

THE REVOLUTIONARY UNITED FRONT AND CHILD SOLDIERS  
DURING SIERRA LEONE'S CIVIL WAR

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General Studies

by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

THE REVOLUTIONARY UNITED FRONT AND CHILD SOLDIERS DURING SIERRA LEONE'S CIVIL WAR, by Jacob F. Vellaccio, 94 pages.

On March 23, 1991 a rebel group in eastern Sierra Leone known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) ignited a civil war in that country that would last over ten years and ultimately result in the death of over 50,000 civilians. Their weapons of choice were child soldiers. Poorly trained, immature and drugged, child soldiers would commit unimaginably horrific atrocities on a grand scale. The RUF saw children as a free, easy to manipulate, abundant, and when drugged, aggressively inhumane force that would conduct fighting for the side that gave them a sense of belonging and home. The RUF's means to accomplish its objectives sunk to new levels when its child soldiers turned to limb amputations, torture, rape, and executions. Sierra Leone's civil war is an interesting case study of how a rebel group could use a sizeable population of a nation's children to commit mass atrocities for the stated purpose of revolutionary change. The RUF's use of child soldiers was the result of failures in governance, extraordinary poverty, and opportunistic and apathetic leadership that synergized to create uniquely horrific conditions that led to this outcome.

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## ACRONYMS

APC	All People's Congress
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Particularly vulnerable to abuse were children, as they were violated in deep and lasting ways, some too awful to be adequately described . . . In some ways, it is as if a new level of cruelty has been attained in this war, setting the bar lower than ever imagined.

—Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Vol. 3B*

Some people tried to hurt us to protect themselves, their family and communities . . . This was one of the consequences of civil war. People stopped trusting each other, and every stranger became an enemy. Even people who knew you became extremely careful about how they related or spoke to you.

—Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*

#### Overview

Sierra Leone's civil war (1991 to 2003) stands out from other conflicts for several reasons. The extensive use of child soldiers by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) augmented the brutality of the conflict and contributed to the severity of atrocities. Child abductions, limb amputations, cannibalism, forced sexual slavery, rape, torture, and executions were some of the major crimes leveraged against all sides of the conflict.<sup>1</sup> An entire generation of Sierra Leonean children lost their innocence through both their roles as victims and perpetrators. The RUF were the first to use child soldiers and the greatest

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<sup>1</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Vol. 3A* (Sierra Leone: Graphic Packaging, 2005), 471.

violators of this crime throughout the civil war.<sup>2</sup> Their objective was to invade Sierra Leone, launch a guerilla war, and usurp authority from the Sierra Leonean government for political power, financial, and natural resources.<sup>3</sup>

In 1991, Sierra Leone's grim political and economic conditions were favorable for the RUF to launch a guerilla war. More specifically, Sierra Leone's economy collapsed, unemployment was high, and its president for the past six years, former Army Brigadier General Joseph Momoh, ran an administration that was especially corrupt.<sup>4</sup> Momoh was part of a long line of corrupt political leaders that held Sierra Leone's highest office and gained wealth at the expense of Sierra Leone's economic growth.<sup>5</sup> Political corruption and dire economic circumstances spawned resentment from the people of Sierra Leone and ultimately the creation of the RUF. In the late-1980s, Foday Sankoh, founder of the RUF, aligned with Liberian government official, Charles Taylor, and leader of a rebel group known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) to support each other's guerilla wars to overthrow their respective nations' governments.<sup>6</sup> Sankoh and Taylor

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<sup>2</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Vol. 2* (Sierra Leone: Graphic Packaging, 2005), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Matthias Goldmann, "Sierra Leone: African Solutions to African Problems?" *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* 9 (2005): 460-461.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Chege, "Sierra Leone, the State that Came Back from the Dead," *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2002): 153.

<sup>5</sup> Larry J. Woods and Colonel Timothy R. Reese, *Military Interventions in Sierra Leone: Lessons From a Failed State*, The Long War Series, Occasional Paper 28 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

sought to rule their nations to enhance their own power and wealth.<sup>7</sup> After coalescing forces and planning, the RUF invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia, which ignited Sierra Leone's civil war, and over a decade of fighting that saw the extensive use of child soldiers.<sup>8</sup>

Four underlying factors led the RUF to use child soldiers during Sierra Leone's civil war. The first three factors stem from the Sierra Leone government's failures in infrastructure that made children vulnerable to the RUF's forced recruitment. Sierra Leone's weak and corrupt government failed to provide the nation basic services for state security, law and order, and education that could have protected Sierra Leone's children and prevented the RUF's use of child soldiers. First, Sierra Leone's weak military and internally focused state security up to and throughout the civil war meant that the nation was unable to defend itself from external threats like the RUF's military invasion.<sup>9</sup> Second, Sierra Leone's legal system tended to protect and serve the wealthy, ignored the poor, and neglected to enforce the rights of children.<sup>10</sup> This breakdown in law and order regarding the welfare of children set a precedent prior to the civil war for the

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<sup>7</sup> Tony Karon, "The Resistible Rise of Foday Sankoh," *Time*, May 12, 2000, accessed October 19, 2014, <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,45102,00.html>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3A*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Mohammed Legally-Cole, "Legacy of Foday Sankoh: Sierra Leone's Hitler," *Expo Times Online*, 15 August 2003, accessed October 19, 2015, [http://expotimesonline.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=119%3Alegacy-of-foday-sankoh-qsierra-leones-hitlerq&Itemid=54](http://expotimesonline.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=119%3Alegacy-of-foday-sankoh-qsierra-leones-hitlerq&Itemid=54).

mistreatment of children and lack of punishment for such crimes.<sup>11</sup> The failures of Sierra Leone's security forces and legal system to protect its people allowed the RUF to take advantage of Sierra Leone's children.

Third, Sierra Leone's weak infrastructure also adversely affected education and schooling for children. The issue of education in Sierra Leone was a component to the RUF's use of child soldiers because the absence of schools for children in rural Sierra Leone could not keep them away from the RUF's recruitment.<sup>12</sup> If Sierra Leone's education system had been comparable to western standards, children may have had a greater level of community to keep them away from the RUF. Sierra Leone's failure to educate its youth also kept the nation from developing economically. A major discrepancy in education between Sierra Leoneans from Freetown and the rest of Sierra Leone failed to develop the majority of Sierra Leoneans for the benefit of the nation. Sierra Leoneans that lived in Freetown received higher levels of education and were thus able to find employment and better paying jobs.<sup>13</sup> The majority of non-Freetown inhabitants did not receive adequate educations and were more susceptible to falling prey to the RUF. The RUF eventually gained a base of constituents amongst uneducated Sierra Leonean male youths and turned to uneducated children as a base of fighters in waging their guerilla war.

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<sup>11</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Vol. 3B* (Sierra Leone: Graphic Packaging, 2005), 243.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred B. Zack Williams, "Sierra Leone: The Political Economy of Civil War 1991-1998," *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1999): 155-156.

<sup>13</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth, Vol. 3A*, 35.

Viewing failed state infrastructure as a primary reason for the RUF's rise to power and subsequent use of child soldiers falls under the category of understanding the conflict through a "structuralist" academic lens.<sup>14</sup> A "structuralist" academic lens attributes the prevalence of child soldiers throughout Sierra Leone's civil war as the result of forces acting on children that children do not control or understand.<sup>15</sup> According to a "structuralist" perspective, the Sierra Leone government's failure to provide security, law and order, education, and competent senior-level leadership for its people led to the civil war and RUF's use of child soldiers.<sup>16</sup> The opposing academic theory of "agency" attributes child soldiers choosing to join the RUF as a significant reason for the RUF's use of child soldiers.<sup>17</sup> The underlying argument against "agency" is that child soldiers were too young to make mature and rational decisions to fight, and faced torture and intimidation to fight for the RUF.<sup>18</sup> Acknowledging the "structuralist" lens reveals that this thesis examines external forces that led the RUF to use child soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

The failure of Sierra Leone's infrastructure and extreme poverty gave rise to the prevalence of children throughout the country. In the period leading up to the civil war,

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<sup>14</sup> Maryiam Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 44.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Maclure and Maryiam Denov, "I Didn't Want to Die So I Joined Them, Structuration and the Process of Becoming Boy Soldiers in Sierra Leone," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 1 (2006): 124.

<sup>19</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 44.

because of poverty and harsh living conditions, the average life span of a Sierra Leonean was approximately forty years of age.<sup>20</sup> The short lifespan coupled with the fact that over half the population was less than eighteen years of age meant there was a high prevalence of young people throughout the country.<sup>21</sup> Diseases such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Disease, malaria, polio, river blindness, and yellow fever plagued Sierra Leone with less than half the population unable to gain access to basic health services.<sup>22</sup> The Sierra Leone government's inability to provide adequate health services for its people and prevalence of severe illness likely increased the value of child labor due to the harshness induced by daily life. Children comprised a large population demographic of Sierra Leoneans available for the RUF's recruitment and contributed to the final reason why the RUF used child soldiers.<sup>23</sup>

The fourth and final reason why the RUF used child soldiers was because of its leadership's opportunistic and predatory mindset that saw children as an easy to manipulate human resource that was much less expensive to wage a guerilla war with than a conventional military.<sup>24</sup> With the RUF's poor leadership incapable of generating support amongst the people of Sierra Leone, they turned to children as a human resource

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<sup>20</sup> Woods and Reese, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Denise Youngblood-Coleman, Ph.D., ed., *Sierra Leone Countrywatch Review* (Houston, TX: Country Watch, 2014), 128; Woods and Reese, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 101.

<sup>23</sup> Woods and Reese, 5.

<sup>24</sup> You Tube, "Ishmael Beah on GCTV with Bill Miller," June 8, 2013, Global Connections Television, accessed April 21, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rymq2hjQ-U>.

to fight for them.<sup>25</sup> Although some children fell victim to peer pressure and consciously joined the RUF, the majority did not choose to fight.<sup>26</sup> The RUF intimidated and forced children to fight by slaughtering entire adult populations of villages and in many cases forcing the children to consume cocaine and other drugs to desensitize them for battle.<sup>27</sup> After losing their families and friends, children became part of the RUF out of fear and despair.<sup>28</sup> Drugged and hopeless, child soldiers proved their effectiveness in committing acts of brutality on fellow Sierra Leoneans.

The two senior-level leaders throughout Sierra Leone's civil war, Foday Sankoh (RUF leader) and Charles Taylor (NPFL leader), were well aware of their organizations' use of child soldiers to wage conflict.<sup>29</sup> Sankoh expected his soldiers to sustain themselves by consuming the resources of the people they victimized, because he simply did not concern himself with the well-being of his fighters.<sup>30</sup> Child soldiers were far less costly to Sankoh because they did not request pay or capable military equipment to fight, which meant he could take a greater share of the spoils of war. Sam Brockarie and Issa Sesay, RUF field commanders under Sankoh, shared similar mindsets to Sankoh in their

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<sup>25</sup> Ibrahim Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (June 1998): 235.

<sup>26</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 281.

<sup>27</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 100.

<sup>28</sup> Maclure and Denov, 124.

<sup>29</sup> The Economist, "Foday Sankoh," August 7, 2003, accessed October 19, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/node/1974062>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

indifference and callousness toward using children to wage war.<sup>31</sup> Bockarie and Sesay served as RUF field commanders sequentially throughout the civil war. Their executing of Sankoh's commands to use child soldiers indicates the RUF senior-level involvement in using child soldiers. The final point regarding the RUF's leadership in using child soldiers are the origins of the RUF and links to the Sierra Leone University's, Fourah Bay College, Pan African Union during the 1970s.<sup>32</sup> The Pan African Union stands as a precursor to the RUF and indoctrinated the importance of using youth as "thugs" when starting political movements.<sup>33</sup> "Lumpens," a Marxist term, refers to youths used as thugs to perpetuate a political movement's agenda and were a significant part of the RUF's origins.<sup>34</sup> Using children to wage conflict was a natural progression for the RUF.

Therefore, the RUF's use of child soldiers was the result of failures in governance, extraordinary poverty, and opportunistic and apathetic RUF leadership that synergized to create uniquely horrific conditions that led to this outcome.

### Research Question

The primary research question of this thesis is, why did the RUF use child soldiers to wage Sierra Leone's civil war? Subordinate questions that follow the primary research question are:

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<sup>31</sup> Rebecca Richman Cohen, dir., *War Don Don*, DVD, New Day Films, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 3B* (Sierra Leone: Graphic Packaging, 2005), 58.

<sup>33</sup> Abdullah, 209.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



1. Did child soldiers affect the nature of fighting in Sierra Leone's civil war?
2. What institutions and organizations share accountability for the use of child soldiers throughout Sierra Leone's civil war?

### History up to Sierra Leone's civil war

Sierra Leone is located on the coast of West Africa, situated between Guinea to the north and Liberia to the south. Although relatively small, Sierra Leone's colonization by western European nations for slaves and its most notorious natural resource, diamonds, were a catalyst for internal conflict and target for poaching by external powers.<sup>35</sup> Sierra Leone's diamond mines played a prominent role in augmenting the adverse economic conditions that plagued Sierra Leone throughout the 1980s and motivated Sankoh and Taylor to launch the RUF's guerilla war.<sup>36</sup> To try to appeal to a greater audience of Sierra Leoneans, Sankoh espoused notions of egalitarian governance and the need for Sierra Leone to change its leadership to improve its economy.<sup>37</sup> However, the RUF's use of child soldiers as an inexpensive and expendable human force indicates he and Taylor intended to pillage Sierra Leone's diamonds for personal wealth.<sup>38</sup> Greed and corruption are two constants throughout Sierra Leone's history that

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<sup>35</sup> Stephanie Schaefer, "International Moral Obligation Towards Sierra Leone in Light of Conflict Diamonds" (Master's thesis, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA, 2010), 14.

<sup>36</sup> Tony Karon, "The Resistible Rise of Foday Sankoh."

<sup>37</sup> Journeyman Pictures, "The Sierra Leone Rebel Leader Who Refused to Disarm," YouTube, January 9, 2008, accessed April 25, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bR9WOisyhOQ>.

<sup>38</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3A*, 138, 102.

led the nation to abject poverty. It is important to gain a broad understanding of Sierra Leone's several hundred-year history plagued by European colonialism and slavery that had a cumulative effect on the adverse political, economic, and social conditions necessary for the civil war and RUF's use of child soldiers. This history provides context for Sierra Leone's failures in infrastructure and the RUF's callous leadership.

Sierra Leone's contact with Europe began in the mid-1400s, when Portuguese explorers established a settlement to conduct a slave trade.<sup>39</sup> By the mid-1500s, the British, French, Dutch, and Danish traded with Sierra Leone for its cattle, salt, cloth, palm oil, rice, and gold.<sup>40</sup> The beginning of trade with European powers is significant because by the mid-seventeenth century, Sierra Leone was fully entrenched in the West African slave trade, which lasted until the early nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup>

The slave trade was particularly cruel and involved the capture of Sierra Leonean men, women, and children by mercenaries and bandits, and exchanged these people to European slave traders for consumable goods.<sup>42</sup> The slave trade would be the first step toward creating interethnic tensions in Sierra Leone. It began the process of elevating the social and political status of the freed slaves that occupied Freetown from native Sierra Leoneans living in the Protectorate. In addition, the slave trade exacerbated ethnic tensions between the two largest native Sierra Leonean ethnic groups, the Mende and

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<sup>39</sup> Schaefer, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Woods and Reese, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ian Smillie, Lansana Gberie, and Ralph Hazelton, *The Heart Of The Matter Sierra Leone, Diamonds and Human Security* (Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada, 2000), 74.

Temne, through upsetting the delicate geographic balance between the two. By the late eighteenth century, Britain began resettling freed slaves from North America to a Sierra Leonean coastal area that is now the city of Freetown.<sup>43</sup> In 1808, Sierra Leone became a British crown colony and the Freetown area, where freed slaves settled, became a designated territory for freed slaves.<sup>44</sup> The freed slave territory (Freetown) became the British colonial capital of Sierra Leone and ultimately Sierra Leone's official capital.<sup>45</sup>

Sierra Leone's history of freed slaves and Freetown is a consequential component to understanding a root cause of the civil war. Although established with good intentions, the division between the freed slave population of Freetown and the native Sierra Leonean population of the rest of the country created political, economic, and social inequality that induced instability over time.<sup>46</sup> In 1896, the British reached an agreement with French Guinea and Liberia to rule the outlying land of Sierra Leone west of Freetown referred to as the Protectorate.<sup>47</sup> The division between the political and economic hub of Freetown and rural Protectorate grew significantly and contributed to some of the tensions that caused the civil war.

Although eighteen ethnic groups make up the population of Sierra Leone, the Mende and Temne tribes comprise approximately sixty percent of Sierra Leone's total

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<sup>43</sup> Goldmann, 460.

<sup>44</sup> Woods and Reese, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 2*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Woods and Reese, 8.

population.<sup>48</sup> The Mende tribe inhabited the southeast of the Protectorate while the Temne tribe inhabited the northwest of the Protectorate.<sup>49</sup> The British subjugated the population of the Protectorate. They elected a British commissioner to oversee the territory and forced Sierra Leonean tribal chiefs to accept divisions in their tribes' territories, which were different from the ancient divisions they already had.<sup>50</sup> British rule from Freetown over the Protectorate's Mende and Temne tribes exacerbated tense relations between all three groups. The British imposed taxes and policies on Sierra Leoneans from the Protectorate that Sierra Leoneans disliked and the British division of districts caused rifts between Sierra Leonean tribes. The significance of tense relations and the civil war is in Sierra Leone's political system after its independence in 1961. The Mende and Temne tribes would ultimately form the backbone of Sierra Leone's two primary political parties (Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and All People's Congress (APC)) that engaged in a series of coups over a thirty-year period that created serious political instability and economic turmoil, ultimately inducing conditions for the civil war.<sup>51</sup>

The next important event in Sierra Leone's history is the discovery of Sierra Leone's diamond mines in 1930, when a British team of geologists launched an expedition for natural resources into eastern Sierra Leone at the height of the Great

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<sup>48</sup> Youngblood-Coleman, 127.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Woods and Reese, 9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Depression.<sup>52</sup> After the discovery of several diamond mines, in 1935 Sierra Leone's colonial government created the Sierra Leone Selection Trust, a diamond mine authority, which subsequently granted the DeBeers Mining Company total and complete mining rights for ninety-nine years.<sup>53</sup> By 1937, Sierra Leone diamond mines were producing one million carats of diamonds annually.<sup>54</sup>

Diamonds were high in value and easy to conceal, which meant that merchants and international traders could smuggle them out of Sierra Leone, without taxation and fees. By 1956, an estimated 75,000 illicit diamond miners in the Kono district of Sierra Leone were smuggling diamonds out of the country.<sup>55</sup> Sierra Leone's diamond mines provided the grounds for rampant Sierra Leonean government corruption and a cause for external groups to seek power in the country.

Sierra Leone declared independence from Great Britain in April 1961 and subsequently faced three decades of political and economic decay leading to the civil war.<sup>56</sup> Sierra Leone's independence was largely the work of the Mende comprised SLPP,

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<sup>52</sup> Peter A. L. Greenhalgh, *West African Diamonds, 1919-1983: An Economic History* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1985), 47.

<sup>53</sup> Smillie, Gberie, and Hazelton, 40.

<sup>53</sup> Woods and Reese, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Smillie, Gberie, and Hazelton, 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> J. Barry Riddell, "Internal and External Forces Acting upon Disparities in Sierra Leone," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 23, no. 3 (1985): 532.

which formed in 1951 and sought independence from Britain.<sup>57</sup> Although independence was a momentous occasion for Sierra Leone, it also began several decades of rampant government corruption plaguing both the SLPP and later on the APC.

The first elected Prime Minister of Sierra Leone, Sir Milton Margai of the SLPP and ethnic Mende, took office in 1962, but passed away two years later in 1964 paving the way for his half-brother, Sir Albert Margai to take his place.<sup>58</sup> Prime Minister Albert Margai instilled Mende tribe members in key leadership positions, which created serious political and social tensions throughout Sierra Leone.<sup>59</sup> Appointing key leaders from the Mende tribe made the Sierra Leone government appear biased and in favor of policies that benefited them at the cost of the Temne.

Towards the late 1960s, the Temne tribe formed the APC party as a response to the unchecked power of the SLPP.<sup>60</sup> The APC became the opposing political party to the SLPP. In 1967, Sierra Leone elected APC leader Siaka Stevens as Prime Minister.<sup>61</sup> Steven's election as Prime Minister posed problems. The SLPP disliked Steven's election and a series of military coups followed.<sup>62</sup> Sierra Leone Army Brigadier General David Lansana led the first coup to oust Stevens out of fear that his party, the SLPP, would lose

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<sup>57</sup> Sierra Leone People's Party, "About the Sierra Leone People's Party," accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.slpponline.com/about-slpp>.

<sup>58</sup> Youngblood-Coleman, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Woods and Reese, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Smillie, Gberie, and Hazelton, 43.

<sup>61</sup> Youngblood-Coleman, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

power.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, Stevens took back his position as Prime Minister after reaching an agreement with the Sierra Leone Army to recognize their political authority through two councils that balanced Sierra Leone's political power.<sup>64</sup> After his swearing in, Prime Minister Stevens reacted to the coups by imprisoning senior Mende law enforcement and military leaders and forcing Mende state employees to swear allegiance to the APC party.<sup>65</sup> Stevens ruled as Sierra Leone's Prime Minister from 1968 to 1985. During his tenure he made Sierra Leone a one-party state, destroyed ethnic relations with the Mende political leaders and SLPP, eliminated news agencies that opposed his viewpoints, and engaged in corrupt political practices that ultimately bankrupted the country.<sup>66</sup>

The major significance behind Steven's reign as prime minister is that it spawned the RUF. In 1982 as Sierra Leone's government and economy worsened, a group of Sierra Leone University, Fourah Bay College students led by their group leader Alie Kabbah, fled to eastern Sierra Leone to form a political organization to rebel against the APC.<sup>67</sup> Their organization became the RUF and its objectives were to overthrow of the Sierra Leonean government, oust corrupt officials, and re-allocate Sierra Leone's wealth to benefit the general population.<sup>68</sup> However, their ideology would quickly change under

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<sup>63</sup> J. Peter Pham, *Child Soldiers Adults Interests: The Global Dimensions of the Sierra Leonean Tragedy* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2005), 38.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Woods and Reese, 12.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Abdullah, 214.

<sup>68</sup> IHS Jane's, "Revolutionary United Front (RUF)," 1.

the leadership of Foday Sankoh, a seemingly innocuous middle-aged former Sierra Leone Army corporal.<sup>69</sup> There are not many known details regarding Sankoh's life. He was born in 1937 to a poor family. The only indication that Sankoh had the devious and dissolute traits required to be a brutal leader was his partaking in a 1971-failed coup against the Stevens regime, which landed him several years in prison.<sup>70</sup> His partaking in the coup showed ambitions of achieving a position of power and willingness to use force to achieve that objective. Upon his release from prison, he travelled around West Africa as a portrait photographer, witnessing the lives of the urban poor causing his anti-Sierra Leone government ideals to grow more radical.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, Libyans infiltrated Sierra Leone to recruit rebels as part of Libyan President, Colonel Muammar Gadhafi's Pan-African initiatives to recruit dissidents against western influence in Africa.<sup>72</sup> Sankoh met these Libyan agents and in 1988, Sankoh took up an offer to travel to Libya to receive "guerrilla warfare and political philosophy" training under Gadhafi.<sup>73</sup> The training offered young disenfranchised Sierra Leoneans, military, and political philosophy training as part of his "Green Book" political philosophy.<sup>74</sup> The training stressed the importance of Pan-Africanism, part of which consisted of unifying Africa and leveraging its power against

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<sup>69</sup> The Economist, "Foday Sankoh."

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Abdullah, 214.

<sup>73</sup> IHS Jane's, "Revolutionary United Front (RUF)," 3.

<sup>74</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 58.



western nations seeking to siphon resources.<sup>75</sup> While training in Libya, Sankoh met Liberian warlord and leader of the NPFL, Charles Taylor.<sup>76</sup> After establishing a relationship, Sankoh and Taylor agreed to support guerilla wars in their respective countries in hopes of overthrowing their country's governments and creating political change.<sup>77</sup>

By the late-1980s, Sierra Leone's dire political and economic conditions worsened, which only helped to fuel the radicalism required for the RUF's invasion that led to a guerilla war, which evolved into the civil war. The retirement of Prime Minister Stevens in 1985 and subsequent replacement with Major-General Joseph Momoh, head of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces, was a fatal move for the government. Momoh was weaker and more corrupt than Stevens, and shortly after taking office, through a series of poor economic policies, bankrupt the country causing a serious economic collapse.<sup>78</sup> By the late 1980s, Sierra Leone's currency was worthless and the state infrastructure completely devastated.<sup>79</sup> Conditions were optimal for a civil war. In 1989, under the leadership of Charles Taylor, the NPFL launched a guerilla war against

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<sup>75</sup> Chege, 149.

<sup>76</sup> IHS Jane's, "Revolutionary United Front (RUF)," 3-4.

<sup>77</sup> BBC News, "Foday Sankoh: The Cruel Rebel," July 30, 2003, accessed October 19, 2014, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3110629.stm>.

<sup>78</sup> Woods and Reese, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

the Liberian government that led to Liberia's civil war.<sup>80</sup> Once Taylor was in power in Liberia, he supported Sankoh's invasion and guerilla war in Sierra Leone.

The RUF's guerilla war began in March 1991 when its first incursion of approximately 100 NPFL commandos and conscripted Sierra Leoneans crossed into Sierra Leone and took the town of Bomaru, located within the eastern Sierra Leonean district of Kailahun.<sup>81</sup> The "vanguards" or conscripted group of Sierra Leoneans fighting alongside the NPFL were some of the RUF's first child soldiers and originated from Sankoh's understanding that he would need inexpensive fighters to wage a war quickly.<sup>82</sup> In the summer of 1990, he subsequently commanded RUF fighters to seek out and force Sierra Leonean and Liberian captives held in border areas between the two countries to fight for them or face death.<sup>83</sup> Some of the first "vanguard" fighters were as young as seven years of age.<sup>84</sup> The youngest "vanguards" would eventually form a group called the "Small Boys Unit" of the RUF.<sup>85</sup> This set the precedent for the RUF's forcible recruitment of child soldiers during the civil war.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 2*, 33.

<sup>81</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 60.

<sup>82</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3A*, 102.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>84</sup> Marcela Gaviria, "Firestone and the Warlord," *PBS Frontlines*, November 18, 2014, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/firestone-and-the-warlord/>.

<sup>85</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3A*, 107.

<sup>86</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 260.

The Sierra Leone civil war lasted over a decade from March 1991 to the formal United Nations (UN) proclamation of the end of the civil war in January 2002.<sup>87</sup> The RUF waged a highly successful guerilla war campaign throughout the first year of conflict, forcing President Momoh to flee Sierra Leone and for a the temporary government of the National Provisional Ruling Council led by, Sierra Leone Army Captain Valentine Strasser to take his place.<sup>88</sup> In 1993, with the help of Nigerian forces from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Sierra Leone Army pushed back RUF forces to the Liberian border, reclaiming diamonds mines that had previously been lost.<sup>89</sup> The Sierra Leone Army became a victim of its own success when they started engaging in illegal diamond mining and selling after freeing former RUF controlled mines.

By February 1995, the RUF regrouped and managed to take back Sierra Leone Army held territory.<sup>90</sup> Shortly thereafter in March, Strasser hired a private military contractor known as Executive Outcomes to train the Sierra Leone military forces and provide direct action support in fighting the RUF.<sup>91</sup> Executive Outcomes performed their duties admirably and by March of 1996, were able push the RUF back to Liberia, provide enough security for Sierra Leone to hold elections, and even bring the RUF to the

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<sup>87</sup> Pham, 210.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>89</sup> David G. Leatherwood, "Peacekeeping in West Africa," *Joint Force Quarterly* 29 (2002): 78.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Pham, 207.

negotiating table.<sup>92</sup> As a result, the RUF signed the Abidjan Peace Accord, which stipulated a cease-fire between the RUF and Sierra Leone government if Executive Outcomes left the country.<sup>93</sup> In addition, part of the peace accord was the stipulation that the UN would send in a monitoring group to watch the RUF.<sup>94</sup> In 1997, a group of Sierra Leone Army junior military officers staged a coup and installed Major Johnny Paul Koroma as the leader of their regime called, The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council.<sup>95</sup> The new regime aligned with the RUF as part of a cease-fire agreement and RUF forces descended upon Freetown in early 1999. In November 1999, the UN finally sent troops for peacekeeping operations with significant offensive support from the British, and disarmed the RUF by May 2001.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the devastation and damage done during Sierra Leone's civil war has left an indelible mark on its people and the scars are still visible today.

### Significance of the Study

Studying failures in infrastructure and government that bring about atrocities like Sierra Leone's civil war is necessary to spot similar situations to ensure these events never happen again. Furthermore, studying the influences on the leadership of the RUF

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<sup>92</sup> David J. Francis, "Mercenary Intervention in Sierra Leone," *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1999): 327.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Pham, 208.

<sup>96</sup> BBC News, "Sierra Leone Profile-Timeline," March 18, 2015, accessed April 29, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094419>.

that allowed them to use child soldiers provides insight into the conditions that lead organizations to commit mass atrocities. Sub-Saharan West Africa currently has some of the harshest and extreme levels of poverty in the world. The 2014 Ebola outbreak showed developed nations the dangers of an underdeveloped Africa and that it is up to the international community to assist with supporting nations like Sierra Leone and Liberia to develop. By studying Sierra Leone's civil war, lessons in regards to African political instability can factor into policies to alleviate poverty in that continent. For example, knowing Sierra Leone's history of corrupt leaders could potentially lead to solutions that address ensuring the profits from its natural resources go to the people and not the elites.

Unfortunately, child soldiers may be more common as failed states become safe havens for extremist and radical fringe organizations. The UN estimates that 300,000 children in nineteen different countries currently serve as child soldiers.<sup>97</sup> This may be a growing trend within Africa's failed states as the nature of conflict during the twenty-first century increasingly involves militant opposition groups unbound by the laws of war throughout their military operations.<sup>98</sup> By understanding the reasons for exploiting children in this capacity, the international community can more efficiently and effectively combat conditions that lead to the use of child soldiers.

### Master of Military Art and Science Outline

Chapter 1, Introduction, provides an overview of the primary and secondary Master of Military Art and Science research questions, a brief history of events leading

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<sup>97</sup> Gaviria.

<sup>98</sup> Frank Faulkner, "Kindergarten Killers: Morality, Murder and the Child Soldier Problem," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (2001): 495.

up to Sierra Leone's civil war, and significance of the study. Chapter 2, Literature Review, presents the major sources used for this Master of Military Art and Science and schools of thought regarding the use of child soldiers throughout the civil war. Chapter 3, Research Methodology, addresses biases and the reliability of the study regarding the thesis findings. Chapter 4, Analysis, presents the findings regarding the reasons for the RUF's use of child soldiers. Chapter 5, Conclusion, reviews the analysis, concludes the thesis, and recommends the most effective ways to prevent organizations and nations from using child soldiers.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this thesis is to present that the RUF's use of child soldiers was the result of failures in governance, extraordinary poverty, and opportunistic and apathetic RUF leadership. Two sections comprise the literature review of this thesis. Section 1: Existing Literature and Schools of Thought, presents the most prominent and influential studies regarding Sierra Leone's civil war and use of child soldiers. It begins with research found in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (hereafter referred to as TRC), which was the most thorough study. Next, Section 1 reviews the schools of thought regarding the civil war and RUF's use of child soldiers. Section 2: Conclusion, of chapter 2 summarizes the findings from the literature review.

#### Existing Literature and Schools of Thought

The literature review began with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's TRC. Seven commissioners comprised the Commission; four Sierra Leoneans, and three non-Sierra Leonean internationals.<sup>99</sup> Thousands of Sierra Leoneans put forth nominations for commissioners with a cross section of Sierra Leonean society and the High Commissioner for Human Rights choosing the final candidates. The TRC presents the background and timeline of Sierra Leone's civil war from 1991 to 2003. Volume two of the TRC, section titled "Historical Antecedent to the Conflict," presents the civil war

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<sup>99</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1* (Sierra Leone: Graphic Packaging, 2005), 53.

as a conflict that originated in part between Sierra Leoneans from Freetown (Colony) that were the socio-economic upper class and countryside (Protectorate), which were the lower class and economically disadvantaged.<sup>100</sup> This class division and jockeying for political power between the APC and SLPP after Sierra Leone's independence in 1961 all the way through Joseph Momoh's failed presidency led to disillusionment amongst the Sierra Leonean population.<sup>101</sup>

Confirming much of the TRC's reporting on the origins of Sierra Leone's civil war and RUF's use of child soldiers was the Combat Studies Institute Press, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center Long War Series Occasional Paper 28, *Military Interventions in Sierra Leone: Lessons From a Failed State*, by Larry J. Woods and Colonel Timothy R. Reese. This document provided a comprehensive primer to understanding the civil war and more importantly an understanding of conditions that led the RUF to use child soldiers. This report related Sierra Leone's history of interethnic tensions and political corruption to the rise of the RUF. The TRC Commission presents the prevalence of young people in Sierra Leone and the ease in manipulating children to fight as reasons for the RUF's use of child soldiers. Children were a plentiful resource for the RUF to use to fight with fifty-five percent of the population of Sierra Leone under the age of eighteen leading up to the civil war.<sup>102</sup> Children easily transformed into fighters once the RUF killed off adult populations of the villages they pillaged.<sup>103</sup> Without food or basic

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<sup>100</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 2, 5*.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>102</sup> Woods and Reese, 20.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*



resources for survival, children turned to the RUF for support and the RUF saw children as expendable and easy to manipulate.<sup>104</sup> However, this source did not provide an extensive history of the RUF's ties to the Pan-African Student Movement and importance to the RUF's use of child soldiers. Neither is there depth regarding the Sierra Leone Army or internal security forces.

*A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, by Ishmael Beah, confirms harsh RUF recruiting techniques like carving rebel initials into children as a form of branding.<sup>105</sup> His account provided an in-depth, primary source to understanding the nature of war crimes committed throughout the conflict and the mind-set of child soldiers.<sup>106</sup> Beah describes his first encounter with the RUF in the village of Mattru Jong, where RUF fighters fired rounds next to the head of an elderly man in front of children to intimidate them and then told the village children that they were going to kill adults to initiate the children as RUF fighters.<sup>107</sup> The RUF's killing of adult villagers created a sense of hopelessness that manipulated children to fight. Drugs numbed child soldiers and pushed them to commit atrocities on the battlefield.<sup>108</sup> This was the case for Beah, who saw the death and destruction inflicted by the RUF on his family and village and subsequently found a home as a soldier in the Sierra Leone Army. While in the Sierra Leone Army, he used cocaine-laced gunpowder called "brown-brown" that stimulated

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<sup>104</sup> You Tube, "Ishmael Beah on GCTV with Bill Miller."

<sup>105</sup> Beah, 24.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

and numbed feelings.<sup>109</sup> While drug induced, Beah describes him and his peers watching Rambo movies as desensitizers and primers for battle.<sup>110</sup> This part of his account leads to the question of understanding Sierra Leone's civil war and prevalence of child soldiers in the context of a "crisis of modernity," which is the first school of thought researched for this thesis.<sup>111</sup>

The Partnership Africa Canada, a non-profit organization that researches and advocates policy relating to conflict and human rights in Africa, presents many of the same reasons for the prevalence of child soldiers throughout Sierra Leone's civil war in their report titled, *The Heart of the Matter, Sierra Leone, Diamonds & Human Security*, by Ian Smillie, Lansana Gberie, and Ralph Hazleton. The authors question the topic of Sierra Leone's civil war as a "crisis of modernity," which began because of three decades of failed governments in the wake of colonialism.<sup>112</sup> Treated as miscreants without education or opportunities, some Sierra Leonean youths found belonging in the RUF and other forces. More specifically, the article posits child exposure to Rambo movies and other violent media as inspiration for young boys to fight.<sup>113</sup> Authors then refute this claim as the RUF forced most children to join their organization and fight. The underlying contention of this article is that the civil war was the result of Sierra Leone's poor economics stemming from external powers stealing its diamonds. The external

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<sup>109</sup> Beah., 121-122.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>111</sup> Smillie, Gberie, and Hazelton, 10.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

powers in this case are diamond-mining firms that intentionally kept the government of Sierra Leone weak and employed companies to take diamonds out of the country without the proper compensation to the host nation.<sup>114</sup> Simply put they say that, “Only the economic opportunity presented by a breakdown in law and order could sustain violence at the levels that plagued Sierra Leone after 1991.”<sup>115</sup> In others words, child soldiers were the result of the RUF’s greed. They had an economic incentive to use children because child soldiers were the least costly option to wage a civil war.

Similarly, in Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler’s article titled, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” the authors contend that poor economic conditions, similar to Sierra Leone during the period leading up to and during the civil war, led to rebellions and are an important component to waging a guerrilla war large enough to topple a legitimate government.<sup>116</sup> Collier and Hoeffler analyze the economics and the impact it has on state infrastructure and services leading up to a civil war. More specifically, education relates to the prevalence of child soldiers in conflict. Lower education levels make young boys more susceptible to fighting in conflict because they have less constructive outlets and less psychological development to keep them from conscientiously choosing to fight.<sup>117</sup> Sierra Leone’s poor economy also made fighting for a rebel organization financially appealing. If a country’s government cannot pay their

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<sup>114</sup> Smillie, Gberie, and Hazelton, 12-13.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>116</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 569.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 588.

fighters or assist with alleviating poverty, fighting for a rebel organization may be an appealing option for males that need to earn an income.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, rebel organizations are more apt to use young boys as child soldiers because they do not have the financial resources to pay adult soldiers. Thus, children are susceptible to becoming soldiers in poorer nations.<sup>119</sup>

In the *Third World Quarterly* article titled, “Liberia and Sierra Leone Dead Ringers? The Logic of Neopatrimonial Rule,” Morten Boas puts forth that state failures in providing services to their people instigate internal conflict and eventual civil war.<sup>120</sup> The author describes politics in Africa as a more simple system, bound less by rules than in western nations. The resulting system puts more power and authority in the hands of political leaders and less return to the people political leaders serve.<sup>121</sup> Political leaders seek political power to ensure the acquisition of wealth and resources for their elite group of supporters.<sup>122</sup> Ultimately, the political leadership in Sierra Leone failed to provide for its people because they were too concerned with their own agendas, resulting in the RUF’s formation and eventual guerilla war campaign.<sup>123</sup> Boas argues that resentment toward poor leadership and disenchantment with the Sierra Leone government pushed

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<sup>118</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, 569.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid..

<sup>120</sup> Morten Boas, “Liberia and Sierra Leone—Dead Ringers? The Logic of Neopatrimonial Rule,” *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 5 (2001): 698.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 699.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 718.

many children to join the RUF out of a feeling of exclusion from their own government.<sup>124</sup> Although relevant and logical, this theory puts too much accountability on children fighting during the civil war.

In the *Journal of Modern African Studies* article titled, “Internal and External Forces Acting Upon Disparities in Sierra Leone,” J. Barry Riddell presents Sierra Leone’s poverty-stricken state and failed infrastructure as the result of both internal and external forces. The neo-Classical or diffusionist position espouses third world nations as repeating a cycle of inadequate governance and policy as the reason for their conditions.<sup>125</sup> The neo-Marxism or dependency perspective views the conditions of third world nations as the result of colonial powers that suppress the development of nations as the reason for their underdevelopment.<sup>126</sup> An example of the neo-Marxist perspective was the British ruling Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century, when they set up a system of governance that benefited their colonial ambitions, while neglecting the well-being of Sierra Leonean people. Most relevant of all from this article is the disparity in health, education, and opportunity amongst the Sierra Leonean youth because of external and internal factors such as colonialism and failed government infrastructure, which led to serious instability and conditions for the RUF to start the civil war.<sup>127</sup> Riddell says that reductionist theories seek to explain root causes of Sierra Leone’s civil war are

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<sup>124</sup> Boas., 718-719.

<sup>125</sup> Riddell, “Internal and External Forces Acting upon Disparities in Sierra Leone,” 389.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 393.

inadequate and overly simplistic because there were several causes of the conflict.<sup>128</sup> He concludes that internal and external factors are to blame for the civil war and with that understanding; the logical deduction is that the emergence of child soldiers in the civil war was due to both internal and external factors as well.<sup>129</sup>

In the *Third World Quarterly* article titled, “Sierra Leone: The Political Economy of civil war, 1991-98,” Alfred B. Zack Williams presents the causes of Sierra Leone’s civil war as historical, with the underdeveloped economy and corrupt political system leading to the RUF’s guerilla war.<sup>130</sup> He uses a neo-Marxian lens and analyzes the impact of peripheral capitalism on the family unit and its influence on child soldiers leading up to the civil war. His contention is that leading up to the civil war, periphery capitalism among the elites and “imperialists” of Sierra Leone used the poverty-stricken, working class as a labor pull for their enrichment.<sup>131</sup> Extremely challenging conditions for the working class family unit of Sierra Leone led many children to find work as early as six years of age in mines or in towns as impoverished street children.<sup>132</sup> As a result, they were poorly educated and in positions that the RUF could exploit.

In the Johns Hopkins University, *World Politics* magazine article titled, “New and Old Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?,” Stathis N. Kalyvas portrays a distinction between

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<sup>128</sup> Riddell, 406.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Alfred B. Zack Williams, “Sierra Leone: The Political Economy of Civil War 1991-1998,” *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1999): 143.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 155-156.

new civil wars as conflicts fought for “loot seeking” and old civil wars as conflicts fought for “justice seeking” ends.<sup>133</sup> A common perception of African civil wars is the banditry aspect or the “warrior gang” component, whereby groups attempt to usurp control of government resources for their own benefit.<sup>134</sup> He says that although the RUF was a fringe organization, their use of violence was organized and intentional.<sup>135</sup> Accordingly, their use of child soldiers, although brutal, was methodical.<sup>136</sup> This notion plays into understanding the influences that affected the leadership of the RUF to use child soldiers. The RUF’s leadership chose child soldiers, rather than used them as a last resort.

The Working Paper Series from the Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’ article titled, “Working Paper 21, The Political Economy of Internal Conflict in Sierra Leone” by Paul Richards, presented Sierra Leone’s civil war as a “new” conflict partially based on ambitions held by rebel organizations for the purposes of wealth.<sup>137</sup> He also advocates that the young and abandoned were socially excluded, which induced a sense of alienation and drove many to find appeal with the RUF’s causes.<sup>138</sup> His findings indicate that some child soldiers in the RUF became ardent

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<sup>133</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, “‘New’ and ‘Old’ Civil Wars a Valid Distinction?” *World Politics* 54 (2001): 100-101.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>137</sup> Paul Richards, “Working Paper 21, The Political Economy of Internal Conflict in Sierra Leone,” Working Paper Series (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2004), 7.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

supporters to the cause and that the group took on a “children’s crusade” identity.<sup>139</sup> He views the use of child soldiers on behalf of the RUF as a planned system, especially in the early phase of the guerilla war.<sup>140</sup> Simply put the RUF thought children would make good fighters.<sup>141</sup> Studying the leadership of the RUF leads to the conclusion that there was intellectual prominence amongst their leaders ultimately dismissing the notion that this was purely a criminal network.<sup>142</sup> What should be noted from this document is the RUF’s choice to use child soldiers and that some child soldiers felt a reason to join the RUF due to their horrendous living conditions.

On the matter of the RUF’s leadership, the article titled, “Legacy of Foday Sankoh ‘Sierra Leone’s Hitler’” by Mohammed Legally-Cole, describes Foday Sankoh’s and Charles Taylor’s ascendancy to political prominence leading up to the civil war.<sup>143</sup> Both men were ruthless in their guerilla wars, which ultimately characterized their style of conflict. A man from unremarkable origins, Sankoh’s radicalization stemmed from his resentment of the upper class from his early childhood years, and subsequent arrest in 1967 after taking part in a plan to overthrow Sierra Leone government.<sup>144</sup> He became part of a plan to overthrow the Sierra Leonean government while serving as a corporal in the

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<sup>139</sup> Richards, 14.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>143</sup> Legally-Cole, “Legacy of Foday Sankoh: ‘Sierra Leone’s Hitler’.”

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



Sierra Leone Army.<sup>145</sup> While in prison, his anti-government ideas strengthened from prisoners that shared his beliefs. Conditions in the Pademba Road maximum prison were also poor and after serving a ten-year sentence, he sought to rebel against the government.<sup>146</sup> Cole says that the RUF's destruction of villages forced many children to fight for them, but also that many children and RUF fighters chose to fight due to the belief this was their time to reclaim resources that had been mismanaged over time.<sup>147</sup> Through "Operation Pay Yourself" and "Commando Takes All," RUF fighters shared the conviction that this was their time to reclaim their nation's wealth after decades of weak and corrupt governance.<sup>148</sup>

Sierra Leonean scholar Ibrahim Abdullah describes the origins of the RUF in the article titled, "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone."<sup>149</sup> Abdullah is the only Sierra Leonean academic featured in this thesis and his work reflects someone who had access to detailed information regarding the RUF's inception and affiliations with the Pan African Union. He details the RUF's inception from the early 1940s under a prominent Sierra Leonean Pan-Africanist, Wallace Johnson and his leadership of an organization that would develop and influence the RUF called the Youth League, which was a dissident political group that opposed

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<sup>145</sup> Legally-Cole, "Legacy of Foday Sankoh: 'Sierra Leone's Hitler'."

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibrahim Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (June 1998): 203.

colonial forces in Sierra Leone.<sup>150</sup> His most interesting findings connect the Sierra Leone street youth culture to politicians that use these youths to perform acts of political intimidation against rivalries and then neglect them after politicians achieve political status.<sup>151</sup> This cycle, held throughout Sierra Leone's independence until the civil war, exacerbated a feeling of disenchantment amongst Sierra Leonean street youth and made them vulnerable to the RUF. His historical findings conclude that the RUF's origins grew from elements of street youth culture and thus using child soldiers was a natural progression.<sup>152</sup> Abdullah's article completes a thorough understanding of the origins of the RUF and furthermore provides a key insight into why they used child soldiers.

Monique Ramgoolie's article titled, "Prosecution of Sierra Leone's Child Soldiers: What Message is the UN Trying to Send?" has highly relevant data regarding the RUF's use of child soldiers.<sup>153</sup> This article holds that the RUF forced children to fight and therefore, child soldiers should be withheld from the jurisdiction of international courts.<sup>154</sup> Ramgoolie's findings indicate that eighty percent of the child soldiers were between the ages of seven to fourteen, and that they comprised forty to fifty percent of the RUF's total force.<sup>155</sup> At such a young age, children were not mature enough to

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<sup>150</sup> Abdullah., 205.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 234-235.

<sup>153</sup> Monique Ramgoolie, "Prosecution of Sierra Leone's Child Soldiers: What Message is the UN Trying to Send?" *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 12 (2001): 146.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>155</sup> Ramgoolie, 147.

understand the impact of their actions, especially while drugged. The RUF specifically targeted children throughout the civil war to use as fighters and sex slaves simply because children are easy to manipulate.<sup>156</sup> Research for this thesis agrees with Ms. Ramgoolie's belief in the vindication of child soldiers from the civil war. Based on the evidence, child soldiers fought out of necessity and cannot be held accountable for their actions.

In the *Third World Quarterly* article titled, "Kindergarten Killers: Morality, Murder and the Child Soldier Problem," Frank Faulkner presents a similar argument to Ramgoolie. Faulkner attributed an increase in child soldiers through conflict as the result of wars affecting civilian populations as conflicts shift from conventional warfare to warfare in failed states.<sup>157</sup> With the advent of inexpensive and easy to operate weapons systems like the AK-47, guerilla groups could train and equip children to fight.<sup>158</sup> A complete breakdown in basic services and "protective mechanisms" for children during guerilla war campaigns waged in urban areas are primers for the use of child soldiers.<sup>159</sup> Children from failed states are most susceptible to the forcible recruitment to fight because they are poorly educated, disadvantaged socioeconomically, separated from family, and possibly internally displaced.<sup>160</sup> In the case of the RUF's use of child soldiers, children matched these traits and were victim to the RUF's guerilla war campaign. This article supports the notion that the RUF's use of child soldiers stemmed

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>157</sup> Faulkner, 495.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 496.

from the ease of manipulating children to fight rather than children conscientiously choosing to fight.

*Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front* by Maryiam Denov, presents the use of child soldiers in Sierra Leone's civil war through the lenses of both structuralism and agency.<sup>161</sup> From a structuralist perspective, child soldiers evolved from Sierra Leone's colonialism and failed state status that allowed the RUF to force children, uneducated and vulnerable to fight.<sup>162</sup> The opposing viewpoint she presents is that child soldiers had agency, or the ability to choose to fight throughout the civil war.<sup>163</sup> Denov sides with looking at the problem of child soldiers through both these theories and introduces the notion of the "duality of structure," that structuralism and agency complement each other.<sup>164</sup> The duality of structure is a theory that combines agency and structure, where human agency influences structures that in turn affect people.<sup>165</sup> Denov's theories on the matter of the RUF's use of child soldiers are the most all-encompassing and centrist. Rather than attribute child soldiers to one theory, Denov applies a more centrist lens through incorporating the two theories.

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<sup>161</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 45.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

## Conclusion

Sources vary regarding the reasons for Sierra Leone's civil war and RUF's use of child soldiers.<sup>166</sup> There are several schools of thought regarding the RUF's use of child soldiers, based on analysis of the history leading up to the civil war. The TRC is the most thorough and comprehensive report about the Sierra Leone's civil war. The TRC presents the issues of Sierra Leone's failures in governance, education system, and rule of law as reasons for civil war. These failures along with the abundance of children in Sierra Leone, and ease of control all contributed to the use of child soldiers. The use of child soldiers also has an economic component, as the RUF chose children as fighters simply because children were less expensive to use and the RUF's leadership had wealth as an objective. Neo-Patrimonialism presents the onus for the RUF's use of child soldiers on the state's failure to provide for its people and subsequent disillusionment on behalf of the people to rise up and take back power and resources from the government. This theory suggests more of a conscientious decision by child soldiers to fight for the RUF and is contentious because evidence points to the RUF forcing children to fight.

Morten Boas, espouses a similar theory through the lens of neo-Classicism or that Sierra Leone's internal problems were inherently innate and thus the RUF's use of child soldiers was a natural tendency of Sierra Leoneans. In "Internal and External Forces Acting Upon Disparities in Sierra Leone," Barry J. Riddell presents Neo-Marxism or that the reason for Sierra Leone's poverty and failed government infrastructure was external organizations such as mining companies and colonial powers, weakening the nation to

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<sup>166</sup> See Denov; Keen; Abdullah; Collier for analysis regarding the use of child soldiers throughout Sierra Leone's civil war.

siphon off resources. In essence, this theory advocated the causes of the civil war as external. In “Child Soldiers Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front,” Maryiam Denov argues that structuralism, agency, and the duality of structuralism offer the most logical explanation for the prevalence of child soldiers throughout Sierra Leone’s civil war. Structuralism holds Sierra Leone’s failures leading to the civil war as the result of its weak government and infrastructure. Agency concludes the opposite of structuralism and holds that individuals conscientiously chose to rebel and ignite the civil war. The duality of structuralism uses both structuralism and agency to understand the civil war and RUF’s use of child soldiers and finds validity in both theories. Despite the balanced approach of the duality of structuralism, this thesis found structuralism as the most relevant and logical academic lens to use in understanding the RUF’s use of child soldiers.

This thesis takes a purely structuralist viewpoint toward the RUF’s use of child soldiers. Unlike sources that portray child soldiers conscientiously choosing to fight, the logical conclusion from seeing that child soldiers had their families and friends slaughtered and were provided drugs to commit mass atrocities indicates that they had little if any choice in deciding their outcome. For the RUF to gain enough power to implement child soldiers, Sierra Leone’s state security, law and order, and education system needed to be weak to allow the RUF to conduct their guerilla war campaign.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3, “Research Methodology” of this thesis will explain the type of qualitative research done to answer the thesis questions, process answering the secondary questions, and repeatability of the study. The final section of this chapter presents the weaknesses and limitations of the study and definitions. As mentioned, the RUF’s use of child soldiers was the result of failures in Sierra Leone’s governance, extraordinary poverty, and opportunistic and apathetic RUF leadership that used children to wage a guerilla war. First, this thesis used a qualitative critical instance case study methodology because it matched the available research on the topic and most effectively answered the thesis questions. The use of child soldiers by the RUF during the Sierra Leone’s civil war was an extreme instance of the prevalence of child soldiers throughout a conflict. Second, qualitative research comprises the majority of sources available regarding the RUF’s use of child soldiers. Much of the information regarding Sierra Leone’s civil war and use of child soldiers came from testimonies and literary sources. This thesis includes the analysis conducted by several prominent scholars regarding the use of child soldiers during the civil war. Third, the research approach consisted of formulating the theory that child soldiers faced forcible recruitment at the hands of the RUF, researching what prominent scholars present, and finally modifying theory based on evidence, analysis, and abductive reasoning. Finally, chapter 3 addresses biases and the reliability of the study regarding the thesis findings.

### Type of Research

The most appropriate methodology for this thesis is a critical instance case study using qualitative analysis. A critical instance case study “examines a single instance that holds some unique interest; illustrates an extreme case; or serves as a critical test of theory regarding a phenomena, problem, or strategy.”<sup>167</sup> The critical instance case study was the most obvious and applicable type of qualitative analysis because of the severity and extent to which child soldiers were used to wage Sierra Leone’s civil war. Critical instance case studies are most appropriate for outlying events that merit research that warrant valuable conclusions. The severity and brutality associated with the RUF’s use of child soldiers represents an extreme case of inhumanity originating from Sierra Leone’s history of colonialism and slavery that induced egregious failures in state infrastructure. These conditions are synonymous with the social scientific theories of Structuralism, neo-Patrimonialism, neo-Marxism, neo-Classicism, and modernity that provided context to assist with understanding the root causes of this issue.

Qualitative research and studies comprise the majority of information regarding the thesis topic. As presented in chapter 2, the majority of research regarding the use of child soldiers is heavily qualitative in nature. In addition, the thesis questions at hand were not easily answered using quantitative measures because understanding human organizations through their history and intent relies on literature rather than scientific data. In most instances, quantitative data was impossible to ascertain, which is likely due to an intentional void in record keeping on behalf of the RUF. Based on this absence of

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<sup>167</sup> Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Eurepos, and Elden Wiebe, *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), 825.



quantitative data, accurate statistical derivations were impossible to calculate.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone remains a third world nation currently facing a serious Ebola epidemic. Collecting social scientific quantitative data would have been dangerous given the current situation.

### Process to Answer Secondary Questions

The same research approach was taken in analyzing and responding to the secondary research questions of this thesis. The first of the secondary research questions, did child soldiers affect the nature of fighting during the civil war? relies heavily on eyewitness accounts and testimonies from Sierra Leoneans that fought for the RUF. The question seeks a correlation between whether the brutality of the crimes committed during the civil war were directly related to the immaturity and coercion child soldiers faced. The second question, what institutions and organizations share accountability for child soldiers throughout Sierra Leone's civil war? seeks to understand the role of organizations that should have helped mitigate the conditions that primed and allowed the RUF to use child soldiers.

### Repeatability of the Study

As mentioned above, this thesis used qualitative analysis and rationale to conclude the reasons for the RUF's use of child soldiers. Due to the highly subjective nature of the thesis questions, and conclusions, scholarly opinion may vary. The most obvious variance in conclusions would be the understanding that children conscientiously chose to fight for the RUF and the prevalence of child soldiers was an example of an extreme form of neo-Patrimonialism. Despite the potential for such a variance, the

research for this thesis was extensive and reviewed many sources to develop and evaluate theory.

### Weaknesses of a Case Study

Despite the applicability of using a qualitative, critical instance case study to address the research questions, this research method has inherent flaws and is fallible. A significant weakness in qualitative research is maintaining objectivity while developing conclusions to support the thesis. More specifically for this thesis, a challenge was accepting the neo-Patrimonial theory that failed Sierra Leonean government services triggered children to conscientiously join and fight for the RUF. By ignoring the neo-Patrimonial theory, this thesis's analysis would have been vulnerable to that theory's arguments. The mitigating approach taken to avoid biased conclusions was finding counter evidence and critically evaluating as many different theories as possible. The most logical and rational theory based on evidence from scholarly, reputable resources remained, and comprised this thesis.

Another weakness in the qualitative research and study of this thesis is the absence of objective, numerical data that specifically deduces conclusions within an incremental values. Analysis and conclusions derived from exact numbers of child soldiers that fought for the RUF, or numerical indicators positing a reflection of a greater theory are not present in this thesis. A study using a Likert scale may have been able to gather data pertaining to the attitudes of former child soldiers, but was not possible to administer given the confidentiality of former child soldiers and adverse conditions in Sierra Leone. In addition, a strong reliance on statistics or numerical data would not have

assisted in this thesis due to the nature of the thesis topic, which is heavily subjective and uses qualitative sources.

### Limitations

Documentation regarding Sierra Leone's civil war was not as thorough as other conflicts such as World War II, and there remains a cloud of anonymity over the victims and young transgressors of the conflict in hopes of giving the child soldiers of Sierra Leone a second chance. Due to much of the information regarding the experience of child soldiers and victims coming from anonymous accounts and testimonies, it was impossible to develop an exact picture of the inner workings of the RUF's child soldier structure. In addition, each of the major political powers that used military force also used child soldiers at one point throughout Sierra Leone's civil war. The Sierra Leone Army, tribal militias known as Kamajors, and RUF were guilty of forcing children to fight.<sup>168</sup> Despite the wide use of child soldiers, this thesis concentrates on the RUF's use of child soldiers, as they were the instigators and most egregious violators of this crime through the number of children they recruited. This thesis also only covered events of the conflict to the mid-1990s even though the civil war lasted over a decade. This is because the RUF used child soldiers from the onset of the civil war.

### Definitions

Sierra Leone's civil war was more than a purely African event with the involvement of diamond traders, South African mercenaries, the UN, and thus with the international community's involvement, the complexity of terms and definitions

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<sup>168</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 360.

increased. In addition, several key academic terms require defining for clarity in this thesis. To improve the simplicity, below are some definitions of terms used in this thesis.

Child Soldier: A person under the age of fourteen that directly engages in an act of war during a military engagement. This definition is similar to the Sierra Leonean Constitution, which designates a person under the age of fourteen a “child” and a person between the ages of fourteen to seventeen a “young person.”<sup>169</sup>

Genocide: Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:

1. Killing members of the group;
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>170</sup>

Mass Atrocity: Acts against people that entail extreme violence such as killing, rape or maiming, inflicted on large numbers of people inflicted by state or non-state actors.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 247.

<sup>170</sup> Gregory Stanton, “What is Genocide?” Genocide Watch, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.genocidewatch.org/genocide/whatisit.html>.

<sup>171</sup> Task Force on the EU Prevention of Mass Atrocities, *The EU and the Prevention of Mass Atrocities, An Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses* (Europe: Foundation for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, 2013), 31.

Neo-Marxism: The social scientific theory that attributes Sierra Leone's weak infrastructure and poverty on external forces such as colonialism.<sup>172</sup>

Neo-Patrimonialism: The social scientific theory that explains a cause and effect correlation between state infrastructure failure and its citizen's subsequent uprising as the result of dissatisfaction. This theory incorporates an element of choice amongst children to fight for the RUF due to dissatisfaction with their condition.<sup>173</sup>

Structuralism: The social science theory that suggests external factors such as globalization, changing nature of warfare, economic stagnation, poverty, and social breakdown draw children into combat and are extensions of violence inherent in their own surroundings.<sup>174</sup>

West Africa: A sub-region of Africa that consists of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Guinea, and Ghana. This thesis will concentrate predominately on the nations of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria when referring to West Africa.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Riddell, "Internal and External Forces Acting upon Disparities in Sierra Leone," 389.

<sup>173</sup> Boas, 698.

<sup>174</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 39.

<sup>175</sup> United Nations Office for West Africa, "Mandate for the United Nations Office for West Africa for 2014-2015," accessed February 16, 2015, <http://unowa.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=752>.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

The RUF's use of child soldiers to wage Sierra Leone's civil war was due to Sierra Leone's weak infrastructure and the RUF's leadership that intentionally chose child soldiers to fight because they were easy to manipulate and required less financial resources than a conventional military. Sierra Leone's weak infrastructure failed to provide adequate state security, law and order, and education to keep the RUF from launching its invasion and using child soldiers to wage a guerilla war. The RUF's opportunistic and apathetic leadership intentionally chose child soldiers to wage Sierra Leone's civil war because they were unable to coalesce support from the adult population of Sierra Leone and saw children as an inexpensive human resource.<sup>176</sup> Chapter 4 presents the analysis regarding the reasons why the RUF used child soldiers to wage Sierra Leone's civil War.

#### State Security

State security in Sierra Leone leading up to and throughout the civil war was ineffectual at conducting its duties and establishing defensive positions from foreign threats like the RUF. State security in this context consists of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces and Police Force. Sierra Leone's Armed Forces had historically suffered from weak leadership and corruption. Sierra Leone's Constitution stipulates:

The principal function of the Armed Forces shall be to guard and secure the Republic of Sierra Leone and preserve the safety and territorial integrity of the

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<sup>176</sup> Abdullah, 235.

State, to participate in its development, to safeguard the people's achievements and to protect this constitution.

No member of the Armed Force shall hold office as President, Vice-President, Minister or Deputy Minister, or be qualified for election as a Member of Parliament whilst he remains a member of the Armed Forces.<sup>177</sup>

The RUF's invasion of Sierra Leone in 1991 was a failure of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces according to its Constitution. Since its independence in 1961, Sierra Leone's Armed Forces violated the Constitutional provision to separate its military leadership from politics and in many cases acted as an internal power broker for the political power encumbering the leadership of Sierra Leone's political parties.<sup>178</sup> The leadership of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces focused on quelling internal groups that threatened its power instead of national defense.

Sierra Leone's post-independence political coups reveal the involvement of the military in internal politics up to and throughout Joseph Momoh's presidency.<sup>179</sup> From 1967 to 1968, the Sierra Leone Armed Forces served as an *ex post facto* force during the internal conflict period between the APC and SLPP jockeying for the position of Prime Minister.<sup>180</sup> The 1968 election of Siaka Stevens as prime minister increased the involvement of the military in political affairs. Stevens ensured the Sierra Leone Armed

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<sup>177</sup> The Republic of Sierra Leone, *Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991*, The Sierra Leone Web, 1 October 1992, accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/constitution1991.pdf>, ch. 11, 165, 3.

<sup>178</sup> David Keen, "Greedy Elites, Dwindling Resources, Alienated Youths The Anatomy of Protracted Violence in Sierra Leone," *International Politics and Society* 2 (2003): 73.

<sup>179</sup> Pham, 38.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

Forces protected his interests by forming an officer corps that was exclusively loyal to his political party.<sup>181</sup> Within a year of his position as Prime Minister, Stevens appointed a lieutenant colonel from his political party by the name of Joseph Momoh to serve as Commander First Battalion of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces.<sup>182</sup> Momoh rose through the ranks of the military and in 1985 became Sierra Leone's President. His presidency ushered in a greater era of rampant corruption and poor leadership since its independence.

Steven's poor leadership, corrupt practices of purging military officials from different political backgrounds, and absence of adequate funds made the Sierra Leone Army incapable of fighting for the nation and defending itself from the RUF. The rampant corruption and embezzlement of state funds during the presidencies of Stevens and Momoh exacerbated already weak infrastructure and state services throughout Sierra Leone.<sup>183</sup> By 1991, Sierra Leone's Army was a victim to Sierra Leone's weak infrastructure. It was small, poorly trained, and under equipped to protect the nation from virtually any external threat. With approximately 3,694 soldiers armed with older, less effective rifles, and plagued with inoperable ground transport, Sierra Leone's Army could not defend the nation from the RUF.<sup>184</sup> The RUF were better prepared to engage in conflict by the early 1990s. They had experience fighting in Liberia, AK-47 rifles, rocket-

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<sup>181</sup> Pham., 41.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Earl Conteh-Morgan and Mac Dixon-Fyle, *Sierra Leone at the End of the Twentieth Century History Politics and Society* (New York: Peter Lang International Publishing, 1999), 93.

<sup>184</sup> Abass Bundu, *Democracy by Force? A Study of International Military Intervention in the Conflict in Sierra Leone from 1991-2000* (London: Universal Publishers, 2001), 51.



propelled grenades, and even artillery batteries to support their operations.<sup>185</sup> The RUF's Liberian and Libyan backing assisted them with acquiring effective weapons systems.<sup>186</sup>

Sierra Leone's Army also suffered from poor training and weak discipline. Former child soldier Ishmael Beah describes Sierra Leone Army soldiers smoking marijuana and using brown-brown, cocaine laced with gunpowder, as a stimulant in the performance of their duties.<sup>187</sup> Beah's training while serving in the Sierra Leone Army consisted of soldiers manipulating him and other young boys to fight, by reminding them of the atrocities committed by the RUF. One Sierra Leone Army officer remarked, "This is your time to revenge the deaths of your families and make sure more children do not lose their families."<sup>188</sup> The actual training Beah received from the Sierra Leone Army taught him how to use a rifle and had him run through shooting exercises, but did little else to prepare him for war.<sup>189</sup> Sierra Leone's Armed Forces were thus incapable of defending the country from the RUF.

Sierra Leone's police force was ineffective at conducting its duties and tended to protect the wealthy. Journalist Mohammed Legally-Cole remarked, "The police have become an instrument of the rich."<sup>190</sup> Their training was poor as many Sierra Leonean

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<sup>185</sup> Bundu, 51.

<sup>186</sup> Staff Reporter, "Libya Funded Sierra Leone Civil War Court Hears," *Mail and Guardian*, October 16, 1998, accessed May 2, 2015, <http://mg.co.za/article/1998-10-16-libya-funded-sierra-leone-civil-war-court-hears>.

<sup>187</sup> Beah, 104, 121.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>190</sup> Legally-Cole, "Legacy of Foday Sankoh: 'Sierra Leone's Hitler'."

police officers went decades without any formal training.<sup>191</sup> The police force had an alienating effect on many Sierra Leonean youths forced to live on the streets. Instead of providing long-term solutions to abandoned Sierra Leonean street children, some of which consumed drugs, Sierra Leone's police arrested and engaged in aggressive police tactics to try to curb the problem. This pushed many Sierra Leonean children away from reform and deeper toward the edge of society.<sup>192</sup> Street children, especially young boys, without families were an easy target for the RUF to turn into fighters. The issue of aimless young boys in Sierra Leone contributed to "lumpen" street culture, which intertwined with the history of the RUF.<sup>193</sup> More on this topic below.

Internal security was also problematic with the Sierra Leone police heavily monitoring and stopping political dissent within Sierra Leone. Under the leadership of Siaka Stevens in 1971, an APC political party militia unit became part of the Sierra Leonean police force and incorporated into an internal security unit named the State Security Department. This unit specialized in combatting internal threats to reigning political parties and focused its attention on controlling civil disobedience and the protection of Sierra Leone's chief executive.<sup>194</sup> By the mid-1970s, the State Security Department turned Sierra Leone into a defacto one-party state and aggressively investigated and punished groups that posed a threat to Sierra Leone's executive level

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<sup>191</sup> Human Rights Watch, "We'll Kill You if You Cry, Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict," *Human Rights Watch* 15, no. 1 (2003): 68.

<sup>192</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 329.

<sup>193</sup> Abdullah, 207.

<sup>194</sup> Pham, 47.

leadership.<sup>195</sup> Similar to the armed forces, Sierra Leone's police force performed poorly at protecting the nation from RUF's invasion in 1991. The RUF's harsh tactics in dealing with youth and political dissenters led to a sizeable population of disenfranchised Sierra Leoneans that eventually fell under the influence of the RUF. The military and police force were too weak, corrupt, and internally focused to stop the RUF.<sup>196</sup> Their indifference to Sierra Leone's external security threats was one of the factors that allowed the RUF to invade and recruit child soldiers.

### Law and Order

Sierra Leone's law enforcement reflected the system of law and order throughout the country leading up to the civil war. Its legal system chiefly consisted of General Law inherited from Britain, and a Customary Law practiced by Sierra Leone's tribes.<sup>197</sup> The General Law system, which enforced Sierra Leone's constitution, did not provide an impartial system of prosecution leading up to the civil war.<sup>198</sup> Not surprisingly, the legal system did not protect its young poverty-stricken citizens from engaging in crime or help them develop through protecting their basic rights. Outdated laws protecting children did

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>196</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 3A* (Sierra Leone: Graphic Packaging, 2005), 148.

<sup>197</sup> Human Rights Watch, "We'll Kill You if You Cry, Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict," 15.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 67.

not provide justice for young victims that were physically and sexually abused by adults.<sup>199</sup>

In addition to a generally apathetic attitude toward youths, Sierra Leone's legal system mostly concerned itself with protecting the rights of its wealthy citizens.<sup>200</sup> The General Law system was corrupt and the legal process favored persecutors who had wealth. This meant that the wealthy maintained their status at the cost of a just legal system. The legal process required extensive funds for Sierra Leoneans to take legal action, eliminating the general Sierra Leonean public from engaging in litigious action when needed.<sup>201</sup> Sierra Leone's magistrates had a reputation for slowly processing paper work for court cases and in many instances, intentionally not recommending cases for the court system.<sup>202</sup> When the consequences of failed state services such as law enforcement become manifest, and law and order were obviously collapsing, Sierra Leone was a target for the RUF to launch its guerilla war.<sup>203</sup> These failures fueled the RUF's conviction and pushed them to take extreme measures such as using child soldiers to wage the guerilla war.

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<sup>199</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 243.

<sup>200</sup> Legally-Cole, "Legacy of Foday Sankoh: 'Sierra Leone's Hitler'."

<sup>201</sup> Human Rights Watch, "We'll Kill You if You Cry, Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict," 67.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> William P. Murphy, "Military Patrimonialism and Child Soldier Clientalism in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean Civil Wars," *African Studies Review* 46, no. 2 (2003): 65.

## Education

The education system for Sierra Leonean youths failed to provide a structure to not only educate children but also keep them away from the RUF's influence during their invasion in 1991. The role of education in the RUF's recruitment of child soldiers not only reflects Sierra Leone's failed infrastructure leading up to the civil war, but also directly affected employment prospects for young people. Without education, young people had a significant void in daily structure, increasing the likelihood that they would fight for the RUF. As one Sierra Leonean girl remarked, "It is the educational opportunities that I want. You see, having lost both parents in the war, an education would serve as my mother and my father."<sup>204</sup> From the early nineteenth century onward, childhood education in Sierra Leone between the wealthier Krios residing in Freetown far exceeded the standards found in the Protectorate.<sup>205</sup> A study conducted by the Sierra Leone People's Party in 1947 calculated that fifty percent of children from the Colony received some sort of elementary education while less than five percent of children from the Protectorate received a similar level of education<sup>206</sup> Under Prime Minister Steven's rule from 1971 onwards, this disparity worsened as he moved to consolidate the nation's power and resources to Freetown, under his rule.<sup>207</sup> As the Sierra Leone's state-run services deteriorated from a worsening economy, state services like education became

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<sup>204</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 173.

<sup>205</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 85.

<sup>206</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3A*, 9.

<sup>207</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 55.

privatized.<sup>208</sup> The wealthy could only afford privatized education, and the disparity between the wealthy and poor of Sierra Leone increased, further exacerbating conditions for the civil war.

Lower levels of education for Sierra Leonean children decreased their ability to find employment and increased their vulnerability to the RUF. The RUF used the publicity tactic of vocally spreading egalitarian principles of government by appealing to the disenfranchised and underprivileged.<sup>209</sup> Secondary education enrollment and per capita income are all significant to understanding conflict risk.<sup>210</sup> Lower levels of education correspond to lower earnings, which create grievances that lead to conflict.<sup>211</sup> Sierra Leone's economic downturn in the early 1980s caused by rampant government corruption and diamond smuggling grossly decreased government expenditure on education, which thus decreased the number of educated people looking for jobs.<sup>212</sup>

Education also affects perceptions regarding radical groups by reducing the appeal of organizations that advocate political change through violent military action.<sup>213</sup> Uneducated children are more vulnerable to having their perceptions changed by extreme rhetoric from a radical political organization. Education can develop a greater moral sense in young people. Poverty-stricken nations with poor education standards tend to

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<sup>208</sup> Williams, 145.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>210</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, 588.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 569.

<sup>212</sup> Abdullah, 211.

<sup>213</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, 569.

have a much greater prevalence of child soldiers due to an immaturity on the behalf of young males that fall victim to fighting. Part of the success of the RUF's recruitment relied on using existing models of education to train child soldiers that filled a void in children to belong to a group and feel like they are developing.<sup>214</sup> Education was a significant component to the RUF's ability to recruit child soldiers to fight during the civil war.

The absence of a proper education system, especially in the Protectorate, led many children to work in diamond mines at an early age and become especially vulnerable to the RUF's recruitment. The diamond districts of Sierra Leone that employed child laborers were full of children for the RUF to try to recruit. The RUF espoused notions of reforming injustice toward those laborers as a recruitment tool.<sup>215</sup> Poorly educated and with few employment prospects, Sierra Leonean children faced a hard life whether on the streets or working in mines. Poverty-stricken children with few prospects of advancement began developing into a sizeable population in Sierra Leone by the late-1980s. They created a culture referred to as the "rarray boy culture," which appropriately describes Sierra Leonean male youths prone to theft, drugs, drunkenness, and antisocial behavior.<sup>216</sup> These youths would develop into the base of Sierra Leonean RUF fighters during the civil war.

Sierra Leone's infrastructure failures in its defense, law enforcement, law and order, and education as a reason for the RUF's invasion and recruitment of child soldiers

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<sup>214</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 117.

<sup>215</sup> Williams, 147.

<sup>216</sup> Abdullah, 207-208.

leads to understanding the causes of the civil war and RUF's use of child soldiers from a "structuralist" perspective.<sup>217</sup> These major state failures primed Sierra Leonean youths to fall victim to and engage in fighting for the RUF. Through this perspective, children hold little accountability for their roles as child soldiers because failures in infrastructure could not protect them from the RUF. As will be discussed below, the RUF's recruitment tactics of forcing children to consume drugs and the murder of entire villages diminished the notion that child soldiers actively partook in fighting. Furthering the argument for a "structuralist" perspective in understanding the RUF's use of child soldiers is the socio-economic circumstances that contributed to this outcome.<sup>218</sup>

Sierra Leone's dire economic and infrastructure conditions contributed to the RUF's use of child soldiers by creating abhorrent living conditions that led to a shortage of adult recruits and pushed the RUF to use children. As already mentioned, at this time fifty-five percent of Sierra Leone's population was under the age of eighteen and the average lifespan of a Sierra Leonean was approximately forty years of age.<sup>219</sup> The young population of Sierra Leone correlates to Sierra Leone's record of maintaining the status of the least developed nation in the world from 1983 to 2004 according to the UN's Human Development Index.<sup>220</sup> From 1986 to 1989, western European aid to Sierra Leone dropped significantly, which depressed Sierra Leone's economic state and reduced the number of operating state institutions and services to treat Sierra Leone's many health

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<sup>217</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 34-35.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>219</sup> Woods and Reese, 20.

<sup>220</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3B*, 241.



issues.<sup>221</sup> By 1991, the relatively high population of children in Sierra Leone was apparent enough for the RUF to use them as a fighting force.

The young population of Sierra Leone meant that there were a significant number of misguided and aimless young boys susceptible to the RUF's recruitment. By the late 1980s, this epidemic provided the RUF a source of fighters. The RUF's primary base of fighters started with unemployable male youths that came from backgrounds where they were socially alienated and disconnected from villages after having had disputes with local chiefs or working for minimal pay in diamond mines.<sup>222</sup> Most relevant of all, male youths and their culture of engaging in criminal behavior existed throughout Sierra Leone's history, and intertwined with Sierra Leone's political system from the late 1960s onward. Sierra Leone's independence in 1961 brought about political leaders running for office and using male youths as thugs for their political activities.<sup>223</sup> Upon a politician's election to office, the male youths that engaged in political coercion did not receive further compensation and remained on the streets, creating an alienating effect amongst the youths against authority.

The origins of the connection between street youth culture and politics directly contributed to the RUF's use of child soldiers. Karl Marx analyzed the implications of political leaders using young unemployable male youths as strongmen for political intimidation in his "Communist Manifesto." He described these youths as,

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<sup>221</sup> Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle, 103.

<sup>222</sup> Keen, 78.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

The “dangerous class”, [lumpenproletariat] the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.<sup>224</sup>

Marx’s perception of lumpens, or the lower class youths, as tools for political leaders to ignite a revolution was similar to the way the RUF used youths as child soldiers. The RUF used lumpens as “foot soldiers” to carry out their political dealings with the intent of discarding them after they conducted violent acts to intimidate and coerce opponents.<sup>225</sup> This reveals the intent to use child soldiers as a force they could ultimately disregard. Marx’s lumpenproletariat is an important component to the RUF and use of child soldiers.

The RUF’s origins in the early 1980s shared ties with the APC political party that represented the working class of Sierra Leone. In the 1970s the APC political party’s youth wing committed acts of political intimidation such as arson and assault on opposing political organizations and leaders.<sup>226</sup> As Sierra Leone’s economy worsened, middle class males began to partake and shape street youth culture and align the destructive street youth culture with overtures of revolutionary change.<sup>227</sup> Over time, street youth culture synergized with Sierra Leone’s radical student organizations, which

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<sup>224</sup> Marx, Karl, Frederick Engels, and Samuel Moore, “The Communist Manifesto,” *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers: 1969), 107.

<sup>225</sup> Abdullah, 207.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 208.

forged the base of the RUF's leadership.<sup>228</sup> This ultimately ingrained the idea in the minds of the RUF's leadership to see street youth as a constituent base of support for their operations. Most important of all, the street youth that comprised the leadership of the RUF were too inexperienced and lacked drive to launch a revolution in Sierra Leone.<sup>229</sup> The RUF's leadership in the late 1980s and early stages of the invasion in 1991 were unable to generate a base of materiel and human resource support amongst Sierra Leoneans for their guerilla war and the RUF turned to children to fill the role of soldiers.<sup>230</sup>

In the early 1980s, with Sierra Leone's economy experiencing a recession, student groups at the Fourah Bay College grew increasingly radical with their rhetoric and calls for revolutionary change. Radical students at the college began talking of the need for a revolution in Sierra Leone and looked to then Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gadhafi's "Green Book" ideology of Pan-Africanism as an inspiration for support.<sup>231</sup> Gadhafi was clear with his socialist as well anti-imperialist views. His "Green Book" ideology called for an end to class in society and staunchly criticized perceived imperialist condescension toward African customs and traditions.<sup>232</sup> Fourah Bay College student leaders and members of the Pan African Union at the college met with Libyan

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<sup>228</sup> Abdullah, 235.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 212-213.

<sup>232</sup> Henry M. Christman, *Qaddafi's Green Book* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 48, 108.

political leaders in 1982 and shortly thereafter began to receive training in Libya in revolutionary insurgent tactics.<sup>233</sup> However, the leadership of the Pan African Union failed to develop an ideology that was appealing to Sierra Leoneans and therefore could not recruit members at the level required for an adequate revolution.<sup>234</sup> The importance of the Pan African Union at this time is in the recruitment of a key leader of the RUF.

Despite their lack of appeal amongst Sierra Leoneans, in the early 1980s, Pan African Union members recruited a Sierra Leonean by the name of Foday Sankoh to join their ranks. Sankoh's served ten years in a Sierra Leone prison for attempting to launch a coup against the government in 1969, which augmented his anti- government ideology.<sup>235</sup> One of Sankoh's major issues with leadership was his education, which went no further than elementary school. Because of his weak education, he was unable to coalesce support for the RUF amongst intellectuals to advance the movement and thus gain a greater support base of Sierra Leoneans. The RUF turned to children to fight their guerilla war because they did not appeal to Sierra Leonean adults. The RUF also used child soldiers because of the leadership's desire to gain wealth.<sup>236</sup> The RUF's "Operation Pay Yourself" consisted of its fighters looting the belongings of Sierra Leonean's they pillaged and killed and taking their resources to sustain operations.<sup>237</sup> Child soldiers and

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<sup>233</sup> Legally-Cole, "Legacy of Foday Sankoh: 'Sierra Leone's Hitler'."

<sup>234</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3A*, 527.

<sup>235</sup> Abdullah, 218.

<sup>236</sup> Denov, *Child Soldiers Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*, 65.

<sup>237</sup> "Foday Saybana Sankoh, an African Revolutionary, Died on July 29th, Aged 65," *The Economist*, August 7, 2003, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/node/1974062>.

other RUF fighters that seized supplies from victims were much less costly and the RUF's leadership reaped the benefit of his fighters' work without a significant financial cost. Evidence suggests that Sankoh and the RUF's senior leadership were directly responsible for implementing child soldiers.

The details regarding Sankoh's orders to subordinates for the implementation of child soldiers are vague. He was keen enough to pass along orders verbally to his commanders, likely out of fear of eventual criminal prosecution.<sup>238</sup> However, RUF members' testimony ultimately found Sankoh and Taylor responsible for implementing child soldiers during the Special Court for Sierra Leone trial. Sierra Leone Special Court documents charge NPFL leader, Charles Taylor with leading the NPFL and assisting with the planning of a Sierra Leone invasion, but acknowledges that he, much like Sankoh, was a strategic leader rather than a field commander.<sup>239</sup> Ex-Brigadier General of the Armed Forces of Liberia, John S. Tarnue testified that Charles Taylor told Sankoh, "Look whenever you are fighting a war, the strength of any revolution, it depends on manpower. They have to recruit whoever they meet, old people, young people, young girls, young boys, so that's what they did."<sup>240</sup> During an interview in 2000, Sankoh acknowledged that all forces, "even the RUF are responsible" for atrocities throughout the civil war.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Gaviria.

<sup>239</sup> Special Court for Sierra Leone, "Prosecutor vs Charles Ghankay Talyor," Case No. SCSL-03-01-T, May 30, 2012, 3.

<sup>240</sup> Richman Cohen, *War Don Don*.

<sup>241</sup> Journeyman Pictures, "The Sierra Leone Rebel Leader Who Refused to Disarm."

Sankoh had the loyalty and following of several RUF colleagues to serve as direct subordinates to carry out the RUF's operations. Sankoh's direct reports, RUF commanders Sam Bockarie, also known as the "Mosquito," Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon, and Augustine Gbao were key leaders under Sankoh that implemented the use of child soldiers.<sup>242</sup> Each of these men served as RUF commanders at different times throughout the civil war. The Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted these four former RUF commanders in 2004 and finally convicted Sesay, Kallon, and Gbao of war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2009.<sup>243</sup> Bockarie's involvement in the civil war as a senior ranking RUF military commander dates back to 1991 and lasted close to a decade.<sup>244</sup> He died in 2003, likely assassinated by Taylor's forces for testifying against him.<sup>245</sup> Bockarie and Sesay executed the orders of Foday Sankoh throughout the civil war, which included forcibly conscripting, training, and implementing child soldiers to wage the civil war.<sup>246</sup> During Issa Sesay's 2009 war crimes trial in Freetown, Prosecuting Attorney Chris Santora concluded that Sesay knew about and encouraged the use of child soldiers

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<sup>242</sup> Special Court for Sierra Leone, "Prosecutor vs Charles Ghankay Talyor," 14.

<sup>243</sup> The Residential Special Court for Sierra Leone, "The Prosecutor vs. Issa Hassan Sesay, Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao," accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.rscsl.org/RUF.html>.

<sup>244</sup> Special Court for Sierra Leone, "Prosecutor vs Sam Bockarie, also known as the Mosquito," Case No. SCSL-03-01-T, May 30, 2012, 3.

<sup>245</sup> The Hague Justice Portal, "Bockarie, Sam," accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.haguejusticeportal.net/index.php?id=8324>.

<sup>246</sup> Special Court for Sierra Leone, "Prosecutor vs Charles Ghankay Talyor," 29, 30.

throughout the civil war.<sup>247</sup> The significance of Bockarie, Sesay, Kallon, and Gbao is that each of these men conscientiously contributed to the RUF's use of child soldiers at the field level and thus conclude the intentional use of child soldiers by the RUF's leadership.

#### Child Soldiers Affected the Nature of fighting during the civil war

Civil wars ignited by invasions by guerilla groups in the name of revolution are commonly more brutal and violent than conventional wars. Frederich Engels, political theorist and Marxist, commented that the success of guerilla wars fought by rebels relies on offensive action to prevent a guerilla groups base of constituents from hesitating to the support the cause.<sup>248</sup> Therefore, for a rebel group to have some measure of success against a larger more well-equipped conventional military force, they must embrace a more violent, unconventional style of warfare.<sup>249</sup> In the case of Sierra Leone's civil war, the RUF used violent tactics like killing off entire adult populations of villages to scare and coerce children into committing atrocities.<sup>250</sup> The RUF's use of extraordinary violence influenced the nature of war throughout this conflict.

Leading up to the 1991 RUF invasion of Sierra Leone, Sankoh recruited and trained the first iteration of RUF fighters known as the "vanguards;" these were Liberian

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<sup>247</sup> Richman Cohen, *War Don Don*.

<sup>248</sup> Kitchen, Martin, "Friedrich Engels' Theory of War," *Military Affairs* 41, no. 3 (1977): 122.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> Gaviria.

and Sierra Leonean citizens forced by Sankoh to fight for the RUF or face death.<sup>251</sup> A subset of the initial RUF fighters was the Small Boys Unit, which consisted of male children approximately ten to fourteen years of age tasked with guarding senior officials.<sup>252</sup> As the war progressed, the involvement of children throughout the RUF's operations became commonplace. By the time the civil war ended in January 2003, an estimated fifty percent of the RUF's 15,000 fighters were child soldiers.<sup>253</sup>

Sierra Leone's civil war reveals that using children to fight military conflicts can affect the nature of war. At the very least, wars fought by children have another element of brutality; children killing and dying on the battlefield. But in the case of Sierra Leone's civil war, it is the fact that children needed extensive psychological programming and other forms of coercion to fight that affected the nature of the conflict. Adult RUF members used intimidation, drugs, and trauma to get children to fight. One child soldier spoke of the RUF's physical and emotional abuse and constant reminders from RUF leadership that his parents were dead and his RUF commander was his new father.<sup>254</sup> Another child soldier remarked that the RUF commander in charge of his unit shot and killed the mother of children to intimidate his group of child soldiers into following his orders or face similar consequences.<sup>255</sup> Alcohol and drugs desensitized and numbed child

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<sup>251</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3A*, 105.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>253</sup> Ramgoolie, 148.

<sup>254</sup> Maclure and Denov, 124.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.



soldiers to the horrors of killing and committing mass atrocities on the battlefield.<sup>256</sup> One RUF child soldier remarked, “We were always drugged before we fight” to increase an RUF fighter’s ferocity on the battlefield.<sup>257</sup>

War crimes and crimes against humanity were prevalent throughout the civil war in part due to the use of child soldiers. Limb amputations and sexual assault were two of the common atrocities committed by the RUF. The RUF’s goal with limb amputations was to eliminate the power that males had in households, as they were the most physically capable member of a family.<sup>258</sup> Limb amputations also served as a reminder to civilians throughout the country to keep from voting during elections at the risk of the RUF severing a limb.<sup>259</sup> Children committed the majority of limb amputations throughout the civil war in part because it was easier for a RUF commander to order someone else to sever a limb than for the commander to do it.<sup>260</sup> Sexual assault on minors, both male and female was common by adult members of the RUF. An estimated 215,000 to 257,000 women and girls faced sexual assault throughout the civil war.<sup>261</sup> Pregnant girls faced

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<sup>256</sup> Gaviria.

<sup>257</sup> Maclure and Denov, 127.

<sup>258</sup> Norimitsu Onishi, “Sierra Leone Measures Terror in Severed Limbs,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1999, accessed April 21, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/22/world/sierra-leone-measures-terror-in-severed-limbs.html>.

<sup>259</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth Vol. 3A*, 473.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.

<sup>261</sup> Human Rights Watch, “We’ll Kill You if You Cry, Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict,” 25-26.

forced sterilization at the hands of the rebels and in some cases underwent forced abortions by the RUF for no other reason than for their entertainment.<sup>262</sup>

The RUF's physical and emotional abuse and widespread use of drugs to get children to fight led RUF fighters to commit atrocities throughout the civil war. Children high on brown-brown and disillusioned were more apt to engage targets regardless of the legal and ethical implications than a trained adult soldier would from a professional military force. RUF training of child soldiers was usually quick and consisted of a brief instruction on how to use a Kalashnikov weapons system and psychological hardening exercises.<sup>263</sup> Not surprisingly, child soldiers did not receive ethics training or rules of engagement training. The RUF trained for just the opposite, seeing the need to implement fear and intimidation to successfully wage their guerilla war. One victim said of child soldiers that, "They [children] were cruel and hard hearted; even more than the adults. They don't know that is good and bad. If you beg an older one you may convince him to spare you, but the younger ones, they don't know what is sympathy, what is mercy."<sup>264</sup> Granted, virtually all wars result in civilian casualties, drugged, poorly trained fighters are simply more apt to commit atrocities, war crimes, and crimes against humanity than a trained and disciplined military.

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<sup>262</sup> Gaviria.

<sup>263</sup> Dr. Mariam Denov, "Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Experiences, Implications and Strategies for Rehabilitation and Community Reintegration" (University of Ottawa, Canada, 2005), 4-5.

<sup>264</sup> Kieran Mitton, "Irrational Actors and the Process of Brutalisation: Understanding Atrocity in the Sierra Leonean Conflict (1991–2002)," *Civil Wars* 14, no. 1 (2012): 113.

The International Community Shares Responsibility for  
the Use of Child Soldiers throughout the civil war

Accountability for the RUF's use of child soldiers and brutality that transpired throughout Sierra Leone's civil war falls on more than just the RUF and failures in Sierra Leone's state infrastructure. The RUF's leadership under Foday Sankoh and Charles Taylor was indeed cold-hearted in the methods chosen to wage the guerilla war, but other factors contributed to the RUF's use of child soldiers. External powers such as trading companies that siphoned off Sierra Leone's natural resources without contributing to the development of the nation and the international community's failure to respond to the civil war also share accountability. Sierra Leone's most profitable natural resource, diamonds, were as much of a curse as they were a blessing. Under the leadership of Siaka Steven's APC regime, by the mid-1970s Sierra Leone's political and social elite were working extensively with diamond trading companies to illegally mine and smuggle the resource out of the country to avoid paying fees.<sup>265</sup>

Sierra Leone's state run company, the National Diamond Mining Company, ran the Sierra Leone Selection Trust, which controlled Sierra Leone's diamond mines.<sup>266</sup> In the early 1970s, two prominent diamond traders from Lebanon, Jamil Said Mohamed and Hanneh Shamel, bribed their way into the auspices of Stevens to attain positions of authority on the National Diamond Mining Company to smuggle diamonds.<sup>267</sup> Several other Lebanese traders dominated Sierra Leone's diamond politics only to worsen the

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<sup>265</sup> Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle, 94.

<sup>266</sup> Smillie, Gberie, and Hazelton, 44.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

country's dire economic situation throughout the 1980s.<sup>268</sup> Smuggling diamonds out of Sierra Leone avoided the significant cost of fees and tariffs due to the Sierra Leone government, grossly diminishing state revenues, which could have assisted in enhancing Sierra Leone's state services.

The international community also shares responsibility for its inability to take action to stop the RUF during the civil war. The first external force to try to intervene in Sierra Leone in 1992 was the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).<sup>269</sup> African leaders from the Organization of African Unity called on Sierra Leone to find a peaceful solution to its civil war and requested the ECOWAS to monitor the situation, but in many instances, these African leaders were themselves in power due to their own coups and forceful regime changes.<sup>270</sup> Nigerian security forces comprised the majority of peacekeeping forces in Sierra Leone, but were restricted to peacekeeping operations according to their status of forces agreement with Sierra Leone.<sup>271</sup> The Nigerian security forces were not well trained or disciplined to the extent needed to make effective change in Sierra Leone. By 1997, Nigerian led peace efforts had failed to the point where Nigerian security forces were actively engaging and firing on not only the RUF, but also Sierra Leone government security forces.<sup>272</sup> Stability efforts made by external involvement set back peace efforts. In 1998, Nigerian forces fought the RUF for

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<sup>268</sup> Pham, 73-74.

<sup>269</sup> Woods and Reese, 39.

<sup>270</sup> Pham, 127-128.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

control of Freetown with the goal of seizing Sierra Leone's diamonds.<sup>273</sup> Efforts made by the ECOWAS failed to stop the RUF's advancement and in some instances exacerbated the conflict. It was not until the UN intervened in 1999 with significant British support that the civil war peace efforts began to take shape.

### Summary

The RUF's use of child soldiers was the result of failures in Sierra Leone's state infrastructure that failed to protect its children leading up to and throughout the civil war. Sierra Leone's weak state security allowed the RUF to militarily launch its guerilla war and conscript child soldiers. The Sierra Leone Army was weak and poorly trained. It was ill resourced to fight and keep the RUF from maintaining a successful guerilla war. Sierra Leone's law enforcement did not detect the RUF's advancement because it focused on quelling internal political opposition. A weak Sierra Leonean legal system, which consisted of harsh law enforcement tactics that alienated the general population from trusting the government, predominately concerned itself with enforcing laws that protected the wealthy. The failure to enforce the rights of children throughout Sierra Leone created a segment of Sierra Leone's youth that were unguided and in a position for the RUF to recruit. Sierra Leone's education system failed to keep children away from performing mining jobs or other manual labor leading up to the civil war, which meant many children were in a prime position for the RUF to take advantage of by the time the civil war began.

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<sup>273</sup> Leatherwood, 79.

The issue of Sierra Leone's horrendous level of poverty made finding a force large enough for the RUF to wage a successful guerrilla war difficult. With the RUF's leadership incapable of convincing enough of the adult population of Sierra Leone to join them in their conquest, they used children. Charles Taylor and Foday Sankoh were willing and ready to wage a guerilla war using child soldiers as their default human resource. They had field level leaders in Sam Bockarie and Issa Sesay that were quick to execute their orders. The destruction enacted by child soldiers that were drugged and traumatized from the RUF's tactics of murdering their families and villages made the nature of the fighting more severe. Children fell victim to force by the RUF and were forever scarred by their experiences as child soldiers. Ultimately, attempts by the ECOWAS and UN from the mid-1990s onward may have initially exacerbated tensions during Sierra Leone's civil war, but were a step in the right direction toward Sierra Leone's peace.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) forcibly recruited and used child soldiers to wage military conflict, which constituted a mass atrocity and led to egregious acts of brutality during Sierra Leone's civil war. The use of child soldiers was the culmination of failures in state infrastructure, corrupt leadership, and the RUF's drive to usurp political power for their own leadership's wealth. However, the origins of the civil war trace back to Sierra Leone's history fraught with slavery, colonialism, political corruption, and failures in state infrastructure. These failures led to abject poverty, which instigated the creation of the RUF, and eventual civil war.

The history of colonialism and slavery created interethnic divisions throughout Sierra Leone that politically and economically disadvantaged the certain ethnic groups that became the backbone of the All Peoples Congress (APC) and Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) political parties. Similarly, Sierra Leone's Freetown capital dominated Sierra Leone's political concerns and focused the financial resources of the nation on the upper class elite living in that area. Sierra Leoneans living outside Freetown in the Protectorate worked the menial and laborious jobs of farming and mining. Due to the upper class's domination of Sierra Leone's financial resources in Freetown, the rest of the nation suffered from abject poverty. Many Sierra Leonean's, especially youths, suffered from unemployment. Among unemployed boys, a culture of unlawful transgressions became the norm, making them a target for recruitment by political organizations looking for a work force to intimidate opponents. These unemployable youths shared many parallels and similarities to Marx's lumpenproletariat. They contributed to the forming of

the RUF and became a base of young males for the RUF to use as a disposable fighting force during the civil war.

The incompetent and corrupt political leadership of Sierra Leone from its independence in 1961 led to egregious failures in Sierra Leone's infrastructure and economy. The successive regimes under Siaka Stevens (1971 to 1985) and Joseph Momoh (1985 to 1992) destroyed Sierra Leone's economy, diminishing its ability to run a military, police force, and education system. Sierra Leone's collapse during the mid-1980s proved an instrumental component for Foday Sankoh and other members of the Pan African Union to coalesce and start the RUF. With support from Libyan agents seeking to create instability throughout Africa for revolutionary change as part of Muammar Gadhafi's "Green Book" initiative, the RUF's initial leadership received training in Libya where they met other African guerilla group leaders like Charles Taylor from Liberia to join forces to take over their respective nation's weak governments. However, the crux of the RUF is that it was a weak and intellectually deficient organization that did not appeal to the majority of Sierra Leoneans. This weakness kept the organization from appealing to a more adult audience, and thus RUF failed to recruit enough adult fighters to wage a successful guerilla war. On March 23, 1991, the RUF launched its invasion of Sierra Leone under the leadership of Foday Sankoh and Charles Taylor and implemented both adult and child soldiers to accomplish their ends.

The RUF used child soldiers because they did not have adequate leadership to coalesce a base of constituents from the adult population of Sierra Leone and saw children as a fighting force that did not require the same financial resources as a conventional military. Operation Pay Yourself reveals the intent of Sankoh and his



leadership to takeover and control Sierra Leone for their financial benefit, rather than egalitarian principles of governance. The immediate and premeditated implementation of child soldiers with the RUF's Small Boys Unit in 1991 and mass murder of entire adult populations of villages to coerce children to fight clearly indicates that the RUF chose child soldiers as part of their rebel force to wage war. Their harsh tactics and use of drugs to desensitize child soldiers pushed children to commit atrocities and increased their effectiveness through intimidating civilians throughout their campaign.

Greed stands out as the predominant human trait that ignited and fueled Sierra Leone's civil war and pushed the RUF to use child soldiers. From the seventeenth to nineteenth century, western powers colonized Sierra Leone and enslaved its people for free labor. The British resettlement of freed slaves in 1808 created a social system that favored freed slaves over the native Sierra Leoneans and marked the beginning of Freetown's dominance of wealth and political power. As a result, Sierra Leone's political leaders ruled the nation for their own benefit and allowed greed and corruption to destroy Sierra Leone's economy. Foday Sankoh and Charles Taylor were the culmination of greed and corruption throughout Sierra Leone's history. Their mission to overthrow the APC government stemmed from their desire to usurp Sierra Leone's political power and gain wealth from the illegal sale of diamonds. Revolutionary change for the benefit of the common person was not the primary motivation as their organizations claimed. They used child soldiers because they lacked the resources to wage a conflict without them. Sierra Leone's civil war shows that it is crucial for the international community to do everything in its power to monitor and hold corrupt political leaders accountable for their wrongdoings to prevent conflicts like this from happening.

Sierra Leone's child soldiers suffered from permanent physical, mental, and emotional disorders from the decade long civil war. The experience of having their families executed and then being forced to commit atrocities permanently affected children throughout the rest of their lives. In 2000, the Sierra Leone government and UN Security Council passed Resolution 1315 on the situation in Sierra Leone to prosecute the civil war's, war criminals under a joint Sierra Leone UN prosecution team.<sup>274</sup> As part of the resolution, children between the ages of fifteen to eighteen would hold accountability for war crimes committed as fighters during the civil war.<sup>275</sup> This did not include punitive measures for war crimes, but put child soldiers on trial for accountability purposes. The trial process likely triggered and resurrected memories of war for child soldiers and victims, but also provided a measure of closure for the victims of the conflict. Today, many of Sierra Leone's former child soldiers continue to use drugs to numb the feelings of pain from the memories that haunt them. Not all former child soldiers lead lives of despair and sadness. For example, in 1996, Ishmael Beah attended a UN high school in New York and went on to receive a bachelor's degree from Oberlin College in Ohio. His success is inspiring and indicative of the potential former child soldiers have if given the opportunity to succeed.

Despite success stories like Beah's, there are still questionable and unresolved aspects to Sierra Leone's civil war. After a decade of fighting, and with the assistance of the international community, especially Britain, in 2003 the RUF and Sierra Leone government reached a peace agreement, whereby the RUF took a seat in the Sierra Leone

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<sup>274</sup> Ramgoolie, 149.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

government. In 1999, Sankoh became the head of Sierra Leone's Ministry of Mineral Resources, and several other high ranking RUF leaders enjoyed positions in Sierra Leone's government.<sup>276</sup> The Sierra Leone government arrested Sankoh six months later, where he spent the rest of his days in a prison cell until his death of natural causes in 2003.<sup>277</sup> Justice for war crimes during Sierra Leone's civil war was not served until 2009, when the Special Court for Sierra Leone sentenced Issa Sesay to fifty-two years, Morris Kallon to forty years, and Augustine Gboa to twenty-five years in a Rwandan prison for their leadership in the RUF throughout the civil war.<sup>278</sup> Although it took several years before the trial, it was crucial that the major leaders of the RUF throughout the civil war received lengthy prison sentences to show the world that the most prominent leaders of the RUF shared accountability for crimes.

Furthermore, on July 17, 1998 in the wake of Sierra Leone's civil war, Liberia's civil war, and the genocide in Rwanda, the International Criminal Court passed the Rome Statute, which allows the international community jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.<sup>279</sup> This statute provides the international community

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<sup>276</sup> Taylor Baines, "When Crime Pays," accessed May 5, 2015, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/165/29454.html>.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> The Residential Special Court for Sierra Leone, "The Prosecutor vs. Issa Hassan Sesay, Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao," accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.rscsl.org/RUF.html>.

<sup>279</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Summary of the Key Provisions of the ICC Statute," accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/1998/12/01/summary-key-provisions-icc-statute>.

jurisdiction to investigate and take measures to stop mass atrocities. It is a significant step in the right direction to prevent mass atrocities from happening.

### Recommendations to Prevent the Use of Child Soldiers

The issues of corrupt leadership, abject poverty, and threats posed by rebel organizations plague many other developing nations. Unfortunately, Sierra Leone is one of several countries that have recently endured conflicts that saw the use of child soldiers and will not be the last. The Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, rebel groups from the South Sudan, Central African Republic, Congo, and Somalia have all used child soldiers in the past fifty years. The Chadian government used approximately 7,000-10,000 children to wage conflict against rebels in Sudan in the mid-2000s.<sup>280</sup> Since 1998, child soldiers have fought in approximately thirty countries around the world.<sup>281</sup> Despite this, the international community's general awareness in regards to child soldiers is increasing. The criminal convictions for child soldier recruitment of the several aforementioned RUF leaders and conviction of Thomas Lubanga, a Congolese Warlord, show that the UN and international community seek to put an end to the use of child soldiers.<sup>282</sup>

Diplomacy is the most politically acceptable and effective means to reduce and eliminate the use of child soldiers on the battlefield. Democratic nations' foreign affairs agencies and ministries that implement policies and put pressure on host nation

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<sup>280</sup> Lydia Polgreen, "Fewer Conflicts Involve Child Soldiers, Report Finds," *New York Times*, May 22, 2008, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/22/world/africa/22child.html>.

<sup>281</sup> SOS Children's Villages, "Children in Conflict," accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.child-soldier.org/>.

<sup>282</sup> Polgreen.

governments to keep children from fighting in conflicts do so without the adverse repercussions of military engagements that could exacerbate conflicts.

### Responsibility to Protect

The UN stipulates conditions for the international community to intervene to provide stability during mass atrocities in its three pillars of the “Responsibility to Protect,” found in its *Outcome Document of the 2005 United Nations World Summit*. The three pillars are:

1. The State carries the primary responsibility for protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, and their incitement;
2. The international community has a responsibility to encourage and assist States in fulfilling this responsibility;
3. The international community has a responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian, and other means to protect populations from these crimes. If a State is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take collective action to protect populations, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.<sup>283</sup>

According to these pillars, the international community should have responded sooner to Sierra Leone’s civil war. However, in the early 1990s, the UN did not have the same proactive stance toward international intervention during mass atrocities. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Gali began to set the UN’s obligation to intervene in 1993 with Francis Deng, Sudanese Diplomat and UN Special Representative on Internally Displaced People, concluding host governments best protected their vulnerable populations, and that the international community should focus on using diplomacy when

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<sup>283</sup> Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, “Responsibility to Protect,” United Nations, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/prevent/genocide/adviser/responsibility.shtml>.

host nations decline UN support.<sup>284</sup> Realistically, the matter of international intervention in the conflicts and mass atrocities of foreign nations is a much greater issue than right versus wrong. International intervention in the form of stability operations can exacerbate conflicts and destabilize regions if conducted without extensive planning. They can also pull in the militaries' of foreign nations and commit them to a long and drawn-out conflict without the prospect of a solution. Military intervention can also lead nations with ulterior motives to provide support at some future cost to the host nation. Even with these complexities, the international community has a "Responsibility to Protect" under the UN's three pillars and should stand ready to do so to stop mass atrocities.

### Deterrence

The most effective means to deter political organizations and militaries from using child soldiers is to hold political and military leaders accountable for the use of child soldiers and publicize their trials and sentences. Information operations that communicate the consequences of using child soldiers to senior political leaders along with messages that deter children from fighting and redirect them to aid stations where they can receive support during conflicts could have helped children escape the RUF's forcible recruitment during Sierra Leone's civil war. Western militaries can also incorporate concerns for the use of child soldiers in their operational planning. If they know that the enemy is attempting to recruit children to fight, western militaries should plan their movement and maneuver scheme around the prevalence of child soldiers to avoid the image of engaging children on the battlefield. They should plan to sustain

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<sup>284</sup> Alex J. Bellamy, "The Responsibility to Protect and the Problem of Military Intervention," *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 619-620.

individually displaced persons that may have had their families and villages killed off and consider the medical implications of treating drugged children.

Lastly, financial support to a host country's government and military to combat guerilla groups can assist with defeating invasions without the adverse political repercussions of foreign military involvement. In 1993, the US provided \$18 million to Sierra Leone and under the leadership of Captain Valentine Strasser, head of Sierra Leone's National Provisional Ruling Council, the Sierra Leone Army pushed back RUF forces to Liberia and retook once lost diamond mines.<sup>285</sup> These efforts proved futile as the RUF regrouped, counterattacked, and advanced to Freetown two years later.<sup>286</sup> Nonetheless, funding proved successful at assisting Sierra Leone's government in combatting the RUF.

The ultimate means to eliminate the use of child soldiers is the ambitious policy of economically enhancing the economies of developing nations to promote the same values and infrastructure as western nations. Poverty and political corruption are inextricably linked to the root causes of Sierra Leone's civil war. Many other developing nations suffer similar fates where militant groups coalesce because of government corruption that leads to drastic economic inequalities between the nation's elites and the average citizen. Additionally, such organizations as the Human Rights Watch, Child Soldiers Organization, and UN maintain an awareness of conflicts where there may be child soldiers. Through reducing such corruption by closely monitoring governments and

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<sup>285</sup> Leatherwood., 78.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 79.

finding solutions to reduce extreme poverty the problem of child soldiers will be a problem of the past.

#### Further Research on the Topic

The issue of child soldiers during Sierra Leone's civil war is one small piece of the history of children throughout conflict. Africa has had far more than its fair share of conflicts where child soldiers fought for a guerilla group. A comparison between the use of child soldiers in other African conflicts and Sierra's Leone civil war would likely point out similarities in conditions between conflicts. Another study could seek to understand if child soldiers demonstrate an inability to uphold the UN's "Responsibility to Protect." Another research topic could look into the advantages and disadvantages child soldiers present on the battlefield to rebel groups and if child soldiers are more of a threat than adult soldiers. Finally, a research topic concerning the tactics and procedures for engaging a military unit of drugged child soldiers to maximize non-lethal effects on might yield interesting conclusions.



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