agreement.[56] As the TRC (2004) notes, reneging on amnesty agreement may bring some war criminals to justice but it sends a "message to combatants... that peace agreements containing amnesty clauses ought not to be trusted." The Commission recommended that "future agreements... should... contain an agreed 'amnesty revocation' clause" (vol. 3b, chap. 6, ¶ 20, 24, 26).

The weaknesses of the Lomé agreement were exposed in the year after its signing. Sankoh and better educated RUF recruits moved to Freetown to form the political wing of the RUF. Most had worked closely with Sankoh and were completely loyal to him. Members of this group were rewarded with ministerial posts and other important positions. However, the participation of the RUF military wing in the peace process was uncertain. The military wing retained control of the north and diamond areas around Kono and did not view surrendering control of these regions as beneficial (TRC, 2004).

Because of this division, Sankoh's commitment to the peace process and his control over the RUF military wing, especially during the events of May 2000, are unclear. Many observers portray Sankoh as treacherous to the end[57] but those close to him testified to the TRC (2004) that he was committed to a political solution after his release from detention in 1999 and that he had lost control of his field commanders.

Even as the Lomé accord was being negotiated, tensions between the RUF and AFRC increased. After a lengthy armed confrontation at Makeni, the northern RUF headquarters, the RUF expelled all AFRC from the Northern Province. While many soldiers disarmed after Lomé, AFRC dissidents who did not disarm found a new base at Okra Hill and became known as the West Side Boys. By December 1999, less than a quarter of an estimated 45,000 combatants had begun to demobilize and most of these were Sierra Leone Army soldiers.

After the accord was signed, the UN Security Council created a peacekeeping force, the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), to support demobilization. UNAMSIL included troops

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[56] Kabbah wrote to the Security Council requesting the formation of the Special Court on these grounds. The Secretary General agreed to the creation of the Special Court, not for the reasons suggested by Kabbah, but because the amnesty was inconsistent with international law in the first place (TRC, 2004).

[57] The Commission for the Management of Strategic Mineral Resources never functioned. Instead, Sankoh used his position to make personal deals with international businesses. Letters found in Sankoh's home after his arrest present "an image of a double-dealing Leader, clutching at financial opportunities for personal and political gain, outside of the governmental framework in which he was ostensibly working. Much of this related to the diamond trade. It also suggests dissention within the RUF ranks, and an attempt by Sankoh to gain control over diamonds that remained effectively in the hands of his fractious field commanders and their Liberian mentors" (UN Panel of Experts, 2000, para. 98).

from ECOMOG, India and Kenya and 260 unarmed observers. By February 2000, the Security Council agreed to expand UNAMSIL to 11,100 soldiers but RUF forces refused to cooperate with them and seized their weapons and vehicles (Hirsch, 2001).

In May 2000 the RUF went too far. They captured almost 500 Zambian and Kenyan peacekeepers stationed in the north and east of the country. This time the British government responded quickly. It ordered foreign nationals to be evacuated and sent in 700 paratroopers to secure Freetown and support the hostages. Annan asked Gadhafi and Taylor to facilitate the peacekeepers' release and within ten days, with Taylor's assistance, all had been freed except six that the RUF killed (Hirsch, 2001).

The hostage taking was humiliating for the UN, which had once again sent peacekeepers to maintain a nonexistent peace. UNAMSIL's mission, like UN missions in Somalia and Rwanda, reinforced the need to provide peacekeepers with adequate equipment, logistical support and a mandate suited to their task. Responsibility for this lay with the Security Council (Hirsch, 2001).

On May 8, in Freetown, a civil society demonstration involving an estimated 30,000 protesters marched to Sankoh's house to call for the hostages' release. As they marched, a Nigerian soldier fired his gun into the air. Sankoh's bodyguards began to shoot into the crowd and the Nigerians could not control the situation. In the end, 17 civilians were killed and many more were injured. Sankoh, dressed in women's clothes, escaped from his house in the confusion. Nine days later he was captured by a soldier near his house, arrested and jailed (Hirsch, 2001).

6.11   The war's end

May 2000 marked a turning point for Sierra Leone. The RUF capture of the peacekeepers and Sankoh's arrest drew world attention to the need for serious international commitment to peace and justice rather than half-hearted and unsustainable power-sharing compromises. The war was not yet over but the Security Council committed itself to increasing peacekeeping forces and support and, in July, established an embargo on Sierra Leonean diamonds until legal diamonds could be properly certified. In August, at Kabbah's request, the Security Council passed resolution 1315 creating a joint UN-Sierra Leone Special Court to prosecute those deemed most responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity (Hirsch, 2001). In November, the RUF and the government signed a cease-fire agreement in Abuja, but although fighting declined, rebels continued to attack civilians (ICG, 2001a).

In December 2000 a UN Panel of Experts on illicit diamond and arms dealings in Sierra Leone issued a report declaring that Taylor was primarily responsible for the war in Sierra Leone. The authors recommended that a complete embargo be placed on all diamonds from Liberia and a travel ban be placed on senior Liberian officials and diplomats. They also suggested a temporary embargo on Liberian timber exports (UN Panel of Experts, 2000). In May 2001 the Security Council imposed the diamond and travel sanctions (Adebajo, 2002).[58]

The sanctions on Liberia and the establishment of a 17,500-strong UN peacekeeping force – the world's largest peacekeeping operation – made a difference. By October 2001, the International Crisis Group observed that UNAMSIL forces controlled all parts of the country except Kailahun and around 22,000 combatants had disarmed – although weapon counts were disappointing. By January 2002, President Kabbah declared the war to be over.

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[58] Several ECOWAS states whose leaders were allied to Taylor opposed the UN-imposed ban and sanctions. Their cooperation was required for implementing these measures (Adebajo. 2002).

Chapter 7:
Who are you for?
Women, children and hierarchies of power

When writing about war and the transition to peace it is tempting to relate the basic 'facts' of the war – key players, the political and economic circumstances that led to the conflict, the nature of the divisions – as if one size fits all. We might mention that the war targeted certain groups in different ways, and that children, women and men may have played different roles in the conflict. But this still is not enough. The routes to war and peace were shaped by the patrimonial social structures – entrenched in law – that pervade Sierra Leone. To understand the experiences of men, women and children during and after the war, we need a sense of the social structures that shaped their existence.

Mariane Ferme's (2001) ethnographic research in a Mende community helps explain the hierarchical, interdependent and communitarian social structures that exist, with variations, in much of Sierra Leone. Although Krio and Lebanese communities are more individualistic, they still need to operate within this dominant, interdependent system, especially outside the capital.

Ferme (2001) writes that in Mende society, "everyone must be accounted for by someone else – ... everyone must be linked in a relationship of patronage or clientship" (p. 106). Unattached people (such as strangers) or those not ruled by traditional, male-dominated power mechanisms (women without husbands) are viewed as "elusive and noncompliant agents" (p. 107) and thus potentially dangerous.[59] These dependency relations are rooted in "the emergent legacy of (domestic) slavery" (p. 82), which colonial officials banned in the protectorate in 1926 and 1927. With the ban, slavery evolved into other forms of dependency as masters married slave women, incorporating them and their relatives into polygamous families. This created a complex network of clientship and patronage that transformed slaves into "'cousins' through the politics of marriage" (p. 81). Ferme writes:

> ...The links between marriage and slavery help place in context the degrees of dependence that underpin the Mende notion that everybody is under someone's patronage, or 'for' somebody..., and within which we must consider not only marriage but also the practices whereby dependents, strangers, and other sociological figures of alterity are incorporated within a familiar universe (p. 84).

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[59] This is not an insular culture, however, as the 'stranger' is generously welcomed, even as he or she is seen as a source of instability (Ferme, 2001).

Chiefs and other big men extend their power largely "by being offered women in marriage, or children in fosterage, by families eager to become connected with them" (Ferme, 2001, p. 171). This provides big men with an important source of labour that can be used in mining and agriculture. Ferme writes:

> When talking about the area's big persons, Wunde men and women would comment first on the crowds of people around them (wives, children, or other relatives and dependents) and then on the enormous size of the rice farms that such crowds made possible through their labor. In turn, large numbers of dependents also consumed many resources for their subsistence. Thus the transformation of ordinary persons into extraordinary ones through multiplication was linked to technologies of food production or of mineral extraction, especially diamonds..., and this ensured the continuity of such a large group, and of the big person (p. 172).

Being a big man or woman[60] also carries expectations. The Mende proverb, "the snake that walks alone loses respect" (Ferme, 2001, p. 171) indicates that 'big people' can be condemned if "they do not use their wealth and status to help dependents and instead seek only their own profit." Such people may be accused of gaining wealth through witchcraft and may, like the autonomous underling, be ostracized (p. 110). This expectation of assistance from a steady stream of relatives and other dependents places heavy pressure on anyone who has any income to speak of.

As in peacetime, this predominant system of hierarchical social interdependency shaped people's relations during the war and their approaches to reconciliation after it. Orphaned children or displaced people had to find a patron to provide their basic needs and to ensure their security. Women and girls who joined or were captured by armed forces, had to find strong 'husband' patrons to reduce the likelihood of rape by other male combatants. After the war, many combatants and captives were reluctant to leave their war-time patrons or 'husbands,' even when they entered these relations through violence. As I will discuss later, the demobilization process often perpetuated war-time dependency relations by defining many women and girls as dependents of male combatants and 'camp followers' (Carlson & Mazurana, 2004).

This devotion to patrons might help explain why Foday Sankoh was so successful in securing the loyalty of many of those he 'rescued' from capture by his own or allied forces, first

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[60] In Mende culture, big women ("female *kpako*") are defined differently than big men. Big women are independent of domestic ties – that is, they are not controlled by husbands or male relatives. A big woman also needs to attract dependents but the latter may not necessarily be extensions of her family. Her independence may come from having a good education or an independent income and she may or may not be married. She thus may be regarded as a threat to the community and may be accused of witchcraft or sexual promiscuity (if she is single) (Ferme, 2001, p. 173).

in Liberia and later in Sierra Leone. This master of manipulation frequently reminded his followers that they owed their very lives to his intervention (TRC, 2004).

Ferme (2001) tellingly entitles a chapter: "Strategies of incorporation: Marriage and the Forms of Dependence" (p. 81). Thus reintegrating into a community after the war – incorporation – requires rejoining systems of dependency within a village. Through formal community reintegrative processes, such as cleansing ceremonies, initiations into male and female secret societies, and marriage, young excombatants are recognized as belonging to a community, and are expected behave according to their social position. For youth who were used to wielding power over older people and defying conventions of politeness, such a transition is not always easy and some choose to leave their communities and rejoin their former comrades. In doing so, they do not become autonomous individuals but join other hierarchies.

Despite the seeming permanence of hierarchical structures and unity of village life, Ferme (2001) describes a culture of secrecy and instability. West Africa is well known for male and female secret societies which prepare youth for adulthood, provide gendered support and organization for members, and bind them in common brotherhood or sisterhood. But secrecy is not always unifying. Big men and women may use secrecy and access to information to maintain their power. Such secrecy and control may be counterproductive as, for example, underlings may prevent unpleasant but important information from reaching authoritarian rulers. As Ferme (2001) observes,

> ...the silencing power of secrecy already carries within it the seeds of its destruction, for it is precisely when secrecy is most successful in imposing its rigid constraints that it undermines the flexibility required for power to constantly adapt itself to changing contexts (p. 160).

Equally important, in a climate of danger and abuse of power, secrecy becomes a means by which vulnerable people protect themselves, seize opportunities and passively resist authority (Ferme, 2001). But secrecy as a means of gaining and maintaining power, or as a means of surviving abuses of power, undermines trust and direct, open communication. Secrecy, too, has implications for reconciliation processes.

During the war, crimes against women, men and children were sensational and often gendered. In addition to the murders, mutilations and – often gender-specific – torture that affected all groups, women were taken as war booty by all forces. Most female captives were raped; many were forced to be long-term 'wives' of male combatants. Some were also forced to fight and kill. In addition to the physical and emotional repercussions of these experiences, the

social meaning of these acts for women make their reintegration into traditional society especially difficult.

Children were not only subjected to mass violations, they were targeted en masse for kidnapping, often being forced to commit atrocities at home before they were taken so they felt they could not return. Some became, through careful indoctrination, among the war's most feared fighters, their minds so twisted by violence, drugs, power and culpability that they now have great difficulty adapting to civilian life.

The traditional construction of childhood and adulthood played into children's war experiences. Most directly, the civil defense forces (CDFs) recruited and 'trained' children as fighters using and adapting existing initiation processes that customarily mark a child's transition to adulthood. Also, the status of children at the bottom of an ageist hierarchy may have endangered some and marginalized others so that they were more open to recruitment by rebel factions. In some ways, the war turned the ageist hierarchy upside down and children used to commanding adults with the power of a gun will be reluctant to return to a context where they are denied a public voice.

Women and children were especially hard hit by the war and have a particularly difficult time reintegrating, partly because of their social context before the violence. This chapter focuses on them. As girls fit into both categories, I will discuss aspects of their experiences that are directly relevant to childhood in the section on children, even when these experiences are highly gendered. Discriminatory laws regarding women's rights and protection from violence will be discussed in the section on women.

7.1   Childhood in Sierra Leone

The civil war has shifted our attention to youth in a continent that is demographically the youngest in the world and has made us rethink our benign notions of childhood in the face of the atrocities committed by child combatants. At the same time, the war has demonstrated how adept the young can be at organizing themselves amid the collapse of age-based moral hierarchies, which have always been taken for granted in these societies.

(Ferme, 2001, p. 227)

On a dusty road on the outskirts of Makeni, my interpreter and I needed to find motorcycle taxis to take us back to the hotel. My interpreter's solution was simple. Rather than strain ourselves in the intense heat, he hailed a young boy who was walking by and asked him to

find us two motorcycle drivers. The boy ran off without protest and without imbursement and, before long, two motorcycles arrived.

Children in Sierra Leone are ill-equipped to disobey. They are expected to do the bidding of adults, whether they know them or not. It is seen as a sign of good citizenship. There are merits to this training but it can also be abused. In a society without telephones and where money for transportation is scarce, children – usually boys – are often sent on long and difficult errands for older people who do not ask about what the child himself is doing at that moment. Girls, too, may be given tasks around the compound by older relatives or boys with little reprieve, even when it is their time for studying.

A Sierra Leonean child, as in other African contexts, is not allowed to contradict an elder and even initiated youth cannot "speak for themselves before elders and chiefs." The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2004) noted that:

> Many youths… had been sanctioned for contravening this rule. The offenders were not allowed to speak in their own defence and became embittered at the exceedingly onerous punishments often imposed on them by the Chiefs and elders for defying this custom. Punishment often included the levying of exorbitant fines and resulted in many offenders working as slave labour in order to defray costs. Many discontented youth fled their villages in order to avoid such punishments and when the conflict broke out became easy converts to the cause of the RUF. Their embitterment also manifested itself in acts of revenge against elders and Chiefs during the conflict (vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 38).

Children were also asked by elders to go on errands during the war, sometimes under dangerous conditions. While many adults did their utmost to shelter and protect children, sometimes losing their lives in the effort, others describe sending children on errands in rebel-held territories. One man described being captured by rebels when he went to a neighbouring village during a time of rebel attacks. The rebels stole the contents of his bag but released him. After describing his own capture he added:

> When I was going to that village, I went with a child who was carrying my bag. So after about 15 minutes I turned around and I saw him. And I asked him, "You, you did not run away? You are still behind me?" And the boy said, "Yes papa. I'm still behind you." So I said, "Take our bag" and we returned to town (interview 51, villager).

In this telling account in the presence of villagers, the adult was not concerned about the boy's safety. He was an afterthought. Similar accounts arose in testimonies by men at the TRC. One man described sending his children[61] to his destroyed village:

> After (the attack) no one could see what was happening. I told my children to be brave and go to (the village) and see what was happening. They didn't burn my compound but they burned several others... On February 1995, the rebels came again. They burned all my compound. Two of my children were burned down. We didn't know for two days then we again sent children who were brave and took the two bodies so we were able to bury them (TRC testimony, Bo, May 2, 2003).[62]

No TRC commissioner or leader of evidence noted that the man endangered the children by sending them to occupied areas and thus did not duly protect them. While commissioners made other statements to establish norms, the obligation of adults to protect children was not mentioned in any hearing I attended. The TRC (2004) states that "children, as the most vulnerable group in a conflict situation, are entitled to be protected from war. In particular they are not meant to participate in the conflict themselves as child soldiers or in any other capacity" (vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 223). But it did not comment on civilian adults who sent children on dangerous errands and thus failed to protect them.

These two narratives, and the fact that they were stated almost in passing and without response, indicate that adults did not always protect children before themselves and that such actions as sending children on dangerous errands held some degree of social acceptance. This norm co-exists with the norm which others displayed of protecting children and taking them in when they were orphaned.

Relatedly, children could be seen as jeopardizing adults during the war. One observer noted that when the RUF attacked, people ran to the bush. "They lived off what they could find: bush yams, etc. Families with children were often forced out because people were afraid the children would cry and alert the rebels" (interview 63).

Life for children in Sierra Leone can be very harsh. Most schools, for those lucky enough to attend, use corporal punishment. At home, many parents and guardians also punish children with beatings. As one child care worker said:

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[61] When a person says 'my child,' the person they are referring to may not be their biological child. It is similar with other terms of relations: brother, sister, father, mother, etc.

[62] At the TRC hearings I took notes by hand. In such testimonies I wrote all the key phrases but am not necessarily quoting the witness verbatim.

In Sierra Leone, if a child breaks the norms they are flogged. Even those of us who are educated, yes, I flog my children. Because I tell him this is bad. If you don't accept it I put you down. I think our children normally respond to that relatively faster than saying, "I will seize your bread. I will not give you a meal today. Or I take that toy from you" (interview 38).

Discipline by beating and the heavy involvement of children in the labour of the household and farms are normal practices in many poor countries – and indeed were normal in North America until fairly recently. As the TRC (2004) notes:

In most traditional societies, children are expected to carry out certain domestic tasks such as cooking, shopping, cleaning, laundry duties. fetching water and caring for younger children. Helping out in the field is also commonplace. The use of children in this way should not be perceived as exploitative, but should rather be seen as doing one's bit to assist family and community, thus contributing to the total functioning of the family. In African societies, enhancing the family's social and economic status has a positive impact on the whole family. The roles and responsibilities of children in African societies help to entrench a sense of family and community rather than individualism (vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 42).

If the aim of discipline and work is the genuine welfare of the child and family, and the means are proportional to the ends, then, as the TRC (2004) states, they should not be seen as exploitative or abusive, whether or not we agree with these measures. However, the extreme patrimonial social structure and age-based hierarchy has led to some abuse of young people whose work may be ordered at the whim of elders and who are not allowed to speak on their own behalf.

Sierra Leoneans often say "There is no bad bush to throw away a bad child." It is a national sustaining myth. It claims that in tight-knit communities a child will always have a place, even if it is not with his or her immediate family. This culture of accepting responsibility for other people's children led many families to courageously take in the orphaned or abandoned children of relatives when they had barely enough to survive themselves during the war. Other stories, even before the war, are not so encouraging and, in the words of Zack-Williams (1999) put "paid to the social scientific myth that the 'extended family' has a coping capacity that is essentially elastic" (p. 155).

As the Sierra Leone economy declined during the 1970s and 1980s, the rural poor were hit the hardest. Children – especially girls – were often kept home from school because families could no longer afford uniforms and other school expenses and because the paltry income the children could earn was desperately needed by the family. Those who could not afford to feed

their children, or who hoped for better opportunities for them,[63] often sent them to live with wealthier relatives or unrelated patrons through another African institution: the wardship system. Sometimes the arrangement turns out well and children are loved and cared for as if they are equal members of the family. But in other cases children are exploited and abused. Many fled these situations and headed for larger towns where they became street youth, easily tossed into the nebulous category of 'lumpen' youth (Zack-Williams, 1999). Blesoe writes:

> Generally (foster children) do receive more beatings than children living with their mothers, and they perform the most physically arduous work. They receive less medical care, compared to children with their mothers, and their complaint of illness is often dismissed as faking to avoid work. Many receive little animal protein from their care-takers and are given food of poorer quality... Foster children are punished frequently by food deprivation... leading many to forage largely for themselves: picking wild fruits, stealing... Rates of malnutrition and death are highest among younger ones (in Zack-Williams, 1999, p. 155, 156).

A Government of Sierra Leone survey conducted in 2000 found that 10% of children do not live with their parents, even when the latter are alive (TRC, 2004). The lines of differentiation between children in the household in the many countries where this system is practiced are strikingly visible. Many wards are not sent to school or not given time to study when they do get the chance. Often they must do extra chores to free the foster parents' children to study. "In short," Zack-Williams (1999) writes, "fostering and the wardship system tend to produce a mass of alienated young people in the country" (p. 156). The TRC (2004) observes that the government does not regulate fostering and recommends law reform to govern adoptions, orphanages and foster homes which have proliferated as a result of the war.

The war and its aftermath widened opportunities for child exploitation. With a vast increase in orphaned or rejected children and impoverished families, the Government of Sierra Leone survey found that:

> In 2000... 48% of children were found to be engaged in unpaid work[64] for someone other than a household member and 10% of these children spent more than four hours a day on such tasks... In the same year, 72% of Sierra Leonean children were working in some capacity (TRC 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 330).

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[63] One motive for poor, rural families to send their daughters to the city to serve as ward for wealthier patrons is to avoid an early marriage. I met one teenage girl whose mother sent her for this purpose and so she could get an education. This can be seen as a form of resistance to traditional structures.

[64] In my view, there is little difference between unpaid work and the situation of many, if not most Sierra Leonean workers who are not paid enough to sustain themselves and their families. Unpaid workers still must be fed and lodged. If paid workers can only manage this, their situation is not much different.

The war in Sierra Leone has been viewed by some young people as a generational war, an effort by young people to topple a corrupt older elite who used their power to exploit youth and silence young voices (interview 13). While this frustration may have motivated some marginalized and embittered youth to join forces with the rebels, it cannot have been a motivation for dependent children, whose participation, along with most youths, can be better explained by their abduction and indoctrination.

7.2 Ambiguous spirits and the path to adulthood

In *Things Fall Apart*, Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (1959) tells of Okonkwo's second wife, Ekwefi, who bore ten children, the first nine of whom died in infancy. After the second child died, a medicine man told Okonkwo the infant was an "*ogbanje*, one of those wicked children who, when they died, entered their mothers' wombs to be born again." After losing nine children, Ekwefi gave birth to a daughter, Ezinma, who was sickly but survived. Achebe writes:

Everybody knew she was an *ogbanje*. These bouts of sickness and health were typical of her kind. But she had lived so long that perhaps she had decided to stay. Some of them did become tired of their evil rounds of birth and death, or took pity on their mothers, and stayed. Ekwefi believed deep inside her that Ezinma had come to stay. She believed because it was that faith alone that gave her life any kind of meaning. And this faith had been strengthened when a year or so ago a medicine man had dug up Ezinma's *iyi-uwa*. Everyone knew then that she would live because her bond with the world of *ogbanje* had been broken. Ekwefi was reassured. But such was her anxiety for her daughter that she could not rid herself completely of her fear. And although she believed that the *iyi-uwa* which had been dug up was genuine, she could not ignore the fact that some really evil children sometimes misled people into digging up a specious one (pp. 80, 81).

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) states that childhood extends up to and including the age of 18. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

defines a child as every person younger than 18 unless "majority is attained earlier" (in Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1997, p. 6). Yet childhood and adulthood are interpreted differently in many cultures. Most Sierra Leoneans were not registered at birth[65] and many do not know their age. In much of the country, the transition from childhood to adulthood occurs at puberty and is socially marked by initiation.[66]

Also, the child-centred, rights-based approach of the African Charter or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is ontologically different from many Sierra Leoneans' understanding of childhood. Hoffman (2003) writes that in Sierra Leone, children are better understood as "unfinished projects" of social networks. "They do not belong to them, to be traded on as commodities, but neither do they warrant the special considerations of the person-in-full. They are works in progress, individualized but not quite yet human individuals" (p. 301).

Similar to Achebe's description of the *ogbanje*, Ferme (2001) writes:

(Childhood) is considered an especially ambiguous period characterized by uncertainties regarding a child's survival, moral development, and communication with adults... Central to the social construction of infancy... is the perceived relationship of infants with the world of spirits, which generates loyalties in conflict with the world of the living" (p. 198).

This perspective may be partly explained by high infant mortality rates. In Sierra Leone, the under-five mortality rate was 36% in 1970 and 28% in 2002 (UNDP 2003 Human Development Report) and in rural areas with minimal health services death rates are even higher. Ferme (2001) writes that with such high mortality, "infants are suspected of lacking a commitment to live among humans, because of their links with powerful agencies in the world of spirits, where they are thought to exist before birth" (p. 199).

Hoffman (2003) links this ontology with the recruitment of children as fighters:

Having not yet been initiated, inducted into the secret societies from which they learn the ideals of social behaviour and the techniques for interpreting the world around them, (children) possess a power they cannot reliably control, a power of secrecy and the spirit worlds they have not entirely left. This gives a certain logic to the child as soldier. Children, combatants say, make the best soldiers because they have no fear. They obey orders without question. They are uninhibited by moral concerns... At the heart of these justifications is a sense that children are not inherently innocent... Only initiation, even into an organization the purpose of which is the exercise of violence, transforms the child into its fully human state (p. 301).

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[65] UNICEF estimates that only 46% of children born between 1999 and 2000 were registered, with percentages much higher in urban areas (66%) than rural areas (40%).

[66] Krios and Lebanese have attitudes towards childhood that are more consistent with UN norms.

Initiation not only marks the social transition from childhood to adulthood, it is the criteria for belonging to an ethnic group. Many people, including urban professionals, told me that without being initiated a person is not viewed as 'one of us.'

Initiation processes are usually guided by elders who isolate a group of age and gender cohorts from the community for a period of time. It often involves physical processes that mark the child as belonging to the culture and community. In much of West Africa and parts of East Africa, girls may receive a clitoridectomy – a practice that is outlawed in some African countries but is supported by the Kabbah government (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2005). In some cultures, boys may be marked by facial scars. During the initiation, children may go through a secret ordeal and elders coach them on the responsibilities and knowledge of adulthood.

For girls, initiation is interlinked with marriage and childbirth. In Mende society many brides are chosen before or as they reach puberty and can be initiated into the Sande society. A prospective husband will woo his wife-to-be while arranging and paying for her initiation, after which they will marry. The girl's consent is required but she is often under extreme family pressure to agree (Ferme, 2001). Once married,

> most (adolescent girls) are pressured to begin child-bearing prior to psychological maturity, which contributes to the high level of maternal and infant mortality. Furthermore when a child or adolescent is compelled to marry at a young age and she refuses to consent to sexual relations or is too young to consent, such marriages may result in sexual violence (TRC 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 99).[67]

Strategies of avoiding early marriage, such as sending girls to the city to live and work as wards of wealthier relatives or acquaintances, also make them vulnerable to abuse.

Male initiation is tied to developing hunting and, in times of war, fighting skills, reflecting men's traditional responsibilities as provider and protector. The Poro society into which Mende boys are initiated forms the root of hunting societies that were adapted to form Kamajor militias.

Initiation of children is meant to provide them with a sense of belonging to a nurturing community, but the 'initiations' or 'training' of many children who volunteered or were forced to become combatants were cruel indeed. If initiation marks an important transformative ritual for the child, then it is unsurprising that some have likened the RUF re-education and resocialization

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[67] Non-consensual sex within marriage is not regarded as rape in Sierra Leone even when the wife is under 14, the age at which even consensual sex with a girl is considered a crime (TRC, 2004).

of child captives to a form of initiation. But these war-time 'initiations' marked the kind of transformation that no child deserves and they left many involved facing enormous hurdles if they are to recover from the experience.

7.3   Initiation by fire – the distorted training of child fighters

During the civil war, Sierra Leone was one of the worst places to be a child. Children suffered rape, amputations, and murder. They were the least self-sufficient if orphaned and were particular targets for kidnapping or 'recruitment' by all sides. Twum-Danso (2002) writes that poor children, children living in conflict areas and orphaned or estranged children are most vulnerable to 'voluntary' or forced recruitment. Although Freetown experienced a reprieve for much of the war, when the AFRC/RUF attacked in January 1999 the poorer, eastern part of the city was devastated while the more affluent west side was successfully protected by ECOMOG forces.

School attendance may or may not make children more vulnerable to attack. Closure of schools due to war or lack of other employment may push children and youths to fight. At the same time, especially as rebel forces sought literate members, they often attacked schools and kidnapped schoolchildren (Brett, 2003).

The RUF strategy for controlling abducted children involved severing ties with the old and dramatically resocializing into the new. Children captured by the RUF were often forced to commit atrocities against their own families or communities so they felt they could no longer return home. Many, especially those who tried to flee, were branded with the word RUF so they would always be suspected by other forces and rejected at home. This put them in great danger. Some captives were used as porters, spies, labourers or 'wives' of senior combatants; others were put through combat training (TRC, 2004).

RUF child fighters were organized into segregated 'Small Boys Units' and 'Small Girls Units' but they were trained together. Many children did not survive this 'training,' which could last anywhere from a few weeks to six months, depending on the conditions the RUF faced at the time. The children were taught to use weapons and engage in jungle warfare. Many starved as they were expected to scavenge for themselves. Perceived infractions were punished by beatings, starvation, torture, branding, mutilation and, in the case of desertion, killing or branding (TRC, 2004).

To survive, many children had to outdo each other in cruelty to be perceived as tough and dangerous. This behaviour was rewarded by promotion. A former RUF official said, a child who is "more criminally minded, that is, able to take care of certain issues that are required of a group, he is made a commander" (TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 257). Some children enjoyed the power they exercised over others. The TRC states:

> The treatment of child combatants in the RUF was characterised by extreme cruelty. Living in an environment of total paranoia and oppression, where survival depended on being even more brutal than one's captors, led to the kind of atrocities that Sierra Leone witnessed on such a terrifying scale. In the process, many children became hardened and immune to the savagery they were inflicting on others. They experienced a deep sense of dislocation and disjuncture from society (vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 264).

RUF forces gave children heroin, crack, cocaine, alcohol and, most commonly, marijuana which could be locally grown (TRC, 2004). The latter is not usually associated with aggressive behaviour but as a doctor working with drug-addicted children explains:

> Whenever you take drugs... the effect is the same. What happens is that you become confused... you cannot concentrate very well. Your attention is not sustained; orientation for place and time is disturbed. That means you cannot even understand where you are... They don't have any judgment at all. They just walk by instinct and during that time anything you tell them to do... they don't know that what they are going to do is wrong... They just blindly follow instructions... Of all the patients admitted to the Kissy Mental Hospital during the last ten years, 88% of them (are) for drug problems (TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 306).

Kamajors, who were rooted in local communities, took a different approach. They usurped traditional initiation processes to gain and train recruits. Village elders were pressured to recruit a quota of children to be 'trained' as soldiers or face a loss of political credibility. Children had little choice but to 'volunteer' as they were told that "fighting to defend their communities was their civic duty" (TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 269).

Kamajor initiators manipulated animist beliefs in supernatural forces to give recruits a sense of invincibility. High Priest Kondewa developed an initiation process:

> ... that promised 'bullet proof' protection to the combatants in battle.[68] The initiation contained a lot of rituals, including cannibalism as well as a fearful outing in a grave yard at night that served to create some mysticism around the process... The initiation ceremony was a cleverly manipulated process that duped

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[68] The deception of 'bullet-proof' magic was carried out by doctoring cartridges which were fired at close range to initiates (TRC, 2004). As one Mende man explained to me, if an initiate was killed in this process, it was because he was an RUF infiltrator so the 'magic' would not work on him.

the mass of the membership into believing that they were the chosen ones blessed by the gods and ancestors to liberate their people" (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 802, 805).

As one former CDF member stated, "It was all about believing... If you make a man's mind, then you can make him feel that something has happened when in fact it does not exist. There was nothing like magical powers... They used basic deception to win people over" (TRC, 2004, vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 805).

The TRC (2004) strongly condemned this "perversion of the sacred and long-standing tradition of initiation and rites of passage" (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 814):

> It cannot be permissible for figures of authority, whether their leadership is political, factional, spiritual or moral, to so wilfully abuse the rights of those who look up to them. The Commission refuses to slight the integrity of any of those who were killed during an initiation process, for they participated in most instances to earn themselves what they saw as the power, but which was actually the right, to defend themselves, their families and their communities in a country whose state security apparatus had collapsed or turned against them (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 812).

Children 'initiated' as Kamajors have a different load to carry than those with the RUF. While Kamajors did commit atrocities – some, like cannibalism, that were part of the ritual process of becoming a Kamajor (TRC, 2004) – they must also come to terms with the fallacy of their own transcendental beliefs and denial of culpability by those who see themselves as heroes. Any former Kamajor speaking out about atrocities risks antagonising those who want to preserve the myth in simplistic good vs. evil terms.

All Sierra Leone fighting forces used child combatants. The National Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration formally demobilized 6,845 child combatants, of which 529 were girls (Child Soldier Global Report, 2004).[69] All sides committed atrocities, including murder, torture, mutilations, cannibalism and rape, although some factions were better known for certain crimes than others. Children on all sides participated in these crimes, either as perpetrators, collaborators or witnesses. In addition, many former child combatants emerged from the war addicted to drugs, which were initially forced on them but on which they developed a dependency. With the end of the war, these children have incredible psychological and physical hurdles to overcome to become healthy citizens in a peaceful society.

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[69] Of these, 3,710 children were with the RUF and 2,026 with CDFs (TRC, 2004).

7.4   The plight of civilian children during the war

Child soldiers were not the only children to suffer greatly from the war. Many children were murdered, amputated, raped or traumatized from loss of loved ones or witnessing crimes. Many became orphaned or were kidnapped, some at such a young age that they cannot identify where they came from. Many fled to refugee camps in countries like Guinea. UNICEF estimates that unaccompanied minors accounted for around five percent of the refugee population. These children were particularly vulnerable to starvation, disease and abuse in the camps. Police harassment, "arbitrary arrests and detention" and rape were perils of camp life in Guinea. As a UNICEF representative stated, "Throughout their time in these camps, refugee girls as young as five became victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence at an astonishing rate considering the ostensible civilian nature of the camp" (in TRC 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 320).

In the camps, many girls were forced to barter sex for the medical and food aid to which they were legally entitled. This "widespread" practice was exposed in a survey conducted by UNHCR and Save the Children, UK. Peacekeepers, UN staff, NGO and aid workers were among those who "exploited the extreme disparity surrounding the refugee population by using the very humanitarian aid and services intended to benefit them as a tool for exploitation" (TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 347).

During the 1990s, few Sierra Leonean children knew the nurturing, positive learning and joy that should be part of growing up. For a group that comprises more than half the national population,[70] the mass traumatization and corruption of children during the war will be difficult for the country to overcome. As UNICEF states:

> The wounds, both physical and psychological, inflicted upon children will leave permanent marks on them and their families, as well as on the entire Sierra Leonean community and indeed all of humanity. In some ways it is as if a new level of cruelty has been attained in this war, setting the bar lower than ever imagined (in TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 188).

7.5   A 'culture of silence': The status of women in peacetime

> *The low status of women is steeped in deep cultural tradition. In traditional Sierra Leonean society, the wife and children are at the mercy of the family. Women have little control or influence over decision-making. Certain socio-cultural practices provide the leading cause of gender disparity and the inferior status of women as evidenced by: high fertility rate, high infant and child mortality rates, high adult female illiteracy rate, exclusion of women from*

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[70] According to UNICEF, Sierra Leone had around 2,518,000 children under 18 in 2003 (http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone_statistics.html). UNDP (2003) states that the total population in 2002 was around 4.8 million (http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/cty/cty_f_SLE.html).

In wars that pit one ethnic or religious group against another, rape is often used systematically to demoralize and humiliate 'enemy' men and destroy the fabric of 'enemy' culture. But the war in Sierra Leone was not sectoral. What explains, then, the mass practice of rape by all sides against the very female civilians they claimed to be fighting for? How can we account for widespread sexual exploitation of women and girls by aid workers? And how can we understand and anticipate the difficulties women will experience as they try to reintegrate into their communities?

Many observers, including the TRC (2004), attribute wartime violence against women and girls to their low status even before the war began. While this does not explain extreme terror tactics against women[71] that are better understood as strategies of population control, it does help explain the special vulnerability of primarily rural women during and after the war, the common practice of raping women as war 'booty' and the gendered experiences of women as civilians, captives and as part of armed forces.

In Sierra Leone, a woman's primary role is that of mother. Her legal and social status is defined by that role. Ideally a woman will always have a conscientious male relative – a father, husband or son – to look after her and it is her responsibility to provide sons, raise children, and keep these men happy. Even in peacetime, the situation facing many women was far from ideal. The war and its aftermath shattered any hope of many women benefiting from this system.

Sierra Leone has two general systems of law and four systems of family law that govern much of women's lives. Like many former colonies, Sierra Leone inherited English common law which tends to govern those in the Western Area around Freetown and those not indigenous to the country. Indigenous Sierra Leoneans in the provinces are largely governed by customary law, which is based on traditional legal systems.

The 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone guarantees women the same "fundamental human rights and freedom" as men (section 15). But this promise is effectively nullified by section 27(4) which allows discrimination in matters of 'personal law,' including marriage, inheritance and

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[71] For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to boys and men, girls and women as 'men' and 'women' respectively unless boys and girls need to be referred to specifically.

divorce. Rights regarding these matters differ according to the type of marriage: civil, Christian, Islamic or customary (TRC, 2004).

Although the age of majority is 21 under common law, under customary law it is not fixed. Under customary law, boys reach adulthood after their initiation around puberty while a girl or woman "does not attain the status of full adulthood, as she is always under the guardianship of the male members of her family while unmarried, or of her husband when married." Under Islamic and customary laws, there is no minimum age of marriage and girls younger than ten may marry. Upon divorce or the death of her husband, she may be under the guardianship of her father, son, or husband's brother (TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 66). According to the Mende worldview:

> Every woman must be affiliated to a man if she is to find acceptance in the community. This insistence is rooted in the belief that a woman's prayer goes to God through a man. Consequently, a woman without a man is not considered to be "complete" by other members of the community (TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 3, ¶ 82).

Outside the Western Area, land ownership is largely by tenure, which is administered by the Chiefdom Council. Women can purchase land but they are rarely in an economic position to do so. Most land rights are acquired through inheritance and in most cases women's right to inherit property is limited or nonexistent. This affects the security of women and children and limits the former's access to credit. Thus, discriminatory 'personal' laws keep most women and children dependent and on the edge of even greater impoverishment (HRW, 2002; TRC, 2004).

Low literacy, especially for women, contributes to poverty and dependency. According to UNICEF, adult literacy in 1990 was 40% for males and 14% for females[22] (www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone_statistics.html). Literacy in rural areas is much lower than in towns.

Given the continuing economic decline since the 1980s, many families cannot afford to send their children to school. Even with free primary education for girls which has been recently implemented, costs include uniforms, books, other supplies, and sometimes small fees requested by teachers, many of whom are not paid regularly. Given a choice, many families devote their meagre resources to educating their sons as girls are often expected to marry early. In some

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[22] The same set of statistics by UNICEF claims the literacy rate in 2000 was 51% and 23% for men and women respectively (www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone_statistics.html). However, because the war prevented most rural children from attending school, and researchers could not have reached the then-occupied north and east of the country where illiteracy is highest, these numbers are suspect.

regions, education is seen as clashing with traditional values and girls' marriage prospects so they are kept home (interview 26).

The TRC report (2004) often uses the phrase 'culture of silence' to describe attitudes towards rape, incest and assault of women and children, especially within the home. Customary law permits a husband to "reasonably chastise his wife by physical force" (Joko Smart in HRW, 2002, p. 19). A woman can only divorce her husband for cruelty if beatings are 'excessive' and frequent – "a single act of physical and brutal force is permitted" (HRW, p. 19). The Physicians for Human Rights (2002) found that 60% of women in their study felt that it is a husband's right to hit his wife.

Sierra Leone's laws are inadequate to deal with the mass rapes that occurred during the war – even those occurring after the 1999 amnesty. Even before the war, rape was rarely prosecuted. Common laws dealing with rape date back to 1960, when Sierra Leone was still a colony, although amendments were made in 1972. The law prohibits "carnal knowledge and abuse of any girl under the age of 13 years with or without her consent," but this does not extend to marriage. It is also a crime to have sex with a girl under 14 unless she is deemed to be a prostitute or has "known immoral character." Not only does this not protect girls judged to be 'immoral,' it also means that the defense will go to great lengths to prove a rape victim's past 'immoral' habits, thus doubly traumatizing her. Evidentiary requirements are also problematic as the testimony of one witness is insufficient to prove a case. Sexual assaults against boys are not explicitly provided for under the law (TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 4, ¶ 74, 78).

For most of Sierra Leone, rape is prosecuted in local courts under customary law, even though "all serious criminal cases should automatically be tried under general law" (HRW, 2002, p. 21). Punishments for rape include fines – 'woman damage' or 'virgin money' which goes to the husband or family for lost honour – beatings, purification rites and being forced to marry the victim. However, as the TRC report (2004) notes, taking a rape case to the local courts requires that the rape victim publicly declare the crime:

> In a society where silence around sexual violence holds sway, the notion of a 'public declaration' is problematic. In addition, fear of shame, ostracisation, stigma, bureaucracy, the disappearance of witnesses and a lack of financial capacity to take a case forward all militate against the victim making the violation known publicly. Hence out-of-court settlements are common. A pervasive "culture of silence" around rape and other acts of sexual violence tends to discourage women and girls from coming forward (vol. 3b, chap. 3, ¶ 94).

This 'culture of silence' continues in relation to war rapes. As one man said, "One of my relatives was raped but we don't talk about it." This denial is meant as a kindness. If people pretend the rape never happened, the woman will not suffer embarrassment and stigma. But embarrassment and stigma are mirrors cast upon society itself.

7.6 Women's and girls' experiences during the war

When discussing women's experiences during the war, it is tempting to focus on crimes inflicted against them. The 'unspeakable' acts of violence inflicted on all ages and segments of the population – especially in poorer and rural areas – seemed to reach new levels of cruelty. These phenomenal acts of terror were not largely spurred by malice, greed or anger, but by a desire to control the population in the absence of legitimacy and a coherent populist ideology that might provide it.[73]

RUF and AFRC terror tactics aimed to dramatically destroy the things people cherished most: family love, trust, sexual reproduction, hands and feet, the cultural fabric of the community. Not only were men and women sexually tortured, the RUF was notorious for amputating limbs; splitting open the bellies of pregnant women; forcing family members to watch while mothers, daughters and sisters were raped; forcing sons to rape mothers and mothers to sing and dance as they held the heads of decapitated sons in their hands, to name a few atrocities (HRW, 2003). The common use of psychological torture is captured in the title of a Human Rights Watch (2003) report: "We'll Kill You if You Cry": Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict. These tactics also effectively communicated to enemy combatants the consequences of capture and to RUF combatants and captives the consequences of escape. It is little wonder that so many SLA soldiers fled RUF attacks. Whatever their motivation, cruel acts have obvious emotional, psychological, physical and financial implications for those who survived them.

Beyond these orchestrated terror tactics, all sides raped, destroyed property, looted or forced people to provide them with food and goods – though CDFs and early SLA to a lesser degree. Women and children were especially vulnerable as they were still responsible for gathering firewood, water and food. Many women and their dependents in female-headed households survived by fleeing to refugee camps where they were again vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Other women survived as market women who risked their lives by travelling to sell food and other goods.

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[73] This explains why RUF acts of terror escalated in Phases II and III of the war after RUF forces abandoned efforts to maintain an ideology (TRC, 2004).

Tens of thousands of girls and women were also abducted or recruited into the armed factions, though the numbers are difficult to estimate. Because many girls and women did not survive, and because of the stigma of association with armed forces (implying a loss of virginity or fidelity), many returning women did not officially demobilize, preferring instead to pretend they had been refugees in Guinea. Carlson and Mazurana (2004) estimate that almost 1/3 of around 48,000 child soldiers were girls. This excludes the thousands of captive and recruited girls who did not serve as fighters.

Women almost always took on more roles than men. Carlson and Mazurana (2004) write that women were used as labourers, communications technicians, cooks, nurses, messengers, spies, combatants and forced 'wives.' Of 50 girls and women they surveyed who had been with the fighting forces, 44% received basic military training and all those who listed their primary role as 'fighter' said they were forced to be 'wives.'

Being the 'wife' of a strong commander gave women and girls some protection from rape and abuse by other combatants. Given their vulnerable situation, it was often to women's advantage to stay in these relationships, though rapes occurred when husbands were absent. When a husband died or was unable to hold off challengers, the girl would be passed on – or would voluntarily move – to another commander (TRC, 2004).

Many girls and women had children with these commanders and at the war's end, when combatants were being demobilized, they were often viewed as 'dependents' and did not receive assistance (Carlson & Mazurana 2004). Many who returned home were:

> shunned and punished by a society which refuses to acknowledge that it is their failures that led to this conflict and their failure to protect women and girls that has led to the plight they find themselves in today (TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 3, ¶ 8).

Women were not only war victims. They protected their families and adopted new roles in the absence of men. Many fought for democracy and peace; others committed atrocities and willingly assisted armed forces in full knowledge of their crimes. But because of the gendered nature of crimes against them, the physical and social implications of those crimes, and their discriminatory social and legal context, women face special hurdles in reintegrating into, and reconciling with, families and communities.

In this brief overview of the history of the war I highlighted major tensions that need to be resolved if individual, community-level and national reconciliation are to occur. While it is tempting to emphasize the sensational crimes of war, we also need to focus on the equally

outrageous but more banal – and legal – systems of exploitation, discrimination and abuse of power that led to the war in the first place and to which people return after. We must also consider the social and economic environments through which the full impact of a war crime is interpreted. This is the context within which my findings, presented in Part III, must be understood.

Part III

Findings

Forward

In the peace negotiations and cease-fire agreements that led to the civil war's end, negotiators layered the institutional elements of a shared peaceful future, the first form of political reconciliation. Two important reintegrative and conciliatory institutions emerged directly from these talks: the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR), which worked together with UN peacekeeping forces (UNAMSIL) to transform excombatants from soldiers into peaceful citizens; and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Two other institutions are also significant for reintegration: the Special Court and the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), NCDDR's counterpart aimed at helping civilians.

These four institutions, taken together, formed the mainstay of Sierra Leone's official security, reintegration and reconciliation strategy immediately after the war. Sierra Leoneans would see little justice for the massive crimes committed during the war. Only the few deemed most responsible for these crimes would be indicted by the Special Court. For the tens of thousands of displaced people, war wounded and excombatants, reintegration was driven by the necessity of placating potential spoilers of peace. And it was guided and justified by a tradition-inspired ideal articulated in the much-quoted saying: "There is no place to throw away a bad child."

Chapter eight examines the ontological vision captured by this expression, the reintegrative work of NCDDR and NaCSA, and the experiences of excombatants returning home. Chapter nine focuses on the TRC's reintegrative and conciliatory roles. And chapter ten looks at the gaps in these processes and the informal ways in which people build trust in the absence of opportunities for direct communication.

Chapter 8:
Institutions of reintegration

8.1 "There is no bad bush to throw away a bad child": the guiding ideal

We have a saying in the local language: 'No bad bush no de fo trowe way bad pikin'... which means 'There is no forest for a bad child.' You know, the culture has... a spirit of acceptance, forgiveness, solidarity. So there is no place for a bad child. No matter how much you have done, they don't put you to... say for example to juvenile homes. We don't have juvenile homes here. So no matter how much you have done, they always take it to be a child. A child is a child.

William, NGO reintegration worker (interview 2).

Sierra Leoneans dug into their "treasure trove called custom" and found a national sustaining myth. "There is no bad bush to throw away a bad child" means that children will always be forgiven and someone – in the extended family or village – will always take them in. This communitarian ontology, which proponents contrast with Western individualism, extends beyond children. It holds that everybody belongs to a community, everyone can contribute to its welfare, and everyone has a valued place in it. This is the perfect ideal for a country needing enormous community capacity to forgive and reabsorb the displaced, the wounded and the guilty. And it directly addresses the first conciliatory need of peacetime after an intra-communal war: individual-community reconciliation.

Unsurprisingly, reintegration workers were passionate about this 'African' ontology that appeared early in my interviews and became a theme of inquiry. Does this ideal of community belonging and forgiveness reflect the reality of most Sierra Leoneans or is it a romantic and useful conciliatory ideal, similar to the concept of *ubuntu* in South Africa? If it did once reflect a reality, can a war-strained community still absorb so many troubled and needy people, as the ideal suggests? Government leaders, NCDDR and reintegration organizations hope that communities have that capacity. Selling this ideal to excombatants, war victims and the population is key to their reintegration strategy.

The reintegration workers I interviewed tended to stress three things: the need to provide excombatants with economically viable alternatives to fighting; the natural capacity of African cultures and communities to absorb all community members; and the desire of most traditional Sierra Leoneans to be amongst their own people. In a country where rural services have long been neglected or destroyed by war, populations of major towns are burgeoning far beyond their capacities to absorb, and increased agricultural production is greatly needed, it is logical to stress

community values and resources in the hope that people will return home. At the same time reintegration workers are well aware of the need for schools and other facilities in rural areas so people will want to stay there.

Joe, the head of a child reintegration organization, is clear in his vision that all people have a place in their home communities. When talking about amputees' reluctance to return home (see 8.3.3), he emphasized that everyone can contribute to village life:

> When I am in my own community, I know I am valued... I know that I have to contribute in one way or the other. If I am an elderly person who used to be a very good farmer but now is not doing it, (I) can direct the young people... to say well this and this were the old methods of doing it... (Even) those who had an accident in the old times before the war... they became so valued. They became blacksmiths. They became, you know, carpenters... And they were *contributing* to the building of the community. And they married, they have wives and they have children and their children became part of their consolation (interview 19).

Similarly, he advises excombatants that contributing to the community is the best way to gain acceptance:

> I tell (child combatants), "O.k., you have learned. You are going to learn a skill. If you learn the skill of carpentry, if you go back to your village, you might have burned the chief's house but the chief is building. Suppose you contribute to the building of that house. You have become an actor in the development of that community. And the chief will take you now as a valuable person... If you go back to your community, you make a contribution, they know your value now, that you are not just any child who was going out (interview 19).

This ideal of belonging, mutual assistance, reconciliation and forgiveness which *is* part of Sierra Leonean life provides a wonderful vision for community-based reintegration and reconciliation but it ignores the harsh realities facing many people, especially children. There may be no home for juvenile offenders but children were treated badly during the war. They were endangered, recruited, violated and summarily executed by all sides. Even after the Kabbah government returned to power in 1998, a man interviewed by the TRC stated that many children were in Pandemba Road Prison in conditions which the TRC (2004) described as "deplorable" (vol. 3a, chap. 3, ¶ 930). A juvenile home would be preferable to that. And many children continue to be exploited, working as wards or free labourers in work that does not benefit them or their families.

It is therefore important, in supporting this ideal of 'community belonging,' to avoid feeding exploitative structures and power abuses that fed the war. Foreign donors in particular

may be drawn to such ideals without sufficient appreciation of the complex relationships of village life. There needs to be much more internal discussion and research on the individual outcomes of programs based on these culturally grounded but romantic ideals that may be blind to important social strains and tensions.

8.2   Ordinary foot soldiers

> NCDDR was set up for us to get peace at all cost...It is because... Sierra Leoneans don't want the recurrence of war. And that's what's happening in Liberia now. That is why we actually put them into institutions and we even give them allowances... No Sierra Leonean is happy about that. You cannot come and burn my house or kill my sister or my father or raze down my whole family and then at the same time I sponsor you. It's that we are paying for peace at all costs.
> **(Stephen, NCDDR worker, interview 21)**

> Young men will remain dangerous as long as they do not have a project.
> **(Aid worker interviewed by International Crisis Group, 2004, p. 12)**

At the end of the war, Sierra Leone was faced with the challenge of disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating more than 70,000 combatants[4] who together possessed between 300,000 and 1.5 million weapons, according to UN estimates. The government also needed to assist hundreds of thousands of displaced, traumatized, wounded and impoverished citizens. Working with the UN, international donors, and local and international NGOs, the Kabbah government took a two-prong approach to reintegration. The National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) led demobilization and reintegration efforts for excombatants and provided them with financial assistance and training. The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) oversaw the return of refugees and displaced people to their homes and continues to be the central agency channelling donor money to communities for economic projects or infrastructure (HRW, 2005; Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 2002; ICG, 2004).

The two programs are not parallel, however. Unlike excombatants, most civilians did not receive individual assistance or training through NaCSA and this created a sense of imbalance and grievance. While most Sierra Leoneans know that excombatants need to reintegrate and do not begrudge them assistance and training, many resent the fact that they cannot afford to send

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[4] According to Human Rights Watch (2005) 72,490 combatants went through the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program.

their own children to school or receive training themselves. To some, this implies that excombatants are being rewarded for their crimes.

NCDDR, which completed its mandate in December 2003, was chaired by the president and included top representatives of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), each armed faction, international donors and NGOs. Working in partnership with UNAMSIL, NCDDR oversaw the official process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of excombatants. Though UNAMSIL supported many aspects of reintegration, it was mainly responsible for the disarmament and demobilization stages of the process (ISS, 2002).

For most excombatants, reintegrating into civilian life formally began when they turned in their weapons to UNAMSIL at a designated reception centre after proving basic competence in handling it (Carlson & Mazurana, 2004). But disarmament was not as simple as it may appear. UN forces, inexperienced in the region, often relied on local commanders to help administer the process. This was supposed to facilitate organization and avoid backlashes from commanders who might resent their forces being demobilized without their consent. However it also enabled commanders to profit from their position at the expense of their underlings. Once again, it seems that wherever there is a high-level gatekeeper there is a toll.

Thus, while NCDDR had checks guarding against top-level corruption, their reliance on commanders set the stage for widespread corruption between excombatants themselves (HRW, 2005). As Hoffman (2003) observes:

> The irony is that for those youth for whom militarization seemed an enticing opportunity to subvert the systems of patronage and its gerontocratic masters, the para-military organizations in which they find themselves are no less so. The warlord organizations that replace (the neo-patrimonial rule of a state-based patronage system), exploiting the region's mineral resources through youth labour and violence, are dependent almost entirely on the dictatorial rule of a charismatic leader who promises an alternative form of authority to the patronage system but replicates its most exploitative aspects (p. 305).

NCDDR asked commanders to submit lists of their underlings who were eligible for demobilization benefits. However, the latter often presented false lists recommending the demobilization of friends and relatives, some of whom had not been with the armed forces at all, in exchange for a cut of the benefits (HRW, 2005).

Kamajors were notorious for this corruption, partly because CDFs had few weapons and these were largely controlled by commanders.[75] Commanders could select who would receive weapons and thus who was eligible for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) benefits (Hoffman, 2003). Hoffman explains:

> If a commander held four or five firearms, maybe he would ask for a little something in return for giving them out to a few of his men. After all, he had financial troubles of his own. A third or a half of the newly-minted ex-combatant's pay packet seemed a fair trade for the opportunity to pass through disarmament and train for a job in post-war Sierra Leone. The upshot was that only those who made the necessary bargains with their commanders had any hope of passing through the locked gate to the inside of the stadium. What's more, only those commanders who themselves made the proper gestures toward the highest-ranking elders in the militia – usually men of standing and means in the community – were likely to have their men selected by gatekeepers like General Joe... In sum, to be admitted past the gate at DDR was to illustrate the second synonym of youth – its 'vertical' dependence on those with greater access to patronage resources (pp. 297, 298).

Though excombatants "consistently complained" that their commanders had too much control over who received demobilization benefits and were abusing their position for their own enrichment, little was done to correct the situation. This led to riots at some demobilization centres (HRW, 2005, p. 50). As I discuss in section 8.3.8, some Kamajor commanders also promised their underlings ample rewards for their patriotism and the latter therefore declined NCDDR opportunities. These rewards never came and many Kamajors and other excombatants were left impoverished, feeling betrayed by their leaders, and unwilling to return home without receiving the benefits promised to them. This poverty, denial of skills training opportunities and frustration drove some excombatants to join military operations in Guinea, Liberia and the Ivory Coast. The skills they learned during the war in Sierra Leone could at least be put to use in looting the poor in neighbouring countries (HRW, 2005).

Those who did enter the disarmament process received an orientation, interview, registration, weapons collection, verification of eligibility and transportation to demobilization centres. At demobilization camps, excombatants were issued with identity cards and provided with reinsertion packages that included "basic necessities," transportation allowances, and 300,000 leones (around US $143) to support them during the first three months of transition (HRW, 2005; ISS, 2002, p. 2; interview 21).

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[75] Also, according to Ferme and Hoffman (2004), most Kamajors reported fighting with cutlasses (machetes) and these were not among the weapons recognized in the NCDDR program.

Demobilization could take anywhere from less than a day to two weeks. Most excombatants attended classes on democracy and civics. Some also received classes on family planning and HIV/AIDs. Though a class on human rights was proposed, it was considered to be too controversial and the idea was dropped (HRW, 2005).

After they arrived at their chosen place of resettlement, excombatants were supposed to be provided with training or education options and a small allowance to sustain them during training (Carlson & Mazurana, 2004).[76] When the training was complete they were provided with a small start up kit to begin their new business. This was the formal reintegration component of the program.

Stephen, an NCDDR reintegration officer, categorizes reintegration efforts as either social or economic (interview 21). Regardless of their motive for joining the fighting forces, whether they were captured or 'volunteered,' many combatants come to see war as an economic activity. Usually unpaid, combatants sustain themselves and their comrades by looting, forcing the 'hospitality' of civilians or commandeering farm produce. Most require an alternative way of supporting themselves in order to give up their weapons, their source of food and income.

Most NCDDR reintegrative efforts, therefore, focused on providing excombatants with skills and training to support themselves and their families. Some excombatants were offered opportunities to pursue formal education,[77] while others entered vocational training and apprenticeship programs such as mechanics, tailoring, carpentry, driving, metal work and, for women, cloth dying (Ginifer, 2003; interview 21). A few excombatants were able to study professional skills such as management, accountancy and computer studies. Ginifer writes:

> Improving education opportunities has been seen as particularly important, as 36 per cent of ex-combatants surveyed never attended school and only one per cent of the entire 'fighting population' were schooled up to higher education level (chap. 2, p. 4).

Though most young people I encountered, excombatant or civilian, expressed a desire for formal education, only a few opportunities were provided for adult excombatants to complete high school or attend university with the sponsorship of NCDDR. According to Human Rights Watch (2005), many of those who received these opportunities were commanders.

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[76] Some CDF commanders collected demobilized combatants' identity cards for 'safekeeping' after demobilization and sold the latter's space in a training program to others. When the demobilized combatant went to register for training he would be told that his space was already taken (HRW, 2005).

[77] Ginifer (2003) writes that by October 2002, 56,751 excombatants had registered for reintegration. By May 2002, NCDDR had sponsored 6,452 excombatants to attend school.

Reintegration workers regarded skills training as a route to social reintegration. As Joe explained, by doing something useful in the community, excombatants can (re)earn the trust of civilians, develop a vested interest in civilian life and contribute to the community itself. As I will explain in chapter ten, civilians overwhelmingly said that they regained trust in excombatants by watching them. Having a profile and a useful function in the community enabled civilians to watch them at work.[*]

But having a useful economic function was not enough. Although many excombatants were warmly welcomed by their families and communities – especially those who were sent by the community to join CDFs and those who were clearly kidnapped and did not commit crimes in their villages – others needed intermediaries to pave the way for their return.

Traditionally, if a conflict or problem arises between community members, those involved would not address the problem directly but would ask a respected person to intervene on their behalf. This is seen as a sign of proper humility. It was therefore better for a reintegration officer or other official to appeal to a community on behalf of an excombatant than for excombatants to return directly. As one Mende elder explains:

> When the bush cow gets onto somebody's farm and feeds on his plants, either rice or whatsoever, that cow will not sleep that night because he realizes he has done bad, he has destroyed something. That's what those people are, those who did wrong with people. They have done terrible damage. Now that we have come back to sit down, they will not just come back to settle. They will always go through places like DDR "We want to go there so please go and beg for us." When we agree then when they come they will settle down (interview 52).

Such a formal appeal, if successful, establishes a commitment by the chief and community to help the excombatant and make him or her welcome. This commitment is important to ensure that the excombatant is not ostracized, a common punishment for those who offended the community. As Joe, the reintegration worker, said, "Every African is afraid of ostracizing" (interview 19).

Ostracism is not exile: it is a refusal of community members to interact with the offender. The Mende elder explains:

> I want to tell you a story. Before the end of the war, when the military took over, one of them left and went to his home town. At that time people had not gone

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[*] Hoffman (2004) cautions against making artificial distinctions between people's economic and social lives. "Many youth... were unable to dissociate their participation in the conflict from their relationship to patrons on whom they depended for both economic and social livelihoods – patrons who either ordered their young 'clients' to fight or who served as their commanders with the various militias" (p. 224).

there to talk to people to forgive them. He told them "I have come so let's sit down." They said ok. Just like we are sitting down here the three of us. So when this man comes here, all of them will just leave the place. When he says good morning, good afternoon to anybody, when he greets people (they won't return the greeting). There was nobody to cook for him. So he went back to the bush. That is why we are afraid to treat them in that way so that they will go back (interview 52).

Still, many excombatants do not remain long in their villages reflecting the long and difficult process of regaining acceptance and trust.

NCDDR officials were well aware that social acceptance of excombatants was not automatic. They worked with local NGOs to encourage civilians to accept excombatants back. As NCDDR reintegration worker Stephen explains:

At times the NCDDR staff move to these different, different locations, hold meetings and talk to the people and preach the message of forgiveness, reconciliation and acceptance. Because what we notice was that the majority of the excombatants who hail from the east and the south are in the northern region and they are afraid to come back to their places of origin... because of reprisals... Because some of them did awful things in their places of origin (interview 21).

In one community, NCDDR officials saw that villagers were reluctant to accept a high-level RUF commander back and decided that 'sensitization' was needed. As one villager described the process:

DDR personally came here to have (a meeting at the) court barré.[79] In that meeting there's the question of Mr. ___ coming back... So people were against it ... DDR also planned another (event). They brought a skit here for reconciliation... They did that at the court barré. For homecoming for those people who had done something bad. They regretted what they had done and what they (wanted us) to accept them to come back.

Over 30 workshops were held here. All this on conflict resolution. Lots and lots and lots of workshops. All this around trying to reconcile with those who have done wrong and try to find a way to bring them back. We have done that. We have had skits. I myself was involved... in one skit. All this on reconciliation (interview 49).

Even with the help of an intermediary, and this 'sensitization' pressure, social reintegration was not easy for many excombatants, especially those associated with the RUF who were returning to villages in the south.

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[79] A court barré is a central village court where important meetings and traditional court sessions are held.

Rosalind Shaw (2002) claims, based on observation of reintegrative rituals, that people in different regions of Sierra Leone have "striking(ly)" different attitudes toward the return of child ex-combatants. In Koinadugu, families conducted "rituals to thank the 'old ones' and God for the safe return of their child (while) those in Mamamah and Makeni did so in order to bring about an inner transformation in the child" (p. 3).

However, the key differences in her two examples were not regional; they reflected the faction the children fought with and whether they had the support of the community and family. In Koinadugu, the children she described 'voluntarily' joined the CDFs, usually with the permission of their families and communities. Their families prayed for them while they were away (Shaw, 2002) and held them in the same heroic regard as any family who sends a loved one to war to protect the homeland. Naturally they thanked God or the 'old ones' for their safe return.

In the north, children were kidnapped, traumatized and resocialized by the RUF. Predictably the families prayed for a transformation in these children, to change them from traumatized children who knew the rule of violence to peaceful, happy children who fit into the community and family.

A similar contrast could be observed between Kamajor attitudes and those of former RUF who returned to their communities. The CDFs I met spoke with confidence and regarded themselves as heroes who acted bravely to protect their communities and the country, though they did not tend to acknowledge CDF abuses. At a time when SLA soldiers could not be relied on to protect communities and indeed seemed to be colluding with the rebels, CDFs stood their ground, often with few weapons and little meaningful training. Even though community members quietly acknowledged CDF abuses, they did not dare challenge local 'heroes.' By contrast, those who had been with the RUF, often under duress, had to prove themselves to the community to gain acceptance.

This contrast is evident in a series of interviews I did in a Mende village that I will call 'Togo.' I heard about this village in Freetown when I asked about communities that refused the return of an excombatant. The people of 'Togo' said they would not accept a senior RUF commander back and NCDDR officials were trying to persuade them to change their minds. I followed this up with NCDDR in Bo and reintegration officers kindly introduced me to the acting chief and community leaders in 'Togo.' The acting chief of the village kindly arranged 12 interviews for me, to be conducted over two days. The interviews were with an equal number of men and women covering a broad spectrum of the population: educators; chiefs; health care

professionals; market women and excombatants. Of the 12, one person declined an interview at the last minute.

Half the interviews occurred in the presence of others – usually family members but sometimes friends. This seemed to be the preference of the interviewees. The other half took place in private and in most of these cases the person indicated that this was her or his preference. Most were conducted in Mende with the excellent interpretation of my research assistant, Musa Jambawai.

The two days in Togo provided me with some of the richest interview-based insights into the challenges of post-war reintegration and reconciliation. I refer to this visit at length in sections 8.2.1, 8.3 and 10.3.

8.2.1   An uneasy return: The Mende village of 'Togo'

Togo was much like many small communities in the years immediately after war. Signs of optimism and rebuilding mingled with ruined, burnt-out houses now overgrown with flowers and vines. Every once in a while a sign advertising an aid project – in this case the World Food Program and the Canada Fund – could be seen from the main road through the village. The village was attacked by the RUF three times during the war. Houses were burned, property looted, people were murdered and children were abducted. Some also voluntarily joined the rebels.

In Togo, I conducted two interviews with youths who had been with armed factions. The first was with a young woman, Grace, who was abducted by the RUF and had recently returned. The second was with a young Kamajor. The contrast between the two is striking.

I interviewed Grace under a shelter on her family's property. Her mother and sister, along with many small children, were present for her support and protection. In a quiet voice she told me about her experiences returning home:

> Grace: Some will make comments like, "You led the people to come and burn this town." But *it hurts*. Because if you look at it, let's imagine I was the one who led the people to come and burn this town, I would not have allowed them to burn my own houses. But you look at it they were all burned down. It's just now my father managed to put up this building, two rooms, that we are managing. Then people begin to make that kind of comment. It's *hurting* to hear them. Before even I came, people were saying it to my own relatives. And even when I came back my parents told me that people were making such comments about me. Nobody really has said it before me. They are saying it but nobody has really said it to me... (italics indicate her emphasis).

Me: When you came home was there a ceremony to welcome you back and to include you in the community again?

Grace: There was no formal ceremony as such but definitely people were very happy. In our small compound people were rejoicing, all of these things. There was no formal ceremony...

Me: If you hear people making comments, it must make you feel a bit distanced from the community. What do you think could happen that could make you feel safer and better now that you're back in the community? Is there a way that the community could help?

Musa (interpreter): She said, number one, she has the responsibility of going to the members of the community to show her appreciation and love for them. And then in return she expects them to be open to her.

Me: How do you show your appreciation and love for them?

Grace: The way I talk to the people. Even the way I walk. Sometimes you walk in a way that people will notice. People will not be happy... The way you walk will show whether you are proud or not. You understand? There are certain ways you walk, people will know this person is proud. And also even the way you walk, you relate to people as you walk, people will know that you are humble enough, you are not very proud. Those are the things I am talking about (interview 57).

Grace had not spoken of her experiences with the RUF to anyone outside her immediate family. She knew she had to communicate her desire to accept community values and be part of the community through her body language and tone of humility and respect. Grace was a victim of the RUF and undoubtedly suffered greatly with them[80] but paradoxically she was on 'trial' by villagers for this unwilling association. She had to do her time by humbling herself and working hard to regain community confidence.

In the same village, a male excombatant who had been with the RUF had originally agreed to talk with me but declined at the last minute. In my notes I observed the palpable sense of unease I felt amongst former RUF in their efforts to return home.

This unease did not seem to be shared by a former Kamajor I interviewed. His tone was very different. While he emphasized the need to forgive those who had been with the RUF, he stressed that those who returned should not be too proud:

Kamajor: Definitely we are angry for the things they did. Even in this town... All of the houses were burned down. Even me, sitting here, I did not fight for

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[80] I did not ask people what happened to them during the war for fear of distressing them. I only recorded such information if they volunteered it.

nothing. It was because it was rebels who killed my father. Looking at it really, we have all the right or we have all the zeal to say 'Those people should not return to this place' but we cannot say so. Because the first thing we all depend on, which is the government, says the people should return to this place. And based on the facts that if you go to the mosque, if you go to the church, they say to you, 'If somebody has wronged you and comes back, confesses and asks for forgiveness, you should forgive that person.' So therefore those people are our brothers. Anytime they come we can embrace them.

Me: Are they confessing?

Kamajor: They have not done it... But the point is that once somebody had been involved in such a thing, he is too cocky. He can still continue to be proud. It's like part of him or her. So she will turn and do the same thing. So if even they who are coming leave their wicked past ways and begin to behave well, then we can (walk/work?) together (interview 54).

The contrast between the two excombatants in Togo is great. The Kamajor is confident, judgemental and supported by traditional authority. Grace knows she must be humble to be accepted. Many RUF returned to this kind of environment and some, used to power in the bush or changed in other ways, did not last in their home villages. Also, while RUF crimes are openly discussed – though not individual experiences – Kamajor crimes are not. This may lead to problems with Kamajors in the future.

Many people mentioned RUF excombatants from the south and east who were living in Makeni or other northern communities because they were afraid to return home. When I questioned Togo villagers, most said that RUF excombatants can return and will be forgiven but they usually said it with a laugh. One educator, Edward, was more forthright:

Edward: Actually I have not seen any excombatants who went away (voluntarily), they actually had gone and committed atrocities. They have fear to come back. I have not seen anyone yet come home.

Me: Do they have reason to have fear?

Edward: Yes, because of what they have done. Because of what they have done so they would be afraid to come back.

Me: But what I mean is, would something happen to them if they did come back?

Edward: Ah... I don't know. Well, I think.... Somebody, one or two came back here. They were here for about a week and then they left. Then they left. Then they came for some time but what happened, or what did not happen... (laughs) They went back (interview 49).

Makeni, then, was an obvious place to visit.

8.2.2 Internal exiles: The town of Makeni

Makeni is the main town of northern Sierra Leone and it was the last rebel base and stronghold. During the RUF occupation, the inhabitants of this dusty trading town lived uneasily with explosions of gunfire at night, looting, violence and the domination of the RUF. Today the tables are turned and former RUF combatants live here at the pleasure of local inhabitants on whom they depend for employment and services.

In the centre of Makeni, dozens of young men on motorcycle taxis congregate, waiting for someone to flag them down while others buzz the streets looking for customers. Boys sell cigarettes and other small items on trays. Still others hang out in little tea booths, chatting away the time with their friends. Makeni bustles with commerce and small-scale industry. Outdoor shops line the roads and make-shift restaurants sell big bowls of groundnut soup on rice. Sidewalk tables are laden with beautiful tie-dye and batik fabrics, dyed in compounds around the city. At night the road is gently lit by the kerosene lamps of outdoor shops and tea stands, the latter even busier now with young men watching the progress of games of draughts.

This is where many young men and women who were with the RUF stayed or returned after an uneasy time at home. In Makeni I interviewed six excombatants in their late teens and early twenties, two of whom were women. None were originally from Makeni and I wanted to know why they did not return, or remain at, home. The young men were interviewed in groups or with friends; the women were interviewed individually.[81] They were introduced to me by relatives of my research assistant who was originally from the area. This was a usual way of gaining introductions.

The interviews were cautious on all sides. A single, short interview is an artificial and inappropriate way of gathering meaningful information from those who exist uneasily in a society. Research on the opinions and experiences of excombatants should be ethnographic, involving a prolonged stay so that excombatants get to know and trust the researcher, or the interview should be of use to respondents. The interview may be on a topic of interest to them[82] or it may provide an opportunity to talk about something with an outsider that they cannot discuss

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[81] I interviewed one group privately in the living room of a local imam. I interviewed the other young man in the presence of two of his friends at a local restaurant where I bought everybody soft drinks. The two women were interviewed individually in the empty courtyard of my hotel. I had interviewed one young woman and she later brought a friend to talk with me without encouragement from me. All interviews were conducted in Krio or Temne and were interpreted by my assistant.

[82] As one example, a Sierra Leonean NGO, PRIDE, conducted research on excombatant views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a subject that was of interest to excombatants. PRIDE was also one of the main NGOs providing information across the country about the TRC.

with those around them. My interviews with former RUF combatants lacked these features so my goals were correspondingly modest.

All four male excombatants said they were in Makeni because they wanted to go to school. One youth said he had been abducted from Freetown during the January 6 invasion and returned home after demobilization. However, he soon quarrelled with his father who wanted him to learn tailoring while he wanted a formal education. Because he was angry at his father he returned to Makeni to find a way to go to school. He also mentioned that he had more friends in Makeni than in Freetown (interview 30).

The second young man said that he too returned to his home community but had no chance to go to school there. He returned to Makeni partly because NCDDR workers told him they would pay his school expenses. This never materialized and at the time of the interview a friend was helping him attend school (interview 30).

The third excombatant had no family support in Makeni but paid school expenses by hawking cigarettes and candy. The fourth excombatant, who was interviewed separately, appeared to have no desire to return to his village in the south. His mother was killed and he felt he had no connections there any more. He lived with a cousin in Makeni and attended school which he saw as his hope for the future (interview 31).

The first three young men acknowledged that many excombatants in Makeni were afraid to return home because of crimes they committed in their communities. When I asked what they should do if they wanted to go home, they said an intermediary should speak to the chief and villagers on their behalf. One excombatant said that a person's demeanour will determine his success in reintegrating (interview 30).

The two female excombatants were in the final month of a six-month hairdressing course provided by Norwegian Aid. Margaret, a young woman from Kono District, visited me with her one-year-old daughter. She was a student when the rebels attacked, killing her parents and brother and abducting her. After the attack she heard that many family members fled to Guinea but were now returning home. She was waiting to complete her course and then planned to return to her family (interview 33).

Margaret thought her family would be happy to see her because they thought she was dead. She said she forgives the people who kidnapped and abused her and killed her family because she's a Christian and because it was war. "Because," she said, "if it's a normal situation nobody would just get up and kill my family" (interview 33). I often encountered this striking

willingness to put war violence into perspective and will discuss this further in chapter ten. Also, those associated with the RUF and AFRC have the most to gain from efforts to promote forgiveness and reconciliation.

The next day, Margaret brought a friend, Messie, from her course who asked to be interviewed. Messie was abducted from a village near Bo. She was taken to Kono and then Makeni by the RUF. After the war she returned to her village where she learned that her father was dead and his house was burned down. Although she was well received by her mother, her family was desperately poor and she saw no way to support herself. Also, her mother gave her a warning:

> When I went to Bo, straight away my mother called me and explained to me that 'Don't tell anybody that you are an excombatant. Just anybody that asks you, just say you are (a returning refugee) from Guinea. Because the militias, the Kamajors, will kill anybody that they expect is an excombatant (RUF) (interview 34).

Messie soon returned to Makeni where she stays with a 'sister' and studies hairdressing. She says she is no longer afraid of attack and may return to her village one day and open a salon but she feels more at home in Makeni than in the village from which she was abducted years ago.

8.2.3   Life on hold: CDF amputees near Freetown

"The trick in politics, " S.B. (a prominent Sierra Leonean politician) *once told me, "is to promise people the earth; I learned this from old Pa Wurie... 'What the African likes is promises,' he used to say. 'Even if you don't have the means to keep your promise. Give people excuses, or make some new promise, and they'll forget about the first thing you promised them. '"*

Excerpt from *In Sierra Leone* by Michael Jackson (2004, p. 62)

Though the lives of Grace and the excombatants in Makeni were full of uncertainty and the struggles of poverty, they were moving on from their war experiences, with or without the support of NCDDR. They had formed support networks, though not always in their home communities. By contrast, the lives of a group of around 15 CDF amputees who I met in an almost-abandoned camp for displaced people had been put on hold. Almost all camp occupants had been repatriated but a group of CDF amputees was refusing to leave until promises made to them by their leaders were kept. They were eager to tell people about their plight and later testified about their situation at the TRC. The interview took place in an abandoned warehouse they had cleaned up to live in. Sixteen male amputees sat around me and my interpreter; their

wives and young children were around the perimeter working, listening or going in and out of the building.

The men were deeply angry, primarily at their leaders and senior politicians who they said had promised them opportunities and had not delivered. The CDFs saw themselves as heroes. As one said, "We were fighting voluntarily. We did not ask the government to pay us. We were really fighting for the motherland, to protect civilians, life and property."[83] Because of this, they believed the government would reward and care for them. Senior politicians manipulated this belief, they said, visiting before the election to make promises they couldn't, or wouldn't keep. As one former CDF tells it:

> And they were saying that we are the king's men. We are militiamen. We are CDF. We are the king's men. Let us not worry. You see?

> The former vice-president... in the year 2002 (before the election), he... promised us that at the end of the war he will send *all* the CDF, the amputees, to overseas, in order to get to learn skills, something like that. But *nothing* happened... Even Chief Hinga Norman. They were promising us that they would give us benefits or they would put us on a pension scheme so that whenever the month ends they would get something in order to upkeep our families. But nothing to that (interview 16).

Another added:

> So Chief Hinga Norman, our former commander or coordinator..., they used our names to acquire aid. But when this aid comes the aid did not reach us. So they enriched themselves through our names. They used our names (interview 16).

Partly because of these promises, some of the CDFs dropped out of the NCDDR program or did not sign up at all for demobilization assistance. They felt they were entitled to have houses built for them as other amputees had, many of whom, the CDFs believed, were former RUFs.[84] Until they received these benefits they were determined to wait, spending their time vigorously petitioning anyone who might help them.

Some of the men had gone home to visit their families but did not feel welcome for long. As one man said:

> When we go home, ok, for the first two weeks our family will accept us but after some time they ask us to at least have our own houses to live there because we

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[83] Ferme and Hoffman (2004) write that "*kamajors* everywhere routinely referred to their activities, and to their very reason for being, as 'the defense of life and property,' suggesting a level of standardized inculcation at work in the movement" (p. 83).

[84] This reflects a Kamajor belief that RUF forces were primary beneficiaries of demobilization assistance. In reality, more than half of the combatants who received DDR benefits were CDFs (Hoffman, 2004).

are very, very angry because we are amputees... But if I have my own house nobody would do something that would make me become angry (interview 16).

Another man, who had been a clerk before the war, said that he had been home a few times. When I asked him why he returned he said:

> Well, in fact there is no place for me. There is no shelter there... When I went I was with my younger brothers. You see they started, they started provoking me. They said, "Eh, you our elder brother. It will be fit for you to have your own shelter than disturbing us." Something like that. You see? When I went the first instance, yes, they were very happy to receive me in order to stay together with them. But as time goes on they started grumbling because the shelter is not enough.

> You see? So I decided to come here in Freetown. I have decided that if I don't receive that of my training, my computer training, I will not go home... I would like someone to help me in order to pursue my course. This is the *only* reason I'm here in Freetown, so that I will get a chance to do that of my eight- or nine-months course training (interview 16).

When I asked them why they were not in the Murraytown camp for amputees where people were being assisted, one said that this depended on 'big people' to arrange:

> You see the Murraytown amputee camp? There are certain people that have that camp. There are certain people, the big people, the important people decided who goes to what camp. We cannot go to the big people and talk to them but our own big people who are responsible can talk to these big people about our plight (interview 16).

Whether or not amputees really need the intermediation of a 'big person' to access services due to them, this perception reflects a reality in which 'big people' are the gatekeepers of all services. Big people can grant 'miracles' to a few – promises of trips overseas – and they can bar others from receiving any services at all.

The day after I visited the CDF amputees, I met Joe, the reintegration worker, and asked him about their situation. Joe replied:

> If you are going to wait for things that you never saw but you were promised, how long are you going to wait? If you have a cacao farm, how long is that cacao farm lying wasting and you are waiting for something, maybe if you want maybe 600,000 or a million and what would that do compared to your cacao farm which, if you have children, you can work with there and you supervise because as long as you are alive you are part of the leadership of that community (interview 19).

Joe's faith in the community's ability to absorb its members is probably the wisest approach in a poor country needing to reintegrate so many people, all wounded in different ways.

His vision relies on communities' organic ability to heal. It is a vision of self- and community-reliance rather than waiting for handouts that may never come.

But a community strained by war and poverty may not be able to absorb its members as the vision demands. In the poorest country on the UN's Human Development Index, people are not managing well. Paradoxically, it is easier to absorb an excombatant who caused enormous grief than a war-wounded person who cannot earn money.

Like the CDF amputees, many amputees and severely war wounded had difficulty being accepted by their families and many returned to camps. In this sense, reintegration has little to do with justness. It is no coincidence that formal reintegration efforts for adults focused on economic rather than social reintegration. When families have no financial cushion, all hands need to be productive.

8.2.4 "Regional Warriors": Squeezing water out of stones

> My dream was to become an engineer – to have a profession and be a respected somebody. But it didn't work out that way. I'm hearing about recruitment now for an operation to overthrow (Guinean President) Lansana Conté. And if I am asked to go to war again, I will go. I will. I have three children who don't have a mom. I have twelve-year-old boy who wants to go to school, but I don't have enough money to buy him a uniform. I want more than anything for my children to be educated. By going to war I have sacrificed myself in this life and I will sacrifice again.

Former CDF who also fought in Liberia and the Ivory Coast (in HRW, 2005, p. 18)

In my first-level economics class we were taught that there is no such thing as a free lunch. I often think of this phrase in relation to the way people squeeze their comforts and sometimes livelihoods out of those beneath them in the hierarchy of power and privilege. Canadians benefit from cheap products often picked or produced by those who can barely meet their family's basic needs. And the low cost of labour is justified by our insistence on paying the lowest price or by corporations' or shareholders' commitment to maximizing profits.

I think too of upper-class Sierra Leoneans who pay their employees less than a subsistence wage for well over full-time work. In one household, a man I knew worked as the day *and* night watchman, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and still was not paid enough to send his children to school. With those working hours he could not live with his family, and his daughter had the reddish hair of a malnourished child. Every morning in the courtyard he shone his boss's Mercedes and smiled when he opened the gate.

So it should not be surprising that some of those – primarily, though not entirely, men – who cannot afford to send their children to school or whose families are hungry, may choose war as a way of life. In Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and the Ivory Coast, these "regional warriors," as Human Rights Watch (2005) calls them, fight when the opportunity arises in their own and each other's countries, primarily for the opportunity to loot. In a vicious downward spiral of poverty, these 'warriors' squeeze the most vulnerable, robbing disproportionately from the poor – or food meant for the poor – to help feed and educate their own families. Human Rights Watch describes a self-destructive spiral in which the poor are the primary losers:

> Ironically those fighters who fought with armed groups, primarily the RUF and NPFL, often described contributing to the very destruction of their villages, communities and the national infrastructure that had greatly exacerbated the post-war economic depression that in turn motivated them to join other wars... Scores of interviews with Sierra Leonean and Liberian civilian victims... described the profoundly long-lasting and devastating effect of losing their lives savings – often several hundred dollars – during a looting frenzy by one or the other armed groups (p. 17).

According to Human Rights Watch (2005), around 2,000 of 72,490 combatants disarmed by NCDDR are believed to have joined armed factions in other countries. The organization recently published a study based on in-depth interviews with 60 'regional warriors' from Liberia and its neighbours. Many were former RUF, SLA and CDFs from Sierra Leone. Most began fighting when they were abducted by either the RUF or NPFL (Taylor's forces) but after this first war experience, almost all:

> ...willingly crossed borders to fight in other wars or 'missions,' a term these fighters used for war. At the time of recruitment into these subsequent wars, almost all were unemployed or living a precarious economic existence, and were motivated by the promise of both financial compensation and the opportunity to loot (HRW, 2005, p. 3).

Recruiters – often former commanders – offered them an initial payment, part of which they received up front.[85] All the regional warriors also looted civilian property and were able to keep a share of the goods in proportion to their rank. "Most used the money to pay rent, school and medical fees for their extended family, and to engage in petty trading" (HRW, 2005, p. 3). Most of the fighters interviewed who took part in the Sierra Leone NCDDR program received only part or none of their benefits and some attributed their decision to continue fighting to

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[85] Payments promised usually ranged from $100 to $500 and sometimes $1,000 according to the recruit's rank. A small amount of money was paid up front (HRW, 2005). To put this into perspective, a teacher with long experience is paid $100 a month (and is often not paid for months on end).

failures in the NCDDR program. Recruiters sometimes exploited this disappointment – and the knowledge that there would be future DDR benefits after other conflicts. One former CDF said:

> After disarmament, I used to grumble about how we'd fought the Sierra Leone war but not seen any benefit from all our efforts. I was working for 2000 leones (US $0.70) a day at a master's [car repair] garage earning only enough to get a little rice. One day in 2002, a CDF commander heard me complaining and said that he would give me an opportunity to go disarm again – in Liberia. He said there was an operation going on there and that if we went, we'd get a second chance at the DDR program (HRW, 2005, p. 24).

This understanding of international responses to atrocities has become part of the calculus of war. Hoffman (2004), who conducted ethnographic research on Kamajors now fighting in Liberia, found that atrocities against civilians are part of the exhibition of war played out for the consumption of both local populations and international press. Within the local context, "power is not a latent force that can be exercised or held in check; it exists only in its dramatization and is evaluated according to its capacity for excessive (and often deliberately incoherent) public display" (p. 223).

Hoffman (2004) found that combatants, who were "avid consumers" of international radio news, were very familiar with wars elsewhere in the world and international responses to them. They learn that "when the international community responds to African crises, the more atrocious the conflict, the greater the level of aid" (p. 216). Kamajors' inaccurate perception that the RUF received the bulk of international assistance through NCDDR also indicated to them that "those who were most feared, who committed the worst abuses" would benefit most (p. 218).

Regional warriors are not fighting for ideological reasons. In contrast to their participation in struggles in their own countries, Human Rights Watch (2005) found that "many of those who were recruited to fight to (sic) conflicts in a neighboring country could not articulate the political objectives and, in many cases, could not even name the organization they were part of" (p. 23). In some ways that makes the struggle to end this phenomenon easier. However, as long as peace fails to bring corresponding hope and opportunity, and as long as a context of impunity remains, young men and women will be available for recruitment into mercenary forces.

8.3 Placating the spoilers

As war draws to a precarious end, talk of justice is moot. The priority is to redirect or disable potential spoilers of peace. While the Kabbah government sought to use the Special Court to disable the main instigators of the war, breaking "the command structure of the criminal

organization responsible for the violence," (TRC, 2004, vol. 3b, chap. 6, ¶ 14), most excombatants needed to be redirected or lured to civilian life. This was not just because of amnesty agreements. With so many implicated in serious crimes, and so many of these drawn involuntarily or reluctantly into the war, mass trials would be impractical and possibly unfair. The structure of the NCDDR program, and the general willingness of the population to accept the nature of the demobilization process indicates that, at least initially, conventional views of justice must be reconsidered: it would be patently unjust to resubject the population to the devastation of war for the sake of enforcing justice on principle. That is the trump card of war criminals.

Both the Lomé Peace Agreement and NCDDR provide for the co-optation of those who threaten peace most. Co-optation of Sankoh and Johnny Paul Koroma failed for the most part and this failure, in the case of Sankoh, culminated in the May 2000 hostage takings and his dramatic arrest in Freetown. NCDDR also had a clear policy of co-opting military leaders and offering incentives to excombatants to re-enter civilian life. The most powerful people in militarized forces received the greatest demobilization benefits – continuing the practice of buying off unwanted leaders with overseas scholarships (TRC, 2004). In addition to their ability to take illicit cuts of underlings' benefits, top commanders – and by implication, those most responsible for war crimes – were offered opportunities to lead major projects, involving large sums of money, and they were most likely to benefit from formal educational opportunities.

The case of 'Togo' is illustrative. It is the home village of a senior RUF official, 'James,' who wanted to return but the villagers refused. A senior politician and NCDDR had gone to the community to persuade them to accept James back. They even granted him large sums of money to run an agricultural project there. But the villagers were angry about his involvement with the RUF whose forces had burned their village three times. They were also concerned that he might be indicted by the Special Court and that would jeopardize the agricultural project. They felt it would be better to keep the project in community hands. NCDDR case worker, Stephen, describes his intervention:

> Stephen: I went to the place. I called the chiefdom elders, the authorities and youths and religious people to put the case across. Now what they told me was that in fact they cannot at that moment, they cannot accept him back into their community because he committed heinous crimes. And even if they would accept him, he should be the first person to go there and repent before the NCDDR would take him over and plea on his behalf.

> I came back. I actually tried to talk to them but then they said 'no.' They're not going to accept him. They even showed me places, houses, structures that they say, they allege were burned out by him or on his directives or so.

So... we convened another meeting after sensitizing the community... It was a very successful meeting and they actually said that they were now willing for him to go back. They accept him... The only thing is that when they come back they have to humble themselves. They have to repent. They have to identify themselves with the people. They should not put on airs. They should not be proud that in fact we did such and such a thing in this community and now that we are back nothing was done to us...

Me: Did he repent?

Stephen: Well actually to me, he told me that actually he didn't do, cause any destruction there. And that I mean he even regrets having joined the RUF. He did that according to him to protect his community so that people could not destroy but he was unable to control them when they went there... He's actually regretting whatever he has done. But he has not, we have not given him the opportunity or he has not gone to ___ to talk to the people to repent... because the time when he came to go there they said we won't allow him to go there...

Now that they are talking about the Special Court a lot of them are now jittery. Because to me when we are talking of reconciliation, then at the same time we are asking for forgiveness, and this and that and you see people arresting people and bringing them before the court and you start thinking whether that would not jeopardize the reconciliation process.

Me: But it seems to me that all the burden is put on the community and the victims to just forgive like that without any kind of justice.

Stephen: Yes, that is what the community, this is what we have been preaching to them that in fact let's forgive and forget but if you start arresting people or bringing them before the Special Court then people start wondering what are we talking about, about reconciliation, about forgiveness, I mean it's over... We have been telling them about forgiveness, reconciliation and peace that we should forget about everything. Nobody should be brought to book.

I mean the war happened. Why did it happen? It happened because of several reasons. Some people were marginalized. Some people were being misruled. Some people were being misgoverned. All these things. And then people agreed ok we have accepted them. Let them come back to our fold. Let us forget about the past and let sleeping dogs lie.

And now that they are talking about a Special Court you start to wonder what's happening. And in fact when I went to ___ ... they said 'Now, this guy wants to implement a project here and that involves money. It's possible if you give him the money he'll run away with the money because he's like (a top) man in the RUF and then maybe he'll fear the Special Court. So it's possible he's using this as a ploy to escape. So what they suggested is that if they want the fellow to implement the agricultural project in that community then the community people should be involved and they should be signatory to the account of that project.

Me: It sounds very logical. I mean the whole idea of these top people getting such large amounts of money is to me problematic, isn't it?

Stephen: (hesitantly) yeah.

Me: That's a reward. It's a reward and the higher up you are the more money you get.

Stephen: Well actually, we do not look at it that way...

Me: ...When you say 'we' you mean you and DDR because in fact that's the word I'm hearing in my interviews. It seems logical to me, but it's a word I'm hearing from other Sierra Leoneans. That it's like a reward.

Stephen: Yes, that is true. These are feedbacks that we've been getting from our meetings, from our workshops. Anywhere we go when we go to tell them about social reintegration and economic reintegration, what is their reaction? They say ok, these guys have destroyed. They have amputated. They have killed. And now what are you guys doing? You are rewarding them. And what about us, the victims?

And now, the NCDDR was set up for us to get peace at all costs. We are paying for peace. It is because we don't want, Sierra Leoneans don't want the recurrence of war. And what's happening in Liberia now. That is why we actually put them into institutions and we even give them allowances (interview 22).

Stephen's strong advocacy for James' return to Togo is revealing. Like other reintegration officers I met, Stephen argued that peace requires Sierra Leoneans to 'forgive and forget' so excombatants can return home as if nothing happened. He saw the Special Court as an obstacle to this goal. He spoke at times as if he was speaking for villagers but it became clear that he was speaking the NCDDR line.

Local politics also played a role in James' acceptance or refusal. Though Stephen explained the war, and by implication, James' involvement with the RUF, as the product of marginalization and corruption, James was a professional from a family of chiefs. As one villager explained, NCDDR first visited on his behalf during the run up to the chieftaincy elections. Community leaders felt they had to refuse him because, "If they'd said they were going to accept him that was going to tarnish their own character and they were going to lose the elections... I felt it was a bit untimely" (interview 48). Also, despite Stephen's claim that James regretted his involvement in the RUF and that he joined to help his community, James continued to be active in the political wing of the RUF after the war was over. He was also amongst those who were 'recruited' by Foday Sankoh in Liberia before the initial invasion (TRC, 2004).

In chapter ten, I will discuss James' potential return to Togo from the perspective of villagers. This case illustrates the fragility and injustice of efforts to buy out senior combatants. It is driven by faith that these senior commanders are tired of war and will be content with such buy

outs. As 'regional warriors' learn from other contexts, it sends the message that war pays and that those who succeed in rising to the top echelons of rebel movements – usually through cruelty and tyranny – will be paid the most of all.

8.4 Reintegrating former child combatants

When ___ (a child who was abducted by the RUF) came to school, each time she hears an aeroplane or helicopter she comes to the bush and hides behind the trees. That happened for some time before she got a little relief. And if she is walking on the road, she will not walk straight. She will walk sideways so that she can see what's happening behind and what's happening ahead. That took some time before she gradually changed.

Educator in rural village (interview 49)

In late 2000-2001 the survivors of the civil war began to know peace. For most, it was a time of tremendous hope. The prospect of safely cultivating crops, rebuilding, travelling, going to school, returning home and reuniting with loved ones. Others must have been more ambivalent – among them, those who were abducted by the RUF and AFRC as children. Snatched from families and communities, often forced to commit violence at home, with a sea of atrocities, complicity and hardship between them and their former lives, these children and youth were deeply changed. They knew intimately the darkest side of humanity and were now expected to fit into 'normal' life, living amongst people who many barely remembered and who regarded them as guilty by association with the RUF. Girls, most of whom were raped during their ordeal, carried the further stigma of the violence against them.

The numbers of children abducted during the war is unknown. According to UNICEF (in Williamson & Cripe, 2002), 8,466 children were registered as missing between 1991 and 2002. Of these, 50 to 57 percent were girls. In 1999 alone, 4,448 were registered as missing, reflecting the thousands of children abducted during the January 6th invasion of Freetown. It is reasonable to assume that the rate of reporting missing children was much higher in the capital where people had better access to humanitarian agencies than in the countryside where such agencies were relatively scarce, especially in the RUF-occupied regions.

According to Williamson and Cripe (2002) 6,904 children were demobilized by NCDDR.[86] The Child Soldiers Global Report (2004) states that, of these, 529 were girls. We

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[86] Though Williamson and Cripe write in 2002, a year before NCDDR finished its mandate, the Child Soldiers Global Report of 2004 provides a similar figure of 6,845 children demobilized.

know that this figure heavily underestimates the number of child soldiers, in particular those with CDFs and girls. This is partly due to the criteria used in the demobilization process.

The Cape Town Principles provide an internationally-recognized definition of a child soldier.[8] It defines a child soldier as:

> ...any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms (Legrand, 1997).

NCDDR's criteria for determining child combatants were much more restrictive. To be eligible for demobilization assistance, children aged 12 to 17 had to prove that they could handle a weapon and had to be presented as a combatant by a commander. Children from the ages of seven to 11 were eligible if they could prove any one of a list of criteria: they knew how to cock and load a gun; they had been trained to use a weapon; they had been with an armed faction for more than six months; they had been used on raids or spying missions; or they held a rank. Children younger than seven could be demobilized if a social worker felt they would benefit from the process (Williamson & Cripe, 2002).

The criterion that children aged 12 to 17 had to be presented by a commander was especially problematic. Commanders who took girls as 'wives' were unlikely to release them. And some boys remained with their commanders, especially around Makeni and in mining regions where they were put to work (Williamson & Cripe, 2002).

Children with CDFs were also likely to be under-represented. The use of children as combatants by government-allied militias was politically embarrassing to a government trying to claim the moral high ground in the war. Though the number of children with CDFs may have been as high as one-fifth of the 25,000-strong militias, top CDF officials have publicly denied that the militias used children at all. One NGO reported that "after this announcement CDF children who were brought forward for demobilization in Pujehun and Kenema were categorically denied access to the process by... UN military observers" (Williamson & Cripe,

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[8] This definition was developed in April 1997 in Cape Town at a Symposium on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, sponsored by UNICEF and the NGO Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2002, p. 9). Hoffman (2003) also suggests that some CDF commanders tried to demobilize children as adults because they were then eligible for direct demobilization payments.

Also, excombatants who were abducted or recruited as children but who were adults when the war ended might have benefited from the psychosocial assistance provided to child excombatants but they were ineligible (Williamson & Cripe, 2002).

The reintegration experiences of children with CDFs and those who had been with the RUF or AFRC were very different. CDF children were often in contact with their families during the war and could return directly to them. They were largely respected by the community as they were seen as protectors (Williamson & Cripe, 2002). Indeed one child reintegration officer said of CDF excombatants, "We are thinking like them, they were defending. That's why I don't normally refer them" as excombatants (interview 25). On the other hand, for reasons explained above, they were less likely to benefit from the formal demobilization process.

Children who had been with the RUF had a much more difficult time. Generally, after demobilization, they were sent to interim care centres (ICCs) run by local or internationally-affiliated organizations such as CARITAS Makeni. They would remain there for a maximum of six weeks while efforts were made to trace their families. During their stay at the interim care centre, they would receive medical attention and engage in activities aimed at helping them "return to normal life, such as regular schedule, chores, classes, play, artwork, singing and learning culturally appropriate behaviour." If the family could not be traced, or if the community or family was not prepared to receive them, the child was moved into foster care or older children could live in small, supervised groups (Williamson & Cripe, 2002, p. 27).

Many children did not immediately want to return home – and many families and communities did not want to receive them. It took time to develop enough trust and willingness on both sides to make reunification possible. Children are often deeply traumatized by what they have seen, done and experienced, and many are also reluctant to give up the status they gained through violence. Abdul, a reintegration officer, says:

> Some of these guys were big guns. They're big honchos during the regime. When the whole chiefdom or district knows the person. So now you call the name. "Ah, I sabe him" "I know him." If that same guy is to go back home and he's somebody not to be reckoned with, he may feel, 'what am I going to do here? Because for the past five years I was called lieutenant. Or commander or brigadier XYZ. Now I go there only to be known by my simple name and maybe people don't want to see me even. Why should I go there? Social status.

And... economic status. Some don't have economic stability or economic strength to go back home. Because they've been seen to be living some kind of buoyant life. I mean, during the regime, when they were there as kind of top brass, top guys. They have their vehicles. I won't talk of money. It's something they just dish out as and when they like. Not to count the number of women they used to have and they don't have now a dime or a cent to occupy their status which they've created for themselves during the war period. How are they going to live in the same community? I'd better stay here and die here as a pauper. I'll not go (interview 38).

The readjustment to a humbler life in which children and youth are subservient to elders involves a difficult readjustment for everyone. This readjustment begins in the interim care centres and foster homes where children receive both medical attention and psychosocial counselling. As Joe explains:

While they are there, you work about how many times they react to some event. Because their mind is obstructed. They are traumatized. And within that time you are detraumatizing them. You make them feel comfortable within the society where you want to place them. And within among themselves, how they can relate to each other. They know, well, when love is needed and how somebody can avoid hurting... And then they start to weigh the values of their community plus the values they had in the bush camp or maybe as combatants...

After that you begin to know, after one month or two months, if the child is becoming more... you know coming back, (beginning the) healing process. Then he'll start to even come back to you and ask, the first questions you asked, the first documentation you wrote about me..., well, it was false... So you need to give them time to come back, and the more you know they are coming back they will counteract those statements that you had before. Then you know that they are becoming normal... Because even the name, the first name they will give you, it might be a bush name. It will not be their surname. But after some time they will start to tell you where they came from and maybe they'll give you their surname now. Then from there we'll start to go to family tracing (interview 19).

According to Abdul, family members often require some persuading and preparation before they are ready to accept a child back:

(We tell) them the kind of child you are receiving now is not the same child that left you some time back... The same creation that made him what he is, is the same creation today, but something has happened to that child and the parent may even tell you what he has even seen that child doing during the war. Now that same child is coming back and some of the parents are rejecting the children, telling them "I no wan kam" Don't come with him or her here. I don't want him. It is only when you go through serious mediation. Talk with the parent that it's not the child that has responsibility. It is not the child that has done this. The child was innocent. He's just another victim. Like you being a victim of this war. Haven't you suffered since the war breaks in this country. Yes. The same suffering the child has also been undergoing. In the jungle he was finding himself

holding a gun. It was not by his own mind. The child did not want that. He was persuaded (interview 38).

You have to really create awareness in that parent. So that eventually when that child comes he may not be expecting normal behaviour of that child. Bad things will come. The child will use abusive language. The parent will think, "That man came to us about this child, so I think I have to be courageous and try to change him" (interview 38).

Because of the difficult readjustment, Abdul ensures that a community witness is present during his first meetings with the parents. He explains:

If that child is causing trouble in that community the parent might want to take a drastic step or even abuse the right of that child. And somebody will come to tell him, "That man came here and he informed you about this. If you take this line of action the law will bite you" (interview 38).

In his program, Abdul says, parents receive a package of agricultural assistance after they accept the child back (interview 38).

Some child excombatants who return home have developed a sense of entitlement because of their experiences in armed forces and assistance provided to them after, Abdul says. For this reason, and to mediate conflicts involving the child, a community-based child welfare committee is formed to support and guide the child. He explains:

The children have a lot of things which they use as a kind of a... pomposity. They feel they are excombatants being supported by NCDDR and UNICEF. They were supporting us, providing vehicles, giving interim care centres, supplying us with a lot of things so we ate three times in a day. So all of these things are in their minds. You know. They feel it's a kind of a privilege... Not knowing that it's their right. These are the normal things that we should do for our children. And by doing that the children may feel kind of buoyant about it.

So that can bring conflict between them and the community. Going back to the community wherein the parent may not be able to provide two square meals. That may cause of problem. They may go out from their homes thieving, molesting people, belittling people. Aggressors feeling they are on top of the heap. Those kind of things... For three years if a child has not been respecting anybody's property. They enter the village. They take what they want to take. Nobody asks them. They abuse anybody, nobody questions them. It's something normal.

That's why we have child welfare committees (CWCs). A selected group of people. Stakeholders like the leader of the youth, the Mammy Queen, that's the leader of the women... When the children cause problems in the community, this committee intervenes between the parents and the community. Maybe a child steals a mango, a cassava... The man will be vexed. So the CWC comes to mediate between that person and the child together with the parents... Those kinds of behaviour, we would not put it to them directly that they are responsible

because it's from where they came from. But we have to make sure that they change it (interview 38).

According to Williamson and Cripe (2002), local chiefs and counsellors were key to successful reintegration. Reintegration officers would approach these leaders, explaining the child's circumstances, usually emphasizing the fact that the child was abducted and forced to join the RUF. Chiefs would eventually introduce them to other key community members who might be part of the child welfare committee. In the community of Daru, for example, the committee consisted of traditional leaders, police representatives, two children and other leaders from the community. This committee not only mediated when conflict arose, they sensitized community members about children's rights and sometimes successfully advocated changing local laws to protect children.[kk]

Agencies involved in child protection and family tracing have been working in a coordinated fashion since 1996 when UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Work, Gender and Children's affairs created the Family Tracing and Unification network. A year later, the then-exiled Kabbah government worked with UN agencies and local and international NGOs to create the Child Protection Committee, later the Child Protection Network. These agencies created strategies and policy guidelines that enabled them to work effectively together once democratic government was restored (Williamson & Cripe, 2002). As a result, the perspectives and approaches of organizations involved with child reintegration are very similar.

During my research, reintegration officials often described their policies and practices as traditional yet it is uncertain whether traditional practices or the agendas of reintegration agencies and personnel guided these processes. Shepler (2005) notes that "a theory and practice of the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers has emerged in the last ten to fifteen years... Program models were taken from Mozambique and tried out in Uganda. They were then tried out in Liberia" (p. 121). Tradition-inspired cleansing ceremonies, used to rid rape victims and child excombatants of the stigma of the past and affirm community support, have been a consistent part of this model in Africa.

At times a 'traditional' attitude was advocated by reintegration organizations and personnel that may or may not reflect local values. As one example, two reintegration workers working with the same organization in different towns emphasized the 'tradition'-inspired need

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[kk] Williamson and Cripe (2002) mention that the child welfare committee in Daru was able to pass a law prohibiting children from being beaten and publicly humiliated for bed wetting, the former of which I also saw during my stay. They write that "previously, a child who had wet his or her bed would be smeared with chicken faeces and paraded through the village carrying a container of chickens" (p. 24).

never to leave an excombatant alone to his or her own thoughts. One reintegration worker, Jacob, explained:

> Jacob: We do a lot of sensitization within those communities, those children are not let alone. We want them to forget about the issues. Completely. If that child keeps on reflecting on what has passed then definitely it will be a problem for him or her. You do reflect once in a while when you have a quiet moment... (but) we don't want them to sit quietly. We want them to be always playing so they try to forget what has passed, rather than keeping on reflecting... It was not his or her own wish to go to the bush. I do understand that very much. But we try as much as possible for them not to reflect their minds on what has happened. It is very difficult to forget.

> Me: Yeah, Do you think that it's important for children to have someone they can talk to about things or are people in the villages just trying to not talk about it so the child will forget?

> Jacob: Like in the villages, people don't accept these children to be saying these things again.

> Me: So they don't want them to talk about it.

> Jacob: Of course they don't want... (the children may do an interview) but the parents don't want the child to be sitting with his or her peer group explaining what has happened.

> Me: Even if the child is sorry? Like often these things might happen one to one... and that seems therapeutic to me. That they can talk to somebody about what happened in order to not feel alone and to try to sort through

> Jacob: It's not that they are not talking to people. But parents don't LIKE the idea. Some parents don't like the idea of these children recalling. Some do sit with their grandfather or grandmother (interview 25).

Though Jacob often presented the notion of discouraging children from talking about the past or sitting alone as coming from parents and communities, upon further questioning he admitted that it was the organization's policy. A colleague also confirmed this. However, some accounts do suggest that parents preferred their children to remain silent about their experiences with rebel forces.[89]

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[89] Jackson (2004) provides an example of a Kuranko man. originally from the north, who did not want to know of his abducted son's experiences with the RUF after he returned. "The son managed to escape during a battle... and return home to Freetown and his family. But his father told him that he did not want

Two formal traditional processes are very important in creating a sense of community belonging: 'cleansing' ceremonies and initiation into male and female secret societies. Cleansing ceremonies are designed to appease the ancestors for offences against them. Without these ceremonies or other acts of ancestral restitution, people believe, bad things can happen to a person. In agreeing to and paying for cleansing, children and their families acknowledge the wrong that has been done and the community affirms that the child belongs to it. William, a reintegration worker, explains that cleansing is a type of accountability, though it is an accountability shared by the family:

> William: Before the child was settled in the community, they have to show remorse... And the people have to show forgiveness but they can only do that when they pass through some traditional rites. They say, ok, this is our child. He belongs to this family and family A belongs to community A. You see, so, you ask the parents, the family members to produce certain things. Like some ask for rice, palm oil, cola etc. etc. Those are all traditional items.
>
> Me: So the family...
>
> William: Yes, the family contributes to that. You see that's part of the accountability. Because they are making that child accountable for what he has done in the community.
>
> Me: But it's not the child who's being held accountable. It's the family.
>
> William: ...You know through the family the Mende child accounts because you have to... they take you to like a stream or... you know? One of those traditional areas, you know where they do cleansing. They say, they say 'you have committed sooo much.' You know, so we are now accepting you, but since you, you, you are taking responsibility for what has happened, though it was an abuse of human rights at that particular point in time, then we'll accept you back into the community (interview 2).

Initiation into secret societies is perhaps an even more important expression of full community belonging. Joe explains:

> Because, like now, I could tell you there are some children who have never, never joined the traditional societies. And they were captured. And they were carried away. And then coming back home. In some villages now when peace is returning, most of the children they are coming up with these traditional societies. That means when coming through the traditional societies the people believe that they are part of that society. And that means automatically they allow

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to hear anything of what happened. It made him feel bad. As for the boy, apart from saying he hated the RUF, and would never forgive them for what they had put him through, he craved only that his ignominy not become public knowledge" (p. 72).

you to go to the society, you are fully accepted. There is an acceptance that when you are reunifying the children with their parents or being in the communities you find that there is traditional cleansing. There is also traditional societies. When they join that means they are cleansed. They are washed. They have been accepted. Because if they don't accept you, you won't be allowed to enter that society, that traditional society (interview 19).

While children's responses to war experiences differ, separation from family may be the most traumatic experience for young children. Williamson and Cripe (2002) write, family and community reunification:

> ...are both the goal and the process of recovery... for the overwhelming majority of children... The more a child sees him or herself as protected and guided by adults with whom he has close attachments, the less likely it is that an experience will cause lasting psychological harm" (p. 17).

The formal, ritualistic processes of cleansing and initiation, though not entirely unproblematic,[90] directly affirms a community's acceptance that a child belongs to it. Other than the 'cleansing' of survivors of rape, these formal social processes are largely lacking with returning adults.

8.5 Conspicuously absent: The demobilization of women and girls

When we think about demobilization and reintegration, it's easy to think that one size fits all, that programs promoting these processes meet the needs of men and women, people of different classes, ages and geographies. But just as women and men have profoundly different experiences in war and peace, so the transition to peace affects them differently. Policies and programs designed to reintegrate people into communities need to automatically incorporate a gendered analysis that recognizes the different realities and power relationships of women and men in war and peace. A gendered approach does not mean pigeonholing men and women into traditional roles. It means giving them choices, consistent with their circumstances, that enable them to control their own lives.

Demobilization programs in Sierra Leone were designed and carried out largely by men, with men and boys in mind, partly because they are most at risk of returning to the bush. These programs ignored the different experiences and social expectations of female combatants and reproduced the power structures of 'normal' society.

We do not know how many girls and women were with the fighting forces but we do know they were vastly underrepresented in demobilization programs. Of 72,490 combatants

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[90] The process of female initiation, as I discussed above, includes a clitorectomy which can be considered a further act of violence against girls and women.

disarmed by UNAMSIL, only 4,751 (6.5 percent) were women and 6,787 (9.4 percent) were children, 506 of whom were girls (Carlson & Mazurana, 2004). Yet most observers put the ratio of females, in rebel forces in particular, much higher.[91]

Observers present a number of reasons for the under-representation of women and girls in the NCDDR program. First, females served many more functions than males did. They were used as combatants, labourers and spies, as males were, but they concurrently served domestic roles. Carlson and Mazurana (2004) found that all girls they interviewed who had been combatants had also been 'wives' and while 60 percent of their respondents said that they had been the 'wife' of a combatant, only eight percent said that this was their main role.

When the time came for demobilization, officials viewed many of these women and girls as primarily wives or 'dependents' who were not eligible for demobilization assistance. This contradicts the definition of a (child) combatant in the Cape Town Principles, above, which includes "cooks, porters, messengers (and) girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage" (Legrand, 1997).

Second, the criterion that combatants 12 years and older required permission of commanders for demobilization prevented the release of some women and girls. RUF-AFRC commanders had little incentive to release their 'wives' who still provided domestic and sexual services for them and many had children from these unions (Williamson & Cripe, 2002).

CDF commanders had other reasons for not wanting to release women and girls as this would expose the myth that CDFs were strictly male forces. Carlson and Mazurana (2004) found that women and girls were "fully initiated members of the CDF" (12), especially Gbethi militias, where "they served as commanders, frontline fighters, initiators, spiritual leaders, medics, herbalists, spies, and cooks" (p. 13). They estimate that around 1,700 girls served with CDFs but only seven were officially demobilized.[92]

Late in the NCDDR program, officials decided that 'wives' of male excombatants could qualify for microcredit. However, to qualify, the excombatant had to accompany his 'wife.' No woman could apply alone. Carlson and Mazurana (2004) argue that had they been able to apply alone, they might have been given choices that would allow them to leave these relationships and still support themselves and their children. They quote one NCDDR official as saying: "even if

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[91] Carlson and Mazurana (2004) estimate that as many as one-third of all child combatants were girls.
[92] 296 CDF (adult) women demobilized (Carlson and Mazurana 2004).

they were raped and abducted, 70 percent of the women and girls wanted to be with their "husbands"" (p. 18).

Third, women and girls face considerable stigma from being associated with armed factions. As William explains:

> (Women and girls) have been stigmatized, one by participating in the war. In our traditional society, a woman is not allowed to stand out and condemn, or even to kill somebody. But some have done that. Some have participated as combatants at warfronts. So it is a concern since people can identify you that you were one of the rebels, you know? And you find it very difficult to go through the normal process, that is the NCDDR or through child protection agencies. So what they do is they sneak back into the communities so that they cannot be identified or recorded or documented (interview 2).

Carlson and Mazurana (2004) also reported stigmatization of women and girls who fought with CDFs.

Perhaps a greater stigma accrues to women who have been sexually active in relationships unsanctioned by the community. RUF forces often reminded their female captives of this fact. Traditionally, even rape survivors were stigmatized and considered guilty of an offence and there was little legal recourse for such violations. Though people are becoming more aware that girls are not responsible for sexual crimes against them (Williamson & Cripe, 2002), these stigmas caused many women and girls to, in William's words, "sneak back" home, pretending to have been refugees in Guinea.

When older girls or young mothers succeeded in entering demobilization and reintegration programs, they were sometimes prevented or discouraged from going to school by well-meaning social workers working with NCDDR. Instead, they were pushed towards gender-specific skills training programs like gara tie-dying or batiking. In this way, for excombatants lucky enough to benefit from the NCDDR programs, the programs often replicated existing class and gender hierarchies with different opportunities going to different classes of people (Carlson & Mazurana, 2004).

Women's stigmatization because of their connection with armed factions and their experiences of rape shows that a crime is not an isolated act. A victim's experience is affected by the social interpretation and context of the violation. Amputation is even more devastating in Sierra Leone than in a wealthy country because of limited medical and psychological assistance and because it severely limits a person's economic possibilities in a poor society with few income-generating options.

The impact of rape and sexual torture is similar. Women not only suffered the stigmatization of rape, many suffered severe gynaecological injuries[93] and cannot bear children. In a society in which women are valued primarily as mothers and their property rights are accrued through men, this affects their desirability as wives and their legal status. The TRC (2004) therefore advocates reviewing and changing discriminatory laws.

In sum, when the war ends, combatants are often expected to fit back into pre-war hierarchies, some of which contributed to the rebellion in the first place. Reintegration processes reproduce these hierarchies as they channel excombatants into roles considered 'normal' for their situation in life. These programs may be highly gendered as women are trained in less lucrative 'feminine' skills or are viewed as dependents of male combatants so are ineligible for assistance in their own right. Programs, in other words, can be both gender blind and gendered in ways that fail to meet the needs of women and girls.

8.6 NaCSA: The civilian equivalent of NCDDR?

In 1991, when the RUF first invaded Sierra Leone, the country was the poorest in the world and at an economic and political breaking point (UNDP 1991). Ten years later as the war neared an end, the vast majority of Sierra Leoneans were decidedly worse off. Even poorer: emotionally, psychologically and physically wounded; widowed, orphaned or otherwise abandoned, people were overwhelmingly concerned with survival.

Family and community mechanisms that could help members during setbacks in the past were strained well beyond capacity. Discriminatory laws and customs that may have once, arguably, met people's needs in a benevolent, patrimonial society could not address the new post-war realities. Above all, laws that severely restricted women's independent claim on property could not serve a society in which thousands of girls and women were orphaned, widowed, expelled or abandoned. Moreover an increasing number of Sierra Leoneans were seeing education as part of their basic needs and their hope for a better future. Meeting this need requires not only a heavy investment in schools and teachers in the present, it demands a tremendous improvement in the economy in the near future if young people's hopes upon graduation are not to be dashed, making them a source of further instability.

The institution charged with coordinating assistance to civilians in Sierra Leone is the National Commission for Social Action, better known as NaCSA. NaCSA is often referred to as

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[93] Among the most common injuries from rape and sexual torture is vestico-vaginal fistula (HRW. 2003).

the civilian equivalent of NCDDR, but the two were very different. Both governmental agencies worked in consultation with the UN and international donors to set policy directions and coordinate all aid relating to their respective mandates, but there the similarity ends. NCDDR was a reactive program designed to achieve "peace at all costs" (interview 21) by providing excombatants with alternatives to war, while NaCSA was designed largely to build the infrastructure of a peaceful society by supporting community-based projects rather than individuals.

I will not describe and critique NaCSA and the experiences of civilian survivors of war in depth. Though such a description and analysis would greatly enrich this study, it is beyond the scope of already-broad research. Here, I will only provide a brief outline of the NaCSA program to provide contextual information for chapters that follow.

NaCSA's mandate focused on five areas: emergency relief; the return of refugees and displaced people; resettlement and reintegration; rural development; and poverty alleviation. The first three functions were winding down at the time of my research (February to May 2003). From then on, NaCSA primarily focused on identifying and implementing community-based projects (NCRRR, 2001; interview 54).

Under the community-based reconstruction and development programs, communities or community groups, assisted by NaCSA field workers, identify projects that they would like assistance with. This may be the reconstruction of schools, wells, court barrés or health facilities or it may be micro-credits or group-run income-generating projects. NaCSA then pairs successful applicants with organizations who can help them. In theory, by taking this community-based approach and involving local people in implementing projects, projects will be more relevant to the community and more empowering for community members. NaCSA claims that this format enables beneficiaries to "acquire the practical skills of project management during the course of implementing the activities by themselves" (NaCSA, 2002, p. 2).

Some civilians felt that providing individual financial and educational/training assistance only to excombatants, who caused so much damage, was unfair and that educational assistance should be provided to all citizens. However, when I asked a NaCSA official about this, he reacted angrily, saying:

> You have to look at it from a broader aspect of it. You know. The fact that we are enjoying peace is a benefit to every Sierra Leonean. And you know, these guys who were committing crimes, you have to remove them from these crimes so that you yourself will not suffer that crime. He will

not be killing you. He will not be raping. He will not maim... So I fail to
see the injustice (interview 59).

The official saw no contradiction between the two approaches: NCDDR dealt with the past:
NaCSA was looking toward the future.

Some groups of individuals did receive individual assistance. Through NaCSA, refugees
and displaced people were returned to their communities and received some start-up assistance.
Also, international agencies provided skills training and some direct assistance to amputees and
severely war wounded people. However, like the CDF amputees above, many amputees found
themselves without family assistance because direct family members were killed, missing or too
poor to support them.

A Canadian who worked with amputees explained that many amputees were rejected by
the extended family. He said:

> It's because they're a burden and because there's a harsh stigmatization toward
> amputees... Because it's... well, when you're disabled you're basically unable
> now. And in the eyes of people like the families... what are they going to do?
> Like, they're not as efficient working. They take more care which means more
> money and when you already have a limited source of funds how are you going
> to find the extra funds to support the extra family member? And sometimes that
> family member is not even a direct family member. It's like a cousin or it's not
> from the direct family so it's from the extended family. That makes it even
> harder for them to justify probably to bring in someone and spread out the limited
> funds that they already have (interview 9).

As a result, international organizations like the Norwegian Refugee Council built houses
for some amputees and their families. The houses I saw in one village were near one another so
they formed a small community within a community. An elderly man whose arm was amputated
said, "We live as a community, as a family, because your arm has been amputated and my arm
has been amputated so all of us have the same suffering" (interview 17). Another elderly female
amputee said that she, too, preferred to stay in her new community only a few hours from
Freetown rather than return home:

> I have no family any more at home. My brother that I should have stayed with at
> home is no longer there. Only the smaller children is what is left. I have nobody
> to take care of me at home now so that is why I decided to stay here (interview
> 18).

In many ways, these amputees, with their new houses and property, were the providers of
their families. The man had been trained in soap making but he said he was better able to pay his
children's school fees by begging. This is interesting because, though I often saw people with

disabilities begging on the streets of Freetown, I rarely saw amputees begging. Because of international publicity surrounding this widespread atrocity, of all groups of war victims, amputees were the best known, the best organized and generally the best provided for.

8.7 Conclusion

Institutional efforts to facilitate reintegration of excombatants and civilians were centrally coordinated through NCDDR and NaCSA, working with UN agencies and local and international NGOs. Though the processes were far from perfect, they benefited from fairly good coordination and unity of purpose and vision. The NaCSA official's strong defense of the NCDDR process indicates that, in his mind at least, the two efforts are consistent with one another despite their different approaches. He is not alone in that view.

The vision sustaining reintegration efforts is exemplified by the expression, "There is no bad bush to throw away a bad child." This presents a view of community and family as infinitely capable of absorbing members who are experiencing difficulties, though proponents recognize that communities need support in the process. While NCDDR and NaCSA do provide some support that families and communities need to reintegrate their members, the stresses of poverty, war and discriminatory laws and practices may mitigate against people's successful return. Also the war and post-war peacebuilding processes may have altered the population considerably as many people have new ambitions and may be less willing to accept subservience, discrimination and abuses of power.

If NCDDR and NaCSA were the main government institutions charged with reintegration, the Truth and Reconciliation was the main institution promoting reconciliation. Where NCDDR and NaCSA stressed the idea of justice as ignoring the past for the sake of peace, the TRC looked long into the past and saw reasons for accountability and change. In a process that had a life of its own, the commission filled a much-needed gap in a country with few outlets for open talk and has the potential to contribute greatly to reconciliation in the country, if leaders will listen.

Chapter 9:
The Sierra Leone TRC: A snapshot

No one could have anticipated the evolution of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. After unpromising beginnings as a second-best alternative to trials, with lukewarm support from politicians and former proponents and scant attendance at its early hearings in Freetown, the TRC began to draw packed houses in former occupied areas. Whereas in early hearings senior RUF officials were cautiously questioned and expressed no remorse for their involvement in the brutal insurgency, just three weeks later TRC chairman Bishop Humper carried out a near crusade, imploring collaborators to confess and apologise for their complicity with the rebels.

In this chapter I will briefly describe the origins, mandate and public perceptions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its sometimes problematic relationship with the Special Court. My main purpose, however, is to describe the evolution of the TRC hearings during the two weeks and a day that I attended them in Freetown, Bo and Kailahun over a period of three and a half weeks. I will also discuss the TRC report, which was publicly released on August 8, 2005, and its potential contribution to reconciliation in the country.

9.1 The origins

With the collapse of the Abidjan Peace Agreement, the AFRC's eight-month takeover of government in 1997-1998, and the brutal January 6, 1999 attack on Freetown, civilian leaders realized that peace would require renewed negotiations and that amnesty would be part of the final deal. In January 1999, government and civil society leaders, who had fled to Conakry, Guinea, began to discuss the potential of a truth and reconciliation commission to address responsibility for the war (Bennett, 2001).

The first meetings were sponsored by the newly-created Sierra Leone Human Rights Committee, a joint effort involving government and civil society leaders in exile, the UN and international organizations. The committee struck up a TRC working group which operated under the National Forum for Human Rights, an umbrella group of human rights NGOs in the country. The government human rights commission, the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights (NCDHR), also began exploring the prospect of a TRC (HRW, 1999b; interview 44; Bennett, 2001).

In the end, incorporating the TRC in the Lomé Peace Agreement was seen as a way of providing some accountability and making the amnesty and power sharing deal palatable to the people of Sierra Leone. Then-Attorney-General Solomon Berewa (2001) (now vice-president) described the TRC as a means of healing the nation's wounds:

> Far from being fault-finding and punitive, it is to serve as the most legitimate and credible forum for victims to reclaim their human worth; and a channel for the perpetrators of atrocities to expiate their guilt, and chasten their consciences. The process has been likened to a national catharsis, involving truth telling, respectful listening and above all, compensation for victims in deserving cases (pp. 3, 4).

After the Lomé Accord was signed, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, offered UNHCR's assistance, providing the TRC with expertise, fundraising and other help. Over the next two years, though continued violence stalled other aspects of the peace process, consultations with civil society and traditional leaders took place about the shape and nature of the TRC. Initially, local civil society groups showed strong interest, participating in consultations and studies (Hayner, 2004). Unfortunately, this good will and enthusiasm did not last and many of the very allies that the TRC needed to hold the government to its commitments and capture the imagination of the population became disillusioned with the process before the hearings even started.

9.2   The mandate

In February 2000, the government of Sierra Leone passed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act which set five objectives for the TRC:

> ...to create an impartial historical record of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law related to the armed conflict in Sierra Leone, from the beginning of the Conflict in 1991 to the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement: to address impunity, to respond to the needs of victims, to promote healing and reconciliation and to prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered [Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000, s. 6(1)].

The TRC was mandated to investigate violations:

> ... to the fullest degree possible, including their antecedents, the context in which the violations and abuses occurred... whether those violations were the result of deliberate planning, policy or authorization by any government, group or individual, and the role of both internal and external factors in the conflict [Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000, s. 6(1a,1)].

The commission was also required to:

...work to help restore the human dignity of victims and promote reconciliation by providing an opportunity for victims to give an account of the violations and abuses suffered and for perpetrators to relate their experiences, and by creating a climate which fosters constructive interchange between victims and perpetrators, giving special attention to the subject of sexual abuses and to the experiences of children within the armed conflict [Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000, s. 6(1b)].

Whereas the mandate of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission focused narrowly on *gross* violations of human rights, the Sierra Leone TRC was asked to look at "violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law" [Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000, s. 6(1)]. The commission interpreted this mandate broadly, examining violations of national and international law and of "economic, social and cultural rights... civil and political rights, as well as other categories of rights such as the right to development and the right to peace" (TRC, 2004, vol. 1, chap. 1, ¶ 54).

As an example, the commission commented on such practices such as female genital mutilation which were not related specifically to the conflict:

...it might well be argued that the practice of female genital mutilation contributed to a context of oppression and marginalization of women that was manifested in violations and abuses that were unquestionably related to the armed conflict such as gang rapes and sexual slavery (TRC, 2004, vol. 1, chap. 1, ¶ 65).

The commission also examined conflict-related events that preceded the war and might continue into the future. The request to look at "the role of both internal and external factors in the conflict" also enabled it to examine events outside Sierra Leone. By contrast, the Special Court was limited to investigating crimes committed since November 30, 1996 and conducted in the country (TRC, 2004, vol. 1, chap. 1, ¶ 64).

The commission was asked to promote "constructive interchange between victims and perpetrators" [Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000, s. 6(1b)] and it interpreted this to include encouraging dialogue and reconciliation between victims and those who committed crimes directly against them − inter-individual reconciliation. Encouraging this type of inter-individual reconciliation was a routine part of the public hearings.

The TRC had four Sierra Leonean commissioners, including the chairperson and deputy chairperson, and three international commissioners. UNHCR was responsible for raising funds in the international community, choosing international commissioners and providing other support.

The names of local commissioners were submitted by the Sierra Leonean government on the advice of a national Selection Panel.[94]

9.3   Difficult beginnings

The TRC was a product of cooperation between Sierra Leonean civil society, government and members of the international community. But problems with the early administration of the project,[95] inadequate funding by international donors and lack of clarity about the TRC's relationship with the Special Court severely weakened this partnership before the public hearings even started.

The lack of support for the TRC by the very civil society leaders the commission needed to have on side can be attributed to three factors. First, early administrative problems and perceptions of political manipulation in hiring national commissioners and staff undermined confidence in the process. TRC chairperson, Joseph Humper, bishop of the United Methodist Church and president of the Inter-Religious Council; deputy chairperson, Laura Marcus-Jones, a former High Court judge; John Kamara, a veterinary surgeon and former principle of Njala University College; and Sylvanus Torto, a teaching fellow at the Institute of Public Administration and Management of the University of Sierra Leone, were perceived to be connected to the ruling party (ICG, 2002b). Hayner (2004) notes that this concern is partly offset by the presence of three international commissioners: Yasmin Sooka, a former commissioner with the South African TRC; Ajaaratou Satang Jow, former Minister of Education in the Gambia; and William Schabas, the Canadian director of the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland (James-Allen et al., 2003). However, the effectiveness of international commissioners in mitigating bias was greatly reduced by the fact that only Jow was in the country full time. Sooka and Schabas were only available part-time.

Largely because of these problems, many of the TRC's early civil society supporters became disillusioned with the process, a particularly damaging development. By the time I arrived, a month and a half before the TRC hearings were supposed to begin in early April, even

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[94] The selection panel consisted of representatives of government, the Inter-Religious Council, the RUF, the National Forum for Human Rights and the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights. Candidates were selected from a short list presented by a UN representative, an international resident in Sierra Leone, and a member of the Inter-religious Council and government (James-Allen et al., 2003).
[95] For a good discussion of some of these early management difficulties see the International Crisis Group report (2002), *Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A fresh start?*

members of the original TRC Working Group failed to voice support for the commission.[96] The response of one civil society leader was typical:

> A lot of Sierra Leoneans felt that the truth commission had a lot of politics. It was politically motivated in the set up. Starting with the executive secretary and members, they all, from our point of view, seemed to be chosen from a political basis. Everything was manipulated. Even some of the so-called Sierra Leonean commissioners now, they all had strong political links... with the SLPP (the governing party) and they still have political links with the SLPP. And so because of that, if the truth commission is supposed to be neutral and it's supposed to give an historically-balanced explanation of what happened, we should not see people who played a role in the SLPP, a high, visible role having high, visible positions within the truth commission (interview 43).

Though the TRC did have some support from local NGOs such as PRIDE[97] and the Market Women's Association, the lack of broad civil society commitment did not instil public confidence or a sense of ownership in the institution.

Second, the shift in support for the commission may also be related to the creation of the Special Court in June 2000 and early proponents' desire for accountability, ideally in the form of trials. Two civil society leaders who were involved in the early talks in Conakry said they had hoped the TRC would bring accountability at a time when an amnesty deal seemed likely. One said he hoped the TRC would reflect the South African model with amnesty being conditional on public confession:

> What we were looking for was, you tell your story. After telling your whole story you apply for amnesty based on what you said, and what you left out, you could be prosecuted for that. Also...(if) somebody did something terribly bad, it's not possible to say you should come to the platform and say 'Oh, I forgive you.' Like let's say if you burned down houses, the commission recommends that you go to that community, you help rebuild their houses (interview 45).

Other civil society leaders who studied TRCs in other countries began to see that truth commissions might retraumatize victims without providing compensation or justice. One woman, Fatima, said, after reviewing videos on the South African TRC, "The impression I got was that (the TRC) opened a lot of old wounds... and at the end of the day, I don't think (the victims) got

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[96] Perhaps as a reflection of this, the TRC working group chose to change its name in 2001 to the Truth and Reconciliation Working Group to create more critical distance from the TRC (interview 45) and to work towards reconciliation beyond the commission (interview12).

[97] The Post-conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) was actively involved in sensitization efforts. It also carried out a study of excombatants view of the TRC that can be found through the website of the International Centre for Transitional Justice (www.ictj.org).

anything out of it." When an international observer told Fatima that "the TRC is truth with a capital T and the R is a small R," (interview 11):

> From that day I just lost interest. Because for me I'm a Sierra Leonean, I have to stay here. My people are here... And I honestly feel as if I'd be lying to them by telling them that just talking about it is going to heal you. It's not (interview 11)

Fatima leads an organization that helps war victims. She said:

> When we started off we had to take statements from them to see those who fit the criteria... They were very, very suspicious of us. They thought we were taking statements for the TRC. Some believe the TRC is going to use their statements in the Special Court. Some wouldn't even understand what the TRC is all about. But for me, explaining what the TRC is all about isn't a problem. But telling them that they're going to benefit is my problem because I'm not sure they're going to (interview 11)

Another civil society leader involved in sensitization efforts about the Special Court and TRC said, "because some people did not decide to show remorse, people say the TRC is more of an insult than justice." She said those who "prefer the TRC are those that have the minimum atrocities. Maybe he was looted or he was beaten, but... those who were raped or their families were killed... prefer the Special Court" (interview 15).

Thus, civil society leaders' ultimate desire for justice, even when they supported the TRC, may have led some to shift attention from the TRC to the Special Court when trials became possible.

Third, civil society confidence in the process may have been undermined by the lack of clarity about the TRC even in the month before the hearings. This especially related to the ambiguous relationship between the TRC and the Special Court,[98] in particular surrounding the question of whether the court could require the TRC to share information with it and whether it could use self-incriminating testimonies given to the TRC in public or in confidence.

The statute governing the Special Court asserts that "The Special Court shall have primacy over the national courts of Sierra Leone" (Statute of the Special Court of 2000, art. 8). Though a report by the Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights states that "the TRC does not fall within this mould" (in Schabas, 2003, p. 1049), the legal stance of this position was unclear. Schabas writes, "There would appear to be no legal guarantee against self-incriminating evidence being used against an accused in a prosecution before the Special Court or, for that

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[98] Other questions were whether the report would name names, whether those who committed violations as children but were now adults were eligible for private hearings, and the nature of victim-perpetrator meetings (interview 6).

matter, before the courts of Sierra Leone." And while Special Court prosecutor David Crane said he would not subpoena information from the TRC, "The real issue... is that defense council will request materials in possession of the TRC, including evidence given in confidence, in order to challenge the credibility of prosecution witnesses, especially victims" (pp. 1052, 1054).

Because of this, and despite TRC assertions that it would not share confidential information with the Special Court, many people worried that it might be compelled to do so. The concern was especially expressed by excombatants and those working with them who were worried that those who testified might incriminate themselves.

Government leaders also did not appear to be fully committed to the TRC process. Top officials could have taken the lead in apologizing for their mistakes during the war. This would have shown great courage and leadership that would have been recognized by the people. A number of people mentioned with admiration that Johnny Paul Koroma apologized for AFRC crimes during the war. Yet the president has not apologized for his own errors during the war that still rankle some Sierra Leoneans.

Six out of the 55 Sierra Leoneans I interviewed mentioned (almost all without me asking them about it) President Kabbah's statement from the safety of Guinea that all those left in Freetown were rebel supporters. One man also mentioned that the president made a similar public statement about people in Makeni (interviews 3, 5, 11, 20, 35, 36, 41). In the words of one labourer:

> You see, so (the president) too has something to say. He too has something to say. He has to apologize. Maybe he was early tempered and he don't know what he was saying. Yes. He can't be blamed. He can't be blamed because it's a war. Yeah, it was a war. But he has to withdraw that statement and apologize to the mission. We are ready to forgive him. He's our president. Come what may he's our president. We just have to forgive him (interview 3).

Some civil society leaders felt that senior officials did not take the TRC seriously and were not interested in using it to reflect on their own culpabilities during the war. One person said that she saw no official, apart from the attorney general, go out of their way to support the commission:

> None of our political leaders have come out, minus the political speeches that they have to give at the start and whatever. But none of them have really come out on board. Even the ministers go to their constituencies and say 'listen, yes, let's do this. I hear statement takers are coming to my area. I'll be there. I'm going to give the first statement.' There's been no political leadership involvement in the TRC which has hampered it a great deal (interview 43).

This lack of support by political leaders, whether real or perceived, further undermined the commission in the eyes of some civil society members who feared that the requisite political will to address the past and make changes in the future was lacking.

The TRC's heavy reliance on NGOs to educate the public about the process and lack of enthusiasm by many NGO staff translated into a lukewarm public response before the hearings. Although most of my interviews were not specifically about the TRC, the subjects of the TRC and Special Court arose in many of them. In the two months leading up to the public hearings, interviews with 22 individual Sierra Leoneans and one group, excluding those who were directly involved in forming or promoting the TRC, revealed ambivalent support and considerable lack of knowledge about the two institutions. Most people I spoke with outside NGO circles did not have an informed opinion about the TRC. Of the 12 who did (including NGO workers), the most common response (five respondents) was that it would reopen old wounds. These respondents questioned the value of talking about painful experiences and of learning who hurt their loved ones or burned their homes. A typical response was:

> Just like this truth and reconciliation system and the court. Who that comes before me to say 'I slaughtered your daughter that I loved so much. Your mother, I killed her. I burned your house.' Before me, that person will never be forgiven. So therefore we don't want to know them again. Why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? (interview 24)

Four respondents preferred trials over the TRC. As one said, "If they acknowledge, then what benefit am I going to get out of it?... They should be punished because those of us have suffered. They should go to the court" (interview 24).

A number of people expressed a desire to "let sleeping dogs lie" while also asking for justice. For some, this seeming contradiction can be explained by a desire to hold those most responsible for the war accountable while being willing to accept rank-and-file excombatants back home. Others concerns regarded bias in the TRC and the Special Court, using money on these institutions which could be better spent elsewhere, the lack of a tradition of speaking openly about crimes committed, and the view that perpetrators were unlikely to admit their crimes.

Interestingly, a group of well-informed respondents who stated adamantly that they opposed the TRC (interview 16), ended up sending a representative to publicly testify on their behalf. In the end, they saw the TRC as a vehicle for informing the government about their situation and asking for assistance. This is reflective of the evolving nature of the TRC which I will discuss below.

Of the three respondents who favoured the TRC and articulated reasons, one saw it as a form of accountability and another saw the value of creating an impartial historical record of the war and, he stressed, the antecedents.

The third respondent, a student in Freetown named Rashid, felt the TRC could facilitate reintegration of former government soldiers, providing a public forum for them to apologize for their actions. Rashid articulated better than anyone the factional violence that occurred after the AFRC fled Freetown in February 1998. He felt that soldiers needed the TRC to explain their situation and apologize for their actions. He said:

> Those who I expect to apologize are the ones who voluntarily supported the AFRC and when, during the intervention of ECOMOG, when they were pushed from the city, went to the bush... Because they are part and parcel of society. So for the fact that they want to be reintegrated. They want to live an amicable life with people in society where they were living (interview 5).

After Koroma apologized on behalf of the AFRC, Rashid said, other soldiers were ready to follow suit:

> There are other soldiers, other perpetrators, who are ready. I've met them. I've discussed this with them. They said that they are ready, the day that they will start, they will go there, they will apologize for the acts that they did...They would apologize because some of them in fact are still in the military because after, after the whole saga then A. T. Kabbah, the president, decided to accept them back in the military. Now that they have occupied their former positions in the military, and they want to continue with the military. They want to continue having or establishing that military-civilian relationship then they have to apologize (interview 5).

The NGO, PRIDE (2002), suggested that RUF excombatants too might support the TRC and Special Court. In a survey of 176 excombatants in Makeni, Bo, Freetown and Kailahun in May and June 2002, they found that, especially after a workshop on the two institutions, most (89% and 79% respectively) were supportive.[99]

My interviews that touched on the TRC took place in Freetown, Port Loko and Makeni. Respondents outside of Freetown showed considerably less knowledge about the TRC process. Though my sample is far from representative, it was consistent with my observations of people's initial responses to the TRC in these communities. Four months before the TRC hearings began, the International Crisis Group (2002b) stated that:

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[99] This study can be found through links with the International Centre for Transitional Justice: http://www.ictj.org

There are many indications of public ignorance about the TRC. For example, much of the population still believes, wrongly, that it will be paid if it testifies to the Commission. Many express doubt about the need for a TRC, saying they believe Sierra Leoneans can simply forgive and forget. Others say the TRC has no power to compel or punish and so can serve no useful purpose (p. 3).

Despite discouraging beginnings, with little positive to show for its first months of operation,[100] the TRC began to gain momentum in late 2002 due to better transparency in hiring and the arrival of key staff, both local and international (Hayner, 2004).

In early December, 2002, two months after its one-year operational phase began, the TRC sent statement takers to collect testimonies and by mid-April, 2003, they had collected 7,100 statements (SLW, April 14, 2003).[101] In early 2003, researchers also began interviewing key witnesses. TRC staff began developing processes for interviewing and hearing testimonies of children and victims of sexual violence, based partly on a report produced by UNICEF, the National Forum of Human Rights, and UNAMSIL (UNICEF et al., 2001). On April 14, the TRC public hearings opened and a monumental process, with tremendous potential to change the country's self-perception, began.

9.4   TRC hearings: snapshots

In my scrapbook of memories of the TRC hearings I have six mental snapshots taken in three towns: Freetown, Bo and Kailahun. Three snapshots are of opening and closing ceremonies in Bo and Kailahun and three are of the hearings themselves. Placed in chronological order, they speak of an evolution of the TRC, but, like all photos they are inadequate to convey the entire story. These snapshots show only that the TRC hearings changed dramatically in different regions and over time but they say nothing of future developments. My sixth snapshot was taken less than half way through the hearings that ended July 18th and I do not know what transpired after that. I therefore can say nothing definitive about the hearings. I can only share what I heard and saw.

9.4.1   Snapshot 1: Cautious beginnings in Freetown

For one of the most important institutions in Sierra Leone's modern history, the TRC public hearings did not initially attract much attention. Throughout the second week of hearings in the hall behind the Freetown YWCA, only between ten and forty seats in the public gallery

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[100] The TRC was inaugurated on July 5, 2002 and its start-up phase ran from July to October 4, 2002. During this time it experienced its greatest administrative problems. The initial operational phase ran from October 5, 2002 to October 4, 2003 and it received a six-month extension.

[101] All five statement takers in each district were from that district, spoke local languages and were familiar with the area and the people (interview 6). The commission gathered 7,707 statements in all (TRC, 2004).

were occupied at any one time. Yet, in that almost-empty hall, a riveting history-telling and history-writing process unfolded. While senior RUF commanders, SLA soldiers, amputees and relatives of victims told all-too-familiar stories of atrocities, they also began to expose little-known or little-acknowledged details of the war, details that would be difficult to deny in the future.

One by one witnesses rose to the stage and swore on the Koran or Bible to tell the truth. Some victims brought a friend or relative to support them as they told their tragic stories. A TRC counsellor also sat beside the speaker, ready to provide a tissue, water or comforting arm. Witnesses were asked to tell their stories in full, without interruption. When they spoke languages other than English an interpreter translated their statements. Questions or statements by commissioners or staff were stated in English and translated back into the witness's language. However, when witnesses spoke English, no translation was provided into Krio or other languages.

When witnesses were finished, commissioners asked questions, followed by the leader of evidence.[102] Finally, witnesses were asked whether they had anything to ask or say to the commission. Many victims were also asked whether they would reconcile with those who harmed them.[103] After testifying, witnesses left the stage and a TRC official debriefed them.[104] At the end of each day, a commissioner read the names of those mentioned as dead during the proceedings. This was followed by a minute of silence.

Hearings were generally held from Tuesday to Friday of each week with one day of closed hearings for children and victims of sexual violence. Not all victims of sexual violence opted for closed hearings, choosing instead to tell their stories publicly. Though people commonly said that rape victims would not come forward, they were among the first to give statements in numbers (interview 6). This, and the evolving public enthusiasm for the TRC hearings, indicates that the TRC may have provided an important avenue for public discussion of past atrocities and future remedies where few such avenues existed within communities. This countered the local 'common sense' understanding that people did not want such open communication.

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[102] The two leaders of evidence were both lawyers by training: Ozonnia Ojielo, the Nigerian chief of the Information Management Unit; and Martien Schotsmans. the Belgian head of the reconciliation division. They were extremely important in directing questioning and analyzing and assimilating information.
[103] This question was on the original statement so commissioners must have known the answer in advance. Nobody who was asked this question refused to reconcile and some witnesses were not asked.
[104] All witnesses were counselled by TRC staff before they testified and debriefed after. TRC counsellors conducted follow-up visits with 226 of 403 witnesses (TRC, 2004).

During the second week of hearings in Freetown, three people testified on behalf of groups. Mr. Jalloh,[105] head of the Amputee Association, testified for amputees. Although he told a heart-wrenching story of the assault that changed his life and of the implications for himself and his family, his main purpose in testifying was to request assistance for amputees in the country. Bishop Humper asked Jalloh whether he would be willing to reconcile with the person who amputated both his hands, if that person could be found, and he agreed.

A senior RUF commander, Colonel Vandy Khosia, who had been part of the RUF political wing in Freetown, testified for RUF combatants who were still being held in Pandemba Road Prison without trial in connection with the May 2000 hostage taking. Khosia pleaded for their – and his own – release. He talked about divisions between the political and military wings of the RUF and argued that members of the political wing who were arrested in Freetown had no connection with the hostage taking.

Khosia was questioned by the commissioners about atrocities and asked whether he would apologize for his involvement with the RUF. When Khosia refused to apologize and denied involvement in atrocities, saying "there are always a few men that don't want to take commands" and "we all went wrong during the war," the commissioners did not press the issue. It was left to the leader of evidence, Ozonnia Ojielo, to question Khosia hard. Khosia still refused to take responsibility for atrocities despite his senior position in the RUF. This relatively gentle questioning of Khosia contrasted sharply with heavy questioning of collaborators in Kailahun a few weeks later (April 24, 2003).

Two other testimonies in the Freetown hearings are significant for what they reveal about the evolution of the TRC process. In one, a Mr. Lahai testified, with his brother at his side, about a horrendous ordeal at the hands of Kamajors. Lahai and his brother had been SLA soldiers. When the AFRC took power in May 1997, all loyal soldiers were told to turn themselves in to ECOMOG. But Lahai and his brother could not get through the Kamajors to do so. He told a harrowing story of being captured and tortured by Kamajors, including at a hospital in Kenema. He also talked about how the ordeal has affected both his and his brother's ability to work.

Questioning of Lahai was gentle and consistent with the victim-centred process that the TRC claimed to be. When Humper asked if he wanted to reconcile with the perpetrators Lahai said that was why he testified. The people who tortured him live near his home and he cannot

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[105] I am including the names of witnesses as they were stated at the hearings and cannot confirm the spelling of their names.

return, even though he was the victim, until reconciliation occurs. He asked, "Can you bring those people to apologize to us and shake hands with us?" He also sought economic assistance as he could not afford to send his children to school (April 24, 2003).

For those following the hearings, Lahai's testimony raised the profile of Kamajor abuses in a war in which CDFs saw themselves as heroes as did many of their supporters. This important early testimony recalls Ignatieff's (1998) statement that:

> A truth commission can winnow out the facts upon which society's arguments with itself should be constructed... The past is an argument, and the function of truth commissions, like the function of honest historians, is simply to purify the argument, to narrow the range of permissible lies (pp. 173, 174).

The day after Lahai's testimony, Ibrahim Brima Kamara, a representative of CDF amputees, testified with the intent of asking for economic assistance for his group. However, the commissioners questioned Kamara hard about CDF crimes – though the leader of evidence was gentler. In the end, when asked whether he had anything to say to the commission, Kamara asked if the CDFs had been wrong. Bishop Humper replied that, "We are not here like a court to say this was good and this was bad" (April 25, 2003).

The week of hearings in Freetown that I attended exposed an emerging narrative that was far more complex than the dominant story of the war. Stories were emerging about divisions within the RUF, CDF atrocities, including cannibalism, and the difficult position that some SLA soldiers found themselves in. At the same time, witnesses were being questioned in markedly different ways. Some were clearly questioned for the purposes of information gathering; others were listened to and questioned in a way that promoted healing and reconciliation. While the testimonies and questioning of the latter may expose information pertinent to the TRC's grand narrative, these hearings were clearly victim centred.

The 'snapshot' of the Freetown hearings is also interesting for reasons of contrast. Though a story in Sierra Leone Web (April 18, 2003) indicates that Moigboi Moigande Kosia admitted responsibility for "recruiting and training... abducted children" for the RUF when he testified before the commission in the first week of hearings, I heard no one admit responsibility for crimes during the (second) week that I attended. According to Hayner (2004) ex-combatants took a while to gain confidence in the commission, but once they did, "many clamoured for the opportunity to speak" (p. 4). Also, the gentle questioning of Khosia, and Humper's statement that "we are not here... to say that this was good and this was bad," contrasted with later developments.

Finally, during this week in Freetown, few people showed much interest in the hearings. None of the human rights people I had spoken to were present while I was there although the Council of Churches sent observers to hearings in a number of districts. Unless I raised the subject, no one around me talked about the hearings, though they were broadcast live on radio and a half-hour summary was presented each night (Hayner, 2004). This public apathy contrasted sharply with the public interest in Bo and Kailahun.

9.4.2 Snapshot 2: The opening ceremony at Bo Town Hall, April 29, 2003

The Honda (motorcycle taxi) driver could not have picked a worse time or spot to hit a pedestrian. Right in front of Bo Town Hall, just before the TRC's opening ceremonies began, he struck a little girl. Women whooped and jumped and everybody looked. The place was buzzing with police, and the careless, unlucky young man was brusquely hauled off. Such was the beginning of my recollection of the Bo TRC hearings.

Inside Bo Town Hall, the public gallery was almost full and would continue to be so during much of the week. In this space, elderly and young, poor and professional mingled. A large group of amputees sat together. Though the poor appeared to come with high hopes for the commission, the opening ceremony at Bo Town Hall was not for them; it was a ceremony for and by the dignitaries of Bo. One by one, in this largely Mende community, Bishop Humper, the provincial secretary, the Anglican bishop, representatives from the Civil Society Movement and NCDDR, the resident minister, and the chairperson of Bo Town Council got up to speak in English. The resident minister said that in Bo, "no rebels were permitted here except when the junta took over" and the audience broke into loud applause. The paramount chief – the only one to speak in Mende besides the interpreter who only provided brief summaries – poured libations and publicly complained that he was not on the written program. The provincial secretary apologized, saying "you are the link between the living and the dead."

9.4.3 Snapshot 3: The Bo Hearings

Despite its fairly elitist start, the TRC proceedings did seem to matter to people around Bo. Attendance ranged from a low of 40 to 50 (when the hearings overlapped with the inauguration of a paramount chief) to a nearly-full hall of at least 200 people. Usually the hall was at least half full. Some local people went to almost all the hearings. Others followed the proceedings on radio and talked about events when we met. This interest was in sharp contrast with the attitudes of people I met in Freetown.

Themes that were hinted at in the Freetown hearings began to emerge more clearly in Bo and were emphasized by the choice and order of witnesses. New themes also emerged. The hearings began to appear as public drama and education, beyond their fact finding and conciliatory roles. This educational function was occasionally highlighted by the chairperson of the day who seemed to address the audience when he or she asked certain important questions.

One example was a series of questions about the term 'sobel' (soldiers turned rebels) used by a witness during his testimony. The chairperson turned slightly to the audience and asked the witness how he knew the attackers in question were 'sobels.' In doing so, he problematized this commonly-accepted concept for observers and listeners (May 2, 2003). Many 'educational moments' ended up as important themes in the report.

Also, consistent with the goal of public education, the days seemed to be ordered in themes. On the first day of the Bo hearings, after a few accounts of rebel violations, a Kamajor named Hassan testified about his recruitment and initiation into the Kamajor society. The commissioners asked him about his Kamajor training, which he said lasted only one week. This publicly contradicted assertions that Kamajors were traditional hunters with deep knowledge of the forest and traditional magic.

When Hassan mentioned Kamajor 'magic' that he believed made men impermeable to bullets, men in the audience cheered and were silenced by the chairman. The educated Mende man sitting beside me told me he believes in this 'magical power.'

The commissioners also asked Hassan about Operation Black December, the two-month spate of Kamajor attacks that began in December 1997. These attacks, which the commission suggests in its report had the approval of some top government officials, involved rituals of cannibalism, massacres of civilians, and extensive looting of property and crops. Hassan denied seeing any crimes.

The next day primarily featured testimonies about Kamajor crimes, presenting a very different picture of the Kamajors than Hassan tried to convey. The public hearings[106] in the days that followed mainly dealt with rebel and SLA crimes. Slowly, a much more complex picture of the war emerged and new questions were raised that had been unthinkable before the hearings began.

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[106] There was a day of closed hearings with children in between.

I asked a commissioner how the TRC chose who would testify out of thousands of statements given. The commissioner replied that they sought representative witnesses in terms of their experiences, violations they suffered and who they were: their region, ethnicity and religion. "so at the end of the day nobody will accuse us of not carrying out a national exercise" (interview 47). The commissioner explained:

> When these witnesses come we have already read their stories. But their stories sometimes are not detailed enough... So when they appear before us, it gives them the opportunity to expand on the testimonies they have already written out. Secondly it gives us the opportunity to clarify some of the issues they raise.

> Like today, for example, there was this man who came just to talk about violations but in the course of the hearings we discovered he was an old soldier... It was not in any way indicated in the statement form... So this hearing gives us the opportunity to get more information.[107]

> Also it gives us the opportunity to let the public know, to hear what the experiences of people are. A number of them have read about it. But I think it's the first time for many Sierra Leoneans to listen to those voices and to make them believe that this is indeed real (interview 47).

When I commented that the commission was exposing a much more complicated story of the war than is commonly portrayed and that interviews seemed to be deliberately chosen and ordered to convey this, the commissioner agreed, adding:

> We tended to believe in this country that it was the rebels who caused all the havoc... If you ask me I would say about 90% of the people would feel this was so. But now in the testimonies... it's becoming apparent that there were other groups. There was the Sierra Leonean Army. There were the Kamajors... Even though some of them, the Kamajors we have identified, are telling us that they did it for the national good. Despite everything, whether it was for the national good or not, the point is they committed violations. And we want to make sure that our record is *impartial*. That word impartial is very, very, very important to us...

> Me: At the introduction ceremony, the war was described as the 'rebel war.' But you're getting a much more complicated picture. Does it ever make you wonder whether that's an appropriate way to call it?

> Commissioner: Yes, that's right. Sometimes we have to ask questions. When you say 'rebels,' you can see it coming out of the questions. Who were they? What did they look like? What were they wearing? Were they sobels? Because they

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[107] In a fascinating series of questions the commission learned that the man had been a lieutenant in the Sierra Leone Army and was forced to retire in 1969 after junior officers mutinied. The leader of evidence asked whether the man, Mr. Conteh, saw parallels between the situation among soldiers in this war and the situation at that time. More important than the answer was the fact that the commission raised the question in the minds of the public and began to show another angle of inquiry that appeared in the report.

have this word 'sobels'... And what is a sobel? So we have been trying to get this information... The word 'rebel,' really. I think the more we start talking about the armed combat, the internal conflict, I think it would be better for all of us (interview 47).

Part way through the Bo hearings, I began to record the apparent main purpose of questioning each witness according to three main themes: fact finding; reconciliation/ healing/apology; and public education. Though the commissioners usually showed sympathy and courtesy to the witnesses, the goals of clarifying facts and gathering information – fact finding – seemed to dominate most of the questioning. Of the 29 hearings I attended, I identified the dominant questioning themes of 24.[108] Of these 24, fact finding seemed to be a major objective for 17, and in 14 cases it was the main objective.

Reconciliation, healing or soliciting an apology were objectives in ten of the 24 hearings. In three of these ten cases, commissioners sought an apology from RUF perpetrators or collaborators, and in two of these cases, both in Kailahun, seeking an apology seemed to be the main objective of questioning. In three other cases, healing and reconciliation of victims seemed to be a main objective of questioning. In these, fact finding was a secondary objective as the commissioners and leaders of evidence did not question the witness hard about facts of primary importance to the commission and focused more on the person's immediate needs.

At times, reconciliation and healing goals seemed to take precedence when commissioners or the leader of evidence recognized opportunities for conciliatory action. This might involve organizing a conciliatory meeting between victim and perpetrator where both were known and the victim wanted a meeting, organizing a proper burial for a loved one, or pushing for an apology where this was likely (see snapshot five).

The third objective of questioning appeared to be public education. Though public education was an integral part of the public hearings, I identified six cases when commissioners appeared to make a statement to the audience, highlighting an issue. In three cases, the witness was either a leader or a celebrated case. When Mr. Jalloh, chairman of the Amputee Association – an organization that resisted cooperating with the TRC and Special Court – testified, Bishop Humper concluded the session with the public statement, "This commission is victim centred... It is in the interest of the nation and the UN to prevent a reaction from your group." He added that the TRC was committed to following victims' recommendations.

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[108] I categorized earlier hearings based on my notes and recollections.

Almost all the 29 witnesses sought economic assistance, largely for themselves but also for the groups or communities they represented. The exceptions were those from whom apologies were sought (though one of these witnesses requested assistance in getting out of prison) and those who specifically sought justice (1) or reconciliation (2).

The Bo hearings also raised questions about witness protection. On a few occasions, when a serious crime had been committed by someone living in the victim's community, the leader of evidence asked the victim for the perpetrator's name and address. In one case the leader of evidence said the TRC would send the victim with a TRC staff-member and a vehicle to get the named man to testify. In my view, this seemed to endanger the victim as the perpetrator still held power in the community (April 30, 2003). However, a reconciliation meeting did occur and the perpetrator gave the victim's family money to cover formal funeral expenses (TRC, 2004).

In another case, an amputee asked the commissioners how they would ensure the security of amputees who testified. Bishop Humper replied that the witness was not alone in fearing for his security. As the government supported the TRC, it should provide protection. He said:

> Any witness or perpetrator who comes before this commission is entitled to maximum protection. Go and tell our brothers and sisters who suffered not to be afraid to testify. We know where the witnesses are and, beginning with the community, there is security. Even after the commission, we will recommend that security continues (May 2, 2003).

At another point, Bishop Humper said to an RUF collaborator, "All people who testify are under TRC protection. It does not give anyone license or permission to harass or attack" (May 16, 2003).

How could the TRC guarantee such protection? Even before its mandate ended, it did not have the capacity to ensure the safety of witnesses after they returned home. Hayner (2004) writes that guarantees of confidentiality in closed hearings represented the main form of witness protection. Therefore, "those who requested appearance in closed session were generally granted it if they were able to demonstrate their reasons, including any safety concerns" (p. 4).

For those who testified publicly, all the commission could promise was that physical harassment of witnesses was a crime and subject to judicial action – in a country where justice has been an exception rather than the rule. The TRC's protection strategy seemed to be based on the commitment of chiefs and other community leaders to ensure that harassment would not be condoned. This strategy was best articulated by a civil society leader who had been involved with the creation of the TRC:

I spoke with some of my colleagues a couple of months back. They were talking about employing a lot of police, sending some witnesses out of the country, which I think is not the answer. If you take police, put them in the community, you'll have to withdraw them one day. If you send them abroad, they'll have to come home one day.

But simply, involve the community members in this witness protection. Let the community members agree that whatever this witness is doing, he is doing it in the interest of the community. He is representing the community. He is doing it to let the community be part of the historical record. And we have a common phenomenon in Sierra Leone whereas if you are well respected in the community, or accepted in the community, you cry, they cry. You laugh, they laugh with you. So if you get them to agree. Whatever happens they will be with that witness. In case, like, at night the person screams, they will all come out *immediately*.

(For returning excombatants), *involve* the community leaders in this process. If possible *call* a community meeting in this village. Religious leaders. Community leaders. And then talk to the community as a whole. Provided the perpetrator shows remorse why he or she did what they did. Then that would sort of help to calm them down and agree to protect him or her (interview 45).

Throughout the week in Bo, the commissioners and staff worked extremely hard and kept long hours. When they were not in hearings, they were giving interviews for television or radio or preparing for the next day. As they gathered more information, their questions became more direct and they were better able to cross-reference information from other testimonies and refer directly to operations, towns and individuals.

By Saturday morning, the last day of the Bo hearings, the commissioners seemed exhausted. The first witness was a young man, James Gibrila, whose brothers died brutally at the hands of the RUF and mother died as a result of her ordeal with them. Though Gibrila was clearly a victim and had suffered greatly, the tone of questioning was mostly fact finding. The commissioners seemed inattentive and tired. They made errors in their questions and asked about information already given. I noted, "They are showing this young man less sympathy and attention than they showed victims earlier in the week... Healing and reconciliation did not seem to be major concerns" (May 3, 2003).

The next witness, a paramount chief, was treated with much more attention and sympathy even though his losses were less than those of the previous witness. Bishop Humper specifically welcomed the chief, acknowledging that he was the first to testify and that other paramount chiefs should follow his example. I asked Sierra Leoneans sitting beside me whether they found the difference in the commissioners' manner towards the two witnesses strange. They both said this

was natural because the second man is a paramount chief. Not all witnesses, therefore, were equal before the commission (May 3, 2003).

The experience of the final witness, a Kamajor commander, suggests some continuity with the Freetown hearings. The Kamajor, Bernard Smith, described a rivalry between two ruling houses over a chieftaincy that was played out within the context of the war. The commissioners and leader of evidence, however, questioned him about the training and structure of the Kamajors and crimes committed by them. They also questioned him about female Kamajors, publicly raising this possibility which countered popular beliefs about the Kamajors as an all-male society. Smith affirmed that there were women "with special powers" – who had visions – amongst them (May 3, 2003).

At the end, like the CDF who testified in Freetown, Smith asked, "Are the people who overthrew the junta bad people?" Bishop Humper replied, "Good acts are good acts but laws are stipulated in the constitution." When Smith asked commissioners about the indictment of Kamajor leader Hinga Norman by the Special Court, Bishop Humper replied, "Before a warrior defeats another warrior there must be evil. Chief Sam Hinga Norman, whether he did good or bad, he is the one who helped overthrow the junta."

In sum, the hearings in Bo seemed much more meaningful to local people than those in Freetown. There was also more of a connection between those on stage and the audience. Commissioners sometimes appeared to address the audience and the audience responded more to developments on stage, whether in response to a bad translation or to witness statements or actions. Commissioners at times had to silence the audience.

The narrative threads of the commission report also emerged during these proceedings. Commissioner's questions were more precise and directed, demonstrating their growing knowledge of events. Still, in Bo, I did not hear anyone admit to crimes.

9.4.4   Snapshot 4: From 'Soldier Killed Rebel Junction' to 'Peace Junction'

If the opening ceremony in Bo was for the privileged, the closing event was largely for locals. In a simple and moving ceremony a major road junction that had been called 'Soldier Killed Rebel Junction' was renamed 'Peace Junction.' All the proceedings were in Krio, which

was better understood by those present.[109] The exceptions were the imam, who prayed in Arabic, and the chief who conducted libations in Mende.

A young man explained that the junction had been the site of a stand-off between local people and attacking rebels. An NGO worker added that "It comes to a point where we don't know who is a soldier. We don't know who is a rebel. The rebels were actually repelled by civilians, including market women." By changing the name to Peace Junction and marking it with a memorial, the community is showing its willingness "to make Bo District a place where we talk about peace and reconciliation," a TRC official said.

Bishop Humper spoke of a need to change attitudes: "Don't say I help myself before I help others. This 'help myself' has destroyed the country." He went on to stress that peace will depend on the commitment of Sierra Leoneans and the international community. Finally, a man spoke of children's bravery in terrible circumstances and the need to embrace them and give them a chance. We concluded by singing a beautiful song about "peace like a river" and I felt that the many people who attended the ceremony, including many young people, were deeply moved.

A few days later a policeman flagged a taxi and asked to go to Peace Junction.

9.4.5   Snapshot 5: The Kailahun hearings, May 16, 2003

It is not easy to arrange a ride to Kailahun. It is in the eastern district where the war started and which was occupied by the RUF for much of the fighting. Kailahun and Makeni, by virtue of their long occupations, probably hosted the two most important hearings and, though I was travelling in other parts of the country, I resolved to attend the Kailahun hearings at least for a day. A delay in an arranged ride and a driving speed dictated by a severely-potholed road meant that I only caught the last two testimonies. But those two hearings and the closing ceremony showed a remarkable transformation in the public face of the TRC. They also showed me that my observations were no more than snapshots of a commission that was changing daily, both in itself and in its relations with its audiences. I can say nothing definitive about the hearings and public ceremonies beyond my record of events.

When I entered the Kailahun Community Centre on the last of four days of public hearings, it was clear that the hearings had changed. The hall was packed, with standing room

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[109] Krio is not universally understood, however, and might be less accessible to people who had not been to school or had not been with the RUF who used it as their lingua franca. This would especially be the case with those who lived far from Freetown.

only. Most of those around me were men but children, women, and even dogs were also present. The audience was rapt.

The witness, a man of 70 named Mr. Saffa, was being questioned hard by the commissioners. Their questions were specific – about RUF committees he served on, his relations with Sankoh and the RUF organizational structure.

Bishop Humper was on a crusade. He noted that Saffa came from a ruling house and was held unwillingly. Because of his situation he "became a perpetrator," serving on committees that forced people to produce food and palm oil for the RUF. Then the bishop said, "Pa Saffa, look at my face and I'll look at yours... We have had over 7,000 statements. You were a civilian rebel. In order to protect your own life, you became a rebel." When Saffa replied, Humper did not wait for the usual English translation but dove in with the next question.

This tone, this pressure by the commissioners, was never used at the hearings in Freetown and Bo. Clearly the TRC had much more information, but something was also happening with the commission's relationship with the audience. In a dramatic series of questions, Leader of Evidence Ojielo asked Saffa about being in a helicopter when the Indian peacekeepers were captured in 2000. He asked if Saffa had entered it. When Saffa denied this, Ojielo said, "People are laughing. Did you enter it?" Saffa smiled.

Ojielo noted that Saffa was "not less than 70 years old." He said, "Do you love the people of Kailahun? Now tell them something they know."

Saffa replied, "These are my people here. They are really sympathizing with me."

Ojielo said, "People value honesty and an apology. Apology can only come with honesty to be meaningful... At your age, every young person here should be coming to you for your wisdom and blessing. They shouldn't be ashamed to have your name. There is an African saying that elders speak the truth. This commission can help you reconcile with your people but the choice is yours Pa Saffa. Nobody is forcing you to admit to what you have not done."

When Saffa began to talk, Humper talked over him, saying, "Pa Saffa, you are a victim and because you were captured you had to join. You did not have palm oil so you got it from others."

Finally, Saffa apologized. Turning to the audience and said, "We were... trapped by the war. We had no way to escape. We were not asked to contribute and we were not the owners of

the plantations but if we did not produce, we would be punished. We used your properties to save our lives. So I'm now appealing to you today to forgive me."

At the end of the hearing, Commissioner Kamara made a public statement:

> One of the requirements of the TRC is to prevent a recurrence of this. Anyone given a criminal instruction and who carries it out is held liable for its execution. A number of people have been telling us that one cause of the last war was maladministration, poor governance and extortion of the people. A district commissioner would come to a chief and say "I want this... and the chief would go to the people and get it. All these things should stop. The war has changed and if people continue in carrying out these practices there will not be reconciliation. They will be prosecuted and punished.

The final hearing in Kailahun with a middle-aged woman, who had been an RUF member, was similar. Commissioners asked precise questions, suggested at times that she was lying, and implored her to tell the truth and apologize. Finally Bishop Humper said:

> If you attach yourself to a group, you must share whatever good they do and whatever bad they do. You had a bush school. You captured children. For the sake of the children who are our future... You did wrong as a rebel, whether as coordinator of education... You did wrong period. You must say, 'I did wrong. I'm sorry.' You will never get this opportunity again.

The witness refused to apologize.

Humper's assertion that "You did wrong," however accurate, contrasted sharply with commissioners' statements to CDFs in the Freetown and Bo hearings that "We are not here like a court to say this was good and this was bad" (April 26, 2003). This position may have changed over time but the two statements may also be consistent. Participating in self-defense militias or even in the original resistance against an oppressive state may be justified, but crimes against civilians and torture and abuse of prisoners cannot. The CDFs quoted earlier asked whether their mission was wrong and, given the desperate need for community defense, it would be hard to say that it was. But willingly collaborating with a group that is notorious for committing atrocities is wrong.

The Kailahun hearings were much different from those in Bo and Freetown. They were clearly meaningful for the audience which was totally engaged in the process. The commissioners applied much more pressure on witnesses and appeared to have more information about them. At times they directly accused witnesses of lying and used the audience to cajole them. The audience responded with laughter or noises of discontent and, rather than being silenced as they had in Bo, this was used by the commission.

Also Humper's occasional interruptions and untranslated conversations with witnesses reflected a new, crusading mentality. But was this crusade consistent with the TRC's claimed impartiality and were its allegations based on reasonable evidence?

9.4.6   Snapshot 6: 'The Slaughter House'

We stood on the hill across the road from the ruined house known in Kailahun as the 'Slaughter House.' It was so named, Bishop Humper told us, because between these blood-splattered walls "87 souls were slaughtered." On the road between us, the road that led to the barracks of the UN Pakistani Battalion, the commissioners, the paramount chief, a reverend, and men and a woman seeking forgiveness stood in a circle. Behind them was a military band and spectators, two of whom sported the insignias of CIVPOL, the UN civilian police, and their national flags: one Kenyan and one Canadian.

One by one the men and woman spoke of their misdeeds. Three were excombatants and two were collaborators, including a man who served as paramount chief under the RUF. In their apologies they named their crimes. One RUF excombatant said, "I am part of the people who forced people to work on our farm... According to the law all these were wrong. We had sex with people who were not our wives." He knelt before the paramount chief and appealed for forgiveness. The chief placed his hands on their heads to indicate that they were accepted and forgiven (TRC, 2004). The excombatant then invited all RUFs to step forward and do the same. No one moved.

The paramount chief announced, "We accept all the people who apologize. The government should accept them too. There should be no more molestation." The reverend followed him, saying, "We unbind them unconditionally from all their wrongs."

Finally, Bishop Humper gave an impassioned speech, talking about the significance of the Slaughter House as a memorial of the atrocities and the "87 souls" who were killed there. "There is an end to everything. There is a turning point." Now is the time for the long journey toward reconciliation.

I felt uneasy. "Eighty-seven souls," a number broadcast to the nation, was very precise for a guerrilla war. Where did it come from? What evidence was it based on in a country in which few forensic digs have occurred? And unless the number was based on sound evidence, why did the chairman of the truth commission cite it as fact? It is one thing for a witness to make

allegations; it is another thing coming from a commission that is charged with providing an authoritative – or at least carefully-analyzed – truth.

The two policemen had disappeared into the 'Slaughter House' and the two teenaged boys who befriended me indicated that I should go down too. The ceremony was wrapping up so I followed them to the yard below the house. One boy stood in the door and, grinning, beckoned me to enter. This "Slaughter House" was turning into a spectacle. I waited outside while the commissioners entered and exited the rooms where the crimes were said to have been committed. The other spectators then entered. Reluctantly, I followed them to the two small rooms within. People were pointing with excitement to the 'blood'-splattered walls and ceiling. I did not linger.

That evening, I met the Canadian and Kenyan policemen and one asked me about my impression of the ceremony and the "Slaughter House." I said I wondered if this had been a conciliatory event. The policemen wondered whether it had been an execution site at all. The blood on the walls and ceiling was too evenly splattered, they said. That blood was sprinkled there, "stage managed," possibly to terrorize. The Kenyan noted that when a person is killed near a wall there will be big splashes of blood, not sprinkles. The next morning before I left Kailahun I revisited the "Slaughter House" and saw again the even sprinkles on the wall. Whatever happened at this site – and atrocities may indeed have occurred – the number, "87 souls," seemed less believable than ever.

◆   ◆   ◆

These six snapshots show an evolution in the public's relationship with the TRC. More accurately, different 'publics' engaged in different ways with the commission over time. The TRC also seemed to change its questions depending on opportunities recognized by the commissioners and leader of evidence. Where a clear chance to solicit an apology or be useful to a victim seemed present, questioning tactics seemed to change from fact finding to promoting reconciliation, apology and healing. In some of the latter cases, such as the hearings in Kailahun and Mr. Jalloh's hearing in Freetown, conciliatory statements and questions also sent a message to the public. A study of the video recordings of all the public hearings would be useful to understand this dynamic better.

After the public apathy and cautious questioning in Freetown, the commission seemed to gain confidence as it gained knowledge in Bo. Moreover, the Bo public seemed to be interested and listening, and the commissioners facilitated this by giving frequent radio interviews. The closing ceremony in Bo was obviously conciliatory and meaningful to local people. This, in a

town that was not as hard hit as many others during the war, partly because of local organized resistance and the heavy presence of Kamajors in the region. This was also a region that many RUF in the north were said to fear returning to.

By contrast, the hearings and ceremony in Kailahun felt more like a crusade. This was not necessarily a bad thing. Many Sierra Leoneans wanted excombatants to at least acknowledge and apologize for crimes they committed and, to my knowledge, this was happening through no other public mechanism. As long as hard questioning did not lead to a witch hunt with false allegations and false 'confessions,' such hearings might contribute to accountability and reconciliation. However, once the commission publicly raised allegations and suggested the witness was lying, the taint of suspicion would remain with the witness regardless of the veracity of allegations.

Finally, conciliatory public apologies and statements of forgiveness at the closing event in Kailahun were overshadowed by the ambiguity of the "Slaughter House." While public monuments of atrocities are important, by presenting the "Slaughter House" as the site of 87 executions, the TRC's credibility and the conciliatory function of the monument were undermined.

Between April 14ᵗʰ and July 11ᵗʰ, the TRC carried out individual hearings for five days each in 13 districts in the country. It also conducted institutional and thematic hearings from May 5ᵗʰ to early August, covering topics such as corruption, youth, women, media, mineral resource management, and the role of external actors in the war (Hayner, 2004). According to Hayner, as excombatants, who were initially reluctant to testify, began to see that the Special Court did not arrest people after testifying, "many clamored for the opportunity to speak." In the end, perpetrators provided more than 13 percent of statements. As the public outside Freetown gained interest in the commission, "there were strong calls" for the TRC to return to the provinces or stay longer (p. 4). Unfortunately, time and resource constraints prevented this. Only around 350 of the 7,707 people who provided statements were able to testify publicly. This strong interest indicates that the TRC did become meaningful to the population. For the first time, ordinary people across the country could talk openly about their experiences in the past and articulate their hopes for the future.

9.5   The TRC as restorative justice? Apologies, forgiveness and reconciliation

Though the term 'restorative justice' is rarely heard in Sierra Leone, the TRC used it to describe its approach to reconciliation. The restorative justice emphasis on restoring relations

"between victims and perpetrators and between perpetrators and the community to which they belong" seems ideal for the commission's conciliatory task (vol. 3b, chap. 7, ¶ 7).[110] This definition does not recognize the need to reconcile victims with their communities but this was also an important part of the TRC's work.

The report notes that restorative justice requires "accountability, truth-telling, acknowledgement, and reparations" (vol. 3b, chap. 7, ¶ 8). The commission tried to encourage perpetrators and those with command responsibility for forces to acknowledge and apologize for their crimes and errors, with mixed success. However, the report states:

> The Commission is of the opinion that forgiveness by a victim is not a necessary element in (the reconciliation) process and cannot be forced. The Commission also notes that an admission of remorse by the perpetrator cannot be forced. Remorse, while desirable is not necessary for reconciliation (vol. 3b, chap. 7, ¶ 8).

While the commission is correct that remorse or forgiveness cannot be compelled, I think genuine forgiveness is part of deep reconciliation between two people. Remorse and change by perpetrators may also be important for victims' security and healing. By discounting these important elements of deep reconciliation, the TRC may be interpreting reconciliation superficially, taking it to mean only a willingness to interact and not take revenge.

When TRC commissioners implored victims to reconcile with perpetrators "for the good of the country," they also confused conciliatory goals (vol. 3b, chap. 7, ¶ 66). Neither the commissioners nor the report explain how victim-perpetrator reconciliation facilitates national reconciliation. The report only implies that it contributes to individual healing which only indirectly relates to the health of the community and state.

While inter-individual reconciliation has little relationship to peace at the national level, individual victims and perpetrators may have their own reasons for wanting to meet. A high percentage of people who gave statements to the TRC said they wanted to meet the person who harmed them or who they harmed. A random sample of 300 statements indicated that 88 percent of victims were willing to meet those who harmed them or their loved ones and 81 percent of perpetrators agreed to meet victims. Also, 31 percent of combatants said they would accept responsibility and apologize for their crimes and 20 percent said they would help rebuild their communities. None were willing to pay reparations to those they harmed (TRC, 2004).

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[110] All citations in sections 9.5 and 9.6 are from the TRC report (2004) unless otherwise stated. Therefore I cite only the volume, chapter and paragraph of any quotations.

Though many excombatants saw the TRC hearings and ceremonies as a means of apologizing to their communities and gaining "the confidence to move freely" within them, many apologies were half-hearted (vol. 3b, chap. 7, ¶ 97b). Many perpetrators did not admit to their crimes or state their roles in the violence. The following testimony of an RUF vanguard, taken from a closed hearing in Kailahun in May 2003, was typical:

Mustapha Koroma: The war was not made by human beings; it was made by God. I am appealing to the Commission to plead to the people in Kailahun for them to have mercy on me.

...Comm. Kamara: If you say you were going to apologize, people will ask apologize for what?

Mustapha Koroma: I am apologizing for what the war did.

Comm. Kamara: What kind of crime do you accept to have caused?

Mustapha Koroma: I apologize for what the war has caused and, as a member of the RUF, I apologize for what the RUF did during the war. I am appealing to the government to assist us with education (vol. 3b, chap. 7, ¶ 89).

Only perpetrators who admitted their actions, even half-heartedly, could participate in closing ceremonies and be 'forgiven' by chiefs. The TRC acknowledges that this act of 'forgiveness' is really an act of acknowledgment that the harm was done and the community is willing to receive the perpetrator back. The report states:

It is important to note that the community cannot forgive in the name of the individual wronged; it can only acknowledge the harm done to the community. The acknowledgement of wrongdoing helps pave the way for the victim and perpetrator to live together. The approval and support of the community in such a reconciliation process is necessary in order to make reconciliation sustainable (vol. 3b, chap. 7, ¶ 20).

Though the TRC report stated that leaders could not forgive for victims, many did speak as if this is what they were doing. A religious leader said, "It is incumbent on all of us here to forgive Ansu Koroma." And a women's leader said, "I am talking on behalf of the women in the town to say we have forgiven you" (vol. 3b, chap. 7, ¶ 85).

These public ceremonies expressing forgiveness and reconciliation are best seen as acts of witness that protect perpetrators and victims from further harm from each other. The TRC noted that after they testified, five witnesses suffered security threats. In all these cases, the chiefs were informed and the issue was resolved. This indicates that this form of witness protection is

fairly effective in Sierra Leone and traditional leaders and other community witnesses have an important role to play in ensuring protection.

9.6   Breaking the silence: The TRC report

Truth commissions can and do change the frame of public discourse and public memory. But they cannot be judged failures because they fail to change behavior and institutions. That is not their function

Michael Ignatieff (1998, p. 173)

Some of us, some people know. We know the origin. But nobody's going to say it. It's not worth giving a life for. And some people say, if you know that this man is high, visible in the SLPP, are you going to go out and say 'Oh yes I know where it actually started or some of the actual early meetings of the parties or the parties involved who started this whole rebel thing'? No. So we all sit down as a nation and say well we know we're not going to get the root causes. How are you going to make sure it never happens again?(History will only come out) when people feel secure. When they feel safe.   **Civil society leader (interview 43)**

For a country often described as having a 'culture of secrecy,' where speaking out may be dangerous, the TRC report offers a remarkable deviation from the past. In a bold, well-researched and, at times, breathtakingly frank document, the TRC has set a new standard in Sierra Leone for discussions about the past and expectations of human rights and governance in the future.

The four-volume report, entitled *Witness to Truth,* was handed to President Kabbah in December 2004 and was publicly released on August 8, 2005.[111] I have discussed contributions of the TRC toward reconciliation; here I highlight major conciliatory aspects of the report.

The main contributions of the TRC report to reconciliation are fourfold. First, in fulfilling its mandate to "create an impartial historical record" of the war [Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000, s. 6(1)] the document provides by far the most compelling history of the conflict available. One of the most illuminating sections is the 375-page chapter on Military and Political History which discusses in detail the motivations, strategies, actions and contexts of all sides based on thousands of testimonies and interviews. The report tries hard to be transparent in its analysis. When witnesses offered contradictory stories, the report outlines and weighs different versions and suggests the one the authors feel is most credible. The sheer volume of people of all levels

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[111] The full report can be downloaded off the internet at www.trcsierraleone.org. It is also possible to download a children's version through the same website.

willing – and wanting – to talk to the commission indicates that the TRC was meaningful to people, including a large number of perpetrators who wanted to explain their situations.[112]

No book or report, however well researched, can provide a definitive history of an event or country. The reader must always weight the credibility of statements or arguments and assess the methods used to arrive at these conclusions. The TRC report had the advantage of relying extensively on primary data – 7,706 personal testimonies - and was able to cross-reference information with the help of an extensive computerized data base. This provided TRC researchers with insights into patterns in the war and the involvement of specific people that they might otherwise have missed. Combining this with the analytical transparency mentioned above and conservatism in apportioning blame, the TRC provided a credible record on which further studies might build.

Some may say the report's authors strove too hard for balance in their criticisms of all sides in a war in which the RUF committed most atrocities. Indeed the TRC was cautious in attributing responsibility for crimes to Charles Taylor and Foday Sankoh and may have understated their roles. This conservatism and reliance on credible, cross-referenced testimonies is appropriate for good scholarly work and is especially important in the work of such an influential report. Also, by stressing violations, the TRC has made it difficult for any group to argue that they are above the law. The report also dealt with rifts within the Kabbah government during the war and criticized decisions and lack of leadership by top officials, including the president. In my view, the report treated everyone fairly and no one was above criticism. The fact that the report names names is also important for creating an environment of openness in the future.

For example, as noted in chapter 6.8, the report challenges the belief that the RUF was driven by a desire for diamond revenues. The rebels did not control diamond regions for extended periods until 1997 but government officials and other elites smuggled diamonds into Liberia throughout the war. With this statement, officials can no longer hide behind the RUF to disguise their own corruption and opportunism.

The conciliatory value of such a history goes beyond reconciling Sierra Leoneans with the facts of the past. It pops the bubble of simplistic myth-making that curtails dialogue to preserve itself. No longer is it possible to dismiss RUF and SLA combatants as mindless

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[112] A major conflict between the TRC and Special Court involved the court's refusal to let the TRC publicly question those in custody. Hinga Norman wanted to appear at a hearing and the court denied permission.

'lumpen' elements or cast CDFs solely as heroes. In its place the report provides a story that is much more human, nuanced and convincing.

Writing a credible and nuanced history of the war based on the input of thousands of citizens also empowers Sierra Leoneans who see their words taken seriously. The report is a public document and hopefully civil society groups will take the lead in disseminating its contents in multiple forms and national languages so it is accessible for review and discussion by children, women and men across the country. International commitment of funds will be needed to realize that potential.

Second, the report promotes reconciliation by holding all people to standards consistent with democratic values and human rights. Significantly, the TRC states that "the Commission is not called upon to assess the justness of the conflict itself." Thus, civil defense forces cannot legitimately argue that they are less culpable for abuses than the RUF because they claim to have been fighting a 'just war.' The report states, "Violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law can be neither justified nor excused on the grounds that they are in some way responding to violations and abuses by the other side in the conflict" (vol. 1 chap. 3 ¶ 36, 37).

The report similarly sets a standard of leadership. It criticizes national and local leaders for failing to take responsibility for their actions during the war and showing a lack of commitment to reconciliation processes. The report prints at length the transcripts of a fascinating exchange between the leader of evidence and President Kabbah, the last witness at the thematic hearing on reconciliation and reparation. In the exchange, the president refuses to acknowledge or take responsibility for his mistakes during the war. The report states:

> The recognition and symbolic acknowledgement by the Head of State in Sierra Leone regarding the violations committed by all sides during the conflict in Sierra Leone and the recognition of the suffering of all victims at this TRC hearing would have been a huge step forward in the pursuit of national reconciliation. It would have set a positive example which individual citizens could have followed... The Commission regrets that the President, as the Father of the Nation, missed a prime opportunity to fulfil this role (vol. 3b chap. 7 ¶ 113).

The report states that "The Commission regrets that the leadership of Sierra Leone has not taken the opportunity to do more to promote reconciliation at the national level," noting that this support is crucial to the "success of the reconciliation project" (vol. 3b chap. 7 ¶ 19). This concern extended to chiefs. The report states:

The Commission was surprised by the number of complaints about the violations committed by many of the Chiefs during the conflict, for which they neither as a group nor individually expressed remorse or offered any explanation to their communities. In reality, while the Commission had to rely on the Chiefs as leaders of their communities and had to work closely with them, the Commission was cognisant of the fact that many chiefs have been discredited by their failure to explain the roles they played during the war. It is for this reason that the Commission has not felt entirely comfortable relying on traditional structures to help foster reconciliation... The Commission has recommended that the role of Chiefs and the manner in which they have been manipulated by successive governments must be placed on the national agenda for discussion, as it has huge potential for further conflict in the future. (vol. 3b chap. 7 ¶ 25).

Third, the TRC's broad interpretation of its mandate enabled it to examine and make recommendations on cultural and legal factors that support violence against women and children or fail to protect them from discrimination or abuse. By considering the cultural context that both enabled violence and into which women and children return, the commission acknowledges that violence and reconciliation are interpreted through culture.[113] Of all the lessons that the Sierra Leone TRC has to offer future commissions and analysts of post-conflict transitions, this may be among the most important.

Fourth, after listening to thousands of witnesses, the commission makes recommendations to address problems that contributed to violations and advocates reparations for certain categories of victims. Although the TRC Act did not use the word 'reparation,' the term "encompasses a broader sense of justice that goes beyond individual satisfaction and includes recognition for the harm suffered, as well as a sense of civic trust and social solidarity" (vol. 2 chap. 4 ¶ 5).

The TRC stresses the importance of reparations in recognizing harm done to victims, addressing imbalances created by assistance to excombatants – though it asserts that this is redress, not assistance or charity – and restoring trust in the state. States are legally obliged to redress wrongs of both state and individuals because they are obliged "to guarantee... human rights and to ensure that human rights violators are brought to justice" and victims receive reparations (vol. 2 chap. 4 ¶ 21). But the report states:

In Sierra Leone, effective redress is simply not available through the courts. The justice system currently does not have the capacity to deal with the massive violations committed during the conflict. Large parts of the country do not have

[113] By 'enabling violence' I refer to attitudes towards women and children that made them more vulnerable to violence. I do not refer to direct atrocities – except perhaps the practice of cannibalism which is not unknown in the region and was used by people falsely acting in the name of tradition. The first mass amputations that I am aware of were conducted by Belgians in the Congo (Hochschild. 1999).

functioning courts and access to formal justice is difficult to obtain. Moreover, the judiciary suffers from a perceived lack of credibility and lacks public confidence (vol. 2 chap. 4 ¶ 11).

The TRC did not limit reparations to those who testified, as the South African TRC did. Nor did it limit them to civilians or nationals. Instead, it used 'vulnerability' as the basis for its recommendations. In doing this, it "acknowledges the impossibility of compensating victims in proportion to the harm they have suffered, and does not by this categorisation prioritise suffering and harm" (vol. 2 chap. 4 ¶ 28).

The commission focused on providing reparations to specific categories of people: amputees; children; victims of sexual violence; and certain groups of war wounded. For war wounded, the TRC considered victims' economic dependency and inability to cover high medical costs to be particularly damaging. It thus determined vulnerability largely according to economic considerations. This was consistent with the economic concerns of victims. Of 7,707 statement makers, 49% asked for help with shelter (the largest number of requests), 41% wanted educational help, 27% asked for medical assistance and 18% asked for cash. Only 2% asked for justice, the second smallest number after religious rites (1%).

The TRC determined that "for certain benefits to be accorded to victims, the violation committed against the victim must constitute a 50% or more reduction of earning capacity" (vol. 2 chap. 4 ¶ 68). This resulted in some chilling calculations. The commission considered that victims who had one ear amputated only lost 7% of their earning capacity whereas those who lost two ears had a 50% reduction. Similarly, those who had one eye removed from its socket had a 30% reduction of earning capacity whereas a blind person had 100% loss. Amputees, victims of sexual violence and eligible children did not have to prove a reduction of earning capacity to gain assistance and the TRC recommended free health care (including surgery for fistula) for victims of sexual violence and free prosthetics and rehabilitation help for amputees.

To explain the focus on economic capacity, the TRC states:

> To ensure sustainability, the programme focused on the reduction of dependency and the empowerment of victims. Restoring the human dignity of a victim means helping him or her to become a fully participating citizen of society again. Having an income may contribute significantly to the feeling of recovered dignity. Therefore, many of the reparations measures recommended by the Commission focus on education, skills training, micro-credit, entrepreneurship, and employment (vol. 2 chap. 4 ¶ 78).

In sum, the TRC report contributes to reconciliation in four ways. First, by creating an impartial and detailed historical record it humanizes the conflict, exposes and destroys myths and empowers the population. Second, it affirms values and standards of democracy and human rights. Third, it recognizes that crimes are enabled and interpreted within a social context and cannot be assessed outside that context. The report made recommendations to deal with social structures and laws that enabled violence or hindered reintegration on just terms. Finally, the report made recommendations on reparations, future directions and legal changes that would better protect women and children from violence.

Chapters eight and nine discussed some major institutional mechanisms that promote reintegration and the first stages of reconciliation. Chapter ten explores informal ways in which individual Sierra Leoneans build deep reconciliation with the state and between each other. That deep reconciliation is measured by trust.

Chapter 10:
"We watch them":
Building trust in the absence of openness

10.1 "You are a bloody rebel!": On the front line

April 3, 2003.

Incident during a poda poda ride, recounted by Umaroh, my interpreter[114]
It started when the driver gave the policeman 1000 leones. The policeman said

the money is too small. So (the driver) gave the 2000 leones to the apprentice

so that the apprentice would collect the first 1000 leones that was given. So

the policeman became offended. He said "Now, what I'm going to tell you. You

offload everything. You put down all your load and you tell the passengers to

bring down their luggage to check."

So they were there arguing. He said, "OK, what I'm doing is discretional. OK, I'm

a security. The one that I feel to search, I'll search. The one that I feel is

safe, I'll allow it to go." So there came in (a youth) who said... "I think we have

peace now. I think we have peace now. Please allow us to go. This is partial. This

is partial. Not the right thing. Look at the other vehicles are going. You did not

check them. Only our vehicle."

So the policeman continued to say that "Oh, this is discretional. I am the

security here... I'm doing a special job because this is security. Any vehicle that

I'm not satisfied with, I'm going to check it. It's discretional. It's discretional."

So the boy continued to say "We have been condoning this for years. Ten years

war. We have been suffering. Now it is peace. Please allow us to go. Don't delay

us here. Look at the other vehicles. Look at the government bus. Why can't you

check the government bus?"

And the policeman said, "Yes, you've already said that. It's a government bus.

That's a government vehicle. No need to check a government bus, let me tell

you."

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[114] As everyone spoke Krio during this incident I could only follow parts. Umaroh recounted it to me later.

Then there came in another policeman who said (to the youth), "You are the one that's collaborating. You are a rebel, in fact... You are a bloody rebel! You are the one that's collaborating! You are the one that's condoning this war. We are trying to check. We are suffering. We are fighting for you people. Now you are saying those obnoxious words. Those obnoxious words"...

The boy continued to say that "This is peace. This is peace. We need peace. We need peace." Then there was that woman, that fat woman who said "I have been begging you to release us. Why are you still adamant not to let us go? My husband in fact is a forceman. You can salute my husband."

There came in another woman who said, "To hell with your husband. Who can salute your husband? I cannot salute your husband. If I am a civilian how can I salute your husband?"

(Then one policeman said to the youth), "I will arrest you for interruption." Therein I (Umaroh) came to stop the policeman because he was advancing towards the boy. I said "No, you are security. You have the ultimate right. You are doing the right thing but please let us go."

Then he said, "For your sake, you can go"...

That's corruption. Because you don't say you're discretionary... There must be a law. If you decide to check, you check everybody.

(Back in the poda poda) the boy said, "All of you are going to face the TRC." He said, "Look at me. I'm not going to the TRC because I'm not concerned. I never owned a gun. I never corrupted the country. In fact I have my O-levels"...

The fat lady said, "Let me tell you. Do you think they are going to call them to the TRC? Look at the Anti-Corruption (Commission). Nothing happened there."

For all Sierra Leoneans' conciliatory words, a journey in inter-city poda podas blasts any illusions. This is the front line of civilian-government relations – an ongoing contest between an old, corrupt, elitist order and hopes for a different future. The struggle is evident in battles between police and drivers, passenger debates, the accusation, "You are a bloody rebel!", the youth's claim of superiority by virtue of his education, and the woman's attempt to use her husband's position to intimidate police.

Popular mistrust of authorities exists simultaneously with a desire for impartial law enforcement and justice throughout the country, a situation that *requires* public confidence in police and the judicial system. In the words of one teacher:

> The only way... the government will be able to put things under control... is when they have enough adequate security in place and to make sure that the *laws* of the country are implemented *everywhere in every corner* of the country... Every corner from Freetown right through to Kailahun, the border with Liberia, right on to Kambia, the border to Guinea. Every part of the country should have the police (interview 5).

When I was in Sierra Leone, police appeared to bring about conflict rather than security and peace. At the frequent roadblocks between towns, drivers were usually asked for bribes and at times they were fined for offering them. The frustrations of poda poda passengers and drivers erupted into quarrels and lively debates. A harmonious driving team could fracture in minutes with the frustration of dealing with police. One tough driver fought back tears after a confrontation, saying, "That was my college money." Passengers too, exasperated after long rides over short distances due to seemingly endless barricades, debated whether bribing was justified. Many said this is a new era. People should not bribe. Others said they must or they will never get anywhere.[115]

Much of the trouble between police and drivers comes from the poverty of both. The taxis and poda podas are in terrible shape, and drivers, who do not usually own the vehicles, are paid according to the number of fares they collect. There is always some infraction they can be accused of. The police, like most civil servants, are inadequately paid, if they are paid on time at all. Not only are they tempted to request bribes, poorly-paid superiors may also demand a cut and encourage corruption by their underlings.

An international police observer said, "It's not corruption in my mind. It's sustenance." He mentioned an inspector who heads a municipal detachment and only earns 170,000 leones

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[115] I am told that, in 2005, road blocks are infrequent though they still exist.

(US$60) a month plus a bag of rice. An average police officer receives 130,000 to 140,000 leones (US$50) (interview 63). The pressure is compounded by the common expectation that those with jobs should support unemployed relatives.

In chapter four I argued that trust is a good measure of deep reconciliation: reconciliation that goes beyond compromises or physically bringing people in conflict together. It is reconciliation that is felt. The case study of Sierra Leone shows that this measure is apt. Long-term national reconciliation in Sierra Leone involves three areas of trust building: creating trust between citizens and the state; building trust and promoting healing within communities; and reconciling factions or divided segments within the population. This chapter deals with all three.

10.2 "We market in 'Do you know who I am?'": Regaining trust in the state

The witnesses expressed discontent over the fact that those public institutions designed to defend the interests of the people were only serving the interests of those constituting them... There is very little trust in leadership. Many people also indicted their fear of being victimized if they criticize them openly... The leaders should urgently address this lack of trust, for it can only be a source of further strife and unrest.

TRC report (2004, vol. 2, chap. 4, ¶ 48)

There is a... widely held view — and I am speaking here from the perspective of the Third World — which attributes the state of poverty in many of our countries to corruption. In other words, we often hear that these countries are rich in natural resources but continue to remain poor and underdeveloped because of corruption. In short, corruption... by public officials, appears to have become one of the root causes, if not the root cause of all that afflict our countries - from civil wars to economic stagnation. Does this mean that combating corruption by public officials is a panacea for all those afflictions?

It has also become a truism to point out that corrupt practices involve two actors, and two private beneficiaries to the detriment of the public good. The public sector employee cannot commit an act of corruption without a private sector bribe, and vice versa.

President Tejan Kabbah, Keynote address, Commonwealth Business Forum

Abuja, Nigeria, Dec. 2004

Most Sierra Leoneans say the war was primarily a response to corruption and mismanagement by state leaders. Although the government is now democratically elected, Sierra Leoneans still tend to be suspicious of those with political power, often accusing them of using their positions to benefit themselves and their families while blocking services and opportunities

from those without status or connections. Partly for this reason, most were inclined to forgive low-level combatants while blaming those at the top for maintaining the conditions that caused the war. In the words of one teacher:

> Up to three months now I have not gotten my salary. You see so how do you expect us to LIVE? My wife and kids? But they (politicians) are living, they are living fabulously, extravagantly, driving all sorts of vehicles, enjoying themselves. We are suffering from blackouts, power cuts, that sort of thing. Now of course we are being affected by inflation. Price of commodities is rising every day. Petrol, the price of petrol has been increased, transport fare has been increased...But they say we have a government. Having a government is one thing but good governance is another. We're not having good governance at all (interview 5).

Whether or not the teacher's widely-shared perception of senior politicians' enrichment at public expense is accurate, the perception indicates severe popular mistrust of government leaders.

Reconciliation between citizens and the leaders and institutions of state is, in my view, the most important kind of reconciliation following the Sierra Leone civil war. Citizens have good reasons to distrust the state and many of its institutions, yet that distrust undermines leaders' ability to run the government. Sierra Leoneans will have to continuously debate and renegotiate the qualities of good governance as suited to the traditions and evolving conditions of the country.

Reflecting the seriousness of this matter, the Kabbah government has made corruption a priority. In 2000, it passed the Anti-Corruption Act, created the Anti-Corruption Commission,[116] and passed a Procurement Bill to deal with, in President Kabbah's (2004) words, an "area of massive leakages of public funds." In February 2005, the government launched a National Anti-Corruption Strategy which, the president (2005) claimed, was "developed in consultation with a cross-section of society and stakeholders in Freetown and Regional capitals." The government also promoted the decentralization of government by enabling chieftaincy and District Council elections.[117] Under the new Local Government Act, which includes a chapter on Transparency, Accountability and Participation, "all elected officials and senior civil servants in Local Government" must declare their assets "before and after their terms of service, as a deterrent to illicit enrichment" (Kabbah, 2003).

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[116] During my stay in Sierra Leone, billboards could be seen all over Freetown encouraging citizens to phone the Anti-Corruption Commission to report corrupt acts. Radio programs, often produced by the NGO, Talking Drum Studio, provided forums in which people could publicly discuss incidents of corruption or improper practices by civil servants such as teachers asking students to pay small sums.
[117] Sierra Leone has not had elected local governments since 1972 (Kabbah, 2003).

President Kabbah (2003), who is in his last term in office (Office of the President, 2005), publicly addressed the impact of corruption which, in his words, "delegitimizes the state." He spoke of the "vicious cycle" of "petty corruption":

> The customs official... may feel justified in "topping up" his or her own income, arguing that this is only "fair" retribution for long hours of work for low pay. The sum of petty corruption constitutes significantly to the bankruptcy of government.

> ...How often are we not told, that public workers such as customs and police officers are prone to solicit or even demand bribes because they are poorly paid?... Does it follow that because ours is a poor country most people have no alternative but to engage in corrupt practices? Does this mean that poverty breeds corruption? One could take it further and ask whether poverty reduction programmes such as the one now being implemented in Sierra Leone, could contribute to our efforts aimed at combating corruption, or is it the other way round? That is to say, in combating corruption we would in the process be contributing to the attainment of our objective of reducing poverty (Kabbah, 2003).

While Kabbah's point is well taken, he does not address the reality that many civil servants do not receive their salaries for months on end and must find alternative ways to survive. For new teachers I met, some of whom had not been paid for eight months, this often involved giving private classes outside school time, raising the objection that better teaching occurs outside school than in it. Other teachers required students to work on their farms or bring small contributions of rice, palm oil or money. As a result, even where school was supposed to be free, costs of uniforms, books and teachers' 'contributions' prevented some families from sending their children to school.

Kabbah (2005) spoke of the value of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), which receives and investigates allegations of corruption but he cautioned that it should not feed public cynicism about political leaders by giving the impression that government "ministers as a class are being targeted" for investigations. He mentioned an ACC press statement announcing that six unnamed ministers were being investigated. This not only affects the ability of all government ministers' to do their work, he said, it also inhibits "highly competent and honest people" from taking up government positions.

However, at least four Sierra Leoneans I spoke with were more concerned that the Anti-Corruption Commission can only investigate cases; it relies on the Attorney General to press charges. The process is not independent and is therefore susceptible to accusations of government manipulation. One human rights observer said:

> The Anti-Corruption Commission... would have been a very good institution but it was effectively emasculated when the enabling legislation was passed in parliament. They only have power to investigate. They don't have power to prosecute and in fact they don't even have power to choose the cases that are to be prosecuted. The only high profile cases that have been prosecuted under the Anti-Corruption Act have political undertones. So people have come to the realization that the Anti-Corruption Commission was set up to sort of muzzle political opponents of the government... Because you look at the only high profile cases that were prosecuted. It was a former government minister, who was rumoured to be ready to challenge the president for the leadership of the party. Automatically meaning that if he had got it he would have been presidential candidate for the ruling party. And all of a sudden we heard he was in court (interview 20).

If this is true it is an old tactic, recalling Siaka Stevens' paradoxical use of corruption trials to threaten or eliminate opponents. Given this history, the government may be well advised to make the Anti-Corruption Commission independent, despite its reservations, and thus demonstrate its commitment to tackling corruption.

It is important to caution against taking allegations against government leaders as fact. Top politicians and civil servants are easy targets for popular discontent. Recognizing and tackling injustice in one's own community is much more difficult. Local abusers may also use discontent with government to detract local criticism.

Power abuses at the local level, including legal exploitation, tend to be dealt with in three ways. First, they may be internalized through ideology so they appear to be natural in the minds of the victims – as may be the case with class, gender or age discrimination. Second, where victims do not accept abuse, the case may be grieved through mediation or judicial processes, traditional or otherwise. Third, those in weaker power positions may deal with injustice surreptitiously, through passive resistance, theft, sabotage or other forms of secrecy. While in the first case, the victim may not know an injustice was done, the second option may be difficult when there is a lack of impartial justice, and the third option cannot be discussed openly by its very nature. Blaming the central government or seeking government assistance may be easier and fairly safe.

A similar phenomenon may exist with Sierra Leoneans' requests for redress or assistance from government. People know they will not receive redress from perpetrators – or if redress were offered or enforced they would not get much. Most perpetrators are as poor as most victims. I asked one man who lost his house and savings after RUF attacks whether he would seek redress from the perpetrators if they were known. He replied, "I'm not even *thinking* of them. If I'm

expecting help, I'm only thinking of other sources but not from them. Because they themselves are poor" (interview 51). Thus, people may calculate that the government, backed by foreign donors, will be a more likely source of assistance than those directly responsible for crimes. They may therefore direct their attention – and frustrations – toward the government.

Finally, Sierra Leonean society is changing fast in response to the war, the transition to peace and dynamic world conditions. Sierra Leoneans need to discuss and negotiate what corruption and good governance are. Traditional (or colonial) practices like paying tribute to chiefs in the form of gifts, maintaining hereditary privileges, channelling redress through chiefs, or accepting patronage appointments may or may not be considered legitimate governing practices in post-war Sierra Leone. These practices need to be discussed by all Sierra Leoneans, not just forums of elites.

One state institution that especially needs reconciliation with the people is the military – and this is a relatively new development. In the 1970s and 1980s, Siaka Stevens sidelined the military and created alternative security apparatuses, such as the hated Special Security Division (SSD), that were loyal to him rather than to the state. The military therefore did not experience popular antagonism before the war and many people celebrated the coup by junior officers in April 1992.

But the war created many reasons for antagonism between the general population and the military. The activities of renegade soldiers, soldiers' inability to successfully fight a guerrilla war and RUF disguise tactics fomented popular distrust of soldiers. This was encouraged by government and traditional authorities who shifted support to CDF militias. As people started to use the term 'sobel,' soldiers became synonymous with 'rebels' in the popular imagination. This became a self-fulfilling prophesy. Many aggrieved soldiers became part of an oppositional force, opposed to Kabbah's democratically-elected government that threatened to downsize the military in favour of militias. The May 1997 AFRC takeover of government, the 1998 attacks on perceived AFRC supporters, including executions of 24 soldiers and the January 6th invasion of Freetown created severe rifts that will be difficult to heal. Thus, public mistrust of the military has taken the form of both institutional and factional distrust.

In sum, popular distrust of government and state institutions, especially the police and military, is a considerable obstacle to peace and good governance. To change this, government leaders must not only take serious steps to tackle corruption and improve professionalism, they

must create and trust independent investigative processes such as the TRC and the Anti-Corruption Commission and fully follow their recommendations.

Top government officials also need to show leadership in taking personal responsibility for past errors, something the current leadership has not done. The number of times people spoke with admiration of Koroma's public apology, even when they did not support his actions, indicates that they would be receptive to such apologies.

Finally, government leaders need to show faith in government institutions. Rather than sidelining the military in favour of militias, the government needs to support its soldiers by ensuring regular and decent salaries and proper screening and training. Paying living salaries to civil servants *on time*, while maintaining no tolerance for corrupt practices, would go far in restoring public confidence.

10.3   "How fo do?" (What can we do?): Informal community reconciliation

Distrust of government is well articulated in Sierra Leone, but many grievances, especially within communities, are unexpressed and consequently unaddressed. Few formal processes exist within communities to discuss serious conflicts openly and directly. Though traditional courts address minor conflicts and infractions, they have never dealt with anything on the scale of the war. Many also see them as biased in favour of local powerholders. Moreover, many conflicts within communities are traditionally dealt with indirectly, through age- and gender-appropriate intermediaries or rituals such as cleansing ceremonies. Direct and open communication, especially between youth and elders, is discouraged. This silence is reinforced by some child reintegration agencies that advise parents to avoid talking with children about the past.

With few opportunities for direct and open conversion between people in conflict, how do Sierra Leoneans express their needs, ask questions and build trust after the war? And what kinds of war-related tensions and conflicts are people dealing with?

A British researcher who examined conflict resolution processes in rural Sierra Leone found that "the experience of war" itself divided people, including noncombatants. As mentioned above, families with children were sometimes forced away from fleeing groups because people were afraid that infants might cry and alert the rebels. As another example, villagers fled to town or camps for internally displaced people if they could but some had no means of transportation and had to stay in the bush. When the fighting ended, the latter were the first to return to the

village. Major disputes arose when some who arrived later accused those who preceded them of looting their property and taking tin from their roofs (interview 63).

A man from Southern Province also mentioned extreme secrecy and distrust between civilians during the war. He said if someone whispered that the RUF might attack at night, no one would tell their neighbours. They would just pack a few things, take their families and head to the bush. If they told anyone, Kamajors who guarded the area might accuse them of lacking confidence in them and cause trouble later. "So people were very skittish," he said. "They would come and go at any rumour."[118]

Some people also used the war to settle old scores or for their own enrichment, pointing fingers at rivals or wealthy people when armed forces entered a village (TRC, 2004). A number of people described having to deny who they were to escape. At least one case occurred when rivals told soldiers that the person fleeing was an RUF supporter.

Finally, the British researcher mentioned civilians' reticence to talk about Kamajor violations – though Kamajors themselves were more forthright about their own crimes. This is another unspoken issue between community members (interview 63).

When I arrived in Sierra Leone, I wanted to look at ways in which war-related crimes were dealt with using redress or other restorative measures. I thought traditional justice might have restorative justice characteristics, providing a forum for open discussion about crimes and the impact of violations, support for healing victims and perpetrators, and opportunities for redress for victims. But when I asked people about this no one favoured the idea. Though Sierra Leonean human rights workers were looking at traditional and religious processes to promote healing and reconciliation, no one thought traditional courts were the answer. As one man said:

> How would you feel if you have given me a heavy slap and then they turn around and call me and say 'You be the judge?' How do you think I would judge that kind of thing? So that is the kind of thing that if we are to use our traditional justice and judge these people. Because it's the same people who have suffered who are going to judge these people (interview 22).

This man wanted unbiased judgments and felt that chiefs and village elders were too involved in the conflict to be neutral. With one exception, no one expressed faith in the neutrality of existing judicial processes in the country. The one person who said that courts should be presided over by respected community members felt that people preferred to have disputes settled by those they knew and trusted (interview 28). In some ways, this divergence is between

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[118] Quotations reconstructed from my recollection of a conversation with a friend.

traditional and newer attitudes towards justice that will have to be negotiated by Sierra Leoneans and may, in fact, continue to coexist.

Judicial and conflict resolution processes may be changing within small communities. The British researcher said that in the past some chiefs imposed heavy fines on people, especially those accused of violations against the chief himself.[119] In other words, chiefs were sometimes complainant and judge. This conflict of interest resulted in some local resentment. To address this concern, the Red Cross helped form alternative local conflict resolution processes that avoided fining. Red Cross workers encouraged people to build a palaver hut (open shelter for discussion) and form Community Peace Consolidation Committees. People in conflict go to these committees and the latter helps them resolve their differences without involving the chief or fines. Few chiefs opposed this because they know things must change and it reduces their work load (interview 63).

Hierarchical communitarian systems may also prevent victims of crimes from receiving individual redress. By customary law, redress for rape cases goes to male heads of extended households in the form of 'woman damage,' not to the victim herself (HRW, 2002). Similarly, a village teacher told me that redress, if it were offered, would go not to victims but to chiefs. A segment of our interview is revealing:

> Teacher: This one is a national issue. And that is why the nation says, the government says, "Let's go down to the people who suffered from all these atrocities and if they are all right, and if they want to accept their own brother, their own sister, it's alright with them.

> Me: But you're not going to the people who suffer. You're going to the chief and the elders.

> Teacher (a bit loudly): You cannot go to that person who suffered (stammers) alone... You have to have a mediator.

> Me: But what I mean is, the payment, the apology, all this doesn't go to the direct person who suffered. It's going to the representative.

> Teacher: You are right. You are right. And this is why these amputees and these people have organized themselves to say "Government we need support." Because they know that they are not getting anything from these perpetrators... They know anything coming to the community they will not even get it. The chiefs are going to receive that (interview 48).

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[119] The researcher said many rural people mentioned polygamy as a big source of tension among men. Chiefs took three to six wives depriving young men of partners. Sometimes when liaisons between young men and a chief's wife was discovered, the man would be brought to court, presided over by the chief, and heavily fined. Often the man would flee the village and was ripe for the rebels' anti-authority message.

Ferme and Hoffman (2004) suggest that attitudes and expectations may be changing as the discourse of individual rights reaches people. They found that "the old male-dominated, gerontocratic, hierarchical order... was being challenged." In the past, goods "intended for collectivities (local teachers, rural villages, professional associations, members of political bodies)... would have been handed over to a senior member of the group for allocation within associations, rural extended households, and so on." Now, people are beginning to confront this "corporativist logic" by insisting that resources be distributed individually "no matter how time-consuming the process, or how small the amount that ended up in the hands of each woman or man, young or old" (p. 84).

These changing attitudes will take time to take hold. For now, people have few options but to say they forgive and ask the government or international agencies for assistance. In 'Togo,' many people, even lower-level chiefs, used passive language when discussing justice and excombatants' return, indicating they had no control over decisions and had to accept them. This was the context in which people spoke of 'forgiveness.'

In Sierra Leone, two sentiments were strikingly evident in discussions about the return of excombatants: the desire for an apology and the willingness for people to say they forgive. Time and again, people said of excombatants, "If he (or she) apologizes, I will forgive."[120] But no one said they had heard an apology, with the notable exception of the high-profile apology of Koroma. Still, people say they will forgive. When I asked what forgiveness meant, the answer was almost always the same:[121] It means 'I will not take revenge.' The following statements were typical:

> Forgiveness is when you sort of release all the thoughts that you have in your mind for somebody. And you forget about it totally. The essence of it is that you will not want to seek revenge any longer (teacher, interview 5).

> What I see as forgiveness is this. If we have made up our minds to let go of what these people have done then, first, we should allow them to come back. Secondly, if ever any of them were with me in my own house, then I should be willing to live with them. And if, even in the morning if I want to go to my garden, I should be willing to call them, to go with them and if I have food and they are around, they are hungry, I should be ready to feed them and share what I have with them. In addition to that, if somebody has wronged you and he has asked for forgiveness and you have decided to forgive, then you need to forget about *all* that he has done (former CDF, interview 54).

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[120] Only two people in 'Togo' said that an apology would not make any difference to their attitude towards excombatants.

[121] The two exceptions were one human rights activist who said "Real forgiveness is from the heart" (interview 12) and my research assistant whose observations I quote here.

A village elder said:

> The houses, those beautiful houses built around, even our children, they have
> killed them. If we say we will not agree for them to come back, will that bring
> our children back to life or our houses? That is why we have to forget about
> everything and swallow the peace and allow them to settle down in our
> community again...

> What is forgiveness? When somebody has done something to you, he has
> wounded you in this way, and he says to you I'm sorry, you will say ok and just
> leave him. I will not take a stick and hit you with it because you have done
> something to me (interview 52).

After two days of listening to interviews in 'Togo,' my research assistant, Musa, offered these astute observations:

> Rather than really *forgiving*, they are rather sacrificing... It's because when you
> listen to speaker after speaker they will tell you, 'We have no alternative. So we
> have to accept them.' ...If I've forgiven somebody then I should be able to make
> a clear statement of acceptance of that person. But I will not go further and say
> "How fo do?" "What can I do?" I have no alternative. For forgiveness, there
> should be an alternative. The alternative is, you have the alternative to *hate* the
> person. But you are choosing to forgive him, to let go that hate and accept him...
> It is possible that one or two people really *have* forgiven, but most people, from
> especially the two days in _____. I get to be more convinced that it's more of
> allowing those people themselves to live with those people.

Some Sierra Leoneans drew a direct connection between people's willingness to forgive and be grateful for little things and their position of power. Recall the priest's statement: "It's because people are helpless. They feel suppressed. They feel no way. And so they just say, "Thank God. I thank God" (interview 36). Jackson (2004) also relates the two. In the following passage, he asks his friend Noah about a conversation with a Kuranko woman, Fina Kamara, whose hand, and the hand of her young daughter, had been amputated by 'rebels':

> When I had asked Fina Kamara what she might do to redress the damage that had
> been done to her and her daughter she said, 'There's nothing I can do.' And when
> I asked her what she thought about reconciliation she used the phrase *m'bara
> hake to an ye,* which small S.B. translated as 'I can forgive, but I cannot forget.'
> What exactly does she mean by this?

> 'It's what you might say,' Noah said, "when someone offends or hurts you, and
> you are powerless to retaliate... Say a hawk came out of the blue and seized one
> of your chickens. What can you do? You can't get it back. The hawk has flown
> away... All you can do is accept, and go on with your life. But you don't really
> forgive... You simply accept that there's nothing you can do to change what has
> happened. Look at me. I have no way of taking revenge on the rebels who took

away my livelihood, but at least I can rid myself of them. I can shut them out of my mind."

..."If I say *I hake a to nye*," Noah continued, "I am freeing myself from the effects of your hatred. I am refusing to hate back. But this doesn't mean that justice will not be done. Most of us here feel that God sees everything, and that God will mete out punishment in his own good time (pp. 68, 69).

Jackson (2004) contrasts the responses of Fina Kamara and Noah with that of Noah's older brother, S.B. Marah, a powerful politician:

Clearly, both one's point of view and one's tactics reflect one's hold on power, and I wondered about S.B.'s unforgiving comments about the RUF. That he gave them no quarter was not because his anger was stronger than Fina Kamara's, but simply because he was in a stronger position. When I asked him for his opinion of the truth and reconciliation process, he said, "I come from a warrior family. My ancestors went to war. So with this war now, I wanted to fight to the finish. I wanted the fight to go on to the end, until the RUF were defeated" (p. 70).

If most Sierra Leoneans see themselves as powerless in relation to excombatants, how do they build trust within their communities? And are excombatants 'apologizing' indirectly? When I asked Sierra Leoneans how they learn to trust excombatants the answer was almost always, "We watch them." The following statements are typical:

(A certain excombatant) has done a lot of harm to the people. It will not be very easy for them to trust him again... If maybe he had come here, stayed here for some time then they watch him, see how he behaves to them, (they might) have some trust. But staying far off and just coming like that, it will take them some time to have confidence in him. They will still have some fear. Because you need to trust somebody (teacher, interview 55).

Well, we are watching them. Some of them are still aggressive. They can't change totally. They change gradually. So as time goes on they build trust. So we are watching them... I treat them as they treat themselves (man in small town, interview 24).

When you (an excombatant) are talking, from the tone of your voice and every other thing we'll be able to know whether you are saying the truth (village elder, interview 56).

Because people built trust by watching excombatants, many felt that those who did not return home were guiltier of crimes and more likely to return to violence than those who did. Also, if excombatants did not return, villagers would not have a chance to re-establish trust. Here are two conversations with a village elder and a teacher:

Conversation with elder:

> Me: There are people who were with the rebels who came back to ___. But they didn't stay long. Somebody mentioned that. They left again. And there are other people that people have mentioned that won't come back. They're afraid because they know what they did. Do they have a reason to be afraid?

> Elder: Yes. The reason is that when you get into that organization (the RUF) then instead of you just being around, you also begin to take the gun and begin to do like them. If the civilians around, maybe people from here, they saw you going from one place to another and attacking towns, you will be afraid because you know people saw you when you were doing those things. *But if you go there and you do not involve yourself in what they were doing, you will not even stay long, you will not hide from your people. You will return back as soon as possible* (interview 52).

Conversation with teacher:

> Teacher (forcefully): The fear that people have is that they will change their attitude they will accept and forgive them but they still will have that fear that maybe after some time they will return to their own ways.

> Me: What would make you think that they wouldn't? What would have to happen... that would make you think that they wouldn't return?

> Teacher: Well, if you stay with them... then you'll be able to tell but you can't tell if you are not staying with them... (Long pause, then softly) But then if you are staying with them, working together with them you will be able to assess whether they will change or not (interview 55).

Returning excombatants or people associated with rebel forces were fully aware that they were being watched. Recall the words of Grace, the young woman who was abducted from 'Togo' by RUF forces (section 8.3.1):

> Grace: The way I talk to the people. Even the way I walk. Sometimes you walk in a way that people will notice. People will not be happy... The way you walk will show whether you are proud or not. You understand? There are certain ways you walk, people will know this person is proud. And also even the way you walk, you relate to people as you walk, people will know that you are humble enough, you are not very proud. Those are the things I am talking about (interview 57).

An imam in Makeni talked about his reconciliation with a child combatant who looted his home during the war:

> Imam: The young boy who was sitting here, he took all the property in this house. So we accept him. Now we can send him to launder for us and do other petty things – go do this, go do that. Because when he comes he says 'Please, we have nowhere to go.' So we accept him.

Me: So is he trying to make up for what he did by doing things for you?

Imam: No, I pay him money. I pay him. It's not for nothing.

Me: But he's not trying to make it up. To say I'm sorry.

Imam: No, we didn't say anything. But I can see his face, he looks sorry, really. So if I have a little errand, he runs quick and comes back (interview 31).

In this way, without talking about the past, the imam and the child are reconciling. The child shows remorse in the eagerness and speed with which he runs errands. By contrast, the same imam did not forgive an adult soldier who killed many people:

> One SLA soldier, he's nicknamed ____. He was occupying that apartment (in the compound). He did all types of bad things around here. So recently he came to me to have a room to be rented. I said I have no room. He's a big boy (interview 31).

In sum, though some people wanted to ask excombatants about the past, their opportunities to do so were limited at least in part by traditional strictures on direct speech and the need to work through age and gender-appropriate intermediaries. Because of this, people built trust by watching each other. Returning home was thus important for reconciliation as it enabled people to interact.

Though many people wanted excombatants to apologize, these were not generally forthcoming. Apologies, deserved or not, were indirectly expressed through body language and humility. Because open dialogue about these issues was limited, even abductees who committed no crimes had to 'apologize' in this way. The TRC provided one of the only opportunities for public apologies and open discussion of the past.

10.4   Reconciliation between indigenous and Lebanese-Sierra Leoneans

The conflict in Sierra Leone did not predominantly involve ethnic rivalries or sustainable factional divisions. Three exceptions might be mentioned. First, political parties are associated with different regions and the central government will have to ensure that it cannot be accused of regional or ethnic favoritism. Also, there is some evidence that northerners were subject to attack by Kamajors during the war. Though Sierra Leone has an admirable history of ethnic and religious cosmopolitanism, the British researcher found that ethnic diversity in the southern communities he studied declined during the war (interview 63).

The second factional tension exists between people associated with the old Sierra Leone Army and AFRC regime, and those supportive of the SLPP government. The government and military will have work hard to restore popular trust in the latter.

The third tension, an ethnic one, is not openly discussed and is only briefly mentioned in one paragraph in the TRC (2004) report that states:

> There is a perception among Sierra Leoneans that the Lebanese keep all the profits from the diamond trade within the Lebanese community and invest only in their own businesses, or export the profits to Lebanon. Many Lebanese, despite their long years in Sierra Leone, have not integrated into Sierra Leonean society and are resented by Sierra Leoneans for their failure to do so (vol. 3b, chap. 1, ¶ 68).

As Reno (1995) suggests, some Lebanese businesspeople, in their key capacity as diamond dealers, have participated in smuggling diamonds and facilitating other corrupt transactions. As a result, the entire Lebanese community is tainted, in the minds of many Sierra Leoneans, with the same brush.

During the war, many Lebanese, Fulla and Mandingo traders were specifically targeted by some armed forces (TRC, 2004), though motives are unclear. These attacks came up a number of times in TRC hearings and in interviews. Fatu, a woman in a northern town, mentioned that SLA soldiers had burned a Lebanese family in their house. I asked her whether Lebanese-Sierra Leoneans were specifically targeted:

> Fatu: Yes, of course they were. Well, we heard a story that in fact it was the Sierra Leone army. This particular soldier that went down to their house. That is what we heard but we could not confirm that. They went to their house because they were rich people. They were business people and they demanded money from them but they refused to give them money. But because they know them, that was why they decided to kill them...

> In fact, even during the military takeover they suffered the most. Because their shops were looted. Because it's now in our minds that the Lebanese helped destroy the country because most of the time they gave and took bribes. Say for example if somebody wants to get a contract, they will bribe perhaps twice or even three times just for them to get a contract. So all these have been built into our minds now. They are one of the corruptive elements. So that's why always when there are coups they are the first people to suffer. So people go into their shops. In fact, during NPRC and AFRC days they went into their shops and they throw out their goods, giving them to people free (interview 26).

These resentments are not new – recall the 'rice riots' of 1919. They reflect both a real grievance against anyone, including Lebanese-Sierra Leoneans, who benefits from war and

corruption and, in Kaniki's (1973) words, a double standard whereby "Lebanese (who) 'profiteered' in trade... were singled out as exploiters, as evil-doers and targets of attack" (p. 113). This perception and real grievances against some Lebanese war beneficiaries point to the need for reconciliation and dialogue between Lebanese and indigenous Sierra Leoneans. It also suggests the need for all citizens to discuss the nature, responsibilities and rights of citizenship.[122]

10.5   Conclusion

So far, conciliatory efforts in Sierra Leone have focused mainly on physical and economic reintegration and promoting a kind of 'forgiveness' that really means 'I will not take revenge.' But these are only the first steps. Sierra Leoneans still need to heal from their wounds and losses and build the trust that is indicative of deep reconciliation. People are currently striving to rebuild trust by watching each other and 'performing' acts of humility, but this is neither fair nor enough. For deep reconciliation to occur there must be real dialogue and some semblance of justness, if not justice.

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[122] It is beyond the scope of my research to examine the situation of Lebanese-Sierra Leoneans during and after the war, though such a study would be valuable. Mamdani (2001) discusses in detail the difficult situation that middleman minorities find themselves in, with more tentative citizenship rights and unequal access to land in post-colonial societies in which rights are largely based on indigeneity. Partly because of this insecurity, middleman minorities often seek to amass wealth and grow in the businesses in which they are allowed to operate. This benefits colonial and indigenous elites. In Sierra Leone, middleman groups – Lebanese. Fullas and Mandingos – tended to occupy key positions in the diamond industry. Because of their overseas connections. Lebanese also are highly visible in import-export and retail businesses.

Part IV

Conclusion

Chapter 11:
Beyond the impasse

The reconciliation process in Sierra Leone is at an impasse. Sierra Leoneans – still in shock from the war, willing to make sacrifices for peace, consumed with the struggle to survive economically, and wanting to see their brothers, sisters and children back home – were quick to say they would reconcile with and forgive excombatants. However this only meant that they were willing to coexist peacefully and without ostracism. People's declarations of forgiveness and reconciliation were riddled with phrases like "We have no choice," "What else can we do?" "We want peace," and "We forgive because the government (or religion) says we must" that reflect, in Musa's words, a spirit of sacrifice and helplessness rather than heart-felt reconciliation.

This raises the question of whether post-conflict reconciliation is as smooth as the word 'process' suggests. Is there a point at which reconciliation becomes stuck or resistant to moving forward towards its deeper, sentient forms? If this is so, why does it happen? Let's review what we know.
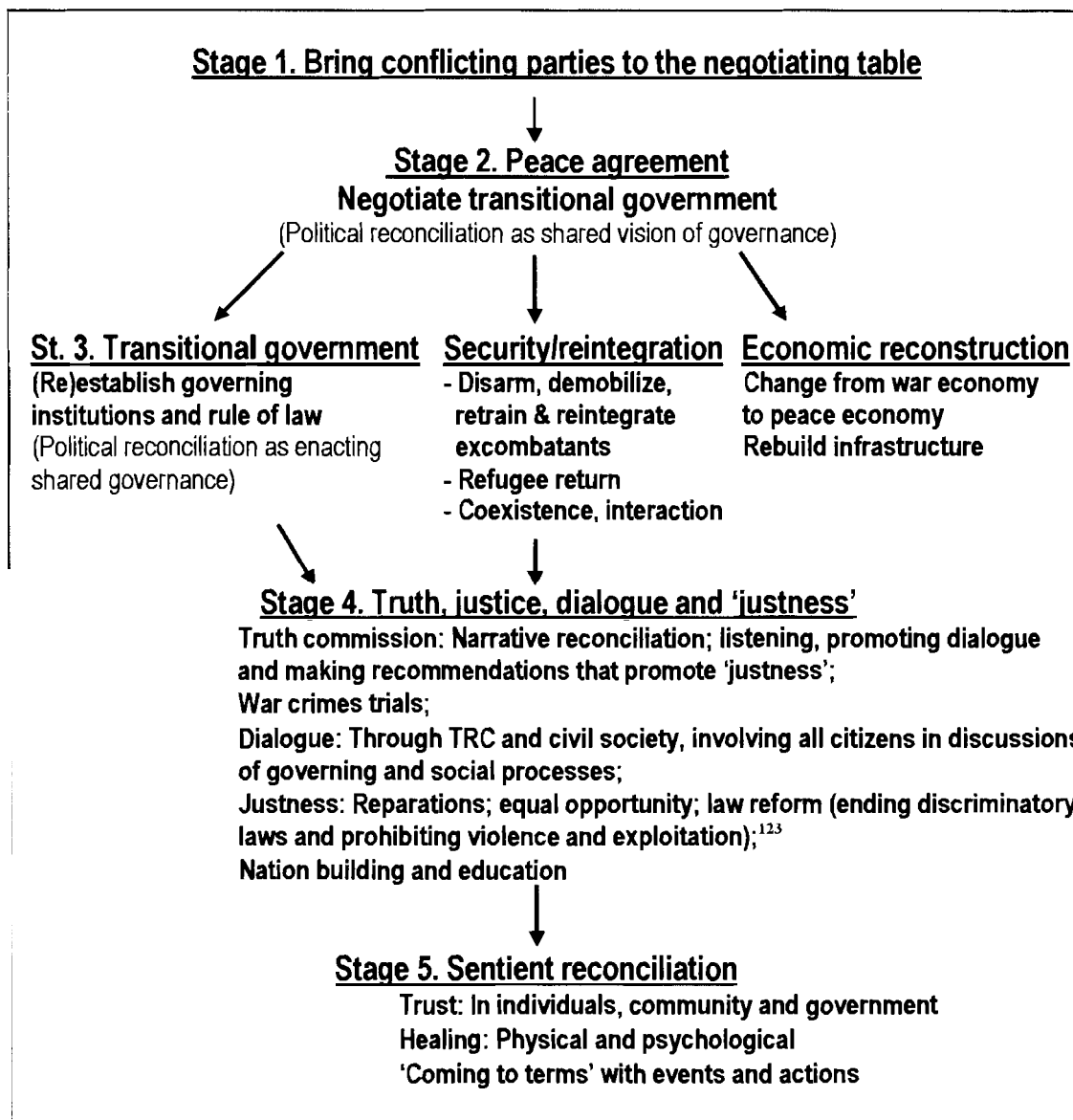
This research found that the four main conciliatory needs in post-war Sierra Leone are:

1. *Intra-individual reconciliation:* Individuals need to reconcile (heal or come to terms) with what happened to them or what they did during the war;

2. *Individual-community reconciliation:* Perpetrators, collaborators and beneficiaries need to re-earn the trust of the community and victims need to regain trust in the community;

3. *Intra-group reconciliation:* Fighting factions – the RUF, Sierra Leone Army, and CDFs – need to come to terms with their responsibilities for war atrocities. The public also needs to acknowledge what these forces did.

4. *Individual reconciliation with political leaders and government:* Citizens need to trust their political and governing leaders and institutions at national and local levels.

The first three conciliatory needs are largely products of war – although the issue of marginalized youth long preceded the fighting and this will also have to be resolved. The fourth relates to the war's root causes that are commonly associated with government mismanagement, corruption and discriminatory social and legal structures. Notably, all four involve sentient reconciliation.

In addition to these primary conciliatory needs, reconciliation takes many forms throughout the peace process and these coexist with other peacebuilding priorities. These are illustrated in Diagram 11.1 below (reworked from Diagram 3.4).

Diagram 11.1   The flow of transitional and conciliatory processes

Stage 1. Bring conflicting parties to the negotiating table

Stage 2. Peace agreement
Negotiate transitional government
(Political reconciliation as shared vision of governance)

St. 3. Transitional government
(Re)establish governing
institutions and rule of law
(Political reconciliation as enacting
shared governance)

Security/reintegration
- Disarm, demobilize,
  retrain & reintegrate
  excombatants
- Refugee return
- Coexistence, interaction

Economic reconstruction
Change from war economy
to peace economy
Rebuild infrastructure

Stage 4. Truth, justice, dialogue and 'justness'
Truth commission: Narrative reconciliation; listening, promoting dialogue
and making recommendations that promote 'justness';
War crimes trials;
Dialogue: Through TRC and civil society, involving all citizens in discussions
of governing and social processes;
Justness: Reparations; equal opportunity; law reform (ending discriminatory
laws and prohibiting violence and exploitation);[123]
Nation building and education

Stage 5. Sentient reconciliation
Trust: In individuals, community and government
Healing: Physical and psychological
'Coming to terms' with events and actions

In chapter three I argued that some forms of reconciliation can be assessed using rational measures while others can only be felt. Rationally-assessed reconciliation involves coming to

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[123] 'Violence' and 'exploitation' are loaded and subjective terms and their meanings need to be worked out through inclusive dialogue within Sierra Leone and in accordance with international human rights agreements that the Sierra Leone government has signed.

agreement, coming together, or coexisting peacefully after conflict. Sentient (felt) reconciliation involves healing, 'coming to terms' with events and building trust after a rift or injury.

Although they may overlap, these two categories of reconciliation are not concurrent. Rational forms tend to precede sentient ones. In Diagram 11.1, stages one to three of the peace process involve rational and measurable forms of reconciliation. Healing, trust-building and coming to terms with the past – and the accountability and truth-telling processes that facilitate them – largely come later, in stages four and five. The first three stages of peacebuilding thus provide the foundation that enables or disables later forms of reconciliation.

11.1 Laying the foundation: Early peacebuilding efforts

In the immediate post-war period, peacebuilding efforts emphasize ending violence, restoring limited democratic governance and the rule of law, and assisting the return and reintegration of excombatants and refugees/displaced people to their former or other communities. Peace agreements and reintegration processes are largely guided by the pragmatic view that pacifying and co-opting those most responsible for violence or most likely to cause trouble in the future provides the surest route to peace. These agreements often contain amnesties, division of territory (in Bosnia) or power sharing deals that legitimize and reinforce war gains and the claims of war leaders. Early peacebuilding efforts do not require fairness or consistency with human rights values to be successful; in fact, they often provide the very opposite.

In Sierra Leone, achieving security meant that excombatants had to be convinced to give up arms and integrate into a peaceful society. They were given training opportunities or education that provided economic alternatives to fighting. Contrary to a logic of justice, senior commanders, the very ones who were most likely to be prosecuted for war-related crimes, were given the largest economic incentives and were often put in charge of large projects or provided with senior jobs. Also, UN forces charged with disarming excombatants allowed senior commanders to determine who could disarm and demobilize, thus maintaining the latter's grip of power over subordinates. This practice – again using powerful intermediaries to administer central government policies – enabled some commanders to skim benefits meant for underlings and others to maintain control over women they had taken as 'wives.' This control was facilitated by NCDDR officials' tendency to view these women as dependents of commanders, even if they were also combatants. In such a context, it is paradoxical, but not surprising, that women and victims of serious crimes have a harder time returning home and being accepted than perpetrators.

The reintegration process was guided by the benevolent philosophy articulated in the expression, "There is no bad bush to throw away a bad child." This philosophy espouses an ideal of African society that holds that Africans will always want to be in their home communities amongst their people and that communities will always support or have a place for their members. It addresses a real need in post-war Sierra Leone to encourage people to return to their villages and to agricultural production rather than crowding towns that are ill-equipped to handle a mass influx. It also serves to disperse excombatants throughout the country, making them less dangerous. And it uses traditionalism and traditional processes to do this.

The ideal contains five assumptions: 1) that Sierra Leoneans are reconciling with and forgiving excombatants; 2) that people want to return home; 3) that returning to the pre-war situation in villages is ideal; 4) that all people are valued; 5) that communities have the capacity to absorb all returnees. But the findings of this study cast doubt on their accuracy and appropriateness. Regarding the first two assumptions, Sierra Leoneans are largely willing to coexist peacefully but they are not reconciling in any deep sense. Although many people did return to their home communities, many others – victims and combatants – preferred to settle in new communities that better met their needs. While some excombatants in Makeni may have been afraid to return home, others felt more at ease among those who had similar war experiences. And others seemed to value the opportunity to pursue their ambitions relatively free from family or community pressures.

The third assumption is also problematic. As chapters five and seven indicate, the situation in villages preceding the war was far from ideal. Rigid power structures entrenched in custom and enforced through customary law controlled by village elites resulted in the marginalization, impoverishment and servitude of many Sierra Leoneans. Victims and perpetrators integrate into peace-time society through these social structures. When reintegration efforts use traditional processes – relying on traditional chiefs and elders to guide and support reintegration and using cleansing ceremonies and initiation into secret societies as vehicles of integration – they reinforce existing hierarchies.

The final two assumptions – that all people are valued and that communities can absorb all returnees – must also be questioned. First, as many amputees discovered, already-struggling families and communities have difficulty meeting the extraordinary needs of large numbers of war survivors – including for food and shelter, and medical, psychological and educational needs. Less obvious, but equally important, is that traditional reintegration processes and conciliatory practices may not require equality or human rights. To say that all community members are

valued is to suggest that all people have a valued role in society but it does not imply that all roles – or people – are considered equal. Similarly, to state that communities can absorb all their members says nothing about the terms of that absorption. Many Sierra Leoneans are absorbed into the local economy through severely exploitative labour conditions; others, like women and children, have a place within society but little say in major decisions that affect their lives.[124] Thus, "There is no bad bush to throw away a bad child" articulates a message of belonging and social interconnectedness but it is neutral in terms of human rights and justice.

In sum, while early stages of peacebuilding, including early forms of reconciliation, meet the immediate needs of transitional states, they do not require fairness, justice or consistency with human rights values to be successful. These stages also tend to focus reactively on the symptoms of the war – achieving security and addressing the emergency needs of victims – rather than acknowledging and addressing its root causes. On the contrary, hierarchical traditional structures that may have contributed to the war are often used to facilitate reintegration and guarantee security. Similarly, efforts to rebuild a peacetime economy, including skills training and education for excombatants, do little to address poor conditions of employment. Of the peacebuilding priorities depicted in the first three stages of Diagram 11.1, only efforts to re-establish institutions of democratic governance and the rule of law require some limited consideration of fairness and equal representation. It is worth asking, then, what sentient forms of reconciliation require.

11.2 Preconditions for sentient reconciliation

Sierra Leoneans have largely achieved the peaceful coexistence that many call reconciliation. A look beneath the surface, however, reveals substantial social distrust and wounds and rifts that will be difficult to mend. In other words, Sierra Leone has met its rational objectives but sentient reconciliation is a long way off.

While much research is needed to understand the conditions that facilitate sentient reconciliation, certain observations may be made. First, war grew out of a climate of extreme social distrust, abuse of power, disabling of public institutions and silencing of dissent and open communication. The violence only added to these. Unless Sierra Leoneans experience and

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[124] Many abuses are culturally supported *in the name of reconciliation*. For example, women who are beaten by their husbands are commonly advised by elders, religious leaders and family members to reconcile with their abuser. Making waves by leaving the abuser is socially frowned upon. In this case, reconciliation paradoxically perpetuates and reinforces an injustice.

recognize a significant change in these underlying conditions, individuals will not regain trust in their leaders either at the national or local level.

Second, assistance in helping victims heal from crime must consider not only the crime itself but also its social and economic implications for the victim. This is most vividly demonstrated in the case of female abductees, victims of sexual violence (especially women and girls who can no longer bear children as a result of their experiences), and severely war wounded. In a society in which rape victims are stigmatized and rural women's claims on property are tied to their relationship with (and benevolence of) male relatives, the implications of rejection due to rape are severe. Healing may require special assistance to victims of sexual violence, a change in discriminatory laws and practices, and sensitization efforts that change social attitudes about sexual violence. [125]

The situation of amputees and other severely war wounded is slightly different as they may not be stigmatized for the crimes committed against them. However, many are rejected because they are seen as a burden or a non-contributing member of the family. These groups also need ongoing economic, medical and psychological assistance to overcome these difficulties.

Third, it is reasonable to assume that victims of serious crimes need some form of justice or fairness to heal and regain trust in their communities. Although trials and punishment or redress may be part of this, they form only a small part of the justice picture. For this reason it is erroneous to dismiss justice as a goal simply because an amnesty agreement has been signed or to view prosecutions as the sole means of obtaining justice. There are good reasons to prosecute and punish war criminals but we cannot assume that this meets victims' justice needs. Instead, survivors of serious war-related crimes need to have a say in what constitutes a fair or just outcome of their suffering. In this, we can draw from the flexible and dialogical approach of restorative justice. Much more research needs to be done to understand how victims in different conflict and social contexts see justice or fair outcomes in its broad sense.

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[125] There has been some encouraging action by government on this front. Following a review by the Law Reform Commission of existing laws that discriminate against women or fail to punish acts of violence against them, the Sierra Leone Law Officer's Department has drafted new laws on sexual offences, marriage, inheritance and succession which it will soon present to Parliament (Amnesty International et al. 2005a; Amnesty International 2005b). This will be a big step in the right direction if these laws are passed and enforced, but the process of changing social attitudes towards women will be slow. Also, even if the playing field for women were level, years of disadvantage will be difficult to overcome. Proactive measures that provide quality education, loans and decently-paying employment for members of disadvantaged groups will be needed to counter this inequity.

Fourth, perpetrators, members of perpetrating groups and their supporters need to come to terms with what they (or those they support) did. This may require some public mechanism for exposing war atrocities and root causes and for reinforcing moral norms consistent with human rights. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was effective as a means of investigating and publicizing events surrounding the war and of reinforcing just laws and norms. Some civil society groups were also very effective in raising awareness of human rights and promoting discussion about what constitutes an abuse of power.[126]

Victims also need to hear that crimes against them were abuses and that they are not guilty or responsible for them. This is particularly important in cases of rape and physical abuse against women and children that may be tolerated even in peacetime or where a stigma applies to the victim. In contexts were human rights violations are legitimated (or ignored) by custom or where violations become the norm – as occurs during war – a reinforcement of moral norms consistent with human rights becomes especially important.

These four observations suggest that sentient forms of reconciliation require:

1) *Justice:* Some form of fairness or broadly-defined justice in the transitional process;

2) *Public truth telling:* Acknowledging war-related crimes, identifying those responsible; and asserting that the crimes cannot be justified. Sentient reconciliation also requires exposing the root causes of the war.

3) *Social, economic and political change:* Changing the conditions that led to the war and that permitted or perpetuated war violence as well as conditions that prevent the successful recovery of vulnerable victim groups; and

4) *(Re)establishment of moral legal norms consistent with human rights and good government:* Public acknowledgment and education about human rights values and laws and expectations of responsible government.

There is a contradiction, then, between early peacebuilding efforts (including rational conciliatory ones) and sentient conciliatory needs. Sentient forms of reconciliation come late in the peacebuilding process and build on the foundation laid by earlier peacebuilding efforts. Yet

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[126] One of the most effective and innovative of these civil society organizations was the Talking Drum Studio which produced radio programs to be aired on Sierra Leonean radio stations. These programs discussed issues surrounding human rights, corruption and abuses of power and were aired on radio stations throughout the country wherever radio was available.

sentient reconciliation seems to require justice, human rights and social, economic and political change while early peacebuilding efforts do not.

This helps explain the impasse. The processes that meet the emergency needs of a society in transition from war contradict later needs for justice and social change. If reconciliation is seen as stopping at the point of peaceful coexistence, the deeply-felt reconciliation which I believe is required for sustainable peace will not be achieved.

11.3 Conclusion: Lessons learned

Given that compromises need to be made in the transition from war to peace, how can this impasse be avoided? This research indicates that three early steps are extremely important if sentient reconciliation is to be achieved. First, criteria of broad justice and human rights need to be incorporated into every step of the peacebuilding process. As early as the first peace talks, these criteria are needed to give weight to those who promote human rights and democracy within the society. The international community, probably through the UN, needs to establish realistic standards of justice, human rights and democracy that must be part of any peace agreement. These criteria will reflect international human rights law but they will also leave space for flexible negotiations – even allowing for the possibility of amnesty for all but the most serious crimes. Once criteria are established, the international community needs to stand by them in every aspect of its involvement in peace negotiations. Just as UN representative Francis Okello refused to ratify the amnesty for serious war-related crimes in the Lomé Peace Agreement, international actors should refuse to endorse an agreement that does not meet these international standards.

Considerations of justice or fairness must also guide all steps of the transitional process, even where compromises need to be made. Without these, demobilization and reintegration programs will always favour the most dangerous and neglect those who are not seen as a threat. At a minimum, fairness means that there will be a balance between individual benefits for combatants and civilians, that victims of serious abuses will be given special assistence, and that demobilization and reintegration efforts will not discount or limit the options available to those associated with armed factions simply because they pose less of a threat.

Second, substantial information needs to be gathered about the broad context of the war, including its root causes, the cultural implications of people's war experiences, and ways in which people integrate into their communities in their daily lives. This information is needed very early in the peacebuilding process. Knowledge of root causes enables planners to avoid replicating or reinforcing the very social structures and practices that led to the war in the first

place. At the very least, it enables them to use these structures with caution. Where the war resulted from a breakdown in governance, the nature of future governing processes must be left as an open question, to be decided through broad-based public deliberation in the future. Identifying areas in which decisions need to be delayed or restraint needs to be used requires substantial social information.

As an example of an opportunity lost because of well-intentioned but misplaced assistance, the British Department for International Development (DfID) began funding the Paramount Chiefs Restoration Program in April 2000, even before the war officially ended. DfID provided these funds despite its own reports that identified power abuses by chiefs as one of the root causes of the war (ICG, 2004). This move created facts on the ground that will be difficult to change when Sierra Leoneans later re-examine their ruling structures. The International Crisis Group (p. 24) writes, "This is a particularly clear cautionary tale that a consensus between donors and the political elite may entirely miss the realities of ordinary people."

Information about a society cannot be gathered from the elite alone, even if they insist that they speak for the people. The political elite benefit from ruling structures and may request assistance that reinforces their power. Research by both local and international researchers, fact-finding missions, and public commissions of inquiry such as the TRC must be used (and funded) to expose alternative views. Once a reasonable level of security is in place, wide-spread public consultations provide valuable information as they identify problems and promote public discussion and political education.

Even when traditional hierarchical structures are implicated in the root causes of the war, early peacebuilding interests may require that local elites and rituals are used to facilitate reintegration and ensure security. I am not arguing against using tradition-inspired integrative processes; they serve an important function in peacebuilding and they are processes that people know and are usually comfortable with. I do, however, caution against blindly or romantically supporting such processes and relying uncritically on elders or other elites when they are implicated in perpetuating injustices and stifling discussion and peaceful dissent. Local leaders will continue to play an important role in community development but this role will evolve as power becomes less centralized at the local level and as more broadly-based local institutions emerge.

While information gathering is always useful, it is clearly most important in countries like Sierra Leone and many smaller African states that have not received much scholarly

attention. In contrast to well-documented transitional countries like South Africa and Bosnia, the existing literature on Sierra Leone and degree of academic debate and research on the conflict is inadequate to meet the needs of effective policy making. In such an environment, truth commissions can make a tremendous contribution to policy making simply by exposing an enormous amount of credible information about the past that had not previous been documented. The need for good research and information on pre-conflict context also points to the immediate need for sociological and anthropological research on societies on the edge of violent conflict. Such research could also be instrumental in developing proactive policies that address tensions before they lead to war.

Information gathering leads naturally to the third step: public consultations and involvement in identifying problems and finding solutions for the future. These discussions, which occur once peace has begun to hold, must include all sectors of the population throughout the country, including rural women, youth and other marginalized or disadvantaged groups. Although most rural adults in Sierra Leone are illiterate, the TRC and civil society groups such as the Market Women's Association have proven that processes can be created that effectively solicit thoughtful discussion and input from people who cannot read or write.

Sierra Leoneans of all levels of education have demonstrated tremendous tolerance and practicality when presented with difficult political situations. This stands the country in good stead as citizens discuss options for the future and work towards governing processes that they can feel part of. Success in these efforts depends on the continued support of the international community, the commitment, cooperation and vision of civil society and, above all, the willingness of existing leaders to listen and respond to what they hear.

Appendix A:
Peter's story

In Freetown I met a man in his 20s who, after ECOMOG freed Freetown from AFRC/RUF control in February 1998, found himself in the terrible and common situation of being suspected by all sides. Peter, a civilian, had friends in the junta and after the ECOMOG victory 'democrats' began to threaten him. Fearing for his life, he fled. His story indicates how some people found themselves with rebel forces simply because that was the safest place to be at a time when ECOMOG troops and civil defense forces, were executing suspected rebels with few questions asked. Peter's story is interpreted from Krio:

> So even when I escaped from the democrats... the juntas that I met threatened me because they never really believed that I was with them and was part of them. I was used as a load carrier... From there. we went but I became tired. I told the people I was tired but they said if I was tired it would be the end of me.

> So we reached a particular point on Kissy road where we met our other colleagues. Then I decided to drop down the load that I was carrying. So after three days, I decided to escape, because of the threats. I was afraid of them. I escaped and decided that it was better for me to return home and face those who were threatening me before, rather than to go into the jungle where there was no security at all.

> So on my way coming I met ECOMOG and the Kamajors. As soon as they saw me they started firing. They thought I was a junta, a rebel. So I decided to turn back. It was a very dangerous location, in fact the house had already been burned down and the fire was still blazing. Smoke was still going on. That was the very place that I went into... So the sole of my foot was burned and the skin peeled away.

> I was really in a dilemma. I was trying to escape from the ECOMOG and Kamajors that were firing at me. I escaped and met the juntas again. I argued with them, trying to tell them that it was ECOMOG that were chasing me. And at that particular time, it was hard for somebody to believe, for the junta to believe that you are part of them or for ECOMOG to believe that you are part of the democrats. So they wanted me to produce something that would identify me that I was with them or not. If not they would put an end to my life. So I took out my school i.d. card. They never believed that at all. They said I was a CDU - a civil defense unit.

> So they were arguing when ECOMOG arrived at the scene. When ECOMOG arrived at the scene they started firing. Then two of the juntas dropped down dead so I had to escape. So when I ran... I met one of my friends (and) that was the time that I got relief.

After a week, that was the time that I got a problem with my (now-crippled) arm. The people who were responsible for this were neither ECOMOG nor the Kamajors nor the junta. They were civilians like me. Everybody was protecting his own area. So as soon as they saw me, they saw me as a threat. So they opened a grenade launcher and they threw it.

From there, there was no way. I could not come over to this side to the democrats where ECOMOG was. And in fact I could not go to the junta because I could not identify with any of these two factions. So I had a problem.

So because I was in that situation I decided that I could never go there nor go there so I decided to stay with my friends at that point. And I decided that if I was going to die, let me die. I was tired of the whole situation.

After being in that situation for 21 days I had not gone to any doctor at all, no one to prepare food for me, so finally now, because I couldn't go back, I decided to follow the junta into the jungle where life was very difficult. So after 21 days I was able to reach Waterloo,... about 20 miles from the city. So when I reached Waterloo that was the time that I believed that my life was saved. So from there, my friends decided to come to my aid by finding transportation for me to go to Makeni. That was the (rebel) base. I was at Makeni for a good 9 months.

Appendix B:
Chronology of events[127]

Colonial period

1787   The British government bans slavery on British soil and establishes the port and settlement of the Province of Freedom, later Freetown, to which it can 'repatriate freed slaves from its settler colonies. The British maintain the area around Freetown as a colony.

1896   The British government proclaims the interior of Sierra Leone to be a protectorate and administers it indirectly through cooperative chiefs.

1951   Formation of Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)

1957   SLPP wins national elections. Milton Margai becomes president.

Independence and lead-up to war

1961   Independence

1962   SLPP wins national elections.

1964   President Milton Margai dies. His brother, Albert Margai, succeeds him.

1967   All People's Congress (APC) wins national elections. APC government is formed in 1968 with Siaka Stevens as the new president.

1970   Former APC supporters, led by John Karefa Smart, break off to form the United Democratic Party (UDP). Senior officers, notably Army Force Commander John Bangura, who are thought to be sympathetic to the UDP, are forced to retire.

1971   Bangura and a group of army officers, including Foday Sankoh, are implicated in a failed coup. Bangura and three other officers are executed.

Sierra Leone becomes a republic and a *de facto* one party state.

Mid-1970s   Libyan government becomes increasingly involved in Sierra Leone. It funds *Green Book* study groups at Fourah Bay College which espouses a populist, revolutionary and anti-imperialist ideology.

1978   National elections increasingly violent. Sierra Leone becomes legal one-party state.

1982   National elections extremely violent. Entire villages are destroyed. Villagers in Ndorgboryosoi, Pujehun, challenge government's imposed candidate and the government sends security forces. This remains a source of local anger.

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[127] All references are in the body of the thesis, primarily Part II, and are not repeated here.

1985   Student demonstration at Fourah Bay College. Student Union president Alie Kabba and four others are arrested and expelled. After their release they move to Ghana where Kabba becomes Ghadafi's Sierra Leonean contact person.

President Stevens retires and is succeeded by Brigadier Joseph Saidu Momoh.

1987   High inflation and plunging diamond revenues. IMF forces Momoh to agree to strict austerity measures, including a drastic reduction in rice subsidies. This affects his sources of political control.

Call for armed revolution from students in exile. Split between those who favour armed rebellion and the Pan-African Union, which votes against the move. Some of the former, including Sankoh, head to Benghazi, Libya for training. There Sankoh meets Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor.

1989   Sankoh travels to Liberia to act as a senior commander in Taylor's NPFL.

1990   Liberian president Doe calls on ECOWAS for military help. ECOMOG is formed to enforce peace. Sierra Leone sends troops and provides a base for ECOMOG.

Sierra Leone civil war

1991   March 23. Commonly given as date of the first RUF incursion into Sierra Leone.

1991-93 Phase I of the war. The RUF fights a conventional war against the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and adheres to populist ideology. Most abuses are committed by NPFL forces. The RUF gains most of its willing recruits in this time.

1991   By late 1991, relations between RUF and NPFL forces are strained. Sankoh appeals to Taylor to withdraw forces. Many NPFL remain until September 1992 when RUF troops force them out of the country.

1992   April 29. Junior SLA officers revolt. Momoh flees and the officers form a new government, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), under 27-year-old Captain Valentine Strasser. Initial optimism turns to fear as young leaders execute, torture and harass perceived political opponents.

Mass recruitment into the army, which began in 1991 under Momoh, continues. Even before 1992 coup, civil defense militias begin to be formed.

1993   The SLA, civil militias and Guinean troops recapture almost all RUF territory. Phase II of war begins. RUF changes strategy to guerrilla warfare and drops efforts to maintain ideology. Tactics demoralize and discredit soldiers who have no training in guerrilla warfare and often flee attacks. By 1994, civilians begin to assume that soldiers are 'sobels': rebels in uniform. This idea is supported by government to justify growing reliance on militias.

1994   Kamajor militias formed.

1995   Executive Outcomes, a South African private security firm, is contracted to defend Freetown, recapture territory taken by the RUF and train militias.

The military government is under pressure by civilian groups to hold democratic elections. This leads to Bintumani I, a meeting of civil society representatives and chiefs that will decide whether there will be "peace before elections" or "elections before peace." Most delegates support the latter.

1996 NPRC experiences a bloodless internal coup. Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio takes over leadership. Bio begins negotiations with RUF leadership in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. A second electoral conference is held – Bintumani II – and despite harassment by soldiers, delegates again vote for elections before peace.

In lead-up to the March elections, RUF increases campaign of terror against civilians, conducting mass amputations to try to prevent people from voting.

March 29. Tejan Kabbah becomes president of Sierra Leone.

November 30. Abidjan Peace Accord signed.

1997 March. Sankoh arrested in Nigeria on charges of purchasing arms. He remains in Nigerian custody until July 1998 when he is returned to Sierra Leone and tried for treason. Phase III of the war, typified by power struggles among leaders, begins.

Faced with a high security bill for Executive Outcomes and under donor pressure, Kabbah dismisses Executive Outcomes before alternative forces are in place.

May 25. Junior officers overthrow government and form the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) under Johnny Paul Koroma. The new government invites RUF to join it in the capital. Kabbah and his government flee to Guinea. Popular boycotts and sanctions pressure new regime. The coup is a turning point in ECOMOG's involvement in the war.

Beginning of AFRC/RUF occupation of major diamond areas.

1998 February 2. ECOMOG attacks AFRC forces and, by mid-February expels them from Freetown, leaving a corridor through which they can escape.

July. UN Security Council creates the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) to disarm and demobilize combatants and act as monitors. On October 22, 1999, UNOMSIL is replaced by UNAMSIL.

With the ousting of the AFRC, Freetown becomes the scene of widespread revenge attacks by 'democrat' supporters against anybody accused of association with the AFRC regime. On October 19th, 24 officers are summarily executed by firing squad, increasing the sense of grievance by former government soldiers.

1999 January 6. AFRC/RUF invasion of Freetown led by AFRC. Massive atrocities in the capital and thousands of children abducted. Precipitates serious talks.

June. Lomé Peace agreement signed. It contains an amnesty agreement, a power-sharing deal and the commitment to form a TRC. UN addendum states that amnesty should not apply to gross human rights violations.

In the lead-up to Lomé, rifts between the AFRC and the RUF widen. Many soldiers disarm after Lomé, hoping to be incorporated into new, post-war army.

2000   RUF leaders in north and east refuse to cooperate with peacekeepers. Divisions between RUF in Freetown (the political wing) and the military wing in the field.

February. Truth and Reconciliation Act passed by Parliament.

May. RUF forces in north and east capture almost 500 Zambian and Kenyan peacekeepers and hold them hostage. British government sends 700 paratroopers to secure Freetown and support hostages. With Taylor's assistance all hostages released except six who had been killed by the RUF.

May 8. 30,000 protesters march to Sankoh's house to call for hostages' release. Sankoh escapes but is captured nine days later, arrested and jailed.

August. At Kabbah's request, UN Security Council creates joint UN-Sierra Leone Special Court to try those deemed most responsible for the war.

2002   January. President Kabbah declares the war to be over.

January. Disarmament process completed. NCDDR continues with reintegration stage until December 2003.

May. National elections. President Kabbah is re-elected and the SLPP Party wins majority of seats.

July 5. Truth and Reconciliation Commission launched. Operational stage begins. October 5. Statement taking December 2002 to March 2003.

2003   March. Special Court begins pre-trial hearings and issues seven indictments.

April to August. TRC conducts individual, institutional and thematic hearings. Investigations continue.

July 29. Foday Sankoh dies in prison.

2005   August 8. TRC report publicly launched.

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