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Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone

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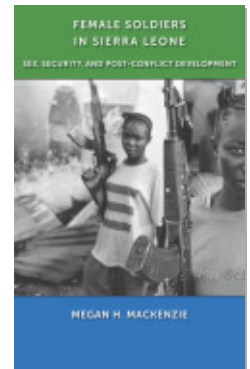
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Loving Your Enemy

Rape, Sex, Childbirth, and Politics Post–Armed Conflict

Kadiatu was with the rebels for one year. She admitted to killing and “holding weapons.” At just twenty-two years of age, Kadiatu has three children, aged eleven, seven, and three. This means her first child was born when she was just eleven years old. Kadiatu explained that the children were all born from a rebel and was adamant that they were all fathered by the same man. Kadiatu admits that things are “strange” between her and her children and complained that she had no assistance in parenting. Although Kadiatu did not clarify where the father is—or if he is alive—she said she tells her children their father is dead.¹

Salamatu thinks she was eighteen or nineteen when she was with the fighting forces. She escaped but still does not know what the DDR is. Salamatu has two children. The first, a four-year-old, was fathered by a rebel. Salamatu did not give any more details other than “he is dead.” Her second child, a one-year-old, was fathered by her current husband. Salamatu explained that her husband “doesn’t accept” her first child and has insisted the child be raised by Salamatu’s mother.²

Sara Ruddick has written that “[women’s] maternal conception of the history of human flesh sets them at odds with militarist endeavours.”³ Ruddick’s work is representative of maternal feminists’ conclusions about women’s natural aversion to war and conflict. Ruddick has written about the positive impact of motherhood on women and especially how it transforms women’s perspectives on ethics, care, and violence. Although Ruddick has admitted that her perspective is a product of her position as a white, heterosexual, Western woman, the limits of this argument have perhaps been underestimated. Associating sex and childbirth as a natural and positive experience for women in Sierra Leone—or many other contexts—is beyond absurd. This presumption about women’s natural role and emotions casts a violent, moralizing net over all women in all contexts. Women who do not fit into this mold of the natural, superior, feminized peace-builder are judged, ignored,

or rendered delinquent or exceptional. It is perhaps only by exploring women's knowledge of the history of human flesh and their roles within militaristic endeavors that the facade of traditional notions of natural, peaceful mothers might be exposed.

Charles Helwig poignantly wrote, “[Women] know what war is about because war is part of any woman’s daily experience. Daughters or sisters or wives, we know about ‘loving your enemy’ in a particularly direct and painful way.”⁴ This quotation begins to capture the intricacy of women’s roles, relationships, and vulnerabilities during conflict. Moreover, through this quotation, one can begin to consider the assumptions associated with “love” and “enemy.” In Sierra Leone, women indeed knew about loving their enemy. In many cases women were raped by a member of their family or community. Thus, a loved one became an enemy. After the official end of the war, a number of women were forced to marry their rape perpetrators, rendering enemies “loved ones.” Men and women who may have been part of enemy armed groups sometimes formed legitimate relationships or fell in love. Women who were raped by enemies were expected to love the children who were conceived as a result. Foreign troops and peacekeepers who arrived to protect civilians from “the enemy” also raped both civilians and combatants. In turn, the simple biblical reference of “loving your enemy” acts as a lens through which it becomes possible to see how sex, love, the family, and childbirth are intimately implicated in warfare. This reference also acts as a starting point for this chapter, which aims to examine and rethink both the idea of women as natural mothers and the assumption that sex and childbirth are private—particularly in the context of war.

This chapter is focused on children born as a result of war—children sometimes referred to as “war babies.” Building on the previous chapter, which concentrated on wartime rape as a warfare strategy, this chapter supports the argument that 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 survivors of rape and their offspring may face serious insecurity concerns.

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. This chapter also discusses the inability of aid agencies to name and categorize children born of war within their existing classifications of vulnerable children—child soldiers, abandoned children, and street children. 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 a political nor a security issue.

A secondary aim of the chapter is to deconstruct dichotomies associated with mothers and war, such as courageous male warriors and peaceful nurturing women. This analysis draws on Jacqueline Stevens's 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 fulfill 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.

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, although not necessarily because of the rape that produced them; rather, these children are understood as atypical because they defy most understandings of conjugal order. Children born as a result of rape are born as a result of sex outside of marriage or a recognized, "legitimate" sexual relationship; as a result, they challenge the traditional liberal model of the family because they reveal that not all children are considered natural extensions of the family unit.

Conjugal Order and Colonial Rule in Sierra Leone

As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of conjugal order refers to laws and social norms that serve to regulate sexuality, (re)construct the family, and send messages about acceptable and legitimate social relationships. The purpose of this chapter is not to depict a singular version of conjugal

order. Instead, the custody, adoption, and paternity laws that influence conjugal order in Sierra Leone are provided. The objective is to show how existing laws, norms, and practices dictate acceptable family structures and determine which children are “legitimate.” These regulations create a particular form of conjugal order that renders children born of rape as “unnatural,” illegitimate, and a potential source of family shame.

Custody Laws

The customary and civil laws regulating paternity and custody in Sierra Leone are fascinating and complex. One report summarizes the basic premise of these laws:

Rights over the procreative services of a woman are vested in her paternal family until they are transferred at marriage to her husband and his family. If a girl has a child before marriage, her family, not having transferred these rights to any man, would be in a position to claim damages from the man who has trespassed on their rights and to claim the child. Ideally, of course, in the traditional village society, all women past puberty should be married, thus avoiding such a situation.⁷

As mentioned in chapter 2, although most regulations associated with custody and adoption in Sierra Leone stem from ethnic norms and customs, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs has increasingly tried to intervene in these areas. Dehungue Shiaka, from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs, explained that in cases of divorce, the ministry investigates the parents to decide if the father is capable of caring for the child.⁸ As noted earlier, in most cases, it deems the mother to be the best possible parent for the child.⁹ 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.¹⁰ In these cases, if the father requests custody of a child after the child reaches the age of ten, custody is usually granted to him.¹¹ 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 him- or herself, and the father is more likely than the mother to have the financial resources to further the child’s education and provide him or her with various opportunities.¹²

One area of law that is currently under review in Sierra Leone relates to the practice of adoption. Traditionally in Sierra Leone, if a mother cannot

raise her child or dies, the biological father's parents will raise the child. Children born during the conflict represent new challenges to this traditional practice. First, children may be born as a result of rape or gang rape. In this case the father may not be known, and there is no relationship or sense of obligation between the father and the child. Second, children may be born as a result of consensual sex during the conflict between an unmarried couple. In this case, the father's family may reject the child as illegitimate because there had been no recognized marriage. Third, the location of the father and his family may not be known either as a result of the mass displacement of the population during the conflict (more than 1 million people were displaced from their homes) or as a result of the high number of deaths during 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 had been rejected by the family of the father. However, there were no real legal or customary frameworks to address these situations. In response, after the official end of the war, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs began creating the Bastardy Act (now called the Adoption Act) to attempt to legally address children born into such circumstances.

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.¹³ 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 recognize the child, then the biological father may recognize the child as "his" and register the birth.¹⁴ 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, according to family law the following cases cover those children whose "legitimacy" is solidified in terms of rights of succession and inheritance:

1. A child born to parents who are legally married.
2. A child fathered by a man other than a wife's husband, but who is explicitly acknowledged by the legal husband as his own.¹⁵

This short list defining "legitimate" children in Sierra Leone can be contrasted to the long list of categories of children whose paternity, and therefore

inheritance and succession rights, can be easily disputed or called into question:¹⁶

1. An extra-marital child, not acknowledged by its mother's legal husband.
2. Children born to a union that has had the consent of the families, but where dowry and other ceremonial traditions have not been finalised.
3. A child born to a betrothed girl and fathered by the intended husband.
4. A child born to a betrothed girl and fathered by a man other than the man to whom she is betrothed.
5. A child born to a married woman and fathered by her partner in a "care-taker marriage."¹⁷
6. A child born to a divorced woman and fathered by her partner in a "debtor-creditor marriage."¹⁸
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. A child whose mother is unmarried and who was fathered by a man already married under statutory law.

These laws and regulations surrounding childbirth and paternity determine which children are accepted. Only particular categories of children are classified as innate members of a family unit while other children are deemed exceptions, problems, or challenges to the family. This further supports the argument that the family is not a naturally forming, prepolitical unit; rather, it is constructed and regulated largely through laws and social norms. These laws inform conjugal order in Sierra Leone. Looking at the issue of war babies through the lens of conjugal order provides clarity regarding the social disorder these children present and the inability of aid agencies and organizations to recognize them as a category of vulnerable children.

War Babies

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. Many women and girls refused to talk about rape, and it was nearly impossible to determine if children abandoned during the war were products of rape. Speaking about an orphanage run by CIS, Rev. Hassan Mansaray noted:

“In our orphanage it is very difficult to know [if children were products of rape], especially if you have the child as a baby. The child doesn’t know how to talk when you get that child so we can’t get the history. Even as the child grows it is very difficult even if the single mother or the biological parent knows that that child is hers [they] find it difficult to come out and say that they are the legitimate mother and because of certain situations had to abandon it.

As an afterthought Mansaray added, “We have a few children that were already old enough that saw their parents raped. One girl saw her mother raped and then killed. Another girl, she saw her father’s head cut off.”

Much of the information I gathered about war babies came in the form of stories told to me by staff at orphanages like Augustan, social workers, or other members of the community in Sierra Leone. Most people who had worked with children during the war knew about this category of children, but few could tell me many specifics about their numbers or their fates. For example, when asked about war babies, Glenis Taylor from UNICEF offered what she knew about these children:

We were receiving reports of girls who were found abandoned in communities mostly with babies. Some of the abductors abandoned the girls and went back to their original areas, and these girls were ashamed to go back. Most of them had babies—maybe one, two, or three—and a lot of them were hesitant to go back. Life had been difficult before, and now they were going back with an extra mouth or two to feed and they had no skills. Some didn’t know if their family was alive, some wondered if the family hadn’t looked for them for all this time maybe they don’t want them back. They had reservations and insecurities. Some of them were accepted in a new way of life, some left their homes as children and were returning as adults, and for some this worked.

Catherine Zainab Tarawally, director of Human Rights Awareness in Makeni and manager of Radio Maria, reported that “southern and eastern people don’t forgive and forget, but the northerners do. These people don’t care for these women, some have impregnated women, and they have had two or three children. But after the disarmament these men just go away and leave the children with the women. That’s why we have a lot of dropout women in this part of the country after the war.”

Rev. Hassan Mansaray from CIS also had some knowledge about war babies:

The experiences with those children are not very pleasant. For example, the orphanage that we run, we believe some of the children that were abandoned are children associated with rape. Like the first boy we had when we started the orphanage, he was six months when he was thrown away. The issue of rape is something very bitter and something that destroys the integrity of the girls because most people in the community, when they know that a child is born out of such a situation, the child is stigmatized—and also the mother. Those are problems that usually, well, so many people find difficult to realize that the child suffered maybe as the result of ill luck, but they leave the fate of the child.

Information about a particularly detectable category of “war babies” sheds further light on this issue. Children born as a result of rape or consensual sex between Sierra Leonean women and foreign peacekeepers or UN staff are more identifiable because they often inherit distinct physical characteristics. 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 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.”¹⁹ Francis Lahai confirmed Shiaka’s analysis by stating, “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.”

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.”²⁰ This is contradicted by Lahai, who, when asked about the potential stigma for children born of foreign peacekeepers, stated, “Nobody wants to accept a child of that nature. Within the family setting we do not make much difference, but in some cases families reject them.”

Whether or not this “ranking” of children born of war favors children born to foreigners, their visibility in the community renders them vulnerable in comparison to those children whose paternity remains hidden. Even if a child experiences less stigma than other children born of war, the issue of abandonment is a real concern for children born from foreign soldiers or staff. For these children there is limited hope of locating their fathers just as there is limited hope for their mothers of receiving help with the child from the family of the father.

Finally, my interviews with female soldiers provide additional information about this category of children. Some women I interviewed were willing to talk about children they had given birth to during the war. I did not specifically ask women if they were raped or if their children were born as a result of rape; however, some women voluntarily disclosed information about children who had been fathered by rebels or by men who had subsequently died. Interestingly, none of the women used the words “rape” or “sexual violence.” There seemed to be code phrases that broadly referred to sex but obscured whether the act was forced or not. For example, several women explained that they had been taken as “wives” by one or more men. As already mentioned, the phrase “taking someone as a wife” typically refers to having sex in Sierra Leone. It is not always clear whether this sex is forced or not; however, it is important to note that “bush wife,” “wife,” and “sex slave” are often used interchangeably by women and are even used this way within organization documents and reports. One female soldier lamented: “Those men [soldiers and rebel] have their own wives to return to without the kids. It was only because of the war that they had these women as their temporary wives.”

Also, many women, like Kadiatu and Isatu, referred to their children as “being from the bush.” Very few women clarified what they meant by this, although both Kadiatu and Isatu added that their children that were from “the bush” were fathered by rebels. Tryphena admitted that she does not know where the father of her oldest child is. She has two more children from another man whom she now lives with. She divulged the following about the father of her first child: “If I told them their father is from the bush they will feel strange. I will just say they are from the last father.” Due to the chaos, displacement and mass movement, and endemic sexual violence

that characterized “the bush,” the interviewees’ use of the term with reference to their children seems to indicate one of a number of possible scenarios: the paternity of the child is unknown, the child was fathered by a man with whom the woman wants no further contact, the woman does not know where the father is anymore, or the father is dead.

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 percent of the women I interviewed acknowledged that they had children born from at least two different fathers. Generally, divorce and remarriage have 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.²¹ Unfortunately, due to blanket assumptions about sex and childbirth during the conflict, husbands may reject children born during the conflict as “bad blood.”²²

One woman in particular confided that her mother had to raise the child she gave birth to during the war because her new husband would not accept the child.²³ Another, who had a child “in the bush” and later remarried, told me that she believes her current husband wants to kill her and complained that due to fear “even yesterday I did not sleep all night.” Isha Kamara, a social worker with the Girls Left Behind project in Makeni, reiterated that men who marry former soldiers hesitate to accept children they think may have been born as a result of rape. She gave the following details:

Some men [may think] how should I take this child, they say I won’t accept these children because I am not the father of these children. But some husbands they accept because it was because of the circumstances of the war that [women] were involved. Maybe because of threats to this lady...[she got pregnant and] gave birth. [Our organization], we call them and we say war is not a good thing let’s forgive and forget. Even the things we have seen, accept the poor children, accept the women.

Abandonment was a consistent theme in the narratives from women who gave birth to children who may be classified as “war babies.” Marie told me that her second husband has abandoned her “because he says I have another husband, the rebel. He has abandoned me, and I live with my aunt. I don’t want the child to have mixed feelings—I will say that the second father is the father of the two.” Hawa had three children, aged eight, three, and one. She said that

they all had the same father but that he had left her to go and dig diamonds. He was not providing any support for the children. She added that two of the children were living with her mother, while the youngest had to stay with her because she was still breast-feeding. Fatmata was also raising three children on her own. Alimatu reported that the father of her first child is dead and the father of the second was a rebel. She clarified that the second father abandoned her and her child. When asked what she will tell her children about their paternity, she replied that she planned on telling them the “true story,” that one father has abandoned them and the other “died in the bush.”

Like Alimatu, Abby intended on being honest with her children regarding their paternity. Abby was with the rebel forces for two years from the age of thirteen to fifteen. She has two children, both of whom were fathered by a rebel who is now dead. She said she will tell her children that their father was a rebel and that they should stay in school. Fatmata explained that the father of her children was also a rebel and that she did not know where he was. When asked what she will tell her children about their father, Fatmata replied, “I will tell them the truth, that their father was a rebel.” Another woman, Salamatu, told me she has two children. The father of the first child left her during the war, and she later married a man who fathered a second child. When asked what she will tell her older daughter about her father, she replied, “I give her the real story about the father. But this girl...when she grows up, she will ask me questions, and I will explain more.”

Isha Kamara stated that the organization she worked for was actively encouraging women to conceal the paternity of their children. She said it was particularly important for a child not to know that his or her father was a rebel who had committed rape:

Now we have asked women to stop telling their children that they are a product of rape because that will make the child to be shy, even that will make the child afraid to say they have a father. [We believe] if you are saying that the child is a rebel...that child will not be happy—she cannot say anything about their father at school when the children are saying “my mother gave me this...my father gave me this,” so we are telling them talk to the husband and tell the husband to take the child and ask for forgiveness.

Accounts of war babies in countries such as Bosnia, Japan, and Rwanda have noted the tendency for mothers to reject or harm these children. One cannot draw such general conclusions based on information regarding the

relationship of mothers to children born of war in Sierra Leone. Mameh Kargbo from COOPI explains the complicated feelings that women might feel toward children born of rape: “Some wanted to take the lives of their children [who were born of rape] they say ‘these children are constant reminders. Tomorrow they will ask ‘where is my father.’ [The women] say that will always remind them. They wonder how they can tell children that they were raped by 4 or 5 men.” From her experience working with women, she concluded that for those who have been gang-raped “the agony of not being able to identify the father of their child is sometimes too much to bear.”²⁴ Dehunge Shiaka of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs also maintains that women will likely have strained relationships with children born of rape:

There could be social problems on both sides [the mother and the child]. 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].”²⁵

In contrast, Glenis Taylor from UNICEF Sierra Leone felt that most of the mothers of children born of rape accepted their children. She told a particularly moving story:

There was a girl mother in a center 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 was what I had 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.²⁶

Very few of the women I spoke with gave detailed information about their relationship with their children. One woman I spoke with admitted that things were not easy between her and the child she gave birth to during the

war: “Right now with the children we have some strangeness with them. We gave birth from the rebels, and now we are having problems with them. All the men left the children with the women, and they need some help.” Fatmata had also revealed that her relationship with her children was “not easy,” but that she cannot linger on the difficulties with the relationship because “they need to be fed and go to school and I’m by myself.”

Other information has been gathered from medical intake forms for girl soldiers discovered at CAW. In a group of fewer than fifty girl soldiers, at least six had either recently given birth, were pregnant, or had received an abortion. Ellie was a child soldier with the RUF for one year and five months. In that time she became pregnant, but the pregnancy was aborted at five months, three weeks. Since the abortion she had not received any medical attention. Maya was reported to have been abducted by a SLA soldier called Brigadier Bayo. She gave birth to a baby while in the army (the forms did not indicate who the father was or if the child was the result of rape). Fatmata was a girl soldier who arrived at the CAW facility five months pregnant. According to the reports, her pregnancy was confirmed to be the result of “rape by the SLA boys in the bush.”

With such sparse information, it is nearly impossible to know the exact numbers of children born of rape in Sierra Leone. Child welfare experts there could only speak generally about the number of children born of war. Augustan Turai of the Ben Hirsh Society declared: “There are *many* within the community.”²⁷ Rev. Hassan Mansaray said that one of the orphanages his organization works with was established because of the high number of abandoned babies. He estimated that about 20 of the 400 children who 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.²⁸ The babies typical ranged in age from six months to just over one year.²⁹ It is important to note that currently there are no formal mechanisms for identifying and tracking children born of war.

What we do know about war babies is that while sexual violence occurred throughout the eleven-year civil conflict, the majority of rapes were committed between 1997 and 1999.³⁰ From this it can be inferred that, as of 2012, children born as a result of violence during the war may be between the ages of seven and eighteen years, with the majority of children in the age range of twelve to fourteen. PHR has estimated that 9 to 10 percent of rapes during the conflict resulted in pregnancies. This would mean that more than 20,000 “war babies” might have been born. As noted earlier, rape statistics

are extremely skewed in Sierra Leone, and this assessment is therefore a low approximation. While the available numbers may not seem significant, they are likely gross underestimates of the total number of children born of wartime rape. Information about this vulnerable population and means to identify it are crucial to determining the total number these children, as well as assessing their needs.

We also know that most abandoned war babies were fostered or stayed in orphanages because it was impossible to trace their biological families. Augustan Binue explained that due to a lack of resources there was no follow-up on children who were fostered.³¹ In a country fraught 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.³²

This testimony sheds light on what life is like in Sierra Leone for children born of war. Far from experiencing a time of development and security post-conflict, these children face multiple insecurities, including poverty, alienation, and abandonment.

Stigma and Children Born of Rape

Unfortunately, stigma does not attach just to the women and girls who have been raped; the children they have given birth to also face similar labeling and stigma. “Rebel baby,” “bush pickin” (bush baby), and “banfa baby”³³ are all labels used in Sierra Leone to describe children born of rape. Francis 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 stigmatizing the mother and the child and calling them names.”³⁴ Rev. Mansaray

from CIS also affirmed: “When [community members] know that a child has been born out of such a situation [rape], the child is stigmatized and also the mother...so many people find it difficult to realize that the child suffered maybe as the result of ill luck.”³⁵

One factor contributing to stigma is the fact that rape was so pervasive that many single mothers are thought to be victims of rape—whether or not it is true. To remedy this situation, women were readily encouraged to marry either their rape perpetrators or someone who would accept their children. This often meant that children born during the conflict and immediately after had a greater chance of being stigmatized 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.³⁶

Stigmatization is not the only obstacle facing children born of war. Many children—whether or not they are born as a result of rape—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 responsible for child rearing in Sierra Leone. Some girls were abducted at extremely young ages. In particular, 23 percent of the women interviewed in Makeni gave birth before the age of fifteen.³⁷ 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 of their parents during the conflict.

During the eleven-year civil conflict, large portions of the general population lost or were separated from at least one parent. Thus, 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 in interim care centers. Despite the multiplicity of arrangements for child rearing 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 mothers possess the necessary skills 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 familiarity with motherhood.

Each source of stigmatization for women and children in relation to wartime rape and the children born as a result correlates to notions of conjugal order, including 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)."³⁸

The Role of NGOs and International Agencies

There are few programs that address wartime rape as a major obstacle to reintegration and rehabilitation in post-armed conflict Sierra Leone. Organizations like PHR have addressed the medical needs of women who were raped, but long-term programs that offer strategies to help women heal are rare. Even scarcer are programs that address the needs of children born as a result of wartime rape. In fact, of all the organizations and agencies that were established in Sierra Leone after the conflict, not a single one 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.³⁹

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 programs for categories of vulnerable

children identified by their donors. As a result, even if organizations identified 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, such as through programs for their mothers. Francis Lahai described 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.”⁴⁰

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 delegitimized this category. Augustan Binue of the Ben Hirsh Society 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.’”⁴¹ When asked what happens to these children, Dehunge Shiaka simply replied: “They are left.”⁴²

Even organizations like the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund, which had extensive resources in Sierra Leone and conducted numerous research programs to assess the needs of children post-armed 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 the organization’s agenda because “the war is over. We are looking at vulnerable children, broadly, like street children and girl-mothers.”⁴³ 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.”⁴⁴ Thus it seems as though even with the growing awareness of the number of children born of war and their vulnerabilities, organizations cannot overcome the restrictions of their funding.

The radicalization 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 categorized as individual

or human security concerns. She argues that issues relating to human security or individual security are still given lower priority than public “collective” security threats and are relegated to the private realm.⁴⁵ The prioritization of security concerns post-armed conflict clearly placed women and “the family” in the private realm in comparison to collective security threats such as organized 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 organizations have been complicit in maintaining gender norms and hierarchies that have categorized rape and childbirth as “private” issues rather than as post-armed conflict development and security concerns.

Initial Recommendations and Conclusions

There is a clear need to expand our understanding of children affected by war beyond the categories of child soldiers, abandoned children, street children, and HIV/AIDS orphans. Although the children in each of these cohorts 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 include only children born of rape but also children born to amputees, children with disabilities, and children with inherited drug addictions. These groups are all too often overlooked by post-conflict policies and mainstream Western media.

More broadly, this analysis of sexual violence and “war babies” further demonstrates that sex, marriage, childbirth, and motherhood are regulated rather than natural relationships. 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. To start, 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 “hardwired.” Most of the practices and policies directed

at survivors of rape and mothers of so-called war babies were inspired by liberal notions of conjugal order. These include 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. Rather than facilitating a “return to normal,” each one of these policies and practices demonstrates the intensity of the effort to create and reinforce conjugal order post-armed conflict.

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