



The international politics of rape, sex and the family in Sierra Leone

INTRODUCTION

The emphasis of 'immediate' and 'hard' security issues over 'everyday politics' has meant that rape as a tactic of war in Sierra Leone and children born as a result of rape are two issues that have largely been pushed to the margins of conflict, development and security studies. Sex and childbirth have traditionally been considered private concerns, distant from pressing security matters; consequently, a generation of children born as a result of wartime rape has been virtually ignored, despite the fact that both the victimised women and their offspring face serious security concerns, marginalisation, poverty and stigmatisation.

Mainstream narratives recounting the transition from conflict to peace are reliably mute on the experiences of women both during war and after the conflict. Narratives tend to focus on violent men being disarmed so that society can 'return to normal' or can return from anarchy to 'domesticated' order. The chaos and lawlessness that characterised the war period is described as gradually being replaced by peace and structure through the help of development agencies and government intervention. Families reunite, children return to school and men find new jobs to support their loved ones. This dominant narrative ignores the stories of women and girls who were raped in Sierra Leone, and of the children that were born as a consequence. Where are their stories? What types of family units are they a part of? What are their vulnerabilities after the war?

Here, five specific areas of silence relating to women's lives in post-conflict Sierra Leone are presented. The first is the manner in which a liberal model of the family is being promoted by remnant British colonial law in Sierra Leone, as well as by the policies of development agencies operating in the post-conflict environment. It is argued that current developmental policies serve to discipline subjects into conforming to this liberal family model. The work of Jacqueline Stevens¹ is used to examine the motivations behind defining the 'natural' family

unit as a married heterosexual couple with children in Sierra Leone. Programmes and policies that support the notion of women as peaceful and innate nurturers are also examined critically. One of the overall aims is to deconstruct dichotomies associated with mothers and war, such as courageous male warriors and peaceful nurturing women.

Second, rape is presented as an integral tactic of the war in Sierra Leone.² Literature that frames rape during war as random, sporadic and arbitrary is contested with the argument that wartime rape is strategic, pervasive and inclusive. Just as guns are used as military weapons, rape is used as a political weapon of war. Disarmament programmes should not just require combatants to disarm, but should also be concerned with managing sexual violence and the lasting impacts of wartime sexual behaviour. Currently, addressing wartime sexual conduct is not readily identified as being integral to the restoration of sustainable peace.

Third, it is argued that stigmas associated with wartime rape and children born as a result of rape³ derive partially from policies and legal structures that designate the liberal family model as the norm. Women are shamed for being raped during war because their experience stands in contrast to the norm of heterosexual sex within the marriage unit. Forced sex during war or in peacetime between married couples is invisible, but forced rape outside the bounds of marriage is visible, deviant and 'abnormal' – regardless of its pervasiveness. Here, Lene Hansen's⁴ discussion on linking and differentiating within policy discourses is useful. In this case 'acceptable' or authorised sex linked to marriage is differentiated from sex that is unauthorised, illegitimate, public and abnormal.

Fourth, information on children born of war in Sierra Leone is presented. Through existing research as well as my own statistics, I seek to establish children born of rape as a significant population group requiring specific resources and attention. Programmes implying that the obligations of women post-conflict are to raise

children and rebuild the private sphere, while the obligations of men post-conflict are to find jobs and rebuild the public sphere are strongly critiqued. This analysis draws on Stevens' analysis of the relationship between the state and the family, as well as feminist critiques of representations of 'natural' mothers.⁵ Lene Hansen's work related to identity formation is also employed in an examination of the consequences for women who do not fulfil the definition of woman as 'emotional, motherly, reliant and simple'.⁶ Hansen has argued that the language used in policies directed at particular groups of people helps shape general ideas and attitudes about them. As a result, policies can serve to construct, or obscure particular identities and categories of people. For example, policies that assume women are the primary caretakers of children help reify the stereotype of women as naturally nurturing and part of the so-called domestic sphere.

Finally, the inability of aid agencies to name and categorise children born of war within their existing classifications of vulnerable children as child soldiers, abandoned children and street children is discussed as a major shortcoming. Not identifying children born of rape as a particular category of vulnerable children in Sierra Leone is a political choice that stems from the misconception that sex and the family are neither political nor a security issue. Referring to Mark Duffield's⁷ conception of the radicalisation of development, or the conflation of security and development, I argue that issues such as rape and childbirth get 'prioritised out' of the majority of post-conflict development projects.

Those working in the area of development are no longer simply securing the post-conflict environment

Methodology and approach

African feminists like Sylvia Tamale have noted the difficulty of eliciting awareness about women's rights on the continent. She argues that the artificial divide between the public and private spheres hinders the work of women activists and researchers. Tamale also addresses the impact of colonial laws on current understandings of women's rights. She points out that the decision by most colonial rulers to exert colonial law over the colonies, but not the 'provinces', has meant that 'communities or individuals within the community that violated women's

rights ... "fell outside the ambit of the human rights structure ...".⁸ Tamale's argument helps to highlight the unique legal and normative frameworks within Africa, as well as the challenges associated with classifying and analysing women's issues as human rights, security and development issues.

The challenges Tamale points to have been exacerbated by the radicalisation of development, as described by Mark Duffield. Duffield argues that the radicalisation of development does not represent a mere blurring of the lines between development and security; rather, it is a declaration that there is no line between the two: '[there is a] convergence between the notions of development and security ... achieving one is now regarded as essential for security of the other'.⁹ As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to highlight issues such as women's rights, wartime rape, and other forms of sexual violence in the post-conflict environment because they have traditionally been categorized as 'domestic' matters distant from imminent national security priorities.

The radicalisation of development has further implications for women. Duffield points out as a result of the radicalisation of development, those working in the area of development are no longer simply securing the post-conflict environment; their mandates have been expanded to include the transformation of entire societies. Given this new agenda, a pertinent question becomes: 'Transformation to what kind of society, and for what ends?'¹⁰ Duffield answers this question by exploring the concept of liberal peace. He explains that the association of 'liberal' and 'peace' has meant that liberal policies and structures are correlated with stability, namely that 'liberal values and institutions have been vested with ameliorative and harmonising powers'.¹¹

The valorisation of liberal values has direct implications for women and children. Here, Jacqueline Stevens' work proves valuable. According to Stevens, the idealised liberal family model is a construction of political policies, including marriage laws, while at the same time the family is presented as natural and pre-political in comparison to the state and politics. Stevens argues that this liberal family model indicates that women's roles in society are linked to motherhood and the family. Understanding NGOs and aid agencies to be 'regulatory powers', I am curious about how, post-conflict, women are consistently seen by these organisations as being peaceful, natural mothers, despite the fact that their experiences during the conflict and their desires post-conflict often stand in stark contrast to this view.

Stevens and Hansen advocate for an investigation into the ways in which regulatory powers produce gendered subjects. As Stevens observes: 'Discourse is then the field where the regulatory norms of sex are observed'.¹² Given the objectives of this paper, discourse analysis is

the most useful methodological approach. Specifically, critical feminist analysis is used to frame the discussion of war-rape and children born of war. Of importance here is Michelle Lazar's claim that 'discourse [is] a site of struggle, where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out'.¹³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's approach to discourse is utilised primarily because they describe discourses as constructed through multiple networks and they do not restrict their definition of discourse to text.¹⁴ Instead, they argue that anything that can represent or convey meaning, including text, economic relationships, institutions and technology should be considered part of 'discourse'.

More specifically, a multi-data approach to discourse analysis is used here. Essentially, such an approach allows for the inclusion of multiple types and sources of discourse. Based on Laclau and Mouffe's notion that discourse can be constructed through multiple means, including policy, the media, interviews and academic literature, a multi-data approach can account for broad-ranging research. Allan Dreyer Hansen and Eva Sørensen recommend a multi-data approach because of the 'inevitable limits to sources'.¹⁵ Focusing on text, Lene Hansen also notes the importance of reading large numbers of texts from a wide variety of sources.¹⁶ This paper includes the analysis of government reports and laws,¹⁷ NGOs and international development agency policy documents and research reports,¹⁸ existing research on female soldiers and sexual violence in Sierra Leone, and personal interviews conducted in 2005.¹⁹

The international community largely ignored the first seven years of Sierra Leone's conflict

THE NATURE OF THE DEBATE AROUND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Sierra Leone is still reeling from a civil conflict that enveloped the country from 1991 until 2002. The main fighting forces involved in the Sierra Leone conflict were the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Civil Defence Force (CDF), the Kamajors, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Sierra Leone Army. Reasons for the conflict include the legacies of colonialism, international and local exploitation of resources, systemic government corruption, extreme poverty and inequality, and involvement by Liberia's Charles Taylor. David Keen has argued that it was a

combination of an absence of employment opportunities, growing poverty in the face of corruption and a decrepit state that inspired men and women to join armed groups.²⁰ Journalist Lansana Gberie²¹ has also written extensively about how rebels were enticed by the prospect of controlling Sierra Leone's diamond wealth. This hypothesis has been supported by a number of experts, including Ibrahim Kamara, Sierra Leone's Permanent Representative to the UN during the war years. Near the height of the conflict, Kamara was quoted as saying that the root of his country's war 'is, and remains, diamonds, diamonds and diamonds'.²²

The international community largely ignored the first seven years of Sierra Leone's conflict. By 1996 the RUF had gained control over the diamond areas in the east, terrorised and murdered countless civilians, looted and destroyed houses, schools and hospitals, and systemically used sexual violence to intimidate the population. More than 15 000 people had been killed, 70 per cent of schools had been destroyed, only 80 health centres, mostly situated in Freetown, were still functioning, 900 000 citizens had registered for food aid and nearly half of the population was displaced.²³ It was reported that by March of that year 75 per cent of school-age children were not attending school and that the country's economy was contracting by 6 per cent annually.²⁴

Following an unsuccessful democratic election and a lengthy period of instability, the UN began withdrawing foreign staff in December 1998. On 6 January 1999, three days after the UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) evacuated its last members from the country, rebel groups initiated what was easily the most brutal attack of the entire conflict. They descended on Freetown in what was called 'Operation No Living Thing'.²⁵ It is estimated that during this attack over 5 000 civilians were killed and one third of the total population was left homeless. Three thousand children were also reported missing.²⁶ The full scope of the horror of these days cannot be summarised here, but Gberie's account provides an effective glimpse into the events:

'Civilians were gunned down in their homes, rounded up and massacred on the streets, thrown from the upper floors of buildings, used as human shields, and burnt alive in cars and houses. They had their limbs hacked off with machetes, their eyes gouged out by knives, their hands smashed with hammers and their bodies burned with boiling water. Women and girls were systematically abused sexually, and children and young people were abducted by the hundreds.'²⁷

If anything beneficial can be seen as resulting from this terror, it was that the international community finally turned their attention to Sierra Leone. The UN approved the deployment of a 6 000-strong peacekeeping contingent under the UN Mission in Sierra Leone

(UNAMSIL) and provided it with the authority to use deadly force.²⁸

There was no single event or peace accord that ended the conflict in Sierra Leone. There are claims (particularly by British soldiers) that British troops sent in after the embarrassment of the UN kidnapping ordeal effectively 'cleaned up' UNAMSIL's mess and restored peace. There are other claims that war fatigue, combined with the increasing effectiveness of UNAMSIL and British troops led to the surrender of RUF fighters: 'The RUF probably thought that the UN peace process was more attractive than dealing with British troops and the Sierra Leone government forces'.²⁹ When the adult disarmament process was completed in January 2002, Sierra Leone's President Kabbah declared the war over.³⁰ By this time 72 490 combatants had been disarmed and 42 000 weapons collected.³¹ In July 1999, through the Lome Peace Accord, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) had been initiated to produce 'an impartial body of historical record' of the war and to 'help restore the human dignity of the victims and promote reconciliation'.³²

Throughout the conflict, rape, sexual violence and sexual slavery were primary tactics of warfare. The TRC report recorded the testimonies of over 800 women and girls who had been raped, but these represent only a small portion of the total estimated number of victims of sexual violence.³³ Although rape was used throughout the 11-year conflict, the highest number of incidents was reported during the 1999 rebel incursion into Freetown. Between March 1999 and March 2000, 2 350 rape survivors were registered in Freetown alone during the Rape Victims Programme of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE).³⁴ Of these survivors, 2 085 were between the ages of 0 and 26 years and 165 were over the age of 27.³⁵ It was reported that 'many' other victims of sexual violence did not come forward for treatment.³⁶

It is important to note that rape did not occur randomly, nor was it merely a 'side effect' of the violent war. Rather, rape was used systematically, strategically and consistently throughout the conflict. There are numerous accounts of women and girls being abducted and kept as 'bush wives' and 'sex slaves' (these terms have been used interchangeably in various reports and by various organisations). Sexual violence was used strategically to violate cultural and religious norms. Sometimes rape was inflicted in front of children, parents and husbands.³⁷ Fathers were forced to watch the raping of their daughters, older women were raped by young boys and women were raped in public places including mosques and churches.³⁸ When Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) conducted a specific study among 991 internally displaced women and their family members they found that 94 per cent of respondents had experienced some

exposure to war-related violence and 13 per cent had experienced war-related sexual assault.³⁹

Hebbeh Forster explains the legacies of sexual violence in Sierra Leone: 'In some rural areas the concept of rape has taken on new meaning. Women have been forced to accept that sexual favours have to be given to those who protect them, be they rebels, soldiers or Civil Defence Forces (CDF). They have lost all rights to the privacy of their bodies and the right to say no to unwanted and possibly unsafe sex. They consider rape as what happens in the bush. This may be one of the greatest evils of our war'.⁴⁰

Sex and the family in Sierra Leone

The customary and civil laws regulating paternity and custody in Sierra Leone are fascinating and complex. By law and convention, children are the property of males in Sierra Leone. Husbands have the right to acknowledge, as their legitimate child, any offspring born to their wives, regardless of who the biological father is.⁴¹ If a child is born as a result of an affair, the husband legally has what amounts to 'first right of refusal.' If he does not recognise the child, then the biological father may recognise the child as 'his' and register the birth.⁴² If neither occurs, then the child falls into legal limbo with respect to inheritance and succession rights.

There is no concept in customary law directly comparable to 'legitimacy' within Sierra Leone's legal system. However, the following cases cover those children whose 'legitimacy' is solidified in terms of rights of succession and inheritance:

- A child born to parents who are legally married.
- A child fathered by a man other than a wife's husband, but who is explicitly acknowledged by the legal husband as his own.⁴³

This short list defining 'legitimate' children in Sierra Leone can be contrasted to the long list of categories of children whose paternity and therefore their inheritance and succession rights can be disputed easily:⁴⁴

- An extra-marital child, not acknowledged by its mother's legal husband.
- Children born to a union that has had the consent of the families, but where dowry and other ceremonial traditions have not been finalised.
- A child born to a betrothed girl and fathered by the intended husband.
- A child born to a betrothed girl and fathered by a man other than the man to whom she is betrothed.
- A child born to a married woman and fathered by her partner in a 'caretaker marriage'.⁴⁵

- A child born to a divorced woman and fathered by her partner in a ‘debtor-creditor marriage’.⁴⁶
- A child born to a widow who has been ‘inherited’ or married by a male relative of the deceased husband, and who has been fathered by another man.
- A child born to an unmarried girl for whom no marriage has been arranged and who has been fathered by an unmarried man who does not intend to marry the girl.
- A child born to a married or divorced woman and fathered by a man who neither is nor has been the woman’s husband, but who registers the birth of the child as his own.
- A child whose mother is married by customary law and who has been fathered by her husband whose personal law is customary law, but who is married by statutory law to another woman.
- A child whose mother is unmarried and who was fathered by a man already married under statutory law.

Although most regulations associated with custody and adoption stem from ethnic norms and customs, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA) has increasingly tried to intervene in these areas. The ministry’s Dehungue Shiaka explained that in cases of divorce, MSWGCA investigates the parents to decide if the father is capable of caring for the child.⁴⁷ As noted earlier, in most cases they deem the mother to be the best possible parent for the child.⁴⁸ It is assumed that the mother is ‘more naturally prepared to mother [sic] children’ and that fathers are often too busy working to care for children.⁴⁹ In these cases, if the father requests custody of a child after he/she reaches the age of ten, custody is usually granted to him.⁵⁰ The rationale for this shift from the mother to the father is that, after the age of ten, the child is better able to take care of himself/herself and that the father is the more likely partner to have the financial means to further the child’s education and to provide him/her with various opportunities.

An area of law that is currently under review in Sierra Leone relates to the practice of adoption. Traditionally, if a mother cannot raise her child or dies, the biological father’s parents will raise the child. However, children born during the conflict represent a new challenge to this practice. First, children may be born as a result of rape or gang rape in which case the father may not be known and there is thus no relationship or sense of obligation between the father and the child. Second, a child may be born as a result of consensual sex between an unmarried couple. In this case, the father’s family may reject the child as a bastard because there was no recognised marriage. Third, the location of the father and his family may not be known as a result of the mass displacement

of over a million persons during the conflict, or may in fact be casualties of the conflict. After the war there was an increase in the number of women with children who were either unmarried, did not know the father, did not want to locate the father, or who had been rejected by the family of the father. As there were no real legal or customary frameworks to provide for these situations, the MSWGCA began writing ‘The Bastardy Act’ (now called the Adoption Act) to legally address children born into the above-mentioned circumstances.

Rape during the civil conflict

The available statistics and information pertaining to war rape in Sierra Leone paint an overwhelming picture. PHR estimates that between 215 000 and 257 000 girls and women may have been affected by sexual violence in Sierra Leone.⁵¹ It is estimated that between 70 and 90 per cent of females abducted during the conflict were raped.⁵² The majority of the incidents of sexual violence reported to PHR (68 per cent) occurred between 1997 and 1999. The available statistics often categorise data by selected groups of women, e.g. abducted women, female soldiers and refugees. This categorisation makes it difficult to approximate the total number of women and girls who were raped. There is also an indication that, because of social stigma and pressure, rape was grossly underreported and that the available data is skewed. My own research found that current statistics grossly underestimate the rape statistics. On one occasion, I had access to the intake forms of child soldiers, abducted and unaccompanied children. The data relating to girls between the ages of three and 18 indicates that 31 out of 42 girls (75 per cent) were raped.

Although mainly perpetrated by the RUF, all factions involved in the fighting used rape as a tactic of war. Women, men, boys and girls of all ages were raped, but women, especially girls under 17, those thought to be virgins, were targeted in particular. In many instances, girls and women were rounded up by rebels, brought to rebel camps and then subjected to individual and gang rape. PHR reported that ‘in many cases the abductees were gang raped, beaten, starved, tortured, forced to walk long distances carrying heavy loads and told they would be killed if they tried to escape’.⁵³ A report by Mazurana and McKay, focusing on girls in military and paramilitary groups, paints a picture of systemic sexual violence against girls in particular.⁵⁴ In the study, all respondents who reported their primary role as being fighters also reported that they were forced to be ‘wives’.⁵⁵

Human Rights Watch’s report on war rape in Sierra Leone gives the following dismal summary of abuses: ‘Throughout the nine year Sierra Leonean conflict there has been widespread and systematic sexual violence

against women and girls including individual and gang rape, sexual assault with objects such as firewood, umbrellas and sticks, and sexual slavery. In thousands of cases, sexual violence has been followed by the abduction of women and girls and forced bondage to male combatants in slavery-like conditions often accompanied by forced labour. These sexual crimes are most often characterised by extraordinary brutality and are frequently preceded or followed by violent acts against other family members. The rebel factions use sexual violence as a weapon to terrorise, humiliate, punish and ultimately control the civilian population into submission.⁵⁶

War babies

In the context of larger debates on the naturalness of the family and the liberal tendencies of post-conflict programs, children born of rape are a fascinating case study. By examining the various stigmas attached to children born of rape, it becomes obvious that these children are considered exceptional, not necessarily because of the rape that produced them, but because they were produced outside the family unit (read: recognised heterosexual married couple). In this way the claim that families are pre-political is revealed as a sham since the capacity for a family to 'come into view' as legitimate is only through the political act of marriage recognised by the state.

Children born as a result of rape challenge the traditional liberal model of the family

Children born as a result of rape challenge the traditional liberal model of the family because they reveal that not all children are considered natural extensions of the family unit. Although sex and childbirth are described as an integral part of the 'pre-political' family, children born of wartime rape demonstrate how some children can become labelled 'unnatural'. Children born as a result of rape also call into question notions of the 'natural' roles of mothers and fathers. Stevens argues: 'The meanings of the most apparently "cultural" or "natural" roles of mother and father still are constituted by and through the state'.⁵⁷ Post-conflict policies and programmes such as Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) seem to indicate that the obligations of women post-conflict are to raise children and rebuild the private sphere, while the obligations

of men post-conflict are to find jobs and rebuild the public sphere.

Drawing from Hansen's assertion that policies construct identities through differentiation and linking, I argue that in the context of post-conflict Sierra Leone, the caring and nurturing mother is juxtaposed to the industrious, adventurous and hard-working male. Furthermore, peaceful, nurturing mothers are located in the domestic sphere and de-linked, or differentiated from masculine politics and identities. The natural place of children born during the conflict is determined to be with the mother. Women who may have been with the fighting forces for ten years and who may never have been parented themselves or acquired parenting skills are supposed to 'naturally' possess the expertise required to mother a child. In turn, women on whom post-conflict policies place the responsibility of child rearing may not always take to the role of parenting 'naturally'; rather, the ideal of the natural mother is constructed through policies that put pressure on women to conform to this identity.

Statistics and information about children born of rape

Given the relative silence and inattention to the issue of children born of war, it is exceptionally difficult to confirm their numbers or to learn what has happened to such children after birth. What we do know is that while sexual violence occurred throughout the 11-year civil conflict, the majority of rapes were committed between 1997 and 1999.⁵⁸ From this it can be inferred that children born as a result of violence during the war may today be between the ages of 10 and 12 years, with the majority of children in the age range of 11 to 12. PHR has estimated that nine to 10 per cent of rapes during the conflict resulted in pregnancies. This would mean that more than 20 000 'war babies' were born. As noted earlier, rape statistics are extremely skewed in Sierra Leone and this assessment is therefore a low approximation.

Child welfare experts in Sierra Leone could only speak generally about the number of children born of war. Augustan Turai of Ben Hirsh declared: 'There are *many* within the community'.⁵⁹ Catherine Zainab Tarawally explained how some men may have produced two or three children during the conflict, but 'after the disarmament these men just go away and leave the children with the women'.⁶⁰ Rev. Hassan Mansaray, director of Children Integrated Services (CIS), said that his orphanage was established because of the high number of abandoned babies. He estimated that about 20 of the 400 children that went through his facility during the conflict were abandoned babies he believes were

born out of rape, or to women who had been abandoned by the child's father.⁶¹ The babies typical ranged in age from six months to just over one year.⁶² It is important to note that there are currently no formal mechanisms for identifying and tracking children born of war. While the available numbers may not seem significant, they may be gross underestimates of the total number of children born of wartime rape. Information about this vulnerable population and means to identify them are crucial to determining the total number of this population as well as assessing their needs.

Most abandoned babies identified above were fostered or stayed in orphanages because it was impossible to trace their biological families. Binue explained that due to a lack of resources there was no follow-up on children that were fostered.⁶³ In a country wrought with poverty, this can result in children growing up in desperate circumstances. Rev. Mansaray reported, for example, that 'most of [the foster families] already had several children of their own – some five or six – so when you place a child with them in the midst of poverty the problem is that the children are mostly used to work. Like three years ago one child was killed along the highway. They sent her to buy wood and she carried the wood on her head to her house and they would sell this wood and out of the profits they would feed the family. Some even send the children to the street to sell or to beg for additional income to augment the running of the families. There are few families that can afford the fees to send their children to school.'⁶⁴ This testimony sheds light on what life is like in Sierra Leone for children born of war. Far from a time of development and security, these children face multiple insecurities, including poverty, alienation and abandonment.

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The relationship between children born of war and their mothers is of particular interest when it comes to questions about the 'natural' family unit. From my interviews conducted with women in Sierra Leone, the mother-child bond does not appear to have been impacted negatively in relation to the paternity of the children.⁶⁵ Glenis Taylor from UNICEF Sierra Leone told a particularly moving

story in this regard: 'There was a girl-mother in a centre and she lost her child. She was not interested in gaining contact with the father. The child died and I thought she would have been happy with that – poor child – but she cried and was so unhappy. She was saying, "after all this, this is what I have to show. At least I had this child as a product of my pain". She was very upset. Many women were interested in having the best for their children.'⁶⁶

Only one woman I spoke to admitted that things were 'strange' between her and her child and that she had a hard time accepting the child because of his paternity. Mameh Kargbo from Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI) noted that a number of women wanted to take the lives of children conceived as a result of rape.⁶⁷ She reported that these women would say things like, 'these children are constant reminders ... tomorrow they will ask where their fathers are'. According to her, for women who have been gang raped, 'the agony of not being able to identify the father of their child is sometimes too much to bear'.

Dehungue Shiaka of the MSWGCA maintains that women will likely have strained relationships with children born of rape: 'There could be social problems on both sides. Because on one hand we have a mother that thinks, "OK, this child is my child and I thank the Lord for this child", but on the other hand this child is a product of rape and the mother will think "the rebel raped me and this is the result". So that kind of normal care that you would expect from a mother may not happen and if that baby grows up with that kind of neglect from the mother, then the frustration will also be with the baby and there is a possibility that there will be a bad relationship on both sides from the growing child who may think that the mother is neglecting him or her and the mother too that may think that "oh this child is his" [the perpetrator of rape]'.⁶⁸

Stigma and children born of rape

Unfortunately, stigma does not just attach to the women and girls who have been raped; the children they have given birth to also face similar labelling and stigma. 'Rebel baby' or 'bush pikin' (bush baby) are both labels used in Sierra Leone to describe children born of rape. Francis Murray Lahai, who works with the Street Children's Task Force in the MSWGCA, reported as follows: 'Community people, whatever the case, say "oh this girl was missing during the war, she has reappeared with a child – who is the father?" ... If it is not possible to know who the father is, they will start stigmatising the mother and the child and calling them names'.⁶⁹ CIS also affirmed: 'When [community members] know that a child has been born out of such a situation [rape], the child is stigmatised and also the mother ... so many

people find it difficult to realise that the child suffered maybe as the result of ill luck'.⁷⁰

The fact that unmarried mothers are often stigmatised post-conflict is due in part to the fact that rape was so pervasive that many single mothers are thought to be victims of rape. Women are encouraged to marry in order to 'fuse' into the community. Such marriage may be to someone other than the person they chose to have a relationship with during the war, or it may be to their rape perpetrator. Children born during the conflict and immediately after may have a greater chance of being stigmatised if they are born to a single mother than to a two-parent family – even if their mother was forced to marry her former rebel captor or her rape perpetrator.⁷¹

My research revealed many cases of women who gave birth during the conflict and later married a man other than the child's father. Twenty four per cent of the women interviewed acknowledged that they had children fathered by at least two different men. Unfortunately, due to stigmas within communities about wartime rape and children born of rape, husbands may reject children born during the conflict as 'bad blood'.⁷² Generally, divorce and remarriage has been quite common in Sierra Leone. The new husband will traditionally adopt his wife's children and formally or informally accept them as his own. But several women interviewed indicated that there were 'problems' between their current husbands and the children they had given birth to before the marriage.⁷³ One woman in particular confided that her mother had to raise her child because her new husband would not accept the child.⁷⁴ Such negative reactions by men contribute to women and girls remaining silent about rape. Kargbo explains the results of this rejection: '[having a child born of rape] is not a problem when the men do not know. That is why you have spontaneous reintegration [where the girls and women] come quietly so that no one knows and no family member knows whether this child is born of rape.'⁷⁵

Children born during the conflict and immediately after have a greater chance of being stigmatised if they are born to a single mother

One of the most visible categories of children born of war is children born as a result of rape or consensual sex between Sierra Leonean women and foreign

peacekeepers or UN staff. Although some women had consensual relationships with these men, there were also cases of UN staff and peacekeepers committing rape. Furthermore, the use of Sierra Leonean women and girls as prostitutes is and remains a serious concern. Shiaka admitted: 'We had ECOMOG [Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group] and the UN, and all of them had relationships with girls and there were children from those relationships'.⁷⁶ Unlike other children born of rape in Sierra Leone, the children born from foreign soldiers or staff are identifiable by their physical characteristics. In areas where peacekeepers have been stationed, it is not unusual to see children who have physical characteristics that are understood as 'not Sierra Leonean'. Unable to explain why, Shiaka also noted that if a child is born from a rebel, 'the stigma is much more greater [sic] than when a girl has a baby with an ECOMOG soldier or a peacekeeper'.⁷⁷ Despite the fact that this 'ranking' of children born of war tends to favour children born to foreigners, their visibility in the community renders them vulnerable in comparison to those children whose paternity remains hidden. But even if a child experiences fewer stigmas than other children born of war, the issue of abandonment is a real concern for children born from foreign soldiers or staff. It is unlikely that these fathers can be located or will contribute to the raising of these children.

Stigmatisation is not the only obstacle facing children born of war. Many children – whether they are born as a result of rape or not – have mothers and fathers with limited parenting skills. Their parents may have been involved with the fighting forces from childhood and may never have been parented themselves. This is of particular concern for women and girls because they are typically held responsible for childrearing in Sierra Leone. Some girls were abducted at extremely young ages. In particular, 23 per cent of the women interviewed in Makeni gave birth before the age of 15.⁷⁸ Some could not remember life before they were with the fighting forces because they were recruited at such young ages. These girls grew up to be fighters, not mothers. Even women and girls who did not grow up with the fighting forces may lack knowledge about parenting owing to the fact that through displacement or death they were separated from one or both their parents during the conflict.

During the 11-year civil conflict, large portions of the general population lost, or were separated from at least one parent. This meant that there were numerous social arrangements other than the traditional family structure, including households headed by children or women, grandmothers, aunts and uncles acting as primary caregivers, and children growing up in orphanages or foster homes, or spending extended periods of time in interim care centres. Despite the multiplicity of

arrangements for childrearing that existed during the conflict, one single arrangement has been presented as ideal in the post-conflict period, namely that of biological mothers raising their children. The expectation is that they possess the skills necessary to do so. In effect, it is assumed that mothering skills will invoke themselves naturally even in the case of those women and girls with neither experience of nor a familiarity with motherhood.

Each source of stigmatisation for women and children in relation to war-rape and the children born as a result correlates back to marriage and the model of the liberal family. If a husband rapes his wife, there is no law or social stigma in Sierra Leone that will distinguish the resultant child as atypical. But a child born as a result of a rape that occurred outside of marriage can be identified as a bastard, a war baby or a rebel baby (unless the mother marries). Stevens describes this distinction as a by-product of policies that regulate the family: 'It is the prerogative of the state to distinguish and hence to constitute the difference between what is profane (sex as "fornication," children as "illegitimate") and what is sacred (sex within marriage, legitimate children)'.⁷⁹

TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The role of NGOs and international agencies

There are few programmes that address wartime rape as a major obstacle to reintegration and rehabilitation in post-conflict Sierra Leone. Organisations like PHR have addressed the medical needs of women who were raped, but long-term programmes that offer strategies to help women heal are rare. Even scarcer are programmes that address the needs of children born as a result of wartime rape. In fact, of all the organisations and agencies that established themselves in Sierra Leone after the conflict, there was not a single one that identified children born of rape as beneficiaries. When asked why this category of children had been overlooked, a senior member of the MSWGCA could only say the following:

'It is difficult to identify this group and we have been sensing something about that. During the war we had a lot of peacekeeping troops coming and then going back and around them we used to see a large number of girls and they had children with these peacekeepers and they left and most of these girls have the children with them and there is no one to take direct control or responsibility. We think this might be a problem for that particular category ... When women bring children to orphanages we have tried to find out what has happened that they want to give up their child and we often find that the

father was a peacekeeper or a combatant or someone who is not dead or who has left the country.'⁸⁰

Not a single person from any of the children's agencies interviewed could explain exactly why children born of war had not been given specific attention. Some mentioned the funding structure of their agencies, admitting that they were only funded to carry out programmes for categories of vulnerable children identified by their donors. As a result, even if organisations established an urgent need to provide for children born of war, if their donors, some of them foreign-based, had not identified such children as beneficiaries, no funds would be made available. As a result, agencies could only address children born of war indirectly, e.g. through programmes for their mothers. Francis Murray Lahai describes the result of this lack of direct funding: 'We have some partners that in a rather uncoordinated way offer some form of assistance [to children born of war]. But they are living by chance, just by chance.'⁸¹

With no agencies identifying children born of war as a distinct category, the children in effect become an 'un'-category with no specific resources, rights or protection. Policies have identified other categories of vulnerable children, but have excluded and thus de-legitimised this category. Augustan Binue of Ben Hirsh admitted: 'There was nothing put into place for these children. These children were only taken care of by the Interim Care Centre because they were abandoned on the streets and other places and brought here. Those that we cannot trace their families, we foster them and call them "community children".'⁸² When asked what happens to these children, Shiaka simply replied: 'They are left.'⁸³

Even organisations like the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which had extensive resources in Sierra Leone and conducted numerous research programmes to assess the needs of children post-conflict, did not have any response to children born of war. Glenis Taylor from UNICEF Sierra Leone admitted that the issue did not fit within their agenda because 'the war is over. We are looking at vulnerable children, broadly, like street children and girl-mothers.'⁸⁴ She also confessed to pressure from donors: 'They are now saying that the war is over ... it is now five years since it is over ... it is now time to move away from [any] war associations.'⁸⁵ Thus it seems as though even with the growing awareness of the number of children born of war and their vulnerabilities, organisations cannot overcome the restrictions of their funding.

The radicalisation of development or the conflation of security and development policies provides a partial explanation for this neglect. It is argued here that the linking of development and security has resulted in 'traditional' security concerns, such as the disarmament of male combatants, having taken precedence over

the so-called 'everyday politics' of sex and childbirth. Although rape has been identified as a security interest particular to women, rape is still not considered an issue of 'high politics'. Hansen explains that matters relating to the security of women often get categorised as individual or human security concerns. She argues that issues relating to human security or individual security are still prioritised below public 'collective' security threats, and are relegated to the private realm.⁸⁶ The prioritisation of security concerns post-conflict clearly placed women and 'the family' in the private realm in comparison to collective security threats such as organised violence.

The official silence on children born of war in Sierra Leone stands in stark contrast to the overwhelming evidence for the existence of this group of children and the widespread knowledge of the vulnerabilities they face. The aid community did not work at shattering the silence surrounding wartime rape, or create acceptance of children born as a result. In fact, by failing to identify children born of war as a vulnerable category, NGOs, aid agencies and international organisations have been complicit in maintaining gender norms and hierarchies that have categorised rape and childbirth as 'private' issues, rather than as post-conflict development and security concerns.

By failing to identify children born of war as a vulnerable category, NGOs, aid agencies and international organisations have been complicit in maintaining gender norms

Initial recommendations and conclusions

There are specific recommendations to be made in relations to each of the five areas of silence discussed in this paper. The first area is the manner in which the liberal, nuclear family model is assumed to be the basis of post-conflict development policies and local laws. Post-conflict policies contributed to the (re)construction of norms associated with 'appropriate' and 'natural' roles for mothers and fathers in Sierra Leone. None of the practices of presenting women with the options of marriage or shame, having grandmothers raise grandchildren to help persuade men that their daughters are worthy of marriage, hiding the paternity of children

born of rape and encouraging women to marry their rape perpetrators appear to be natural or 'normal'. Rather, each one of them demonstrates the intensity of the effort to create family units post-conflict.

The assumption that people will naturally organise to form consensual heterosexual marriages with offspring can be particularly discriminatory to women. Notions such as the natural nuclear family serve to define sex and childbirth as natural and 'pre-political'. Stereotypical ideas about women's proper role within the family unit may make it more difficult for them to come forward when they experience sexual violence. Furthermore, such stereotypical notions often results in the distribution of aid or information about services through the male head of the family, placing single women, single mothers and women who are in abusive relationships at a disadvantage.

During a long civil conflict, multiple types of family arrangements come about as a means of survival. Policy-makers need to acknowledge this and create policies that are not based on an assumption of particular familial relationships. Households headed up by children and women, and by single women and single mothers in particular, require targeted resources and attention post-conflict. Community members adapt and stretch their resources during a conflict and in its aftermath. Peace and post-conflict transitional justice mechanisms should acknowledge such local sacrifices and efforts should be made to establish- at a local level- what programmes and interventions are necessary.

It is only when assumptions about the naturalness of heterosexual relationships, marriage, motherhood and childbirth are abandoned that truly original and progressive thinking and policies can be initiated. The Sierra Leone case study demonstrates that sex, marriage, childbirth and motherhood are regulated rather than natural relationships. Most importantly, childbirth and motherhood should not be viewed by policy-makers as equally instinctual. Childbirth may be a biological function, but sex and reproduction do not necessarily occur organically. Furthermore, the desire to be a mother and the skills required to nurture children are not necessarily 'hard-wired'. In the light of this, targeted programmes with adequate resources need to be instituted to help women and men with the task of raising children, and to provide education and sensitise communities about parenting. Such programmes would help dispel the myth that women are naturally 'made' to give birth and help diminish stigmatisation of those women who do not want to give birth, who decide to put their children up for adoption, or who find parenting a challenge.

The second area of silence discussed in this paper was the need to define wartime rape as a tactic of war and to address systemic forms of violence against women that

continue post-conflict. Just as ideas about the model family require rethinking, so the understanding of wartime rape must be elevated above simplified categorisations such as acts of genocide, offences on enemy men, or symbolic crossings of boundaries or territories. Rather than war being a time where sexual violence is exceptionally high, it is possible that war, and the destabilisation of state control that often comes with war, reveals the immense effort that is made to regulate sex and to keep it in the private realm.

Rape has been discussed as a tool of war by feminist scholars and, more recently, by the international legal community. However, it still is neither monitored sufficiently nor addressed during conflict and in the post-conflict period. Wartime rape and sexual violence should be monitored and accounted for during war in the same way other militant activities and atrocities are monitored. Sexual violence, including rape, has been integral part of military strategy in most wars and should be viewed as such. International, local and governmental organisations should not wait until after a conflict is over to address sexual violence. Local hospital and community health facilities should be given the resources and the skills to treat victims of sexual violence. This would require security forces, be they local military forces, UN troops, or regional armed forces, to secure health facilities and to ensure that victims of sexual violence are able to report their abuse and receive treatment without fear.

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In addition to more targeted programmes to treat victims of sexual violence, the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes should include measures to educate former combatants about sexual violence. Men and women who have been involved in a conflict for years may have skewed ideas about gender relations and may have little knowledge about laws relating to sexual violence, or their own rights in relation to sexual violence and domestic abuse. Disarmament programmes need to do much more than to take weapons away from combatants; they provide a prime opportunity to educate combatants and civilians about gender relations, the law and human rights.

The third area of silence that was discussed is the stigma that victims of rape and children born as a result of rape face after the end of the conflict. Resources and programmes would help to diminish this stigma, but concerted efforts in terms of protection and reparation would help to improve the plight of rape victims and children born of rape. In their 2007 annual report on Sierra Leone, Amnesty International focused on the lack of reparation for victims of sexual and domestic violence during the war, and the need to protect women from future violence.⁸⁷ The report noted that the TRC did not address domestic violence sufficiently and that levels of violence remained very high in the country. It was also reported that insufficient resources and inattention to sexual and domestic violence inhibited the reintegration of women and resulted in systemic and lasting abusive relationships. Reparations, including an apology to the victims of sexual violence in Sierra Leone, as well as acknowledgement of the widespread and devastating nature of sexual violence during the war, would be a first step towards diminishing silence and stigmatisation.

Despite the continuing prevalence of sexual and domestic violence in Sierra Leone today, there are positive developments in terms of new legal frameworks. In 2001, the MSWGCA created the National Policies for the Advancement of Women and Gender Mainstreaming.⁸⁸ These policies condemn sexual violence and encourage the creation of new laws in this regard. Subsequently the Domestic Violence Act of 2007 came into force with the aims of restricting violence in intimate settings, helping to raise awareness and eliminating silence in relation to these crimes.

The fourth and fifth area of silence identified the need to recognise children born of wartime rape as a significant population group requiring targeted resources and attention, and the necessity for children's organisations to include this category of children as beneficiaries in the post-conflict period. Including children born of wartime rape as a specific and vulnerable category would be a first step towards reducing the stigmatisation of these children. In addition to rethinking the scope of post-conflict development, there is a need to expand our understanding of children affected by war beyond the categories of child-soldier, abandoned children, street children and HIV/AIDS orphans.

Although the children in each of these groupings certainly are vulnerable, they do not encompass the entirety of children who require attention. The recent fixation on child-soldiers (read: the image of a young male child holding a gun) has eclipsed the need for research on other categories of children impacted by warfare. This 'other' category does not simply include children born of rape, but also children born to amputees, children with disability and children with

inherited drug addictions. These groups of children are all too often overlooked by post-conflict policies and mainstream Western media. Measures should be taken to provide such children with protection and legal rights.

More general recommendations include the need for a widespread re-examination of the meanings of development, reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation. In the collective, universal processes that are implemented after the official end of a war, the development, reconstruction and rehabilitation processes often exclude women and girls. For countless women in Sierra Leone, post-conflict reintegration is defined by silence, concealment, stigma and fear. For them, this period has not always been a time of positive transformation. Development policies do not necessarily replace traditional, corrupt, chaotic or violent arrangements with peaceful and progressive ones.

To transform the post-conflict period into a time of possibilities and progress for everyone, women must be included in the policy-making and implementation process. This requires in-depth interviews with women and analyses of their war experiences, as well as concerted and ongoing efforts to allow women to share control and participate in decision-making. It is only when women are listened to, taken seriously and treated as authorities with regard to war and post-war transitions, that inclusive and lasting security can be achieved.

ACRONYMS

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CAW	Children Associated with the War
CDF	Civil Defence Force
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CIS	Children Integrated Services
COOPI	Cooperazione Internazionale
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
NGO	Non-governmental Organisations
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
PHR	Physicians for Human Rights
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone

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NOTES

- 1 Jacqueline Stevens, *Reproducing the State*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- 2 This paper is concerned with rapes perpetrated against women and girls. However, it is acknowledged that men and boys were also victims of rape. It is hoped that the focus on women and girls does not contribute to an oversimplification of the portrayal of sexual violence in Sierra Leone. Rape was not simply perpetrated by male soldiers against females. In some cases, female soldiers or commanders commanded rapes. Boys were forced to rape family members and fathers were forced to perpetrate or watch the rape of their children.
- 3 Although I use the term 'children born as a result of wartime rape' to refer to this specific category of children whose paternity is known to be linked to rape, I also use the term 'children born of war' to refer to a larger population of children that may face similar stigmas and vulnerabilities as children produced as a result of rape. Similar to R Charli Carpenter, one of the only other scholars writing on the issue of sexual violence and children born as a result, I argue that terms such as war babies or rape babies are both negative and feed the tendency to sensationalise their identity.
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- 6 Lene Hansen, *Security as practice: discourse analysis and the Bosnian War*, London: Routledge, 2006, 19.
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- 9 Duffield, *Global governance and the new wars*, 16.
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- 16 Hansen, *Security as practice*, 52.
- 17 This includes an analysis of Sierra Leone's marriage and adoption laws, and an analysis of government policies related to the disarmament process, and marriage and childbirth.
- 18 These include policy documents from organisations such as Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), Children Associated with the War (CAW), Human Rights Watch, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Caritas Makeni.
- 19 These interviews were conducted with former female soldiers between the ages of 18 and 32 years at a training centre for female soldiers in Makeni, Sierra Leone. Women were asked questions about their children and the fathers in order to garner information about so-called war babies.
- 20 David Keen, *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*, New York: Palgrave, 2005.
- 21 Lansana Gberie. *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).
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- 23 Adekeye Adebajo and David Keen, Sierra Leone, in Mats Berdal and Spyros Economides (eds), *United Nations interventionism 1991-2004*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Lansana Gberie, *A dirty war in West Africa: the RUF and the destruction of Sierra Leone*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- 24 Adebajo and Keen, Sierra Leone, 204.
- 25 John Hirsh, *Sierra Leone: diamonds and the struggle for democracy*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2001, 150.
- 26 Ibrahim Abraham, Bush path to destruction: the origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL), in Ibrahim Abdullah (ed.), *Between democracy and terror: the Sierra Leone civil war*, Oxford: Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2004.
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- 32 Adebajo and Keen, Sierra Leone, 215.
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- 38 Isha Kamara, social worker, Girls Left Behind Project, interview by Megan Mackenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 23 November 2005.
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- 40 Forster, HIV/AIDS, 149.
- 41 Barbara E Harrell-Bond and Ulrica Rijnosdorp, *Family law in Sierra Leone: a research report*, Leiden, Netherlands: Afrika-Studiecentrum, 1975, 20.
- 42 This mirrors British common law.
- 43 Harrell-Bond and Rijnosdorp, *Family law in Sierra Leone*, 45.
- 44 Harrell-Bond and Rijnosdorp, *Family law in Sierra Leone*, 45–49.
- 45 A caretaker marriage or union consists of a woman estranged or separated from her husband who becomes involved in a conjugal union. It is described as a 'caretaker' marriage because the male partner assumes the role of caretaker in place of the previous husband.
- 46 A debtor-creditor marriage comes about where a woman wishes to divorce her husband, but is unable to pay back the initial dowry. The husband can suggest that the woman obtains the money by finding a wealthy man and pledging her services until the debt is paid.
- 47 The definitions of 'child' and 'adult' vary between ethnic groups and from region to region in Sierra Leone. For example, a former British act called 'The Young People's Act' identified anyone over 16 as an adult, while another law designates the age of 14 years as the threshold between childhood and adulthood. Traditionally in some chiefdoms both male and female children go through initiation ceremonies that can include female genital mutilation, training in local hunting procedures and learning about the history of the tribe. These ceremonies dictate the transition from childhood to adulthood, but can be performed at a variety of different ages depending on the physical development of the child and the financial resources of the family.

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- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
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- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Augustan Turai, project manager, Ben Hirsh Society, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 11 November 2005.
- 64 Rev. Hassan Mansaray, director of Children Integrated Services (CIS), digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1 December 2005.
- 65 Baldi and MacKenzie, *Silent identities*, 92.
- 66 Glenis Taylor, project officer, Child Protection, UNICEF, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2 December 2005.
- 67 Mameh Kargbo, programme officer, COOPI, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 30 November 2005.
- 68 Dehunge Shiaka, MSWGCA, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.
- 69 Francis Murray Lahai. Focal Point for the Street Children's Task Force, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 30 November 2005.
- 70 Rev. Hassan Mansaray, director of Children Integrated Services (CIS), one of the first organizations to address the needs of abandoned children during the conflict, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1 December 2005.
- 71 Baldi and MacKenzie, *Silent identities*, 90.
- 72 Mameh Kargbo, COOPI, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 30 November 2005.
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- 74 Personal interview with female soldier, digitally recorded, Freetown, Sierra Leone, December 2005.
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- 76 Shiaka, MSWGCA, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Baldi and MacKenzie, *Silent identities*, 91.
- 79 Stevens, *Reproducing the state*, 223.
- 80 Lahai, Focal Point for the Street Children's Task Force, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 30 November 2005.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Binue, Ben Hirsh Society, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, 11 November 2005.
- 83 Shiaka, MSWGCA, digitally recorded interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.
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* Angola; Botswana; Burundi; Congo-Brazzaville; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Gabon, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar; Malawi, Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; Reunion; Rwanda; Seychelles; Swaziland; Tanzania; Uganda; Zambia; Zimbabwe (formerly African Postal Union countries).

ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper builds on the work of feminist theorists and points out that mainstream depictions of war are among the most glaring examples of the exclusion of the experiences and voices of women. The paper represents a portion of research conducted over a two-month period in Sierra Leone at the end of 2005, when over 50 female soldiers in Makeni between the ages of 18 and 32 were interviewed. It details five areas of silence that need to be exposed, highlights the stigma associated with wartime rape, and argues that by not identifying rape as a tactic of war and discussing children born of rape, these issues become relegated to the margins of conflict, development and security studies. The paper depicts insights that have been largely absent from dominant discourses on the war in Sierra Leone and calls for the recognition of the multiple types of violence and insecurity that women and children face both during and after conflict. The transitional recovery period provides a critical opportunity for the positive transformation of gender relations. Understanding and acknowledging women's experiences of conflict is crucial to achieving representative and effective post-conflict policies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan MacKenzie is lecturer in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand and a faculty affiliate with the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University. In her research MacKenzie continually tries to demonstrate the links between sex, power and international politics. Her research areas include gender, international relations and development studies, and her publications include a recent article entitled 'Securitisation and de-securitisation: female soldiers and the reconstruction of Women in post-conflict Sierra Leone'.

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P O Box 1787, Brooklyn Square 0075
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Tel: (27-12) 346 9500 Fax: (27-12) 460 0998
iss@issafrica.org

www.issafrica.org

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