

Chapter 9

Breaks with the Past: Conflict, Displacement, Resettlement and the Evolution of Forest

Socio-Ecologies in Sierra Leone¹

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Abstract

In contrast to media fixation on the physical violence of recent West African conflicts, scholars have emphasized the lasting effects of massive population displacements. In Sierra Leone, for example, roughly 2 million of a total 3.8 million people had to migrate internally and several hundred thousand more fled to neighboring countries. As many have noted, both the experiences of those who were displaced and later returned home, as well as the dramatic shifts in population geography caused by those who did not, have had considerable impacts on important social issues including ethnic relations, identity formation, (macro)economic patterns and medical services provision. What remain less well understood, however, are the effects of these disruptions and reconfigurations on rural livelihoods and, by extension, on the (re)production of human-environmental relationships across broad swathes of landscape. These are of critical importance to processes of post-war stabilization and reconstruction, since most of Africa's mainly agrarian populations rely almost entirely on the productivity of their immediate landscapes for subsistence and small-scale commercial production. Focusing on Sierra Leone, in this chapter we draw on extensive field data to describe how rural residents' responses to both the vagaries of intense and chaotic conflict as well as the unstable conditions of peacebuilding have produced a considerable transformation of people-forest relationships across the country.

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Introduction

In contrast to media fixation on the immediate brutalities of the Mano River War(s)² in Sierra Leone (1991–2001) and Liberia (1989–1996; 1999–2003), a key emphasis in scholarly work has been the equally important and in many ways more lasting disruptions produced by war-induced displacement of more than half of the two national populations (Chimni 2002; Crisp 2000). In Sierra Leone, for example, an estimated 2 million of its then 3.8 million people were forced to migrate internally and several hundred thousand more fled to neighboring Guinea and Liberia (Norwegian Refugee Council 2002). While many people endured such exile for several years, many more abandoned their old lives, resettling themselves in new parts of the country (Binns and Maconachie, 2005; Maconachie, Binns, Tengbe and Johnson 2006). As a number of scholars have noted, both the experiences of those who were displaced and later returned, as well as the dramatic shifts in population geography caused by those who did not, have had considerable effects on a wide range of important issues. A range of studies have illuminated the effects of these dynamics on various aspects of national life, such as social relations and identity formation, (macro)economic patterns and medical services provision among others (Binns and Maconachie 2005; Grant 2005; Maconachie et al. 2006; Medeiros 2007).

Much less well understood, however, are the effects these experiences and population flows have had on how rural people have gotten back to the business of making a living and, by extension, the socio-political and material characteristics of human-environmental relationships across the majority of Sierra Leone and Liberia's landscapes (Maconachie et al. 2006). In the post-war context such concerns have been largely obscured from view by more dramatic immediate concerns such as disease control, fiscal collapse and electoral violence. Nonetheless, they have been and remain critically important as the two countries move forward with their self-reconstruction since the majority agrarian populations rely almost entirely on immediate forest and savanna environs for subsistence and small-scale commercial livelihood production. During the conflicts and their

² This term is used by Danny Hoffman (2011) to illustrate the close connections between the broader political economies of the individual Liberian and Sierra Leone civil wars.

aftermath, rural residents (displaced or otherwise) have had to formulate new livelihood strategies not only in new environments, but also in considerably changed social and economic contexts (Maconachie et al. 2006).

Focusing on the Sierra Leonean case, in this chapter we draw on extensive field data to describe how rural residents' responses to the vagaries of chaotic conflict and the unstable conditions of peacebuilding have produced a considerable transformation of people-forest relationships across the country. We argue that the civil war and its fallout, by producing a range of novel necessities, experiences and opportunities, created the political and economic space for new forest livelihood activities to be established and expanded. We contextualize this socio-ecological dynamic in the broader political economy of the colonial and postcolonial Sierra Leone nation state, illustrating how this transformation has challenged notions of the state's centralized hegemony in forest governance, that have been prevalent since the colonial era.

Following this introduction, the remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. In the next section we provide a brief overview of Sierra Leone's political and economic history demonstrating how formal forestry governance in Sierra Leone was (and continues to be) couched in a colonialist mindset focused on "rationalized" large-scale timber exploitation. Building on this analysis, the third section moves on to describe the Sierra Leonean civil war (1991–2001) and its aftermath, explaining how it produced new socio-political spaces in which novel forms of human-forest relations could emerge. In the fourth section we analyze current dynamics in the evolution of Sierra Leone's new forest socio-ecologies at the grass-roots level and the tensions between these and the centralizing ambitions of the Forestry Division. Finally, in the fifth section we offer a summary and concluding thoughts.

Origins of the "Rationalising" Urge: Colonialism and the Birth of Formal Forestry in Sierra Leone

The modern state of Sierra Leone owes its earliest existence to a late-eighteenth-century experimental attempt, partly initiated by the British Government, to provide a form of redress to former slaves from England, Eastern Canada and the Caribbean (Braidwood 1994) by "repatriating" them to a small Colony founded in the Freetown Peninsula. While for some time Imperial ambitions were limited to

this small holding, during the 1890s “scramble for Africa” the British annexed a deep and broad swathe of adjoining territory, expanding colonial hegemony to include the “Protectorate”—a domain largely matching the current borders of the country. As the colonial adventure was intended to be profitable (or at least self-supporting) (Kaindaneh 1993; Meredith 1986), however, the motive for this act was less to acquire territory per se than to establish control over (and increase) the extraction of valuable commodities for the benefit of the imperial core (Munro and Hiemstra-van der Horst 2011). The formalization and institutionalization of natural resource exploitation for export was therefore a key focus of the Colonial Government during the early 1900s, pursued through the establishment of managing bureaucracies (Akiwumi 2006a, 2006b; Munro and Hiemstra-van der Horst 2011), such as the Sierra Leonean Forestry Department founded in 1911.

At root, the organization and operations of the Forestry Department were premised on two key systems of ideas. The first was an overtly racist and thorough-going distrust of native environmental competence, which itself was deeply linked to a systematic misreading of the Sierra Leonean landscape through the lenses of pseudo-scientific ecological notions such as “succession,” “equilibrium” and (deforestation-induced) desiccation. In essence, the colonial perspective held that the agricultural practices of the indigenous population had destroyed (and continued to destroy) the tropical moist forests which, it was believed, had once covered the majority of the country (Fairhead and Leach 1998, 2000; Munro and van der Horst forthcoming). The second was a particular ideal of professionalized forest management based largely on a German cameralist model of forestry practice that had been developed during the 1800s. This approach was predicated on the simplification and rationalization of arboreal resources for easy and efficient economic exploitation by separating forests from people, altering their ecologies to enhance production of higher-priced species, and increasing harvesting rates with mechanized industrial equipment (Munro 2015). In simple terms, the objective was to manufacture forests that were easier to count, manipulate, measure, assess and hence to exploit for maximum yield and profits (Neumann 2005). Indeed, the very establishment of forestry departments in Sierra Leone and the rest of Africa at the start of the twentieth century was itself considerably a product of a broadly-based belief that the continent’s forests were in immediate danger of destruction by the local population and required urgent intervention by rational, scientific—and of

course European—professionals. The appropriation of control was thus justified within the moral-economic framework of colonization (Endfield and Nash 2002) and the sequestration of resource-rich areas was easily framed as a beneficent gesture protecting ignorant locals from themselves.

Despite its urgent initial pursuit and the “civilizing” rhetoric under which it paraded, however, the colonization process in Sierra Leone that began with the Scramble for Africa in the 1890s proved neither quick nor socio-politically motivated but rather a protracted attempt to subsume the territory, its resources and its peoples under the hegemony of imperial capitalism. As Hoogvelt and Tinker argue, colonial-era exploitation was expressly designed to feed capitalist development in the imperial homeland, not to develop capitalist economies in the colonial periphery, and was:

[n]ot, therefore, just exploitative, but super exploitative. It was rapacious rather than reproductive, bent on quick returns rather than long-term exchange. It was destructive of the soil and resources, yet failing to provide alternative forms of livelihood. It was content to work in makeshift technological and capitalist enclaves, allowing itself to be supported by the surrounding social formation, rather than attempting to change or improve it. (Hoogvelt and Tinker 1978: 73)

On the whole, then, the colonial period was characterized by—or indeed predicated on—nearly wholesale exploitation of the colonial hinterland for maximum profitability at the least possible cost by a system in which Sierra Leoneans (like many other peoples) were effectively made to pay for their own colonization.

Despite the economic and strategic importance of the Sierra Leonean territory, however, the British authorities never achieved truly systematic control over the country, partly due to the relatively short period of formal colonization (1896 to 1961) and the distraction of the First World War which drew Imperial attention and investment largely elsewhere. In this context the colonial Forestry Department struggled, particularly since its potential profitability was a much longer-term and less lucrative prospect than the opportunities for filling imperial coffers offered by the agricultural and mining sectors.

Between 1921 and 1941, for example, investment in agriculture was increased by 400 percent while expenditure on forestry remained stagnant (Blood 1941) with the result that during this period Sierra Leone was heavily reliant on imported timber to meet domestic needs. Importantly, the Second

World War offered a strategic opportunity for the Department which secured for itself four large-scale sawmills with the rationale of contributing supplies to meet the timber demand of the war effort (Cline-Cole 1993; Munro and Hiemstra-van der Horst 2011). When the conflict ended the Department retained the mills and attempted to transform itself from a peripheral bureaucracy draining the colonial treasury into the progenitor of an efficient industry producing enough timber for domestic needs. As one observer exclaimed at the time: “[s]awmilling, which was an outcome of wartime necessity ha[d] come to stay” (Pelly 1952: 10).

These notable developments notwithstanding, at independence in 1961 the institutionalization of formal industrial forestry was still very much an unfinished project. British investment had been haphazard and self-serving and offered little to the rural majority of Sierra Leoneans still dependent on direct access to land to meet the bulk of their daily needs. Still, the role of natural resources in the socio-economic development of the country had been profoundly altered (Colson 1971) and the lives of rural Sierra Leoneans had on the whole become more linked and vulnerable to the vagaries of volatile national and global markets. As a consequence, the independent government that took over Sierra Leone did not inherit a stable polity, but instead a fragmented one that was in many ways coming apart at the seams (Phillips 1989). Despite its efforts to the contrary, the British Administration in Freetown had always been reliant on financial support from the colonial office in London, and the governance structure inherited at liberation was financially unsustainable (Harris 2014). Nevertheless, in line with the modernization discourse of the time, industrialization remained a principal concern for the postcolonial Sierra Leonean Government, as was the pride associated with the idea of new nationhood, which mandated spending on prestige projects to impress visiting foreign officials and prospective investors (Siddle and Swindell 1990). As a result, promoting the development of a more formalized and technologically sophisticated forestry sector remained an important focus in the postcolonial era. This effort was led in both policy and practice by the state itself which directly conducted the majority of large-scale logging operations through the centrally-owned Forest Industries Corporation (FIC). By 1968 the FIC had become one of the most prominent industrial actors in the country (outside of the mining sector) employing around 1,000 people (*Sierra Leone Trade Journal* 1968).

Just as during the late colonial period, however, the promising initial successes of the nascent industrialized forestry sector in Sierra Leone were again relatively short lived, in this case due to broad-based political-economic decline. Already in the 1960s there were problems of political insecurity—notably marked by three *coups d'état*—as the country attempted to adjust to democratic governance. Although stability was increased in the 1970s, it came in the form of an authoritarian regime headed by Siaka Probyn Stevens whose pursuit of a “state hegemonic project” (Zack-Williams 1999: 125) gathered pace with the reconstitution of the country as a single party democracy in 1978 (Abraham 1993). Determined to consolidate and maintain his power, Stevens targeted any and all forms of opposition using a combination of cunning manipulation, intimidation and violence. At the same time, he constructed a “shadow state” (Reno, 1995), building a neopatrimonial network of personalized support paid for with wealth looted from Sierra Leone’s rich mineral extraction industry (Bøås 2001; Richards 1996).

The implications of these developments for the forestry sector were significant, changing the nature of both the formal timber production industry and the Department charged with its oversight in ways that remain salient in the present day. On one hand, the autonomy and capacity of the Department itself were reduced quite dramatically by the patterns of Stevens’ rule and his increasing focus on mineral—and particularly diamond—wealth. In order to consolidate his grip on power, Stevens increasingly centralized the political and economic functions of the state in the capital city of Freetown, using the state and its resources to distribute patronage to his cronies while the rest of the country was neglected (Riddell, 1985, 2005). Forestry was no exception, and the authority of the Department in this period became highly concentrated in the Chief Conservator of Forests, a figure tied by personalized neopatrimonial connections to the president, ensuring “that the Forestry [Department] literally spoke with a ‘single voice’ in policy formulation” (Grainger and Konteh 2007: 54). At the same time, however, the Department’s relevance waned as mineral resources, especially, diamonds, proved to be much more congenial to realizing profits with little state investment (Forde 2011).

An intriguing aspect of the forestry sector’s decline during this period is its paradoxical relationship with the central state which both promoted it and allowed it to sink into ruin. In a number

of ways—and particularly earlier on—Stevens’ government exhibited considerable enthusiasm for commercial forestry. In 1975, for example it succeeded in negotiating establishment of the Sierra Leone Timber Industries (SILETI), a timber company co-owned by the state and operated by an Italian enterprise, set up to exploit forests in the south-east of the country. The company was given a 25 year logging concession, however, only just eight years later the regime reversed its position and “things fell apart.” The Government accused SILETI of engaging in “the unauthorised felling of trees by using forged stamps to mark trees, ... smuggl[ing] logs out of [the country] ... via neighbouring Liberia and paying no royalties to the government even on logs legally felled” (Tuboku-Metzger 1983: 241). SILETI’s concession (due to expire in 2000) was cancelled in 1983 and the company was expelled from the country. Moreover, the government-owned FIC fared little better during the same period. Despite Stevens’ early emphasis on increasing exports, by the late-1970s the Corporation was in dire financial straits. In order to revive it, in 1978, the government negotiated with the UK government for a Le 3 million loan (around US\$2.8 million) to purchase logging trucks and a new sawmill production line. As well, that same year the West German government was prevailed upon to provide the FIC with 30 million DM (around US\$14.2 million) for the construction of a new timber complex (Office of the President, 1980; Tuboku-Metzger 1983). Despite these interventions, however, due to subsequent neglect the FIC fell quickly back into a state of decay and logging operations came to a halt in 1989 largely due to the inoperability of its sawmill which had fallen into disrepair. Overall, with the demise of SILETI and FIC, by the early 1990s only a few small-scale logging operations mainly run by wealthy Lebanese families were still operational in the country (Hartley 1992; Leach 1990, 1994).

Ruptures and Reconfigurations: Civil War, Displacement and Political-Ecological Shifts

The 1980s were ultimately the beginning of the end for the Siaka Stevens’ patrimonial government, and marked the beginning of a slide into chaotic conflict that would prove transformative for the country. In 1985 Stevens, citing “fatigue,” stepped down as president installing the erstwhile head of the army, Brigadier Joseph Saidu Momoh, as his successor (Alie 1990; Davies 2000; Zack-Williams 1999). Momoh however, inherited a situation of increasing economic and political disintegration (Kpundeh 1994; Luke and Riley 1989) which, lacking the charisma and political nous of his

predecessor, he failed to contain and by the early 1990s the country was ripe for conflict (Zack-Williams 1999). The national debt rose at a pace still more dramatic than that of the previous decade while corruption became truly pervasive, spreading throughout the furthest reaches of the state apparatus (Keen 2005). In this context the political and economic disenfranchisement of the country's populace—especially rural youth—during the 1970s and 1980s had created widespread frustration and anger (Abdullah 1998; Kandeh 1999). In 1991 hostilities spilled across the eastern border from neighboring Liberia creating the necessary catalyst for conflict and alluvial diamond fields provided the necessary resources to finance its perpetuation.

The war itself (1991–2001) was a complex affair involving a variety of combatants including *sobel*s (soldiers colluding with and/or sometimes posing as rebels in strategic areas), foreign mercenaries, village level militias, West African peacekeeping forces and—during its later stages—British troops (Abdullah 2004; Gberie 2005; Zack-Williams 1997). More importantly, however, it was also intensely disruptive and violent. Over the course of its 10 year duration more than 50,000 people were killed, many more were maimed, raped or otherwise violated and over half of the population was displaced in a torrent of violence that left no Sierra Leonean unaffected (Hoffman 2011; Keen 2005; Richards 1996). Importantly, the rebel/sobel onslaught also caused major destruction to the governance regime, shattering vestigial illusions of central state control over the country—not least the forests of the rural hinterland, many of which provided cover for rebel bases and movements (Richards 1996, 2005). The Forestry Department, already in decline for the previous two decades, saw its activities nearly completely halted: any notions of reviving the FIC were thoroughly quashed and during the latter part of the 1990s its staff could hardly even conduct field trips to areas outside of Freetown. Moreover, at times the capital itself was not safe from the ravages of the conflict and during its occupation by the rebels in 1999, Prince Palmer, then Head of the Forestry Department, was killed (Munro 2015). Largely abandoned by the state and left to fend for themselves, rural residents in many areas across the country took matters into their own hands, building networks of cooperation for provisioning and defense famously exemplified by the rise of the Kamajors and other ethnic militias that emerged to (quite successfully) challenge the Revolutionary United Front (Rebel) menace (Hoffman 2007, 2011; Zack-Williams 1997). Sierra Leone's forest was often allegorized as an actor

within these conflicts. As Paul Richards notes, the rebels presented themselves as “bush revolutionaries” revolting against an urban (patrimonial) elite and many protagonists of the war viewed it as a crisis in which the “bush” came to “town” (phrased in Krio: *lepet dcn kam na tcn*—the leopard has entered the city) (Richards 1996). Equally, the civil militias such as the kamajors who were considered to have had power over bush paths, as well as the secrets and medicine (*hale*) of the forest in their societies. Through this unique access to the resources of the forests (physically and symbolically) the kamajors could mobilize power outside the usual channels to develop a village-level defense (Hoffman 2011). Historically, the kamajors protected their villages from the various animal, human, and extra-human forces of the forest (bush devils, wild animals) (Hoffman, 2007); and, to an extent, protecting villages against bush revolutionaries was seen as an extension of this earlier role.

At the same time as the ever tenuous authority of the state was falling to pieces, the relationship between the Freetown urban core and the marginalized rural periphery was also being considerably disrupted. In this a key factor was the massive influx of rural residents that produced acute changes in Freetown’s structure and population (Munro 2009). Until 1997, Freetown was relatively insulated from the excesses of the conflict and was generally seen as a haven of safety from rebel atrocities. As a result, large numbers of provincial people driven from their homes by the war relocated to the capital and its surroundings, increasing the number of its residents as much as threefold (Abdullah 2002; Boadi, Kuitunen, Raheem and Hanninen 2005). This major shift in population geography was to prove critically transformative for the forestry sector, creating foundations for new markets, commodity chain networks and livelihoods for the generally cash-poor rural majority. For one thing—and particularly in the later context of post-war recovery and reconstruction—the arrival of so many new migrants created a major upsurge in demand for materials to supply housing construction and household energy needs creating the basis for effectively new industries. As well, they also brought with them the social means by which to organize these novel economies: close ties to their villages of origin provided the basis for the establishment of strategic trade networks linking rural producers of lumber, firewood and charcoal to urban markets where demand was rising rapidly. The establishment of refugee and internally displaced peoples (IDP) camps augmented these patterns. Located both on the outskirts of Freetown and in the east of the

country, the camps essentially became new towns and many functioned for over a decade while others evolved into permanent settlements. Growing rapidly, they became key sites of economic activity and trade in firewood became an important micro-industry (Leach 1992; Sargent 1993) while sales of building poles received a considerable boost from the demand for refugee shelters (Alieu 2001; Munro and van der Horst 2012a).

Beneath the more obvious patterns of state disintegration and the relatively simple dynamics of supply and demand, however, deeper processes were also at work that caused fundamental shifts in the relationship between rural Sierra Leoneans and the forest and savanna landscapes that most call home. In essence, through the processes of displacement and resettlement, the civil war and its aftermath exposed large numbers of rural people to new technologies and ways of thinking about forest-based products and livelihood strategies. Certainly the rapid post-war growth in urban material needs provided a vibrant market for rural goods encouraging a rapid increase in their production. Nonetheless, it was largely the conflict itself and the strategies of state and donor agencies for immediate post-war rehabilitation efforts which produced technological and ontological shifts transforming forests from *sources* of micro-scale subsistence into *resources* for commercially-oriented production. The now national-scale commercialization of firewood and building poles, for example, was actually largely a product of experiences in the IDP camps where many displaced rural residents began for the first time to think of these normally subsistence products as tradeable commodities (Munro and van der Horst 2012a, 2012b).

Still more illustrative, however, is the dramatic rise in charcoal production and trade which emerged during the conflict and has since grown rapidly into a notable industry. Until the mid-1990s, charcoal was a largely peripheral and uncommoditized product—consumed mainly by rural blacksmiths, and of marginal importance relative to firewood which was used as a household fuel—and a material which few Sierra Leoneans knew how to produce.³ During the civil war, however, a variety of population movements resulted in technological transfers that gave birth to a new

³ The charcoal used by blacksmiths differs from cooking charcoal. They are made through different processes, with the blacksmith charcoal producing smaller charcoal pieces that produce a more intense heat.

commercial subsector that ultimately revolutionized urban household energy markets across the country. In the context of relocation to IDP camps near Freetown, displacement over the borders to Liberia and Guinea and interaction with Liberian refugees (and in one case Liberian prisoners of war) based in different camps across Sierra Leone, a wide range of people learned both the techniques of charcoal making and its potential profitability from skilled artisanal producers in these areas. Following the end of the war, a great many brought this new knowledge back during resettlement to start production in their home villages. As well, since the war, Guinean traders and semi-nomadic charcoal making teams have stayed in or near many Sierra Leonean villages in the border regions, teaching the trade to a considerable number of people particularly in the north of the country. In the post-war context the results of this revolution have been nothing short of dramatic. Village-level production of charcoal for urban markets has become widespread across many areas of the country, particularly in areas within reach of major transportation arteries. Illustrating the trade's socio-economic importance, residents of charcoal producing villages emphasized in interviews that through it, they had acquired economic freedom, earning enough to marry and set up their own households as well as to buy costly but important items such as motorcycles and other much-desired goods. Indeed, one charcoal trading village encountered during field research was made up entirely of ex-combatants who had established their own settlement after the disarmament program and turned to cooperative charcoal production as an exclusive source of income (Munro and van der Horst 2012a).

Another critical example of these trends is the massive expansion of rural lumber production. Prior to the 1990s, chainsaws were rare in Sierra Leone and used almost exclusively by large commercial timber operations such as FIC and SILETI, while village-level lumber production was modest in scale and based almost exclusively on labor-intensive pit-sawing. Following the end of the civil war, this situation began to change rapidly as a number of developments combined to stimulate the rapid proliferation of chainsaws in the country (Munro and van der Horst 2012a, 2012b). First, as part of the effort to resettle citizens displaced during the conflict, government agencies provided chainsaws to chiefdoms all over the country, training local residents (and notably a fair number of *re-integrated* ex-combatants) in their use, in order to facilitate land clearing and lumber production for the resettlement program. Second, in subsequent years, the government of neighboring Guinea

increasingly cracked down on illegal timber exploitation activities, eventually placing a ban on timber exports. In response, a number of Guinean chainsaw operators migrated to Sierra Leone, taking up residence in Sierra Leone villages and passing on chainsaw milling skills to their host communities. Finally, outbreaks of illegal logging for export in Sierra Leone itself have also contributed significantly to both the proliferation of chainsaws in the country and the ways in which the board production industry has developed. In 2007, a number of Chinese timber merchants crossed the border from Guinea and started making arrangements with northern communities, often providing chainsaws as direct payment for timber (Hiemstra-van der Horst 2011; Hiemstra-van der Horst, Munro, and Batterbury 2011; Munro and van der Horst 2012a). This development not only furthered the dissemination of saws and training in their use for on-site Chain Saw Milling (CSM) of lumber materials, but also illustrated to many rural youths, entrepreneurs (and ex-combatants) the profitability of the practice, in turn stimulating the growth of this informal sub-sector and fostering a high demand for chainsaws in rural areas as well as the near disappearance of pit-sawing operations. Thus the decline in domestic large-scale timber production during the 1980s did not result in a return to high reliance on timber imports for Sierra Leone—instead the formal sector was supplanted by a plethora of small-scale producers operating in off-reserve rural areas across the country who, via complex and varied transportation and trade networks, have rendered the country self-sufficient in timber for the first time since the 1970s (Munro and van der Horst 2012a).

Markets for timber and other forest products have continued to expand in the post-war era, due to continued processes of urbanization and the rebuilding of infrastructure. This has allowed for the continual expansion of trade in firewood and poles and most villages within a few kilometers of a highway or an urban center are involved in the selling these commodities, acquiring an important supplement to agricultural income (Munro and van der Horst 2012a). Moreover, the increase in production capacities has combined with the rapid growth of many urban centers to perpetuate the growth of the charcoal and lumber trades over the past decade. Thus, a wide variety of the political, demographic technological and conceptual shifts produced by the war and its aftermath have now become entrenched in the political-economic structures and functioning of the country as a whole.

Supply chains—while remaining flexible—have become institutionalized and expanded and a nascent process of capitalization has emerged.

Policy vs Praxis: Formality, Informality and Tensions in the New Sierra Leonean Forest Socio-Ecologies

As illustrated by the preceding analysis, the Sierra Leonean civil war and its aftermath have proved both brutally destructive and creatively productive, dismantling the status quo and generating a range of novel necessities, experiences and opportunities leading to important reconfigurations of thinking and practice with respect to forests and the forestry sector. In essence, the shifts and changes described above ultimately created a space of possibility in which the transformation of forest socio-ecologies across Sierra Leone could—and almost inevitably would—take place. The disintegration of formal governance in rural areas, the undermining of agrarian livelihood strategies, mass human displacement and the creation of both new and expanded economic markets all combined to produce a critical political-economic context in which novel rural-urban productive networks could emerge and the nature and role of forests in rural life could be re-imagined. Key to these processes, of course, were technological shifts facilitated by new social relations within novel human networks of knowledge exchange, collaboration and entrepreneurial mobilization.

The result of these disruptions and re-formations has been a national scale shift at the grass-roots level away from the previous externally imposed vision of a formally managed and centrally directed forestry sector to the development of vibrant and spontaneous informal practice that allows for the participation of a wide range of new actors. Rural residents' responses to the vagaries of chaotic conflict and the unstable conditions of peacebuilding have thus produced a considerable transformation of people-forest relationships across the country. These, in turn, are supported and reproduced by new rural-urban political and economic relationships via the emergence of capitalized and (more-or-less) systematized, but also informal, flexible and even (spatially) ephemeral forest product supply networks. This has been facilitated by the emergence of a new political and socio-ecological dispensation in which ongoing population movements and rising urbanization continue to drive the growth and evolution that has not only reshaped forest-society and urban-rural linkages but also spun them away from *de jure* centralized control. The small-scale domestic trading networks of

forest products that emerged during the civil war have been increasingly intensified, institutionalized and capitalized in the post-war era even as state influence over forest management across the country crumbled into near non-existence. In its place a *de facto* process of democratization and localization of socio-ecological governance has begun to emerge despite an adversarial legislative environment that continues to emphasize the importance of reviving centralized bureaucratic control and large-scale industrial timber production.

Indeed, the nascent small-scale commercial forestry industry in Sierra Leone currently sits in significant tension with the orientation, rhetoric and goals of the Forestry Division (née Department)⁴ which is trying to swim against the popular current to re-establish export-oriented forestry in the country and more direct control over the country's forest resources *in toto*. Not long ago, for example, it oversaw both the sale of the FIC's former rights and production infrastructure to a Nigerian company (Munro and van der Horst 2012b) as well as the announcement (though not effective implementation) of a national system of fees and regulations that effectively criminalized small-scale producers (Hiemstra-van der Horst 2011). This orientation, however, is merely an extension of the agency's historical struggle to mold a commercial forestry sector—both domestic and export-oriented—that conforms to its own image of “proper practice” rooted in colonial era perceptions and ideology. While a lively domestic commercial sector did emerge during the civil war it was not one aligned to the model of large-scale, spatially stable and centrally supervised heavy industry envisaged by Sierra Leone's professional foresters. Instead it is informal, mobile, dynamic and conducted by a mosaic of small-scale producers working in complex rural-urban networks effectively beyond the ability of the Division to contain. As a result, the Division has become not the progenitor and stern “parent” of a modern internationally oriented industry but rather little more than a spectator observing with apprehension the development and rapid growth of a spontaneous and vibrant grass-roots driven suite of forest-based production chains delivering much needed simple and low cost materials to domestic markets. In essence, the initiative has shifted considerably from the center to the periphery

⁴ The Forestry Department was renamed the Forestry Division during the 1990s.

as forest-based lives and livelihoods have been reconceived and a new socio-ecological dispensation has emerged.

Conclusion: The Roads Ahead

Despite the relatively dramatic nature of these developments, it is difficult to speculate what the future holds for forestry and its subsectors in Sierra Leone. The transformations produced by the civil war and its aftermath have considerably changed the rules of the game with respect to forest industry and governance but in ways that have raised the concerns and ire of central regulators. Importantly, as the Forestry Division continues to work toward the re-centralization of control, it is increasingly supported both technically and financially by the international community via a range of initiatives tied to the broader Global Forest Governance (GFG) regime (Hiemstra-van der Horst et al. 2011). As progress is made toward implementation of national-level programs under the United Nations' Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation UN-REDD+, the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (EU-FLEGT) program, and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) (although the last has not yet been extended to the forestry sector in Sierra Leone as it has elsewhere, such as in Liberia) it is almost certain that the monitoring and regulatory capacity of the Division will be considerably strengthened (indeed this is a key prerequisite for participation in either of the first two initiatives which are already in development).

At the same time, however, the very nature of the new informal forestry practices and their flexible, ephemeral and diffuse networks makes them extremely unamenable to classic modernist command and control approaches to resource management. Moreover, in line with current discourses of pro-poor development and stakeholder participation these initiatives also come with their own prescriptions for negotiation and resolution of tensions and conflicts within the sector to ensure that lower income and less formally established actors are not unfairly treated or unreasonably disadvantaged. This is a critical consideration in the context of peacebuilding in Sierra Leone where widespread employment—especially for youth—is seen as a critical ingredient for maintaining stability (Peeters, Cunningham, Acharya and Van Adams 2009; Peters 2011). The change in the productivity regime of the forestry sector can therefore be contextualized within the broader shift in Sierra Leone from an externally conditioned formal economic sector (since devastated by the war) to

a more spontaneous informal economic sector (Lahai 2012). As has been noted by Lahai (2012), such a post-war informal economy has been critical to Sierra Leoneans (particularly the youth) striving to carve out pioneering survival strategies. The small-scale productive forest sector has thus created a critical space—not only economically, but also in terms of identity- for communities to occupy in their path towards reconstruction. Therefore, any approach based on either rigid control or simple eradication of the existing charcoal, lumber and other commodity chains is not only impracticable from a capacity perspective, but a political non-starter given the income it provides to a sizeable section of the populace as well as the urgency of broad based social demands for their products. As a result, it seems evident that current pressures strongly favor the evolution of a compromise in which formal central policy and informal peripheral practice will both have to adapt and change meeting somewhere in the middle. How, when and to what extent this may occur, however, remains an open question.

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