

Amputation as a Strategy of Terror in Sierra Leone

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Abstract:

Amputation, the loss of one or more limbs, is not a new phenomenon. It has been practiced for an inestimable length of time as a result of acute trauma or chronic vascular disease. These are the causes mainly thought of when discussing amputation in regions like North America (Canadian Medical Association Journal 2000). The loss of limbs as a result of war is not new, either. Amputation of soldiers' limbs during the American Civil War (Civil War Medicine 2004), during the 20th century's two World Wars, or during numerous other armed conflicts has been a common feature and consequence of injuries sustained during combat operations. The practice of amputation as a terror tool has historical antecedents as well. The colonial legacy of Belgium's King Leopold II includes the use of such strategies to subdue the people of the Congo; the amputation of hands or ears was a common punishment imposed on the colonized when the Belgians deemed that their rubber production was insufficient (Hochschild 1998).

Sierra Leone is one of several countries in the 1990s in which amputation was used as a terror tool. The situation in Sierra Leone was initially ignored by the global community and written off as another small-scale, local civil war. By the time international press coverage had been achieved, the conflict had left more than 20,000 people maimed and between 50,000 and 70,000 dead (Campbell 2002).

Introduction

The institutionalization of mutilation and amputation as a terror tool or military strategy in the context of conflict appears to have taken on a renewed significance during the last decades of the 20th century in war-torn countries such as Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Angola, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Mozambique (DiGiovanni 2001; War Child Landmine Project 1995). Some conflicts, like the decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone, have been characterized by rebels' use of forcible amputation with machetes or axes, while other struggles tell the story of vicious explosives that are sometimes specifically designed to attract children, like airborne butterfly mines (United Nations Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, "Landmines" 2004). While Cambodia and Angola have large numbers of amputees, the majority of these were maimed by land mines. In Sierra Leone, where the highest number of double-upper-limb amputees exists, amputees were the victims of deliberate, systemic, large-scale amputations by other humans (Onishi 1999). People's limbs are the deliberate targets of those using either landmines or weapons like machetes. Sierra Leone is one of several humanitarian crises in the 1990s characterized by the "militarization" of amputation; what is different about Sierra Leone is the large number of people deliberately left to live whose limbs were amputated. Post-conflict development takes on a new meaning when it must aid a society in dealing with thousands of amputees who need rehabilitation instead of burial ceremonies.

Like many other wars and humanitarian crises, Sierra Leone was initially ignored by the global community and written off as another small-scale, local, civil war. By the time the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF) rebels attracted international press coverage, they had been waging a terror campaign for almost 10 years against the citizens of Sierra Leone. The conflict left more than 20,000 people maimed and between 50,000 and 70,000 dead (Campbell 2002). While practically every human rights violation that one could think of occurred during the 10-year period, this paper will focus on the multi-dimensionality of the use of amputation (Dufka 1999).

Methodology

The devastating consequences of the RUF's reign of terror are many and beyond the scope of this paper. In order to try to understand what happened in Sierra Leone, we have included a variety of sources. Academic analyses of what happened from different perspectives provide a background on Sierra Leone and why the RUF was so "successful" with its *modus operandi* of amputation. The first section provides a brief critical review of the current literature on Sierra Leone as well as some theories useful in understanding the crisis. Next, a section on the background of the conflict explains how both economic incentives and social grievances created an environment ripe for exploitation by the RUF. Our argument, that the RUF and other groups in Sierra Leone were using amputation as a multi-dimensional

tool to serve their various interests, draws upon official RUF statements and what little academic work has been conducted on the subject. Unfortunately, little empirical data on Sierra Leone exists, such as the number of amputees in diamond-producing zones versus non-diamond producing zones, or amputees maimed by police forces and other belligerent factions versus RUF rebels. The discussion of the multi-dimensions of amputation as a tool is subdivided into sections on amputation as a political, socio-political and economic tool. Including the primary, secondary, and tertiary impacts of amputation on Sierra Leone illustrates how the practice of amputation has affected individuals, society, the economy, and politics.

Literature Review

Many of the initial analyses of the seemingly irrational violence in Sierra Leone reified "culture" as "the" cause, suggesting increased tribalism, or viewed the conflict as local, small-scale, and of little interest to the rest of the world. Both viewpoints ignore the global system's role in creating conditions ripe for the RUF and in perpetuating the conflict once it started.

One of the earliest pieces on the war in Sierra Leone was Robert Kaplan's *The Coming Anarchy* (1994). Kaplan used the example of Sierra Leone to argue that worldwide demographic, environmental, and societal stress was resulting in criminal anarchy, and that this criminal anarchy would be "the" threat in the post Cold War world. In Sierra Leone, he saw disease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, a scarcity of resources, an erosion of the nation-state, and the empowerment of international armies and drug cartels (Kaplan 1994). One sees a Malthusian doomsday in Kaplan's analysis; his theory of "New Barbarism" explained amputation and mutilation as the response of young people in Sierra Leone driven to violence by population and environmental pressures. Economic and social factors, to which one can credit the rise of the RUF, did not emerge in his analysis. His thesis was faxed to embassies all over the world, as policymakers saw in it an explanation for the "unexplainable" violence occurring all over the world (Richards 1996).

Written in response to Kaplan's argument, another seminal piece on the RUF and Sierra Leone is Paul Richards' *Fighting for the Rainforest* (1996). His book provides an in-depth analysis of many of the social and political preconditions for the RUF's rise to power and challenges Kaplan's thesis that "unprovoked crime" and senseless violence were occurring because of increased tribalism and strain on

resources. Richards argues successfully that Kaplan's "New Barbarism" thesis neglects the youth experience and has no perspective of African history. Richards posits that violent struggles to command resources, be they political, economic, or social, are nothing new. Furthermore, there are no direct correlations between deforestation and environmental degradation and the RUF's agenda. The fact that Kaplan sees the Sierra Leone crisis and others as fed by overpopulation and that the West has no role or interest in solving it is erroneous, argues Richards. The global political economy, from the diamond industry to the Structural Adjustment Programs implemented by the Breton Woods institutions, has played a role in the deterioration of social, political, and economic conditions which allowed the RUF to engage in their terror campaign.

Another advocate of both internal and external structural causes for the RUF's incursion is Alfred Zack-Williams. In "Sierra Leone: the Political Economy of Civil War, 1991-1998" (1999), he emphasizes historical factors and the extent of underdevelopment as major causes for the rebellion. The dominant political party, the All People's Congress (APC), as well as deteriorating terms of trade and an irrational post-independence development plan in a sense created the RUF, according to Zack-Williams. An illegitimate state operating under a one-party rule was neither able to protect its citizens from the heinous crimes of the RUF nor from those of the fractured national army (Zack-Williams 1999).

Paul Collier's research on the "Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy" (2000) advances the discussion of why groups like the RUF are waging civil conflicts. The discourse on civil war usually focuses on political grievances, but Collier provides evidence that economic causes are presently driving civil conflict. He shows that while many of the traditional reasons for civil conflict, e.g., inequality, undemocratic states, and ethnic or religious factions, cannot explain civil conflict, dependence on commodity exports and low national income greatly influence the potential for civil conflict (Collier 2000). His analogy of grievances for rebellious groups to an image for a business describes the leaders of the RUF succinctly. Their grievances were merely a veneer for their true motives of controlling the diamond mines. Collier uses the RUF as an example of grievances at odds with behavior: the group of almost 20,000 people fighting under the rhetoric of political change was only carrying out the orders of its leaders who wanted control of the diamond industry.

Greg Campbell's recent *Blood Diamonds* (2002) provides a compelling argument that the RUF was really only interested in controlling the diamond mines. He does not neglect the impact of the political situation of Sierra Leone, both past and present, but unlike many others who write on the conflict, he sees diamonds as the ultimate motivating factor for the RUF. Like Richards, he argues that because of the globalizing world, there are no isolated, regional conflicts, and he illustrates the global ramifications of the war in Sierra Leone by tracing these blood diamonds across the world and exploring some of the links to other terrorist organizations.

What is interesting about the literature on Sierra Leone and the RUF is that over time it seems to be shifting to a more economic explanation of the conflict. Initial analyses, including but not limited to Kaplan's "New Barbarism" thesis, saw unexplainable violence, a reversion to "tribalism," and an "ethnic conflict." Media coverage spoke of the atrocities of the RUF amputating the limbs of every living thing in sight for no apparent reason. Anthropologists offered sociological and political explanations for the violence. Paul Collier's piece, written for the World Bank, offered policy alternatives that addressed these economic causes instead of focusing efforts in assumed causes. Greg Campbell traced the blood diamonds from stores in the United States, to buying houses in Antwerp, to the jungles of Sierra Leone, and successfully argued that the conflict was not an isolated, regional, unexplainable event but a calculated, rational effort by leaders of the RUF to control an extremely profitable market. We feel that the greatest understanding of the conflict can best be gained by incorporating Paul Richard's socio-political analysis and Greg Campbell's economic analysis.

What is still lacking in the literature on Sierra Leone is an in-depth analysis of the multi-dimensionality of the practice of forcible amputation. Amputation as a political tool was occurring to induce micro- and macro-level changes, both economic and political, for a variety of interests. While leaders of the RUF were vested in controlling diamond mines and reaping the profits, many of their young followers were much more interested in micro-level reforms that would better their daily living conditions.

Theoretical Framework

Including dependency theory and world systems theory (which Zack-Williams does, to his credit) enhances our understanding of the conflict but not

necessarily that of the use of amputation. Dependency theory argues that underdevelopment has been created by the political economy of the northern states and the extractive nature of capitalist institutions. It is analytically helpful in that it is a systems approach, which allows us to view Sierra Leone in the greater global economy. Dependency theory posits that the institutions of capitalism, i.e., the diamond market, will exacerbate inequalities, not rectify them. This could not be more true than in Sierra Leone, which enjoyed relative prosperity and peace prior to the introduction of the diamond industry and entry into the global diamond market. Before the diamond market and Cecil Rhodes' construction of the diamond as a thing of value, none of the problems associated with the diamond trade existed in Sierra Leone. The authors, however, recognize that the political situation in the country in Rhode's time was very different from the one which evolved in post-independence Sierra Leone. Sixty years after the discovery of diamonds, this same West African nation occupies the last position on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), and quality of life continues to deteriorate (Campbell 2002). With the ensuing underdevelopment of the periphery created by the core came the necessity to "develop" the periphery via strict Structural Adjustment Plans (SAPs) which, in Sierra Leone (as in a multitude of comparable cases), wreaked havoc on already-damaged economic and political systems.

Building on dependency theory, world systems theory proposes that the world is divided into core, periphery, and semi-periphery states. For this analysis, the core and periphery distinctions are most helpful. Core states exploit periphery states in order to enrich themselves. One sees world system's theory at work in the exploitation of diamonds for consumption in core states, in that the United States consumes two-thirds of the stones circulating on the global diamond market (BBC 2001). Furthermore, not only are actual products being extracted, but the value-adding cutting and processing stages of the diamond market are located beyond the periphery (Sierra Leone), returning profits to the core states. Among other things resulting from this process are the conditions of a precarious economy, weak political structures, and social unrest, all of which contributed to the rise of the RUF.

A final theoretical framework useful for specifically and critically assessing and interpreting the practice of amputation in Sierra Leone is the study of signs, or semiotics (Janzen 2002). Five concepts of semiotics are especially relevant in attempting to decipher the meanings conveyed by amputation in this context.

First, the sign refers to any sensory incidence which purveys “some direct or indirect additional association” (Janzen 2002: 5). For our discussion, amputation is the sign, or physical occurrence, that is provoked by some, felt by some, and seen by others.

The second concept is that of the symbol. Theoretically, it refers to an independent set of ideas or source of meaning of a sign that is contingent on a point of reference outside of the sign itself (Janzen 2002). Practically, it is useful to study the meanings and messages that rebels might wish to convey with the practice of amputation.

Symptoms, for their part, refer to the ways in which a sign is personally experienced and thus entails the subjective dimension of the feeling (Janzen 2002). In the context of Sierra Leone, this third concept represents the individual and subjective experiences of those who have been victims of the specific form of brutalization discussed here.

According to Janzen, symbols and symptoms bring about a greater sense of reality to the sign through the “felt and thought perception of the subject, the sufferer, and those around the sufferer” (Janzen 2002: 6). For the purpose of the present discussion, an analysis of symbols and symptoms could help uncover less-obvious meanings of amputation as experienced both by its perpetrators and its victims.

The fourth concept is the name, which represents a verbal symbol inherent to the language of semiotics that is highly valuable in discussing this topic (Janzen 2002). In effect, those most renowned for having practiced amputation in Sierra Leone often took on nicknames that explicitly referred to the practice.

The fifth characteristic of signs is “semiosis” (Janzen 2002). The term portrays the non-static nature of the sign in its ability to be repeatedly considered for reinterpretation, allowing for a “process of ongoing signification” (Daniel, in Janzen 2002: 176). In other words, the semiotic power of amputation is made even more considerable by its non-static nature. It is the purpose of this paper to call attention to these dynamics’ analytical and explanatory potentials.

Origins of the Crisis: Colonialism, Diamonds, and Deteriorating Social Conditions

In order to move beyond explanations of the conflict as merely “irrational,” an understanding of the conflict’s historical context must be included.

Like many other African nations, Sierra Leone’s circumstances today were shaped in part by the slave trade and colonialism. Located in West Africa, Sierra Leone lies next to Guinea and Liberia, and the lines drawn by colonists in state-making led to many different ethnic groups cohabiting in different states. Pre-colonial Sierra Leone was dominated by a system of kingship, of which the remnants persist today (Hirsch 2001). The British establishment of Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, was an attempt to create a home for former slaves, whose traffic and trade to their citizens the British crown would outlaw by the early 19th century according to a newfound “morality.” Early development of Freetown led many to describe it as the “Athens of West Africa,” because of its high reputation for education (Hirsch 2001). The British colonial system of indirect rule allowed many kingdoms outside of Freetown to maintain control over their traditional dominion areas. This manifested into a strong sense of regionalism throughout much of Sierra Leone, such that the capital was seen as largely removed from the rest of the country (Campbell 2002). Moreover, the borders between Liberia and Guinea have never been protected, and their porous nature allowed for the ease of the initial RUF invasion from Liberia.

Pre-independence Sierra Leone experienced relative peace among many different ethnic groups and religions. It should be noted that for much of Sierra Leone’s pre-independence history, diamonds had no role in the region’s economic development and political demise, since they were not discovered there until the 1930s. While the British were in control, they decentralized the entire diamond industry by permitting paramount chiefs to rule indirectly and allowing miners to keep a portion of their findings in lieu of a salary (Hirsch 2001). These arrangements decreased the state’s control and complicated any initiatives for governmental regulation of the industry.

Diamonds were first discovered in Sierra Leone in 1930, and the fields continuously produce a large number of top-quality stones (Campbell 2002). It is impossible to tell where a diamond was mined; there are so many refinement processes, and certificates of authenticity are often forged. Diamonds are small and easily converted into cash, making them a prime target for smuggling activities. Jewelers are required to have a certificate of origin, but this certificate only divulges from where the diamond was “officially” imported. A diamond initially mined in Sierra Leone and smuggled to a De Beers buying house in Liberia will have a certificate of authenticity from Liberia, so it is not considered a conflict diamond. In countries

rife with corruption, manipulating a diamond certificate is a common practice (Campbell 2002). Ironically, even with these false certificates in place, no one took note that Liberia, which can produce between 100,000 and 150,000 carats per year, was exporting more than 31 million carats between 1994 and 1998 (Smillie et al. 2000). Further encouraging the smuggling of diamonds out of the country was Sierra Leone's rapidly deflating currency, less advantageous than the Liberian dollar and which, tied to the American dollar, offered a much more lucrative profit to diamond smugglers.

Before the war, Sierra Leone's diamond industry was comprised of highly regional production centers which typically avoided government regulation. Initially, the government had given exclusive mining rights to a De Beers subsidiary company, the Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST). As the value of diamonds grew and miners became aware of their potential economic gains, it became more difficult to control the mines and their output. Smillie et al. (2000) estimate that by 1956 there were 75,000 illicit miners operating in the fields. Hence, the government reverted to granting individual concessions to buy and export diamonds (Campbell 2002). During Siaka Stevens' 17-year presidency, he essentially nationalized the SLST to ensure that he personally profited from the lucrative trade, and the minute legitimate diamond trade plunged (Smillie et al. 2000).

The diamond-smuggling industry is much more developed and organized than are the government's channels for distribution and offers significant profits to everyone except the miners. Since the eastern area of Sierra Leone is so far from Freetown, in both ideological and literal senses, diamonds were often exported out of Guinea or Liberia, where smugglers could make a greater profit (Campbell 2002). The deteriorating economic situation in the capital sent many uneducated youths to the eastern Kono province in search of financial gain (Abdullah and Muana 1998). The informal diamond sector, once marked by disorganized crime, became influenced by organized crime and was entrenched in a web of drugs, arms, and smuggling activities (Smillie et al. 2000). The boundaries between the diamond sector and the government were as porous as the state boundaries between Sierra Leone and its neighbors and led to officials enriching themselves with mine profits

Economic motives for the conflict fueled its leaders, but general social malaise ensured the recruitment of many disillusioned young people. Sierra Leone's post-independence history included a

short experiment with democracy followed by years of military, one-party rule. A series of coups and countercoups led to the rise of Siaka Stevens to the presidency in 1968. When Stevens began his 17-year leadership, he entered into a system of multi-party politics; when he left in 1985, he stepped down from a one-party state (Hirsch 2001). Not only did his rule degrade the political arena, he eventually also destroyed and corrupted every institution of the state. Political violence became normalized during his term, Parliament became a structure with no power; the judicial system was ruled by dollars; investments in education were nearly zero, and economic degradation followed. Clientelist politics characterized Stevens' very long term, marginalizing and disillusioning much of the society. This emergence of a state that served as a repressive apparatus rather than the incarnation of popular institutions led to the degradation of civil society as a whole (Zack-Williams 1999). States rich in natural resources have a tendency to engage in patrimonial political relationships because companies can carry out state duties (Richards 1996). Stevens used the diamonds to perpetuate his patron-client system of governance in Sierra Leone.

Further economic and political degradation followed with Stevens' handpicked successor, General Momoh. Poor fiscal management and prolonged involvement in the Liberian civil war led to the government's bankruptcy. Civil servants, teachers, and technicians were no longer paid salaries, creating conditions in which massive numbers of young people had no educational or economic opportunity, a situation exploited by the RUF. By the early 1990s, according to the United Nations, Sierra Leone was one of the poorest countries in the world, even with its ample natural resources, including diamonds, gold, bauxite, coffee, and cocoa (Hirsch 2001). It is ironic that Sierra Leone was the first modern nation-state in Africa, and that by 2001 it was the very last country in the United Nations Human Development Report (HDR 2001).

Compounding the issue of bad governance were the worldwide recession of the 1990s, which reduced the price for raw materials, and the end of the Cold War, which diminished the availability of foreign aid (Richards 1996). These two trends led to a shrinking of the state both in sociological terms (in respect to the numbers of people it could serve) and in physical terms – the number of facilities that were within its sphere of influence (Richards 1996). The political economy of Sierra Leone in the 1990s was one of contrasts. Regional tensions between the capital and

rural areas had existed for years, but they intensified as conditions deteriorated. The vibrant, albeit illegal, mining sector existed alongside a stagnating agricultural sector, creating what some have called a “model shadow state” (Richards 1996).

The fact that since independence hardly any of Sierra Leone’s potentially economically productive resources had been harnessed into successful development schemes led to a worsening of daily living conditions. RUF leaders were often well-educated and created political propaganda to overthrow the one-party state of the All People’s Congress (APC), yet their actions were more consistent with a group looking to enrich themselves with a lucrative natural resource. The RUF used the youth crisis ravaging Sierra Leone to its benefit by providing a social network and sense of belonging for the burgeoning masses. Only 1.4 percent of the GDP was spent on education in 1990, and school enrollment for all levels of education was about 30 percent (Bangura 2002). Since Sierra Leone was such a resource-endowed economy, a large number of these uneducated youths made their living in illicit diamond mining and saw their profits go into the pockets of the leaders. There could not have been a more perfect pool of exploitable soldiers for the RUF than a plethora of illiterate, marginalized youth living in the illicit diamond-mining culture of drugs, loose morality, violence, and disrespect for institutions (Bangura 2002). Nevertheless, one needs to realize that the “social incentives” put forth by the rebels at the early stages of their campaign, such as an RUF-inspired form of education in the context of nonexistent public educational opportunities, must have lost their appeal over time, as the increasing reliance on abduction of youth into RUF ranks seems to indicate (McIntire, Kwesi Aning, and Addo 2002: 11).

Hence, at the time of the RUF’s initial invasion from Liberia, Sierra Leone was characterized as a patrimonial state running out of resources, with a societal void facing its youth, the growth of rural slums in diamond districts, and a failing primary sector. Against this backdrop of an ailing economy, disillusioned society, and inept political structures, the 100-member Revolutionary United Front (RUF), comprised of Sierra Leone dissidents, Liberian fighters loyal to Charles Taylor, and mercenaries, invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia in 1991.

Sierra Leone: Forcible Amputation as a Multi-dimensional Tool

The systematic, calculated use of amputation has taken place in several conflicts in Africa and

elsewhere, but was never as widespread as in Sierra Leone. The most often-cited example of amputations in respect to the RUF was its response to President Kabbah’s call to join hands and vote, after which it mutilated hundreds of people and deposited their hands in bags on the President’s steps (Campbell 2002). However, the RUF had been waging its war for five years prior to the hands incident in 1996, so there must have been other motivations to amputate. Hence, the use of amputation as a tool presents several complex dimensions aside from just stopping people from voting. The consequences of losing a leg or arm, or two, on a population that was largely illiterate and dependent on working the land for its livelihood would shape the difficult post-conflict development.

Amputation as a tool served different, although related, purposes for the RUF. Among other things, it literally served as a tool to keep people from voting, as a means of recruiting and ensuring loyalty among an easily manipulated youth, a means for the youth to be revenged on an older generation they blamed for the country’s current problems, and a way to keep citizens dependent on the RUF. In order to understand the motives of the RUF’s amputation tactics, one must first comprehend that the leaders were not interested in creating a democratic state; rather, they were interested in controlling the diamond mines under the guise of social and political change.

To support this argument, it is helpful to compare official RUF propaganda with the group’s actual practices. Hypocrisy abounds in official statements in the group’s manifesto, *Footpaths to Democracy*:

We can no longer leave the destiny of our country in the hands of a generation of crooked politicians and military adventurists. It is our right and duty to change the present political system in the name of national salvation and liberation. This task is the historical responsibility of every patriot. We must be prepared to struggle until the decadent, backward and oppressive regime is thrown into the dustbin of history. We call for a national democratic revolution-involving total mobilization of all progressive forces (Revolutionary United Front 1995).

This nationalistic rhetoric of political change that coerced many to join the RUF was merely a tool. The RUF was never interested in instilling a democracy. In fact, physically disabling people from voting deprived victims of one of the key components of a democratic system. Like their mission statement, their anthem speaks of the need to save Sierra Leone:

RUF is fighting to save Sierra Leone
RUF is fighting to save our people
RUF is fighting to save our country
RUF is fighting to save Sierra Leone.
(Revolutionary United Front 1995)

During the 10 years in which the RUF allegedly fought to “save our people,” more than 20,000 people were mutilated and between 50,000 and 75,000 were killed (Campbell 2002). These victims can hardly be said to have benefitted from the RUF’s struggle for a supposedly better world.

The other three verses of the anthem speak of the need to control the resources and minerals, offering some insight into the real motivations for the conflict.

Where are our diamonds, Mr. President?
Where is our gold, NPRC?
RUF is hungry to know where they are
RUF is fighting to save Sierra Leone.

Chorus:

Go and tell the President, Sierra Leone is my home
Go and tell my parents, they may see me no more
When fighting in the battlefield I’m fighting forever
Every Sierra Leonean is fighting for his land.

Our people are suffering without means of survival
All our minerals have gone to foreign lands
RUF is hungry to know where they are
RUF is fighting to save Sierra Leone.

(Chorus)

Sierra Leone is ready to utilize her own
All our minerals will be accounted for
The people will enjoy in their land
RUF is the savior we need right now.

(Chorus)

RUF is fighting to save Sierra Leone
RUF is fighting to save our people
RUF is fighting to save our country.
(Revolutionary United Front 1995)

Perhaps a more accurate line would be “every Sierra Leonean is fighting for his *hand*,” since so many of the people whom the RUF claimed to be helping were maimed or killed during its quest for control of the diamond mines. This nationalistic rhetoric was a tactic to encourage support for the movement and to mobilize an easily manipulated population to carry out

awful atrocities. “All our minerals have gone to foreign lands” suggests that they have been stolen from the Sierra Leoneans. While this is true to some extent, RUF rebels were guilty of smuggling diamonds out of the country for their own personal gain (Campbell 2002). The issue of accountability also arises (“All our minerals will be accounted for”), but the RUF was merely trying to shift monopoly of the mines to itself and away from the shadow state. During the peace process, Foday Sankoh, leader of the RUF, demanded the position of Minister of Minerals in addition to Vice-President, revealing more of his true motives.

While the RUF claimed to have kidnapped United Nations peacekeepers in Sierra Leone “for their own protection,” its treatment of Sierra Leoneans was hardly for their own protection (Campbell 2002). Many stories and accounts have emerged about child kidnapping and forced conscriptions (Voeten 2002). Mattia, a 16-year-old boy living at a camp for former child soldiers, described his allegedly “unforced” conscription into the RUF’s “swelling ranks”:

I was kidnaped when I was ten, during a rebel raid on our village. My parents were shot dead and I was taken. I was too small to fight, so I had to carry the bags and look for food and water. I was sick most of the time. I often had a fever and aches and pains. But you couldn’t run away because they were guarding us. And they would kill you if you tried (Voeten 2002: 40).

There are thousands of stories like Mattia’s from children forced into conscription. These children can put a gun together blindfolded, but have few memories of their families (Voeten 2002). Many learned “to develop skills to defend myself in times of attack” from watching *Rambo* movies (Richards 1996). The great disconnection between the RUF’s political rhetoric and its actions does not mean that the dire social and economic straits they lament about were untrue. In fact, they were quite true and created the large, easily convinced youth population who saw a shadow state, and even a shadow nation, in the RUF. Each of these elements offers a complementary indication as to why the use of widespread amputation in Sierra Leone can be analyzed as having served as a strategic tool and was not merely an expression of unthinkable hatred.

Amputation as a Political Tool

The latter half of the 1990s saw increased violence on the part of the RUF, Sierra Leone’s rag-tag armed

forces, the Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Groups forces (ECOMOG), and even a private mercenary company from South Africa. Executive Outcomes (EO), the South African mercenary group, was granted concessions to diamond mines, which they sold to another diamond mining company (Campbell 2002). The global community was not supportive of a private army fighting Sierra Leone's battles and began to withhold international aid on the condition that EO leave the country. The use of amputation as a political tool exploded with the scheduled Presidential elections for 1996. A country by then already torn apart by years of civil war was eager to move forward, and elections took place. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was elected president of Sierra Leone but his victory would be short-lived (Campbell 2002).

Yet another coup was staged soon after Kabbah's request for citizens to "join hands for the future of Sierra Leone" (Campbell 2002: 78). The bags of amputated hands that shortly thereafter began to appear in front of the presidential palace in Freetown can be attributed to Kabbah's metaphor about the future of the country. Mr. Jarka, a victim of double upper-arm amputation, was told by his RUF aggressors to go to Tejan Kabbah after they had mutilated him (Onishi 1999). Kabba Jalloh experienced a similar communication when the rebels who cut off his two arms told him that his lost limbs would be sent to his president (Campbell 2002).

What these examples (among thousands) illustrate is the rebels' message that people were being punished for having voted for Kabbah, and that there was nothing this man could do to help the civilians at the mercy of more powerful groups like the RUF. In an analytical sense, amputating victims simultaneously discredited the government and punished its supporters by imposing immobility (Canadian Medical Association Journal 2000) and powerlessness upon them. Referring to Janzen's theory of semiotics, one could argue that for the RUF, amputation was used as a symbol to demonstrate the government inadequacy

The RUF, however, did not always succeed in completely demoralizing its victims. There are stories of people voting with their toes as both a symbolic and literal sign of anti-RUF behavior (Campbell 2002). Another very straightforward example of amputation as a political tool was the practice of amputation across the palm, leaving just the thumb, which was the symbol of a marginal political group called "One Love" (Lacoux and Ford 2002). During times of heavy

fighting among the RUF, ECOMOG, and the more-or-less defunct army of Sierra Leone, the RUF would use an amputation victim to send messages to ECOMOG and other forces.

The fact that belligerents in the Sierra Leone conflict did not manage through their actions to purvey a consistent "political agenda" does not mean that there was nothing political to be inferred from their acts (Hoffman 2003: 12). Amputation can be interpreted as an act of communication whose message is politically related, whether observers perceived it as coherent and objective or not. Reducing the extreme violence characteristic of the civil war in Sierra Leone to purely "culturalist" interpretations that argue for violence as the culmination of "primitive tribal hatreds" seems to be an effective way to miss the much more complex grievances and variables at work in the conflict (Hoffman 2003: 13).

Powerful explanations of the Sierra Leone case seem to lie in the political realm because they allow for a much deeper content analysis of the events of the war, including the mutilation and rape factors (Hoffman 2003). Building on Jacques Rancière's idea that communication, as a first gesture toward political speech, is violent, Hoffman appears to partially perceive the violence of rebel groups, including amputation, as an expression of political dissatisfaction and frustration in these same movements (Hoffman 2003). The failure of patrimonial and clientelist politics had created a disenfranchised generation that represented a "crisis of youth" (Hoffman 2003: 14-15). Hence, the violence involved in crimes like forced amputation symbolizes the dangerous discontent of the alienated with the political system and its embodiment in the government.

Amputation as a Socio-political Tool

Central to the strategies of the RUF was the large group of uneducated youth disillusioned by the APC's neglect of civil society and the practically nonexistent economic and educational prospects in the city. The RUF saw in these young people a

reserve of fighting men who were attracted by the simplistic emancipatory rhetoric of the RUF's ill-defined ideas and motivated by the acquisition of wealth through looting and of authority by wresting control from both the local and national political authorities whom they blamed for their predicament and the agony of the nation as a whole (Abdullah and Muana 1998: 178).

The RUF greatly succeeded in exploiting the country's climate to draw these potential followers to it.

Creating a loyal populace was one way in which the RUF implemented amputation as a socio-political tool. In the absence of a functioning state and civil society, the rebels were attempting to create a shadow state and nation and used amputation as a means to ensure combatants' loyalty to the group. By alienating many groups of society and using youth to perform terrible crimes, sometimes against their own family members, the RUF ensured that it would have a loyal force to extract diamonds and continue terrorizing the population. Many of the young people in the diamond districts had emigrated there in search of work, having broken ties with families, peer groups, and other social institutions. Because of this, their sense of belonging was almost nonexistent. The RUF offered something to belong to, and the leaders easily manipulated this.

Leaders advertised their bush camps as alternatives to the failed educational system, appealing to the masses of uneducated and unemployed youths (Richards 1996). The power and respect an AK-47 or Kalashnikov rifle offered to a 10-year-old was something many had never experienced because of the social and economic climate. Children were forced to maim or kill their own relatives as a rite of initiation to the RUF (Campbell 2002), ensuring that the children would stay within the RUF because they could not return home.

After just one year of the RUF's initial campaign for political justice and an accountable and transparent government, the APC was overthrown in a coup. If the RUF had been concerned from the outset with the overthrow of the APC, its violent attacks would have decreased from that point on. This was not the case, however. The movement became increasingly violent during the latter half of the 1990s. Rebels continued to prey on young recruits to carry out many of their numerous amputations and murders. Marijuana was often used in the diamond fields, and the RUF used some of the profits from the diamonds to purchase fear-inhibiting drugs such as cocaine and marijuana to distribute to the young recruits (Campbell 2002).

Amputation took on a life of its own among these young soldiers and became enmeshed in a cycle of violence. Many of these young soldiers had grown up during the 1980s and early 1990s amid the terrible social and economic conditions pervading the country. The lack of education and economic

opportunities, coupled with a distrust of traditional systems of patrimonial redistribution, provided the mental backdrop for many young soldiers (Archibald and Richards 2002). The growing intensity of the generation gap caused many recruits to join to RUF and other armed factions to "take revenge or protect themselves" (Ibid. 349).

Initially, many of the amputees were men (Onishi 1999). This selective choice of victims would most profoundly affect the socioeconomic order, especially family-organizational structures. In effect, the immobility imposed by missing arms or legs forces individuals to relinquish their former roles; men might no longer be able to provide for their families, and women may similarly have to redefine their contribution to the household. Beyond affecting men's economic role as providers for the family, their capacity to fulfill expected social roles as fathers and husbands may also have been compromised (Onishi 1999). This sudden necessity to transform traditional social responsibilities may have lead to painful and lengthy identity redefinitions. Still, as the war waged on, this selective amputation gave way to a more all-inclusive terror, including women, elders, and children.

For victims of amputation, various symptoms could be felt as a result of the violently imposed physical disturbance (Janzen 2002). It is impossible to account for all the lived experiences of every victim of amputation, but one can tentatively infer a few of the symptoms perceived by the amputees. On a very broad level, amputation as felt personally, and as witnessed by those surrounding the sufferers, was most likely experienced as a symptom of a helpless government (Hoffman 2003). It appears that this is specifically the message RUF rebels wanted to convey as they chopped off people's hands.

Linked to feelings such as shame, frustration, and worthlessness involved in violently induced identity transformation processes may also be the psychological, if not psychiatric, symptoms experienced by those who survived the moment of amputation. As discussed by Carolyn Nordstrom in the context of Mozambique, physical scars are a constant reminder to the sufferer of amputation, and to those who surround him or her, of his or her experience (Nordstrom 1997). She writes that "The change endures in a vicious cycle: the war cannot be relegated to memories of the past, but is experienced afresh each time the mutilation intrudes into thought or action" (Nordstrom 1997: 185).

The physical condition of amputation is thus subjectively felt through concrete symptoms like a new inability to function independently, as well as through more individual symptoms such as emotional difficulty in adjusting to the novel reality brought about by the condition. All in all, the forms of suffering brought about by arbitrary, yet calculated, mass amputations greatly impacted the stability of the social order.

The “noms de guerre” or nicknames favored by RUF fighters reveal the identity transformation processes that specifically affected them. There were special units of the RUF devoted entirely to cutting off hands, and there was a perverse practice of rewarding rebels when they returned with bags full of hands (Dufka 2000). Often, victims would be captured and have to wait for the arrival of these “chop hands groups.” The very act of amputation became something that these drugged, disillusioned youth began to identify with. The fact that so many young rebels took on names such as “Queen Chop Hands,” “Nasty Rambo,” “General Babykiller,” “Captain 2 Hands,” “Adama Cut Hands,” and “Commando Cut Hands” shows that amputation and violence in general were becoming part of their identity (Richards 1996; Campbell 2002). This might especially be true in the case of children who were forcefully enlisted and then repeatedly taught that violence was acceptable until they ceased thinking otherwise. The name, another concept important to the analysis of signs, which expressed hate and brutality may have been a supplementary way to reinforce and ingrain violence as a behavior in those who forcefully or voluntarily joined the RUF.

Deeper psychological inquiries could also investigate whether conscripted children might have carried out violent acts in the transition process from the position of passive victims themselves to that of perpetrators. In other words, is there some kind of psychological dynamic at work by which victims of violence restage for others the trauma they have lived through themselves, but with a victim-perpetrator role reversal?

It is important to note, however, that socio-political amputation was not exclusively the domain of the RUF. As the conflict prolonged, groups such as the police, armed forces, and the Kamajors (an ethnic group) also began to engage in amputation. This served all of their interests in further scapegoating the RUF as the aggressors and perpetrators of this awful type of violence. Some of the worst violators were said to be “sobels,” soldiers during the day and

rebels at night (Richards 1996). In his recent work entitled “The Civilian Target in Sierra Leone and Liberia: Political Power, Military Strategy, and Humanitarian Intervention,” Danny Hoffman writes that many Kamajors he interviewed seemed to believe that the harsher the violence imposed by a warring faction on the population, the more the help or attention the same group would receive through humanitarian and post-conflict assistance (Hoffman 2004). In effect, this logic seems to stem from their perception that the international community had tried the hardest to keep the RUF from returning to its weapons because their gruesome tactics had received so much publicity (Hoffman 2004). Hoffman’s article presents the intriguing idea that in the minds of the belligerents, violence may have also been a way to attract the attention of and the benefits provided by the international community, such as job training and reintegration schemes (Hoffman 2004).

Hoffman highlights yet another potential social dimension of the violence promoted by warring parties in Sierra Leone. This symbolic explanation lies in the “physical experiences of contact and combat” and especially in the use of rather simple technology requiring a relative corporal proximity between the parties (Hoffman 2003: 20). Hoffman cites the popularity (among RUF rebels and the Civilian Defense Forces [CDF], pro-government militias among which he conducted research, including the Kamajors) of concepts such as that of a hard body and masculine power, which are deployed and reinforced through violent group combat (Hoffman 2003). This “phenomenological” dimension may offer some insight into the social symbolism of crude violence, but one must be careful not to fall into stereotypical and purely cultural relativist explanations of it (Hoffman 2003: 20).

Amputation as an Economic Tool

The rationality of the *modus operandi* of amputation and mutilation was not as random and senseless as it was portrayed by the media. Amputation/mutilation was used as a political and socio-political tool, but it also had economic ramifications. The first areas that the small RUF attacked were the diamond mining districts in eastern Sierra Leone, and the initial focus on this geographical region was directly related to its abundant natural resources. The use of terror strategies such as systematic amputation served to displace massive populations away from these diamond-mining areas (Campbell 2002). A favorite tactic of the RUF was to send a letter, or a recent

victim of forcible amputation with a sign around his neck saying, “the RUF sent me,” as a warning that the rebels were on their way. This led to a massive displacement of more than half of Sierra Leone’s then 4.5 million people (Smillie et al. 2000). Hence the RUF was able to gain control of diamond mines and production. By controlling the mines, the RUF could purchase enough Liberian arms to sustain its war as well as drugs to coerce many of its combatants into committing atrocities.

For those people who refused to leave the diamond areas and other areas controlled by the RUF, another dimension of the use of amputation as an economic tool emerges. While the RUF was interested in maintaining a loyal fighting force, the rebels were also vested in keeping civilians dependent on them. The RUF used amputation during harvest times to ensure dependency on their group for food, and it was not uncommon to see farmers missing arms or legs if they went out to harvest (Lacoux and Ford 2002). Furthermore, a machete is not an expensive investment; they were readily available to all of the recruits. In fact, many of the aggressors often used a victim’s own machete to mutilate him or her. While the leaders of the RUF were profiting from the diamond mines, they encouraged their followers to rely on the cost-effective method of amputation. In other words, amputation was cheap, the fear of it induced people to abandon the much-coveted diamond regions, and its physical consequences effectively compromised victims’ economic autonomy.

The Multi-level and Multi-sectoral Impacts of Amputation

The most immediate impact of amputation is obviously the loss of limb(s) or other body parts. However, the systemized use of amputation as a tool in the case of Sierra Leone has led to primary, secondary, and tertiary impacts on individuals, society, and the economy. The immediate impaired functioning on an individual level is amplified by the thousands of amputees to a level of wider social distress, or secondary impacts. This aggregation of people who cannot provide for themselves and are demanding a more transparent government illustrates the tertiary, or economic and political, impacts of amputation.

Primary Impacts: Impaired Functioning

The primary impact of amputation on its victims is the loss of limb(s) or other body part(s) and the ensuing health complications that arise. In effect, the

impetus for amputation, as opposed to murder, is to prevent people from functioning autonomously. This handicap could be a result of the physical dimension (e.g. the loss of both arms) or the psychological dimension, but most likely incorporates aspects of both. While these impacts of lost limbs and impaired functioning are created at the individual level, they manifest into a societal issue as high numbers of amputees in a population put a greater burden on an already malfunctioning health-care system. In the case of Sierra Leone, there was very little formal health infrastructure prior to the war, and the conflict decimated much of what was in place, leaving many people in precarious health situations (Hoffman 2004).

Given what little previous health infrastructure existed, what can be done to address the primary impacts of amputation? Sierra Leone has no significant disposable income to invest in its health-care sector and remains dependent on outside intervention, which may not be readily or extensively available. One international actor that has been active in Sierra Leone for years, with the intention of addressing these primary impacts, is Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). They have provided the majority of in-country clinical work, and the bulk of this effort focuses on providing clinics for chronic pain and phantom limb syndrome (Broughton 2001). One cannot address the physical impacts of amputation without addressing its psychological impacts, and although MSF went in with the purpose of providing physical healing, their work has taken on a psychological aspect as well. Although insecurity, cultural barriers, and linguistic problems created a slow start, their presence and interest in people’s stories is allowing for some mental, as well as physical, healing to occur (Ford and Lacoux 2002). Another laudable aspect of MSF’s work was their inclusion of a needs-assessment survey to determine what their patients’ priorities were. Interestingly, pain relief was not one of their top concerns, but finding family members and lost possessions, returning home, finding employment, and obtaining some sort of success and self-respect were more pressing issues (Ford and Lacoux 2002).

Secondary Impacts: Social Order and Identity Transformation

The secondary impacts of mass-scale amputation relate to the strains imposed on the pre-conflict social order and people’s social roles. As a result of a decade of atrocities, of which amputation is just one, traditional norms and the local value system within Sierra Leone, which in the past encouraged the

protection of civilians, including children, have all but collapsed (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts, "Sierra Leone" 2000). Atrocities such as pregnant women being cut open and their fetuses murdered exemplifies how traditional ethics of respect were abandoned. Rebuilding the value system and social fabric of societies that have witnessed and suffered such heinous acts is another central developmental challenge facing post-conflict countries, including those like Sierra Leone, which witnessed the use of amputation as a terror tactic or, more broadly, as a quasi-militarized terror strategy.

The alteration of social roles occurred at many levels of society. The ostracization that has occurred as a result of amputation has led many unwed Sierra Leonean amputees to fear that they will never find somebody to marry (Hoffman 2004). Children who are amputees might be prevented from attending school or may simply feel too "different" to venture outside the safe haven of their home (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts, "Landmines" 2004). Children were not alone in feeling that they resembled monsters. Danny Hoffman cites the case of Sierra Leonean victims who had undergone surgery to have the bones of their forearms separated in order to use them like pinchers, and whose appearance made people run away from them (Hoffman 2004).

According to Valerie Cresson, a psychologist at Handicap International who has treated amputees in Sierra Leone, the maiming of men seemed to have been a favorite choice of the RUF (Onishi 1999). In effect, she believes that disrupting their ability to fulfill their simultaneous roles as men, fathers, and husbands was seen as an effective way to upset the existing patriarchal social order (Onishi 1999). The comment made in 1999 by Mr. Jarka, who lost his arms to the rebels in Sierra Leone, necessitates no further explanation: "But now I am like a baby" (Onishi, 1999). His wife had to take over and had no choice but to accept this imposed reversal of roles (Onishi 1999). As previously mentioned, while men were targeted during the early years of the terrorizing campaign of amputation, as the war progressed targets were broadened to include every demographic group.

Also central to the secondary consequences of amputation and to changes in the social order are issues of labeling and identity transformation. The altered physical appearance of amputees comes to

dominate the identity ascribed to them by others, and the label of "amputee" is the most explicit manifestation of it. Amputation becomes the sign of a new condition, being an amputee. This new condition, in the eyes of the victim, may be felt as an illness; identification with it leads to a transformed social identity (Nordstrom 1997).

As previously discussed, Carolyn Nordstrom writes about the construction of self-identity through war experiences in Mozambique and describes those who have suffered mutilation as being "doubly constructed by their war experience" (Nordstrom 1997: 185). Violence has affected their world as well as their bodies, and this violence is relived whenever the reality of a mutilated body interferes with their daily lives (Nordstrom 1997). People who interact with those who have been mutilated similarly re-encounter the violence of war when they are faced with its highly visible scars as embodied in victims of mutilation who, in their eyes, are no longer the same individuals (Nordstrom 1997).

Such repetitive flashbacks of painful and violent experiences of war, whether on the part of those who have suffered amputation or not, should not be diminished; they represent a vicious cycle of pain and fear that impacts how a person experiences his or her life. In Nordstrom's words, "The person is, quite literally, re-mutilated with every interaction" (Nordstrom 1999: 186). One's self-identity is no longer the same as it was prior to the episodes of violence; hence, neither is one's world (Nordstrom 1999). In other words, what Nordstrom appears to say is that one's past and current experience of, and interaction with, the world around him or her continuously build upon each other to create an ever-changing reality.

Tertiary Impacts: Economic and Political Issues

A third category of impacts of amputation revolves around broader economic and political issues. Ironically, in immediate post-conflict Sierra Leone, being an amputee temporarily offered a financial advantage. Amputees became "professional victims" for a while and sometimes even refused to wear a prosthetic device, not only because it was perceived as unattractive, but also because their state allowed them to more effectively raise donations through begging or through foreign donations (Hoffman 2004). However, in Sierra Leone, as elsewhere, being the most visible symbol of a war brings few benefits in the long run.

It appears that the communities most affected by the amputation of individuals would be those who engage in subsistence farming. Inability to farm leads to less available food for consumption as well as for market production, weakening the base of an already fractured economy. As stated previously, Sierra Leone has the highest estimated number of double-upper-arm amputees (Onishi 1999). Employment opportunities are limited in Sierra Leone as it is, and are practically nil for an amputee. The population is still considerably dependent upon a state recovering from bankruptcy and the "benevolence" of fickle foreign institutions and organizations for its economic well-being.

The economic effects of mass amputations can be expanded from the individual to the national. Without a sustainable endogenous resource base, Sierra Leone will make little progress. Because the international market created and sustained by the diamond industry provided a significant portion of the revenue rebels used to buy their weapons, the diamond oligarchy should play a financial role in Sierra Leone's reconstruction. Blood diamonds, such as those from Sierra Leone, easily make their way into the global markets; diamond executives in London and Antwerp reap the majority of these profits. Not only should they build processing plants in Sierra Leone and strengthen the formal networks, but they should also provide financial support for the rehabilitation of amputees.

Finally, although one of the goals of the RUF was to disable people from voting by mutilating their arms, people voted with toes and any way they could. The lasting effects of the amputations have played a role in the demand for greater political accountability and transparency. The need to have a human rights-centered post-conflict development is evident in testimonials from people who have lived through the atrocities and emphasizes the bottom-up approach to implementing human rights (Archibald and Richards 2002). This idea has been put into practice with the establishment of an independent Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose purpose is to record violations of human rights and humanitarian law, address impunity, help victims, and prevent a repetition of the conflict. In addition, a Special Court has been set up to try the grossest perpetrators of violence. Such efforts are central to Sierra Leone's attempt to institutionalize good governance of its political and economic arenas, but they have not been immune from financial constraints such as the difficulty of providing victims with monetary compensations (Butscher 2002).

Conclusion

Writing about a topic such as forcible amputation, one comes to wonder whether analyzing its dynamics does not diminish its horror. Furthermore, one might get the feeling that attempting to find subtle symbols in a brutal practice somehow equates excusing it. Nevertheless, analyzing the practice and finding a space within its meaning for political messages does not bring legitimacy to a violent tactic. On the contrary, wrestling with the issue of amputation in the context of Sierra Leone is very important because ignoring or discarding the potential political subjectivity in the message of violence might just perpetuate the vicious cycle (Hoffman 2003). If the rebels were sending political messages through specific warfare tactics, they are better uncovered and studied in order to keep the same script of violence from being played out again. Amputation is one particular locus where such insights on the micro- and macro-dynamics of the conflict can be found.

To understand the politics of the Sierra Leone civil war more fully, one needs to look at historical details and the parties to the conflict. The objective of this paper was to come to grips with the specific topic of forcible amputation and the potential messages and purposes illustrated by its widespread practice. Amputation was not the only violent tactic used during the decade of civil war, and violence was not the exclusive trademark of the Revolutionary United Front. Other warring parties used violence as well. For a more comprehensive idea of events in Sierra Leone, one must look at the conflict in its greater complexity.

This paper differentiates between various motives for amputations, be they political, socio-political, or economic. Not explicitly discussed but worth mentioning is the notion that terrorizing through amputation might have been an end in itself or a means to get attention from the world community (Hoffman 2003). This fits with Hoffman's argument that warring factions were well aware of other groups' practices and functions. Beyond everything else there may well have been a degree of incomprehensibility that affected the victims as well as the perpetrators, who had thrown themselves, and pulled others into, a spinning wheel of violence (Hoffman 2004).

Although the war in Sierra Leone has been officially over for three years and the United Nations is anticipated to remove its presence in December 2004, the effects of a 10-year war of amputations will not end when the Mandate expires (Campbell 2004). Current efforts at rehabilitating both amputee victims

and child soldiers are not producing the anticipated optimistic goals. The state is bankrupt, ranks last on the UN's Human Development Index, and lacks financial commitment from the international aid community. These factors, among others, have contributed to the premature termination of many of the soldier rehabilitation programs, and only minimal rehabilitative efforts for amputee victims have been provided.

To summarize, Sierra Leone has a long road ahead to strengthen its political, economic, and social institutions in order to ensure that future conflicts do not occur. Macro-level changes will require the support of the international community via multi-lateral financial institutions, the United Nations, and the global diamond industry. Groups like MSF are providing responsible post-conflict development with physical and mental rehabilitative efforts on a micro-level, and the need for more groups like this is going to expand with the upcoming withdrawal of UN forces if Sierra Leone is going to avoid future wars of mutilation. The consequences of amputation and the experiences of people having suffered amputation, as well as the experiences of the perpetrators, are equally important in a post-conflict development context. While the role of international institutions is important in post-conflict reconstruction, without an in-depth comprehension and inclusion of the various lived experiences of both former combatants and victims (which are not mutually exclusive categories) peace and stability in Sierra Leone will remain out of reach.

There are a few lessons, perhaps useful to the study of other "revolutionary" movements and the terror tools that sometimes characterize them, to be learned from an in-depth analysis of the practices of terror resorted to by the RUF, as well as other warring factions, within the context of the decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone. The first, put forth by Danny Hoffman, is that "invoking tradition as an explanatory framework" in any African conflict setting, including Sierra Leone, is inappropriate (Hoffman 2004: 213). In other words, purely culturalist explanations of the violence will miss the bigger picture.

This is not to say that the observer needs to overlook the local context of the war. Conflicts are inherently fueled by local politics, social conditions, and economic inequalities, as the role of the diamond industry has shown in Sierra Leone. The catalytic role of natural resources was confirmed by a prominent Sierra Leonean himself:

The conflict was not about ideology, tribal or regional differences. It had nothing to do with the so-called problem of marginalized youths, or . . . an uprising by rural poor against the urban elite. The root of the conflict was and remained diamonds (Ibrahim Kamara, Sierra Leone's Ambassador to the UN, in McIntyre, Kwesi Aning, and Addo 2002).

As a closer look at the social repercussions of the use of amputation has revealed, the rebels were also acting within a specific sociocultural context. This is worth examining in depth in order to understand why particular terror tactics might have been chosen by the rebels, perhaps specifically because they were thought to have the greatest impact on the existing social order. Local and cultural experiences must be understood to enlighten a broader analysis, but they should not be essentialized as the unique answer.

Finally, the regional and global nature of the conflict in Sierra Leone must be taken into account. It is true that in this age of the internet, mobile phones, global markets, and sometimes porous borders, such a dimension will no longer leave any conflict untouched. As a consequence, "there is no war on earth today that is not informed by the knowledge of wars elsewhere" (Hoffman 2004: 214). As Hoffman's research has shown, the Kamajors, and hence most likely the RUF, were aware of, and interested in, other rebel movements elsewhere in Africa (Hoffman 2004).

Following this line of argument and analysis, one cannot help but ponder, for example, the case of Rwanda. If the genocide of a half-million human beings was not enough to unleash a massive intervention by the international community, perhaps the RUF thought it could get away with a campaign characterized by the use of amputation. On the contrary, they could have deemed that letting their victims live to tell of the horror they experienced would induce the international community into action. This final thought should not be interpreted as an attempt at ranking the brutality and degree of suffering involved in various guerrilla tactics. Rather, we seek to suggest that revolutionary movements themselves may come up with strategies based on the experiences of, and reactions to, belligerents in other conflict settings.

Notes

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