



**COPING AS AN EX-COMBATANT: STRATEGIES OF INTERACTION
AND RE-INTEGRATION**



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Spring 2011

Acknowledgement

I would first of all like to thank my supervisor Lisbet Holtedahl, for her supervision, guidance and encouragement throughout the process of writing this thesis. I wish to also thank my family, both in Sierra Leone and Norway, for their love and support that encouraged me throughout the length of this course and especially during fieldwork in Sierra Leone. This thesis would also not have been written without the help and contribution of my respondents in Sierra Leone. Special thanks also to lecturers, classmates and friends at the Visual Cultural Studies Department for their support during our class seminars and throughout the past two years.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFRC – Armed Forces Revolutionary Council

APC – All Peoples Congress

CDF – Civil Defence Force

ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States

ECOMOG – Economic Community of West African States

FTI – Fambul Tok International

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NPFL – National Patriotic Front of Liberia

NPRC – National Provisional Ruling Council

RUF – Revolutionary United Front

SLA – Sierra Leone Army

TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission

UN – United Nations



Introduction

This thesis is based on the result of both literature and field research carried out in Sierra Leone. Empirical data was gathered over a period of six weeks, four of which I spent in my main fieldwork location Dodo, a small village in Kailahun, east of Sierra Leone. This thesis deals with observing how returnee ex-combatants re-integrate and live again in their societies and communities after being accepted by their community members. The reintegration of ex-combatants has been a major subject in the current development of post war Sierra Leone. It is in fact, one of the major challenges confronting the country. Sierra Leone's eleven year conflict was marked by extreme violence and brutality. During the war, combatants committed widespread atrocities against civilians, including those in their own communities. These acts of violence created suspicion and fear about the prospect of ex-combatants returning to their communities in Sierra Leone.

The relationship between communities and ex-combatants is critical to the long-term recovery of Sierra Leoneans in general. Traditional reconciliation techniques and ceremonies, such as cleansing rituals, have made a considerable impact in terms of community relations. The result of these rituals shows that it is possible to develop practices that 'work' (to some extent), both in the sense of reducing the risk of repeating the said act and re-integrating offenders into a wider web of their community. This, at the same time gives victims a voice to express their feelings in a way that is both satisfying and socially productive. As a journalist and researcher, I have witnessed a lot of cases of ex-combatants confessing to wrongdoings and receiving 'forgiveness' from communities in some parts of the country. In my previous research, I tried to find out how traditional reconciliation methods like these can complement modern reconciliation methods such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that was held in Sierra Leone after the war.

In this current project however, I will, for the most part, be focussing on what happens to an ex-combatant after undergoing a traditional reconciliation ceremony and has returned to live with his family and community members. Using one ex-combatant as my main informant, I sought to find out what happens after he has been allowed to go back and start living in his community. Through ethnographic research, I studied and observed his interaction with other members of his community in Dodo town, how he has re-integrated and/or is still re-integrating into his community and to what extent his life and way of living has changed after

he underwent a traditional cleansing ceremony in 2008. To create a balance, it is also important for me in this thesis, to scrutinise how my main informant was excluded in his community following his return after the war. I will also be focussing on how this ex-combatant interacts with other ex-combatants that are living in the same town, and what meaning do life has now for an ex-combatant in general; thus, uncovering the dynamics of the social field of ex-combatants.

One main reason for doing this research is for me to continue the research I started in June 2008 in Kailahun, which dealt with the relationship between traditional methods of reconciliation and modern methods of reconciliation like Truth Commissions. My findings during my previous research were that indeed, both methods can complement each other and can be used as tools of mediation in conflict resolution. However, in terms of their effectiveness, one is not more effective¹ than the other because the two cannot live in isolation. If traditional methods were only used it would not have been successful because some people still view these mechanisms as primitive. My findings also showed that the TRC alone did not achieve its objective of reconciliation that it initially set out to achieve. It needed the help of home grown methods. Therefore, what Sierra Leone needed was a TRC that incorporated the knowledge and expertise of traditional leaders and rulers to use their beliefs and rituals to complement the narrative and catharsis methods of the TRC. Two years after my first research, what has changed? I returned to the same district, Kailahun. Kailahun was the first district to be attacked in 1991 when the war started. It is located in the east of Sierra Leone. The rebels maintained a strong base there throughout the period of the conflict. This district was the last to ‘achieve peace’² and so the last to receive any kind of government assistance after the war. Up till now, the signs of war and violence are clearly visible in some parts of the district, especially in dilapidated and bombed-out infrastructure. Therefore it became an ideal area for my field research.

Personally, I also think that it is important to continue research in areas where several kinds of peace initiatives have been implemented (for example in Sierra Leone) and find out if these initiatives really made a difference in the areas they were implemented. I am motivated to continue this research because as a Sierra Leonean, it is important for me to find out if my

¹ By effective here I mean that after ex-combatants have gone through the TRC hearings or the traditional methods of reconciliation, they are allowed to go back to their former villages and communities. It does not however mean that they are, or will be fully accepted in the community although they can live there.

² This means that Kailahun was the last place to be declared safe and arms free during the peace process.

country's fragile peace is holding on and if ex-combatants especially, have successfully re-integrated and are engaging in building up their different communities to avoid them going back to the gun.

When I started analysing my field data after fieldwork, my conclusions showed to be a little different from my initial thoughts (or mindset) that I had when I entered the field. Is Sierra Leone's fragile peace holding? Well, yes. No political conflicts or rebel attacks since the war ended in 2002. A lot of ex-combatants (though not all), have returned to their communities and families. Among other findings that I am going to present in this thesis, I found out that time is a key factor for the acceptance and eventual re-integration of an ex-combatant. The frequency of an ex-combatant's interaction with his community, the more easily it is for him to be accepted and re-integrated. I also found out that even though traditional reconciliation ceremonies are important for the reconciliation and re-integration of an ex-combatant, yet, it is not enough and is only regarded as a symbolical act. This will be explained in my analysis chapter.

In discussing the re-integration of ex-combatants, I will be viewing it from the perspective of Social re-integration. It is important to find out what determines the ability of ex-combatants to re-integrate into society. The process of re-integration is complex and not as easy as it may sound; but the ability of ex-combatants to re-integrate depends on their personal characteristics and on their experience of a conflict. Based on data collected during fieldwork, the process of re-integration in the context of this thesis, is discussed by illustrating how my main informant's identity as an ex-combatant (one of his multiple identities), did not become the main trait that overwhelms his other identities.

The structure of this thesis will be as follows: It continues with Chapter 2, which focuses on the background on issues that will be discussed in the body of the thesis. It will contain a brief background on the Sierra Leone conflict, perspectives on reconciliation and re-integration which are major themes in this thesis, and an explanation of what traditional reconciliation ceremonies and traditional methods of reconciliation is all about with regards to the Sierra Leone context. I decided to include this detail, to give the reader an understanding of the starting point of my research project in the first place. Chapter three will include a theoretical framework that supports the analysis of interaction and re-integration as a social process that deals with the process of the construction of identity and re-establishing relations. In chapter

four I elaborated on issues regarding my fieldwork: the methods I used and the choices I made. Chapters five and six contains my ethnographic material and empirical findings during field work, with examples of important empirical situations that took place during fieldwork. With the help of my theoretical perspectives, these two chapters will contain an analysis of my fieldwork data and answers to my research questions and hypotheses.

1. Background

This chapter will deal with a brief background on the conflict in Sierra Leone. To help the reader have a better understanding of this project, it is also necessary to include in this section a description of what type of traditional reconciliation ceremonies a lot of the ex-combatants have gone through, to prepare them for their return and re-integration into their various communities. Here I will include data from both my previous and current fieldwork. I will also in this chapter include a brief description of re-integration perspectives and what re-integration in Sierra Leone had been since the end of the war. A more detailed discussion on reintegration will be included in the theory chapter.

The Sierra Leone conflict

Sierra Leone, a small West African country with a size of 27,000 square miles and a population of about 6 million people has had a rather chequered history since it got independence from Britain in 1961. Its complex contemporary situation, history, political system and conflicts can best be understood by grasping its experiences and circumstances in history. At independence the country seemed to have great promise with relatively well functioning educational, administrative, judicial and political institutions. It inherited a Westminster-style of government with modifications to accommodate the peculiarities of local conditions. However after independence in 1961, the great euphoria that welcomed the birth of a new nation turned to despair and disappointment because of the actions or inactions of the political leadership.

Before the outbreak of the war, corruption and mismanagement were among the main reasons why Sierra Leone became, according to the UN Human Development Index, the poorest country in the world. After fifty years of independence, it is still the poorest country in the world. With the breakdown of state structures and the effective suppression of civilian opposition, wide corridors were opened for trafficking of arms, ammunition and drugs, all of which eroded national/regional security and facilitated crime within the country and between Sierra Leone and Liberia. Besides the internal ripeness, the brutal civil war that was going on in neighbouring Liberia played an significant role for the actual outbreak of fighting.

More than eight years have passed since the rebel war ended in Sierra Leone. The conflict lasted for eleven years and was marked by extreme violence and brutality. The war started in

March 1991. An insurgency force self-styled the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded the country from Liberia, which triggered the war. Charles Taylor (then a scrupulous faction leader in Liberia's civil war who later became president of Liberia and is now facing trials for war crimes) reportedly sponsored the RUF as a means to destabilise Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone then was a rear base for the West African peacekeeping force ECOMOG³ that was preventing Taylor from seizing the Liberian capital, Monrovia. The first attack was in Bomaru in the Kailahun district on the 23rd March 1991. The RUF quickly overran the Kailahun district and they made that a strong base throughout the period of the conflict.

Sierra Leone's eleven-year conflict was marked by extreme violence and brutality on two sides. On one side was the Sierra Leone Army, the government-aligned local militia Civil Defence Force (CDF) also locally known as the '*Kamajors*' and ECOMOG. On the other side was the RUF which was best known for its indiscriminate abuse of human rights, amputation of limbs of innocent civilians, widespread sexual violence and forceful conscription of children to join its fighting force. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, there was "...widespread and systematic sexual violence including individual and gang rape, and rape with objects such as weapons, firewood, umbrellas and pestles. Rape was perpetrated by both sides, but mostly by the rebel forces" (Human Rights Watch, 2003:3).

Although the RUF sometimes made ideological statements and there were sketchy reports of 'revolutionary' and 'egalitarian' practices, the words of the rebels were repeatedly and dramatically contradicted by their actions (Keen, 2005:39). Initially, at its inception, the RUF consisted of a mixture of middle class students with a populist platform, unemployed and alienated youths and even teachers. They were attracted by the RUF rhetoric⁴ and they joined the movement. Liberian fighters from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), who had helped Charles Taylor in his quest to become president of Liberia, were also members (mercenaries) of the RUF. However, the RUF's ideology of salvaging Sierra Leone from the corrupt APC regime quickly degenerated into a campaign of violence and became particularly known for its crude and indiscriminate human rights abuses.

³ ECOMOG is the military force for the West African Organisation: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

⁴ The main aim of the RUF was to 'liberate' the people of Sierra Leone and overthrow the one-party All People's Congress (APC) government of President Joseph Saidu Momoh, which the rebel leadership described as corrupt, tribalistic and lacking a popular mandate.

The war came to its climax with the destruction of most parts of the capital Freetown, on January 6, 1999. During this attack on Freetown, an estimated 5,000 people were killed. Before ECOMOG successfully fought the rebels out of Freetown, large parts of the city were burned down and about 3,000 children were abducted as the rebels retreated. After this final attack on Freetown, the government, the international community and civil society groups held peace talks with the rebels.

After several unsuccessful peace negotiations, the war finally came to an end with the signing of a peace accord in Lomé Togo in July, 1999 that led to the setting up of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2002. The TRC was set up because of the consequences of the war. The nation needed healing after years of brutal killings, atrocities and physical and psychological trauma.

Perspectives on Reconciliation and Reintegration

Various methods of transitional justice were used in Sierra Leone. In addition to the Sierra Leone TRC, the Special Court for Sierra Leone was also set up. While the TRC was set up to address impunity by responding to the needs of the victims of the war, promote healing and reconciliation and prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered during the war, the Special Court on the other hand was set up to prosecute those who bore the greatest responsibility of the war in Sierra Leone; for example the rebel and faction leaders. However, the TRC and the Special Court were considered western. Even though the TRC commissioners employed traditional methods during its reconciliation processes, they were very limited and TRC hearings were not done in the inner rural villages of Sierra Leone. Therefore, ex-combatants living in the inner-most rural villages in Sierra Leone did not get the opportunity to take part in the TRC hearings.

One cannot start discussing interaction and re-integration of ex-combatants without mentioning reconciliation. Reconciliation is a complex term and there is little agreement on its definition. This is mainly because reconciliation is both a goal – something to achieve – and a process – a means to achieve that goal (Bloomfield, Barnes & Huyse 2003). While it is important to hold offenders accountable for gross human rights violations, the far more pressing task in a violent conflict situation is to restore a humane public order and thereby prevent the recurrence of atrocities. This is exactly what political scientist Andrew Rigby

(2001) refers to as movement from the confines of past injuries and injustices, where individuals try to forsake the search for vengeance. Transforming the relationship with former enemies is the main focus here. In the same way, at the core of any reconciliation or re-integration process lays the preparedness of people to anticipate a shared future. Thus, according to Bloomfield, the basic tenets of reconciliation is that it is a process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future (Bloomfield et al., 2003). However for this to occur, people are required to forgive, not forget the past, and thus be in a position to move forward together.

Reconciliation therefore involves the mutual acknowledgement of past suffering; it involves the changing of destructive patterns of interaction between former enemies into constructive relationships, attitudes and behaviour; and reconciliation is also a process that involves a process towards sustainable peace. Thus, reconciliation mainly focuses on remembering, changing, restoring and continuing life in peace. It could eliminate the danger that the wrongdoings of the past will create renewed conflicts; but in practice, it is a long, difficult and unpredictable process that demands a change in attitudes, in conduct and in the international environment (Bloomfield et al., 2003).

After reconciliation comes reintegration. It must be noted however that reconciliation still continues even though the process of re-integration have started. Reintegration can be explained as the reinsertion of a part into a whole, or the process of recovery in a well-functioning unity. It is seen as a long term process during which ex-combatants gradually become 'normal' community members both in social and economic terms. The reintegration of ex-combatants means their transfer from the field of military or fighting forces to any other social domain or category. For the individual, it refers to the transformation from combatant to civilian and moving from fighting forces back into a community of civilians. Efforts to reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life have emerged as a critical component of peacekeeping in recent times.

Reintegration in itself is broad in context. However for the relevance of this thesis, I will focus on the social reintegration of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone. That is, their lives among other members in their community. It refers to the situation in which members of a community share common norms, beliefs and goals that are structured and enforced through social institutions and a common dialogue. Social reintegration involves the re-establishment

of family and community ties that play a significant role in the success of re-integration programmes. Social reintegration has posed problems for both ex-combatants and civilians in Sierra Leone. Ex-combatants fear they will be targeted and ostracised if they return to their families and communities, while civilians fear a return of violence, or resent the crimes the ex-combatants are frequently alleged to have committed.

One of the problems facing reintegration has been the latent hostility to ex-combatants among civilians in Sierra Leone. Reconciliation has at times been a grudging process. Typical comments heard from some members in communities that I have worked in the past are: “we are forgiving the ex-combatants for the sake of God”, or “we are forgiving them because the government says so”. For their part, ex-combatants have found the process of re-integration extremely difficult when they are constantly reminded about atrocities and violence they committed. This has led to tensions in some communities. I must hasten to note here that I however did not notice tensions of this sort in the community I conducted fieldwork in. Hypothetically, maybe it could be because time has helped healed the wounds of the inhabitants in this community. I will go into more details about this in my analysis chapter.

Traditional Reconciliation Ceremonies

As mentioned earlier, traditional reconciliation techniques and ceremonies, have made a considerable impact in terms of community relations between ordinary citizens and ex-combatants. During my last research, I worked with a local NGO, Forum of Conscience that was implementing a community healing and reconciliation programme called ‘*Fambul Tok*’⁵. This time around during fieldwork in Sierra Leone, *Fambul Tok* is now an independent NGO on its own and no longer under the Forum of Conscience NGO. It is now called *Fambul Tok International* with parts of its funding coming from the American NGO Catalyst for Peace, a foundation based in the United States that supports locally rooted reconciliation processes in post conflict African societies. The direct translation of *Fambul Tok* is: “relatives talking” - meaning people coming together and discussing. It was built on the Sierra Leonean tradition of “family talk”, a tradition of discussing and resolving issues within the security of a family circle. The *Fambul Tok* community reconciliation programme uses traditional methods and is designed to provide Sierra Leoneans with an opportunity to come to terms with what

⁵ Local Lingua franca ‘Krio’.

happened during the war; to dialogue, to experience healing and to map out a new path forward together.

As with my previous research project, I travelled around for the first two weeks of my research for this thesis, with organisers of this project and observed more traditional ceremonies, witnessing how both victims and perpetrators of war are brought together at community level. The traditional reconciliation ceremonies I witnessed involved rituals such as cleansing ceremonies, songs and dance. These ceremonies are similar to the one my main informant in this thesis went through in 2008. The ceremonies vary from community to community and from ethnic group to ethnic group, but the objectives are the same, to foster reconciliation between victims and perpetrators.

What all the ceremonies have in common is that the inhabitants of the village or town where the ceremony takes place gather around a big bonfire usually in the centre of the village or town. Then victims come forward and narrate what happened to them during the war. Because of the re-integration programmes implemented by the Sierra Leone Government a lot of ex-combatants are living in their communities. If not in the same village they used to live in before the war, it could be in villages nearby their home villages. So it turned out that in most of the ceremonies I witnessed, the victim know his or her perpetrator and in other cases, both victim and perpetrator live in the same village. This was the case in one of the ceremonies I witnessed in a small village, in the Kailahun district. This victim narrated:

*“...He was among a group of rebels that attacked us...He took all the food I had been saving. At first I refused to give him the food; then he took hot water and threw it on me, burning the left side of my back. So I gave him the food...My daughter was heavily pregnant then. He beat her...They were arguing among themselves what the sex of the baby was. In the end, they cut open her stomach and took out the baby. He said I should not cry, if I cry he will kill me...He is here tonight, I know him. He lives in ***** village, not far from here...”*

When she called his name and pointed to the corner in the crowd where her perpetrator was sitting, he did not hesitate to come forward. He laid flat; face down on the ground in front of his victim, begging her to forgive him. He explained that he was carrying out orders and if he had not done as he was told he would have been killed.

She continued:

“Even though I have been seeing him around the chieftom, I was still scared and I had not forgiven him. I did not think he would be here tonight. And when he came forward and admitted what he did, that did something to me. It softened something inside me. There is nothing else I can do unless to forgive him. Nothing will bring my daughter back. So...”

All the other ceremonies I witnessed are almost like this. The offenders (ex-rebels/combatants) who were present came forward and one at a time narrated their stories and confessed their wrong doings. Then the affected families or victims who were present were called forward to face their offenders and narrate what happened to them and would eventually hug or touch the head of their offenders as a symbol of forgiveness. The perpetrator will then be prayed for by either the Imam or the pastor of the town or village and in some cases by both (Figure 1). The following morning, a cleansing ceremony will take place sometimes, in a sacred area of the village or chieftom. In one village it was at a sacred stream in the chieftom wherein all the perpetrators that confessed and asked to be forgiven the previous night were ritually cleansed. During this ceremony, the chief and other elders poured libations to their ancestors and called on them to purify and cleanse the offenders and prayers said for their forgiveness. The elders used several items including kola nuts, rice, (both cooked and raw), beans, corn, and other grains, and threw them into the stream, symbolising the washing away of the evil deeds of the perpetrator. In another village, it was a sacred shrine and there I was not allowed to go. However, before they went to the shrine, a cow was killed in the middle of the village as a sacrifice to the ancestors.

These rituals are intended to bring both perpetrators and victims together and the traditional cleansing ceremonies are done to cleanse the perpetrators of their wrongs and then re-accept them into society. After which, the ex-combatant or perpetrator starts his process of re-integration into his community or village and starts living a new life among his victims who have accepted him back.

It is what happens to an ex-combatant after these traditional ceremonies that will be discussed in this thesis and not the rituals or ceremonies themselves. How do these traditional reconciliation ceremonies help re-integrate ex-combatants and former perpetrators of the war, back into their societies and communities? To what extent is acceptance possible when dealing with the relationship between victims and ex-combatants? What are the coping

strategies employed by the inhabitants of a community in order to co-exist with ex-combatants? These are the questions I took to the field with me and will attempt to answer in my process of analysis.



Figure 1. An ex-combatant being prayed for as he kneels before his offender

2. Identity, Social Change and Re-integration: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter offers a theoretical exploration of the central elements involved in interaction and re-integration. The aim is to attempt to give meaning to the concepts of social change and identity in a post-conflict context and to use these notions in the analysis of social and cultural reintegration processes and how they relate to my empirical material. In this thesis interaction and re-integration is looked at from the individual's position in relation to my informants' surrounding community and society. This means, the individual interacting with and re-integrating into a larger entity.

Before entering the field, I searched for and read literature on the theory of interaction thinking that it would be the one suitable theory necessary to help me in my project analysis. I guess I concentrated on interaction because I am studying the interaction process of ex-combatants and how they are re-integrating into their community. During fieldwork however, several perspectives presented themselves in my data. This did not at all happen by accident. These perspectives were present in my project but I was blinded by concentrating only on interaction. I needed to be in the field in order for me to be aware that there were more theoretical perspectives present in my project than meets my eye. That was when I finally understood what one of my professors, Peter Crawford, meant by "the supermarket syndrome" whereby students search for theories like they are searching for grocery in a supermarket and then 'cook' these theories to suit their projects. By this he means that we should avoid being eclectic and allow our field research to shape out theories and not the other way round.

During fieldwork, I found out that interaction theory was actually in place for my project, but I also came across other perspectives that seem to be part and parcel of my informants' daily lives: their religious lives, their unawareness of the effects of globalisation in their town and my main character's longing to belong and be a deeper part of his community. All these different perspectives are, in my opinion, a part of a wider anthropological theoretical framework: that of social identity. Thus interaction, religion, belonging and globalisation all becomes markers of identity. Therefore in my thesis, I will use these different markers or sub

theories (if I am allowed to call them that) as tools of identity to help me in my analysis of how ex-combatants re-integrate themselves into their society after being a part of a violent conflict. It is however prudent to start by first of all taking a look at social change and how it can contribute to a person's identity or construction of one. This concept is directly linked to the markers of identity stated above because these markers also bring about change in any society.

Social Change

A society emerging from conflict situations without doubt goes through several negative and positive changes socially. Social change, therefore, is conceived as the change occurring within, or embracing the social system (Sztompka, 1993). During a civil war much of a society's social fabric is damaged and/destroyed. This damaged fabric later, needs to be restored. The restoration of a society's social fabric after conflict reflects that a crisis has come to an end thus welcoming the several processes that involves in getting things back to normal. I therefore decided to use the word 'coping' in my title to emphasise the fact that social change has occurred in the social system of relationships between ex-combatants and ordinary citizens. This decision is an attempt to acknowledge the social reality that, after a protracted civil conflict, society can never go back to the way it was before. At the same time, the word 'coping' indicates movement which emphasises the fact that interaction and re-integration are never static; they are continuous, ongoing processes.

Depending on what one understands as change, various kinds of change can be distinguished. In this context, I am looking at the ultimate elements; that is individuals and their actions. Social change occurs in the interrelations among these elements; these include social bonds, loyalties, linkages between individuals and the interactions and exchanges between the actions of these individuals. It is only through the complex interplay and interactions of individuals that their overall characteristics and that of their community emerge (Sztompka, 1993). The implications of their interactions can result to agreements or disagreements, peace or war, co-operation or conflict and so on. These results thus however bring about social change in the system of the individuals' community. In all changes occurring in the human world, an important consideration is the awareness of change by the people involved and particularly the awareness of the results that process bring about.

Identity

In the social-science debate, two perspectives on identity act as the red thread between the individual and their social environment. The first perspective defines identity as the social roles that we fulfil in interaction with others. Who we are is the sum of these roles. Who we are is always defined by our relations with others and is therefore, naturally, socially constructed. The essential meaning of a social role only exists in interaction with the 'counter role' (Hogg *et al.* 1995: 257). One can only be a son or daughter through their interaction with parents; a sister or brother in relation to siblings. It also makes a difference whether I am a researcher in relation to other faculty members or students or whether I am in interaction with my informants. These social roles place the individual in a network made up of personal relations with others.

The second perspective on identity has its roots in social psychology and attempts to give insights into group processes and relations between groups. It argues that the social categories to which we belong define who we are socially. Our social identity is, according to this perspective, the sum of all the characteristics of all the social categories to which we belong. Social identity related to social category can be an ascribed status but can also come from self-identification. The social structure to which the individual is linked in this line of interpretation is composed of all the different social groups and categories in a society (Ibid. 259-260).

Both of these perspectives deal with who we are socially and, at the same time define social structure on a different level. The first underlines the individual and their social identity based on direct relations with others. The second is more focused on larger networks of which the individual is a part and stresses the social identity related to social categorization and group membership (Hogg *et al.* 1995: 259-260). For this thesis, both forms of social identity are seen to be relevant in examining how ex-combatants interact and re-integrate after violent conflict situations. Identity is thus produced and reproduced both in discourse – narrative, rhetoric and representation – and in the practical. Whatever angle we discuss it from, identity matters. It matters to people in their everyday lives and to sociology and the other social sciences.

Identity is increasingly being recognised as a concept that is never singular but one that is multiply constructed in different contexts. According to Hall, the construction of identity or (rather) identities is a never ending process. It is always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended (Hull, 1996). According to him, rather than being characterized by a singular and stable identity, in the contemporary global world the subject is constantly associating him or herself to different articulations between discourse and practice, which process, in turn, leads to multiple identifications. Therefore, using Hull's definition of identity as a tool, I will use my markers of identity stated above to help explain why, for example, Samba, my main informant, is now an ex-combatant turned pastor, leading a small Christian congregation in his town. In his pursuit of trying to be a part of his community as he was before the war, he is also negotiating his way to become a member of an agricultural club that has ex-combatants as part of its members. In his hope of being forgiven by his victims, he goes in person and asks for forgiveness from the relative of somebody he killed. These multiple identifications are the outcomes of the process of his new constructed social identity in his town; and this, according to Hull, is the start of a long, unending process. Thus, People do not only perceive themselves as a total of individual characteristics because part of their identity – their concept of who they are – derives from belonging to a social category.

In the paragraphs above, I mentioned interaction as a marker of identity in Dodo town. Today's modern sociological or ethnographical arena conceives human societies and interactions in different ways. One thing that characterises a human being's identity is his or her capacity to interact with, and through that interaction, adapts to his or her environment. Therefore, interaction, when seen at its most basic and layman's point of view, is fundamental to life because we meet and do things with other people in our everyday lives. To an anthropologist however, interaction is a concept which is used to help deconstruct events and understand peoples' actions as they go about their daily lives in their various societies. According to Goffman, "every person lives in a world of social encounters, involving him/her either in face-to-face or mediated contact with other participants. In each of these contacts, he tends to act out...a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he expresses his views..."(Goffman, 1967:5). Therefore, if I could relate with Goffman, social interaction deals with the face-to-face process consisting of actions, reactions, and mutual adaptation between two or more individuals. The interaction includes all language forms, including body language and mannerisms. The goal of social interaction is to communicate with others.

Micro sociology, and in particular, interaction theory, may provide an alternative explanation of how different kinds of rituals work to help integrate an offender in his community. According to Goffman's (1967) face-to face interaction theory, a person is likely to feel ashamed, judged or threatened when he is in the 'wrong face' or in other words, in an embarrassing situation. Samba, my main informant/character is seen here to be in the 'wrong face' with his community members because he was a rebel during the war. He has undergone a traditional reconciliation ceremony in 2008 that symbolised the beginning of his forgiveness and acceptance. At this ceremony, the whole chiefdom gathered together and he had to face families of those he had killed during the war and do a public apology as part of the traditional ritual. His feeling of shame, embarrassment and remorse now that he is facing his victims, could be literally interpreted as because of the fact that he is in the 'wrong face' with members of his community. This feeling is however needed for the community to accept him once more. The traditional ceremony he went through can be interpreted, according to Goffman's interaction theory, as an interaction ritual whereby at the end, it could bring about a feeling of forgiveness and solidarity. Goffman extends this theory to show that solidarity creating rituals do not only occur in formal rituals (such as the traditional reconciliation ceremony my main character went through), but appear in all facets of everyday life. He defines an interaction ritual as an instance of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of community membership. This brings me to my research questions:

- How important then are these traditional reconciliation ceremonies in the process of the re-integration of Ex-combatants?
- Did they help in the acceptance of Samba in Dodo town and to what extent is acceptance possible?
- What are the coping strategies employed by the inhabitants of Dodo in order to co-exist with ex-combatants?

My analysis in the coming chapters will help me in finding answers to these research questions stated above.

According to Geertz, "religion has made no theoretical advances of major importance...and it lives off the conceptual capital of its ancestors" (Geertz 1973:87). Even though this seems to be a theoretical perspective of 'little importance' (if I go with Geertz's description), it is of importance to my ethnography because religion is a marker of identity in Dodo town, my fieldwork location. I would however disagree with Geertz in this because from my point of

view, religion is seen as a major concept in the world of 21st Century anthropology, sociology or political science and its contribution to our changing world is enormous. Religion plays a unique role in the reconciliation and re-integration process of bringing ex-combatants and the inhabitants of Dodo town together and for particularly Samba, my main informant.

As in so many areas of anthropological concern, functionalism has tended to dominate recent theoretical discussions of the role of religion in society. According to Durkheim, the sociological approach to religion emphasises the manner in which belief and particularly ritual reinforce the traditional social ties between individuals. It stresses the way in which the social structure of a group is strengthened and perpetuated through ritualistic or mythic symbolisation of the underlying social values upon which it rests (Durkheim, 1912). Malinowski however sees religion from a psychological perspective. Religion, according to Malinowski, satisfies both the individual's cognitive and affective demands for a stable, comprehensible and coercible world and how it enables him to maintain an inner security in the face of natural contingency (Malinowski, 1948).

These two approaches together, have given us an interestingly detailed understanding of both the social and psychological functions of religion and how they contribute in shaping an individual's identity in a wide range of societies. For Samba, religion is an important part of his daily life. Samba's whole family is Muslim. It is interesting however to note that he is a Christian and is leading a small congregation in the town. This is how he chooses to identify himself in his society: as a Christian living with/in a family of Muslims and leading his own Christians congregation. This emphasises the point where I earlier argued that individuals do not coincide with a social identity but that they carry multiple identities that become more or less relevant depending on the social and cultural context. The exact meaning of the concrete empirical content of a social identity can vary within certain limits of context and history.

The play of re-integration

Once an armed conflict has formally ended, reconstruction and reintegration can start. In contemporary civil wars, the distinction between civilians and combatants is not always clear, nor is the distinction between perpetrator and victim which, I believe complicates the process and meaning of reintegration. Ball (1997:86-91) uses reintegration in a very strict sense. She employs the term to refer to the reinsertion of former combatants into society and their

regaining of financial independence by productive labour. In practice, this means demobilization and providing ex-combatants with food, clothing, shelter, possibly land, tools and starting capital. In the long term, one could also include education and training, credit facilities and employment projects. Everything is put in motion to take combatants out of the military or fighting factions and place them back in civilian structures. As you will see in the following chapters, the ex-combatants in Dodo are half way through Ball's meaning of re-integration. Data I collected shows that there are at least two organisations that already have ex-combatants as part of their membership and engage in activities that encourages them to start their own capital. These programs are part of the community's coping strategies and benefit both the individual and the community.

Re-integration thus, in my view is the result of co-existing levels of linkage and integration. High levels of integration and linkage offer social opportunity. But strong bonding organization (integration) together with low linkage levels (bridging relations) means that social cohesion does not reach beyond the social network itself. This might cause group members to be indifferent or even openly hostile towards other networks within the community. According to Colletta & Cullen (2000: 15-16), "the absence of horizontal relations – of cross cutting ties between unlike groups... can erupt into hostilities if one group is seen as monopolizing resources and power to the disadvantage of the others." Therefore, Rebel groups, like the RUF in Sierra Leone often reflect such an excluded position in society and can be seen as reacting to unequal power relations embedded in social organization. In their own way of organizing, they represent strong bonding based on loyalty or force, and reject or jeopardize linking relations or actively demonstrate a destructive or negative attitude to extra-community interaction. With this in mind, coping as an ex-combatant in a post-conflict situation then means breaking down the existing bonding relations that hold together the rebel group. Subsequently, reintegration means the *reintegration* of former rebels or combatants into non-conflict-related *bonding* groups that have the potential to participate in *bridging* relations with other groups in society. Cognitive forms of social relations influence the ability of this process to succeed because they determine whether people and groups are willing to maintain such relations.

In summary, the specific interest of this thesis is the interaction and re-integration of ex-combatants after they have been re-accepted back in to their societies. Thus, re-integration is seen in this context, as a process of the re-establishment of social relations between

individuals and groups and between groups within a community and society. These relations consist of a structural and a cognitive dimension. The structural dimension encompasses the actual relations and the elements they are composed of (individuals and groups). Social relations are in their structural dimension *bonding* where they *integrate* individuals into networks and *bridging* where they create *linkage* between groups and networks. The cognitive dimension holds the norms, values, perspectives and attitudes that either predispose (if positive in nature) people and groups to engage with each other or (if negative in nature) make people and groups reluctant to participate in such relations with each other. The structural and cognitive dimensions are as form is to content: the structural dimension (what) refers to the relation and its elements; the cognitive dimension (how) shapes its *character*.

The situation of Samba, a young man, an ex-combatant as a generalized and simplified presentation of the actual theme of this thesis, serves as a case in point. When he was conscripted into the RUF and became a rebel during the war, the bonding relation with his family and kin was broken. In the following years, the rebel group became a forced alternative for him, but one with little potential for linkage with other people or groups in his society and community because of the hostilities they carried out. When the war came to an end and after demobilization, one of the choices for him to make was either to try and attempt to re-establish his kinship ties with his family, or to stay in the community where he was at the time and try to establish new relations with new bonding groups. Samba decided on the other, to return to his family and re-establish his family relationship. With this therefore, I draw up three hypothetical conclusions:

1. That coping as an ex-combatant in a post-conflict situation then means breaking down the existing bonding relations that ties one together to a rebel or combatant group.
2. That with interaction, time helps heal the wounds of inhabitants who are currently living together with their perpetrators.
3. That the ideal objective of the re-integration of an ex-combatant would be that they shift socially and culturally into other social identities that facilitate their insertion into bonding networks with the potential for linkage, or that the connotation and meaning of being an ex-combatant is positively renegotiated in the community.

3. Fieldwork in Sierra Leone: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter deals with my methodological framework. It describes the context of my fieldwork and my method of data collection. One of the interesting aspects of my field work was the effect the video camera, used as a tool for research, had on members of the community I lived in. My methodology will also describe my relationship and position as a Sierra Leonean scholar living in the Diaspora and doing research in one of the remote villages in Sierra Leone. This obviously brings out concerns about challenges, ethics and limitations of my research process.

Before I left for Sierra Leone on fieldwork, I was a bit worried about the how my informants will react to a video camera, since my topic of research involves a subject every Sierra Leonean wants to forget. I was also concerned about how I would be accepted in the community I would be working and living in, even though I had done research in that area before. I was also concerned about the health of my main character because the last time I was in contact with him, he was living with shrapnel in one foot, an injury he got while he was fighting with the rebels during the war. I was also a little bit concerned about language barrier because I will be doing research in an area dominated by the *mende* ethnic group where they also speak *mende* as their local language. However, I was confident that I will be able to communicate because almost everybody in Sierra Leone can talk *krio*, which is the main lingua franca. How I worked my way through these challenges and how my whole research process played itself out in front of me, will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Entering the Field

According to Friedman (1994), ethnographic fieldwork is the activity whereby members of the centre travel to already pacified peripheries to examine (and I can add study) the life of the other. Thus the anthropologist/student researcher has, so to speak, his or her back to the centre and his or her gaze fixed innocently upon a 'captive' and already classified periphery. So with my gaze fixed on studying the life of an ex-combatant, I arrived in Freetown, Sierra Leone on 19th March 2010 with mixed expectations. I had not had confirmation as to whether it will be possible to do research with Samba, my main informant/character before I left Norway. I had

been in touch with the co-ordinator of the *Fambul Tok* traditional reconciliation programme a couple of months before my travel, but there was still no confirmation up to the time I was ready to travel. However, I was optimistic and was also looking forward to travelling to the provinces to witness two traditional reconciliation ceremonies. The first one took place in Kabala, in the Koinadugu District in a town called Koinadugu and that was planned for the 22nd of March. The *Fambul Tok* 2nd anniversary celebrations also took place in that town on the 23rd. The second traditional ceremony took place on the 26th in the Kailahun District in a town called Dugbayema. Witnessing these ceremonies organised by *Fambul Tok* was just a part of my field work because they were not my main research objectives; but I needed to document them so that I would use them as background material for both my thesis and film, because they are the starting point of my whole project.

I had planned to do research in Malema Chiefdom in the Kailahun district, because that is where Samba lives (or so I thought) and also because I had done fieldwork in that area before in 2008. However, when I arrived in Sierra Leone, I found out that he no longer lives there and had moved. It took me a week to locate him and with the help of the *Fambul Tok* NGO, I was able to locate him in Dodo, a small town, east of Sierra Leone. That was how Dodo became my main area of research. Before I went to Dodo, I spent my first week in Sierra Leone travelling with members of the *Fambul Tok* NGO, filming traditional reconciliation ceremonies that involved confessions of ex-combatants and perpetrators with them asking for forgiveness from their victims. Before going in depth into my research in Dodo, let me rewind a little bit to the first few days of my research in Sierra Leone.

I arrived in Freetown, on Friday night, the 19th of March. On Saturday, I contacted the co-ordinator of *Fambul Tok* and he confirmed that I will be travelling up to the provinces with them on Monday, 22nd of March to witness traditional reconciliation ceremonies that would be held in two different areas. I was asked to be at their office in Freetown at 9:00a.m so that I can travel with the staff to Koinadugu town in Kabala. This place is located in the Koinadugu district, north of Sierra Leone and that was where the first traditional ceremony was held. The ceremony will take place that same night and the cleansing ceremony the next day, which also marked the 2nd anniversary of *Fambul Tok* and the 19th anniversary of the start of the war.⁶ As usual, I was excited, but excitement turned into frustration when I arrived at the office and

⁶ The war in Sierra Leone started on 23rd March 1991 and was pronounced officially ended in January 2002. For the *Fambul Tok* reconciliation to choose this day to celebrate their 2nd anniversary was also significant.

there was nobody there. My time studying in Norway had made me forget that in Sierra Leone we do not go by GMT (Greenwich Mean Time) but by BMT (Black Man Time). We eventually left Freetown at 3:00p.m. However, whilst I was waiting, I made several enquires about the whereabouts of my main character. I got to know that his health had improved a lot and that he had gotten surgery for his foot. The shrapnel had been taken out and skin grafting was done on the area. I was told it was difficult to locate him since he had moved from where he was known to be living. I was however told that they will still continue to look for him. So I was still hopeful.

We arrived in Koinadugu town at 11:00p.m and were greeted by the locals with traditional songs and dances. I did not film this ceremony because I had been warned from Freetown that I should not, since this was the first *Fambul Tok* traditional reconciliation ceremony that was being held in the north of Sierra Leone. I must however note that even if I had had the go ahead to film, it would have been a big challenge, because it was very dark since there is no electricity. The air was heavy with the cloud of dust created by the dancing feet, that even the rays from several torch lights could not facilitate proper visibility for even the normal eye. At the reconciliation ceremony the whole town gathered around a big bonfire where victims narrated their ordeals during the war and the perpetrators that were present came forward and asked for forgiveness from the whole town. The cleansing ceremony took place the next day and I was also not allowed to film it because of some traditional taboos and laws that were not explained to me. I was however allowed to film the preparation of the reconciliation feast which started off with the sacrificing of a cow. It was the first time for me to witness the killing of a cow and getting that on video took some courage; but it got better as I continued filming. The day ended with a celebration marking the 2nd anniversary of the *Fambul Tok* traditional reconciliation programme.

We left Koinadugu town at 6:00p.m on the 23rd of March, for Dugbayema a small town in the Kailahun district, east of Sierra Leone. There, the second traditional reconciliation ceremony will take place, set for the 26th. I spent two days in Daru town, also in the Kailahun district while the *Fambul Tok* staff had meetings with their provincial staff that are located in Kailahun district. We arrived in Dugbayema town at 9:00p.m and the ceremony started right away. Inhabitants from the other small towns in the chiefdom also came to witness and be a part of the ceremony. Here, I was allowed to film. It was dark, just like the first ceremony, but light from the bonfire and my jogger's headlight made it possible to film. Since I had

described these traditional ceremonies in the beginning of this thesis, I will not go into them again here.

By now I had not heard any news about, Samba. I had started thinking of changing my project to see if I could do research in Dugbayema town with a woman and her perpetrator I had come across and interviewed. However, the heads of the town had not had any prior knowledge of my coming, except when they saw me among the *Fambul Tok* staff. Therefore, it was difficult for me to have permission to stay and continue my research. I thus travelled back to Freetown with the *Fambul Tok* staff on the 28th of March. I stayed in Freetown for a week while hoping for news about the whereabouts of my main character. I used this time to re-charge my camera batteries and stock up on supplies ready to leave when the time came, hoping that it was soon. On the 4th of April, my luck changed when I got a telephone call that Samba had been located. He had moved from Joijoma town where I met him in 2008 and is now staying with his mother and brother in Dodo town. Both towns are in the Kailahun district with about 21 kilometres from each other. Thus at 8:00a.m, on the 6th of April, I left Freetown in a hired car for Dodo; happy that I was still on track with my initial project idea but a little bit worried that my research area will be different from where I had hoped to work. We drove for twelve hours, the first five of which was on good road (asphalt).

Gaining Access

Gaining access to observe the traditional ceremonies was not difficult at all. I was given the go ahead the first time I spoke to the co-ordinator months before I travelled. However, when I arrived in the field with my video camera all prepared to record the first ceremony planned for the 22nd, I was told that I will be allowed to observe the ceremony, but without a video camera. The reason being that this was the first time the *Fambul Tok* traditional reconciliation ceremony is being held in that district and in that town. It was the same for the cleansing ceremony the next day. I was not allowed to even go to the site where the cleansing took place because of some traditional taboos I did not understand. I was however allowed to film the slaughtering of a cow that was offered as a sacrifice to the ancestors because this event did not take place at the cleansing site. I was however given access to film the other traditional

ceremony in Dugbayema town, because it took place in a different district; but only because I was part of the *Fambul Tok* group⁷.

Dodo, my main research area, is a little town in the Kailahun district, east of Sierra Leone. There I spent four weeks observing, filming and participating (where I can) in some of their daily activities. Dodo town is about 532 kilometres from Sierra Leone's capital Freetown, located in the Dea Chiefdom in the Kailahun district. The town is about 48 kilometres from the main Kailahun headquarter town. Gaining access to do field work there and the permission to film turned out to be easier than I had expected. We arrived in Dodo a little over 8:00p.m. I had stopped in Kailahun Town to pick up a staff member of *Fambul Tok*, who drove with me to Dodo and accompanied me to the town chief to announce my arrival. My main character knew that I was coming so he was expecting me. I later got to know that before I had even arrived, he had gone to the Chief of the town to inform him that I will be coming to work with him; so the chief also knew that I was coming. Even before I was shown to my lodging, I had to explain myself to the chief and present my research to him formally. I read out the letter I got from the University asking for permission to do fieldwork and showed him the university stamp to prove its authenticity.⁸ Then he welcomed me and said that they (the town) knew I was coming and were expecting me and wished me a wonderful stay. He then told me to go to the Paramount Chief the next morning, who lives in Baiwala, the nearby town about 3.2 Kilometers away from Dodo, to inform him that I will be in the chiefdom for the coming weeks on my research process.⁹

So the next morning, Samba accompanied me to Baiwala town which is the headquarter town in the Dea Chiefdom. There I met the Paramount Chief and informed him about my research process for the next coming weeks. I was also introduced to the chiefdom speaker and the local council chairman and presented my research to them as well. I took a little tour of the town before starting the journey back to Dodo. I was really surprised at how easy it was for me to get permission to do research, not only in Dodo, but the other neighbouring towns and villages. This turned out to be an advantage for me because during my stay, my research led

⁷ I travelled with the co-ordinator and other staff of *Fambul Tok* for six days, putting on their T-Shirt for easy identification. So I was taken as part of the organisation when we arrived in this town.

⁸ Majority of the inhabitants of dodo cannot read. So the easiest way was for me to explain what my research was all about and what I was there to do. Also, a letter of permission (or any other letter) bearing both a stamp and signature of (in this case) my university is more authentic than a letter with just a signature, because there is this notion that signatures can be fudged. We can carry on this debate forever, but keep in mind that we are talking about a town that is not exposed to modern day technologies.

⁹ Dodo town is part of the Dea chiefdom in the Kailahun district. There is a paramount chief that is in charge of the whole chiefdom, and then there are village/town chiefs that are in charge of their respective village/towns'

me to another nearby town that I had to film in. Thus there was no need for additional permission to film in that town.

Being a ‘Pomwi’

As stated earlier, my informants were expecting me, so it did not take long for me to settle in and start work. I stayed with Samba in his brother's house. Samba gave up his bedroom for me for the four weeks that I was there. This I thought was very noble. It was also good for my research because I had almost twenty-four hours contact with Samba and other members of his family. Samba was still limping, but looking a lot better than when I last saw him in 2008.

My lodging in Dodo was very basic as expected, and very different from what I am used to in Freetown. For a city girl like me, born and raised in Freetown, who has been studying in Norway for three years, settling in the town was a big adjustment. Forget about WC's, toilet rolls and bathrooms/showers. Think about holes dug in the ground, wash rooms made of palm leaves, little plastic water kettles locally called 'coolers' and a bucket of water when you really need to wash off the dirt and dust. Not wanting to sound too spoilt, imagine a researcher with diarrhoea half way into her research and have to adjust and adapt to the health situations that were presented to her. It was as a matter of fact diarrhoea and stomach infection that eventually made my fieldwork shorter. This is not my first time of experiencing this type of living style; but some form of re-adjustment is always needed every time I find myself experiencing it again. The people where however the nicest people I have ever met and were very helpful and friendly. Always ready to help '*pomwi*'¹⁰, the “white man.”

This word '*pomwi*' automatically made me different in the eyes of my informants, something I battled with right through my fieldwork, because I did not see myself as different. My informants saw me not as a Sierra Leonean but as a 'white man'. Even though they sometimes jokingly call me *pomwi*, I felt uneasy somehow. One day, I asked one of my informants why they call me *Pomwi* and I became more confused after I heard his answer. It was as if I was culturally incompatible to blend-in in Dodo. The following are edited paragraphs from my field journal:

¹⁰ I was labelled '*pomwi*' the *mende* word for white man, because, according to them, I did not look like an African; maybe because of my fair skin or maybe my dress code.

*Today, I asked*****why people call me 'pomwi'. He said they were just joking. But he also said that I do not look like a Sierra Leonean. He said my skin is too fair. He pulled out my hand and traced a line along my green vein saying: "look, I can even see your green vein for God sake!" "...I have never seen you in a skirt" he continued, "always in trousers, theses white man trousers with many pockets. You don't wear flip flops like the other girls, only boots...It is only a white man that is brave enough to go and live in a place where he does not know anybody..."*

I am a Sierra Leonean and for me to hear him talk like that made me feel strange. This week is almost four weeks since I arrived in Sierra Leone; almost two weeks in Dodo. I admit that the long winters in Northern Norway made my skin a little fairer than normal but that does not justify someone to call me white. I admit that I had to visibly struggle with sanitation and diarrhoea for the most part of my fieldwork. I admit that I did not go native like most anthropologists do and threw away my practical t-shirt and trousers attire for local cotton lappa¹¹ and flip flops like all the other women in the village do. But how can I possibly try to film in a lappa? Is this why most of the men in village answer to me as "yes sir" before correcting themselves afterwards saying "yes ma"?...I cannot stop feeling like an outsider here, even though I am a Sierra Leonean, born and raised.

Data collection

I employed qualitative research methods during my ethnographic research process. During my stay in Dodo, I followed Samba in and around his town observing with and without the camera, his daily life as an ordinary citizen after the war and after his re-acceptance in to his community. I stayed in his house and this was a big plus for my research because that gave me almost 24 hours contact with him and his family. Participant observation with the video camera, audio recorder, still camera, interviews and sometimes, just ordinary observations were all tools and methods I used during data collection.

¹¹ This is a piece of cotton cloth that women and girls tie around their waist. This is usually ankle long.

Ethnographic research did not only allow me to be in the field in person, but it also allowed me to spend a lot of time with my informants. It gave me the opportunity to observe firsthand how my main informant is living now, two years after undergoing a traditional cleansing ceremony that symbolised the start of his reconciliation between him and members of his community. It also gave me the opportunity to talk to, observe and interact with several inhabitants of Dodo, capturing their feelings and reactions on how it is to live in the same community with someone that had killed or committed other atrocities and been branded as a rebel during the war. One such person was a woman who was a sister to a man Samba had killed during the war.

Before entering the field, I had pre-judged that it will be easy for me to narrow down my research by focussing on just one ex-combatant who is my main informant. But it was difficult to just focus on just one person during field work because I met several other ex-combatants during my research process. So, even though I did as planned and observed in depth the life of one ex-combatant, I however observed to some extent other ex-combatants in the town. This I think was an advantage for my research because that approach helped me find out to what extent my main informant has integrated with not only members of his community but also fellow ex-combatants he is living with. It also helped me to understand to what extent a person with such a dangerous past can be accepted in his town where he was once known to be a rebel and a murderer during the war.

Conducting interviews with the video camera was one method, but I also did a lot of informal conversations with other ex-combatants and a lot of other ordinary inhabitants of the town without the video camera. I just talked as the opportunities presented themselves. The only way to get around in Dodo, its environs and neighbouring villages is by motorbike. So I engaged myself in conversations with the different motorbike riders that I came in contact with. Majority of the motorbike riders are ex-combatants themselves and it was on one of my motorbike trips that I got to know about the Bike Riders Association (BRA), a group that has both ex-combatants and ordinary civilians as its members. One of my structured interviews was conducted with the town chief and it was through him that I got to know about the

SINAVA¹² agricultural group that also has both ex-combatants and ordinary civilians as members.

Thus I was keen to pick up anything I heard or observed that could be of help to my research and most times as seen in the paragraph above, my interviews or interaction with different people led me to new information that became useful for my research. In the process of gathering data through interviews, both the interviewer and the interviewee shape the process and the data collected. Therefore, very early in my research, before I travelled to Sierra Leone, I had decided to focus on the life histories of my informants. This was tricky because I would be doing research on a topic that most Sierra Leoneans want to forget. Life histories however, are a methodological tool and allow people to reconstruct their experiences in a coherent story in which continuity of person exists, and reflects the way they give meaning to their experiences during the war and after the war. So by just asking them a very open question: “tell me your story”, I gave them the opportunity to structure their own accounts with minimal interruptions from me.

Observation using a video camera as a tool for qualitative research was an interesting phenomenon during fieldwork. Even though I had the go ahead to start my work, I however thought it was wise to introduce my informants to the video camera a little later, because I was not sure what their reaction to the camera might be. I however found myself not resisting the camera on my second day in Dodo. That instinctual feeling was good because I got to film Samba as he interacts with his family during a family ‘*sara*’¹³ that his brother had, and as he interacts with other people in the town. When Samba went to live with his mother and brothers in Dodo, he was put in charge of his brother's shop, the only shop in Dodo. So it was interesting to observe with the camera, his everyday interaction with customers that come to buy things from the shop.

Taking out my camera to film around the town could be a thesis on its own. The children were immediately fascinated by it and they followed my every move as I took shots of the town: the school, the mosque, houses etc. I had to pack up my equipment and go back to my room to get the children back to normal and back to their various homes. It was not only the children that were fascinated, but the adults too. While I was interviewing Samba in the shop that he

¹² A local *mende* word meaning ‘Because of Tomorrow’

¹³ A traditional food sacrifice.

sells in, we were interrupted many times by customers. I later learnt that most of the people that came to buy something at that particular time came because they saw the camera and wanted to 'be in the film'. They did not know that I was interviewing Samba; they thought I was just filming around. For many of them the only video camera they have seen is in movies. I worked around with the camera in plain sight most of the time without filming so that my informants can get used to it.

On some occasions, the camera made an informant nervous. One example is Samba's mother. She was afraid that I am from the Special Court and the court will come and take her son away after I finished my research. It was not difficult however for me to make her fully understand who I am and what I am doing and after a couple of days she came to me and told me that she is ready to talk to me. I realised though during the interview, that she was nervous throughout the period I was talking to her. Therefore, I decided to cut the interview (with the camera) very short. She was however her normal self after I had parked up my camera and we just sat and talked. She even invited me to help them crush rice the next day, which I did. This is one example where the video camera can be a barrier to one's research. I got vital and useful information after I had parked up my video camera.

Obstacles and Challenges

Gaining access to one's research area is one thing. However, gaining access to one's informants is another issue altogether. Even though I had the chief's consent, I also needed the consent of every one that I will be talking to and will be included in my research. The family, especially Mustapha, the younger brother of my main character, was a bit sceptical at first because as mentioned above, they thought that I was from the Special Court to do a film about their brother, an ex-combatant and then take it back to show the court, eventually putting him in danger of being arrested. So it took some convincing from me and Samba himself, for them to really believe that I am a student. It is interesting to note that before they got comfortable with me (which did not take a long time), they did not object to me filming them, because the chief had given me permission. For my main character's mum however, it took a little while; and when I eventually got to talk to her, she told me that she thought that I had come to "expose his son to danger."

Electricity was also a big challenge during my research. At the reconciliation ceremony I filmed, the only source of light was from the bonfire. I had brought along with me a 'jogger's

headlight.' I wore that over my head, and stood at an angle where it would be supplemented by the light from the fire. So I managed to get footages that were not too dark. There was also no electricity in Dodo town, so I had to be very rational so that my batteries would last for the period of time I was there. Because of this, I did not watch my footages after filming because I was saving my batteries. I would only do a quick check on about 10 seconds of the last recorded footage to make sure that there was picture and sound. I however got to charge one of my batteries twice for just a few hours, during my stay in Dodo. A young man who lives in a nearby town comes once in a while with his generator, TV and DVD player, to show movies. He came twice during my stay and I got to charge one of my batteries only for the duration of the movie which was usually about two hours.

I also found it difficult to get one person to operate the boom microphone when I needed to use it. At the traditional ceremony I filmed, I gave two men a crash course on how to operate it and they worked with me the whole night. However, at my main fieldwork location, I was finding it difficult to get one steady person to be my boom man. I had trained a young man in Dodo and made a tentative arrangement with him and he worked with me in the beginning. But he is a carpenter. He was available for me to use because his boss was out of town and he had nothing to do. However when his boss came back, he did not give him permission to work with me since it will mean him being away from the workshop. So I had to look for other interested people and that was difficult. It was in the middle of the farming season and almost all the young men in the town go and work in their farms for almost the whole day. The women in this community are very laid back and wait for permission from the men before they could do anything. So it was impossible to get a woman either. Because of this, I found myself changing assistants, using anybody that was available for that moment. This turned out to be very expensive for me since I had to pay different people every time I need to use the boom microphone.

I left Norway feeling confident that language will not be a problem for me because I will be doing research in the country where I was born and raised, and 98% of Sierra Leoneans can communicate in *krio*, the main lingua franca. However, I realised from the second I arrived in Dodo that language was going to be a challenge for me. Even though everybody speaks *krio*, they were however comfortable talking their local language, which is *mende*, a language I do not speak nor understand. They feel that they could express themselves better in *mende* than in *krio*, a point which I instantly understood. For a student living in Norway, even though I

can communicate in, and understand *Norsk* to a large extent, I however feel very comfortable communicating and expressing myself in English which is our official language in Sierra Leone. I knew I was going to need an interpreter at some points of my research; for example when I needed to interview the chiefs; but I was not prepared for the shock that greeted me when everybody was talking *mende* to me. Even when I told them that I cannot speak *mende*, they insisted on speaking it to me saying: “this is the only way you will learn.” These episodes usually lasted for very short periods because when they start a conversation with me in *mende*, I will just sit there, smiling politely, not saying anything, then they will laugh and switch to *krio*. The fact that I could not talk *mende* limited my access to certain data, for example privilege conversations that went on among my informants at the times I did not have my video camera with me. I however found an interpreter in the person of the Head Master of the local primary school in Dodo. H.M¹⁴ as he likes to be called was my interpreter right through my research period in Dodo. When I needed to talk to the chiefs or when I think I will need an interpreter, I give him a day's notice and then he is ready to accompany me to whoever I wished to talk to. When I spoke to my main informant or other ex-combatant however, we communicate in Krio. Later when writing my field notes, I transcribe their conversations in English since it naturally makes for easy reading and referencing.

Even though I had the H.M as my interpreter in the field, I had to find a way to interpret other data I had collected informally, such as informal conversations and observations with my camera that I did on my own. This was where my audio recorder came in handy. So during my last two days in Sierra Leone, in the quietness of my parent's home in Freetown, I asked the driver of the hired car that took me to Dodo (luckily he is *mende*) to go through my tapes with me and interpret all twenty of them where interpretation was needed. I placed the tape recorder as close to the camera as possible and recorded as my tapes played and my hired driver interpreted my data all over again. I must confess that after this process I got new insights and ideas on how to continue my research because I had watched through my tapes, an opportunity I did not get in the field because there was no electricity. I however felt disappointed and frustrated since I was booked for Norway the next day because of diarrhoea and stomach infection I got while in the field and was still suffering from. The premature end of my research process because of my illness was a big disadvantage for me.

¹⁴ H.M, the abbreviation for Head Master, is how everybody calls him in the town. I got so used to calling him that, I must admit, I never got round to ask his real name.

4. Key Situations and Findings: Empirical Descriptions

This section will mostly deal with my ethnographic findings. It will be divided into two parts. Here, in this chapter, I will present my empirical data, describing and linking them with my theoretical perspectives discussed in chapter three. The next chapter will deal with part two of my empirical descriptions which will contain a final analysis of my fieldwork data, paying attention to key social situations. I will also be discussing the coping strategies the people of Dodo town are employing to live together peacefully in the same community, taking a look also at the challenges they face and how they overcome these challenges. In this section, my hypothesis and research questions will be verified or falsified.

Space and Time

It is really difficult to say if ex-combatants are accepted by all inhabitants living in their communities because you do not see nor interpret what is in the hearts of people and you never know what they are thinking. Likewise, it is almost impossible to use words to describe one's emotions. However, victims and perpetrators living in Dodo town have accepted the fact that they must live with each other in some way in the same community. In this chapter of my thesis, I will, with the help of the theoretical perspectives presented in chapter three, analytically describe how both ex-combatants and ordinary inhabitants of the town are living together today. I will start off by discussing the importance of traditional reconciliation ceremonies as a first step to reconciliation. Going back to my first research project, I will be presenting the differences or changes that have taken place with firstly, the Fambul Tok traditional reconciliation programme and secondly with Samba my main informant/character.

a. Fambul Tok: Then and now

In 2008, during my first fieldwork in Sierra Leone, I spent a lot of time with staff and members of the *Fambul Tok* traditional reconciliation programme. It was through this programme that I met Samba for the first time. By then, I did not know that I will be coming back two years later to continue or rather do another fieldwork. I must state here that a lot have changed since 2008. As mentioned before in the introduction of this thesis, during my last research, I worked with a local human rights' NGO, Forum of Conscience (FOC). This NGO was responsible for the implementation of the *Fambul Tok* traditional reconciliation programme that deals with community healing and reconciliation. Anything that had to do

with planning or organising traditional reconciliation ceremonies was done by the FOC. Their first traditional reconciliation ceremony was held on March 23rd 2008.

When I returned to Freetown two years later to research for this thesis, *Fambul Tok* was no longer a programme under an NGO, it has developed into an NGO on its own now called *Fambul Tok International* (FTI). They have moved from their office space in the FOC building, to their own two stories building in the centre of Freetown (as shown in figures 2 & 3.), dedicated to “advancing peace by mobilising ordinary people – entire communities ravaged by war – in the hard work of reconciliation.”¹⁵ Their second annual report starts with the introduction:

“For Fambul Tok, January 2010, signalled more than just a new year. It signalled the deepening and broadening of our vision, as well as the expansion of the platform we’re building to be able to manifest that vision. We now have a new home – and it’s our own. Fambul Tok International (FTI) was officially incorporated as a US-registered public charity on October 5, 2009 and we began operating fully under those auspices as of January 2010.”

I was fortunate to attend their second anniversary celebration that was held in Kabala in the north of Sierra Leone. What made this occasion special was that it was held on the 23rd of March 2010, the exact date the war started in Sierra Leone 19 years ago and the exact date the first *Fambul Tok* reconciliation ceremony was held in 2008. It was at this anniversary celebration that FTI announced in a press release that they “join the people of Sierra Leone in petitioning the government to make March 23rd a National Day of Reflection.”

Analysing my field notes later on, I could not help but think if it was a coincidence that March 23rd is an important date for FTI. I concluded that it was definitely not a coincidence. FTI chose this date so that Sierra Leoneans will be constantly reminded of the need for forgiveness and reconciliation on the day they were introduced to the costs and mayhems of a violent conflict that lasted for eleven years and now a strong part of Sierra Leone’s history. At a press conference on March 30th where FTI launched its 2nd annual report, the Deputy Ambassador of the United States Embassy in Sierra Leone noted that “the nation of Sierra

¹⁵ Fambul Tok website: <http://www.fambultok.org>

Leone will not know peace until the communities are healed”, emphasising FTI’s vision of community healing and reconciliation.



Figures 2&3. Fambul Tok’s new Freetown office.

b. Samba: Then and now

It was through one of FTI's community healing and reconciliation programmes that I met Samba. As an ex-combatant, he came into contact with *Fambul Tok* in 2008, when they went to his home town in Jojoima, Malema Chiefdom in the Kailahun district. He was deeply involved in the process of peace and reconciliation with *Fambul Tok* up onto June 2008, when he went through a traditional reconciliation ceremony that was held in his home town. Since then, he has been living among his community members. But how has it been for him? In my introduction to this thesis, I mentioned that I will be discussing his interaction with other members of his community and how he has re-integrated and/or is still re-integrating into his community. It is however important to note that another aspect that was of importance during my field work was how he was excluded in the community upon his return.

My first contact with Samba was as an ex-combatant living with an injury he got on his foot during the war. Always appearing quiet and unassuming, Samba was fighting on the side of the rebels during the war. He told me:

"I used to be a commando in the RUF". I was called Junior Rambo, because of my physical build... One day we were attacked by government forces where I sustained an injury on my left leg, as a result of a bomb. I was only able to get it treated and operated upon last November (2009)".

Up until March this year, I had never known his real name. I only knew that he used to be called *Jr. (Junior) Rambo* during the war. In 2008 during his traditional reconciliation ceremony, he was mostly being called *Jr. The Rambo* had been dropped. When I returned this year, he is now being addressed as Samba, his real name. *Jr. Rambo* was gone, now being replaced by the new person, Samba, as he was known before the war. In my four weeks in Dodo, not once did I hear anyone call him *Jr. Rambo*. Instead they call him pastor or Samba. Not that they did not know that *Jr. Rambo* was the name he went by when he was fighting for the RUF. Could this mean that the inhabitants of Dodo have now come to accept Samba as one of them? This interesting transition in a young man's life supports my claim in my theory chapter of an individual constructing his own identity. The obvious question however is what brought about this change?

Since I stayed with Samba in his house, I got access to him all the time, which was a big advantage for me. During one of our talks, I got to learn a lot about him and the fact that before he started living this life of inclusion and acceptance in Dodo, he was excluded and

ostracised in Jojoima. Samba, I got to learn, was captured and forcefully conscripted into the RUF fighting force when they attacked his town, Jojoima. Since he was captured in 1991, he fought alongside the rebels until 1994 when he was injured on his foot during a bomb attack with government forces. After his injury, he no longer went to the war front and he was trying to get his foot better; but he was still very much a part of the RUF. He later on went to live in Liberia and was there until the end of the war in Sierra Leone when he came back. Before Samba came to live in Dodo town, his mother's hometown, he was living in Jojoima, his father's home town. After the war, that was the first place he returned to; his father's house where his paternal brothers and sisters live. That was before his traditional reconciliation ceremony.

“My father’s house was the first place I could think of to return to. So I did. But they did not want to see me because I was a rebel. They had nothing to do with me. At first I was not even allowed to live in the house. But eventually I was given a room in the house. My foot was by then in a bad shape. I do not go out of the house during the day; only at night when most people are asleep. Then I will clean my foot, bandage it and go in again. I most times sleep hungry. My brothers would eat and will not think of me and our rooms were close by. My situation was like that until Fambul Tok came to our town to talk about the traditional reconciliation ceremonies...I presented myself to them. I told them who I am; I did not hide anything. I told them the truth. That’s how I became involved with the Fambul Tok programme.”

Even though Samba has gotten surgery on his foot,¹⁶ he is still limping, but looking a lot better than when I first met him in 2008. He has moved from Jojoima, and is now living in Dodo, the town where his mother was born and still lives. He stays in his brother's house and now sells in his brother's shop. He was put in charge of this shop when he came to live in Dodo town. While talking to him, I also learned that he has a girlfriend, the mother of his two children that lives with him in Dodo. His girlfriend is a nurse and lives in Baiwala town, about four kilometres from Dodo. He met his girlfriend during the war, while he was fighting with the rebels. He was among a group of rebels that went to her town and found out that she was being tortured by another [different] group of RUF rebels that had attacked her town. He

¹⁶ He was very reluctant to talk about how he got help with his foot and will not go into details on camera nor on the record. Therefore for ethical reasons, I will not discuss that aspect in my thesis.

rescued her from the hands of this other group of rebels and that was where their relationship started. Whenever he talks about his girlfriend, his eyes lit up and it is no secret that he has great respect for her. He told me:

“...Her father is against this relationship. He does not want me to be with her. I remember after the war when we went to her home town, her father chased me out of his house with a cutlass, calling me a rebel... But I have never met a woman like her. Right throughout my injury, when I was suffering in Liberia, she did not leave me. She stood by me. And she is still by me...”

Samba spends most of his time running his brother's shop (figure 4). So he has little or no time at all to do things on his own since he is always attending to customers. During my observation of him, I realised that this has created a certain hunger in him to belong and be better integrated into his society than he is now. While I was there he was seriously negotiating his way to become a member of an agricultural club called SINAVA that has ex-combatants as some of its members. This hunger has also been extended to his religious life. He told me that before he came to live in Dodo, he used to visit several churches after his traditional reconciliation ceremony where he openly confessed his actions during the war asking for forgiveness.

“I found out that when I did that, people's response towards me started changing” he continued. *“It then became easier for me to talk about my past and ask for forgiveness from people and it became a bit easier for me to interact with people. When I moved to Dodo, I decided to continue so I started by gathering people, Christians, who live in Dodo. Even though this is a Muslim dominated town there are Christians too. There used to be a Christian congregation here before the war.”*

Individuals belong to different categories and have different social roles that lead to multiple social identities. These different social identities can mutually influence each other within and between the two forms of social identity talked about in my theory chapter. Here we see Samba as a very good example: after fighting on the side of the RUF, he is demobilised and becomes an ex-combatant. He returns to his community and faces ostracism from his paternal family and the family of his girlfriend. He then moves to live with his maternal family where he is more accepted and then put in charge of his brother's shop. Wanting to be

a deeper part of his society, he is finding a way to become a member of the SINAVA farming club. Added to that, he is a local [un-ordained] pastor that leads a small Christian congregation in an entirely Muslim community. In the next section where I discuss my data, I will go in-depth into these multiple identities of Samba.

The above description thus confirms that society's social fabric is at least partly embodied by individuals having multiple social identities. Individuals as persons never have only one social identity and, depending on the context, there may be shifts in the dominance and relevance of certain social identities. This provides space for social change and re-integration because it offers individuals room to identify with certain social identities while they may actively dissociate from other identities (Samba not wanting to be a Muslim for example). It also offers others in the community the opportunity to perceive such individuals in different social identities.



Figure 4. The shop

Ethnographic Data

Social settings are created and maintained by people in an attempt to accomplish goals that eventually facilitate resource exchange. When an individual enters a setting therefore, he or she must find a role, a way of interacting with others, that is consistent with the expectations of people in that particular setting. This is known as role relationships. Initially, role relationships are unclear and uncertain; but as time passes, relationships progress and role expectations become more certain. Individuals gradually become part of their new settings and its structured patterns and behaviour.

a. Interaction

When Samba went to live with his mother and brother Mustapha in Dodo town, he was put in charge of his brother's shop, the only shop in Dodo. So it was interesting to observe with and without the camera, his everyday interaction with customers that come to buy things from the shop. The shop is part of the house Samba lives in together with his brother. That was also the house I stayed. Samba works in this shop, and he is always there, attending to customers. Even when I had to interview him on camera, I had to do it while he works. It would have been impossible to get him alone, away from the shop, because that is his job and the shop cannot afford to be closed for the period of time I will be talking to him. We were interrupted almost every five minutes by customers wanting to buy something from the shop. Filming Samba in the shop was an important data in itself, because I got to see how he interacts with other inhabitants of the town. He may be in one place for almost the whole day, but he comes in contact and interacts with a lot of people more than the average man in the town does in one day. The role relationship that he thus develops through his interaction with the customers that come to buy in the shop thus provides him with a sense of identity and purpose in life because being in charge of the shop is one of his everyday roles in his community that he is proud of. Thus, if we look at it from the point of view of Goffman's face to face interaction process, we see the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence.

Interaction is also an adaptive model by which an individual is enabled to adapt to his or her environment. Samba has gone far in his adaptation to individuals in his community. People in the town sometimes also come to Samba for his help on any kind of problem they are going through or sometimes just to talk. One example is when Samba's neighbour came and asked

him to massage his foot that he hurt while he was farming. This was not the first time for him to come to Samba with this because he said to Samba: “*use the same muscle rub you used the last time.*” Others come to him for bandages and other things used to dress wounds. Samba has a whole cabinet full of bandages and other wound dressing supplies in his room; and he told me that he had that much because before his operation, he had to clean and dress his wound on his own. So he buys these supplies in the pharmacies, and these were leftovers he had. Now that an operation had been done on his foot and he is on his way to recovery, he does not need them anymore. So he uses them on people that need them. This in my analysis suggests that the town has come to terms with Samba living among them in the community to a point at which he is seen as a person one can trust. He in turn is very comfortable around them. There is no sign of stigma or ostracism towards him. They go to him and ask him to help them with anything possible.

This situation is the same with other ex-combatants living in the town, in that they are not excluded, neither ostracised. While talking to the town chief, I got to know that there is a farming reconciliation club in the town called SINAVA. SINAVA is a *mende* word and its direct translation means “Because of tomorrow”. Even the name of the club suggests that this town is moving away from the past and concentrating on what they can do to build a good future for themselves. Its members are both ex-combatants and non ex-combatants living in Dodo. This is an agricultural club that does farming activities. Money generated from farming is partly used as micro-credit for members of the club and partly for the upkeep of the club. When I visited the SINAVA farm, I met only a cross section of the members brushing the farm and getting it ready for planting because it is the planting season. This season they will be planting groundnuts. Among the cross section of members that were present, two of them were ex-RUF fighters, one was a *Kamajor*¹⁷ and the rest were ordinary inhabitants of the town (non-ex-combatants). The club consists of a total of 23 members. 14 of them are ex-combatants and the others are non-ex-combatants/ordinary inhabitants of the town.

Talking to the members of SINAVA, I noticed that all of the ex-combatants said that they were captured and forcefully conscripted to be rebels. This is important because it presents a situation wherein, their re-acceptance and re-integration into their community becomes a little bit easier because of the fact that they did not voluntarily join the rebels during the war, but

¹⁷ The Kamajors were traditional hunters turned fighters during the war and they were fighting alongside the Sierra Leone Government.

were captured and forced to be rebels. The former RUF combatants were willing to talk to me but not the former *Kamajor*, because he did not consider, nor refer to himself as an ex-combatant. He did not consider himself an ex-combatant because he was fighting on the side of the government as a member of the Civil Defence Force (CDF). This was an interesting observation for me because it made me realise that since the end of the war, when people used the word ex-combatant, we (Sierra Leoneans, me included) automatically relate it to being an RUF. As a matter of fact however, the term ex-combatant refers to anybody who had been involved in combat, be it for or against the government as in the case of Sierra Leone for example. This was one important lesson I learned during fieldwork.

I must hasten to note here that the attitudes of some ex-combatants have made their full reintegration into their communities difficult. Even though this did not present itself in Dodo, a number of ex-combatants have failed to acknowledge, or comprehend, that many killings during the conflict were morally wrong. In fact, some ex-combatants believe they deserve to be rewarded for their role in the conflict. Some RUF members have tended to think of themselves as legitimate revolutionaries, while the CDF have tended to portray themselves as saviours of the people. So I was really not so surprised of the fact that the *Kamajor* member of SINAVA does not consider himself as an ex-combatant, because he does not see himself in the same category as RUF ex-combatants. To resolve this situation there will have to be a balance between encouraging ex-combatants to realise that wrongful acts have been committed, and forgiving them.

All the ex-combatants I observed during the course of my fieldwork are really living well. They have blended in so well in the town that unless you are told, you will never know that they were active fighters during the war; be it for or against the government. A majority of the ex-combatants living in the town are married and all the ones I talked to got married after they came back to Dodo, after the war. I was curious to find out what their relationship is like with their in-laws and one ex-combatant told me:

“...You see this woman here, when I went to her father to ask for her hand in marriage, he was very happy. He knows I am an ex-combatant; but he also knows I am not a bad person... I was not afraid to return to Dodo because during the war I did not commit any wrong here. My father-in-law knew that I was captured. I did not join the rebels willingly.

I was captured... Now I am married and have two small children. My in-laws are even happy now because they have become grandparents...”

b. Belonging

Identity of any kind is consequential. Otherwise it would not be identity. Earlier, I mentioned the fact that my main character has a longing to belong and be a deeper part of his community thus negotiating a way on the possibility for him becoming a member of SINAVA. Here we see Samba employing what is known as organisational identification. One day I was visited by the Chairman of the SINAVA club while I was sitting outside the shop. He was out of Dodo and therefore was not with the other members when I had met them in their farm. He had come to say hello and introduce himself to me. We made arrangements so that I will follow their planting exercise. Samba joined us out on the porch and suddenly the conversation changed. Samba started talking to the chairman, asking him what the possibility is for him to become a member of SINAVA. This was a moment worth filming and I went into my room and got my camera. Luckily I had left it mounted after I finished filming around that morning. Thus I was able to capture most of the conversation. I got to see another side of Samba during this: a hungry side; a side wanting to belong. Here, Samba took the opportunity of the chairman’s visit to me, to ask if and how he can become a member of SINAVA. Even though the chairman told him that the club has a fixed number of members and it would mean changing the constitution to accommodate him, Samba pursued by trying to convince the chairman:

“I have to come in and be a part of SINAVA some kind of way. I want you to consider. Create a space in the constitution just so that I can be a part of it.”

To this the chairman replied:

“Samba, you have a sweet tongue. The gift of speech does not solve problems. There is a process for one to become a member of SINAVA.”

Here, Samba wanted to know what the chances were for the constitution to be amended so that the membership could be increased. It was as if becoming a member of SINAVA will complete a part of him. This was Samba being pro-active and hungry to be a part of and belong to the SINAVA reconciliation club. This is how I analysed his actions. Even though he is now being accepted and is part of his community, he still wants to belong to this club that includes ex-combatants and benefit from it just as how other ex-combatants are benefiting.

Interactionally, an individual's organisational identity may be framed at least as much by that organisation's or group's image as well as the presentation of the individual himself. In this case, Samba's organisational identity was framed by the presentation of himself because he expressed interest in becoming a member of the club. Organisational identification is consequential in particular ways. In this case, membership of SINAVA will give Samba access to resources that may be of benefit to him.

Belonging has a lot to do with acceptance. For someone to fully belong to an organisation, he must first be accepted as a member of that organisation. Similarly, for someone to belong in a community or society, he or she must be accepted in that community and be allowed to live or visit. For Samba, he considers himself very safe in Dodo, his maternal hometown. He is living among his maternal family: his mother and brothers especially. He is accepted in Dodo town but he does not have the same feeling of acceptance and belonging in Malema his paternal chiefdom. The main reason for this was that during the war he killed a man whose family is from that chiefdom.

“It happened just after I was captured and conscripted into the RUF. I did not do it on purpose. We were in a town in Malama Chiefdom. At that time I had been given a gun: an AK47. I did not know how to use a gun... and it accidentally went off and hit and killed this man. I was shocked.”

If I could analyse this incident, I will thereby state that one main reason why he was ostracised in his paternal chiefdom was because he killed this man. The incident happened in a town in Malema Chiefdom and the victim was a man well known in the chiefdom. During his traditional reconciliation ceremony in 2008 in Madina town in the same chiefdom, he openly confessed killing this man and asked for the family of this man to forgive him. He told me that since his traditional reconciliation ceremony, he had not visited this man's family. He said he would like to visit them if it is possible so I decided that I will go with him.

On the day we decided to go, we left at around 10:00a.m on a motorcycle for the 56 kilometres journey to Madina, in the Malema Chiefdom. He told me he had been going to Madina but never to this man's family. Today, at the site where the traditional ceremony took place stands the construction site of a 'Barray' or Town Hall. This is going to be the place where everybody in the village will gather whenever there is a community gathering when construction is finished. This spot thus symbolises the place where the whole village can come together. Begging the question, I asked Samba at the site if he could recall what

happened to him there two years ago. He of course remembered but he was more interested to talk about the family of his victim. So we set out in search for them. The brother of the man Samba killed still lived in Madina, but we were told he was in his farm so we could not talk to him. However his sister lived in Malema¹⁸ village, about 1.6 kilometres from Madina. So we set out to look for her.

Malema village is located at the top of a steep hill. We had just finished climbing the hill when I saw a woman in her kitchen hut making soap. I greeted her with the little *mende* I knew. She answered, but then turned back suddenly looking at Samba, and then she called out his name. It was a call of disbelief, as if asking: “is this really you?” She and Samba started talking in *mende*. She was talking very fast, as if she was annoyed. Our motorcycle driver was standing next to me interpreting and that's when I found out that this was the woman we had come to see, but Samba did not recognise her at all. This was the first time to come face to face with her since he confessed on his knees before her and her family in 2008. The woman however remembered him very well and during our dialogue, her main concern was why had Samba not come back to “settle the peace” with her family after the reconciliation ceremony. That was the main topic during our dialogue.

Our visit to the sister of one of Samba's victims was one of the most emotional for me during fieldwork. This raised the question as to whether some people that were directly affected by the war are able to really forgive their perpetrators. When Samba first realised who she really was, the first thing he asked for was for some water to drink and she gave it to him. Traditionally, when somebody has travelled from afar, it is customary to offer water to that person as a sign of welcome. If water is not offered, even when one asks for it, it means that the person is not welcomed in that village. In this case she offered Samba water when he asked for it: she went into her hut and took cool water from the water pot. This means that Samba was welcomed. However, she was really upset by the fact that firstly, Samba did not recognise her, and secondly that since the traditional ceremony, he had not come back to visit her family to peacefully settle whatever scores they have, as is the tradition. She was not calm until Samba made a promise that he will come with his brother to “settle the peace” as expected of him.

¹⁸ This village shares the same name as the chiefdom.

During the conversation between and the woman, I got to know that before the war, she was in a relationship with one of Samba's many paternal brothers.¹⁹ I thus became really confused. Naturally, I started thinking to myself that if this woman was in a relationship with one of Samba's brothers, and Samba knew and admitted that fact, then how come Samba did not recognise her? Oh is it that he recognised her, but pretended he did not? I must admit that at this point in my fieldwork, I became really confused in determining what type of person/character my main informant is. How many 'faces' does he really have?

When I asked Samba why he had not return until now, he was making lots of excuses, using his injured foot as his main excuse. I must note here that this was the only time during my fieldwork that he willingly spoke about this episode of his life. It was as if he does not like going down that road. This could be the reason why he 'deliberately' did not 'recognise' his victim's sister even though she used to be in a relationship with his brother. This supports what I mentioned earlier in the beginning of this chapter where an individual can choose to disassociate him or herself from a certain identity. Here Samba is disassociating himself from this episode of his life that identifies him as a killer, because he is not one anymore. Was it because of remorse? Was it that he is ashamed? Or was it that he is scared to go to that part of his community? He admitted to me that he however feels more comfortable in Dodo than in Jojoima or any other part of Malema Chiefdom. It is worth noting though, that on our way to and from Madina, there was at least one person in every small village we passed that knew Samba. They will just shout his name in a greeting as we rode past. This suggests that he is very well known not only in Dea chiefdom but also in Malema Chiefdom, thus ruling out the question of him being afraid to go to Malema.

c. Religion

In my theory chapter, I introduced the importance of religion in Samba's life. Even though Samba's whole family is Muslim, he is a Christian and his practice of Christianity is of great importance to him. He told me that he was introduced to the bible and Christianity during the war. By then he was seriously ill and was almost at the point of death because of his injuries. On one Sunday, I went to church with him and I had my camera with me because I was going to film the church service. The venue where church services are held is a small mud hut, and

¹⁹ My four weeks with Samba was really not enough time for me to get to know his paternal family, which I got to learn, was very big. I was unable to fully understand who was a biological relative or who was referred to as a relative because he/she is very close to the family.

it is the same venue that a young man uses to play movies once or twice a month in Dodo. I had told Samba that I will be filming that day, so his dress code was different from the last Sunday. This time he had on a suit and tie, and even managed to wear a pair of soft trainers, loosely tied to facilitate easy movement for his injured foot. The total congregation was ten, confirming the fact that there are not many Christians in the town. Samba delivered the Sermon that day, a very inspiring one, and I was amazed to see how energetic, charismatic and fired-up he can be when he is in church.

For the whole time I was there, I noticed that every morning at six, he leads morning devotion with a group of people. Also, while he sells in the shop, he takes the opportunity to read his bible and prepare for services on Sundays. So what do people in Dodo think about this 'new Samba'? I did not do interviews to find answers to this question. I merely observed. Some customers coming to buy things in the store call him 'pastor'. During a discussion about gender and women's rights that happened outside the shop, a man taking part in it said to samba: "you are a pastor, so I am coming to you for advice. Tell me what the bible says about women's right." Even though he is part of the minority religion in the town, he still remains fervent. Does this suggest that the new Samba is accepted and trusted in the town? When I was talking to him in the beginning, he said when he just came to Dodo his brother wanted him to be a Muslim; and he was really a Muslim for a short while. This was evident when I saw him recite the Al-Fatiha²⁰ during a family gathering they had.

His brother gave him a Muslim gown and he was very fervent, doing his five daily prayers. In his words:

"...I never missed my five daily prayers. Sometimes if my brother is absent, I lead the prayer group. That was how I started coming closer to the people who did not want to see me. I prayed with them..."

However he said he did not feel fulfilled nor satisfied and wanted to know God more. He said he could not understand what was being said in the Mosque. This was a dilemma for him because he did not know how to discuss this with his brother and his brother was the one who opened his arms to him and is taking care of him in the town. He told me that he however got the courage to tell his brother that he wants to go back to being a Christian; and his brother

²⁰ The first chapter of the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an.

had no problems with that. So he started going to church with the Muslim gown his brother had given to him.

We see him constructing who he wants to be here. He wants to be a Christian so this one symbolic act: wearing the Muslim gown to church sends the message that he is in charge of his new identity. He said it was in church he found some kind of fulfilment and a meaning to his life, and he has not gone back since. This mirrors back to his search for belonging; not only longing to be a member of SINAVA, but also wanting to belong to a religious system that would give his life some meaning. Now he is a leader in his church and his congregation and other members of the community call him “pastor” even though he is not an ordained pastor. Even though it is a small congregation, yet, in my opinion, it is easier for him to be seen and recognised in that small but conspicuous group than in the large Muslim group in the town.

On the other side of the religious sphere in Dodo are the Muslims and religion play a very important role in shaping who they are. 90 % of the inhabitants in Dodo are Muslims. The mosque is located about 200 meters away from the school and directly opposite the mosque is Samba’s house, where I stayed. The shop is part of the house and from my first day to my last day in Dodo, I woke up at 5:00am each morning to the sound of the call to Muslim morning prayers. As part of my data collection I observed Juma prayers at the mosque on one Friday. Fridays are very special in Dodo and it is the day that people dress up to go to the Mosque for Friday prayers. It is also the day when one gets to eat a little more special food. It was similar to our Sunday dinners we observe in our family. I am a Christian and this was my first time in a Mosque. Even though I was giving permission to film in the mosque, I had to abide by the rules. That is: to have on a hijab (locally called and stay only on the female section. I was however allowed to have on trousers (I had nothing else). Since I was not allowed to go to the male side because I was a woman, I went outside by the side of the mosque so that I will be able to get some shots of the men as well during prayers. Islam is the main religion practised in Dodo and I was not surprised by the fact that the mosque was parked full.

d. Globalisation

According to Friedman (1994), the construction of identity is very much a part of the historical dynamics of the global system. Inhabitants of Dodo town are however unaware of

the role globalisation is currently playing in shaping or socially changing their identity. To start with, it is a very small town. The town has an estimated number of about six to seven hundred inhabitants and I got to understand from the town chief that that was more than the town can handle. A lot of the inhabitants are migrants from Liberia. This migration started even before the war. Dodo is just 18 kilometres away from the Liberian border so it is easy for migration to take place through trade, inter-marriages and refugees as well, especially during the Liberian war. The houses are scattered around on the left and right axis of the town. I did not notice any burnt out buildings in the town; but I however got to learn later that they were broken down and replaced with mud houses, most of them with thatched roofs so that returnees coming back to the town after the war could have places to live in. This made sense. The war ended in 2002. That is why there are a lot of thatched roof houses in the town. There is however two and a half (if I am allowed to say that) concrete buildings, one of which is the mosque that seemed quiet new, suggesting that it was built quite recently. The other is owned by another inhabitant, a business man, who permanently lives in Kenema. The half concrete building was actually my lodging that housed the shop. The shop, which is the front part of the house, is constructed out of cement but the back of the house was constructed out of mud. There are however, new concrete buildings being put up in the town by a number of inhabitants. These are houses build next to their mud houses, suggesting that the mud houses are just temporary. They will be replaced by concrete houses. This is a classic example of social change happening in Dodo.

The shop is the only shop in the town. In charge of the shop is my main informant, Samba, the ex-combatant. Samba's brother owns the shop and he travels to neighbouring Liberia or to Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone to buy merchandise for the store. In this shop, one could buy anything from cigarettes to candies, clothes to bicycle tyres, and anything else you can find in-between, with of course the dominating presence of Coca Cola. I am using the analogy of coca cola, the all famous anthropological example of globalisation to show the changing effects of globalisation in a small town like Dodo.

In the shop, you find two kinds of Coca-Cola products. One locally (Sierra Leone) made called Mega Cola and the other is canned coke or Fanta imported from Europe. This one is more expensive than the locally made and if someone is seen with this type of coke then that person is automatically identified as 'rich'. Being rich in this context does not mean economic/monetary wealth or social status; but implies that at that moment, the individual can

afford to buy the imported Coca-Cola. The only disco jam session that I witnessed in Dodo presented the picture of a small town rapidly developing globally after the effects of 11 years of war. The shop was a very busy place that day: people came to buy new pairs of slippers and sandals, or underwear, or cheap perfumes or hair decorations in preparation for the dance. During the dance, 'boyfriends' impressed 'girlfriends' by buying imported Coca-Cola or Fanta.

The youths and young men are also unconsciously influenced by the globalised world. On two occasions during my stay a young man came to show movies in the town in the evenings. This is something he does regularly two to three times in a month. This is one way for the young to relax in their make-shift cinema hall. Sometimes, football matches are shown, usually British Premier League or European Champions League matches several months old, as was the case on one occasion when I was there. A few young men, who can afford it, proudly wore the vests of Manchester United that were in fact imitated copies that loses shape, size and colour after one wash. Yes, even in one of the most remote villages in Sierra Leone, Manchester United football club is known.

There is almost no telephone network in Dodo, yet its inhabitants have mobile phones. The closest you can get to a telephone coverage is a 'point' (that's how the locals call it); an open area about two hundred meters just outside the town. Coverage is not even guaranteed at that 'point' because the waves fluctuate and not once did I succeed to make a telephone call from there. So if one really needs to make a call, one has to travel two miles to Biwala, the neighbouring town where they have several 'points' with good mobile phone coverage. However, one can actually buy top-up cards for their phones from the shop. The shop thus serves as a link between Dodo and the outside (globalised) world, making it a very important element in the town and a source for social change.

In the above descriptions, I have attempted to link my markers of identity mentioned in chapter three with my ethnographic data. The result shows that identity is indeed consequential because its markers discussed above, greatly affect people's lives across a range of situations. I will now in the next chapter, analyse my hypotheses and research questions as I attempt to do a final analysis of my data.

5. Coping as an ex-combatant: Final analysis

Introduction

The primary objective of this study was to gain insight into processes of post conflict interaction and the social re-integration of ex-combatants from an anthropological point of view. It has been approached from an individual's perspective but with the emphasis on his (my main informant's) relationship with the social and cultural context. This study also rejected a single-dimensional focus on the violence used in times of war; but instead the focus was on interaction and re-integration as a social process, which can be understood as an attempt to restore or cope with the long-term socio-cultural harm caused by wartime acts of violence.

Central to this study was focussing on what happens to an ex-combatant after undergoing a traditional reconciliation ceremony and has returned to live with his family and community members, using one ex-combatant as my main informant I also focussed on how he interacts with other ex-combatants that are living in the same town, and what meaning do life has now for an ex-combatant in general. This study takes a look at interaction and re-integration as processes that revolves around the re-establishment of relations between the individual and social networks, which contains – implicitly or explicitly – a negotiation of social and cultural identities. Three questions were central to data collection. Firstly, I sought to understand whether traditional reconciliation ceremonies help re-integrate ex-combatants and former perpetrators of the war, back into their societies and communities. Secondly, to what extent is acceptance possible when dealing with the relationship between victims and ex-combatants? Finally, what are the coping strategies employed by the inhabitants of a community in order to co-exist with ex-combatants?

To analyze the empirical data, this study draws on theory regarding identity, social change and reintegration. The theoretical framework is based on identities, experiences and meanings, which are additionally marked at two levels: individual life experience and the community. In this framework, reintegration comes about through the re-establishment of social relations that can be bonding and create the integration of individuals in groups, or bridging by creating linkages between groups and networks. Interaction exists between the cultural context and individuals who internalize this context. Through agency, cultural context

is continuously recreated by people who reproduce and transform social structures and cultural meanings in their relations with this particular context. With this in mind, I drew up three hypothetical conclusions:

1. That coping as an ex-combatant in a post-conflict situation then means breaking down the existing bonding relations that ties one together to a rebel or combatant group.
2. That with interaction, time helps heal the wounds of inhabitants who are currently living together with their perpetrators.
3. That the ideal objective of the re-integration of an ex-combatant would be that they shift socially and culturally into other social identities that facilitate their insertion into bonding networks with the potential for linkage, or that the connotation and meaning of being an ex-combatant is positively renegotiated in the community.

The next section therefore attempts to answer my research questions and reflects on interaction and re-integration as social processes as it emerged from my empirical data.

Traditional Reconciliation Ceremonies (Re-visited)

Findings from my previous research I did in 2008 showed that traditional methods of reconciliation can successfully complement modern methods of reconciliation like Truth Commissions. Therefore going into the field to research for this fieldwork, I was confident that traditional rituals as methods of reconciliation play an important role in the re-integration of war perpetrators and ex-combatants; and the attributes of such methods help ex-combatants to start a new life in their communities. That was the starting point for my first research question. The traditional reconciliation ceremonies were therefore one social situation that I considered important during my fieldwork. The bonfire and cleansing ceremonies served as a platform that brings both victims and perpetrators together. These ceremonies hold certain significance to not only the members of the community as a whole, but most importantly, to the victims and perpetrators themselves. For example, in Dugbayema town, the perpetrators were prayed for as part of their cleansing and forgiveness. Both the Imam and Pastor of the town were present and they offered prayers according to the religion of the perpetrator. The sacrificing of a cow in Koinadugu town is also a symbol of cleansing, whereby the shedding of the blood of the cow represents the washing away of sins and past evils of not only the perpetrators, but also of the town as a whole. These ceremonies are really taken seriously because it is a part of their tradition.

At the end of my field work however, I found out that even though traditional rituals do play a role in the re-integration of ex-combatants; but they are not as important for one's re-integration as I thought. For the full re-integration of an ex-combatant, more is needed, because traditional rituals are just part of it. The process of reconciliation and re-integration of ex-combatants and other war perpetrators varies from community to community. In the Kailahun district where I spent most of my field work period, the traditional reconciliation ceremonies are just part of the re-integration process. The ceremonies are taken as symbolical and a first step of the re-integration process of the particular ex-combatant involved. But, for ex-combatants that have gone through the traditional reconciliation ceremonies to be fully accepted by their victims and their communities, they must go back to their victims privately and settle the scores with the victims' family. In other words, after asking for forgiveness from the victims' family during the traditional rituals, the ex-combatant must be willing to return to that family (or families) privately to continue the process of her acceptance and forgiveness. This is evident in Samba's visit to Malema village. The sister of the man Samba killed was very upset that Samba never came back after the traditional reconciliation ceremony in 2008 to 'settle the peace' with her family. She was also not pleased with the fact that Samba waited two years before he paid his first visit to her. This thus suggests that traditional rituals are not enough for the re-integration process of an ex-combatant, because one can go through it and is still not accepted in his/her society. This thus falsifies my first research question.

Re-integration (Re-visited)

It is wise to take another look at re-integration in the context of this thesis after the realisation that social re-integration need more than just a traditional reconciliation ritual. Thus, the term *re-integration of ex-combatants* is somehow a peculiar one. It suggests that the ex-combatants need to be supported and equipped to make their re-entry to peaceful society a successful one. Ex-combatants face a number of challenges when re-integrating into civilian society. Some lack the necessary skills and education to secure jobs and thus have no source of income and no guarantee of securing the basic amenities. Therefore the success of re-integration depends to a large extent on the support ex-combatants receive from their families and communities.

The way Samba and other ex-combatants have interacted and re-established social relations in the community they now live in, has been extensively described and analyzed in the previous chapters. However, Samba, faces a typical re-integration challenge since he is injured and is

almost totally dependent on his brother and maternal family. Even though his job is to take care of his brother's shop, yet he has no income of his own. Even if he eventually succeeds in becoming a member of the SINAVA agricultural club, his capability to re-integrate into the labour force as a farmer is hampered because of his disability. It is a fact that he is accepted by his maternal family; but he still has a long way to go with his paternal family and the family of the man he killed as shown in previous paragraphs. It is evident that it is Samba that strives hard for his community's forgiveness and acceptance. The community does not reach out to him; he is the one trying to reach out to it. The community can only reciprocate when they see his willing. The question thus arises: has he really re-integrated?

In general, the ideal objective of the re-integration of an ex-combatant would be that they shift socially and culturally into other social identities that facilitate their insertion into bonding networks with the potential for linkage, or that the connotation and meaning of being an ex-combatant is positively renegotiated in the community. The former option addresses the structural dimension of social networks and identities; the latter relates to the cognitive dimension containing perspectives and attitudes. Samba is a unique example. It may become clear from this example that the role of the individual is one of an actor, making his or her agency intelligible within this fabric of social relations. Hence, people are not being reintegrated but they reintegrate themselves into their different societies. Therefore, in order for ex-combatants to re-integrate, they must acclimatise to the new social structure, including the norms and laws of the community they live in. Such acclimatisation requires an un-learning of violent behaviour and learning how to face difficulties and social conflicts in a non-violent manner. The community cannot do that for them; they have to do it for themselves.

Acceptance

It is really difficult to say if ex-combatants are accepted by all inhabitants living in their communities. Likewise, it is almost impossible to use words to describe one's emotions. However, victims and perpetrators living in Dodo town have accepted the fact that they must live with each other in some way in the same community. There are several situations in my data that show that ex-combatants in Dodo are accepted.

To start with, there is no doubt that Samba's maternal family in Dodo accepts him more than his paternal family in Jojoima where he was shunned and ostracised. In Dodo, he is put in charge of his brother's shop. That is a position of trust. He has a very good relationship with other inhabitants in the town. People come to him for help. All these were shown in the previous chapter. On my second day in Dodo, Samba's brother had a family 'sara.'²¹ Here was where I first saw Samba's interaction with not only members of his family, but also with the heads and other members of the town. I got to learn later that the *sara* was done as an offering to God and the ancestors for the protection of Samba's brother's family. This is a ceremony where family, close friends and town elders come together, pray and then eat together in the same bowls. It is a symbol of love, friendship and togetherness and people who are invited to these communal ceremonies are trusted and are very close to the family concerned. The fact that Samba was involved in this event showed the level of acceptance that his family had gone through, because being a member of a family does not mean an automatic invitation to a family 'sara'. As my field work progressed and I got to know my informants more, I realised that I recognised three other ex-combatants that were also present at the 'sara'.

Some people in Dodo however, see acceptance as a grudging process. For example, they feel that God has punished Samba enough and now God is giving him a new chance. According to one inhabitant, even though Samba hurt him during the war, now, there is no reason to be afraid of him because he is in a better position than Samba:

“He came here with a group of rebels and took our wives to the farm and forced them to do hard labour. They used our wives to harvest all our crops; all our rice. Whilst they were in the farm, they were also abused. See, that is my wife sitting over there. She will tell you... Right now, I am better off than Samba. I have my farm and I can work. God has punished him a lot. That foot (referring to Samba's injured foot) is one big punishment. The fact that he is alive shows that God has given him a second chance. So if God has forgiven him, who am I not to forgive him? If God had not forgiven him he would have died of that injury...”

²¹ A traditional food sacrifice.

However the process of acceptance takes a different turn when we leave Dodo and go to Madina, the village where the sister of Samba's victim lives. Here we see that even though she welcomed Samba (with water) but the outcome of his visit did not exactly show that she has whole heartedly accepted or forgiven him. With regards to my second research question, this thus brings to light that acceptance is a process and relies strongly on time. The fact that Samba lives in Dodo, make it easier for him to be accepted; just as the saying goes "time heals all wounds." He is seen every day, they buy from him in the shop and he interacts with them.



Figure 5. Samba asking for forgiveness from family of victim

On the other hand, Samba does not live in Madina. So his presence is not felt, nor is he notices in that village and in the Malema Chiefdom as a whole. Since his traditional reconciliation ceremony in 2008, he seldom visits the village and two years later was when he eventually visited the family of one of his victims. So it makes it really difficult for interaction between Samba and the victim's family and also difficult for the family to start feeling forgiveness or acceptance. I asked the sister of the victim how she is feeling now that she saw Samba again after two years. She said that even though there have been numerous sensitisation for forgiveness, the fact that she saw Samba now brought back memories of her brother and memories of his killer. "Nothing we do can bring him back... but it is hard. I will never forget" she said. I did not get a direct answer from her, but I got a sense of her feelings of hurt and her almost rejection, to Samba's plea for forgiveness. This is illustrated in figure 5, which is a picture extracted from a sequence in my Master's film. People are transformed into social and cultural actors through interactive relations with their social and cultural

environment. Not only does this context infiltrate their daily life experiences but, through agency, individuals reproduce and transform social structure and culture at the same time. It is precisely in this interaction provided by agency that space is created for negotiation of the form and content of social and cultural identities. I would therefore conclude that acceptance is possible but is a process that takes time because it is closely tied with (if not completely dependent on) interaction.

Coping Strategies

This third research question mainly deals with the inhabitants of Dodo town. During fieldwork, I discovered that together, they have developed several coping strategies that enable them to live together peacefully. Firstly, there are disco jam sessions that they call reconciliation dances. One example is the Bike Riders Association (BRA) disco jam that was organised while I was there. If one wants to get around in one of the provincial towns in Sierra Leone that are too small to make a car taxi profitable and too large to cross on foot, it is common to call for an '*okada*', a motorbike taxi driven by young men, many of whom are known to be former rebels. During field work I did not get any data that confirms that some of the '*okada*' riders are ex-combatants so I cannot confirm that there are ex-combatants who are members of BRA. One can sense the excitement in the town because dances like this do not happen often in Dodo. The shop was buzzing with customers wanting to buy all kinds of things. Talking to one of the customers who came to buy a set of shaving blades, he said that dances like these are considered reconciliation dances, because it is an opportunity for almost everybody in the town to meet at one common social gathering and have a good time, regardless of who you are or have been in the past. Jam sessions like these are organised at least once a month; each month in a different part of the chiefdom. They are organised by different clubs in the chiefdom.

A second coping strategy I found out was agriculture. The people of Dodo as with the rest of the Kailahun district are farmers. Driving into Kailahun, there is a signboard that reads: "Welcome to Kailahun. The soil is our gold." Thus it made perfect sense to me when I found out that SINAVA is an agricultural club made up of both ex-combatants and non-ex-combatants. This is a very unique way of re-integrating ex-combatants into their communities. Members of SINAVA engage in farming and other agricultural activities as their main source of livelihood. After they have harvested their crops, they sell them and part of their profits

goes towards, loan or micro-credit to members of the group. This gives members, especially the female members, some form of financial independence which enables them to do things on their own without asking their husbands for money. Members of the club also work in farms owned by other people in the town. For example, the town Chief employs the group to help out in his farm, especially during the pre-planting process of clearing and burning of the farm. This does not only generate extra money for the club, but it also boosts up the self esteem of its members, because the chief is not afraid to employ them [ex-combatants] to work in his farm.

Samba is not a part of this club; but he very much wants to be a part of it. I noticed this by the way he was talking to the SINAVA chairman during his dialogue with him. Here we see the play of social capital and power relations. Social identities are often connected to access to resources and assets in the broadest sense (Jenkins 1996: 39). The positions in the social landscape that social identities represent are therefore not neutral. The relationship between these positions is one of power distribution and the cultural content frequently serves to support such power relations. Samba admitted to me that even though he is very happy in Dodo and he is living and doing things in common with his family and members of his community, he does not own anything of his own. He sells in his brother's shop; he does not own it. If he needs anything from the shop he does not just take it, he has to ask his brother. He gets enough food (from his brother's kitchen) but he would like to be his own man and not depend on anyone. Thus if he becomes a member of SINAVA, he will get the opportunity to get loans or micro-credit to make him a little bit financial independent, which is one step further for him to become an independent man. His situation as compared to that of his girlfriend is quite different. His girlfriend is more self-sufficient. She is a qualified nurse and midwife and works in the Chieftom's Health Centre in Baiwala, two miles from Dodo. This means that she is more independent than Samba. So this hunger to be his own man and be self-sufficient is important to him because he wants to be the one with the financial control in their relationship, especially when it comes to their children.

A third coping strategy I found out was religion or belief systems to put it differently. Dodo is a very religious town with 90% of its inhabitants Muslims. Samba's whole family is Muslim. However, Samba is a Christian. In the previous chapter I discussed Sambas choice in choosing to identify himself as a Christian even though his whole family is Muslim. For Dodo town as a whole however, religion, Islam to be precise plays a vital role in their everyday

lives. The Imam told me that when people were returning to their homes in Dodo after the war, there was no Mosque. He said he later sensitized the town and then the whole community started contributing every week when they go to Juma Prayers until they got enough to build a mosque. He also told me that when ex-combatants started returning to the town, he took that opportunity to preach to them and encouraging them to go to Juma Prayers to pray and ask Allah for forgiveness. He said that was how it started and now every ex-combatant living in Dodo (with the exception of Samba) goes to Mosque and is a fervent Muslim. This, I had the opportunity to witness myself when I filmed in the mosque.

Another way that the people of Dodo community cope with each other is to sit together and discuss issues. Every day, I found a small group of usually men, sitting under a tree or somewhere else discussing, sometimes very heated discussions. One such discussion was the one on gender that took place at the shop. Mustapha's house (where I stayed) that housed the shop is directly opposite the mosque. Thus after each daily prayer people come over to sit and chat. Usually among this crowd is the town chief. In the evenings, before and after the last prayer for the day is usually when most people come over to the shop and just sit and talk with Samba and others. Thus the shop is a vantage point in the village and in my opinion, it is a place where 'you see and be seen.' It is the heart of interaction in the town, a territory that accepts all type of people, with no boundaries.

6. Conclusion

This study has looked at interaction and reintegration as dynamic processes that revolve around the re-establishment of relations between an individual and his social networks that involves a negotiation of social and cultural identities. With this study I hope to have shown how qualitative anthropological research can contribute to our understanding of interaction and reintegration as social and cultural processes in all their diversities. Thus, to conclude, I will attempt to think through how my ideas and hypotheses of this study have developed through researching the processes of interaction and re-integration as in fact, the process of the re-establishment of social relations.

Data collected for this thesis has shown that re-integration in practice is a big challenge for ex-combatants. During the war, combatants identify themselves as part of a social unit; one that accepts them as fighters and gives them some kind of status and an 'important' title. Samba's title was "Junior Rambo." The idea of leaving that social circle is both threatening and scary to combatants, even to those who would prefer to stop fighting, because the circle of combatants is seen as a source of security. Therefore, for a society or community to be able to achieve the social re-integration of its ex-combatants, it must be able to understand the dynamics of the process. That is: integration into the circle of combatants, disintegration from the circle of combatants and then re-integration into one's family and community. During this process, a combatant's identity changes: first from being identified as a combatant into being identified as an ex-combatant (after the process of disarmament and demobilisation). The next stage of a combatant's re-integration then is through his/her interaction with his/her people and community. This is important because it serves as the beginning of the end of his/her bond with the circle of combatants. Based on that interaction, the combatant's identity changes again; this time from an ex-combatant to a pastor for example, as is the case of Samba my main informant. This thus supports one of my hypotheses that coping as an ex-combatant means the breaking down of the existing bonding relations that one has to a rebel or combatant group.

Ex-combatants also re-integrate in the interaction with their context; and as my second hypothesis pointed out, the longer that interaction, the easier it is for the wounds of hurt and hate to be healed. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I must confess that my main informant's character really confused me. His identity has been drastically changed as compared to almost

three years ago when I first met him. I found it difficult to comprehend how someone that was once branded and known to his family and community as a rebel and a killer is now getting along so well with them. The answer however is that he has lived among his (maternal) family and community for so long that they do not consider him as an ex-combatant anymore. Time has indeed helped healed the wounds of the inhabitants of Dodo through Samba's everyday contact and interaction with them. The same applies for the other ex-combatants living in the town. As my field work progressed however, I realised that it was really not that easy for him and that he just wants to forget certain episodes that happened during the war some of which he was reluctant to share with me.

Long after my fieldwork, during my final weeks in the editing room, as I worked on the completion of my documentary film, I couldn't help but realise that Samba's character has changed in front of my very own eyes without even realising it: from that of an ex-combatant to that of being a strong dynamic person who can convert an unbeliever to God through his charismatic preaching. When my supervisor asked me how I viewed my project after editing my film, I replied: *"It is as if I have turned an evil person into an angel."* As a Sierra Leonean, after studying Samba for almost three years, time has indeed healed even the anger and hurt of the war that I had been carrying around. I am at this point admitting that Samba's identity as a 'changed' man who has been 'born anew' created such an impact in me that unintentionally, he ended up being portrayed in my documentary film as 'the good guy'. What role did I play then, in his identity package? He did not consider me as a 'pumwi', but as (in his words) "a highly educated little girl" who came to do a research about his life. This gave him a confidence of some sort when he moves around and interacts in Dodo. It is as if my interaction with him gave him some amount of legitimacy among his kin.

I got a surprised telephone call from Samba sometime in April 2011 as I was finishing this thesis. He told me that he is now living in Jojoima (his father's hometown) and he will stay there until the end of the year. This is a big, positive step for him, considering the fact that he was shunned and rejected by his paternal family. He told me:

"...It is time for me to move forward with my father's relatives. Out of Sight, out of mind. But if they see me every day, they will be thinking about me and it will be easier for both them and me, just like how it was when I was living in Dodo."

I asked him who is looking after his brother's shop now that he is away and he said:

“Mustapha is doing it himself. One of his wives sits in the shop when he has to go to Freetown. I am coming back in December. I will take over when I come back. But for now, this [meaning staying in Joijoma] is important to me.”

The discussion that there is still little evidence about the factors that explain whether individuals can successfully re-integrate after a conflict situation is still very much alive. However, the fact remains that there is the need to convert combatants who pursue their objectives through force, to civilians who pursue their objectives through other means. The ex-combatants in Dodo are now farmers. The picture on the cover of this thesis shows an ex-combatant sharpening his tools to go to the farm. The tools in that picture symbolises the past, present and future of these ex-combatants. During the war, these tools were used by ex-combatants to mutilate, amputate and cause destruction and mayhem. Now, ex-combatants use these same tools to cultivate crops in their farms. Thus, even the identity of the tools has been changed. The group of people using these tools now identify them with a completely different situation, that of farming. Instead of cultivating terror, they now cultivate a new life of hope. Thus, the extent that an ex-combatant gains acceptance from family members, friends and their community as a whole through formal or informal processes of reconciliation and acceptance, communities are in a better position to re-integrate former soldiers and facilitate their reinsertion into civilian life.

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