Lessons

1 Sierra Leone in context

2 Images of Africa

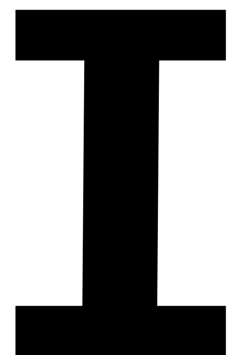
3 Gender and war

4 Conceptions of Youth

5 Story from Emma Fofanah

SECTION **one**twothreefour

Learning Across Cultural Boundaries



Learning Across Cultural Boundaries

Journeys begin with a series of preparations, from studying maps, to buying tickets, to packing suitcases. Less carefully scrutinized than passports and suitcases, however, are the cultural assumptions travelers carry to a foreign country—often termed cultural baggage. Cultural baggage refers to conscious and unconscious concepts of the world based on the particular social location or background of the individual. This may take the form of assuming a single standard of values or universal ideas of morality. For instance, a number of the American students we met in the course of traveling to West Africa were incensed with the system of bribery that operated throughout the region, comparing this system with "honest people back home." We were blocked at various junctures in the roads by small bands of youth who had put up a rope and wanted some change or cigarettes before lowering the barrier for our car to pass. Whether we describe this as an informal toll or highway robbery, the practice grew out of limited opportunities youth have to generate income.

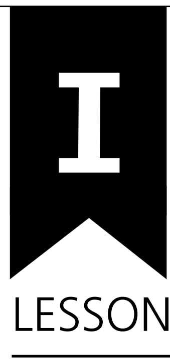
A healthy dose of cultural relativism—evaluating actions, beliefs and practices relative to the specific cultural context in which they occur—is as important as immunizations when entering foreign countries. Too much relativism can produce cynical detachment from the problems of a society—or support pre-existing prejudices. For example, travelers may come to the conclusion that extreme poverty is "just the way it is" and stop short of probing for the deeper reasons behind wide economic disparities. Too little relativism means carrying an excess of certainty about one's own cultural values. Maintaining the right balance between too much and too little relativism can be vital for learning.

Cultural relativism need not imply that all societal values are equally valid. It is possible to be critical of the practices of a society while attempting to understand factors that sustain particular ways of life. Further, cultural traditions are often contradictory in their effects. Polygamy, for example, commonly practiced in some areas of Africa, may both restrict women and grant them particular freedoms. Although this form of marriage, where men take multiple

wives, does express male power over women, it also creates female communities with some degree of autonomy from men.

Whether as students or travelers, people carry with them images of foreign lands shaped by popular culture, e.g., television, movies, and music. In making the film, *Diamonds, Guns, and Rice*: Sierra Leone and the Women's Movement, we sought alternatives to standard media images in the United States. Many news reports covering the Sierra Leonean civil war during the 1990s portrayed the rebels as inexplicably violent and primitive in their methods. The primary rebels in the Sierra Leonean conflict were described as young black men brandishing machetes and carrying out atrocities, often amputating the limbs of civilians. In many media accounts, responsibility for the terrible suffering fell entirely on the rebels—what one Sierra Leonean woman interviewed for the film termed "the bad boys on the ground." These reported atrocities added to preexisting racist images of African "savagery." Wars in the less technologically advanced societies of Africa are more often cast as "dirty" and primitive in their methods. Military actions carried out by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq, in contrast, are portrayed by the U.S. media as "clean," with their surgical strikes and computer-generated targets.

This first section includes five lesson plans, establishing a portal of entry into the Sierra Leonean civil war. In preparing students to screen the documentary video *Diamonds, Guns, and Rice* later in the curriculum, Lesson 1, "Sierra Leone in Context," provides a brief history of Sierra Leone. Lesson 2, "Images of Africa," encourages students to reflect on their own perceptions of Africa and how these are influenced by images in the media and popular culture. Caleb Heymann, co-producer of *Diamonds, Guns, and Rice*, and a high school student at the time the film was made, tells how the videotaping changed his perceptions of gender. This experience also led him onto his current path in the field of filmmaking. Lesson 3, "Gender and War," introduces students to gender dynamics associated with war and the reconciliation process. Lesson 4, "Conceptions of Youth," features an interview with educator Susan Shepler, who discusses issues in cross-cultural research, such as cultural assumptions concerning the responsibility of youth for their participation in the violence of war. Lesson 5, "A Story from Emma Fofanah," introduces Emma Fofanah, one of the Sierra Leonean women featured in *Diamonds, Guns, and Rice*. Fofanah provides yet another entrée into the story of the civil war—one told from the perspective of a Sierra Leonean-American woman struggling to cope with the trauma of armed conflict in her homeland.



LESSON

Sierra Leone in Context

Time: Approximately 30 minutes

Materials: A world map or globe

Handout: "Setting the Stage for Civil War in Sierra Leone"

Procedure: Have students locate Sierra Leone on a world map, using either a globe or map in the classroom.

Distribute "Setting the Stage for Civil War in Sierra Leone." Allow students time to read the handout.

Facilitate a class discussion based on the following questions:

1. What factors does the essay introduce in establishing a context for the civil war in Sierra Leone? What are some of the difficulties in separating external (e.g., colonialism) and internal (e.g., indigenous practices) factors to explain the root causes of the civil war?

2. How might the historical context shape relationships between Sierra Leoneans and "helpers" from Western countries?

3. Sierra Leone has implemented a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Special Court to help the country recover from the civil war. What are some of the differences in these processes? How do you think each contributes to the peace process?

Setting the Stage for Civil War in Sierra Leone

Ariel Ladum

Sierra Leone is a small coastal country in West Africa, bordered by Guinea in the north and east and Liberia in the south. In 1787 over three hundred "Black Poor" and about 100 whites left Britain to establish a British colony of Sierra Leone managed by the British Sierra Leone Company. Sierra Leone also has historical ties to the United States through the brutal legacy of the slave trade. America was a primary market for slave labor, and Sierra Leone was a prized region for slave traders bringing captives to build the plantation economy of the South. In 1792, 1,200 freed slaves seeking refuge from the American War of Independence joined the surviving settlers of the Colony—many of whom had died from harsh living conditions. This second influx established "Freetown" as the first permanent settlement. Sierra Leone did not become a Crown Colony of Britain until the 1808 downfall of the British Sierra Leone Company.

As the first modern political state in sub-Saharan Africa, Sierra Leone benefited from developments in infrastructure, although the indigenous peoples suffered under colonial domination. The British built railways and roads, as well as the first university in the region—Fourah Bay College. Improved intra-state transportation facilitated the exploitation of Sierra Leone's rich natural resources, particularly diamonds. Colonizers started recruiting men to work in migratory labor camps, and many young men left their communities to seek their fortunes in the diamond mines. Soon, however, the fantasy of getting rich through mining for diamonds proved illusory. Whether working for paltry wages in the mines or sifting through the mud for a few crude stones, young men often returned to their villages as poor as when they left.

During the period of African anti-colonial movements after World War II, black Sierra Leoneans resisted British rule, and gained independence in 1961. Immediately following this victory Sierra Leone's future looked bright—new roads were built and many hospitals, schools, and clinics opened. This hopefulness was short-lived, however. Sierra Leoneans struggled to survive under a series of corrupt leaders who continued to exploit the country's abundant diamond reserves for their own enrichment. By the mid 1980s, the country was mired in rapidly expanding foreign debt, rampant inflation, currency devaluation, budget deficits, and declining exports fueled in part by a growing informal economy largely based on an illicit diamond trade. Faced with frequent blackouts, food and fuel shortages, and unemployment, Sierra Leoneans had reached a state of desperate crisis.

Some have offered singular explanations—such as greed over diamonds or unbearable living conditions—for the rise of a rebel movement in March 1991. Factors underlying civil war in Sierra Leone are complex, however, linked to problems throughout West Africa—problems that, in turn, are tied to contemporary Western economic policies and the legacy of colonialism.

As the colonizer, Britain established an institutional framework for later economic exploitation of Sierra Leone. The British model of economic development in Sierra

Leone consisted of exporting raw materials for manufacturing abroad; Sierra Leone itself had virtually no industry. In order to acquire raw materials colonial rulers manipulated the customary chieftaincy system—in which Paramount Chiefs acted as local government in provincial areas— transforming traditional leaders into agents of colonial power. Thus, rather than equipping Sierra Leone with a solid bureaucratic structure to provide strong governance, British colonialism left Sierra Leone with a de-centralized system of patronage in which citizens benefited more from alliances to local chiefs than from allegiance to the government in Freetown.

Post-independence regimes followed the example set by colonial powers. Successive governments continued to exploit traditional systems in order to sustain an export-based economy, granting cooperative Paramount Chiefs greater power, assets and wealth, overlooking particular smuggling operations, and awarding cabinet, civil service, and army appointments to certain ethnic groups. In turn, lower-level leaders granted favors such as land, mining licenses, and protection to their own supporters who provided political backing, manual labor, and social deference. Some supporters were financed entirely by local leaders, and naturally more loyal to them than to the more removed government.

Sierra Leonean state leaders were also involved in their own patronage system involving arms traders in East Europe, the

Photo by stringer_bel

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2009

global diamond industry, and Western economic organizations. Government officials sacrificed the collective good of Sierra Leoneans to personally benefit economically from these international players. Government officials would turn a blind eye to diamond smuggling or establish unequal trading relationships in exchange for arms. They set very low buying prices and export taxes for diamonds and cash crops that benefited global markets, and cut spending on social services to qualify for more loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

All of these factors have been identified as primary in creating conditions conducive to the outbreak of civil war. By subverting traditional systems of governance and mismanaging Sierra Leone's assets to serve private interests, political elites created a state of chronic deprivation and poverty for the general public. Divisions between a minority of rich political elites and very poor masses continued to grow. Few prospects for work, and limited health care, education, and other social services created deplorable living conditions.

The powerful elites used brutal tactics—including the death penalty—to silence any political opposition. The youths, abandoned by leaders who were unable to meet their basic needs, felt powerless to change their inhumane conditions and lost hope for a better future.

In the early 1990s the Liberian civil war spilled over into Sierra Leone and young men took up the fight to depose corrupt governments on both sides of the border. Fighters from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor, joined with disenfranchised, radicalized students and disillusioned elements within the Sierra Leonean Army (SLA), as well as foreign mercenaries from the Ukraine and fighters from Burkina Faso, to form the rebel group, Revolutionary United Front (RUF). After Charles Taylor became President of Liberia in 1997, the Liberian government supplied the RUF with arms and training in exchange for looted goods and diamonds mined illegally by the rebels.

The Lomé Accord of July 1999 between the RUF and Sierra Leonean government eventually brought hostilities to an end, but not before years of fighting took a tremendous toll on the country. The groups involved in the fighting— the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), as well as the rebel organization of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), the Sierra Leonean Army (SLA), and the Civil Defense Forces (CDF)—waged war not only against each other, but also against civilians. During the civil war an estimated 12,000 children were separated from their families and forced into servitude. Although estimates vary, of the 4.2 million citizens of Sierra Leone at least 75,000 were killed, over one million were displaced within the country, more than 500,000 became refugees, and in excess of 400,000 people had at least one limb amputated.[1] Although all fighting factions employed brutal tactics against the civilian population—including murder, mutilation, amputation, slavery, rape, and kidnapping—the RUF was found responsible for the largest number of human rights abuses.[2] In fact many critics insist that the Lomé Peace Accord was a terrible denouement to the bloody conflict because it rewarded

1 Pratt, D. (1999). *Sierra Leone: The Forgotten Crisis*. Retrieved from http://www.sierra-leone.org/pratt042399.html

2 Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (2004, October). *Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Overview, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 retrieved July 2005, from United States Institute of Peace Web site: http://www.usip.org/library/tc/tc_regions/tc_sl.html#rep

the RUF; rather than punishing the military commanders, the negotiators granted immunity from prosecution as well as four ministry positions in exchange for demobilization of the rebel forces.

The Lomé Accord called for the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Purposes of the TRC included rebuilding relationships, preventing future conflict, and creating a balanced historical account of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law. Although formally established by the Sierra Leone Parliament in February 2000 by virtue of the Truth and Reconciliation Act, the TRC did not start hearing testimony until April 2003, issuing a final report in October 2004. In addition to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in January 2002 the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone jointly created the Special Court for Sierra Leone to punish the worst human rights offenders and bring restitution to victims. The vast majority of people indicted by the Special Court are Sierra Leonean. Many Sierra Leoneans, however, lay considerable responsibility for the conflict at the feet of Charles Taylor, the former Liberian President. On March 7, 2003 the prosecutor approved indictments against Charles Taylor and former AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma. Charles Taylor fled his country and sought refuge in Nigeria, where, as of 2005, he remains, fighting extradition. The CDF trial began on June 3, 2004, the RUF trial began on July 5, 2004, and the three AFRC accused were brought to trial in March 2005. As of July 2005, three leaders of the former CDF, three leaders of the former RUF, and three leaders of the former AFRC were indicted for multiple counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.

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Images of Africa

Time: Approximately 50 minutes

Handout: "Have Camera, Will Travel: A Student Perspective on Africa"

Procedure: Ask students to generate a list of words or phrases they associate with Africa and Africans and write them on the board.

Divide the class into small groups (3-4 students). Ask students to discuss potential sources of such images in their groups.

Distribute "Have Camera, Will Travel: A Student Perspective on Africa." Allow students time to read the essay.

Facilitate a class discussion based on the following questions:

1. How were the student filmmaker's perceptions influenced by his experiences traveling in West Africa?

2. What are your perceptions about where we get many of our images of Africa? How do these compare to the perceptions of Caleb Heymann?

Homework: Write a one-page essay illustrating how the student filmmaker's perceptions of a group of people changed after visiting where they lived.

Have Camera, Will Travel: A Student Perspective on Africa

Caleb Heymann

In 2004 Caleb Heymann graduated from Pomona College with a B.A. in History. He is currently studying at AFDA film school in Cape Town, South Africa.

In the summer of 1999, between my junior and senior years of high school, I had the opportunity to travel to West Africa with my mother, Jan Haaken, to visit my cousin, a Peace Corps volunteer in Guinea. Having previously learned the basics of video production through Flying Focus Video Collective, a Portland-based group of activist videographers, I decided to take a camera along. I was not prepared, however, for what lay ahead. What began as a family vacation developed into a life-changing experience.

The first stop was Senegal, the country neighboring Guinea. I landed in Dakar, Senegal's bustling capital, with two suitcases—one stuffed with lightweight clothes, the other containing a Hi-8 video camera, a couple dozen blank tapes, and a barely functional tripod built for still photography. I also arrived with an unrealistic expectation of what it would take to translate raw footage into a film. If someone had told me about the mind-numbing tedium of logging hours of footage, searching for photos and additional video material, or editing in an outdated analog studio, I may very well have turned around and caught the first flight back home. Instead, I came into the trip openminded and curious.

Despite knowing little about video filmmaking, I did know a few things coming into the project. I realized that there was—and is—a tradition of Westerners documenting African cultures in a way that oversimplifies or otherwise misunderstands their reality. For centuries, African cultures have been understood as "primitive" in opposition to "civilized" Western cultures. The concept of primitive cultures often includes racist stereotypes of Africa as a continent of brutal savages. In my African History course, for example, I learned about Western biases in how resistance movements were typically portrayed. When black Africans rebelled against the colonial powers in the 1960s, Western media often focused more on threats to white colonizers than on the suffering of black Africans. More liberal accounts viewed black Africans as helpless victims of bloody conflicts. While the victim model may have been a step up from the savage model, it nonetheless continued to strip Africans of their identities as complex individuals.

It was important for me to understand some of this history before picking up the camera. While it is easy to think of the camera as an objective recorder of physical reality, a cameraperson makes many decisions that influence how the subject is portrayed; one must decide both what to shoot and how to shoot it. Technical aspects—including camera angle, lighting, depth of field, and zoom—all contribute to messages communicated to the viewer.

Photo by David Hond

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2004

For the visual focus I felt it was important to film the subjects in a way that emphasized their individuality while also capturing the horrifying circumstances in which they lived in the aftermath of war. Although I could not become a cultural insider, I wanted to convey the African perspective on the conflict as much as possible and avoid letting my personal values dominate the choices I made with the camera.

Although you never shed your own cultural baggage, there are ways a filmmaker can interact respectfully in a foreign country. For me, this meant listening before speaking. It meant being willing to learn from people of other cultures. For example, I found that saying "hello" takes a long time in Africa, and that you first must ask questions like, "how is your mother, how is your father, your sister," before getting to the point of your visit. These long greetings were reminders that we are always part of a larger group rather than simply standing as an individual. This custom also reminded me that what one culture considers an efficient use of time may be considered rude in another. Historically, Westerners have imposed their values onto African cultures in the process of colonization. By listening and learning first, however, one can begin to counterbalance the injustices of history and respect other cultures. I learned that filmmaking of this type requires respectful collaboration with the community being filmed. We talked to people about the issues we were exploring in the documentary, and tried to get their ideas about what images to include. In refugee camps, we discussed how women wanted to present some of the reasons for the war.

What I learned through the process of gathering footage made me think more about gender. I had grown up in a community of political activists for whom sexual equality was a central issue, and this trip opened my eyes to the range of struggles facing women in Sierra Leone. Sometimes the sexism operated in subtle ways, such as a husband "offering" to sit in the room during the interview when his wife spoke about the concerns of women in her village. Women also seemed to do most of the physical labor as men sat and socialized. Throughout my trip I often saw women out in the fields farming with hand tools, or carrying large buckets of water and heavy loads of produce on their heads on their way home or to market. At the same time, many of the interviews and informal discussions my mother and I had with women revealed how traditions such as polygamy that seemed blatantly unjust to me were in fact more complex than they initially seemed. Some women insisted that having other wives to help take care of their husband actually liberated them from many domestic responsibilities and gave them a sense of independence from their husbands. Older women, in particular, held considerable authority in the villages despite not having the property rights or legal rights of men.

This film would not have been possible without footage from Sierra Leoneans who often risked their lives to document the war. Much of the material we gathered for the film was recorded on second-rate equipment and duplicated several times, with picture quality deteriorating with

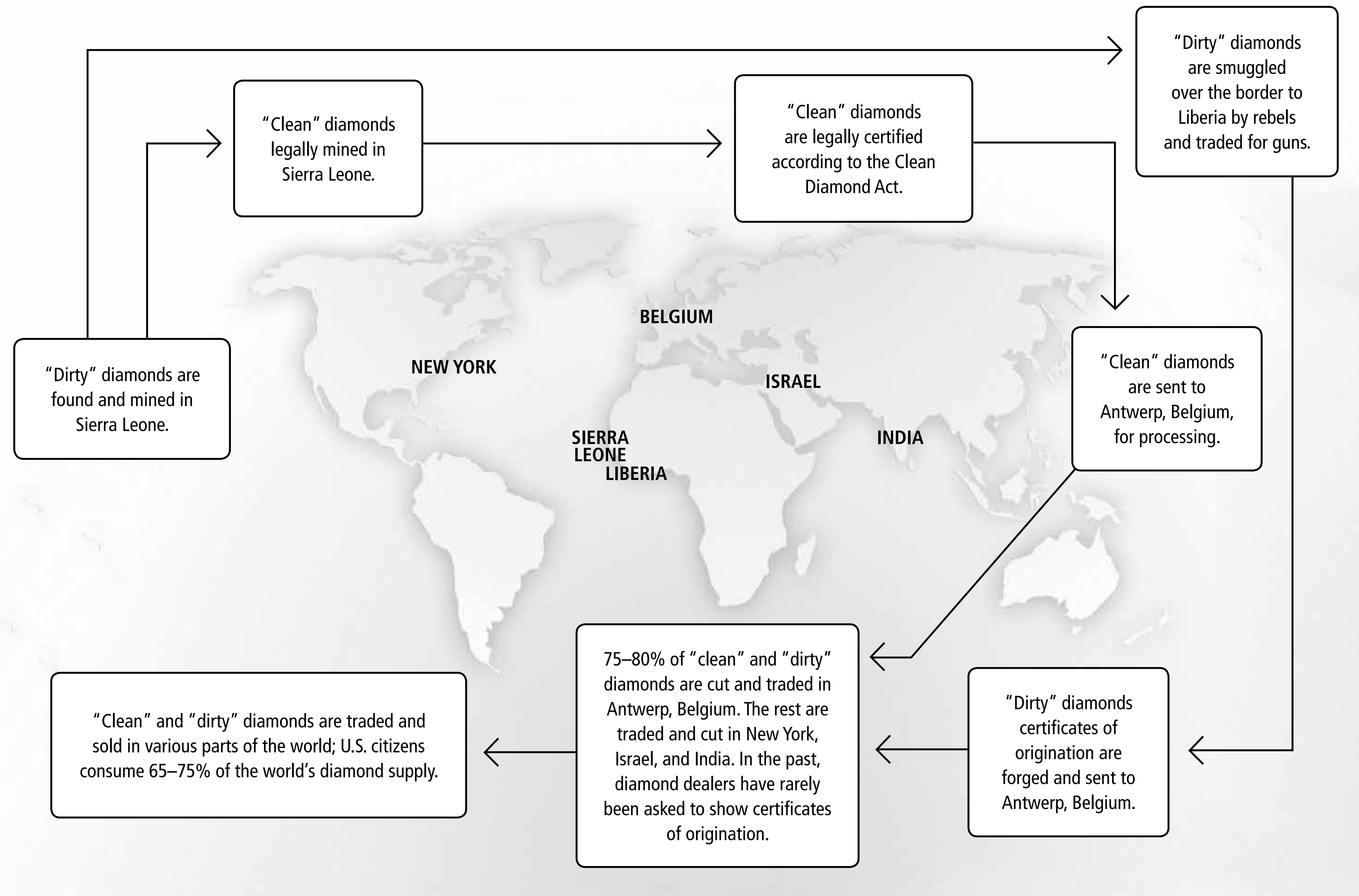
Illustration by Kate Burkett

each copy. Grassroots activists sent copies of a video to a friend in one country and then on to someone in the next. The scene of young soldiers marching through the streets of Freetown, for example, was originally filmed by DDwin Kamara from behind a curtain in a hotel room. Even though the tape was in its third generation by the time we procured a copy, we felt that including this grainy footage was important in offering a first-hand account of the war. Although American students are accustomed to high production values in films and electronic media, particularly work that comes out of Hollywood, the unpolished quality of the images in *Diamonds, Guns, and Rice: Sierra Leone and the Women's Peace Movement* creates its own aesthetic—one more common to international teams working with videographers and activists in third world countries.

When we returned home to the States to produce the film, we realized the importance of communicating a sense of hope rather than despair over this war zone in West Africa. Much of the material we received from Sierra Leoneans and news outlets depicted gruesome acts of violence. It would have been easy to create a film that simply documented the horror of the civil war through accounts of the victims of maiming, rape, and other dreadful crimes. Yet *Diamonds, Guns, and Rice* goes beyond the victimization of Sierra Leoneans by focusing on the progressive struggle of determined women to bring peace and justice to their country. The film deals with individuals who were able to survive and remain hopeful through horrific circumstances. I believe the film is a small step toward recognizing the richness and resilience of African cultures.

As a student, my experience with this project brought into focus my own goals and reminded me why it was important to go beyond the borders of my homeland. Life is extremely difficult in West Africa, yet people also have a great capacity to enjoy life. There is less reliance on the hundreds of products we require to get through the day—from countless cleaning products to an array of electronic gadgets—and much more emphasis on being resourceful and using what you have. In returning to the United States, I felt more part of an international community and developed a passion for progressive uses of media. The pictures of Africa in mainstream media such as television shows, commercials, and movies, do not tell the real story. Alternative media can tell stories that would not be told on the major networks. Media centers, cable access networks, and video collectives offer valuable opportunities for young people to work in film, radio, and television at little or no cost. My hope is that *Diamonds, Guns, and Rice* will inspire other students to experiment with these facilities and venture into the unknown.

Tracing the Trail of Diamonds



Map courtesy of Christopher Schnese

Lessons

1 Retrospective

2 Stories from Yatta Samah and Corinne Dufka

3 Forgiveness Story

4 Role Play: Reintegrating Child Soldiers

5 International Tribunal

SECTION onetwothree**four**

Toward Peace and Reconciliation

4

Yatta Samah: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Yatta Samah is of the Mende tribe. She was born in Kenema town in the district of Kenema, located in the eastern region where the civil war initially broke out. She received a teacher's certificate from Freetown Teachers College, and when the war started in 1991, Samah decided to concentrate her energy on educating and mobilizing women. She taught women about their rights, how they could help maintain peace, and how to leave behind the atrocities of the war and focus on positive means of healing. Samah won the Women's Creativity in Rural Life gold medal laureate award in 2000 from the Women's World Summit Foundation in Geneva, Switzerland for working with rural women. In 2004, her work was recognized by FAO in Rome as the best women's farming organization in Sierra Leone. As a community activist Samah organized a women's farming collective that led to the Moawoma Rural Women's Development Association (MORWODAS). Describing herself as an ecofeminist, Samah works across different regions in Sierra Leone, helping the area recover from the devastation suffered on all levels during the civil war. Under Samah's leadership, the Moawama organization continues to grow as a grassroots nongovernmental organization (NGO) for rural women's empowerment.

In an interview focused on women, economics, and the peace process, Jan Haaken asks Yatta Samah about her own experience in organizing a rural women's farming cooperative.

Haaken: Your approach to the peace process focuses on building new economic opportunities for youth, as well as giving testimony to what people experienced during the war. Could you describe your rural organizing project and how this work is related to the peace process?

Samah: The Moawoma Rural Women's Development Association (MORWODAS) is an indigenous non-governmental organization that first started as a community-based organization in April 1995, during the height of the civil war. While interviewing women in Kenema I found that most of them were the breadwinners in their homes. The men were staying inside because they were afraid of being accused of collaborating with the enemy by the various warring factions. I initiated the idea of cooperating across differing ethnic groups, as women, to stabilize our situations for survival and economic empowerment. This effort has grown to become a large women's cooperative organization that operates not only in Kenema but also in other districts. We have established the Association based on the desire for a program that would draw urgently needed attention to the plight of rural women, who produce about 60-80 percent of foods consumed in Sierra Leone. Its programs include agricultural and other sustainable income-generating activities, skill training, promotion of health and sanitation, and education on the civic rights of women and children. To build a strong foundation MORWODAS has made long-term investments in food production, training staff, and constructing buildings.

MORWODAS is the first and the only Association that has won two Gold Medals: the first in 2000 from the Women's World Summit Foundation and the second from the Food and Agricultural Organization in 2002. The Association is different from other economic development projects in that it is the first owned and managed solely by women. The women come from five adjacent chiefdoms (counties): Dama, Koya, Gaura, Tunkia, and Nomo. Located behind the Moa River in the Kenema District of Eastern Sierra Leone, these five chiefdoms are referred to as the Moawoma Community.

Central to the MORWODAS mission is serving and empowering women, especially those living in the Moawoma Community. Since its conception, membership in the organization has soared to over 10,000. The Association brings women together through their traditional work as farmers, as well as in new ways across ethnic lines, for example, in building on common spiritual principles across Christianity, Islam, and Animism and in finding how respect for women, working for peace, and a healthy environment are all connected. MORWODAS helps rural women rehabilitate themselves, alleviate their poverty, and effectively integrate into society in the spirit of mutual aid and self-development.

Haaken: In many countries, women are either excluded from or reluctant to participate in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs). What was this process like for the women in Sierra Leone?

Samah: In Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation program, there was no discrimination on a gender basis. All participated freely and equally. Women who had been sexually abused gave testimonies on camera. They vented their experiences to release the stress in them. After their testimonies, they were able to overcome their trauma. The TRC also gave recognition to the treatment of women, and how the poor status of women in society made women victims to terrible human rights abuses.

"The TRC opened the wounds of the war by getting testimony, but the TRC also encouraged dialogue and programs for healing. The Special Court opens old wounds and leaves them open."

Haaken: Some feel that the TRC is a better procedure and some feel the Special Court is better in addressing the injustices of the war. What is your view of these two procedures?

Samah: If we are able to forget the past, we will be in a position to start rebuilding our battered lives. The TRC told us that we have to move forward and to "forgive and forget," but the Special Court just incarcerates people. Although it is important to prosecute the leaders involved in human rights violations, we have not seen benefit yet from the Special Court. The TRC opened the wounds of the war by getting testimony, but the TRC also encouraged dialogue and programs for healing. The Special Court opens old wounds and leaves them open. For example, if I was

raped and tell my story or if I say what happened to my sister and they do nothing about it, I am just re-traumatized. That is what has happened with the Special Court. So it has not so far been a good thing for us.

Haaken: Whether people are able to forgive depends on how they understand why the rebels committed the atrocities. It has been difficult for many people outside the country to understand why these young people often came back to their own villages to attack their own communities, and sometimes their own families. How do you understand that?

Samah: The war was basically a youth war. More youths participated than any other age group. Most fighters were below the age of twenty. The youths often came back to burn down houses in their own villages, sometimes attacking their families, because they had been treated very badly and abused by their elders. Sometimes the young men fall in love with the wives of the elders and have no resources to marry, so they resent the older men. These boys would face fines imposed by the elder men in their villages, maybe for having relationships with women who were in forced marriages. So the girls, too, went to the bush and took up arms because they were angry over their bad treatment. Many of these girls do not want to go back now to their villages because they were forced into marriages, denied an education, and treated very badly.

Photo by Steve Evans, 2012

Colophon

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