ORDINARY WARSCAPES IN SIERRA LEONE:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SIERRA LEONE CIVIL WAR AND

ITS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

A Thesis

by

JEREMIAH MATTHEW WAGSTAFF

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2006

Major Subject: Geography

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Jonathan M. Smith
Committee Members,	Christian Brannstrom
	Patrick K. Muana
Head of Department,	Douglas Sherman

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ABSTRACT

Ordinary Warscapes in Sierra Leone:

The Relationship between the Sierra Leone Civil War

and Its Cultural Landscape. (December 2006)

Jeremiah Matthew Wagstaff, B.S., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Jonathan Smith

The recent civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002) saw massive migrations amongst the civilian population and widespread damage to villages and towns. This study combines elements of military and cultural geography to ask the questions of how the events of the war changed the cultural landscape and how the cultural landscape influenced the course of the war. Fieldwork for this study was conducted during the summer of 2005 in the Eastern Province and included numerous semi-structured interviews regarding the landscape histories of villages, towns, and various temporary camps.

These findings revealed that a clear relationship existed between the civil war and the cultural landscape. On the one hand, the war caused dramatic changes in the morphology of the cultural landscape, creating three distinct landscapes (pre-war, war-time, and post-war), while on the other hand the cultural landscape went far to structure the character of the war.

In order to understand how the cultural landscape structured the war one must first consider how the landscape was perceived by each major faction (Revolutionary United Front, Sierra Leone Army, and Civil Defense Forces) as presenting a unique set of risks and opportunities. This perception was based in their strategic intentions and capabilities. Intentions can be understood as military objectives (derived from political goals), while capabilities can be understood as factors which constrain and enable action. Since each faction had different military objectives and capabilities they each perceived

the landscape in a unique manner and this perception influenced their military operations.

It is recommended that cultural geographers begin to study the impacts of war on the landscape and that military geographers expand their focus on the physical landscape by taking into account the role of the cultural landscape and environmental perception.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Erin Wagstaff, without whose support and motivation I would have never finished. Thank you for listening to me rattle on about Sierra Leone for the last two years, enduring my trip to Africa, and your constant help in editing this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOMENCLATURE

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group
EO	Executive Outcomes
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
RSLMF	Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
ULIMO	United Liberian Movement for Democracy
UNAMSIL	United Nations Aid Mission to Sierra Leone

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*When the rebels attacked they killed 3 people and burned
many houses and buildings like the school, market, church,
the chief's house and those of other important people.
They captured maybe 50 people who were forced to carry
everything valuable to Zogoda* (rebel base); *most of them
we never saw again. We all ran to the bush and hid until it
was safe. Some of us stayed there for several weeks or
even months. Then, we went to Kenema and stayed in the
camps. When we returned a few years later, there was
only rubble and foundations left.*

--Excerpts of interview with villagers from Kpai

The small West-African country of Sierra Leone recently emerged from a brutal
civil war (1991-2002), in which a majority of the fighting targeted the civilian
population, not opposing armed factions. During the war, at least fifty-thousand people
were killed, while thousands more suffered amputated limbs. Around one million
citizens became refugees in neighboring Guinea and Liberia and nearly the entire
population became internally displaced at one time or another.[1] These numbers were out
of a pre-war population of roughly four million people. These population disruptions
were largely the result of deliberate attacks on the civilian population practiced to
varying degrees by all of the major armed factions.

These strategies, as well as the demographic changes they precipitated, produced
widespread and fundamental changes in the cultural landscape of Sierra Leone. By
cultural landscape, I am referring to everything from settlement patterns, house types,
transportation networks, land use patterns, and urban morphology to less tangible

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This thesis follows the style of *African Affairs.*

[1] Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (Hurst & Company, London, 2005), p. 7.

elements of iconography and perceived meaning.[2] The variable character of this landscape played an important role in structuring the course of the war. The major goal of this study is to document and describe changes in the cultural landscape caused by the war. A secondary goal is to discern the role the landscape played in influencing the course of the war.

The major contribution of this study lies in furthering our understanding of the impact of war on the cultural landscape, a topic only a handful of studies in geography have examined. This knowledge can be useful to both policy makers and academics. If we are to solve the problems caused by war and repair its effects, we must first know what those effects are. Military geographers have rarely looked beyond physical factors and a major argument of this work is the equal, if not greater, relevance of the man-made landscape. There is also a heated debate in the literature on the war in Sierra Leone over the causes and nature of the war. This study has something to add to that debate, assuming changes in the cultural landscape reflect the character of the war at that time and place.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis seeks to answer two primary questions:
1) How was the cultural landscape of Sierra Leone changed during and after the war?
2) How did this cultural landscape influence the course of the war?

The first question is one of cultural geography and the second question is one of military geography. Both questions are unusual because cultural geographers have rarely studied the impact of war on the landscape and military geographers have rarely looked at the influence of the human landscape in shaping the outcome of wars. To my

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[2] My understanding of the term cultural landscape comes from Carl Ortwin Sauer, 'The morphology of landscape' in John Leighley (ed.), *Land and Life* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1967) and D.W. Meinig (ed.), *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essay* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979). My use of term cultural landscape is heavily biased to morphology, although at times I discuss meaning.

knowledge, no study has combined both of these questions in a single work. Although war is a topic rarely studied by cultural geographers, the ideas of one its most famous practitioners, Carl Sauer, form the basis of this study. In two well-known works, he outlines an approach for understanding the cultural landscape rooted in the concepts of morphology and perception.[3]

For Sauer, the landscape can be understood as being made up of a variety of forms, which combine to create structures. This framework for understanding the landscape is referred to by Sauer as the "morphologic method." In this work, I will examine the cultural landscape of Sierra Leone using this methodology, by understanding it as a variety of forms, which combine to produce four major structures, referred to as morphological units. These four morphological units are the village, town, rebel forest base, and transportation network. Each of these morphological units, or structures, can be broken down into their constituent forms, so that the structure of a village is made up of a variety of forms, such as house, farm, *sohkwehun*, *court barri*, church, etc.

The other concept that I borrow from Sauer is the notion that all landscapes are perceived as having a unique set of risks and opportunities by their inhabitants. These perceptions are unique because every culture sees the landscape in a different manner. I use this idea to understand how the four morphological units in question influenced the course of the conflict. While the three main factions involved in the war do not represent different cultures, they were certainly very different military institutions, each with unique habits of thought.

A handful of studies in geography have explored the impacts of war on the cultural landscape. Toal and Dahlman have investigated the effects of the war in Bosnia on resettlement in two counties. Their study emphasizes the politics and circumstances behind the creation of a post-war landscape, while describing war-time changes mainly

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[3] Carl Ortwin Sauer, 'The morphology of landscape' and 'Foreword to historical geography' in John Leighley (ed.), *Land and Life* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1967).

to set the context.[4] Steinberg and Taylor have written an interesting study of monuments and memorials in post-war Guatemala, but again their focus was on the post-war condition and they are concerned with iconography rather than morphology.[5] Falah has examined Israel's intentional destruction of Palestinian villages during and after the 1948 war.[6] His work is very comprehensive and empirical, although the subject matter is slightly different than my own.

Falah's work gave me the idea that individual villages could be studied, although we have gone about the research in completely different manners. He relies heavily on historical documents, whereas I rely mainly on semi-structured interviews with villagers. Steinberg and Taylor's study gave me the idea to include monuments and memorials in my description of the post-war landscape, although I was unable to find nearly as many as they had. I did not locate Toal and Dahlman's article until well after fieldwork and much writing, so they had little influence on this study.

Military geography has traditionally been concerned with the role of the physical landscape in shaping the outcome of wars and battles.[7] Attention is rarely given to the influence of the cultural landscape or changes in that landscape caused by the war. McColl and Lohman have discussed the locational strategies for the placement of insurgent bases, but have done so from a Maoist model of revolutionary warfare, which can neither be applied universally nor in the case of Sierra Leone.[8] In addition, terrain is

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[4] Carl Dahlman and Gerard Toal, 'Broken Bosnia: the localized geopolitics of displacement and return in two Bosnian places,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **95**, 3 (2005), pp. 644-662.
[5] Michael K. Steinberg and Matthew J. Taylor, 'Public memory and political power in Guatemala's postconflict landscape,' *The Geographical Review* **93**, 4 (2003), pp. 449-468.
[6] Ghazi Falah, 'The 1948 Israeli-Palestinian War and its aftermath: the transformation and designification of Palestine's cultural landscape,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **86**, 2 (1996), pp. 256-285.
[7] The most notable current works in military geography include: Eugene J. Palka & Francis A. Galgano (ed.)*, The Scope of Military Geography: Across the Spectrum from Peacetime to War* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 2000); Michael Stephenson (ed.), *Battlegrounds: Geography and the History of Warfare* (National Geographic, Washington, D.C., 2003); John M. Collins, *'Military Geography for Professionals and the Public'* (Brassey's, Washington, D.C., 1998); Harold A. Winters (ed.), *Battling the Elements: Weather and Terrain in the Conduct of War* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1998); and Patrick O'Sulllivan, *Terrain and Tactics* (Greenwood Press, New York, 1991).
[8] Andrew D. Lohman, 'Insurgencies and counter-insurgencies: a geographical perspective,' in Eugene J. Palka (ed.), *The Scope of Military Geography* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 2000) and Robert W. McColl,

understood as being universally perceived by different military forces because they have the same capabilities and limitations.

Although this study will take into account the role of physical geography, its implications for the war are not my primary concern. In civil wars, it is the human geography, and more specifically the cultural landscape, that is the leading geographical mediator. Dense vegetation or forbidding terrain may provide the shelter necessary to sustain and protect an insurgency, but the war must be won through control of the local populace.

I have relied heavily on the works of two anthropologists, Doug Henry and Paul Richards. Henry's PhD. Dissertation is primarily concerned with the impacts of the war on health and bodies, though he often includes detailed information on the places that these bodies inhabit. Richards's numerous works span many topics related to the war, in which he has occasionally discussed geographic themes and often given good description of war-time places.

I would like to emphasize the tremendous gap that exists in the literature, which this thesis is attempting to fill. As we have seen, there are only a handful of works in cultural geography that examine changes in the cultural landscape during and after wars. Furthermore, none of these do so in a systematic manner, in order to understand how the landscape changed as a totality. Instead, they examine one part of the landscape in order to emphasize a separate agenda. In military geography equally few works have discussed the role of the cultural landscape, and they have done so in a very general fashion. This thesis is original in that it has tackled both of these questions in a very detailed and systematic way. First to describe the total change in the landscape as a result of the war, both during and after the war, and second, to understand the total influence of the landscape upon the course of the war.

'The insurgent state: territorial bases of revolution,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **59**, 4 (1969), pp. 613-631.

Fieldwork and Research Methods

Fieldwork for this study was conducted over a two month period from May to July of 2005, in Kenema and Kailahun districts of the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. While in this region, I visited twenty-eight villages, seven towns, three military bases, six former IDP camps, and two former rebel bases. (See Figure 1.)
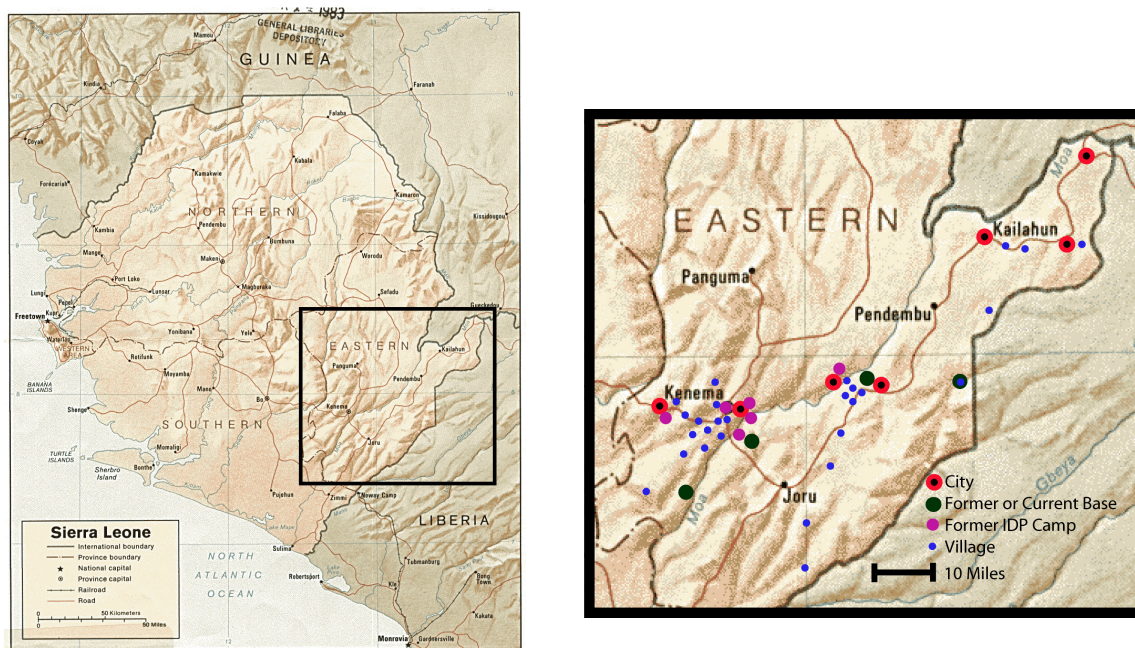
Figure 1: Map of Study Region (Relief Map, 1976)

During these visits, I conducted semi-structured interviews with residents and former combatants in order to reconstruct the landscape history and gain more detailed local knowledge about the history of the war and its effects. I also spent a significant amount of time on walking tours of these areas, taking pictures, making sketch maps, and noting observations. In addition I visited the offices of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local government officials (policemen, schoolteachers, clerks,

etc). I did this research with the assistance of a local guide and translator, Ngiemah Jajuah (age nineteen), who spent most of his childhood in this region during the war. He was present at many cities when they were under attack and lived in two of the IDP camps we visited, during his childhood.

I chose this study region because it was where most of the fighting occurred during the first half of the war and could be understood as the cockpit of the war. The majority of the population comes from the Mende ethnic group, which simplified my needs for a translator and guide. The two districts of Kailahun and Kenema, which also represent the general border of the study region, were two of the three districts most affected by the war (to clarify Kenema and Kailahun are the names of two districts, and the largest cities in those districts). I chose not to include the third, Kono district, to the North, where much of the alluvial diamond mining occurs, because a different language was spoken there. It also would have increased the size of my study region beyond manageable limits. The selection of sites within the study region did not follow any scientific methodology or statistical selection procedure. My choices were often a product of random influences and the vagaries of the transportation networks.

The first major cluster of villages I visited, between Kenema and Blama, were chosen purely by accident. After a motorcycle accident outside Wanjama, I was forced to wait several hours for transportation. In the meantime, I spoke with some villagers who told me about being attacked during the war. I met with the chief and learned about the attacks on his village and several other villages nearby. These villages (Kpai, Wanjama, Njala, Serabu, Fabina, Taninahun, Weima Tokmombu and Handubu, Baiama I and II, Saama, and Giehun) were only about ten miles from Kenema, where I was lodging, so I decided to start there. These villages were also within ten to twenty miles of the Zogoda, the rebel forest base and headquarters for much of the war, a site I also eventually visited. While staying in Kenema, I befriended a Catholic priest, who took me to visit two villages near the Liberian border (Belabu and Faima). After I felt I had collected enough information here, I moved on to Segbwema and Daru, two towns about seven miles apart. From there I visited several villages in between them (Mofindo,

Mendekelema, Dambu, Tongoma, Yendema, and Baiama). I also chartered transportation to visit four other villages, all about thirty miles away in different directions, which several different people mentioned I should visit (Bomaru, the first village attacked during the war; Giema, the site of a large rebel base; and Mendekelema and Neama, the site of mass graves). Once I left Kenema, the transportation situation became very difficult and I was often limited to visiting sites within walking distance. The third sub-region I visited included the towns of Kailahun, Buedu, and Koindu. I stayed here a short time and visited only two villages (Kunduwundu and Vaama). The availability of transportation and lodging were severe limiting factors, which certainly biased my site choice to those relatively close to the towns.

A typical day involved visiting one or two villages. Upon arrival I would ask to meet with the chief to discuss the war and its impact on the village. A white visitor to the village was a rare event and I often drew a large crowd, which proved helpful as their recollection of the events of the war could often turn into somewhat of a debate, yielding more accurate information. During the interviews, I asked the following questions:

1) What was village like before the war (size, shape, population, facilities, house types)?
2) When was the village attacked (often multiple times)?
3) What happened when the village was attacked and/or occupied?
4) Where did the villagers flee?
5) When they returned, how did they rebuild and did they receive any assistance?
6) Did any Kamajors (tribal militia) or government soldiers help defend the village?
7) How had the village change from before to the war the present time?

These interviews took anywhere from one to three hours depending on the size of the crowd and the degree of cooperation I received from the chief. After an interview, I would normally be taken on a tour of the village with someone appointed by the chief who was very knowledgeable about its history. He would describe which houses were new, where old foundations lay, and point out the directions from which the rebels attacked and to which the villagers fled. During this time, I often made some sort of

sketch map and took numerous photographs of house types and ruins. Ngiemah and I also counted the number of houses and foundations, often revealing numbers wildly different from those we were told in the interview.

A major limitation of the interviews was how I was perceived by the locals. The only contact most of these villagers had with whites was through representatives from NGOs coming to assess the damage inflicted on the village and what its needs were, in order to determine if it qualified for any kind of aid. I quickly became aware of this problem when, at the end of the first few interviews, I asked if there was anything else they would like to tell me or if they had any questions for me. Invariably, I was told about the extreme hardships of living that accompanied their abject poverty and was asked what I planned to do to help rebuild. How many houses could my organization build, could we dig a well, build a clinic, or repair the road? No matter how much time or effort I spent telling them that I was not an NGO representative, they never really understood. I told them that there was nothing material I could offer them, that I was there to learn about their culture and document the effects of the war, and that the best I could do was try to inform others in the Untied States about the war and its devastating effects on their communities. I tried to explain how embarrassed I was that most people in the United States had never even heard about Sierra Leone, let alone knew about the war. Even after all this, the common response was "God bless you, we are grateful for your help, but please, we are begging you, please go tell George Bush about our village when you return to Texas, please ask him to send money." Although I will never know to what extent, their perception of me as someone who could give them aid certainly skewed their responses when conducting interviews.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty-six ex-combatants from all three major factions (The Revolutionary United Front, Sierra Leone Army, and Civil Defense Forces) in order to gain more detailed information about how villages were attacked or defended, how they were perceived, and descriptions of the layout of rebel bases. These interviews were shorter and did not always yield useful information. After the war ended, the military was reconstituted and fighters from all three warring factions

were incorporated into the new institution. Thus, anytime I visited a military base, I often began by interviewing one or two high commanders (majors or colonels) who served in the army during the war. They would then assist me in locating a few enlisted soldiers or junior officers from each faction, whom I then tried to interview one by one. A few were extremely cooperative and provided much useful information, although most gave short, non-descript answers and were obviously hesitant to talk with me.

Chapter Synopsis

The remainder of the introduction sets the context of the study. The first section describes the regional geography of Sierra Leone, focusing on broad physical and human themes, since more detailed information regarding the study region is provided later. The second section is a brief history of the war, outlining several characteristics of the conflict. The remainder of this thesis is organized into three chapters.

Chapter II is divided into four sections, by the morphological units of village, town, rebel forest base, and transportation network. Each section describes the pre-war state of the feature and then discusses changes brought about during and after the war. In addition, there is a discussion of how each feature was attacked and defended, and how it influenced the course of the war. This chapter seeks to identify the general patterns common across the study region.

Chapter III is organized regionally as opposed to topically as in the previous chapter. In this chapter the study region is divided into three sub-regions: between Kenema and Blama, between Daru and Segbwema, and the border areas of Kenema and Kailahun districts. The events of the war for each sub-region are presented in great detail, followed by a description of the current condition of these places.

Chapter IV concludes the work by reviewing the major changes that occurred in the landscape during the war. The broader processes behind these changes will also be examined. The influence of the four morphological units will be reevaluated by looking at how they coalesced to shape the war and how they led to three very different views of

the landscape for the three major factions. I will finish with some recommendations for future studies.

Geography of Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is a small country, about the size of South Carolina and roughly circular in shape.[9] (See Figure 2.) It is bordered by Guinea to the north and east, Liberia to the south and east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The climate is tropical monsoon, leading to the highest annual rainfall in West Africa, which varies between two-hundred and fifty to one-hundred and fifty inches a year. The year is divided between the dry season, lasting from November to April, and the rainy season, from May to October. Vegetation varies from mangrove swamps along the coast to pockets of virgin rainforest surrounded by large areas of secondary bush (land abandoned for several decades) and farm bush (farm land left fallow up to fifteen years) throughout much of the interior. The largest areas of rainforest lay along the Liberian border and in the southeast region. There are nine major rivers, all flowing from the northeast border into the Atlantic. These rivers have thin drainage basins and deeply incised channels along the middle and upper courses. Water levels vary drastically with the seasons and only the lower courses are navigable.

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[9] This description is compiled from: John Clarke (ed.), *Sierra Leone in Maps* (University of London Press, London, 1969); Irving Kaplan (ed.), *Area Handbook for Sierra Leone* (Department of Defense, Washington, D.C., 1976); and R.J. Harrison Church, *West Africa: A Study of the Environment and Man's Use of It* (Longman, London, 1980).

Figure 2: Map of Sierra Leone (Relief Map, 1976)

The country is commonly divided into four regions: the peninsula, coastal swamps, interior plains, and interior uplands. The peninsula is less than two-hundred and fifty square miles, yet it includes the capitol city and a large mountain range, with elevations up to three-thousand feet. Coastal swamps comprise a very thin strip, about ten to twenty miles wide, traversing the entire coastline. Mangrove swamps occur at the mouths of rivers while the rest is seasonally flooded sedge swamp. The interior plain stretches inland around one-hundred miles, and varies in elevation between one-hundred feet to seven-hundred feet. Vegetation in this region is mostly secondary bush and farm bush. The upland region can be divided into a large plateau in the north, and an area of rolling hills further to the south and east. To the north, the rivers have cut deep valleys while in the south and east they have created a highly dissected hilly landscape. The northern plateau area has many small mountain ranges and large hill masses. Most of this region is composed of open savannahs, with elevations ranging from one-thousand four-hundred feet to two-thousand feet. To the south and east the terrain is made up of rolling hills varying from five-hundred feet to one-thousand feet in elevation. Much of this area is secondary forest and farm bush with isolated pockets of primary rainforest.

The current population is near five million and is comprised of a dozen major ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Mende and the Temne. Each ethnic group speaks their own language, though Krio, a form of Pidgin English, is widely spoken throughout the country and formal English is not uncommon. A majority of the population is Muslim, while a small percentage is Christian; however, both of these blend elements of traditional animist religious beliefs. The country is divided into three provinces (Northern, Southern, and Eastern) and the Western Area which comprises the peninsula. The three provinces are further divided into twelve districts and each of these districts have between ten and twenty chiefdoms. Chiefdoms are the main political unit and are governed by paramount chiefs, who wield considerable power and autonomy. Each chiefdom might contain anywhere from a few dozen to almost a hundred villages.

History and Nature of the War

The causes of the war in Sierra Leone are a heated topic of debate in the scholarly literature. Sorting out which of these arguments best describes the conflict is a fruitless task. Instead, I believe they simply describe different aspects of the war. In a recent book, James Hillman argues that we can never *explain* the *causes* of a given war, instead the best we can hope for is to *understand* how it happened by looking at the *reasons* that led up to it, be they historical, social, political, or economic.[10]

With regards to the war in Sierra Leone, the reasons were many. The immediate cause was the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) raid into Bomaru with the backing of Charles Taylor and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). The proximate cause was the student radicalism of the 1970's and 1980's which led some to eventually seek revolutionary warfare training in Libya.[11] The underlying causes were numerous: a history of peasant revolt against political corruption,[12] a violent and contested social history preserved into the present,[13] a climate of political repression and violence,[14] and constantly declining economic conditions. There was also an abundance of propelling causes: the presence of lootable economic resources that were easily traded for military supplies, the involvement of several mercenary firms, the intervention of multiple outside powers, and the massive influx of humanitarian aid.

David Keen has written a very nuanced work on the history and nature of the conflict. He argues that the underlying causes of the war were largely internal, while the

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[10] James Hillman, *A Terrible Love of War* (Penguin Books, New York, 2004), p. 9-10. Though Hillman applies this logic to the American Civil War it is meant to capture a universal phenomenon, and I have employed much of his framework here, aside from the notion of a propelling cause.

[11] Ibrahim Abdullah, 'Bush path to destruction: the origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* **36**, 2 (1998), pp. 203-235.

[12] Roger Tangri, 'Conflict and violence in contemporary Sierra Leone chiefdoms,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* **14**, 2 (1976), pp. 311-321 and Fred M. Hayward, "The development of a radical political organization in the bush: a case study in Sierra Leone,' *Canadian Journal of African Studies* **6**, 1 (1972), pp. 1-28.

[13] Mariane C. Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001) and Paul Richards, 'To fight or to farm: agrarian dimensions of the Mano River conflicts,' *African Affairs* **104**, 417 (2005), pp. 571-590.

[14] Jimmy Kandeh, 'Subaltern terror in Sierra Leone,' in Diane Frost and Alex Thomson (ed.), *Africa in Crisis: New Challenges and Possibilities* (Pluto Press, London, 2001).

conditions in Liberia were simply the spark that ignited a multitude of grievances that had accumulated over the past three decades. These grievances were rooted in the deterioration and reformulation of the political system following independence in 1961 and especially during the reign of Siaka Stevens between 1965 and 1985.

The results of these political changes included the decline in state-provided education, institutionalization of corruption, ethnicization of the Army, violent intimidation of political and civil society opposition, rise of illegal diamond mining, declining state revenues, deterioration of the transportation infrastructure, severe economic decline, and the increased power of paramount chiefs at the local level, whose rule was often seen as arbitrary and corrupt. By the time the war broke out in 1991 there was little left of a centralized bureaucratic state to maintain order, while a large portion of the population, especially young men, felt excluded socially and economically, allowing them to turn to the gun when the opportunity arose.[15]

Phase I

The war began when the RUF, assisted by the NPFL, crossed the Liberian border into Sierra Leone in March of 1991.[16] These forces, divided into a northern and southern flank each containing a few hundred fighters, made quick gains in the Eastern Province. Their activities focused on directly engaging Sierra Leone Army (SLA) forces for control of towns and villages, followed by occupation, where upon they were converted into training and supply camps. The SLA was able to largely contain this offensive within six months, with assistance from the Guinean Army, civilian hunters recruited as irregular scouts, and Liberian irregulars opposed to the NPFL. Soon thereafter in 1992, a small group of junior officers within the SLA staged a coup and installed themselves as

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[15] David Keen, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (James Currey, Oxford, 2005), p. 8-35.
[16] This description of the war comes mostly from L. Allison Smith, Catherine Gambett, and Thomas Longley, 'Conflict mapping in Sierra Leone: violations of international humanitarian law from 1991-2002,' (Sierra Leone Conflict Mapping Program, No Peace Without Justice, Sierra Leone, 2004), p. 20-41 and Author Unknown 'Findings and recommendations of the Sierra Leone truth and reconciliation commission including selected chapters of the report,' p. 7-1 – 7-337.

the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), with the goal of ending the war quickly by enlarging the army and launching a counteroffensive.

During this time, rifts were forming between the RUF and the NPFL over the conduct of the war. The NPFL made up a majority of the combat forces and also supervised the training of conscripts, giving them a high degree of control over rebel operations. Elements of the RUF grew upset with the NPFL over their atrocities, looting, and unwillingness to allow the Sierra Leoneans to take charge of the fighting. This dispute eventually developed into all out fighting between the two groups, followed by the withdrawal of NPFL forces to Liberia. Already severely weakened by infighting, the RUF was devastated by the SLA offensive, launched early in 1993. Only a few towns in the far north east of Kailahun district remained in rebel control when the NPRC decided to declare a ceasefire in December.

Phase II

In late 1994, what remained of the RUF emerged reborn from an isolated forest preserve near the Liberian border where they had been hiding. They now fought by a very different set of rules, acting as a guerilla insurgency whose brutality towards the general population simultaneously sought to control them through fear and delegitemize the government and the army (combined in the NPRC). This strategy was accomplished through the gradual establishment of a network of remote jungle bases from where incessant raids were launched against towns and villages. At the same time, ambushes were laid along all of the major highways, isolating large parts of the country and severely inhibiting the movement of the SLA. This new method proved extremely effective. By early 1995, the RUF controlled large parts of the interior and had a large force positioned only miles from Freetown, while the SLA was barely holding a string of isolated towns overflowing with displaced villagers.

One characteristic of the war that became more pronounced during Phase II was the figure of the sobel—soldier by day, rebel by night. The SLA was well known for indiscriminate looting of areas that had been attacked by the RUF. The drastic

expansion of the SLA under the NPRC led to a marked decline in the moral qualities of ordinary soldiers, who were capable of looting, killing civilians, and in some cases colluding with the enemy. This already poor image of the SLA was ruined by RUF false-flag operations, in which rebels wearing captured uniforms carried out numerous attacks on villages and committed atrocities under the guise of the SLA.

Were it not for the appearance of two new actors the RUF might have achieved victory. The large number of villagers living in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps at towns throughout the country began to organize themselves into self-sufficient militias. The most successful of these were the Kamajors, based in the Mende Southeast. Starting in 1995 they slowly began taking back the bush from the RUF, defending their villages, and launching raids against RUF strongholds. Militias and irregular hunter groups were influential actors from the beginning of the war but it was only during Phase II that this influence became substantial. During Phase I both the Tamoboras and the Donsos, based in the Kurankuro and Kono ethnic groups, acted as irregular scouts for the SLA. It was also common during RUF assaults on the larger towns of Bo, Kenema, and Freetown for youth vigilante groups to self-organize and help repel the invaders, in some cases even enforcing curfews to prohibit soldiers from looting. As the war progressed other militias and hunting societies arose, each particular to a specific ethnic group, but the Kamajors were by far the largest, most well organized, and most effective of these groups.

The other new actor was a South African mercenary company, Executive Outcomes (EO), hired by the NPRC in mid 1995. EO and the Kamajors began working together and over the next year were able to reopen several highways, recapture several economically productive regions, and destroy several important RUF forest bases. The RUF was weakened to the point that elections were held in 1996, with the new president opening peace talks and combining the various militias and irregular hunting societies into the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), a new formal branch of the armed services. With the assistance of the CDF a large number of displaced villagers were resettled during this time.

The rising power of the CDF fostered resentment among the SLA, who saw the CDF as usurping their role. At the same time, the CDF did not trust the SLA, whom they suspected of collaborating with the enemy and using their position of power for personal enrichment. Relations between the two factions gradually worsened through 1996 and 1997 and led to a host of skirmishes across the country. In May of 1997, fearing the Army was soon to be disbanded; elements of the SLA staged another coup, calling themselves the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. The first act of this brutal regime was to invite the rebels to come out of the bush and share power, an offer that they gladly accepted. The CDF were ordered to disband, which they of course refused. These events set the stage for the next round of conflict between the CDF and various peacekeeping groups against the combined forces of the Army and rebels.

Phase III

The CDF were greatly outnumbered by the combined forces of the AFRC and were forced to go into hiding to survive. The war now took on the character of a counter-insurgency campaign perpetuated by the AFRC against the CDF. Small scale operations and fighting continued over the next year, leading up to the country wide attack on AFRC supply lines known as "Black December" at the end of the year. In February of 1998, Nigeria and Guinea decided to intervene substantially by committing a force of several thousand peacekeepers, known as ECOMOG. After first recapturing Freetown, ECOMOG slowly pushed through the interior, retaking most of the major towns from the AFRC. In this effort they were assisted by the CDF. RUF and AFRC forces fled to both the Northern Province and the RUF heartland in the north-east Kailahun District, where they regrouped.

Heavy fighting continued throughout much of 1998, with AFRC forces directly engaging ECOMOG for control over key towns. This operation culminated in the devastating AFRC attack on Freetown in January of 1999, which was coordinated with other large scale operations throughout the country. A peace agreement followed which allowed Foday Sankoh to share power with the elected President, Tejan Kabbah, but

fighting soon resumed. Beginning after the attack on Freetown, but especially after the arrest of Foday Sankoh in 2000, the RUF and AFRC began to splinter into several smaller groups. Both the United Nations and Britain decided to send peacekeeping forces in 1999 and 2000 and though small scale fighting continued, by the end of 2001 the war was mostly over. The official date for the end of the war was January of 2002, which was marked by a symbolic weapons-burning ceremony.

CHAPTER II

MORPHOLOGICAL UNITS: ELEMENTS OF

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF SIERRA LEONE

What were thriving villages in some areas are now mud
ruins being overtaken by rainforest. Houses, markets,
schools, roads, and religious institutions are destroyed.

Doug Henry
Embodied Violence: War and Relief along the Sierra Leone Border
PhD Dissertation Describing Fieldwork in 1997 and 1998

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the major morphological units of the cultural landscape of Sierra Leone and to describe how they changed during and after the war. The aim is to identify patterns common across the study region. In the next chapter, the individual study regions will be historically examined in detail. These findings are based on accounts and observations collected during fieldwork with relevant information from secondary sources included. As a cautionary note, I wish to preempt any reading that concludes the features described were ever uniform, fall into neat phases, or were static for large periods of the war. Instead, the most striking feature of the landscape was its amorphous character. The appearance of consistency that this chapter may induce, is solely a narrative device, allowing the different elements of the landscape to be introduced, described, and understood in a coherent manner.

Villages

In Sierra Leone, about sixty-eight percent of the pre-war population lived in dispersed and often remote villages.[1] These villages varied greatly in size and shape across the country, with the smallest having a population of less than a hundred and the

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[1] H.B.S. Kandeh and K.V. Ramachandran, 'The Analytical Report: 1985 Census of Population and Housing Sierra Leone' (Central Statistics Office, Department of Development and Economic Planning, Tower Hill, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1985), p. 142.

largest several thousand. There were approximately sixteen-thousand villages scattered across the country, yielding an average size of two-hundred and twenty inhabitants.[2] This diffuse settlement pattern probably went furthest to influence the course of the war and it was also the part of the landscape most affected by the war.

Pre-war Morphology

Within the study region, a typical pre-war village ranged in size from a few hundred to a few thousand inhabitants, with anywhere from fifty to two-hundred structures. A handful of major house types and construction methods were common in these areas. By size, these houses varied from small one room circular huts to the medium sized dwelling of two to three rooms up to the large well-constructed houses with five or more rooms. Other buildings in the village included the *court barri* (a gathering pavilion), cooking huts, smaller *barris* for lounging, a church or a mosque, and sometimes a school or a clinic. (See Figure 3.)

The size of a structure was closely related to the construction material. Most small and some medium homes were wattle and daub with a thatched roof. A better quality, medium sized home would have mud-brick walls or a concrete finish along the walls with a zinc-plated iron roof. (See Figure 4.) The larger houses consistently had mud-brick walls, sometimes with a concrete finish. Some larger houses had concrete block walls, while zinc roofs were standard. Invariably, the larger houses belonged to people of wealth or stature such as the chief, a government official, or a merchant. Some of the medium houses and several of the larger houses had a concrete façade or porch with pillars and steps. According to the 1985 census, the average house construction materials for Kenema and Kailahun Districts were ninety percent zinc and ten percent thatch for roofs, while wall material was thirty percent concrete and seventy percent mud.[3]

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[2] 'Final Results: 2004 Population and Housing Census' (Statistics Sierra Leone, Freetown, 2006), p. 1. Though this figure comes from after the war, I doubt these numbers have changed significantly. The average should not to be confused with the mode, which probably lies between three-hundred and five-hundred.

[3] Kandeh, '1985 Census of Population and Housing,' p. 228-230.

Figure 3: *Court Barri* and Homes (Kpai, Nongowa Chiefdom)

Figure 4: A Typical Pre-war House (Yendema, Njaluahun Chiefdom)

Figure 5: A Typical Farm (Wanjama, Nongowa Chiefdom)

Figure 6: A Typical Farm *baffa* (Wanjama, Nongowa Chiefdom)

The village cannot be understood outside the context of its environs, most importantly the numerous farms linked to it by bush paths. A typical farm was about one-quarter to one-half hectare with roughly one farm per family. (See Figures 5 and 6.) They practiced a shifting form of cultivation with average fallow periods of seven to ten years. During the first year, mainly rice was planted. Then, in the second year a variety of crops such as ground nuts, cassava, bananas, corn, and peppers were grown. A village of three-hundred people might have twenty to thirty farms under cultivation and many more in a fallow state. The bush paths that link these farms are numerous and winding, with many forks, some hidden. Certain paths lead to *sɔkɔisiahun*, secret bush hiding places, where valuables and harvests are occasionally stored, and where the villagers could hide when in danger.[4] There were also the secret society bushes. The Sande Grove (women's initiation society) is often located on the edge or very close to the village, while the Poro Grove (men's initiation society) lay further in the bush.

In some places, the remnants of the pre-colonial war-town settlement pattern were still evident. In this pattern small villages were connected in a hierarchical fashion, with a large central village of several thousand inhabitants ringed by several smaller villages of a few hundred inhabitants each, were still evident. In pre-colonial times, warriors and civilians lived in the central village, which was surrounded by several smaller hamlets where slaves worked on farms.[5]

Attack and Defense

Attacks on villages can be divided into four categories. Grouped by increasing level of intensity, they were: minor raid, occupation, major raid, and raze. Every village had a unique story and not all of them fit neatly into these ideal/typical categories.

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[4] Doug Henry, *Embodied Violence: War and Relief along the Sierra Leone Border* (Southern Methodist University, unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2000), p. 72-74.

[5] D.J. Siddle, 'War-Towns in Sierra Leone: a study in social change,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* **38**, 1 (1968), pp. 47-56.

1) Minor Raid: These types of attacks were more common towards the end of the war—during and after the time of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). In a minor raid, rebels or soldiers would enter the village shooting, scattering the villagers into the bush for the next few hours or days until it was safe to return, and take the easily lootable property, mostly animals and agricultural yields, while inflicting little or no damage on the village or its occupants. These raids were short, but frequent—happening several times within the same year to the same village.

2) Occupation: In this type of attack, which was more common at the beginning of the war, the object was to capture the village and convert it into a rebel base. These attacks attempted to selectively destroy and profane elements of the village landscape. Generally, only a few buildings were destroyed, such as the houses of the chief, government representatives, or merchants. These men were then publicly tortured and killed.[6] Sometimes, their heads were placed on poles in the center of the village. The sacred sites of the Poro and Sande secret societies were publicly entered and desecrated while the rebels danced around in the villager's masks and outfits reserved for special rituals.[7] In this type of attack, the landscape became one medium through which existing symbols of power were destroyed and profaned to signify rebel control. The villagers were gathered in the *court barri* and told they were being liberated from the corrupt APC regime and that their laws no longer applied. New laws were created in their place. One change was that no doors were to be locked and all possessions were to be evenly distributed, allowing the rebels to loot the village with ease. *Sɔkɔisiahun were* looted with the help of rebel informants. Also, young men were conscripted and trained as fighters, within or very close to the village.

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[6] Ibrahim Abdullah and Patrick Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone' in Christopher Clapham (ed.), *African Guerillas* (James Currey, Oxford, 1998), p. 178; Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone*, (James Currey, Oxford, 1996), p. 8.; Patrick K. Muana, 'The Kamajoi militia: civil war, internal displacement and the politics of counter-insurgency,' *Africa Development* **XXIII**, 3/4 (1997), pp. 77-100, p. 79-80.

[7] Henry, *Embodied Violence*, p. 43-44.

3) Major Raid: This type of attack, the most common throughout the war, but especially between 1994 and 1997, sought to loot and depopulate the village.[8] As in the other types of raid, the main purpose was to gather supplies, but these supplies were not limited to food. Two of the most precious commodities were zinc roofs and conscripts. When the rebels entered, they would kill a few people and burn down the mosque, church, school, clinic, and the homes of important people. Most villagers would escape into the bush, but several were captured and subsequently became porters or fighters. The loot was gathered and the conscripts were forced to carry it to the nearest base, at least ten to twenty miles away. With the zinc roofs missing, it was only a matter of time in the tropical monsoon climate before rows of foundations and rubble were all that remained. After the rebel attack, it was common for soldiers to come and carry away what was left on trucks to sell at the nearest town.[9] Those villagers who ran into the bush would hide at their farms or *sɔkɔisiahun*.[10] Some lived there for several weeks or months before undertaking the dangerous journey to the nearest town. As news of these attacks spread and the infamous reputation of the rebels grew, villagers began to flee with the first rumor of rebel activity nearby.

4) Raze: During a raze, the entire village was destroyed and all of its occupants either fled or were killed. This type of attack was uncommon, as the factions were more concerned with controlling the population than eliminating it. Though this was not a consistent strategy, it did occasionally occur in response to a perceived serious injustice. For example, one village was burned down by AFRC fighters who learned that the villagers had been helping local Kamajors. In another instance, NPFL forces destroyed a village that was the site of serious infighting between their own forces and the RUF during the early part of the war. After the split in 1992, NPFL forces practiced a

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[8] 'Finding and recommendations of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission including selected chapters of the report' (Freetown, 2005), p. 7-82.

[9] Abdullah, 'The RUF of Sierra Leone,' p. 184; Henry; Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest*, p. 14; Muana 'The Kamajoi militia,' p. 81.

[10] Henry, *Embodied Violence*, p. 73-75.

scorched Earth policy, destroying many villages along its return path to Liberia.[11] Villages that became battlegrounds between different forces could easily be destroyed indirectly due to the fighting and sometimes the victor would destroy the village if the occupants had sided with their enemy, such as in the large village of Mendekilema (Gaura Chiefdom).

Some villages were defended from attack, mostly by Kamajors, though, in the first five years of the war, it was not unheard of for soldiers to protect a village. When the soldiers defended, they set up checkpoints at all the entrances, dug trenches along likely directions of attack, and sometimes took the zinc roofs from houses to construct barricades. Normally, the soldiers deployed forces of platoon strength at large, strategically important villages—such as at major road junctions or near the entrances to towns. The Kamajors, however, defended in a completely different fashion. Instead of erecting fixed defenses, they went on nightly patrols and lay in ambush for rebels or soldiers moving along surrounding bush paths. At other times, they would distribute themselves around the edge of the village and wait for an attack, at which time they would all charge the rebels or soldiers with their machetes and shotguns. When the rebels did occupy villages, there does not seem to have been any organized defense, though they sometimes lay in ambush along the main roads and trails when they were expecting an attack.

Villages played the most important role in influencing the general course of the war. The pertinent characteristics of villages were the dispersed pattern in which they were spread across the countryside, the relative remoteness (many were accessible only by bush path), and the open layout that did not lend itself to organized defense. These factors combined to make villages a prime target for the different types of attack. This quality, exploited by the RUF throughout the war, provided them with several opportunities: to delegitemize the government by showing its inability to protect its own

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[11] L. Alison Smith, Catherine Gambette and Thomas Longley, 'Conflict mapping in Sierra Leone: violations of international humanitarian law from 1991-2002' (Sierra Leone Conflict Mapping Program, No Peace Without Justice, Sierra Leone, 2004), p. 270.

citizens, to control the civilian population through fear, and to serve as a source of resources in terms of food, loot, and conscripts. In contrast, villages were seen as a risk by the SLA: first as potential RUF support camps, later as indefensible locations, and finally as hiding places for Kamajors. For these reasons, few resources were devoted to their protection. Eventually, the Kamajors made villages into a risk for the RUF by making raids on villages more costly, if not impossible, and by using villages as a base of operations from which attacks on rebel forest bases could be launched.

Wartime Changes

In areas where the pre-colonial settlement pattern was still clear, there was a tendency to abandon the hamlets and concentrate the population into the central village. In some places, these central villages grew to five-thousand or more inhabitants, receiving food shipments from NGO's and protection from Kamajors and soldiers. Agricultural practices also adapted to the new environment of violence. Some people chose to remain in their villages despite the fighting, while others risked visiting their farms during harvest times, spending the rest of their time hiding in the bush or living in towns.[12] Due to the chance of ambush and capture, especially while isolated on the farm, swamp rice farms were abandoned because of the small field of view they afforded, and farming efforts were focused instead on the upland rice farms along hill sides.[13] Since the rebels normally attacked during the rice harvest, a rice scarcity developed and second-year farms became the primary source of food. These farms were more concealed, due to their overgrown character.

During lulls in the fighting, many villagers returned to rebuild. This reconstruction occurred mostly around the 1994 ceasefire, 1996 elections, and as chiefdoms were slowly secured by Kamajors and ECOMOG between 1998 and 2000. Life could be very difficult for those returning before the war ended, because they

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[12] Henry, *Embodied Violence*, p. 52.
[13] Mariane C. Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001), p. 46.

received little or no assistance by the government or NGOs. Doug Henry describes the process for those leaving the camps:

> If left to their own abilities, self-resettling refugees usually begin little by little. Men will go back first to rebuild a house, taking enough bulgher wheat or "corn-soya blend" from the camp in order to stay and work for several days, and then come back to the camp to resupply, and bring news of the area to one's waiting family. Smaller, 1 to 2 room, stick-frame mud houses are preferable to mud brick, as these can be completed in only several days. This back and forth process may go on for several weeks or months until it is deemed appropriate to take more family members back.[14]

A similar process, taking several months to a year, was described to me by many villagers who resided in towns during the war. A number of villagers also told stories of returning only to be attacked after several houses were complete, all easily torched due to their thatch construction. In some villages, such events were repeated many times.

Post-war Changes

When I visited these villages in 2005, their character was different from what it had been before and during the war. They were ramshackle shadows of villages comprised of small, fragile homes and littered with piles of rubble and bare foundations. They were reduced in population and area, as well as often being laid out in a different fashion as well. (See Figures 7 and 8.) In every village I visited, save one, the population was less than before the war. These reductions in size ranged from as little as ten percent to as much as seventy-five percent. These population changes depended upon the size of the village. (See Table 1.) Small and large villages saw the largest decreases in population. In contrast, medium villages only saw moderate changes, while very large villages maintained a post-war population roughly equal to their pre-war population.

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[14] Henry, *Embodied Violence*, p. 227.

Figure 7: View of Fabinah Village (Nongowa Chiefdom)

Figure 8: View of Faima Village (Nomo Chiefdom)

TABLE 1
Average Population Change Based on Village Size

Village Type	Pre-war Size	Average Population Decline	# in Sample
Small	200 or less	70% to abandonment	6
Medium	200 to 1000	10% to 30%	13
Large	1000 to 4000	50%	5
Very Large	4000 or more	Roughly Even (+/- 10%)	3

Source: Fieldwork

I believe this pattern is related to the two major constraints on rebuilding a village—labor and time. Materials were not an important factor since most of these structures were built from what was locally available. Time was important because, if the village could not be built quickly enough, those waiting for a home might decide to remain in a town or to move to a nearby village that was being rebuilt faster. Reconstruction was a communal project in which labor was organized by the chief, yielding a new wattle and daub house every three to four days. Small villages could not muster the requisite labor and their inhabitants may have been inclined to migrate to larger villages nearby. Medium villages struck a nice balance—they had enough labor, but not too much of a work load to complete before people grew tired of waiting. Large villages certainly had enough labor, but the task of rebuilding two-hundred or more structures may have been too daunting for a large portion of the population. Very large villages had a great deal of infrastructure in place and were often sited in desirable locations, raising the incentives to rebuild. Also, chiefs in these villages were able to wield considerably more power and could summon more resources in the form of labor, government aid, and NGO aid to commit to the rebuilding initiative.

Another factor is that the reconstruction process is not complete. Many people saw their wattle and daub houses as temporary shelters to be used until they could afford or receive aid to build a better home. In ever village, new houses were under construction, a process which was hindered by the constant upkeep required of wattle

Figure 9: A Typical Postwar Wattle and Daub House (Wanjama, Nongowa Chiefdom)

Figure 10: Several NGO-built Houses (Weima Tokmombu, Small Bo Chiefdom)

and daub dwellings. It will be several years, perhaps decades, before these villages return to some semblance of their pre-war condition.

These hypotheses still do not explain the across the board drop in village populations in this region. From what villagers told me, there were three major causes for the population decline: death, migration to a different region of the country, and migration to a nearby city. Death and regional migration could account for at most a five percent population drop over the course of the war, which is minor compared to the three percent annual growth rate. The remaining population decline can only be attributed to a substantial number of displaced people choosing to remain in towns after the war. This process will described in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

There were also numerous changes in the layout and consistency of villages. Each village was rebuilt atop the remains of its predecessor, but did not always encompass the same area. The most basic changes were the house types, new in size and construction material. Before the war most houses were either mud-brick or concrete with zinc roofs   Now most houses were wattle and daub, some were mud brick, and a lucky few had concrete walls, often the work of an NGO. (See Figures 9 and 10.) The proportion of zinc roofs varied between thirty percent and fifty percent, with the lower numbers being more common. These zinc roofs were not the new silver kind found in town, but rather old, rusted, and brown. In addition, a ring of ruins, either in the form of piles of rubble or bare foundations, was often spread around the edge of the new village. (See Figures 11-14.)

Assistance from NGO's was very patchy and did not seem to follow any noticeable pattern at the small scale—for instance, in a cluster of villages, all equally damaged, you might find one that had received aid. At the scale of the entire Eastern Province, there was an observable and stated belief that Kailahun district was much more devastated than Kenema district, and deserved more aid. From my observations, these regions were equally devastated. Several NGO officials stressed the difficulties involved in the fair and equitable distribution of aid. Most NGO offices would have one

Figure 11: Remains of a House Foundation (Baiama II, Small Bo Chiefdom)

Figure 12: Façade Remains of a House (Kpai, Nongowa Chiefdom)

Figure 13: Another House Foundation (Weima Tokmombu, Small Bo Chiefdom)

Figure 14: Remains of a Well-built House (Weima Handubu, Small Bo Chiefdom)

or two non-natives managing several native employees, whose responsibility it was to select and oversee the day to day projects. They were notorious for funneling aid into villages where they had friends or family members and in some instances only giving aid to those chiefs willing to pay the highest bribe. Considering the state of living conditions in the country, it is difficult to condemn this behavior.

Towns

Before the war, around twenty-eight percent of the population lived in towns, the largest of which were Freetown (469,000), Koidu-Sefadu (82,000), Bo (59,000), Kenema (52,000) and Makeni (40,000). The remaining small towns, of which there were roughly one-hundred, had a maximum size of fifteen-thousand inhabitants, though the average was between three-thousand and five-thousand.[15] Most large towns owe their origins and dominance to transportation networks created in the early twentieth century, notably the construction of the railroad linking Freetown to the interior in 1898. These towns grew up as classic trading entrepots, supplying a rural hinterland providing agricultural, mineral, and forest resources to Freetown.[16]

Despite the destruction caused by the war, it was clear from my observations that smaller towns could be divided into two categories, evident by their layout. (See Figures 15-18.) Some towns had very clear commercial strips or central business districts, with a variety of shops and government offices. There was obvious development in infrastructure, in the form of wide roads or their remains flanked by multi-story buildings. Blama, Segbwema, Pendembu, and Koindu fell into this category. Other towns were more uniform in the spacing and types of buildings seen. It seemed as if these towns had originally been large villages, which slowly changed into places of trade and commerce. Towns of this nature included Daru, Kailahun, and Buedu.

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[15] Kandeh, '1985 census,' p. 142, 146-150.
[16] Ibid, p. 32-33.

Figure 15: A View of Blama

Figure 16: A View of Buedu

Figure 17: A View of Daru

Figure 18: A View of Kenema

Attack and Defense

Initially, the RUF was strong enough to make quick advances and towns were captured with ease. This lasted until they were finally halted in Daru and Koidu-Sefadu in late 1991. A revamped SLA reclaimed many towns during the NPRC counteroffensive of 1992 and 1993, leaving only the most remote towns of Kailahun district in rebel hands. During Phase II, the rebels were numerically weak and focused on raiding and isolating towns. Following the AFRC coup of 1997, the rebels came to control many of the towns jointly with the Army. It was only after the arrival of ECOMOG forces, who were assisted by the Kamajors, that the balance of forces was roughly equal, leading both sides to risk battle for control over towns during much of 1998 and 1999. This fighting can be divided into three categories: occupation and looting, raiding, and destruction.

1) Occupation and Looting: In this type of attack, a town was captured with little or no fighting and any damage done came later, in the form of looting. This type of attack occurred most often during Phase I, though later in the war, this looting followed more sustained fighting. Common lootable items included zinc roofs and valuable objects stored inside homes and buildings, but they could go as far as removing the windows and doors from every structure in the town. A frequent sequence of events began with the rebels capturing a town with out fighting, followed by looting and limited redistribution of the town's resources. If the town was recaptured by the SLA, the looting was often much worse, especially during the NPRC counteroffensive.[17]

2) Raiding: This type of attack, widely perpetrated by the RUF during Phase II, could take a variety of forms, though it generally involved the infiltration of a small force to attack a specific target. Sometimes the raids were quick, eliminating the target and retreating back into the bush before a response could be mounted, while at other times battles lasting several days occurred. Common targets included the homes and offices of

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[17] Henry, *Embodied Violence*, p. 35.

politicians, Army officers, Kamajor leaders, and government clerks and officials. At other times raids were carried out against IDP camps and public spaces in Bo and Kenema. These raids offered little material reward, though their psychological impact was immeasurable. They served to eliminate or suppress the military and political leadership of the town, as well as adding to the atmosphere of panic and fear among the towns people, further delegitemizing the government by showing its inability to provide security.

3) Full-Scale Battle: As one might imagine, this type of attack involved two forces fighting for control of a town, often within the town itself. These "battles" occurred in a handful of places during the first two years of the war, were completely absent during the middle years, and then reappeared with much greater frequency and intensity towards the end of the war, especially in 1998 and 1999.   The RUF and Kamajors were mostly limited to assault rifles and rocket propelled grenades as opposed to the SLA and ECOMOG, who had a range of light tanks, armored cars, and mortars, which could cause considerable devastation. In many towns fought over during this time, hardly a single original building in the town center was left standing. In some cases, sheer firepower may have been used to intentionally level a whole town.

Although it is clear that most towns were defended throughout the war, defense was fairly disorganized. The essential elements seem to have been a network of checkpoints placed around and inside the town, with machine guns located at the major entrances. When attacked, the soldiers or militia defending the town would simply rally on the site of the fighting. Considering the sprawling nature of many towns and the small garrisons assigned to protect them, this tactic probably represented the best plan. The rebels proved adept at bypassing these defenses and were routinely able to enter, attack, and sometimes leave before a response could be mounted. In some cases, crowds

of civilians would overpower the rebels, when they were few in number and lightly armed.[18]

Whereas villages influenced the war in a very general way, the role of towns was much more specific. There was an implicit belief that control of the country was based in control of the towns, evident in the operations of the various factions. The RUF's original war plan was to capture Bo, which would then be used as base from which the rest of the country could be taken.[19] During Phase II, attacks on villages, the ambushing of highways, and the sites of forest bases were all planned around the intended isolation and raiding of specific towns. This strategy was most obvious during Phase III, when high-profile attacks on villages diminished, while most of the fighting moved to the towns, culminating in the 1999 attack on Freetown. The important characteristics of towns were their small number, highly uneven distribution, sprawling layout, concentrations of wealth, and position at the nexus points for the main roads. For these reasons the capture, raiding, or isolation of a town became the centerpiece of many operations during the war.

Other Wartime Changes

Several of the most important changes are related to the large population fluctuations caused by the movement of displaced people fleeing from the rebel advance. Most towns that became magnets for displaced persons, such as Bo, Kenema, Segbwema, and Daru, probably doubled and at times tripled or quadrupled in population. When fleeing from the rebel advance, most villagers went straight to the nearest town where they sought refuge with friends or family members. Those lacking relations simply squatted on vacant property, at schools, or on land near the edge of town. Eventually, these numbers grew to the point that a variety of NGO's began to create camps for these displaced people. One study claims there were at least sixty different IDP camps spread across the country in 1999 with a total recorded displaced population

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[18] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest,* p. 15.
[19] Paul Richards "War as smoke and mirrors: Sierra Leone 1991-1992, 1994-1995, and 1995-1996,' *Anthropological Quarterly* **78**, 2 (2005), pp. 377-403, p. 383.

near six-hundred thousand.[20] It is likely that these figures are too high as camp administrators routinely over exaggerated the number of camp dwellers to receive more aid. The numbers living in camps were, however, only a fraction of the total displaced population, a large part of which lived with their extended families or camped out on vacant property.

These camps, built on the outskirts or within a few miles of the town, were laid out like small communities. They varied in area between one-quarter to one square mile and in size between a few thousand inhabitants to as many as fifteen-thousand to twenty-thousand. (See Figure 19.) The residents lived in hundreds of small wattle and daub shelters with NGO supplied plastic sheeting as a roof. (See Figure 20.) These dwellings made up most of the camp and stretched out along roads in every direction. The larger camps of five-thousand or more were built around a clinic, often a school, and a dispensary. Other buildings might include a *court barri*, church, mosque, market area, midwife's hut, soccer fields, and sometimes an administrative office. The size and extent of these camps were constantly changing in response to the distribution of aid and the conditions of the war.[21]

Other changes to towns were implemented by the faction that occupied it, often appropriating buildings for their own use. It was common for the rebels to move into police stations and use them as a base of operations, while primary schools were often converted into makeshift training camps. Checkpoints were commonly used by all sides who wished to limit the movement of spies hiding among the civilian population. Once, when walking the streets of Kenema with my guide Ngiemah, he remarked that during the war we would have had to cross through six checkpoints manned by government soldiers to traverse this far into town from the highway. The Kamajors were notorious for taking over large buildings, especially hotels, to use as barracks.[22] One such building

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[20] Christopher Squire, 'Sierra Leone's biodiversity and the civil war' (Biodiversity Support Program, World Wildlife Fund, Washington, D.C., 2001), p. 20.

[21] Many of the ideas in information in these paragraphs come from personal communications with Doug Henry and Patrick Muana.

[22] Muana, 'The Kamajoi militia,' p. 89.

Figure 19: A Section of RTI IDP Camp, Near Kenema (Photograph courtesy of Doug Henry)

Figure 20: A Typical Dwelling in Majihun Road IDP Camp, near Segbwema (Photograph courtesy of Doug Henry)

was pointed out to me in Kenema, while another, the Brookfields Hotel in Freetown, has been extensively documented in the work of Daniel Hoffman.[23]

Post-War Changes

     After the war, the population of towns across the country was radically different from what it had been before the war. (See Table 2.) Freetown, Bo, and Kenema all outpaced the average national population growth due to immigration of around one-hundred thousand, sixty-thousand, and fifty-thousand new residents, respectively. It is not surprising that Koidu-Sefadu, the diamond capitol, barely maintained its pre-war population, since it was bitterly fought over throughout the war and changed hands at least six times. The remaining small towns experienced either rampant growth or stagnation with moderate declines.

TABLE 2

Population Changes in Major Towns and those in Study Region Between 1985 and 2004

Town	1985 Population	2004 Population	Growth
Entire Country	3,515,812	4,976,871	41%
Freetown	469,776	772,873	64%
Bo	59,768	149,957	150%
Kenema	52,473	128,402	144%
Koidu-Sefadu	82,474	87,789	6%
Makeni	40,038	82,840	106%
Blama	5,559	4,000 (est.)	-30%
Segbwema	8,257	5,000 (est.)	-40%
Daru	3,830	8,000 (est.)	210%
Kailahun	9,054	15,000 (est.)	120%
Koindu	8,238	10,000 (est.)	21%
Buedu	3,479	8,000 (est.)	129%

Source: 1985 and 2004 Sierra Leone Census Data[24]

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[23] Daniel Hoffman, *The Kamajors of Sierra Leone*, (Duke University, Durham, NC, unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2004)

[24] Kandeh, '1985 census' and '2004 Census'. 2004 estimates for small towns are based on general observations and a comparison of alleged pre-war figures from interviews with census data to estimate the accuracy of post-war claims.

The widespread growth of towns can be attributed to a number of factors. It seems likely that many people, especially young men, came to prefer the opportunities and freedoms associated with town life over the strictly controlled, hierarchical, and gerontocratic life of the village.[25] At the same time, in the years spent living in the town during the war, many people become economically linked to them and came to prefer the higher standards of living and better access to resources, especially education for their children. Regardless of the reason, it was clear that one of the biggest effects of the war was to speed up the process of urbanization.

The divergent growth of smaller towns may be related to their pre-war size and layout. Before the war, Koindu, Segbwema, Blama, and Pendembu[26] were all important towns of the first, commercial type described earlier. These towns saw some of the heaviest fighting and damage to infrastructure, followed by sharp post-war population declines. Daru, Buedu, and Kailahun had less well developed infrastructure before the war, were less damaged, and saw large gains in population after the war. While several unique conditions of these towns also played a role, it seems as though damage done to the infrastructure in towns of the first type was so great that it may have been easier to start from scratch in the less developed towns that weathered the war better.

The post-war condition of towns was fundamentally different from that of villages, in that most villages were completely destroyed and had to be rebuilt from scratch; whereas, even the most devastated towns still had a good deal of infrastructure remaining. At the same time, rebuilding a village could be done relatively quickly and cheaply, while repairing or reconstructing a building in a town was expensive and time consuming, often to the point that many projects will take several years to a decade to complete, assuming they ever begin. This meant that many towns were, three years after the war, either still in their worst wartime state, or that only makeshift repairs had been made to damaged sections. In the larger towns, the damage was often selective, so that you might see only one home destroyed along an entire street, or in town centers it

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[25] Paul Richards, 'To fight or to farm: agrarian dimensions of the Mano River conflicts,' *African Affairs* **104**, 417 (2005), pp. 571-590.

[26] Although I only visited Pendembu briefly it was obvious that it was well built before the war, had seen high levels of destruction, and was now sparsely populated.

Figure 21: The Remains of an Important House in Kenema

Figure 22: New Shops in Front of Old Foundations in Segbwema

would only be the government buildings that were destroyed. (See Figure 21.) The damage was much more widespread in the smaller towns, often the result of repeated battles. In a few towns, every store along the entire street front was reduced to rubble or a foundation, while those shopkeepers who returned had erected simple wooden stands over what remained to sell their wares. (See Figure 22.)

Pakistani UNAMSIL peacekeepers built circular welcoming monuments at the entrances to many towns in the Eastern Province.   In a select few, they also helped rebuild the mosque. Several abandoned UNAMSIL bases, guard posts, and checkpoints were left where they were, perhaps in an effort on the part of the peacekeepers to memorialize their service. (See Figure 23.) Other notable memorials included signs and graves in Kenema, graves of Army officers in Segbwema, and the remains of murals of famous soldiers in Daru. The consensus among most people I talked to was that their first priority was the reconstruction of homes, schools, churches, mosques and government buildings, a task that was not yet complete. They also wished to simply forget about the war and did not see anything worth memorializing.

In several towns, NGOs like Oxfam, UNHCR, MSF, GTZ, CRS, ICRC and IRC were well established.[27] Some rented property near the town center to use as an office, while others built their own compounds near the outskirts of town. They made their presence well known with the signs and banners they posted near the town center, which were some of the most noticeable features in smaller towns. (See Figure 24.) One IRC representative stated they were trying to transition from post-war aid to standard development by focusing on issues like women's rights, domestic abuse, and education.

Land near the edge of town, which had once been the location of IDP camps, was largely abandoned. The remains of foundations were partially evident where rows of shelters once stood. Some of these sites still had a few homes of those who never left and claimed to be the caretakers of the land. (See Figure 25.) The site of Nyandiama camp in Kenema was being encroached upon by the expanding city, where dozens

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[27] United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Doctors without Borders, German Technical Cooperative, Catholic Relief Services, International Commission of the Red Cross, and International Rescue Committee. These were the most visible NGOs though there were certainly more, some only had offices in Freetown while others shared offices with the larger NGOs.

Figure 23: Remains of a Pakistani UNAMSIL Base in Buedu
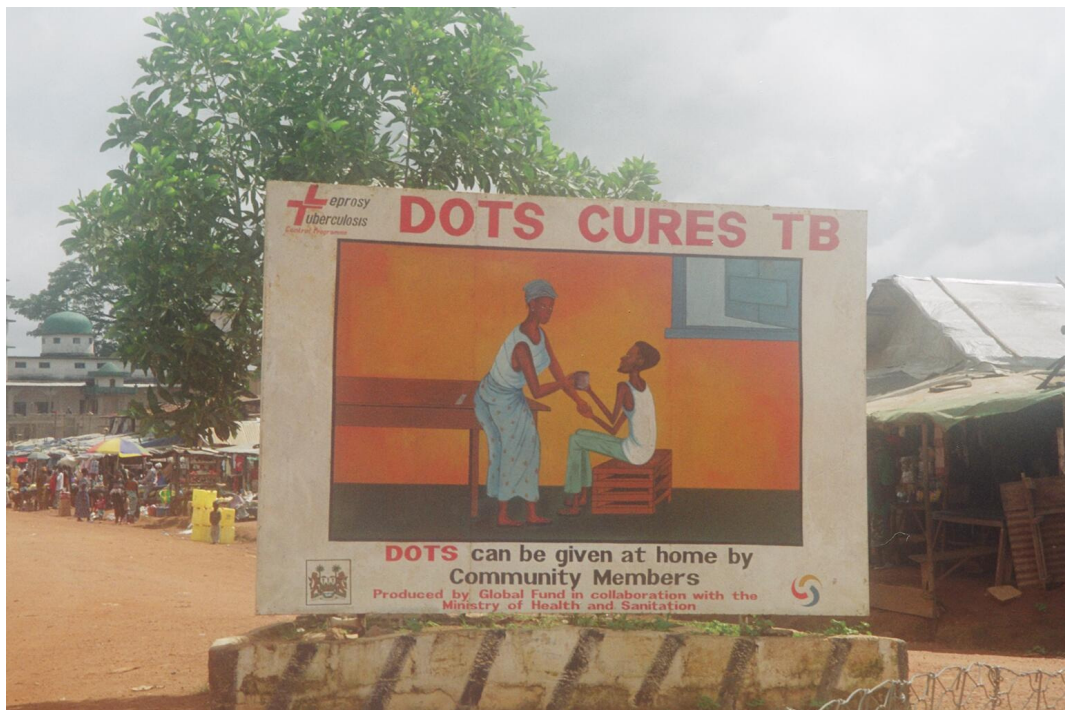
Figure 24: Sign Posted by an NGO in Kailahun

Figure 25: The Last Remaining Dwelling of Lebanese Camp, Near Kenema

Figure 26: Suburban Growth on the Abandoned Site of Nyandiama Camp, Near Kenema

of middle to upper class well-built homes were under construction. (See Figure 26.)

Rebel Forest Bases

Rebel bases were the most unique and ephemeral of morphological units. These bases, or camps as they are known in the vernacular, were the critical element of RUF operations during Phase II and allowed the RUF to escalate a small border rebellion into a full fledged civil war in little over a year. Their purpose was to provide a secure and remote base for training and from which villages and towns could be raided and the main highways ambushed.

History

In the first two years of the war, the RUF strategy was heavily based on the capture of towns and villages and the assimilation of their populations into the rebel movement. During this time the major towns and the occasional village were the base from which the rebels operated. The first recorded forest base was created near Kailahun in 1992 to serve as a youth training camp. This was intended to give the RUF the capacity to train its own fighters without the interference of the NPFL. After learning about the camp, the local NPFL destroyed it.[28] Not long thereafter, the NPRC counteroffensive was launched and further rifts with the NPFL led to their return to Liberia. The RUF was severely weakened and near defeat when a new plan emerged, which became Phase II.

Forest bases were the central component of this new plan. From these bases, the RUF was able to raid with impunity across large swaths of the country, and in these bases it could train any civilians unlucky enough to be captured. This strategy was used to great effect between 1993 and 1997, when dozens of camps were founded across the country. The EO campaign to destroy several of the larger bases, coupled with the growing power of the CDF, led to the destruction of many bases between 1996 and

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[28] Smith, 'Conflict mapping,' p. 264.

1997. Following the AFRC coup in 1997, the RUF came out of the bush to join forces with the SLA, returning to the use of towns and villages as bases. While some splinter factions continued to operate out of forest camps, control of a sizeable number of towns during Phase III allowed the RUF to largely abandon these bases later in the war.

Geography

The most important aspect of the location of these bases was that they were constantly moving, both within and between regions. When the encampment moved within a region, it did so because it had been discovered or destroyed by the enemy and the general location remained the same, within a few miles. A base would move to a different region when the conditions of the war no longer required its existence or the inhabitants were needed elsewhere. In either case, these bases were no more than temporary encampments lasting anywhere from several months to a few years. An NGO report documenting the war describes this aspect of the forest base quite well:

> The RUF conscripted thousands of Sierra Leoneans of all ages and both sexes to be trained as fighters at large training bases. These were opened from time to time depending on the state of the RUF advance, on the number of new conscripts and recruits and on the logistic support available. While one senior RUF officer was responsible for the opening of bases and the provision of training, this did not stop other, smaller training bases from being opened under localized commands.[29]

The aim of the RUF was to have at least one large base near each major town, highway, or economic region. The base was always sited in a heavily forested area with steep terrain—typically in one of the rain forest preserves scattered across the country—and was five to ten miles from the nearest road or settlement. Because of their shifting nature, it is difficult to determine where and when these bases existed. There were often

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[29] Smith, 'Conflict mapping,' p. 45.

three to four major bases in each province, with dozens of smaller camps, observation posts, and way-stations spread across the country.[30]

Morphology

Every former combatant I interviewed gave me the same basic story for the layout of forest bases. Each base was comprised of one central camp and between two to five satellite camps. The central camp was the largest component, anywhere from two to three times the size of a satellite camp and generally occupied the same area as a medium village, with up to one-hundred structures laid out in a grid pattern. This central camp was where most of the rebel soldiers and loyal non-combatants lived, and where all looted goods and weapons were stored. This camp was often located atop or beside a hill; some even required climbing ropes for access. The satellite camps were much smaller, no more than a few hundred square meters, with perhaps a dozen makeshift buildings. Here the training of new conscripts occurred and here most of the slave laborers lived. All of this activity was completely concealed by rain forest canopy.

Most of the structures, known as baffas,[31] were simple open buildings with no walls and a grass or leaf roof. There might be a few wattle and daub structures in the satellite camp, and slightly more in the main camp. Cutting down trees was strictly prohibited as it would reveal the base's location, meaning that there was little construction material to work with. Much of the stolen zinc wound up in the central camp; some former combatants even described entire buildings made out of zinc. Other structures might include a church, a healer's hut, and some type of obstacle course. Distributed throughout the camp were shallow holes used to store weapons and ammunition, which were only accessible when defending the base defense or when leaving to go on a raid.

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[30] An exhaustive list would be irrelevant for this study, though those interested should see 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission report,' p. 7-90 - 7-94; Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, p. 14-15, 39; and Abdullah, 'Revolutionary United Front,' p. 189.

[31] Henry, *Embodied Violence,* p. 163. *Baffa* is a generic name for any type of lean to grass –roofed structure and is not a structure solely found in rebel forest bases.

Attack and Defense

The defenses were laid out in a series of concentric checkpoints along all of the avenues of approach, generally bush paths. At the first checkpoint, there would be two men, about four to six miles from the nearest road or village. One to two miles towards the base would be a section of ten to twelve men, who were separated from the satellite base by another one to two miles. The satellite bases might each have anywhere from thirty to one-hundred fighters at any time. When the base was attacked, the rebels would slowly fall back to the nearest satellite base, while the entire base network was alerted and joined them. The satellite base would then be the site of the skirmish with the rebels using the buildings for cover. These skirmishes regularly ended with the destruction of the satellite base. The central bases were well defended, due to their location atop or beside steep hills or slopes and their well-sited machine gun nests.

Attempts were made by the SLA to destroy some of these camps, but these efforts would often result in only the destruction of a satellite base, while the attackers would leave under the false impression that the entire camp had been destroyed. In addition to laying in ambush along paths leading to the camps, the Kamajors also launched raids against them from time to time, though not with the intention of destroying them. The main offensive, which saw the destruction of several of the most important camps, was led by EO in 1996, and by 1997 most of the major rebel bases were destroyed or abandoned.

The influence of forest camps, which were a product of the war, was very different from that of towns and villages, which existed before the war. This difference means that they began as an intentional change in the landscape, but very quickly became a dominant feature able to influence the course of the war. Their location was influenced by the pre-existing settlement geography—they were built within striking distance of the major towns and highways—but they allowed the forces operating from them to effect severe changes in that pre-existing geography. At the most basic level, Phase II could not have worked without them, for the entire premise of their new

Figure 27: Remains of an Obstacle Course in a Satellite Base Near Camp Zogoda

Figure 28: The Few Remaining Artifacts in the Central Base of Camp Zogoda

strategy was to raid, not occupy, towns and villages: and these raids had to be launched from somewhere.

Post-war Remains

Although I only visited the remains of Camp Zogoda, I believe the fate of every rebel forest base was quite similar, as a decade of laying abandoned in the rain forest will erase most traces of previous inhabitance. (See Figures 27 and 28.) In the spaces of the camp, the undergrowth was thicker, out of place in the mostly open forest. A few artifacts were present, including a rusted ammo box, some extremely deteriorated zinc (perhaps taken from one of the villages I visited), and what seemed to be the faceplate for an air-conditioner. In some places, the ground was raised, possibly the remains of a foundation, very similar to what many villagers claimed were the foundations of destroyed homes. It is not surprising that there were very few material remains, as anything of value would have been looted by the attackers, or later on by nearby villagers coming through to recover stolen items, especially zinc roofing. These scant remains serve as a reminder of how temporary these camps were and how quickly they vanished from the landscape.

Transportation Networks

This element of the landscape was important for the obvious reason that it was the glue holding all of the other features together. There were very few changes in these networks as a result of the war, though their influence on its character is worth discussion.

Morphology

At the most basic level, there are two largely separate transportation networks: roads and bush paths. Roads vary in quality from the tiny fraction that are freshly paved, mostly connecting major towns, to a much larger fraction that are dilapidated and

Figure 29: A Typical Bush Path

covered in potholes, to the vast majority, that are simple dirt tracks, impassable during much of the rainy season. Though there are a great many miles of roads in Sierra Leone, there are still large areas and many villages that they cannot reach. For these regions, one must use bush paths, the total length of which easily exceed by ten times the length of all roads combined. (See Figure 29.) Some of these link scattered villages in the bush. Many connect villages to their numerous farms, secret society bushes, or *sɔkɔisiahun*, and others are a sort of bush highway across regions without roads. These bush paths or trails are often not much wider than a person and are flanked by thick, at times impenetrable vegetation on either side.

Throughout the war, regular military forces like the SLA, ECOMOG, and UNAMSIL consistently used only the roads. They were dependent on roads because they were all motorized formations and they lacked the training or confidence to fight the rebels in the bush. In contrast, the RUF and especially the CDF, as well as elements of the AFRC and ULIMO, showed a marked preference for using bush paths and by-pass routes for movement. Since it was only at the very beginning and very end of the war that the rebels had any type of motor transport, the use of bush paths was certainly an option, with the added benefit of masking their movements from their more conventionally minded enemies. The CDF, comprised of hunters and villagers intimately familiar with the bush, also performed well in this environment, often proving more capable bush fighters than the rebels, which led to their use as scouts and auxiliaries by both ECOMOG and the SLA.

Influence

In terms of pure mobility, transportation networks influenced the war by favoring foot-mobile military forces over motorized forces. Motorized forces, such as the SLA, ECOMOG, and UNAMSIL, were severely constrained due to the few paved roads traversable year round, the considerable number of dirt roads largely impassable during the rainy season, and the inaccessibility by road of many villages and later rebel bases. The obvious benefit was that when they were available, roads allowed rapid movement

of large forces. The foot-mobile forces of the RUF and the CDF, were unhampered by these constraints, as they relied on bush paths. These paths were far more numerous, could be traversed year round, and allowed access to large areas untouched by roads. However, travel by bush path was slow and required large forces to break into smaller elements whose convergence on a target required high levels of coordination.

Another aspect of transportation networks was the opportunity they provided for ambush, a feature exploited to great effect by the RUF and to a lesser degree by the CDF. Throughout the war, but especially during Phase II, the rebels were notorious for laying ambush to the highways linking the major cities. They attacked SLA formations, relief convoys, and ordinary civilian traffic with impunity. In this way, they utilized their own transportation method to deny the enemy his, by moving to and from ambushes along the highways by bush path. This tactic allowed the RUF to effectively isolate several towns during Phase II, creating islands of government control in a sea of rebel dominated territory. Though only small sections of the country were under rebel control, they gave an appearance of ubiquity by denying access to the major highways and selectively raiding near and far through bush paths.

Although the rebels frequently used bush paths, they by no means controlled them. This fact was exploited by the Kamajors, who proved adept at ambushing the rebels along bush paths. The Kamajor battle song is about setting the *dambi*, or trap, for the rebels. This tactic was aided by their knowledge of the terrain, which was superior to that of the rebels, as most were assigned to protect their native villages or chiefdoms.[32] It may seem surprising that the CDF did not engage in the same sort of guerilla war against the AFRC, since they were road bound for the year or so before the ECOMOG interventions. This fact helps illustrate the main differences between the two groups, as the CDF was a decentralized, defensive response to the centralized, offensive goals of the RUF. The CDF were only involved in offensive operations as auxiliaries, mainly as scouts and skirmishers assisting regular military formations, like the SLA, EO, or ECOMOG.

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[32] Muana, 'The Kamajoi militia.'

Post War

There was not a tremendous difference between the pre and post-war transportation networks. The NPRC did initiate several road cleaning projects in the major towns, and segments of the highway between Freetown, Bo, and Kenema, were repaved between 1992 and 1994. For the most part, the existing roads, many first laid down in the 1950's and 1960's, continued to deteriorate, unsurprisingly when one considers the maintenance required to keep many of the dirt roads to remote villages in a traversable condition. It is likely that a majority of the bush paths became overgrown from disuse when most of the villagers fled to the towns, but this overgrowth would have been quickly remedied after resettlement. One important effect of the post-war road state was to funnel aid into only those places most reachable by road. Remote villages along poorly maintained roads, and especially villages only access by bush path, were much less likely to receive aid.

CHAPTER III

TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE:

AN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF PORTIONS OF

KAILAHUN AND KENEMA DISTRICTS

In this chapter I will describe the landscape history of three different places in the Eastern Province during and after the war. This narrative will weave together the interactions of the four morphological units outlined in the previous chapter. The first section includes the towns of Kenema and Blama, thirteen villages in between, and Camp Zogoda. In the next section I will discuss the towns of Segbwema and Daru, and six villages in between. The last section is a collection of eight villages and three towns spread across the Liberian and Guinean border in Kailahun and Kenema districts. Although, significant gaps exist in the testimonies I received, I have attempted to fill these in with the help of a very detailed NGO report on the history of the conflict.[1]

Between Kenema and Blama

This region is comprised of Kenema Town, Blama Town, and most of the villages in between these two towns that lie along the highway. (See Figure 30.) Seven villages sit next to this stretch of highway, with at least twice as many more accessible by bush path. During the war this region was important because it lay along the main transportation corridor between Freetown and the interior, specifically between Bo Town and Kenema Town. Not far to the south of the highway was Camp Zogoda, the rebel headquarters between 1994 and 1996.

Although parts of Kenema District were attacked earlier in the war, it was not until late 1993 that this region became involved in the fighting. In December of 1993,

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[1] Gaps were filled in using Smith, 'Conflict mapping,' Section I p. 299-326 and Section II & III p. 261-291.
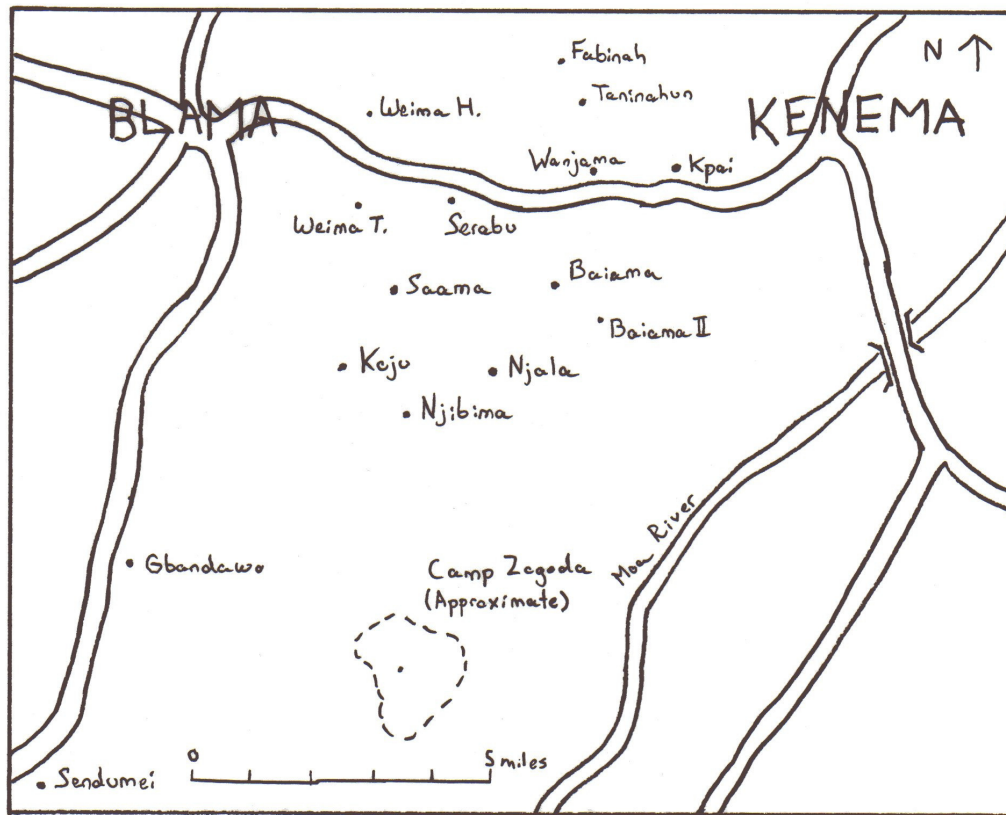
Figure 30: Map of Subregion I (Sierra Leone (map), 1968)

several hundred revels emerged from their hideout in the Gola West Forest Preserve and destroyed a swath of villages on their trek to the Kambui Hills Forest Preserve, South of Kenema. Here, Foday Sankoh personally selected the site of Camp Zogoda, which was founded between January and February of 1994.[2] This base was the first of the new bush camps that Phase II would depend on. The activities Camp Zogoda supported and attempts to destroy it would dominate the fighting in this region until late 1996.

The Zogoda was laid out like most rebel forest bases, and it is described in the TRC Report as "an encampment of makeshift buildings and storage huts nestled in the forest atop a ridge in the Kambui Hills."[3] Although this is a good general description, I

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[2] 'Truth and reconciliation commission report,' p. 7-90.
[3] Ibid, p. 7-90.

received a more detailed account of the base from a former Kamajor. There were defensive checkpoints at two mile intervals along the trails leading towards the base. Training was conducted in satellite bases surrounded by a high bush wall with barbed wire. There was an obstacle course, a barracks, and several large pits for storing weapons. The trainees carried heavy gear and wooden rifles. On a large hill, a few miles away, was the main camp. The hill was so steep that you had to use ropes draped down from above to reach the top. It was the size of a large village, with many well ordered huts, some with zinc roofs. In the center was a large house where Foday Sankoh lived; it had a generator and a lot of modern office equipment.

Immediately after construction of this camp, the rebels began attacking surrounding villages. The thirteen villages I visited were first attacked within a two week period in late March or early April. These attacks were timed to coincide with the rice harvest, which many villagers were subsequently forced to carry to Camp Zogoda or its satellite bases. Only two villages in this region, Taninahun and Fabinah, were spared due to their location a few miles north of the highway. They were eventually attacked on January 11, 1995. These initial attacks were mostly major raids where only important structures were destroyed and a few people killed while everything was looted. One of the larger villages, Weima Tokmombu, with around one-thousand people, was completely destroyed, except for the mosque where the rebels spent the night. All of the zinc roofing was removed and carried back to Camp Zogoda. The two remaining villages, attacked in January of 1995, were completely destroyed, aside from one or two buildings left to store loot and spend the night.

Most villagers immediately fled into the bush during the attacks, while an unlucky few were captured by the rebels and taken to Camp Zogoda. Those who fled to Kenema or Blama, often arriving at Bandama Checkpoint (along the highway on the western edge of Kenema). Once in Kenema they stayed with family or friends, or they squatted on vacant property or at schools, which eventually became Internally Displaced Person's (IDP) camps. Some villagers chose to stay in the bush for up to a year after the first attack before finally moving to Kenema, surviving on bush fruits or small farms

hidden in the bush. In Weima Handubu, the villagers spread out around the bush within a few miles of the village and built small settlements of five to six huts each. One of these, named Kangama (refuse to go) was built on the site of a small palm oil processing station, essentially several large pits where the seeds were crushed. A few other villages had similar stories, but on a much smaller scale. Those who stayed behind were constantly harassed by the rebels and had to rebuild their bush shelters every few months. At the same time these first raids were launched, ambushes along the Bo-Kenema highway began and by June the entire stretch of highway was considered impassable. The town of Blama, which had a small garrison of soldiers, was attacked six times. The rebels eventually managed to occupy a portion of the town separated by a small bridge. Much of the town center was destroyed as a result of the fighting, while the homes of prominent civilians were intentionally destroyed by the rebels. (See Figures 31 and 32.)

The massive influx of displaced villagers from across the district led to the establishment of several IDP camps in Kenema and one in Blama. There were at least four camps in Kenema: Lebanese Camp, built on the site of the Lebanese school on the western edge of the city, with around fifteen-thousand residents; Gofor Camp, built near the bridge across the Moa to the south, with around eight-thousand residents; Nyandiama Camp, in the south-east, with around sixteen-thousand residents; and RTI Camp, near the site of the Rural Technical Institute. One additional camp was also created in Blama, along the highway to the east of the town, which had as many as fifteen-thousand residents. Most of these camps did not come into existence until later in the war, between 1996 and 1998, and they seem to have been most populous during the 1998 to 2000 period. Though it is unclear when, it does appear that these camps were sometimes attacked outright, while at other times the food stores were raided by the RUF, SLA, and later the AFRC.

Kenema was first attacked in December 1994. The battle lasted eight days and began as a raid on the homes of prominent people. As many as eight other attacks like this were conducted between 1994 and 1996, with the rebels often coordinating the

Figure 31: Remains of a Destroyed House in Blama

Figure 32: Remains of a Looted Office in Blama

attacks of several small groups from different directions simultaneously. Most of these battles lasted a few days and ended with the destruction of the homes of important people or government offices. Several of the outlying settlements very close to Kenema were also raided on a regular basis, driving more people into the town center.

In the village of Baiama, soldiers escorted villagers back in July of 1995, constructed defenses out of the remaining zinc, and stayed for three months until moving to nearby Serabu. Within a week of their departure, the rebels attacked and razed the village. This village may have been resettled early because it lies along several bush paths close to Camp Zogoda, which may have been routes for groups of rebels moving to ambush the highway. Many villages also reported being attacked from the general direction of Njala, a few miles south of Baiama. After moving to Serabu, one of the larger villages in this region, the soldiers constructed similar defenses and beat back numerous rebel attacks over the next two years. However, most villagers from this region resided in Kenema until general resettlement began after the 1996 elections. When they returned, they found their villages completely overgrown and all lootable objects were gone, especially zinc roofs. Several roofless structures were still standing in various stages of disrepair. Those buildings that were left untouched, especially important structures, were often covered in graffiti. In three villages, the rebels had poisoned the wells by putting gunpowder in them.

While in Kenema, especially in the IDP camps, many young men were recruited into the Kamajors, a militia which began operating against the rebels and defending villages in this region. Recruiting began around June of 1996, after which many villages were reclaimed and resettled. A force of around 200 Kamajors was stationed in Blama in October 1996. Their work, scouting and raiding, led up to the November attack on Camp Zogoda.

Raids on Camp Zogoda by the Kamajors and sometimes the SLA were not uncommon. During 1995 and 1996, several Kamajors in nearby villages claimed to have participated in multiple attacks on the Zogoda. Groups of around a dozen would patrol, sometimes on a daily bases, in the direction of the Zogoda. The final attack came in

November 1996 and included four SLA companies, a few hundred Kamajors, some Executive Outcomes (EO) personnel on the ground, and two EO piloted helicopter gunships. Several of the satellite bases were attacked by ground forces, while blocking elements were placed at all of the escape routes. After a three day intermittent artillery bombardment on the central base, rebels began surrendering in mass, allowing the ground forces to converge on and destroy the central base.[4]

The destruction of their main forest base pushed the RUF to the negotiating table and a peace treaty was soon drawn up. Nevertheless, intermittent fighting continued and serious rifts began to emerge between the SLA and Kamajors over the questionable activities of the former, which included harsh treatment of civilians, widespread looting, and apparent collusion with the RUF. In Kenema, this conflict led to skirmishes between soldiers and Kamajors at checkpoints, the burning down of several Kamajor houses, and the execution of several of their fighters and imitators. Eventually this fighting developed into the AFRC coup of May 1997, after which the soldiers invited the rebels to come out of the bush and share power.

Their combined occupation of Kenema led to widespread looting and a large flight of civilians, but fortunately there was little outright destruction. One of their first acts was to attack the Kamajors and destroy their homes and support networks. After heavy fighting, the highly outnumbered Kamajors were forced to go into hiding or flee into the bush. In August of 1997, a large group of Kamajors residing in Blama were driven out and many of their houses and the houses of those who had been assisting them were burned down. A training and interrogation base was set up the south of Kenema on the site of the waterworks. Here, many suspected Kamajors were detained, tortured, and eventually executed. The remains of this camp were covered with graffiti detailing the exploits of its former occupants.

The second round of attacks on villages began soon after the coup and continued on weekly basis between 1997 and 1998. Most of these were raids of various intensity,

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[4] The description of this assault come from interviews with former Kamajors and SLA personnel, personal communications with P.K. Muana, and from: Jim Hooper, *Bloodsong: First-Hand Accounts of a Modern Private Army in Action* (HarperCollins, London, 2003), p. 248.

but at most only a few houses were destroyed in any village. The rebels and soldiers who attacked were more concerned with looting, especially food supplies, than causing destruction. In Serabu, the rebels and soldiers established a training base for young men, and looted material from all of the surrounding villages was taken there. Some villagers fled to Kenema again, but since it was also under AFRC control until 1998, it was not always a safe place. It is unclear what percentage of the population remained in the countryside during this time, but it seems to have been less than half. At the same time, many Kamajors went into hiding in the bush, only coming out to visit their villages at night for food. Over time, they grew in strength and began leading small scale operations against AFRC forces.

In February of 1998, Nigerian peacekeepers (ECOMOG) captured Freetown and began the push up country, arriving in Kenema by the end of the month. AFRC forces fled without a fight and the city was quickly taken over by ECOMOG, who were assisted by a large number of Kamajors. The Kamajors set about establishing checkpoints and pass systems to control civilian movement, while publicly torturing, executing, and burning down the houses of anyone who collaborated with the AFRC. By March, large number of displaced people began to return to the villages around Kenema as they were secured by Kamajors. The number of displaced people residing in Kenema and in the camps continued to fluctuate between 1998 and 2000 as intermittent rebel raids continued. However, by 2000, this region was largely secure and by end of 2001 all of the IDP camps were closed down and resettlement was complete.

After the war, these villages were in the condition described in the previous chapter. They were smaller in population and area and had fewer, less well-built homes. A few villages had received some post-war aid. Weima Tokmombu had a dozen concrete homes with zinc roofs built by a Canadian NGO, most likely chosen because of its proximity to Blama. Three other villages had new wells dug by the African Muslims Association, since the previous ones had been poisoned by the rebels.

Blama was much the worse for wear and less populated than before the war. Most of the buildings in the town center were either abandoned or destroyed and many

Figure 33: Remains of a Destroyed House in Kenema

Figure 34: A Makeshift Structure Built atop a Destroyed House Foundations in Kenema

of the homes of prominent residents still lay in ruins, especially along the road heading south to Sendumei. Kenema also had ruins, but they were much more scattered. Along the main road through town, a few large government buildings were destroyed, but new ones were being erected in their place. The remains of several destroyed homes of prominent residents were dispersed throughout the town. (See Figure 33.) No effort had been put forward to rebuild these homes because many of the residents were killed during the war and their children had either left the country or were too poor to rebuild. In other places, makeshift buildings, often of wood or wattle and daub construction, had been built atop the foundations of completely destroyed buildings. (See Figure 34.) Despite these ruins, the town as a whole had grown significantly since before the war. This growth is very clear in satellite imagery and is also evident by the large number of construction projects on the edge of town.

Kenema, unlike other cities, had a large number of monuments and memorials. Pakistani peacekeepers built a large clock-tower along the entrance road, which reads "Long Live Pak-Sierra Friendship." They also converted their former base into a children's park, though I never saw any children playing in it. (See Figure 35.) In a small village, in the hills on the outskirts of town, there were plans for a monument to remember the victims of a rebel attack in which over thirty villagers were killed. The Catholic priest behind the project showed me the site and told me about his idea to build a monument atop the mass grave with the names of the dead and a description of what had happened. At the edge of this village was the grave of a holy man who supposedly foresaw the war in a prophecy, though he died long before it began. After the war a new headstone was emplaced noting his prediction. (See Figure 36.) A very small and unobtrusive sign, funded by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was placed along an intersection where many civilians were once massacred. (See Figure 37.) Along a fork in the main commercial strip, set in a small grass plot, was the grave of Dr. Alpha Lavalie, who was famous for his plan to use the Poro Society to recruit civilian irregulars to fight the rebels.

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Figure 35: A UNAMSIL Base Converted into a Children's Park

Figure 36: The Grave of Holy Man Who Predicted the Civil War, Built After the War

Figure 37: A Sign in Kenema Posted by the TRC on the Site of a Massacre

Between Segbwema and Daru

Segbwema and Daru, only seven miles apart, were the locus of heavy fighting through much of the war. Both towns lie along the old colonial railway, the main transportation corridor heading to Freetown. Before the war, Segbwema was an important trading and services town, with a hospital, several good schools, a bank, and a large market with many shops. The town of Daru sits on the eastern shore of the Moa River, while the Moa Barracks, nearly as large as the town, lies across a small bridge on the western shore. Many of the villages in this region were heavily affected by the fighting over these two towns.
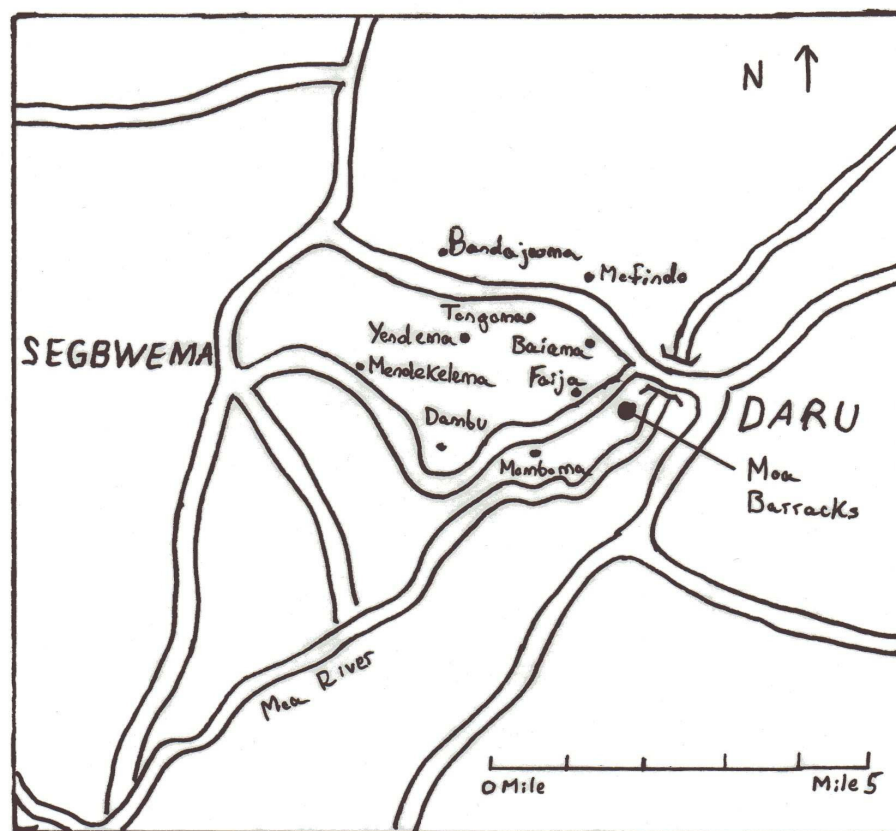
Figure 38: Map of Subregion II (Sierra Leone (map), 1968)

I visited the towns of Segbwema and Daru, as well as six out of the twenty or so villages in between them. (See Figure 38.) While this number is only a small portion of the villages in this region, there were still noticeable patterns and connections between events happening in the towns and the villages during the war. After the initial assault on Daru early in the war, this region saw only brief raiding in late 1992, since it was well defended at that time. During Phase II there was also only minor and intermittent raiding, while both towns became host to large IDP populations. Most of the heavy fighting occurred after the AFRC coup, as the previously well defended villages were now open game. Both towns subsequently changed hands several times and took high levels of damage between 1998 and 1999.

The capture of Daru was a major objective for the northern front of the initial RUF offensive in 1991, which would have neutralized the largest SLA base in the district and given the rebels control of one of the few bridges over the Moa River. The main force of NPFL/RUF fighters reached the town of Daru in late April and quickly occupied the town and burned down the houses of important people before soldiers from the Moa Barracks forced them to retreat. The townspeople went to live in the barracks, while a large number of soldiers moved into the town and beat back several more rebel attacks over the next several months. Eventually these soldiers were reinforced by troops from Guinea who brought much heavier firepower to the defense. Intermittent attacks continued until October or November when an infamous NPFL commander led the largest attack yet. The town was captured and the soldiers retreated back to the barracks, but the rebels were unable to take the bridge. Eventually their commander was killed in the fighting and they retreated. Much of Daru was destroyed as a result of the artillery and rockets used by the Guineans. Daru was not attacked again until December 1996, very late in Phase II.

Segbwema was first attacked on December 25, 1992, almost a year after the cessation of attacks on Daru, probably by a small force from the north where the rebels had bypassed the Moa River. During this attack, a small group of NPFL fighters held a prominent doctor hostage in his home before beheading him and burning down his

house. A small group of soldiers, police, and ULIMO fighters managed to push them out after several hours of fighting. Soon after, soldiers arrived from Daru to serve as a garrison and set up defensive emplacements along the town entrances. After their arrival, there were no more attacks until Phase II, during which a few minor raids were repelled with little damage to the town.

In the first round of attacks on villages, Baiama and Tongoma, on the main road between the two towns, were attacked in December 1992. This attack occurred roughly at the same time as the first raid into Segbwema, but the village attacks probably occurred first. Both villages were occupied by the rebels and were used as bases of operation in the region. Most of the villagers fled to the IDP camps at Segbwema. Within a year, soldiers from Daru had removed the rebels from both villages and stayed there for some time until the villagers returned in 1996, at which time Tongoma and Baiama were ruined. It is likely that several other villages along this road were attacked at or near the same time. A third village, Dambu, the second village out from Segbwema along another route between the two towns, was raided in early 1993, a few months after the previous attacks. Soldiers were defending Dambu, but they retreated when the rebels came. Baiama or Tongoma may have served as a staging point for this raid and others. Dambu was unoccupied until 1995, when it was resettled with the assistance of some soldiers who set up defensive positions. It appears that those villages closest to Daru and Segbwema were well defended and held by the SLA for most of the war, as they believed any successful assault on either town would have to first capture these villages.

In response to these attacks and the general insecurity in the region, people began to flock to both towns in 1991. In Segbwema, by 1993, there were at least four-thousand squatters encamped throughout the town. This led to the creation of an IDP camp on the road to Majihun village in May of 1993, which came to host between six-thousand and thirteen-thousand IDPs.[5] One or two years later, another camp was created at the Moa Barracks in Daru with around eight-thousand residents. During and after the elections in 1996, people began to leave the camps in order to resettle their villages.

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[5] Henry, *Embodied Violence*, p. 47.

The second round of fighting followed the AFRC coup of May 1997, in which the rebels and the soldiers joined forces. Now that they controlled both towns, there was widespread looting as well as the destruction of the homes of Kamajors and their supporters. The villages of Mofindo, Yendema, and Baiama were all attacked. Yendema and Mofindo both lie near, but off of the main road between the two towns, perhaps the greatest factor which preserved them to such a late point in the war. At Yendema everything of value was looted and many houses were destroyed, while many villagers were captured and taken to a Peiyama Camp to the north. The small village of Mofindo was also raided, though most villagers managed to escape into the bush. There they built and rebuilt small clusters of dwellings over the next few years, while being constantly harassed by rebels and soldiers. Baiama was attacked for a second time, but from a different direction—the rebel base at Giema to the east. Much of the village was looted and destroyed, while those captured were taken to Giema.

Though there were some prior raids by Kamajors alone, Segbwema and Daru were not recaptured until ECOMOG forces assisted by Kamajors came through in March of 1998. Segbwema was captured first, after heavy fighting, which saw the use of heavy weaponry and damage to the town. This force then moved on to Daru, but was ambushed a few miles from the town. This ambush developed into a running battle involving several villages along the road (none that I visited), the Moa Barracks, and the town of Daru itself, all of which were severely damaged by the fighting. ECOMOG and the Kamajors were able to capture Daru and hold on to it throughout the rest of the war, despite numerous AFRC attacks.

Segbwema was attacked twice by AFRC forces over the next several months. Although both attacks were defeated, several homes and buildings were destroyed as a result of the fighting. In December of 1998, a very large attack occurred, which succeeded in capturing the town. By some accounts, ECOMOG fled when they learned of the attack and the remaining Kamajors were not properly equipped to handle the huge assault. Most of the damage to the town caused during the war happened in this attack,

**Figure 39:** ICRC Building in Central Segbwema in 1997 (Photograph courtesy of Doug Henry)

Figure 40: Remains of the ICRC Building in Central Segbwema in 2005

when Majihun Road Camp was also destroyed. (See Figure 39 and 40) Many residents fled to Kenema where they stayed for the remainder of the war. This attack was part of a larger national strategy to isolate ECOMOG forces at the Moa Barracks while other AFRC forces launched the devastating attack on Freetown a few weeks later. AFRC and later solely RUF forces were able to hold Segbwema for the rest of the war, despite almost daily attacks from Kamajors in Daru.

At least three villages (Mendekelema, Dambu, and Tongoma) were attacked this time. Mendekelema, very close to Segbwema, was completely destroyed following the attack on the city, forcing many residents to flee to Daru. Dambu was attacked at the same time and was also completely destroyed. The last attack occurred in Tongoma, but it was unclear if this attack was related to the assault on Segbwema. The village was looted and much of it was also burned down, though the villagers were allowed to flee to Daru barracks. Most of the villages between the two towns were occupied by a succession of soldiers, rebels, Kamajors, and ECOMOG over the next two years of fighting. When villagers returned in 2000 and 2001, many said small groups of Kamajors were living there.

Whereas before the war Segbwema was the more important and larger town, its role had now been usurped by Daru, which was now larger and much more populous. Though there had been much destruction in Daru as a result of the war, it was not entirely evident at the time of my fieldwork, since most of the town had been rebuilt. After the 1998 attack on Segbwema, many displaced people and donor agencies relocated there. Many of the villages around Daru were not well defended when it was first attacked and they were easily destroyed. These villagers had to live in Daru throughout the war and many of them chose to stay there after it was over. Also, many of the IDP camp dwellers remained after the war because they became tied to the community through marriage or land tenure arrangements. These factors helped Daru maintain and increase its population after the war, which helped raise the resources and incentives to rebuild the town.
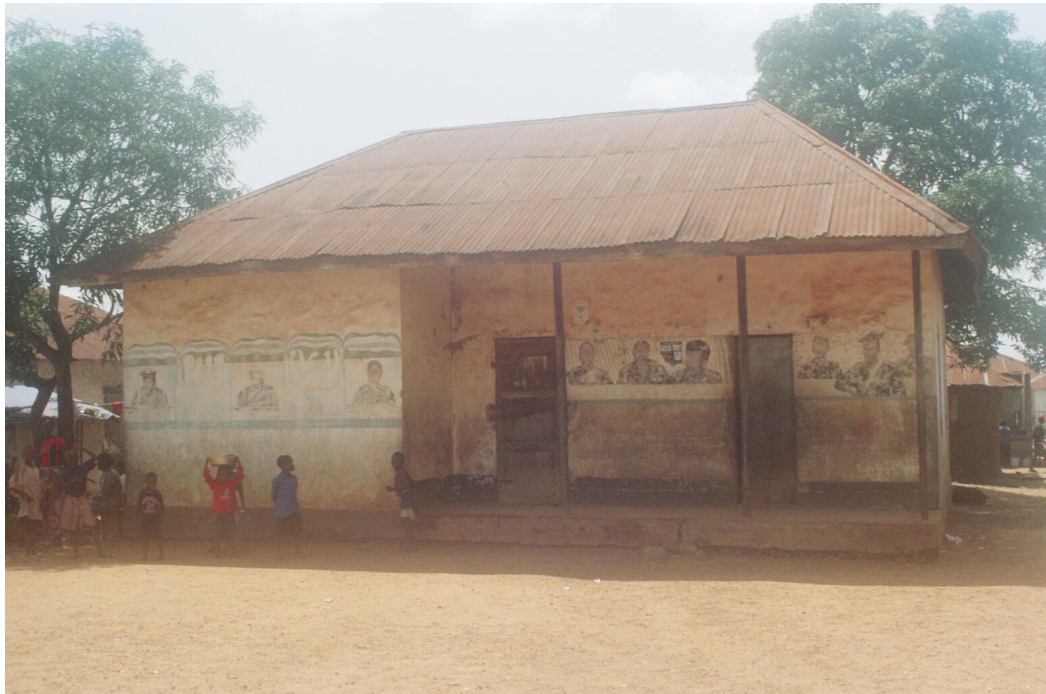
Figure 41: Paintings of Famous Soldiers in Daru

Figure 42: Monument to an Indian Peacekeeper in the Moa Barrack

There were two monuments worth noting in Daru. In the town of Daru were several paintings of famous soldiers, made early in the war, some of whom were the NPRC coup plotters. (See Figure 41.) These paintings may have been more than pure propaganda as there seems to have been more trust and dignity associated with the military in the first one or two years of the war. When I asked a local policeman about the paintings, he apologized for their presence and stated there was a plan to remove them. They might also have served as a recruiting device as a small flyer for the current RSLMF was posted near one of these paintings. In the Moa Barracks there was a large obelisk honoring an Indian UNAMSIL peacekeeper who died in an assault on Pendembu in 2001. (See Figure 42.) I expressed my surprise to the officer escorting me that the first real monument to the war would honor a foreigner. He replied that there was nothing in the actions of his countrymen worth honoring and that they had enduring respect for any foreigner who would give his life for Sierra Leone

Segbwema faired much worse during and after the war than Daru. Though a significant amount of the town was destroyed through the fighting, larger potions were also looted. Some of this looting was done by AFRC forces who sold the materials (zinc roofs, doors, and windows) to traders in Guinea or Liberia, while even more were simply stripped off by early returnees in 2002 before widespread resettlement began. A high level of destruction was centered on the edge of town along the road to Daru, where constant raids were carried out by Kamajors between 1998 and 2000. The remains of one Nigerian armored vehicle lay here, while another sat near the new police station. (See Figure 43.)

The worst destruction was around the main market street and the old town center, which before the war contained several two-storey concrete buildings, but was now filled with rubble and foundations. (See Figure 44.) Along the market strip, some makeshift wooden shops had been erected, but there was little activity, as most of the traders had either been killed or fled during the war. The main secondary school had been repaired (it had been deroofed during the war) by the GTZ, while the bank and police station were rebuilt by the government. One large area of well-built homes was

Figure 43: Remains of an ECOMOG Tank Near the Police Station in Segbwema

Figure 44: Ruins Near Central Segbwema

Figure 45: The Grave of Captain Prince Ben-Hirsch in Segbwema

now only ruins and foundations covered with small wattle and daub dwellings. Another area of similar homes was occupied by the RUF during their stay and was still in good condition, aside from being covered in graffiti. This section of town was closest to the road to Bunumbu, which led to the rebel base at Peiyama. There were a few graves of notable soldiers who died during the early years of the war, when people still had faith in the Army. One of these belonged to Captain Prince Ben-Hirsch who was famous for his skillful use of irregular combatants to fight the RUF. (See Figure 45.)

A combination of factors reversed the roles of these towns after the war. Segbwema's heyday was in the 1950's and 1960's and ever since the closing of several training farms and dismantlement of the railway in the 1970's, it had been slowly declining. The large amount of infrastructure kept the town alive and made it the economic center of Kailahun District until the outbreak of the war, when many of these fixed assets were destroyed. Daru absorbed much more post-war aid partially because it was perceived as more secure by donor agencies, since Segbwema was occupied by the RUF for the last four years of the war. It was also rumored that the Paramount Chief in Segbwema would not allow any NGO's to rent property for an office, instead forcing them to buy land. Not a single NGO accepted this policy and Segbwema never received any post-war aid.

There is little new to say about the post-war state of villages in this region as they followed the patterns outlined in the previous chapter. (See Figures 46 and 47.) A few villages received assistance in water and sanitation projects (the digging of wells and latrines), but none were given any dwelling reconstruction aid. In fact, zinc roofs were fairly rare and the few I saw were looted from the Moa Barracks after the war, and understandably so, since they were originally stolen from the villagers.

Figure 46: Mofindo After the War (Njaluahun Chiefdom)

Figure 47: A House Under Construction in Yendema (Njaluahun Chiefdom)

Borderlands of Kailahun and Kenema Districts

The last region, comprising eight villages and three towns, does not fall in to nearly as compact of a study region as the previous two. (See Figure 48.) Instead, this region represents a smattering of sites across Eastern Kailahun and Kenema districts. Most of these villages were visited because of some important feature. Several are very close to the Liberian border and were some of the first villages attacked during the war. Though these accounts reveal few local patterns, they are interesting for their idiosyncrasies and because of some of the larger processes they reflect. Instead of describing the entire region as a chronological progression, as in the previous two sections, I will give the full story of each village and town separately.
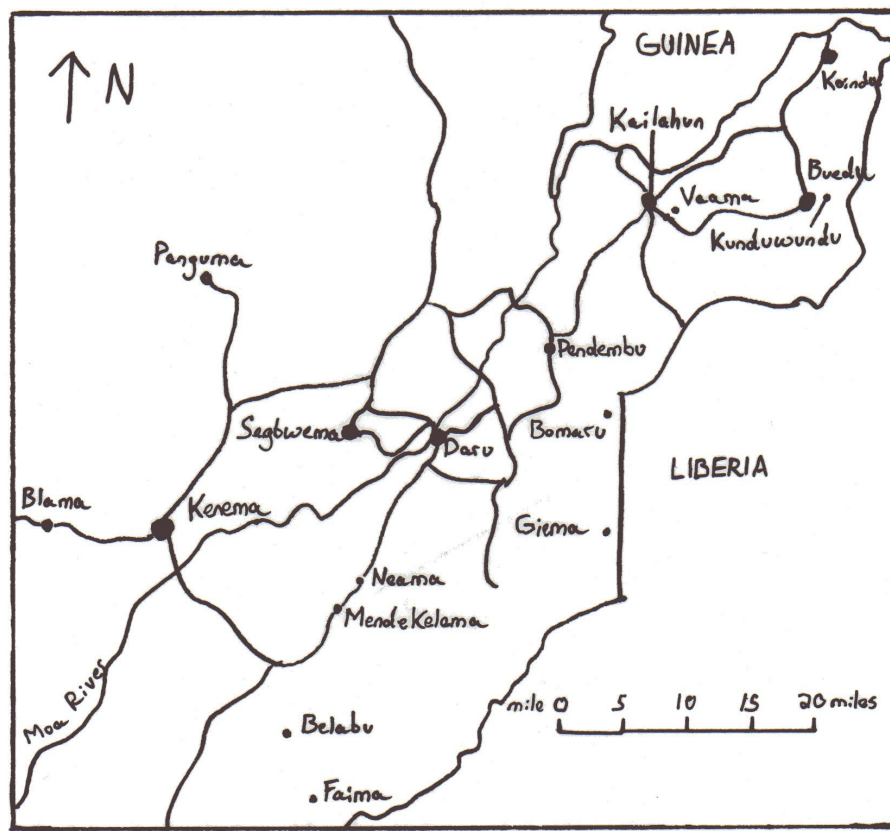
Figure 48: Map of Subregion III (Sierra Leone (map), 1968)

Belabu and Faima are two large villages south of Kenema, near the Gola Forest Reserve and Liberian border, which were attacked very early in the war. Faima was first attacked on April 12, 1991. Most residents thought it was only an NPFL food-finding raid from Liberia. There were no political messages and no Sierra Leoneans could be discerned among the fighters. They came into the village shooting at anyone who ran away and asking for "Momoh's soldiers." The villagers were gathered and told to separate between Liberians and Sierra Leoneans, after which the gunmen began killing the Sierra Leoneans. In the chaos that followed, over sixty people were killed and the entire village was looted without destroying any buildings. Nine days later, Belabu, fifteen miles up the road to Kenema, was attacked by a similar force. This time, no villagers were killed. However, they were assembled and spoken to by a Commander Qadaffi, while their homes were looted. The rebels returned every few weeks for supplies and recruits until a group of soldiers came and began firing on the village indiscriminately. Though there were no rebels there at the time, several villagers were killed. Afterwards, the soldiers scolded the villagers for assisting the rebels. From then on, it became very difficult to tell the soldiers and rebels apart.

Both villages were attacked again a few days before Christmas in 1993. Faima was defended by at least one platoon of soldiers, who were defeated by a large force coming from the direction of the border. The entire village was destroyed and many more villagers killed. Foday Sankoh was supposedly spotted with the force on their way to found the Zogoda. Only a few days later, another force (soldiers, but more likely rebels dressed as soldiers) razed Belabu and converted what was left into a temporary base. Not long after this attack, villages around Kenema (see the previous section) began experiencing raids from the South. It is very likely that these attacks were made by the spearhead force that went on to found Camp Zogoda. Both villages were abandoned until the election in 1996, when Kamajors returned with villagers from Kenema and the IDP camps. After 1997, this area became hotly contested between the AFRC and the Kamajors. Belabu managed to hold off several attacks and survive, but Faima was razed a second time in January of 2000 by a large AFRC force.

Neama and Mendekelema, about ten miles apart, both lie along a main road south of Daru, not far from the Gola Forest Preserve and only about twenty miles north of Belabu and Faima. Both of these villages are very large, with around three-thousand occupants each, and both have five to eight smaller satellite villages around them. Mendekelema was attacked in mid-May of 1991. A few people were killed and the houses of many important people were destroyed. After this attack, the remaining villagers were assembled and spoken to about the RUF's plan. Most of the fighters who claimed to be in the RUF were Liberian or Burkinabe. Many young boys were conscripted as porters, but they eventually became soldiers. The next day, soldiers came and fired upon the village, but soon left, allowing the rebels to return and execute around sixty prominent people, who were later buried in mass. Much of the village was destroyed during this attack and many villagers fled into the bush. This pattern of soldiers coming for a few days followed by rebels continued until 1995 when the village was almost completely destroyed and the remains were occupied by the RUF.

In Neama events worked out very differently. During the first attack, within a few days of the attack on Mendekelema, very few people were killed and no houses were destroyed, though the villagers were assembled and spoken to. Several young men were conscripted, after which the rebels left. Many of the villagers fled into the bush until a few months later when a force of ULIMO militia and soldiers came to defend the village. They dug trenches, erected checkpoints, trained some of the villagers, and patrolled the surrounding area aggressively. Neama began attracting displaced people from many nearby villages who sought this protection. RUF attacks were occurring several times a week though, mostly as small raids to kill or conscript a few villagers. The village grew to over five-thousand inhabitants during this time and nearly became a recognized IDP camp, as food shipments were delivered from a major NGO. It was decided that the people could be better cared for in Kenema so the village was abandoned in 1995. Only a few soldiers and young men stayed behind, but the RUF soon forced them out.

After the elections in 1996, the RUF abandoned both villages. Neama was resettled with the help of several local Kamajors and Mendekelema was resettled with no help at first, but later a large contingent of ECOMOG troops and Kamajors were stationed there. Both villages remained relatively peaceful until after the AFRC coup. In August of 1998, Neama was attacked by a very large AFRC force that routed the Kamajors, razed the entire village, and killed over one-hundred people. Within one week, the AFRC force moved on to Mendekilema where there was a major battle with over one-hundred troops on each side. The ECOMOG forces defended with bomber aircraft, helicopter gunships, and armored cars, but were overwhelmed after three attacks in one day. The village was razed and over forty people were killed. What remained of the villages was occupied by the RUF/AFRC until resettlement began in 2000 and 2001.

Bomaru, the first village to be attacked in the war, had a population close to five-thousand when the war began. The events surrounding the attack on Bomaru are confusing. I received several different versions of the story. It is clear that the village was attacked two to three times over a two week period, and that both soldiers and rebels were involved in each fight. The soldiers were defeated each time and after their final defeat the villagers were gathered and told about the RUF's goal to take Freetown. Over one-hundred villagers were killed during the skirmishes and a few houses were destroyed. The RUF eventually conscripted many young people from this village. Bomaru was recaptured during the NPRC counteroffensive in May of 1993, but it was largely deserted as many villagers fled, fearing retribution from the government, while most of the other villagers were forced to retreat back to Liberia with the RUF. The soldiers remained in the village and soon it had returned to its pre-war size as people from surrounding villages sought protection there. The RUF began to occupy the smaller abandoned villages surrounding Bomaru from which they launched constant raids, often abducting people tending their farms or outside the village at night. The soldiers beat back several raids into the village, but they eventually abandoned the area sometime in 1995. Now attacks from the rebel base at Giema to the South increased, though they never tried to capture the village. After the AFRC coup, this region was

devoid of Kamajors and ECOMOG forces never ventured this far out. In May of 1998, just a few months before similar attacks on Mendekilema and Neama, Bomaru was attacked and destroyed by a large AFRC force. Some people who had fled to Liberia earlier returned and settled here with RUF/AFRC forces who remained until the war ended in 2002.

I also visited Giema, a small village atop a hill less than a mile from Liberia, but was unable to learn much. The village was first attacked early in the war in March of 1991. No one was killed and no houses were destroyed, but nearly all the young men were conscripted into the RUF. A few years later, on the site of the village or somewhere in the nearby bush, a major rebel base was created, which became the national headquarters for some time after the Zogoda was destroyed in 1996. The village was full of ruins and had been razed at least once, though I was unable to determine if this action occurred before it became a major rebel base or as part of one of the attacks to destroy the base.

The last two villages, Vaama and Kunduwundu, are both small villages on the road leading out of Kailahun Town and Buedu Town. (See Figures 49 and 50.) Vaama was attacked in early April of 1991, but no one was killed and no buildings were destroyed. The roads were blocked in all directions, so many villagers stayed and most of the young men were conscripted into the RUF. Rebels would pass the night there while moving along the highway to Kailahun Town. The Army came in 1993, but the rebels and most villagers had already fled to Pendembu. They returned one year later to find the entire village destroyed and looted, and rebuilt the village as it stands today. Since this village was deep inside rebel territory, the village never saw any more fighting. Kunduwundu is outside Buedu, a few miles from Liberia and was also attacked in early April of 1991. This attack was more of a desecration raid as important people were tied up and beaten in public while their houses were burned down. Most of the villagers were forced to carry loot back to Liberia and never received any type of

**Figure 49:** NGO-built Houses in Kunduwundu (Kissi Tongi Chiefdom)

Figure 50: Houses in Vaama (Luawa Chiefdom)

revolutionary sermon. Many of the villagers stayed in Liberia or fled to Guinea, leaving the RUF to occupy the village alone for most of the war. When the villagers returned in 2001, two houses remained standing and everything of value had been looted.

After the war, these villages saw slightly smaller population declines than the rest of the study region. This difference may be because many of them are relatively far from the nearest town, whereas in the previous two sub-regions there was a town within five miles of every village. Perhaps the closer a village is to a town the less likely its inhabitants are to return. The only village to receive any post-war aid was Kunduwundu, where World Vision built ten concrete homes with zinc roofs. When traveling to Koindu from Kailahun by motorcycle, I did notice a very large number of roadside villages with dozens of concrete homes, clearly built by NGOs. In Bomaru, there were plans for a monument to honor those killed in the first attack. (See Figure 51.) There was actually a village meeting with the contractor when I arrived, where I learned that there was much more interest in having seed drying floors built than a monument. In Neama and Mendekilema, both badly hit during the war, entire rows of foundations were visible stretching on for a few hundred feet.

Unfortunately, I was able to gather little useful information regarding the war-time state of the towns of Kailahun, Buedu, and Koindu. Many people I spoke with fled to Guinea within the first year of rebel occupation and could only describe the state of the town upon their return after the war. All three towns were first captured between late March and early April of 1991. In Kailahun and Koindu, no one was killed and no homes were destroyed. The townspeople were gathered and told about the revolution, after which many young men were conscripted, while other civilians were forced to carry looted goods back to Liberia. In Buedu around a dozen important people were killed and their homes destroyed when the town was first captured.

Between April and June of 1993, all of these towns were recaptured by the SLA, although not for more than a few months. The RUF fled without a fight and convinced many civilians to join them or else face the unforgiving SLA. Those civilians who remained were harassed and beaten by the SLA. Many were sent to Daru where a
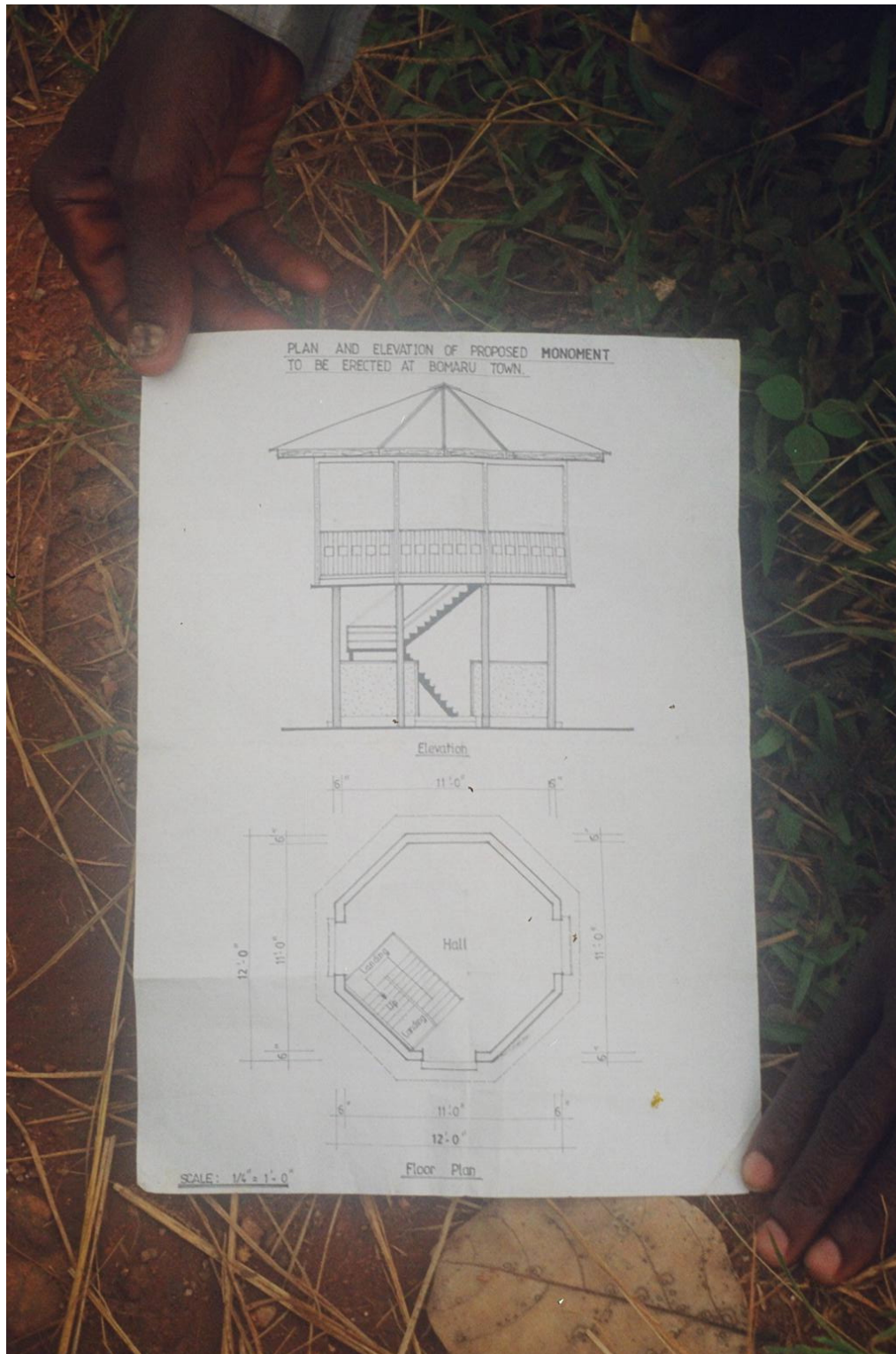
Figure 51: Plans for a Monument in Bomaru (Upper Bambara Chiefdom)

clumsy system was established to determine who was a civilian and who was a rebel. Any suspected rebels or collaborators were executed. The SLA also went about systematically looting anything that remained, to be sold later at the markets in Daru.[6] Those few who were able to visit the towns at this time described them as being very bushy and abounding with structures missing roofs, doors, and windows, though there was little outright destruction.

With the beginning of Phase II, these towns were recaptured by the RUF with heavy fighting, which caused a lot of damage to buildings and infrastructure. Sometime in late 1996, Kailahun and Buedu were recaptured by the SLA, at which time they were almost completely deserted. Within a few months, the AFRC coup occurred and the rebels were in control of these towns once again. During May of 1998 ECOMOG forces attacked and temporarily captured Buedu and Kailahun, but were soon pushed out by RUF/AFRC forces. This fighting also caused severe damage to these towns. All three towns were occupied by the rebels until disarmament in 2001, at which time they were sparsely populated, overgrown, and full of destroyed or looted buildings.

After the war, Koindu was by far the most devastated town, while much of the damage to Kailahun and Buedu had been repaired or concealed. (See Figures 52 and 53.) In their general appearance, Koindu closely resembled Segbwema, while Buedu and Kailahun were much more like Daru. As was the case in the previous section, the high levels of pre-war infrastructure may have prohibited reconstruction efforts in Koindu, while the lack of infrastructure in Buedu and Kailahun eased efforts to rebuild. Despite the poor state of Koindu, it was still bustling with activity, since its role as an important trading town between Liberia and Guinea had not changed. Pakistani peacekeepers also built welcoming monuments at the entrance to all three towns, which were decorated with development messages from NGOs. (See Figures 54 and 55.)

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[6] Henry, *Embodied Violence*, p. 35.

Figure 52: Ruins of the Market Center in Koindu

Figure 53: Remains of a Destroyed House in Koindu

Figure 54: Central Monument and NGO Signs in Buedu

Figure 55: Central Monument and NGO Signs in Kailahun

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The cultural landscape of Sierra Leone was profoundly transformed by its eleven year civil war and this thesis has attempted to make sense of that transformation. Some things are clear—three unique landscapes were associated with the war (prewar, wartime, and postwar) and the transformation between them had definite spatial and temporal patterns. A variety of deeper processes underlay these changes in the landscape. The character of the landscape went far to influence the course of the war and these influences can be clearly discerned, both at the scale of the individual morphological units and in their totality. The key to understanding the influence of these features lies in the ability to see the landscape through the eyes of the different factions so that we may comprehend how they utilized the landscape to pursue their war aims.

Changes in the Landscape

Obtaining reliable information on the composition of the prewar landscape proved difficult, though some general characteristics have emerged. There was little development in infrastructure after the establishment of a one-party state under Siaka Stevens in the early 1970's. During his reign, economic conditions deteriorated to the point that Sierra Leone was one of the poorest countries in the world by the time the war began. The general picture is one of countless small villages dispersed across the countryside consisting mostly of houses made of mud-brick and zinc, though thatch and wattle and daub houses were not uncommon. A handful of very large towns, laying along the track of the old railway, served as the main commercial centers, while numerous smaller towns were spread across the country. Villages and towns were the dominant features in the landscape, connected by a dense network of bush paths and an aging system of roads.

During the war, the character of the landscape changed drastically. Villages were systematically raided, abandoned, looted, and destroyed by both the RUF and the SLA. Villagers fled to the towns, which doubled or tripled in population. In response, IDP camps were created in several large towns, holding up to twenty-thousand people. These overcrowded towns and IDP camps proved difficult to defend, making them a common target for rebel raids. Refugee camps were also created near the border in Guinea. The rebels created a network of constantly shifting and secluded forest bases from where they launched their incessant raids. Transportation networks changed as well. Roads were not used for fear of ambush, forcing many civilians to make long journeys across the numerous footpaths criss-crossing the countryside. The rebels also utilized these footpaths to mask their movements, routinely massing troops from different bases during offensives. Periodically, a ceasefire would lead to a premature hope that the war was over. On multiple occasions, this hope resulted in widespread resettlement and rebuilding of abandoned villages only to have them destroyed again when the ceasefire ended.

As the war ended in 2002 and resettlement was complete, the landscape did not return to its prewar state. Most villages became shadows of their former selves—reduced in both population and area. The dominant house type changed from zinc roofs with mud-brick walls to thatch roofs with waddle and daub walls. Abandoned sites littered the countryside and included tiny villages never resettled, the remnants of IDP camps, and former rebel bases. Towns changed as well. Most had grown substantially during the war in both population and area. In Kenema, a process of suburbanization was occurring as expensive houses were being built on the site of former IDP camps at the outskirts of town. NGOs were an extremely pervasive element in the post-war landscape. Their presence was signified by their ubiquitous white land cruisers, the numerous signs posted in villages and towns where they had worked, and their offices, often on the most expensive real estate in town. Less noticeable was an effort to remember the war in monuments and memorials. There had been little progress here,

probably because insufficient time has passed for people to have the desire or the ability to do so.

Changes in the landscape during and after the war are the superficial reflections of deeper social, economic, and demographic processes. The first process, the massive and constant migration of civilians during the war, was caused by the general feeling of insecurity perpetuated by the RUF. These migrations began as an abandonment of the countryside in favor of the towns, but went on to include movement between regions, out of the country, and temporary returns to the countryside. This underlying process is reflected in the extremely temporary character of the war-time landscape. Villages were destroyed and rebuilt numerous times, with their consistency changing each time. Rebel bases were constantly being destroyed or abandoned and then rebuilt in a new region. Most IDP camps lasted only a few years and even during their brief existence there were continuous cycles of growth and contraction as the population fluctuated. These migrations, which were to a large degree instigated by the RUF and the SLA, concentrated the population in towns, IDP camps, and rebel bases. In doing so, both factions were able to increase their control over the civilian population, perhaps the most important objective in a civil conflict. The results of this process were ephemeral and creative, producing landscapes that existed for only short periods during the war and then disappeared entirely upon its conclusion.

The second process, reflected in both the war-time and post-war landscape, was the new economics of looting. A majority of the changes that occurred in the landscape were not the result of outright destruction, but of looting. After the roof, doors, and windows of a home or building were removed, it was only a matter of time in the tropical monsoon climate before the structure began to weather away and was reclaimed by the bush. These and other looted materials fueled the rebel war machine and lined the pockets of soldiers through most the war. This second process was more permanent and destructive, yielding a new postwar landscape, but one that was largely a subtraction from its prewar character.

After the war, the reconstruction of this subtracted landscape was pursued through two means: small scale initiatives using local labor and materials and the attraction of vaunted post-war aid from the government or an NGO. The dispersement of post-war aid was heavily slanted to urban areas and those villages easily accessible by road. A majority of villages received little or no aid and were forced to revert to the construction of primitive homes available within their limited means. This factor, combined with the fact that a majority of the rural population became accustomed to town life during the war may help us to understand why so many villagers chose to remain in the towns in the post-war era.

In the colonial era, massive infrastructural investments were made in towns like Segbwema, Blama, and Pendembu to exploit the economic linkages of the railroad through the mass exportation of agricultural and forest products. After the dismantling of the railroad and subsequent changes in the global prices of commodities during the 1970's and 1980's, the original purpose of these towns slowly faded away. The main reason why these towns were able to maintain their dominance was because of the services they offered, such as markets, banks, health care, and education did not exist elsewhere and no new investments were flowing into the country.

By destroying much of the fixed capital in towns, the war freed these economic linkages to realign in a manner more consistent with the post-colonial economic geography. Towns better placed along road networks, like Daru and Kailahun, and those with connections to markets in neighboring countries, like Koindu and Buedu, were well situated to exploit the opportunities presented after the war.[1] This realignment was not purely economic. For the same reasons that towns like Segbwema were important before the war, they were desirable targets during the war and suffered greatly from fighting to control them. Less desirable towns were less devastated and thus better placed to grow in the post-war era.

These changes reflect David Harvey's notion of creative destruction, or that capitalism generates two opposing processes, the embedding of dead labor (capital) into

[1] Although Koindu was not booming after the war it was recovering faster than other towns with heavy damage to infrastructure like Segbwema, Blama, and Pendembu.

the landscape (also known as the spatial fix) and the eventual need for that landscape to be destroyed to "make way for new geographical configurations of production, exchange, and consumption." These tensions eventually develop to crisis proportions, which somehow lead to the destruction of the obsolete landscape, so that a new landscape may be created (creative destruction).[2] In Sierra Leone the colonial landscape was clearly failing to meet the economic needs of the country, especially just prior to the war.[3] This failure precipitated a crisis of the state and the economy that resulted in the civil war, the agent which destroyed the remnant colonial landscape, allowing economic linkages to realign themselves after the war.

Influence of the Landscape

Each element of the landscape contributed a unique influence to the character of the war. Villages presented an excellent target, ensuring that much of the day to day, tactical fighting would revolve around their capture, defense, or raiding. They set the general course of the war as one made up of numerous tiny skirmishes pitting rebels and soldiers against ordinary civilians. The influence of towns was much more specific, as many campaigns revolved around their capture or isolation. Rebel forest bases also had a very specific influence—they allowed Phase II to work so effectively by providing a secure space for training conscripts and launching raids. Transportation networks influenced the war by consistently favoring foot-mobile forces using bush paths over motorized forces using roads. These elements combined to create the conditions for a war that would favor the insurgency, cause extreme hardships for the civilian population, and be a protracted conflict in which the insurgency could attempt to exhaust the will of the government.

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[2] David Harvey, 'The geography of capitalist accumulation' in John Agnew, David N. Livingstone & Alisdair Rogers (ed.), *Human Geography: An Essential Anthology* (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1996), p. 620-621. Though he does not use the term "creative destruction" in this piece, this is clearly argument he puts forward is the same.

[3] David Keen, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (James Currey, Oxford, 2005), p. 8-35.

The discussion above highlights the general possibilities presented by the landscape, but it was up to each faction to decide how they could best utilize these possibilities to serve their war aims. Before we can understand how they did so, we must recognize that each faction perceived the landscape as having a set of risks and opportunities associated with it. This perception was largely a product of their intentions and capabilities. Intentions can be understood as military objectives, which are derived from political objectives. Capabilities are the material and moral resources at their disposal and serve to enable certain types of action while constraining others. It follows that each faction would then perceive a different set of possibilities present in the landscape, since they were all looking at it with different intentions and capabilities. These perceptions were also dynamic—shifting as experiences, capabilities, and the balance of forces changed during the war.

The claim that these perceptions were shared between members of each faction is supported by interviews conducted during fieldwork and simply examining the events of the war. It could also be argued that the shared understanding of the risks and opportunities that the landscape presented them with was rooted in common practices. For example, two teenage rebels conscripted from different ethnic groups moving along a bush path in preparation for an ambush will probably see the landscape in a similar manner out of necessity.

The intentions of the RUF were to delegitemize the government and the army, control the civilian population, establish an economic base, and to defeat enemy forces in the field. Their major capabilities were a general lack of heavy weapons and vehicles and no moral inhibitions associated with the use of force against civilians. The first capability constrained their capacity to engage their enemies on an equal footing in a direct confrontation, while enabling their mobility and easing their logistical needs. The second capability enabled control of the civilian population through fear and terror, although the resentment this control fostered destroyed any chance of popular support and was a major contributing factor to the growth of irregular militias.

The intentions of the SLA were to retain control over the key towns, control the civilian population, and to contain, rather than defeat the RUF, so that they could continue to profit from the war and maintain the power it allowed them. Their material capabilities were the direct opposite of the RUF's as they were equipped with heavy weapons and ample vehicles for movement. The firepower at their disposal gave them an advantage in direct fighting, but their motorized quality limited their movement to roads and tied them to the towns for logistical purposes. Their moral capacities were similar to those of the RUF though less calculated in presentation. The sobel (soldier by day, rebel by night) phenomenon is a reflection of this capacity. The strange combination of their unwillingness to defend villages, but the frequency with which they looted them after RUF attacks, eventually destroyed their legitimacy in the eyes of the civilian population and was another factor that contributed to the growth of irregular militias.

The intentions of the CDF were primarily to defend and resettle villages, reclaim control over the countryside from the rebels, and to act as auxiliaries to more regular forces in offensive operations. Their major capability was their knowledge of the terrain, experience in the bush, and support from the local population. These factors worked in their favor when they were within their own chiefdoms, while their use in other areas put them on a more equal footing with the rebels as bush fighters and led to looting, extortion, and atrocities. Another capability was their armament, even more limited than the RUF, often only single barrel shotguns and machetes. This constrained their combat power to ambushes, raids, and bush fighting, while preventing them from mounting offensive operations on their own. The benefit was that they required very little logistical support and could blend in to the civilian population much easier.

At the beginning of the war the RUF and SLA had similar views of the landscape. Towns were the objects that the RUF sought to conquer and the SLA sought to hold. While both sides used roads, the RUF also exploited bush paths in their movement through the countryside. The key difference was in their perception of villages. The SLA saw villages as a risk because they were difficult to defend.

However, once captured, villages became a target, the destruction of which deprived the rebels of a support base. The RUF saw villages in the reverse manner; they were an opportunity, which could be easily captured and later turned into support bases and training camps. Although the balance of forces initially favored the RUF, these scales slowly shifted over the next year until the NPRC led counteroffensive began in 1993. The RUF was forced to abandon most of its territorial possessions and flee into the bush. Out of sheer necessity, they were forced to modify their plans for the conduct of the war, and with it their view of the landscape.

As Phase II began, the RUF adopted a fairly different view of the landscape, which was more appropriate to their weaker position and limited means. The most important change was that they would no longer operate out of towns and villages, but would create secluded bases in the forest. For movement, they would rely solely on bush paths, while laying ambush to the main road networks to deny the SLA its source of mobility. Using these bush paths to mask their movements, they would strike far and wide at villages and towns across the country. Towns were no longer an object to be captured, since the RUF was too weak, instead they were to be raided and isolated (by ambushing surrounding roads). While there were material rewards for these raids, they served the greater purpose of delegitemizing the military government by revealing its inability to protect its own citizens. Villages were still seen as targets to be attacked, but occupation was replaced by raiding.

The SLA's view of the landscape changed little during Phase II. Roads were still their sole source of movement, even though they were prone to ambush. They still saw the towns as the locus of their power and sought to keep it that way. Most villages were still left undefended, though looting following rebel raids increased in frequency. This rigid perception of the landscape played into the hands of the RUF. The emergence of the Kamajors in 1995 presented a new actor with a very different perception of the landscape. Their familiarity with the countryside allowed them to make villages and bush paths into a risk for the RUF. Their raids and assaults on forest camps, in conjunction with EO and elements of the SLA, denied the rebels a secure base of

operations. The Kamajors denied the RUF's use of the landscape in the same manner as the RUF had denied the SLA its use of the landscape, by turning their potential opportunities into risks.

After the AFRC coup, the balance of forces fundamentally changed as did the conditions of the war. The Kamajors were now severely outnumbered by the combined forces of the AFRC and the SLA, who were in control of the towns. The now insurgent Kamajors continued to perceive the landscape as they had during Phase II, defending villages and patrolling bush paths. Throughout this period, the RUF/AFRC alliance perceived the landscape in a hybrid manner, combining elements of operations from both Phases I and II. Towns were still viewed as the primary targets, with all out assaults more common than raiding, since the forces were more equally balanced. Villages were seen as a risk because they had the potential to support insurgent Kamajors, yet they were also still seen as an opportunity for resources and at times as support and training bases. Roads and bush paths were used interchangeably, depending upon the needs of the situation, and the RUF continued to excel at laying ambushes along the major highways.

This framework for understanding the influence of the cultural landscape is not unique to Sierra Leone. It can be applied to other civil and revolutionary wars, and could also be used to understand how conventional forces comprehend the nature of the physical landscape. Although I have only a general knowledge of the conditions in Iraq I will offer a few comments based in this type of analysis.

In Iraq, the population distribution is much more weighted to urban areas and the remaining rural areas consist of nucleated settlements strung out along the major rivers. Here the population is much more concentrated and urban than in Sierra Leone. The various insurgent groups utilize this landscape in two main ways. First they have turned the road-bound motorized nature of the occupation forces into a major weakness by using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to set ambushes and quickly melt back into the surrounding population. Their superior knowledge of the urban terrain gives them an advantage when towns become battlefields, such as in the large battles in Fallujah or

Mosul. The second aspect of their operations is to tempt the occupation forces into stand up fights in large towns, where heavy firepower inevitably comes into play. This firepower usually results in a great deal of damage to the town and unintentional civilian casualties, which serves to harden opinions against the occupation forces and garner grudging support for the insurgency.

Recommendations

I would like to end this work with two recommendations pertaining to geography and the military. Research that asks questions similar to this work is without a doubt rare. With a few notable exceptions, it is very difficult to find publications that examine the impacts of war on the cultural landscape or vice versa. As I have said before, most cultural geographers shy from military topics while military geographers tend to ignore the human dimension.

The first recommendation is that cultural and military geographers pursue topics in the vein of this work. This recommendation is not a programmatic statement, rather an attempt to nudge those few researchers willing and able to do difficult work under the worst of field conditions in the right direction. One cannot argue with the fact that we live in an age of small wars, often called low-intensity conflicts by the military, which are to a large extent mediated by the cultural landscape. To date, most research conducted in this manner is carried out by anthropologists. While I applaud and appreciate their contribution, there is still plenty of room for geographers here.

Anyone seeking to pursue such a study could benefit from my mistakes. Were I to conduct another study in this manner, I would choose a conflict still in progress and preferably one that had just begun and I would make repeated visits to the study region over the course of the conflict and its aftermath. If the budget permits, a one or two week reconnaissance trip to visit the country and the intended study region would help immensely in planning fieldwork and formulating a research question. Apply for funding as early as possible, because paying out of pocket is expensive and unnecessary.

When studying the relevant literature, learn which scholars, irrespective of their academic discipline, are pursuing similar questions and get in contact with them. Their advice, knowledge, and local contacts could prove invaluable and they are often eager to help a fellow scholar.

When constructing a research framework, the most important questions are the scale of the study region and how one will manage breadth vs. depth. In my fieldwork, I probably strayed too far in the direction of breadth, resulting in a fairly shallow depth. It may have proved more useful to learn a lot about a few places, than a little (and often very similar stories) about a lot of places. When dealing with questions of death and destruction, people will be more open if there is a sense of trust with the researcher and that trust takes time to develop. One way to reduce this tension is to familiarize oneself with the culture and especially to speak the native language, a skill I regret not acquiring. Another pitfall is the tendency, at least in my case, to privilege the knowledge and opinions of elites. In my experience, ordinary people are often more truthful, more accessible, and more knowledgeable.

Researching the study region and planning for fieldwork are important, but one should maintain a high degree of flexibility and mobility when in the country, especially if a conflict is raging. Very often, the constraints of transportation, lodging, and safety are the major limiting factors controlling where you can travel and what kinds of research you can pursue. These problems can be mitigated by packing light and not sticking religiously to a fieldwork plan made months in advance. The goal should be to stay flexible and let the research take you where it may.

My second recommendation is that the military begin to evaluate the role of the cultural landscape in low intensity conflicts, a necessity apparent through the stalemated wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the military excels at understanding the influence of terrain and physical geography on its own operations, it has generally failed to examine the role of the cultural landscape or to comprehend how the enemy perceives either the physical or the cultural landscape. Soldiers and officers are uniquely positioned to document these relationships through their experiences in these conflicts.

The underlying premise behind this recommendation is that a better understanding of the impacts of military operations on the landscape and the way landscapes are perceived and utilized by insurgent groups will lead to more successful counter-insurgent strategies than those which are currently favored.

A degree of overlap exists between these two recommendations. Though I find it unlikely, the military could contract geographers to do studies in current war zones. At the same time, military officers who already have an interest in academic geography could contribute their own field experiences to both military and academic professional journals. In either case there is ample opportunity for future studies and the development of a general body of knowledge on this topic.

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VITA

Jeremiah Matthew Wagstaff was born in Pasadena, TX on June 22, 1982. He attended Texas A&M University from 2000 to 2004 receiving a Bachelor of Science in Geography, during which time he was also a member of Company K-2, Texas A&M Corps of Cadets. He chose to stay at Texas A&M University to pursue a Master of Science in Geography, working under the direction of Dr. Jonathan Smith. His research interests include traditional cultural and historical geography applied to questions of military history and theory. In October of 2006 he joined the United States Army.

Jeremiah can be reached at: 46 Pebble Hollow Court, The Woodlands, TX 77381. His e-mail address is jeremiah.wagstaff@us.army.mil.