

**Rationalizing Evil:
The Revolutionary United Front and
the Logic of Violence**

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Introduction

As events in Bosnia, Chechnya, Rwanda, and Kosovo have vividly demonstrated, the end of the Cold War has not eliminated conflict. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, in 1998, of the 27 major armed conflicts that took place, only two were interstate—the rest were internal. They were often pre-modern wars, in which political, social, economic, and religious frictions become hopelessly entangled. These conflicts share commonalities—communal relations disintegrating to critical levels and violence erupting in spite of governments' intervention. Citizens organized behind various causes and for differing beliefs, are the primary propellers and sustainers of these conflicts. The location of violence outside the 'state' is the most challenging aspect of this type of violence. Consequently, understanding the development of citizen groups in the face of intra-state conflict is vital for identifying proximate causes of conflict. This knowledge facilitates productive interventions and action by the international community, something that, as events in Somalia showed, severely lacks.

In the conflict ravaged country of Sierra Leone, one of the primary groups of citizens engaging in violent conflict is a guerilla group known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The RUF claims it seeks a liberated Sierra Leone and a united Africa. It critics wonder how its methods achieve these noble goals, given that its primary methods include mutilating, raping, and killing people so gruesomely, that human rights organizations call them "evil." We are left to ask ourselves, where is the logic in all this. Is the RUF made up of evil people? Have they gone crazy? What would drive members of this group to fight for a free Sierra Leone in this way?

This thesis takes a seemingly cruel and illogical case of citizen action and tries to understand the rationale behind their actions. Consequently, the objective is to identify factors in intra-state conflicts that influence the formulation of citizen groups' action plans (the relation between goals and how they are achieved) and the conditions that prompt organizations to feel violence best achieves these objectives.

Determining why citizen groups choose certain methods for achieving goals, and why methods sometimes become violent, helps clarify proximate causes of intra-state conflict. In order to diffuse intra-state conflict and create peace within conflict-ridden nations, it is essential to understand the dynamics and *raison de'être* behind human relations at all levels, from local to global. Examining why people of different cultures, ethnicity, and regions choose particular methods for realizing their purpose, and why methods chosen sometimes become violent, facilitates the development of salient communities. Through understanding the roots of conflict, peace can emerge.

This project rests on the assumption that no one acts irrationally. Every person and organization works to achieve their goals, their purpose, in the way that they see as the most efficient and effective manner. However, just because certain actions seem logical and rationale to one group, does not mean those same actions must seem rational to others. In fact, human civilization is about negotiations among different logics and rationales.

In order to examine the different factors that affect why citizen groups decide to act in in the first place a comparative methodology is employed. It sets a framework that includes history, economics, politics, and sociology.

A. Argument

This thesis argues that people that join the RUF do so because they are part of the socially marginalized strata of society seeking to meet basic needs and change the government. It is argued that this is not a conflict about material gain, and diamonds, as in often suffegested. Neither is the violence senseless. Violence is the instrument used to destabilize the regime the RUF wants dismantled. By attacking civilians, and innocents, RUF members undermine the security-enforcing role, and monopoly of force, that the legitimate government should have; consequently, highlighting the government's ineptitudes.

Any peace process initiated in Sierra Leone must focus on the socio-psychological underpinnings of the conflict. The basic needs of people who joined the RUF must be addressed for this war to fully end. A process of reconciliation should also commence, in which combatants and non-combatants alike, join forces in an attempt to create a better future. Only through a profound national reconciliation that focuses on the root causes of conflict in Sierra Leone, will this troubled country transition into more peaceful times.

I. Outline of Thesis

Chapter one describes the seemingly “senseless violence” inflicted by the RUF in Sierra Leone. This permits the reader to situate him or herself in the context of the Sierra Leone bush, and imagine the reality of RUF tactics. After explaining what RUF action entail, a discussion follows on whether this is senseless violence or if “senseless violence even exists. This is important to understanding the nature of the group being discussed.

Chapter two goes back in time to provide an in-depth account of RUF development. First, the development of the lumpen proletariat, a group of marginalized youth that created the basis of the modern rebel group is discussed. Then, more recent historical factors, such as the Liberian Civil War, in the early 1990s, are examined, to explain catalytic factors of the RUF’s formation.

Chapter three examines more purely the logic of the RUF. The assumptions, goals, and methods supported by the RUF are examined in its manifesto *Footpaths to Democracy—Toward a new Sierra Leone*. Theories on aggression are explored to explain why the RUF employs such violent means to meet its objectives. Political and economic motivating factors for such violence are also examined to provide an in depth analysis of RUF violence.

Chapter four explores conflict resolution mechanisms for mitigating “senseless violence.” Methods to address the socio-psychological are explored, as are more traditional methods of conflict resolution.

II. Conclusion

In writing this thesis, I hope to debunk the myth that some people and organizations are simply evil or crazy. Rather, I hope to demonstrate that by not demonizing the ‘other’, we have a better chance of understanding them, identifying their fundamental needs, and transforming conflict in a way that benefits all stakeholders. My personal interest in this subject originated from a deep held belief that all people are rational actors, and no one is evil. After hearing many people demonize the RUF, I began wondering why people join the group. Why would they kill so brutally? And I began to imagine what it would be like if I grew up without a family, in the inner cities of the worst country in the world? What would it be like if every day I could only fight to survive? Would I have the same value system I have now? Or, would I not even have the luxury of values? All these thoughts made me realize that there must be a reason people’s frustration erupted so fiercely, and with such violent intensity. Failing to understand these underlying causes of conflict cripples the efforts of any person, or organization, seeking to resolve conflict in Sierra Leone and create peace.

III. Chapter I: Senseless Violence—a snap shot of the RUF

“Civilians were rounded up, in groups or in lines, and then taken individually to a pounding block in the village where their hands, arms, or legs were cut with a machete...Men were ordered to rape members of their own family...women were raped by rebel forces, often in front of their own husbands...women and girls also suffered [from]...having foreign objects inserted into their vaginas. [Sometimes] victims [were]...rounded up, and locked into houses which were then set alight.”¹ People were asked to choose which limb they would prefer amputated—all this in the name of a democratic Sierra Leone.

This chapter describes the types of violence propagated by the Revolutionary United Front, and debunks the common notion that RUF actions are senseless and evil. This is done by first discussing the types of violence in which rebels engage, then possible explanations. Subsequently, the historical, political, economic, and sociological factors that shape RUF rationale are explored, elucidating a comprehensive theory of RUF motivations for acting violently. One will see that RUF fighting is actually a battle of the marginalized community in Sierra Leone for empowerment, and the use of violence is its tool of last resort.

I. RUF Violence

War has raged in Sierra Leone since 1991. Once again, as in 1999, and 1997, the prospect of peace exists. Rebels want peace talks. Regardless of whether fighting ceases, the brutality of this war will not be soon forgotten.

Over the last ten years it is the civilians of Sierra Leone who have suffered most. Already, by 1993 relief organization estimated that one million people, out of a total of 4.5 million had already been displaced from their homes in Sierra Leone, and forced to move, often to neighboring Liberia or Guinea.² Estimates of casualties now range between 30,000-75,000 war-related deaths. Atrocities such as branding, gang rape of women and children, amputation of limbs, ears and lips with machetes, and decapitation have been common.³

In March of 2000, the United Nations estimated that the number of survivors of amputation was approximately 600, representing less than a quarter of all amputees.⁴ Over an estimated 5,000 children, once innocents, are now warriors, with a youth full of nightmarish memories. These children have often been drugged with marijuana and

¹ Amnesty International's 1998 Report, "Sierra Leone—A year of atrocities against civilians." Accounts of RUF attack survivors. www.humanrightswatch.org

² David Lord, Editor. "Paying the Price: The Sierra Leone Peace Process." *Conciliation Resources: Accord—an international review of peace initiatives*. Issue 9, 2000, p.13

³ Ibid, p. 13

⁴ Ibid, p.13

cocaine to encourage their participation in atrocities.⁵ These horrors, combined with a dire economic situation in which 90% of people live below the UN established poverty line, make this country rank last on the United Nations Development Program Index.

The RUF is responsible for much of this violence. However, exact statistics are impossible to determine due to the complicated web of fighters that include the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), Liberian-RUF soldiers led by Charles Taylor (whom Sierra Leonean RUF consider more aggressive), Guinean fighters, Kamajors (ethnic Mende hunters), and SOBELS (soldiers by day, rebels by night).

RUF Tactics—targeted violence

Though many people and factions have fought in this war, the RUF is the group that has become infamous for its violent fighting tactics. Amputations, rape, and killing of civilian men, women, and children have been among the most common brutalities.

Violence is often times gender-based. Women and girls are often kept as “wives” for members of the RUF. Gang rape is common in RUF camps. Rape is also used for punishment when women do not follow instructions.⁶

⁵ Ibid, p. 14

⁶ Amnesty International, Secretariat www.amnesty.org

The RUF recruits children and young men by making them kill community members, and turning them into soldiers. Many children get lost and separated from their parents.⁷

Victims of amputations also goggle incredulously at RUF cruelty exclaiming like Mustapha Mansary, the adviser of the Kono district amputee camp, “They just did it for its own sake...They didn’t accuse us of doing anything.”⁸

II. Explanations for RUF Violence

In traditional guerrilla warfare, rebels try to win the hearts and minds of the people. The RUF commits atrocities against the people whom in traditional war-strategy would be allies. Scholars try to understand this anomaly. Consequently, various theories have developed as to why violence is the choice method for achieving an objective RUF leaders claim is political.

A. The RUF—evil incarnate

Human Rights Watch has called the RUF “evil.”⁹ Abductions, forced labor, gender based violence like rape, atrocities against children, killing, mutilation, sexual abuse, and forced recruitment are among the common RUF actions that allow this rebel group to be easily demonized.¹⁰ People who view RUF violence as being evil usually feel it is senseless as well, meaning there is no logic in what the RUF does. Besides from the RUF being evil incarnate, the other explanation for senseless violence is that RUF members are

⁷ Amnesty International. International Secretariat, www.amnesty.org

⁸ James Traub. “The Worst Place on Earth” Class Sierra Leone Packet

⁹ www.humanrightswatch.org

“barbaric, drug crazed, and dragooned by warlords,”¹¹ making rebels act irrationally. Consequently, this first theory assumes the RUF acts in a senseless manner that is neither purposeful nor logical.

B. Economic motivations for violence

Another explanation for RUF behavior, which has more evidence in favor, is that the RUF is an economically motivated rebel movement. First, attention is brought to the \$300 million a year in revenue rebels gain from the diamond mining industry.¹² Analysts criticize that the RUF uses diamonds to finance the war effort, and that “when the RUF is not fighting it is digging...making the point of war ...not actually to win it, but to engage in profitable crime under the cover of warfare.”¹³ This theory is further enhanced by claims that the RUF does not have a political agenda.¹⁴ Proponents of this theory are likely to explain military denial to diamond mines as the proximate cause for the RUF opting for negotiated settlements with the Sierra Leone government.¹⁵

¹⁰ Amnesty International, International Secretariat, www.amnesty.org

¹¹ Chris Talbot. “Carve-up the diamond and mineral rights exposed, as Britain continues re colonization in Sierra Leone. World Socialist Web Site: News and Analysis www.wswg.com 6/26/2000

¹² Sierra Leone: The forgotten crisis

¹³ UN Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN). “Sierra Leone: IRIN focus on diamond smuggling.” African News Service, copy right 2000, 5/24/00). In the past decade, approximately 85% of Sierra Leone diamond output was smuggled onto the international market.

¹⁴ Sierra Leone: The forgotten crisis

¹⁵ For example, in 1996 Executive Outcomes, a South African based mercenary company quickly quelled RUF advances on Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, and ran the RUF out of the diamond areas. Following ejection from the diamond mines, the RUF extended an olive branch to the Sierra Leonean government calling for the end of the civil war. One of the stipulations of this peace agreement was that Foday Sankoh, the leader of the RUF, should take on the role of vice president and minister of mines and

By focusing on one causal factor of RUF violence, both these theories are rendered limited and shortsighted. Both theories fail to explain why people join and stay in the RUF, two aspects that shed light on the rationale for violence. The book *Harvest of Thorns*, by [Shimmer Chinodya](#), provides a good illustration of why these two theories are inadequate. First, people do not join rebel movements because they want to be evil. Rather, as with the protagonist of this novel, many people join rebel groups because they find it is constructive in some way. Furthermore, a distinction must be made between elite motivations for fighting and mass motivations for fighting. The economic-motivation argument fails to make this distinction. Though it may be true RUF leaders line their pockets from illicit diamond trade, and can parade around in lizard skin shoes, the average fighter of the RUF lives and breathes the bush, knowing no worldly luxuries. Consequently, the average person does not grow rich, nor even close. Though the diamond trade may sustain conflict by providing the rebels with financial resources, it is not the impetus for employing violent methods. (The RUF did not gain control of the diamond areas of Sierra Leone until 1994. The origins of the RUF predate this time frame by decades.)

Journalist James Traub suggests that violence is more than a result of evil, drugs, drinking, or the desire for economic gain. Rather, the RUF is the “local expression of region-wide forces causing disintegration.”¹⁶ In suit, Robert Kaplan offers population

natural resources. Proponents of the economic-motivation theory point to this series of events as evidence that the RUF is only concerned about sustaining an illicit diamond trade and making money.

¹⁶ James Traub

pressure, resource competition, and environmental collapse as underlying causes of RUF violence.¹⁷ Interestingly, most theories on RUF behavior begin by stating the RUF lacks political purpose. Subsequently, theories cannot explain the “determined fighting” that makes dismissing the RUF as a group of “drug-crazed kids” a serious mistake.¹⁸

III. A Comprehensive Theory on Violence

The war in Sierra Leone is a war of terror. Horrifying acts of brutality are inflicted against defenseless civilians. This is not happenstance. As Paul Richards explains, “Terror is supposed to unsettle its victims. The confused accounts of terrorized victims and violence do not constitute evidence of the irrationality of violence. Rather, they show the opposite—that tactics have been fully effective in disorientating, traumatizing, and demoralizing victims of violence. In short, they are devilishly well-calculated.”¹⁹

Young people caught in the dispute point to political factors as the causes of conflict. They remind that the RUF took up arms to fight for a multiparty democracy, against state corruption, and that it is a coherent movement.²⁰ However, politics, just as economics,

¹⁷ Paul Richards. “Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, youth, and resources in Sierra Leone.” International African Institute, Villiers Publications, UK, 1996., p. xv (see Kaplan 1994)

¹⁸ British Chief of Defense Staff, Sir Charles Guthrie said of RUF factions, “They fought a very determined fight and clearly are very capable. I think it would be a serious mistake to dismiss them as drug-crazed kids.” (Clarece Roy MaCaulay. Sierra Leone Hostages Freed. The Associate Press. NY, NY. 9/10/2000) The discipline and dedication necessary for such sustained and systematic violence require a sense of camaraderie among fighters and sense of purpose not provided when personal gain is the only goal.

¹⁹ ‘Paul Richards. “Fighting for the Rain Forest,” p. xvi

²⁰ ‘Paul Richards. “Fighting for the Rain Forest,” p. xvi

does not explain the whole picture. As Richards suggests, we must see if this war, and RUF violence, makes “sociological sense.” Why did the RUF decide violence would best achieve its objectives? Does it make sense that the RUF successfully recruits people to employ violent methods? Does it make sense that dirty bush-worn rebels ferociously cheer their leader dressed in military fatigues and lizard skin shoes?²¹

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the types of violence propagated by the RUF. Among the tactics used are gender-based violence, forced recruitment of child soldiers, and amputations. The most common explanations for RUF violence—evil and diamonds—have also been debunked by framing the conflict, not in terms of what has happened in Sierra Leone, but why it has happened, why people choose to join the RUF. The subsequent chapter sheds further light on why people joined the RUF by describing the formation of this rebel group.

²¹ Carroll Bogert. “World Class Crimes.”

IV. Chapter II: Historic Factors of RUF Rationale

The RUF is not a movement that formed over night. Nor is it a group that suddenly appeared on the scene in 1991 when it invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia. It developed over time. This chapter explores the historical factors contributing to the formation of the Revolutionary United Front. The first section sets the stage for the RUF invasion from Liberia, discussing the formation of the RUF. The second section describes events of the last ten years, and provides an overview of the war in Sierra Leone.

I. From Rebellious Youth to Rebels: The Formation of the RUF

In the 1940s and 50s the rebellious youth culture in the capital city of Freetown became known as the lumpen or “rarray boys.” Lumpen refers to “the largely unemployed and unemployable youths, mostly males, who live[d] by their wits or who [had] one foot in what is generally referred to as the informal or underground economy. They [were] prone to criminal behavior, petty theft, drugs, drunkenness, and anti-social tendencies”²²

Society viewed lumpen youth as anti-social gangs involved in petty theft and violence. Excluded from participating in mainstream activities, like movies and dance halls, prompted lumpen youth to develop their own kind of “urban leisure patterned on the

²² From the 70s to the 80s this group was 100% literate, some had special skills, but no jobs; and they drifted in and out of numerous potes in the urban center.” (Concord Times, Freetown. “Sierra Leone: Where did we go wrong?” (Speech by Ibrahim Abdullah: the youth question and the nation-state project) Africa News Service, copyright 2000, 5/6/00)

hunting societies.”²³ The middle class and city officials despised these lumpen societies, or Odelays.²⁴ The marginalization of these people forged a strong fraternal bond and sense of community between them. They came to share a common history of being excluded from society and committing crimes against that society that has lasted until today.

In 1961, Sierra Leone got its independence and a president with good ideas regarding how to improve Sierra Leonean society.²⁵ However, he died shortly thereafter and the brother, Albert Margai, ushered in the trend of official corruption. Margai’s unprecedented levels of corruption alienated many citizens, and further alienated the lumpen youth that focused solely on survival, and escaping a dismal reality through drug-use and music.

The late 1960s and 70s, and the autocratic rule of Siaka Stevens, occurred alongside the politization of the lumpen. Stevens further concretized the corrupt image of the Sierra Leonean government by promoting the “systematic subversion of the formal state apparatus and the growth of a large informal economy, much of it based on illicit diamond trade.”²⁶ Meanwhile, middle class youth began entering popular culture and

²³ Concord Times, Freetown. “Sierra Leone: Where did we go wrong?” (Speech by Ibrahim Abdullah: the youth question and the nation-state project) Africa News Service, copyright 2000, 5/6/00

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Sierra Leone: The forgotten crisis, Report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honorable Lloyed Axworthy, PC, MP from David Prattel, MMP, Napean Carleton, Special Envoy to Sierra Leone. April 23, 1999. www.fas/org/man/dod-101/ops/war/docs/crisis-htm

²⁶ Sierra Leone: The forgotten crisis

partaking in potes (resorts) and masquerades (odelays). The middle class brought political awareness to the lumpen youth's marginalized status, and the culpability of the state for its position.²⁷

The lumpen brought drug culture to the middle class. With the onset of reggae music in the 70s the music/drug culture became even more politicized by songs about liberation and revolution.²⁸ Some middle class youth proceeded to drop out of school and adopt the mannerisms of rarray boys. By the 70s there were many high school dropouts, and a few intellectuals. Some lumpen matriculated to universities such as Fourah Bay and Njala College. Others joined increasing hoards of unemployed youth. Regardless of class or education, in the potes people bonded through drugs and music. International voices like that of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Bunny Wailer captured the feeling of dissidence lumpen felt with their society and government. Purple Haze, a Freetown band, and Super Combo, from Bo, were more locally grown reggae groups—all carrying the message of liberation and revolution. This strengthened the culture of resistance growing within the lumpen ranks.²⁹

²⁷ Editor Christopher Clapham. *African Guerrillas. "The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone: A Revolt of the Lumpenproletariat.* Indiana University Press, 1993., p. 173

²⁸ Ibid p. 173 (The first phase of this shift in lumpen culture was that the middle class youth began taking in the drug culture of the lumpen and pote (resorts).

²⁹ Ibid, p. 173

The Potes became arenas for political discussion centered on the system.³⁰ As unemployment increased in the 70s, so did the number of potes. Consequently, the ideas of Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fannon, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Karl Marx spread quickly throughout lumpen youth. This diffusion of ideas helped pave the road for student radicalism in the 80s, the direct predecessor to the RUF.

In the early 1980s university students became the role models for there less privileged “brothers,” due the prestige students gained for protesting the All People’s Congress government (APC) in 1977.³¹ The pote code of honor began giving special regard to ‘service men,’ meaning those who studied at a university. The less fortunate eagerly listened with respect and politicized from the safety of the pote.

Societal pressures propelled a transfer of power from Stevens to Major General Joseph Saidu Momoh, the military commander, in 1985. Though Momoh came to power on a wave of enthusiasm, it soon became apparent that corruption flagrantly continued and no new reforms were implemented. This was compounded by high inflation, currency devaluations, food shortages, and fuel shortages. Two trends began. First, there was a sharp increase in unemployment and disaffected youth that drifted from the countryside to either Freetown or the diamond mines. This youth became further socialized in a

³⁰ Ibid, p. 174

³¹ Ibid, p.174 (Student protests in the late 1970s demonstrated the weakness of the Stevens regime, and made students realize that regimes were not immutable. This realization spurred much of the 1980s student activism).

“climate of violence, drugs, and criminality.”³² Second, the number of student militant grew dramatically. In the second half of the 1980s students radicalized in response to government suppression of demonstrations and exposure to new ideas like Mumar Qaddafi’s Green Book.³³ And in 1989, Foday Sankoh and other intellectuals went to Libya³⁴ for formal revolutionary training, which was to create the launching pad for the RUF two years later in its attempt to shatter APC grip on power.³⁵

An analysis of the historical precursors of the RUF demonstrates that the people who made up the lumpen, and who make up the RUF, feel marginalized from society and disempowered. By building a community of disempowered people, individuals create a sense of belonging, acceptance, and self-worth, which in turn empowers. The RUF continue the historic trend of being despised and excluded by mainstream society. Consequently, history validates RUF claims that it had been systematically marginalized and victim of state sponsored poverty and human degradation. According to RUF rationale, this situation could only be remedied by violence.³⁶

³² Sierra Leone: The forgotten crisis

³³ Revolutionary United Front. FAS Intelligence Program. www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ruf.htm (10/19/00)

³⁴ Foday Saybana Sankoh was once a corporal in the army and was jailed for a coup attempt against Stevens. When he returned from Libya he formed a tight-knit group with Abu Kanu and Rahsid Mansaray, and the three went on a recruiting drive among lumpens to create the RUF. (Abdullah and Muana, p. 176)

³⁵ Federation of American Scientists web site. FAS. Intelligence Resource Program. Revolutionary United Front. <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ruf.htm> Created by John Pike

³⁶ In the 1980s students tried protesting to create change. They tried voting. Non-violent means of action did not alter their marginalized status. Armed with the ideas of Mao and the Green Book, lumpens, now politically mobilized into the RUF, were intent on forcibly creating what they considered as rightfully theirs—economic and social opportunities.

II. The 1990s—a decade of vengeance and vindication

By the time 1991 rolled around, RUF leadership felt it had a right to claim the wealth of Sierra Leone for itself.³⁷ Through political connections, businessmen had controlled Sierra Leone’s mineral wealth for decades. Consequently, RUF leadership concluded that the time for “reasoned debates” and non-violent action had passed.³⁸ A lasting solution could only be found through “an explosion of destructive violence.”³⁹ This section describes the development of the RUF in the 1990s.

The immediate origins of the RUF rebellion in Sierra Leone are found in the civil war of Liberia. In 1989, Charles Taylor attacked the government of Samuel Doe, gaining control of the Liberian government. He was to be an essential ally of the RUF.⁴⁰

During this same time, across the border, in Sierra Leone, President Momoh was deciding to hold multiparty elections, planned for 1992.⁴¹ Many felt this was simply a ploy to legitimize the All People’s Congress 24 year grip on power. In 1991, before the elections

³⁷ Historically, diamond mining was one of the oldest forms of “collective lumpen resistance in Sierra Leone.” (Abdullah and Muana, p. 179) Together, the lumpen could pick up and go to the diamond areas and just start digging. In Sierra Leone, diamonds have always been illicitly controlled by whoever is in charge. Consequently, using diamonds to fund movements is nothing new. The RUF leadership, it can be argued, just follows the example set by previous powerful actors in Sierra Leone.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 179

³⁹ Ibid, p. 179

⁴⁰ Federation of American Scientists web site. FAS.

⁴¹ <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ruf.htm> Created by John Pike

could be held the RUF invaded. With the assistance of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), Foday Sankoh and a small band of men crossed from Liberia into Sierra Leone's Eastern Province to end the APC's political reign.⁴²

A humanitarian crisis quickly ensued. The RUF, led by Sankoh, imitated the tactics used by Taylor in the Liberian Civil War. Youth were conscripted and tattooed for military identification.⁴³ Traders in border regions were targeted, attacked, and sometimes beheaded.⁴⁴

From the onset, the RUF used violent tactics, making it calling card dead civilians, and hundreds of handless, footless, earless people. Village leaders were primary targets.⁴⁵ However, the group's first four years of operation were not illustrious.⁴⁶ Starting out as a small rebel group, RUF leaders focused on recruitment. Youth military camps were created in captured settlements.⁴⁷ This was also a time in which RUF fortunes fluctuated.

⁴² Charles Taylor had a particular interest in assisting the RUF and destabilizing the Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL) due to the GOSL's support for international peacekeeping troops in Liberia, which Taylor strongly disliked. Also, Taylor's government has been accused of smuggling diamonds from Sierra Leone, a task facilitated by his close ties with the RUF.

⁴³ Richards, p. 5

⁴⁴ <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ruf.htm> Created by John Pike

⁴⁵ Richards, p. 8

⁴⁶ <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ruf.htm> Created by John Pike

⁴⁷ Richards, p. 7

Rebels would overrun diamond areas in Sierra Leone, then be pushed back by the Sierra Leone Army, and try and retake the diamond areas yet again.⁴⁸

The RUF's lack of military strength forced it to rely on guerilla tactics. Consequently, the RUF relied on hit-and-run raids to give it the illusion of strength. Civilians in the countryside feared the swift attacks of the RUF.⁴⁹

It was not until 1995 that the RUF published the manifesto, *Footpaths to Democracy*, making its beliefs, and doctrine public.⁵⁰ It was also during this time period that the RUF successfully took control of state diamond and bauxite mines, providing it a stronger economic base.⁵¹ Economic strength bolstered RUF fighting ability. In order to combat the RUF, the Government of Sierra Leone recruited a private mercenary company, Executive Outcomes. EO successfully battled the RUF. By 1996, the RUF had been practically expelled from all diamond areas.⁵²

⁴⁸ <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ruf.htm> Created by John Pike

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

This period of RUF weakness paved the way for the signing of the first peace agreement between the RUF and the Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL). It was the first of many. Since then, cease-fires have been breached, and treaties broken. According to RUF leadership, it has followed treaties and cease-fires as long as all parties have respected the agreements, and according to the RUF, the GOSL continually defaults on its commitments. Consequently, fighting continued through the 1990s, with only short intervals of rest.⁵³

Now, Sierra Leone has a democratically elected president, President Ahmad Kabbah, a former United Nations Development Program official. Kabbah called for a state of emergency in Sierra Leone, permitting the authority to extend his presidency for two more years. From the RUF perspective, this presidency is simply the continuance of corruption. The RUF looks forward to forming part of the Government of Sierra Leone.⁵⁴

Conclusion

This chapter looked at both the recent and longer-term historical events that impacted the development of the marginalized people who today comprise the RUF. As Freetown youth worker Dennis Bright summarizes, “The long years of neglect of youths in the development programs of successive governments in Sierra Leone has been widely

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

acknowledges as a major cause of the war. Indeed, during the dictatorial rule of the APC; youths were groomed in violence and used as hired thugs in election campaigns but abandoned afterwards and left to sink into drugs, crime, and other vices on the margin of society. By the time of the outbreak of the war, the conditions were favorable for manipulation and mass mobilization of such marginalized members of society into organized crime and violence. The massive looting, rape, use of drugs and arson is partly due to the background of the young recruits.”⁵⁵ Consequently, the deep-rooted origins of this conflict are apparent.

During the 1990s, the RUF has grown in size and power. In 1991, no one in Sierra Leone even knew whom RUF, a then rag-tag insurgency, was. Now, it is a key coalition actor in the Sierra Leon conflict, whose cooperation is necessary for the cessation of the civil war, and whose violence is world-renown. The following chapter provides a description of RUF leaders’ political and social objectives as well as an analysis of members’ motivations for joining, fighting, and choosing violence as the best course of action for achieving goals.

⁵⁵ David Lord, “Paying the Price: The Sierra Leone Peace Process”, p.12

Chapter 3: Sociological Factors of RUF Rationale

In order to explain the causes of RUF violence, this section explores the sociological factors influencing why people join the RUF, why they stay, and why the violence is deemed rationale. The first section describes RUF political rationale. The second section explores reasons people join the RUF. The third section provides a social-psychological explanation for RUF behavior.

I. The RUF Explains Itself⁵⁶

A. RUF Manifesto. The RUF manifesto, *Footpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone*, explains RUF objectives, ideals, and rationality, according to its leaders. The manifesto begins by quoting France Fanon: “Each generation must out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it.” And that is precisely what the RUF manifesto claims the RUF is trying to do.

The “RUF is fighting to save Sierra Leone,” sings the RUF anthem. Historically the people of Sierra Leone have been “perpetual victims of state sponsored poverty and human degradation,” inflicted by autocratic and military regimes. RUF members want to alter their historic situation of marginalization and exclusion from mainstream Sierra Leonean society. They reject being the “victims of [the] state.”

⁵⁶ All quotes from the RUF Manifesto: “*Footpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone*” were published in 1995 and posted on the World Wide Web by Peter Anderson, www.sierra-leone.org.

“We no longer leave the destiny of our country in the hands of a generation of crooked politicians and military adventurers.” The RUF manifesto suggest the RUF sees politics in Sierra Leone as a corrupt game in which politicians, “use state power to enrich themselves by accumulating the wealth and property of the land.” The RUF feels an obligation to say “enough is enough,” and fight against blatant political corruption.

“Where are our diamonds, Mr. President? Where is our gold, NPRC?” The RUF manifesto demonstrates frustration at not having access to Sierra Leone’s natural resources. The “RUF is hungry to know” where all the economic opportunities are for Sierra Leoneans. Consequently, taking control of the diamond mines, is a way of righting this wrong.

“Our people are suffering without means of survival.” The manifesto clearly explains that governments have not met the basic needs of Sierra Leoneans. Upon this tenet lay the ideals enunciated by the RUF. “No more slavery, no more master;” “Arms to the people; power to the people;” and “Wealth to the people.” These ideals are based on the sociological desire to survive and flourish. Consequently, “people should empower themselves in order to harness their resources and use them for their own survival.” For the RUF that translates into **armed struggle as the most efficient method** “to not fold [one’s] arms and sit on the fence while [the] society collapses.”

Aside from stating beliefs, the manifesto also defends the RUF against anticipated criticisms. Violence is explained as a product of limited martial rule in liberated zones of

Sierra Leone. Atrocities are attributed to the involvement of “alien” troops from Liberia, and errors from which the RUF have learned. Forced participation is not forced at all, but rather a product of individual’s realizing the importance of the RUF battle. The RUF goal is not economic or malevolent, simply a “consciousness of [themselves] as enterprising people...developed because of a self reliant struggle [in which] the only force than can defeat militarism and dictatorship is the armed force of the suffering people as expressed in a guerilla campaign.” Consequently, according to the RUF, its underlying objective is to build a political system over which the oppressed people of Sierra Leone have absolute control.

B. RUF Web page. In addition to the manifesto, the RUF has its own web page—www.RUFP.org—in which the organization’s views and rebuttals to criticisms are found. On the first link of this site, the fighting strategy of the RUF is clearly explained. In order to pursue the sacred objective of “total empowerment of the people for genuine democratic order or culture” the RUF delineates three phases of its struggle.

The slogan of the first phase of struggle is “Arms to the People.” The RUF believes that organized, informed, people are the motivating force of political and economic revolution. Consequently, the RUF has trained men, women, children, and elderly to use weapons, so that they may “dismantle the corrupt APC/SLPP system and its sordid successors.” According to the RUF, “this phase is currently being vigorously pursued and the RUFP will not relent until the task is accomplished.” The RUF sees its goals as

legitimate because it believes that “the possession of arms should not be the monopoly of a privileged group. Everybody should be a fighter to defend their rights.”

The second phase of the struggle is expressed in the phrase “Power to the People.” This refers to the type of political power to which the RUF aspires. The RUF explains that it has “abiding faith in the necessity of democratic empowerment of the people in order to wipe out the scourge of poverty and human degradation that afflict us as a people.”⁵⁷ Consequently, its leadership envisions a society in which “all local government structures are going to be overhauled so that everybody participates full and actively in the decision making and implementing processes according to their ability.”⁵⁸

In the third phase of the struggle the RUF wants “Wealth to the People.” This means that it wants to empower the people of Sierra Leone to “harness their resources and use them for their own survival and development.” RUF leadership believes the natural resources of Sierra Leone are the “natural property of the people.”⁵⁹ If the RUF cannot destroy the current system that exploits the country’s natural wealth, the people will perish—that is what the RUF seeks to avoid.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ www.rufp.org, *Ideals*, Basic Document of the RUF—The Second Liberation of Africa

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

Aside from the RUF manifesto and documents, no other explanation may be needed of the rebel groups actions. However, critics will be quick to suggest that it is only rhetoric meant to gain sympathizers internationally. In order to examine the validity of RUF claims, the social psychology behind RUF fighter's actions are explored.

1. II. Deciding to Join the RUF and Fight—Why people do it

Sankoh, Kanu, and Mansaray first recruited RUF members among then Freetown lumpen.⁶¹ Since the lumpen worldview idealized freedom fighters recruitment was easy. In fact, by the early 1990s Freetown pote culture had reached the hinterlands of Sierra Leone providing fertile ground for RUF recruitment across the country.⁶²

Some recruits joined more for the military training offered than the lumpen worldview, because they wanted a substitute⁶³ for the lack of formal education opportunities.⁶⁴ Others joined because they were bored, hungry, and frustrated teenagers, and Sankoh promised them jobs and free education.⁶⁵ For example, Moses Sinnah, a demobilized soldier commented that he grew up in Kailaun and joined Sankoh at the beginning. He says, "I took my O-level exams, and I wanted to continue with my education, but nobody

⁶¹ Abdullah and Muana, p. 187

⁶² Pote numbers increased from three or four in 1970s to over 70 in the 1990s. They were centers for high school dropouts and unemployed youth to convene. Drugs were supplied and political ideas exchanged. In diamond areas potes served as places for illicit miners, called san san boys to compile and exchange goods. (ibid, p. 179)

⁶³ James Traub. "The Worst Place on Earth" Class Sierra Leone Packet

⁶⁴ Abdullah and Muana, p. 180

⁶⁵ James Traub

would help me. I asked my uncle for help, but he wouldn't do anything for me. My friends told me I should join the RUF.” He only knew the RUF was liberating the motherland. Traub explains, “Moses had been a fifteen year old boy with no prospects who suddenly had a gun and a career.”

Other people did not join RUF ranks so eagerly. Many captives once they realized that they could not return to society because of RUF tattoos carved into their bodies, imminent threat of being killed by the RUF for desertion, and the possibility of being tortured or killed by the Sierra Leone army (for RUF tattoos), grudgingly accepted the anti-social RUF political violence.⁶⁶ Captives also feared revenge at the hands of civilians who might judge him or her on the same lines as the lumpen leadership.

The risk of adults trying to escape from the RUF has made children desired targets of recruitment. Children are easily incorporated into the RUF family, because they have little choice in whether they join. Paul Richards explains that “terrorized in the process of capture [children] are later treated generously by the rebels and the secrets of the movement are revealed. This process amounts to a type of initiation.”⁶⁷ There is a prominent belief that youths in wrecked villages and countryside “will come to see the world like the RUF, even when forced to join the movement against their will.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Abdullah and Muana, p. 180

⁶⁷ Richards, p. xix

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.28

The RUF conversion process is at times so powerful that captives adopt RUF political ideology and actively fight and partake in the community.⁶⁹ For example, Fyia Musa, became part of the RUF leadership from the Kissi Chiefdoms in the Kailahun District. In his university days he had been a trouble-maker. He was abducted by the RUF in 1991, while working as a low paid agricultural “assistant in a rural secondary school in Kailahun.” He claimed that his conversion to the RUF style of violent radicalism was spurred by a speech in which President Momoh said education was a privilege and not a right. Though taken against his will, this experience made Musa an easy convert.⁷⁰

Interestingly, people, even after being immersed in RUF life, and believing in RUF ideals, only criticize the RUF upon returning to mainstream society. One woman who was abducted by the RUF described her experience in the following manner: “we” to describe her experience in the bush, describing camaraderie. She says begins by saying, “There was a lot of lawlessness here; rampant use of hard drugs. Life was ruthless and very rough and women were frequently raped...no one enforced any type of law whatsoever. RUF fighters were most of the time under the influence of drugs. They did as they pleased.” After disparaging the RUF, she transitions into using the term “we,” and describes the sense of community she felt in the bush. “Whenever we sent distress messages to our leader, he would advise us to continue changing places...” “My colleagues and I were extremely happy and much relieved when we heard the orders from our leader...” She even defends the RUF against conventional criticism. “The general

⁶⁹ Abdullah and Muana, p. 188

⁷⁰ Abdullah and Muana, p. 188

feeling in the RUF circles [when the ARFC and RUF decided to join forces] was that they had come to stay and would no longer go back to the bush to fight. They would collaborate with the AFRC to run the affairs of the country.” On crime she commented that “there had been a lot of raping in the RUF camps at the war front but as soon as the RUF arrived at Freetown they were under strict discipline, and as such most of the killings, raping, and vandalism that took place in the city was done by regular soldiers. This ex combatant ends her article by thanking a religious community for absolving her of sins committed in the bush.⁷¹ The contradictory emotions evoked in the article demonstrate the power of community created by the RUF, and sense of belonging that it fosters.

One possible explanation for people’s attachment to the RUF while in the bush is that once recruited or captured by the RUF, one is provided with power (guns) and a career (being a guerilla fighter). This fosters a sense of purpose in individuals, something that for unemployed, uneducated people, craving opportunities, will not be easily relinquished.⁷² For example, the RUF considers its bush camps (in which fragments and scraps of revolutionary text are used as books) as an alternative to failed schooling. Thus, joining the RUF is a chance to get education and a basic training in the art of bush warfare. Many captive children adapt quickly, and exult in newfound skills, and the change, perhaps for the first time in their lives, to show what they can do.⁷³

⁷¹ Desmond Davies. “Special Report: Sierra Leone: A complex case.” includes “Life with the RUF: Continuation of the story of a woman abducted by the RUF” Class packet on Sierra Leone

⁷² Richards, p. 29

⁷³ Ibid p. 29

Positive incentives are also used. For example, girls are sometimes offered shoes and dresses to choose from, and for young girls that have never had a decent pair of shoes, loyalty to the 'nice' RUF will be clinched.⁷⁴ This pattern is explained by the Stockholm Syndrome, a condition in which a terrified captive identifies with the captor because he or she is treated with unexpected respect and kindness, subsequently converting the captor into a supporter.⁷⁵

Fear is another method for retaining recruits and captives. People may fear retribution by both the RUF for escaping and the populous for having been affiliated with the RUF.

III. Explaining the Violence

The immediate goal of the RUF has been to make the country ungovernable, forcing the government to include the RUF in a transition government on its terms. Violence has been the most efficient means of pressuring various governments because of the frail and collapsing situation of the state. Had Sierra Leone been a strong state, the traditional guerilla tactic of winning the hearts and minds of the people might have been the method of choice. However, the impact of the socially excluded gaining access to instruments of violence, and committing unrestrained violence, has had the same end result as traditional guerilla violence. The RUF has become a legitimate power-sharing actor in Sierra Leone

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.28

⁷⁵ Richards, p. 20

that must be reckoned with, even if the majority of Sierra Leoneans despise it wholeheartedly.

RUF violence can, therefore, be seen as a product of rebel determination to survive, enter negotiations with the regime, and become part of the government.⁷⁶ The taking of foreign hostages has been a way of gaining international publicity and recognition. Amputations and mutilations were used as means for making people feel helpless under state protection, and in turn want peace at any cost. Hit and run raids all over the country made the nation think the RUF was all-powerful.

Spreading terror and crushing resistance became the modus operandi of the RUF, because it has worked. Before the 1996 elections it served as a warning not to vote. After the elections, it served as punishment for voting. In “Operation No Living Thing” of January 1999, the RUF not only killed indiscriminately, but also charged government buildings, burning and looting the symbols of the “government.”⁷⁷ The message sent was: This government is worthless. Such tactics have forced the Sierra Leone government to not only eagerly invite the RUF to the negotiation table, but to try and follow all the stipulations it demands, for fear of continued violence.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Abdullah and Muana, p. 183

⁷⁷ Commander Sam Brockarie took the State House and told government people to give themselves over immediately. “The Eastern Police station and the building housing the Criminal Investigation Department were reported to have been burnt by rebels. They also freed their colleagues who were either sentenced to death or were serving various jail terms.” (“Sierra Leone: Rebels Enter Freetown.” Panafrikan News Agency. Copyright 1999 Africa News Service, 1/6/99)

⁷⁸ The RUF claims it has only breached ceasefires when the government has not fulfilled its side of the bargain. Attacks by the Kamajors and the Sierra Leone Army (regardless of whether attacks are by renegade soldiers) against the RUF have been cited as provocations for continued RUF violence.

A. Theories of Violence

This chapter has shown that RUF violence is no anomaly. Rather, it is a logical extension of RUF development and objectives.

Cultural anthropologists would look at this case and say violence is a result of socialization and the learning of cultural values in Sierra Leonean society.⁷⁹ The cultural anthropologist would argue, for example, that the RUF is a product of Sierra Leonean independence. The Brits imposed a new constitution and then pulled out, virtually inviting “politicians to change the systems to suit their own purposes. Corrupt leaders found it easy to alter a constitution that never had time to acquire an aura of legitimacy political systems need to endure.” Sierra Leonean leaders then engaged in years of blatant corruption that “destroyed respect for government.” All the governments of Sierra Leone have made strategic alliances with the Lebanese businessmen who control the economy and the diamond mines. So, should anyone be surprised that “the young soldiers and rebels who looted town and villages were merely doing in a crude fashion what they had watched their leaders do for years?”⁸⁰

According to the RUF the current situation is not surprising in the least. In fact, the RUF suggests, “It is experience that has taught the suffering African of Sierra Leone that

Previously, not returning Sankoh to Sierra Leone was considered violating a ceasefire agreement, and an invitation for continued RUF aggression.

⁷⁹ Miles Wolpin, “State terrorism and death squads.” Found in the “Culture of Violence” by Kumar Rupesinghe.,

⁸⁰ Joe Opala. “Background to Sierra Leone. Published by the International Rescue Committee. Class Sierra Leone Packet.

power lies in the gun and whoever controls the guns controls the means to steal the wealth of the country. And the only way to stop this corruption of power is for the people to take up arms in order to take back their power and use this power to create wealth for themselves and generations to come by reconstructing a new African society in Sierra Leone...”⁸¹

Political conflict theorists would emphasize that violence helps overcome resistance to change. Political violence is different from criminal or random violence, precisely, because it is an attempt to: “overthrow a tyrannical regime, to redefine and realize justice and equity, to achieve independence or territorial autonomy, to impose one’s religious or doctrinal beliefs.”⁸² Political violence also has a “discourse” in which its values, ideals, and strategies are enunciated. The political discourse of the RUF is exemplified by its manifesto and web page. The RUF, through its violent antics has become a politically relevant organization. Consequently, it has gained legitimacy as a stakeholder and national actor—another aspect of political violence. In the case of the RUF, its effort to overcome resistance is aimed at both civilians and the government. A reputation for cruelty makes many villagers flee their homes at mere rumors of RUF encroachment, diminishing resistance to RUF control of territory and resources.⁸³ Violence is also used as the strategy of choice for destabilizing the government.

⁸¹ www.rufgp.org *The Armed Struggle*

⁸² Apter, David. The Legitimization of Violence, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, London: 1997, p.5

⁸³ Miles Wolpin, p. 202

The materialist school of political theory would explain that violence is used for six strategies of war: 1. increase access to fixed resources (like diamonds) 2. capture movable valuables (people and goods) 3. impose exploitative relationship on another independent group (villagers) 4. conquer/incorporate another group (captives and child soldiers) 5. use conflict to enhance decision-making position within society (being invited to negotiate and get ministry positions) 6. forestall attacks by others (government refrain on retaliation for fear of repercussions).⁸⁴

B. Aggression—the root of violence

Each of the aforementioned theories is a possible explanation for RUF violence. However, these conflict theories only explain the social aspect of violence. When an individual decides that violence is the best method for realizing his or her objectives, the impact of colonialism, or the desire to overthrow a tyrannical regime, are not the factors that make a person willing to chop off someone's hands. When a rebel rape's a woman, he does not think about democracy and how this action will further his political objectives. His actions are products of aggression.

Aggression is an act “carried out with the purpose of causing physical or mental pain to another individual or organism.”⁸⁵ Aggression can sprout from emotions such as anger,

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 203

⁸⁵ Fry, Douglas and Bjorkqvist, Kaj, Editors. Cultural Variations in Conflict Resolution: Alternatives to Violence, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New Jersey: 1997, p. 27

or be a tool used for accomplishing specific goals.⁸⁶ The type of aggression experienced by RUF combatants develops in three phases. First, an individual experiences what psychologists call “frustration-aggression.”⁸⁷ According to this theory, the source of aggression is always a frustration of some kind, whether recent, situational, or from childhood. People join the RUF to try and alleviate frustration. (If they are forced to join the RUF that will also be a frustrating experience.) Then, frustration is channeled into aggressive behavior through social learning. New combatants see role models “attaining their goals through aggressive means.”⁸⁸ When the goals are attained through aggression, the efficacy of aggressive action is reinforced. After frequently engaging in aggressive action, this pattern of behavior can become what psychologist term habitual aggression.⁸⁹

One of the central factors leading to the development of aggressive behavior is a person’s psychological need to preserve one’s self. Psychologist Gregory Rochlin suggests that all humans are narcissistic⁹⁰ beings whose primary concern is the self. Consequently, people try to defend against actions that jeopardize accomplishments, imperil

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 27

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 31

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 32

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 31

⁹⁰ Narcissism refers to self-love. All human beings have a “compelling imperative for self preservation...it expresses itself in an endless lust for a rewarding image of one’s self, whether that image is seen in a glass or in another’s eye. The further passion for praise, honor, and glory makes for an endless marathon.” Narcissism is a “human psychological process through which preserving the self is assured. In infancy, childhood, maturity, and old age, the necessity of protecting the self may require all our capabilities. And, when narcissism is threatened, we are humiliated, our self esteem is injured, and aggression appears.” (3, p.1)

relationships, deny rewards, or lower self-esteem—in other words, endangers narcissism. Rochlin explains that “in defense against such hazards, and as the instrument of recovery, aggression issues. Aggression may provide the means through which success is assured, by which gratification is obtained, and a sense of worth is gained.”⁹¹ When aggression cannot be justified, or is forbidden by conscience, aggression is turned inwards “against the discredited self.”⁹² But, when people seek vindication, as in the case of the RUF, and combatants hold the government culpable for their strife, “vindication is a license for aggression, [and] the violence that is loosened may be without measure.”⁹³ Rochlin views the process of self-preservation as a process of self-transformation in which aggression is not merely a reaction to frustration or deprivation, nor simply as attack or hostile action. Rather, aggression is employed in the process of self-refinement. He suggests that aggression “leads to a secured self-esteem.”⁹⁴

This explanation of aggression is particularly relevant to understanding RUF violence. Most people who join the RUF do so to meet some kind of need. Combatants who voluntarily join the RUF usually do so because they feel disempowered. A lifetime of utter lack of educational and work opportunities, combined with a feeling of marginalization, can injure a person’s self regard, making him or her desire vindication for a life of being wronged or “jipped” by society. Fighting in the RUF makes this

⁹¹ Rochlin, Gregory. Man’s Aggression: The Defense of Self, Gambit, Boston: 1973, p.vii

⁹²Ibid , p.vii

⁹³ Ibid, p.vii

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 5

category of people feel like they are proactively taken control of their life and future. They have an occupation and gain an education. They are respected, and are part of a team, a group, and a “family.” Success as a combatant can foster a self-esteem where previously little to none existed. They are empowered. Rochlin explains that to “restore ourselves we make use of aggression.”

C. The Logic of Violence

In many ways, the ability to employ violence represents the ultimate source of power. Rochin explains that “parties who can defeat their opponents in violent confrontations are able to force their enemies to do what they want them to do.” If enemies don’t comply, one can simply kill them.⁹⁵ The RUF primarily uses violent tactics to make people compliant to its soldier’s demands. The motivating factors of violence are the combined logics of politics and aggression.

An important aspect of violence is that once begun, it develops its own rationality. According to sociologist David Apter, this rationality “sets itself apart and above the rest of society often in the name of those most marginalized.”⁹⁶ Consequently, it should not be very surprising that the most marginalized people in Sierra Leone have resorted to violence.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 49

⁹⁶ Apter, p. 16

However, people do not commit political violence without a “discourse.” In other words, RUF combatants would not amputate people’s hands just to do it. A discourse is required, be it political or social. People need to talk themselves into being violent. This process “engages people who suddenly are called upon to use their intelligence.”⁹⁷ People begin critically examining their lives and situation, “engaging the intelligences in ways out of the ordinary [and taking] people out of themselves.”⁹⁸ In other words, people’s purpose in life is expanded through a discourse that provides a vision and a means for realizing that vision. Consequently, by creating a political discourse in which violence is legitimized as a rationale means to an end, not only does a person have a greater sense of purpose, ties between people in violent organizations are reinforced because of the shared purpose and discourse. This is evidenced by the camaraderie and strong ties developed between RUF combatant’s while in the bush due to a shared struggle.

Conclusion

This chapter began by explaining the rationale of the RUF from the RUF perspective. This discourse emphasizes the marginalized and desperate situation of most Sierra Leoneans, and the noble RUF goal of creating a better country. It is a discourse that legitimizes violence as an acceptable and necessary method for attaining its goals.

The second section explained that most people join the RUF to meet basic needs, be it security, human relation, affection, education, jobs. Fighting in the RUF is an

⁹⁷ 4, p. 2

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 2

empowering experience. One commands civilian attention, and instills fear. The gun is a tool of power. Also important, people become part of a tight-knit community that needs each other, because once in, the consequences of leaving include both civilian and RUF reprisal. Consequently, whether an adult or child combatant, being part of the RUF provides a support network, a purpose, and a source of empowerment.

The third section provided the social-psychological theory necessary to understand RUF logic and violence. This discussion demonstrated that when “narcissistic” needs for self-preservation, self-worth, and appreciation, goes unmet, feelings of aggression can be fostered. If an individual finds a scapegoat for his or her state of disempowerment, he or she often seeks vindication. This can lead to violence. When people on a mass level want vindication, this can lead to organized violence with an entire discourse rationalizing and legitimizing violence.

Regardless of the explanations for violence provided in this chapter, many people will likely continue to condemn individuals in the RUF as immoral and evil human beings. Such views will only make attempts at conflict resolution and reconciliation more difficult, because it implies that people fighting in the RUF are intrinsically bad people. However, as I have sought to demonstrate, the people in the RUF are a product of their environment—a country with few opportunities for advancement and history of deprivation. People who join the RUF do so in an attempt to meet their basic human needs. When one is consumed by the goal of survival, sometimes moral values become an unaffordable luxury. Likewise, if violence is a way in which one’s own security and

needs are met, it becomes rational. People do not choose violence as a way to achieve objectives because they are evil or immoral, but because circumstances make it efficient. Consequently, this war will not end until the root causes, which make extreme violence the preferred method of struggle, are addressed.

Chapter Four: Resolving Conflict in Sierra Leone

The impact of violence, such as that propagated by the RUF, has a far-reaching impact on individuals and community life. People are intimately exposed to brutality, displacement, and civil disorder, leaving people scarred, and the social network torn.⁹⁹ Conflict resolution, consequently, becomes a difficult and much needed endeavor. This chapter assumes that a cease-fire has been established (as is the current situation) and addresses issues impacting the creation and implementation of conflict resolution mechanisms in Sierra Leone. The first section describes the difficulties associated with resolving conflict in protracted civil wars. The second section explains which issues must be addressed for conflict resolution to be successful. The third section discusses how issues should be addressed, and the final section gives examples of types of endeavors that will help mitigate violence.

B. I. Protracted civil violence and the difficulties of conflict resolution

Peaceful societies tend to have environments that are affectionate, low in overt aggression, and have people with secure self-identities, factors that foster interpersonal and social trust.¹⁰⁰ In a country like Sierra Leone, few of these factors exist. Rather, what is found is a protracted social conflict, meaning a conflict that is dependent upon the

⁹⁹ Maynard, Kimberly. *Rebuilding Community—Psychological healing, reintegration, and reconciliation at the grassroots level*, in Rebuilding Societies After Civil War: Critical Roles for International Assistance, Edited by Krishna Kumar, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, London: 1997, p. 203.

“satisfaction of basic needs such as those for security, communal recognition, and distributive justice.”¹⁰¹ Protracted social conflicts begin and are reinforced by the deterioration of physical security and “institutionalized underdevelopment through the destruction of infrastructure.”¹⁰² Consequently, a vicious cycle of underdevelopment and conflict deprives both victimized communities and dominant groups of economic resources necessary for meeting basic needs. This type of situation cannot easily be mitigated by force or balance of power means, such as weakening foes. Rather, political and economic development are required to reduce the insecurity both communities and individuals feel.¹⁰³

Political and economic development initiatives face the gargantuan challenge of healing a scarred society. In intra-state warfare more civilians are directly attacked than in traditional inter-state wars. As sociologist Kimberly Maynard explains, war is “no longer primarily the domain of trained fighters on the battlefield, but...the realm of ordinary citizens in house-to-house combat.”¹⁰⁴ Consequently, psychological trauma is becoming a worse and more prevalent effect of war. For example, a study of ex-combatants shows that there are four clusters of war trauma experiences that contribute to psychological trauma—exposure to fighting, exposure to abusive violence, deprivation, and loss of

¹⁰⁰ Howard, Marc Ross. The Culture of Conflict: Interpretations and interests in comparative perspective, Yale University Press, Connecticut: 1993, p. 188.

¹⁰¹ Azar, Edward. The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases, Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, England: 1990, p. 2

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 16

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.2

¹⁰⁴ Maynard, p. 204

meaning and control. Civilians in combat zones suffer these same traumas.¹⁰⁵ Symptoms of trauma often include: “anxiety, depression, substance abuse, social withdrawal, hostility, estrangement, despair, isolation, meaninglessness, anticipation of betrayal, hyper-vigilance, and destroyed capacity for social trust.”¹⁰⁶ These feelings provide obstacles for conflict resolution initiatives.

On the macro societal level, the same trauma is reflected. Maynard suggests that “in worn-torn societies, healthy social patterns between dissimilar groups are replaced by distrust, apprehension, and outrage, impairing community cohesion, interdependence, and mutual protection,”¹⁰⁷ all of which are goals of conflict resolution initiatives. In fact, exposure to violence has “destructive repercussions on democratic participation as well. Inasmuch as individuals fear for their safety, distrust others, have limited sense of future and tend to see the world in black and white, their ability to contribute to group decision making and constructive future planning is negligible.”¹⁰⁸ If these severe traumas go unhealed, “the unnoticed substructure of democracy, the cognitive and social capacities that enable a group of people to freely construct a cohesive narrative of their future,”¹⁰⁹ is compromised. In other words, war traumas undermine the process of reconciliation, which is necessary for constructing a peaceful future.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 205

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 206

¹⁰⁷ Maynard, p. 208

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 208

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 208

II. Core Issues to Address

In the case of Sierra Leone the first step in addressing the conflict is framing the conflict correctly. Framing is a process of interpreting and describing events. It gives focus, and helps parties understand and interpret what the conflict is about. How a conflict is framed determines what will be done to stop the situation.

In Sierra Leone, the interests of the RUF have been confused because many people focus on the role of diamonds and material interests of the war. However, many intractable conflicts, such as this one, involve the inability of “one or more groups to meet their fundamental human needs—needs for such things as identity, security, dignity, and control.” If these fundamental human needs are not addressed in the peace process then people in groups like the RUF will likely fight almost indefinitely until attaining their objectives.¹¹⁰ Though unmet needs do not necessarily cause conflict, the lack of salient social institutions in war-torn countries, (which under normal circumstances might deter conflict based on need), makes this issue of crucial importance to any peace process. Consequently, conflict resolution initiatives should strive to meet people’s basic human needs in order to address core issues of the conflict, and ease the insecurities and traumas caused by war—primary reason for the disintegration of a nation’s social fabric in a social conflict.

¹¹⁰ Wehr, Paul. International Online training program on intractable conflict.

III. How Issues Should be Addressed—A systems approach to conflict resolution

The mitigation of protracted social conflicts require a paradigmatic shift away from just resolving issues such as destroyed infrastructure, or refugee crises. Rather, the rebuilding of relationships is required. Consequently, any framework for conflict resolution in Sierra Leone must “address and engage the relational aspects of reconciliation as the central component of peace building.”¹¹¹ Building peace in Sierra Leone, as with most intra-state wars today, requires long-term commitments to “establishing infrastructure across the levels of a society, and infrastructure that empowers the resources for reconciliation from within that society and maximizes the contribution from outside.”¹¹² This means that a successful peace process will require the efforts of multiple domestic and international actors. The fundamental question thus becomes—how to create a catalyst for the much needed reconciliation in Sierra Leone.

Reconciliation is pursued by building mechanisms that engage all sides of the conflict with each other. Reconciliation is not only a concept, but also a praxis that “endeavors to reframe conflict so that the parties are no longer preoccupied with focusing on the issues in a direct, cognitive manner. Its primary goal and key contribution is to seek innovative ways to create a time and a place, within various levels of affected population, to address, integrate, and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present.”¹¹³ This process requires looking at conflict as a

¹¹¹ Lederach, John Paul. Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies, United States Institute for Peace Press, Washington, DC: 1997, p. 24

¹¹² Ibid, p. xvi

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 35

system, meaning a relationship of parts to a whole, and examining the dynamics and structure of conflict.¹¹⁴ Consequently, focusing on the system of conflict in Sierra Leone, the economic, social, political, cultural, and psychological interaction in human society, which operates at all levels of social organization, can be addressed and a profound reconciliation begun.¹¹⁵

The peace and reconciliation process in Sierra Leone requires the engagement of three levels of actors. (Think of a pyramid.) At top part of the pyramid is the military, politicians, mediators, and highly visible civilian leaders whose efforts are required for the approval of a cease-fire. Peace at early stages requires a cease-fire.¹¹⁶ As the peace process progresses more people and social sectors are included. For example, at the middle level of the pyramid, actors such as academics, conflict resolution trainers, and NGO leaders are found. This is the realm of problem solving approaches, where different stakeholders are invited to figure out what to do to make peace last. Workshops that provide relaxed discussion atmosphere, conflict resolution training, and awareness building are just a few examples of methods employed by middle-level actors.¹¹⁷ At the bottom part of the pyramid are the grassroots actors, such as indigenous peace initiatives, national organizations, and individuals. Grass roots strategies for affecting change focus

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.26

¹¹⁵ Forcey, Linda, Editor. *Peace: Meanings, politics, strategies*, p. 11

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 45

¹¹⁷ Lederach, p. 47

on the masses.¹¹⁸ By emphasizing the involvement of these three levels of actors, conflict resolution expert John Paul Lederach suggests that it will be possible to establish “an infrastructure across the levels of society, and infrastructure that empowers the resources for reconciliation from within that society and maximizes the contribution from the outside.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, this approach allows conflict to be understood in its larger context by involving diverse actors in the peace process.

Actors engaged in peace building should simultaneously focus attention and energies towards two areas—rebuilding civil society and healing personal traumas. When a state has a strong civil society, with salient political and social institutions, the causes of protracted social conflict are minimized because people have access to political, social, and economic interaction that helps meet basic needs and address grievances in a non-violent fashion.¹²⁰ Consequently, efforts to strengthen the state’s authority structure and capacity to respond and meet the needs of various constituents are a must. The international donor and aid community can play an essential role in funding civil society strengthening projects.

Addressing the traumas of war is another essential focus of peace building. As previously mentioned, intra-state war has devastating psychological affects that can weaken the social fabric and trust necessary for cultivating reconciliation. The

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.52

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. xvi

¹²⁰ Azar, p. 13

psychological healing process for traumatized combat veterans and victims alike “revolves around reestablishing healthy relationships with others.”¹²¹ This is the essence of social recovery. Maynor suggests that this process takes place in five stages. First, physical safety is established.¹²² Second, people go through a period of communalization and bereavement.¹²³ Third, trust and the capacity to trust are rebuilt.¹²⁴ Fourth, personal and social morality is re-established.¹²⁵ Fifth, democratic discourse is restored and reintegrated.¹²⁶ In spite of theoretical clarity on how peace building and societal healing should occur, the implementation is always complicated and sensitive. The next section provides concrete examples of how these theoretical suggestions for peace building can occur in practice.

IV: Conflict Resolution in Practice

This section provides examples of conflict resolution mechanisms that can help mitigate violence, foster reconciliation, and build peace in Sierra Leone. The peace building

¹²¹ Maynard, p. 209

¹²² The process of social healing is difficult because during the process of returning when refugees and displaced populations return, inter-group animosity is likely to be high and security issues important.

¹²³ The second stage is of sharing traumatic experiences, and allowing for mourning over losses, an essential for the healing process (that can occur in an atmosphere of safety).

¹²⁴ Aside from beginning to rebuild the capacity to trust, the third phase includes renewing interpersonal relations, bonds, and beginning to restore honor to the adversary (which has likely dehumanized during the conflict).

¹²⁵ In the fourth phase, there is a reconstruction of a sense of ethics, and operating rules for society, and guiding of individual behavior.

¹²⁶ In the fifth stage, the reintegration of all societal elements into community helps restore the democratic discourse and permits talks about the future and development of the community as a whole. **This entire process is complex and not clear-cut, precisely because it has to do with psychosocial recovery.** (Maynard, p. 209)

process is divided into three stages in which the actors previously described are essential players. Conflict resolution mechanisms suggested are aimed at ameliorating the root causes of conflict by focusing on the needs of individuals and of society as a whole.

Phase I

The first phase of conflict resolution should be dedicated to ending fighting, and providing a sense of security to people in Sierra Leone. International actors, such as the United Nations, through its peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), can enforce cease-fire agreements. Regional peace keeping organizations such as Economic Community Organization of West African States (ECOWAS), can also help in provide security (though this organization still has a long way to go before being as efficient as the UN).

Once a secure environment is established, domestic and international Non Governmental Organizations can help implement to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate combatants. DDR programs encourage former combatants to relinquish weapons in exchange for food, technical training, and seed money for starting enterprises, among other incentives. When combatants are consulted about what they want or need to start a new, non-violent life, these programs are likely to be more successful.

The disarmament process holds huge symbolic power that can be harnessed if, for example, weapons used for killing are melted down and turned into artwork such as metal

sculptures or building materials. This transformation symbolizes the transformation of conflict people seek.

The cease-fire and disarmament period can cause ex combatants a great deal of insecurity, because of fear that civilians will seek retaliation, and try to injure fighters once they are disarmed. This fear has potential destabilizing effects because it is a strong incentive *not* to disarm. Implementing civilian witness and protection programs can mitigate fear of the disarmament process. In such a program, groups of people would constantly accompany individuals fearful of reprisal and attack by others. The goal is to provide a sense of security to individuals and communities. Such endeavors have the double benefit that they help individuals as well as strengthen civil society by reinforcing the values of law and order. Hence, this first stage of the peace building process requires creative conflict resolution mechanisms that help people and communities feel safe from attacks and continued violence.

Phase II

The second phase of the peace building process requires conflict resolution mechanisms aimed at laying the groundwork that fosters reconciliation. Before reconciliation can occur, the people of Sierra Leone will have many psychological needs and traumas that will need addressing. Inter governmental organizations should sponsor training programs and therapy sessions that stress the value of grieving, causes of psychological disturbances, typical symptoms experienced by victims and combatants of war, and the danger of neglecting one's psychological injuries. Adults and children, alike, can express

their suffering and sadness constructively through narratives, writing, verbally sharing stories, as well as through art, dance, and drama.

The state can also play an important role in initiating the healing process by holding a national mourning period for all who have suffered in the war. Symbolic bereavement, ritualistic burial for the dead, religious prayers, and public recognition of those killed or injured can help recognize and validate people's anguish. The state, with international support can also instate long-term services for psychological treatment for those severely traumatized by the war. For the healing process to begin, it is essential that people express emotions, anger and sorrow, spurred by the war.

Once a space is created for the expression and exploration of these sentiments, further efforts at encouraging reconciliation can occur. The second phase of peace building is also the phase in which people try to rebuild trust and capacity to trust. Reframing the conflict in non-adversarial terms, such as "tragedy happened for "X" reasons, but peace is the goal that only will be achieved through cooperation" can help create the basis of renewed trust.

Domestic and international actors implementing development and relief projects that have trust-building attributes help diminish animosity. Ex combatants can collaborate with civilians to rebuild homes, roads, and infrastructure. Community projects that require the consensus of all stakeholders can help people relate to each other in a

different, non-antagonistic, atmosphere. Foreign organizations have the financial power to create monetary incentives for people to join in cooperative endeavors.

Domestic and international NGOS can also play a crucial role in the reconciliation process by sponsoring training and workshops that encourage dialogue, joint problem solving and conflict resolution training for civilians and ex combatants. Such activities encourage people to jointly brainstorm ways of confronting societal problems such as children left orphan by the war, child combatants, economic development, and other issues. Creating opportunities for beneficial cooperation is essential for rebuilding a joint future.

Phase III

The *third phase* of the peace building process should focus on long-term stability in Sierra Leone by creating political and civil institutions that support a multiparty democracy. Actors at all levels can encourage this goal by supporting the reintegration and restoration of democratic discourse, in other words, by strengthening civil society.¹²⁷

A strong civil society restores legitimacy to the state through citizen participation. Local and international NGOs should support the development of associations with diverse ambitions, but that seek to liberalize politics. This can be done in an empowering manner by providing resources requested by grassroots organizations, instead of imposing resources and objectives upon them. The expansion of domestic political resources,

¹²⁷ Academics like Naomi Chazen 1988, Harry Goulbourne 1987, and Pierre Landell-Mills 1992 (Ottaway, 239) strongly support the idea that a strong civil society is necessary for a democracy.

including the expertise of group activists and popular support, organized cogently, creates a space for interactive and dialectic dialogue that promotes pluralistic democracy.¹²⁸ The development of a middle class,¹²⁹ where people actively seek better opportunities, enhances pressure for democracy and the equal opportunity offered by the liberal state system. Economic approaches to development can foster the strengthening of a middle class. International lending institutions encouraging macroeconomic approaches to agriculture and land use to reconstruct the economy, rural credits to compensate farmer expenditures, micro enterprise investments to spur local economies and shops, can help create wealth and an empowered working population. These efforts can help fundamentally restructure the way in which the governments of Sierra Leone have operated in the past, incidentally meeting the political needs expressed by the RUF.

The conflict resolution mechanisms described in this section provide just a brief example of what domestic, regional, and international actors can do to create peace in Sierra Leone. Peace building should not just be about resolving issues. Rather, peace building is about creating institutions and processes through which citizens can address grievances non-violently, and have their basic need met. The process is long and results are often not apparent; however, the commitment of top, midlevel, and grassroots actors can ensure that the systemic factors of conflict are addressed in a way that empowers and heals people of Sierra Leone.

¹²⁸ Phillip Huxtable. 1998. *The African State Toward the Twenty-First Century: Legacies of the Critical Juncture* in The African State at a Critical Juncture, p. 288

¹²⁹ Deutsch and Lipset suggest that a middle class is essential for promoting a democratic society.

Conclusion

This chapter began by describing the difficulties of peace building in protracted social conflicts, and ended by describing what can be done to foster reconciliation in Sierra Leone. We must remember that conflict is healthily and normal in society, but as Sierra Leone demonstrates, conflict can have very negative effects. The process in which Sierra Leone will now embark must provide the mechanism for adapting to different situations and inventing new approaches to problems. Hopefully, the explosion of conflict can be avoided, and the ground set for the rebirth of a more peaceful Sierra Leone.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This thesis has demonstrated that the violence committed by the RUF is a rational product of people's unmet needs. Rebel's fundamental human needs for control, security, and affection are met by this rebel organization. In fact, the RUF has become a family for many people in which they receive nurturing, and attention. Its tactics, and the fear it instills in civilians helps rebels feel in control of their life and powerful, providing a negative source of empowerment.

In order to mitigate violence in Sierra Leone the RUF cannot be dismissed as a group of drug crazed, evil, hoodlums. Such a view ignores and discredits the hurt and anger that fosters violent behavior. Instead, organizations interested in resolving conflict in Sierra Leone should look to the RUF as an example of what happens to individuals who desperately want opportunities to give their life a sense of purpose and stability.

Consequently, several conclusions can be drawn from this thesis:

1) *Demonizing the "bad guys" is not conducive to conflict resolution, because it assumes that the "bad guy" is inherently "bad."* Such assumptions render conflict resolution useless. Rather, the RUF and other violent groups should be treated as people with legitimate grievances. Compassion instead of hatred is required to address and heal grievances.

2) Military force cannot create peace or foster reconciliation. Though this may seem obvious, international leaders have been quick to suggest increasing the number of peacekeeping forces to Sierra Leone, or hiring private military security, as means of permanently squelching conflict. Such strategies ignore the root causes of conflict. Though military action can help stabilize a conflict, it is not a band-aid for societal wounds.

3) In war torn societies, conflict resolution mechanisms should be aimed at healing both individuals and society. This means providing adequate support systems for people traumatized by the war, and by reconstructing and fortifying civil society.

In closing, I want to emphasize one idea that cannot be overly emphasized. No person is innately evil. No one is born with the desire to kill. Being violent is not an inherent part of human nature. Combatants in the RUF, children in inner-city gangs, terrorists, and murderers, alike, commit violent crimes, not because they are “evil people,” but because frustration and a society that does not meet one’s needs fosters aggression—aggressive energy requires an outlet. Instead of demonizing, and hating, we should try and understand those we find illogical and incomprehensible. The road of compassion leads to reconciliation.

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