

CONCERNING VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILD SOLDIERS
IN SIERRA LEONE

By

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To my Mother and Father—
My mentors, my life

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFRC	Armed Forces Ruling Council
APC	All People's Congress
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOMOG	The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OBHS	Organized Body of Hunting Societies
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SAHO	South African History Online
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UPA	United People's Army

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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My thesis examines images of child soldiers in Sierra Leone, focusing on a series of portraits taken by South African photographer, Guy Tillim, as well as other visual representations from the film *Blood Diamond* and the autobiography *A Long Way Gone*. This research will consider the conflicting narratives of child soldiers—as both victims and perpetrators, and how this complex perception translates to ambiguous readings of such images. Supported by visual and historical analysis, my thesis also looks to the trope of the warrior/hunter in African art in order to draw out themes of power and masculinity in connection to the appearance and violent acts committed by child soldiers during the war in Sierra Leone. This approach demonstrates how the identities of these young combatants, exhibited through the appropriation of various types of dress and adornments from the past, may have been constructed through another figure of authority, the paramount chief.

The first chapter of my thesis will give historical background on the Civil War of Sierra Leone (1991-2002), highlighting particular political and military figures, as well as combatant groups and ethnic populations most affected by these events. This introduction will describe some of the social, political and economic factors to give the

reader a broad context for the local and international impact of the conflict. Attention will also be given to addressing the representation of child soldiers as icons—symbols who generate a greater discourse in relation to wars erupting in different countries across Africa. The second chapter will consider the trope of the warrior/hunter. Focusing on dress as a means to communicate themes related to masculinity, initiation, and secret knowledge, I analyze the history and garments worn by paramount chiefs of Sierra Leone in connection to Kamajor militias.

The third chapter of this thesis will center on a series of photographs of CDF (Civil Defense Forces) child soldiers by Guy Tillim, from his joint project with fellow South African photojournalist Omar Badsha, entitled *Amulets and Dreams: War Youth and Change in Africa* (2001). In analyzing these images I will consider Tillim's oeuvre and how photojournalism as a medium straddles both news and art—text and image. Pinpointing the aim of the project, I will question themes related to humanitarianism and the staging of photographs.

Chapter 4 will examine the portrayal of child soldiers in Sierra Leone through the media of film and literature. Looking to *Blood Diamond* (2006), I will explore the appearance of RUF (Revolutionary United Front) child soldiers. The longer analysis of *Blood Diamond* will be coupled with a brief examination of Ishmael Beah's autobiography *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007). Providing a local narrative, Beah's account will demonstrate how child soldiers in the SLA (Sierra Leone Army) dressed. Both the RUF and SLA held similar initiation practices and based their appearance on American hip-hop and military personalities. This chapter demonstrates

that Kamajors, discussed in the preceding chapters, and the RUF and SLA had discernible codes of dress during the Civil War.

Suspending the term “child soldier” in quotation marks, I hope to draw out the construction of a universal type that is located in many developing countries across the world—especially in Africa. My conclusion will draw my analysis together, arguing that although the child soldier is a popular icon, forged by local and global media, his identity is complex and historically situated.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CIVIL WAR IN SIERRA LEONE

March 23, 1991, marked the beginning of a prolonged period of conflict in Sierra Leone.¹ The Civil War, which lasted nearly 11 years, officially ended January 18, 2002. While drastically transforming the social, political and economic landscape of the nation, the war was responsible for innumerable people being wounded and far more than 50,000 lives being lost. Several other West African countries were involved in the conflict, especially those closest to Sierra Leone. This widespread involvement in Sierra Leone's national affairs reflected not only goodwill on the parts of those offering international assistance, but also ill-will from those who sought gains such as resources and political clout. This moment in history can also be referred to as the Mano River War when linking the conflicts of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. The first shots purportedly rained from Liberia onto Sierra Leone under the auspices of former President Charles Taylor² of neighboring country Liberia, indicating early cross-border, cross-cultural entanglements.

Political Figures and Their Constituents

Sir Milton Margai, of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), became Sierra Leone's first president following independence from England on April 27, 1961. He was succeeded in 1967 by Siaka Stevens, proponent of the opposing party the All People's Congress (APC). During these two separate administrations, Sierra Leone's economy had steadily eroded. In 1977, student revolts broke out signaling not only a general

¹ The historical context I provide comes from a variety of sources, especially (Badsha 18-19). For additional texts that supply thorough narratives of the Civil War in Sierra Leone I suggest Ferme, Hoffman and Richards.

² On April 26, 2012 the SCSL (Special Court for Sierra Leone) found Charles Taylor guilty for "aiding and abetting" war crimes and crimes against humanity on 11 counts (see Memmott).

increase in the population's unrest, but also the disintegration of Sierra Leone's educational system, which impacted wartime youth recruitment.

In 1985 Major General Joseph Momoh replaced the 80-year-old Siaka Stevens as president. While Momoh continued operating under the authoritarian, militant, and corrupt leadership of his predecessor Stevens and the APC, Foday Sankoh, an ex-army corporal prepared a cross-border attack in Liberia. This armed insurgency erupted in 1991, backed by Sankoh and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the rebel force supported by Liberia's Charles Taylor and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. This coup was staged with the help of Captain Valentine Strasser, who announced the overthrow of Momoh's APC government on April 30, 1992, under the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC).

As a result of political instability and violence, seventy percent of the population became homeless or refugees. In this state of vulnerability, civilian populations began to organize themselves into units in order to provide protection and security against both the RUF and the government army. These grassroots militias were considered part of the Civil Defense Forces (CDF). The CDF was comprised of different groups such as the Kamajors, who were prominently located in the south and east (the highest percentage of CDF forces were from this group), and the Donsos and Gbethis of Kono, from the north.

In 1996, multiparty elections were held once again. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah assumed presidency under the amnesty of the RUF; however, this agreement lasted only briefly. Johnny Paul Koroma was soon recognized as leader of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) with Sankoh as his deputy. United, the army and the RUF were

proclaimed the United People's Army (UPA). In 1998, the Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) intervened in order to restore the democratically elected Kabbah, yet the fighting continued.

In January 1999, the AFRC/RUF commenced a severe attack on the nation's capital of Freetown in which 63,000 people were murdered, 3,000 children were abducted, and a third of the population was left homeless. On July 7, 1999, RUF leader Foday Sankoh and President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah signed the Lomé Peace Accord, which granted all participants in the conflict unconditional amnesty, but this treaty too was soon reneged upon in 2000. In 2002, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) carried out a successful operation that implemented the peace agreement, thereby demobilizing and disarming over 45,000 rebels, and finally bringing an active end to the war in May.

How to Position the Figure of the "Child Soldier"

Estimates vary on the number of child combatant participants. By war's end, the National Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) had formally demobilized 6,845 child combatants³, of whom 529 were girls (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 97).⁴ Since 2001, images of child soldiers have been highly visible in mass media outlets including newspapers, magazines, film, television and the Internet (Denov 1). Such visual representations present a paradox, for young combatants can be viewed as both victims and perpetrators. Desperate circumstances

³ This number ranges up to 9,000 (Badsha 10). Note these numbers fail to differentiate between willing volunteers and others who were forced into conscription

⁴ Note this research focuses on the perspective of adolescent male combatants. For information regarding female child soldiers see Chris Coulter's *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone* (2009) as well as Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana's *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War* (2004).

spur many child soldiers to commit violent acts, while age marks their innocence. As children are not fully developed members of society, they are not held entirely responsible for their actions.

Oftentimes child soldiers are portrayed as smug and armed with AK-47s. Images such as these lead to categories that reflect set-personalities generated by the media. Seeking to generalize the multiple narratives and character types of child soldiers, Denov uses categories like “Dangerous and Disorderly,” “The Hapless Victim,” “The Hero,” and “Invisible Girls, Emblematic Victims” (Denov 7). These brackets appear to highlight some of the stereotypes surrounding child soldiers. One may consider how some media sources compound information in order to capture and transmit news more succinctly. One may contemplate even further how this method of transmission may affect the overall representation of child soldiers, as images oftentimes supersede the particular realities from which they arise, sometimes leading to erasure or amalgamation of distinct historical contexts. In turn by generalizing the child soldier he becomes part of a universal type—a popular icon. And so the term “child soldier” is suspended by quotation marks for a moment to indicate the problematic nature of the term.

CHAPTER 2 THE TROPE OF THE WARRIOR/HUNTER IN AFRICAN ART

The figure of the warrior/hunter is a common trope in African visual culture. Through a broad analysis of select works of African art and adornment, this chapter seeks to address themes related to power and masculinity that typify the construction of the warrior/hunter type. After considering the representation of the warrior/hunter, I will then examine clothing worn by paramount chiefs in Sierra Leone, focusing on weaponry, hats, and tunics laden with amulets.¹ The latter half of this chapter aims to draw out a conceptual shift during the war in which child soldiers began styling themselves after paramount chiefs, signaling a subversion of power. With the gerontocracy threatened, Kamajor youth began to perform the identities of their elders who had traditionally projected power and masculinity, traits apparent in the warrior/hunter type in African art.

Conceptualizing Power and Masculinity Through African Art

Power is not a latent force that can be exercised or held in check; it exists only in its dramatization and is evaluated according to its capacity for excessive (and often deliberately incoherent) public display (Hoffman in Stovel 223)

Herbert Cole's 1989 exhibition *Icons: Ideals and Power in the Art of Africa* at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art helped define themes related to the conception of power and masculinity in African art history. Identifying key visual features related to social hierarchy in African art, Cole highlighted the warrior/hunter as a prominent and central figure to the structure of African communities, dedicating a section of the exhibition catalog to "Hunters, Warriors, and Heroes: The Forceful Male"

¹ Amulets are ornaments inscribed with Koranic text that function as a sort of spiritual protection for the wearer.

(Cole 92-115). For the purposes of this project, it is important to outline some of the main attributes of the warrior/hunter in African art in order to understand how themes like power and masculinity apply to the image of male child soldiers in Sierra Leone.

Cole succinctly describes the different social roles of men and women, which are apparent in African art: “For the men hunting, for the women procreation” (Cole 93).² Women are often accompanied with their children, as mother-nurturers, a depiction held in dialogue with the male-provider, who is often shown alongside weapons and animals. While females are commonly portrayed as mothers and wives, men are depicted as powerful and even violent. These distinct social roles are expressed through a variety of media including wooden sculpture and metalwork, as well as through textiles. The artistic conventions employed for the sake of the warrior/hunter in African art aim to communicate his strong social standing, across numerous cultural and historical contexts.

A copper alloy sculpture dating from fifteenth or sixteenth century Benin shows a man with legs akimbo carrying an antelope on his shoulders (Fig. 2-1). He holds a bow while simultaneously grasping the legs of the dead animal with both hands. At his feet is another animal, which may have aided him in the hunt. Diagonally across his chest is an open container, perhaps a horn for medicines³, special substances meant to help the hunter during his dangerous pursuit. The close-fitting hat fastened around his chin is a common article of clothing found in most warrior/hunter costumes, though head-coverings take on a variety of different forms. A universal feature appearing across all

² As this research focuses on male child soldiers, the discussion of the warrior/hunter is limited to representations of men, although examples of female warrior/hunter types exist in African art, Bamana Jo figures from Mali for instance. See (Cole 103) and (Blier 111) for additional examples.

³ Like amulets, horns can contain special medicines meant to protect hunters from harm.

representations of the warrior/hunter in African art is the display of a weapon. In the Benin example, from southern Nigeria, the figure's choice weapon is a bow, but other representations of warrior/hunters may exhibit other tools to imply his occupation. The presence of the dead animal emphasizes the hunting context of the work in addition to the valued skill of the hunter who has successfully procured food for his community. Later we will see examples emphasizing the role of the warrior who protects the community from enemy threat.

Artwork created by the Edo people of the Kingdom of Benin (1440-1897) came from the southern region of present day Nigeria. Existing up until the late nineteenth century, Benin reached great artistic advances, especially between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Local court records and accounts made by early Dutch travelers indicated that the palace courtyard of the *oba*, or king, was decorated with hundreds of metal plaques (Ben-Amos 31-32). Approximately 900 plaques survive today in public and private collections (Ezra 117).⁴ Serving as a sign of status as well as a record of court life, these plaques show narratives that include numerous battles and hunts.⁵ Like the sculpture in the round of the Benin hunter (Fig. 2-1), several of the Benin reliefs depict warriors carrying bows and wielding swords. Archery seems to have been a particularly vaunted skill to the court of Benin, as many plaques portray archers with their bows, engaged in hunting activities.⁶ Military attire is distinct and could indicate

⁴ These plaques, together with around 2,000 objects from Benin, were brought to the West as a result of the Punitive Expeditions led by the British in 1897 (Stepan 76).

⁵ For examples of Benin plaques which specifically present warrior/hunter themes see (Ben-Amos); (Blier 63); (Ezra 117-142); (Kaplan 44); (Kotz 81); (Poynor 103); (Stepan 75); (Willett 181).

⁶ In addition to archery, leopard hunting was a specialized skill. According to Ben-Amos, the leopard is considered the king of the bush and therefore references the *oba* in Benin art. Plaques from the sixteenth century commemorated members of the leopard hunters' guild. Furthermore, leopard hunters had

the heightened position of warriors within the social hierarchy of the Benin court. For instance, early accounts suggested that court officials wore imported horsetail headdresses which symbolized “military authority and were worn by war chiefs” (Dapper in Ryder 40, Freyer in Kotz 81).

According to Boniface Obichere, hunters were principally made up from a middle-age-grade of mature adults and warriors, the *ighele*, who had assistants and probable successors in the youth age-grade, *iroghae* (Obichere in Kaplan 51). Hunters were privileged members of society who could advance socially with honorific titles at the village or court level through hunting large game such as elephants, leopards, and larger species of antelope (Obichere in Kaplan 51). It was believed that the hunter had “special psychic and manual powers which enabled him to kill animals and wild beasts without losing his life” (Obichere in Kaplan 51). Furthermore, “his hands were looked upon as special, like those of artists, and thus deserved special treatment and respect” (Obichere in Kaplan 51). The socio-political context informed by classical works of art from Benin of warrior/hunters forms a discourse in relation to child soldiers from the war in Sierra Leone. Just as the *ighele* relayed their knowledge of the hunt to the younger *iroghae* age-grade, so too were the children of Sierra Leone indoctrinated by older members of society. Later my analysis will emphasize the import of the warrior/hunter costume adopted by child soldiers that include headdresses, weapons, and other adornments that speak to an innate sense of power inscribed by special materials.

Not only is it important to consider the subjects depicted, but also the material from which they were created. These plaques, and other art objects, which often portray

“charms to tame leopards so that the king could parade in the city with them, a sign of his domination over the king of the bush” (Ben-Amos 10).

metal weapons, point to the significance of metal as an artistic medium as well as a symbolic commodity. Numerous metal sculptures created by the Fon of the Kingdom of Dahomey (1600-1900, located in present day Benin) depict the personification of the god of warfare and iron, Gu.⁷ Typically he brandishes weapons in both hands, especially long ceremonial swords. The swords (referred to as *basagla* or also *gubasa*), recall the expression: “The audacious knife gave birth to Gu and the vengeance continues” (Nooter 192). This saying not only highlights Gu’s warriorlike nature, but also seems to promote a divine lineage of violence and masculinity.

Representations of Gu are usually in-the-round, and his limbs are often elongated, thereby stressing the importance of his human form. One example, attributed to Ganhu Huntondji, portrays Gu without clothing (Fig. 2-2). Commissioned by King Glele, this brass cast sculpture was purportedly composed of spent bullet shells (Blier 31). Furthermore, gunpowder was said to be ceremonially applied to its surface before war (Blier 31). This example underscores the ritual significance of certain materials in African art, as well as how weaponry is crucial to representations of the warrior/hunter.

Animals, like the antelope slung across the shoulders of the figure in the Benin sculpture (Fig. 2-1), are important to the trope of the warrior/hunter and can materialize in different ways through different media. For example, rather than appearing along with naturalistic depictions, animal parts can be applied to garments. Claws, horns and pelts of beasts are often exhibited on garments worn by different African hunters’ groups, as in the example of a type of protective garment (*kegheshio*) from the Oku

⁷ A parallel may be drawn in Yoruba cosmology with Ogun, god and patron of warriors, hunters and craftsmen—professions that call for the use iron (Freyer in Kotz 81). Also, see “Title Staffs of Iron and Brass” (Thompson Ch 7, pp1).

region in Northwestern Cameroon (Fig.2-3).⁸ Gowns of this sort are worn by *kegheshio*, who are members of the Ngang men's association, a group that oversees healing and anti-witchcraft activities to make life in the community more secure (Roy Sieber in Cole et. al. 4). The shirts hunters wear make public their knowledge of the bush, for the materials attached to their garments represent the "secret things" (*bas*) that he has accumulated over time from the wilderness (McNaughton:1982 54-55, Nooter 100). Furthermore, hunter's shirts convey the warriorlike mentality of the wearer, for the accumulations of animal parts display his triumph over nature, or rather, his ability to harness the powers found in nature. Tunics are not merely worn in the bush for personal protection, but are also worn publically, thereby communicating their special social status to the entire community (Arnoldi & Kreamer 123, McNaughton 1982:58-59).

While exhibiting slain animals parts through dress reveals the hunter's skill and success publically, amulets and the charged substances in which such garments are dyed are perhaps less overt expressions of protection and power (Bravmann 36-37). More specifically, in Muslim cultures, the protection that is Allah's written word conveyed through Koranic inscription is concealed by means of wrapped fabric, casing, or other binding. Therefore the trope of the warrior/hunter displays power through revealing masculinity—through conquering the physical world with weapons, while at the same time concealing the spiritual defenses that has led him to his victory. Whereas some

⁸ For more examples of hunting garments from different areas and groups in Africa see (Bordogna & Kahan 23, 51) [Mossi, Burkina Faso], [Yoruba, Nigeria]; (Kreamer et al. 137) [Loma, Liberia] (McClusky 62, 68) [Maninka, Guinea], [Bamana, Mali]; (McNaughton:1982) [Bamana, Mali]; (Nooter 104) [Bamana, Mali].

hunting tunics prominently exhibit animal parts, others tend to exaggerate power through the display of amulets.

A photograph taken by Doran Ross in 1976 documenting a “great” war shirt (*batakari*) and helmet worn by Akan Paramount Chief Nana Diko Pim III of Ejisu provides an example of a military uniform worn by high-ranking Asante army officials (Fig. 2-4).⁹ In the late 1970s *Batakarikese* (or “great Batakari”) were documented being worn by Asante paramount chiefs at the funerals of Asantehenes (Kings of Asante) and other important men (Cole & Ross 214). The abundant presentation of amulets in this example (Fig. 2-4), which encase Koranic verses meant to protect the wearer, leaves no visual space for the eye to rest. As one might guess, amulets are especially important accessories in times of war, but they are equally important items at birth since newborns require protection as well. Children from Islamicized parts of Africa have always worn amulets (Victoria Rovine), so it is interesting that child soldiers seem to accumulate and display them lavishly. Folded mostly in triangular and rectangular shapes, the amulets in this photograph (Fig. 2-4) appear in a variety of colors including green, red, and yellow (the colors of Ghana’s national flag), and are covered in different materials such as leather and metal. Reminiscent of sculptural representations, the ruler holds a musket in his hands, which symbolizes his power and prestige. The weapon, as well as the striking number of adornments attached to his shirt, emphasizes the paramount chief’s influential social and political position, again recalling the figure of the warrior/hunter.

⁹ For additional examples of war shirts from Ghana see (Arnoldi & Kreamer 14); (Clarke 27); (Cole & Ross 18-20);

Animals may be presented in whole or in parts to suggest hunting, and in turn, parts of humans may be utilized to indicate the hunting of people—the warrior conquering his enemy. Several sculptural examples portray “trophy heads,” the severed head perhaps symbolically referring to victory in battle (Cole 98). Indeed, the head bears a significant conceptual role in parts of Africa. In some contexts the head may reflect the base of human intelligence and emotions (Arnoldi & Kreamer 12), thereby the literal or metaphoric taking of another’s head increases his or her socio-political power.¹⁰

Although the cultural contexts for “trophy head” sculptures are diverse, oftentimes the warrior is portrayed with one hand upon the severed head while the other clutches the weapon used to achieve his feat.¹¹ In connection to “trophy head” sculptures and the war in Sierra Leone, one may contemplate how dismemberment relays power, especially in times of great instability. During the Civil War, militias committed public acts of violence such as amputating body parts—particularly arms—in order to promote a sense of fear among the civilian population. Combatants enacted their masculinity through acts of physical dominance. As amputations were usually conducted to wound rather than kill the victim, one considers power as a symbolic display, for those handless citizens were at once reminders of an impending threat—a threat of warriors who may claim the lives of more victims, more “enemies”.

¹⁰ For more on the significance of the head in relation to Yoruba art see Babatunde Lawal’s “Orí: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture” (1985).

¹¹ Cultural contexts vary greatly for “trophy heads” across African art. *Ikenga* sculptures from Nigeria are kept in shrines by Igbo men in order to promote personal success via religious offerings, whereas in the Cameroonian Grassfields they are probably effigies representing “big men” or chief headhunters. A metal Dahomey sculpture shows a Fon executioner. See Cole’s survey for further reading (Cole 96-99).

As mentioned, the responsibilities of both the warrior and hunter in African society overlap at times, translating to the conflated image of the warrior/hunter. One last example, highlighting the intersection of the various attributes that set the standard for the warrior/hunter type in African art, is Chibinda Ilunga.¹² The Chokwe people, concentrated in northern Angola and the southern Democratic Republic of the Congo, are known to have produced sculptures dating between the nineteenth to twentieth centuries of the mythological hunter and cultural hero, Chibinda Ilunga. According to oral traditions dating back to the 1600s, Chibinda Ilunga was a Luba prince and expert hunter who married a female Lunda chief named Lueji. Chibinda Ilunga was said to have innovated hunting techniques through the introduction of new weapons and hunting charms, and also to have established divine and sovereign rule to the Lunda court.

Used in a courtly context, Chibinda Ilunga statuettes are usually carved from wood and possess multiple key traits including a flintlock gun (*uta wa mbanze*), a weapon introduced into Angola during the eighteenth century. Another typical accessory is the hooked staff (*cisokolu*) on which containers (*mukata*) for hunting charms can be placed. Antelope horns that hold special medicines (*mbinga ya kai*), which are believed to protect the hunter, are depicted in some representations of Chibinda Ilunga. Tortoise shells were used for the same purpose (*kafulu*). Additional adornments hang from Chibinda Ilunga's belt such as his ammunition box (*ngonga*) and a small calabash for gunpowder (*musase wa fundanga*). A small machete with a triangular blade (*kasau*) is also carried on his hunter's belt. Holding the title,

¹² General sources I use for Chibinda Ilunga include: (Manuel Jordan 29-37), (Wastiau 119, plate captions), (Mack 138-139), and (Stepan 32).

Mwanangana, which has been translated as “lord of the land,”¹³ Chibinda Ilunga’s royal status is indicated by his headdress, a winged crown referred to as *mutwe wa kayanda* when turned upwards or *cipenya mutwe* when facing backwards. Finally an additional narrow headband made of beads (*kaponde*) is present in some representations.

As demonstrated, the representation of the warrior/hunter in African art appears across different media and historical contexts. I provided specific examples from Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, and Angola, created from materials such as metal, wood, and fabric layered with animal parts and amulets to substantiate this pattern. Taking on different form through a variety of materials, the dress and adornment associated with the warrior/hunter indicates his social and political power. In the next section, I will analyze how the trope of the warrior/hunter is reflected in the appearance of paramount chiefs.

The *Kamajor* as Paramount Chief?

From the inception of paramount chiefs in 1896 to the conscription of Kamajor child soldiers into the Civil War up until 2001, this part of the chapter chronicles the changing role of the archetypical figure of the warrior/hunter in Sierra Leone. Focusing on dress as a means to communicate themes related to masculinity, initiation, and secret knowledge, I analyze garments worn by paramount chiefs and the uniform adopted by Kamajor militias in order to identify a specific historical and conceptual shift—the transfer of power from the old to the young—a subversion of past authoritarian structures. Before child soldiers began utilizing dress as a means of conveying their violent, masculine identities, paramount chiefs had already appropriated aspects of the warrior/hunter costume at the onset of English colonization. Utilizing

¹³ This title resonates with paramount chiefs who were once referred to as “owners of the land.”

photographic portraits of paramount chiefs taken by Vera Viditz-Ward in Sierra Leone around 1986, I make comparisons regarding the military regalia adopted by child soldiers, captured in images taken by South African photographer Guy Tillim near the end of the war. Often forced to participate in the revolution, child soldiers employed conventional modes of dress inscribed with power, traceable through the trope of the warrior/hunter and through the history of Sierra Leone.

By the fifteenth century, Sierra Leone was divided into numerous kingdoms governed by members of society who held autonomous power over their separate regions—these people of power were the warriors, hunters, and traders of the community (Little 83-84, 175). Titled “owners of the land,” they exercised complete authority within their separate domains until 1896 when the British declared Sierra Leone a protectorate, thereby jeopardizing the political sovereignty of local rulers (Little 89). Upon establishing a relationship with Sierra Leone, British officials vested power in those who had already been in control by designating these local rulers, these warrior/hunters, with the honorific title of paramount chief (Fyfe 114:1979).¹⁴ Although the paramount chief was still the highest-ranking personage in his domain, he now shared his role as leader with a British district commissioner who oversaw many chiefdoms (Fyfe 129:1979).

While the district commissioner was accountable for “judging criminal cases” and “settling land disputes,” paramount chiefs were responsible for enforcing local laws, recruiting labor for community projects and collecting taxes (Fyfe:1964 253-254 6). Hut

¹⁴ It should be said that the title of paramount chief is not unique to Sierra Leone, since other African countries possess leaders with this same honorific title. Furthermore, though beyond the scope of this research, female paramount chiefs in Sierra Leone have been given special attention. See Little’s chapter on “Women as Chiefs” (Little 195-6).

taxes imposed upon local populations to pay for administrative costs led to protests in Sierra Leone in 1898.¹⁵ Paramount chiefs joined these tax rebellions, which were led by Bai Bureh in the north and by the Poro secret society¹⁶ in the south (Fyfe:1979 114-123). Ultimately unsuccessful, British forces eventually put down the revolts.

Beginning in the 1930s the administration of the chiefdoms had gradually changed so that by the 1950s power was more dispersed. Not only did paramount chiefs share their authority with members of their administrations and other lower-ranking officials, their positions also became salaried, thereby negating the custom of tributes in the form of money, products and service. In 1961 Sierra Leone became independent, and in 1971 it joined the British Commonwealth. The relationship between Sierra Leone and her former colonizer resonates today as the paramount chief system continues.

Certain adornments directly reflect this shared past, as British officials once presented local leaders with ornamented canes intended as objects of display signifying the symbolic power of the chief (Roslyn Adele Walker in National Museum of African Art 6). An image of Paramount Chief Alimamy Salifu Mansaray (b. ca. 1896-d. 1990; crowned August 22, 1930), taken in 1986, shows an example of one of these objects resting across his lap (Fig. 2-5). One may compare these wooden canes to scepters, since they are topped with brass knobs and often bear the British coat of arms. Showing the rest of the community the chief's heightened relationship to the Crown, such canes are public symbols of the bearer's social and economic power. In sum, the

¹⁵ A hut tax was a type of taxation introduced by British colonists in Africa. These taxes were collected for every household within in a community.

¹⁶ Poro initiation will be discussed at greater length later in the paper, but for more information see (Alldridge 124-135) and (Little 183-185).

role of paramount chief shifted over time from hunter, to colonial interlocutor, to rebel, to local functionary. The history of paramount chiefs in Sierra Leone, those who once revolted against the economic injustices of the colonial system of governance, generates an interesting parallel to child soldiers who likewise rebelled during the contentious socio-political-economic climate of the Civil War.

Perhaps one of the most visually striking ways to communicate power is through dress. Beginning in the thirteenth century, Mandinka traders and warrior-kings traversed the Sahara, bringing Muslim-inspired garments into northern Sierra Leone (Roslyn Adele Walker in National Museum of African Art 7). Paramount chiefs wear special gowns for ceremonial occasions that are made of locally woven and dyed cloth or of imported textiles (Lamb 133). The type and quality of material can indicate the owner's economic status and personal preference as well as local design conventions. For example, returning to the photograph of Paramount Chief Alimamy Salifu Mansaray (Fig. 2-5), the cut and design of the tunic indicate that it is a *huronko*. *Huronko* is a Limba term used to describe a kind of garment with a triangular neckline and large single pocket sewn to the front, pressed with dark stamped-motifs of various designs onto yellow or brown-colored fabric (Lamb 124).

Paramount Chief Alimamy's *huronko*, rendered in a geometric style with linear bands in addition to star-like and circular patterns, would have taken a long time to manufacture, since the complicated process for dyeing the fabric requires the retrieval of plant material from three specific trees including the *kubara* tree, the roots of the mahogany tree (*kyordo*) and the bark of the *ekuwere* tree in order to achieve the red-ochre color (Lamb 124). Such gowns are believed to absorb the special medicinal

substances that protect the wearer from negative forces (Lamb 125-127). Therefore, *huronkos* can be viewed in relation to the efficacy of hunting costumes, which were believed to secure the protection of the wearer during his time in the bush because of the special substances it was imbued with (McNaughton:1982 55, McNaughton:1988 71).

Paramount chiefs in Sierra Leone also wear headwear that varies according to ethnic group and gender. Hats not only function in a practical sense, providing protection from the climate, but also symbolically, as social markers revealing information about the identity of the owner (Arnoldi & Kreamer 13). For example, hats may express the wearer's religious affiliations. Among the Islamized Temne, chiefs often wear hats with attached Koranic amulets, as shown in a photograph from the 1974 induction of Paramount Chief Bai Fork (Fig. 2-6). Indeed, one of the most widespread styles of headwear in West Africa derives from the fez, a flat-topped conical hat form that can be traced back to the introduction of Islam in North Africa (Lamb 141).

However, for the purposes of this paper the most important hat form, made from locally woven cotton and still worn by both the Limba and Temne today, is the tri-cornered hunter cap (*kokon dangba*) (Fig. 2-7). When worn, the two outside corners project laterally from the sides of the brim while the third hangs forward and to one side (Lamb 145). Typically the corners of the hat are topped with large pom-poms, as seen in the image. The hat was originally meant to mimic the horns of animals that would have assisted hunters in deceiving prey and averting the potential threat of other dangerous forest creatures (Lamb 146).

Paramount chiefs display other emblems of status, especially on ceremonial occasions. Such accessories may include necklaces made of beads, cowry shells, animal teeth or Koranic amulets, as well as flywhisks made of palm fiber and hair (Fig. 2-6). The elaborate materials used to create these various objects reflect the wearer's heightened status (Arnoldi & Kreamer 112, Cole & Ross 230). For instance, beads were once highly valued import items and cowries were previously exchanged as currency before colonization (Hogendorn & Johnson 101). Furthermore, as alluded to earlier, those who possess and display materials such as animal teeth, hair, and plant fiber may be seeking to announce their power (Rubin in Berlo and Wilson 7)—and especially in the case of the hunter, his hunting skills or communion with nature. Although adornments can be for public display in order to convey the wearer's status to the community, they can also provide personal, spiritual protection in the case of Koranic amulets.

As previously mentioned, paramount chiefs were offered imported canes as symbols of local authority as well as colonial loyalty. But chiefs often replaced imported government staffs with locally made canes or walking sticks (Kup 163). Weapons were also exhibited, perhaps recalling the traditional role of paramount chiefs who were once warrior/hunters who protected the community through civil defense. A portrait of Paramount Chief Fayra Morlu Jabba III, taken in 1986, shows him brandishing a sword (Fig. 2-8). The numerous amulets sewn onto his tunic, and the musician who sits behind him, speaks of the continued status enjoyed by paramount chiefs at this time. The musician in the photograph with Chief Fayra recalls a tradition among the Bamana hunters of Mali who had their own distinct group of bards (*donsonjeliw* in Mande

language) who sang praise songs and epics narrating tales belonging to their particular hunter's lineage (some still do) (McNaughton:1982 55).¹⁷ The next section of this chapter will analyze the re-imagining of power in Sierra Leone as children become chiefs—hoisting automatic weapons on their shoulders and wearing amulets around their necks and chests. In a way, these Kamajor soldiers take on the role and appearance of their elders, the warrior/hunters of the past.

Kamajors: Initiation and Secret Knowledge

From the start of the war, the SLA began utilizing local hunters for reconnaissance missions because they knew the landscape (Ferme 75, Wlodarczyk 57). At the same time, local communities organized civil defense groups to counter the threat of rebel advances, thereby supplementing the underfunded and poorly equipped army with more manpower (Ferme 75, Wlodarczyk 57). Although it is difficult to ascertain a precise timeline, the first hunter militia believed to have participated with the SLA are the Tamaboro—a predominantly Kuranko group from northern Sierra Leone. It was not until 1995 that the Kamajors, an ethnically Mende group from the south and east of Sierra Leone, became involved in the war. Broadly aligned with the SLA, the Kamajors were considered allies under the auspices of the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), providing the greatest number of defense personnel (Ferme 74, Wlodarczyk 62).¹⁸ In addition to the Tamaboro and the Kamajors, other civil defense groups included: Donsos, Kapra, Gbethis, and the Organized Body of Hunting Societies (OBHS) in the Western area (Ferme 75, Wlodarczyk 62). Although these different hunting associations reflect

¹⁷ For more on Mande hunters' bards see "Heroic Songs of the Mande Hunters" (Bird in Dorson 275-293).

¹⁸ It is estimated that the number of Kamajors at the time of disarmament was around 37,000 (Wlodarczyk 62).

certain ethnicities and specific geographical loci, the degree to which they remained ethnically separate, maintaining particular identities, remains uncertain (Włodarczyk 62).

Kamajors were Mende hunters from southeastern Sierra Leone.¹⁹ *Kamajor* is commonly translated in Mende as “hunter.” The Mende language is open to a variety of interpretations, and *Kamajor* can thus also be translated several ways. For instance, *kama* and *joi* transliterates as “a past master at doing mysterious things,” while others have proposed “masters of marvel” (Włodarczyk 94). Though the accepted definition is simply hunter, *kamajor* thoroughly connotes mystical powers—mystical powers that may recall amulets referenced in the garments worn by warrior/hunters in African culture. Before the war, Mende hunters comprised a small number of individuals who were charged with the protection of the community, primarily from wild animals but occasionally from human enemies as well (Włodarczyk 94).

Protecting the community is paramount to the role of warrior/hunter, but he must also safeguard himself, and this is achieved through secret knowledge. McNaughton’s research on Mande hunters who wear similar clothing for similar purposes provides a compelling analogy: by “learning to use the environment as a pharmacopoeia, to make medicines for healing ailments as well as to harness supernatural energy, the hunters were able to hunt while not being hunted” (McNaughton 55). Utilizing the raw materials of the forest to satisfy their needs, Mande hunters are capable of spending an extended amount of time in the bush. Hunters are perceived as dangerous for their secret

¹⁹ By “traditional” I mean to make a distinction along the lines of Ferme and Hoffman as they have described Kamajors as a “kind of premodern archetype” “contradicted by their historical association with modern technology and weaponry” (Ferme 75).

knowledge, which allows them to overcome the supernatural forces of the wild.²⁰ This ability to survive the threatening bush gives their personalities an aura of mystery and intimidation. They are also revered as heroes by their local community for providing food and protection (McNaughton 54). Kamajor units, comprised mainly of Mende hunters, were likewise charged with safeguarding their local communities from rebel attack. They defended civilians by intimidating rebels with their appearance. Their costumes declared who they were—initiated men with secret knowledge, men of power.

Mende cosmology describes the transference of power from the nonmaterial realm to the physical world:

All life and activity derives from the Supreme God, *Ngewo*. *Ngewo* not only created the universe but also invested it with nonmaterial power, which has been described as “an influence which is not directly visible to the naked eye but manifests itself in various ways and on special occasions in human beings and animals... This power left behind by *Ngewo* is referred to as *hale*, which sometimes gets translated as “medicine” although it tends to signify something much wider. It is that (material objects—animate and inanimate) which can be used to secure ends through nonmaterial by virtue of its power (Little 217-218, 227; Wlodarczyk 94)

A group of herbalists and Koranic scholars began a Kamajor initiation society to assist in strengthening the power of local defense forces in Bonthe district around 1995 (Wlodarczyk 62, 102). The *kamoh* (initiators), who possess specialist knowledge of the Koran and *mori* magic,²¹ were responsible for the initiation of new recruits (Wlodarczyk 102). Poro, a long-established men’s organization presiding in parts of Sierra Leone and Liberia which functions to set behavioral codes for local communities, had been responsible for regulating phases of maturity through age-grade ceremonies. To

²⁰ According to Charles Bird’s research, Mende hunters augment their power through ceremonies before the hunt in order to counter the “destructive forces unleashed by the death of the animal” (Bird in Dorson 278).

²¹ A *mori* man is a practitioner of medicine (*hale*), who holds influence in Mende spiritual life (Little 273).

become a Kamajor, the recruit was supposed to have already undergone initiation through the Poro society; however, younger children were being conscripted and therefore hastily initiated during the war (Włodarczyk 102). Kamajor initiation began supplanting secret societies at this time.

The period of the Civil War redefined the institutions responsible for ushering transitions from childhood to adulthood. Boys passed through stages more rapidly, and as a consequence boys were recognized as men at an earlier age than before. Kamajor initiation functioned along similar lines as Poro²², with groups learning both secret information and surviving tactics. Like Poro, there was a designated space for conducting Kamajor rituals apart from the military encampment. Spatial boundaries were circumscribed by time, as initiates were only allowed to move outside of the bush and back into the villages during daylight (Włodarczyk 84). At this time combatants coated themselves with white clay in order to announce their presence to the community, perhaps recalling rites associated with Poro.

As in the past, initiation helped tie members of groups together through shared experience. Kamajor militias were instilled with routinized training (as is the case with most child soldiers) during initiation. Initiators sought to rouse child soldiers, inspiring them to act courageously “in the face of battle” (Włodarczyk 104). The idea of remaining brave in battle is a key element to the success of the warrior/hunter, who wants to appear masculine in the eyes of the community and fearsome to his enemy. Maintaining camaraderie among members of the same age-set during initiation was

²² Hunting fraternities (*donson ton*) are organized similarly to Poro. According to McNaughton, *donson ton* “offered the camaraderie of like minds uniting individual practitioners from a number of communities in a formal structure of support and respect.” These branches hold meetings, gather for funerals, and sometimes stage group hunts (McNaughton:1982 54).

equally as important as fostering a sense of loyalty within particular militia units. Bonding through the process of initiation had changed as a result of the war. Since many combatants lost relatives during the span of the conflict, militias operated as substitute families rather than as a sort of temporary convocation (Włodarczyk 104).

As alluded to earlier, specialists were called upon to initiate members of Kamajor society during the war. These Islamic experts, referred to as *mori* men, utilized their command of the Koran, harnessing power through rituals. Power was obtained through “the correct application of a combination of written Koranic passages, blessings, prayer, time and space” (Włodarczyk 88), which were conducted through a variety of forms:

Koranic texts can be written on note paper, folded and tied or placed in a pouch as a charm. It can also be written on a board (*wala*) with black ink or a piece or burnt wood from the *luba* tree, then washed off to create a dark liquid called *nesi*. The liquid into which the words have been dissolved retains their magical properties and can then be drunk or smeared on the body for magical effect. The Koran can also be used for divination (*fa*) and guidance (*istikhara*).

Once the power object was imbued with medicines or the written word, it had to be concealed in some way (often wrapped with material) from both the wearer and those with whom he may come in contact (Włodarczyk 89).²³ During the war, as in the past, amulets were believed to provide both spiritual and physical protection in the context of hunting and military combat. Broken codes of conduct during wartime were believed to weaken the efficacy of power objects such as amulets (Ferme 75). For instance, warriors pierced by bullets were considered to have participated in “witchcraft,” which resulted in their failed protection (Włodarczyk 115). With the completion of the disarmament phase in 2002, the war in Sierra Leone was officially declared over.

²³ Poro and Bondo (a men and women’s association, respectively, active in Sierra Leone) masks can also be inscribed with Koranic verse and *mori* magic (Bravmann 44-45)

At that time, the new order prohibited the display of weapons and hunting regalia—particularly clothes, headdresses, or protective amulets. The justification provided was that it would “spoil the medicine” and “visit disaster on the culprit” (Ferme 84).

The beginning of the chapter addressed the trope of the warrior/hunter in African art, and then traced the history of paramount chiefs in Sierra Leone in order to draw a connection between their powerful social positions and similar manner of dressing. The accessories and attire banned at the end of the war, which included weapons, amulets, different types of headwear, and hunting tunics, describe the costume of not only the warrior/hunter and the paramount chief, but also Kamajor child soldiers—images to be discussed in the following chapter. The second half of this chapter focused on Mende Kamajor hunters and their initiation practices during the war. Parallels were made to Mende hunters from Mali and to the Poro secret society through the theme of secret knowledge. Pointing to a transfer in governance, the Kamajor replaced the long-established Poro society as the predominant institution for initiation during the war. Although some of the rites and rituals remained similar, the pace quickened and attitudes changed. McNaughton has argued that Mende shirts abstractly reflect the bush as well as the hunter’s desire to control his personal environment (McNaughton:1982 58), in turn, one may consider how Kamajor militias reflected power through conventional modes of dress at a time of great instability. Perhaps dress was a means for ordering a chaotic political environment, for figures in the community who had long signaled authority—the paramount chiefs who were warriors and hunters in the past—were being eliminated by rebel forces.²⁴

²⁴ Sixty-four chiefs had been killed by rebels or died from other causes during the war (Stewart 184).

CHAPTER 3 GUY TILLIM'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF CHILD SOLDIERS IN SIERRA LEONE

This chapter focuses on photographs of young combatants from Sierra Leone taken in 2001 by South African photojournalist Guy Tillim. Elucidating Tillim's oeuvre, I briefly examine the multiple aims of photojournalists who may drift between disciplines as artists, reporters, and humanitarians. A close formal analysis of a select group of photographs from Tillim's *Amulets and Dreams* will reveal how the garments and accessories worn by CDF child soldiers recall the dress of paramount chiefs. Images of child soldiers can evoke tensions related to violence and to victimhood. By exploring how image and caption function as part of the work, I consider the specific contextual framework provided by *Amulets and Dreams* as well as the overall humanitarian angle of the project.

Guy Tillim's Oeuvre

In order to analyze Guy Tillim's photographs of Sierra Leonean child combatants, it is important to view these images in relationship to his collective body of work. Tillim was born in Johannesburg in 1962. According to Stevenson gallery, which represents Tillim, his formal career began in 1986 with the Afrapix collective, a group of South African photojournalists with whom he was associated until 1990. During this time, Tillim worked as a freelance photographer for foreign media outlets including Reuters, an international news agency headquartered in London (1986-1988), and Agence France-Presse (1993-1994) (Stevenson Gallery).

Tillim is known for creating black and white images that poetically illuminate places in Africa that possess a sense of desolation, poverty, and conflict. His photographs seem inherently ambiguous, open to multiple interpretations due to the aestheticization

of these serious themes.¹ Commenting on this tendency to produce attractive images Tillim has said, “Of course, there is always this: to change what is ugly and brutal into something sublime and redemptive. So I have photographs I like for reasons I have come to distrust” (Artthrob).

A list of Tillim’s exhibitions and publications reveals the variety of places he has traveled, many of them areas of conflict. These include: *Departure* (2003), *Kunhinga Portraits* (2003, these photographs of displaced peoples were taken in the Angolan province of Bie during the final months of the Angolan Civil War), *Soldiers* (2003), *Leopold and Mobutu* (2004, which documents a Mai Mai child soldier training camp in Beni near the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)), *Jo’burg series* (2004), *Petros Village, Malawi* (2006), *Congo Democratic* (2006, these images surround the contested presidential election in 2005 of Josef Kabila and Etienne Tshisikedi), *Avenue Patrice Lumumba* (2009, taken in Mozambique, DRC, Madagascar, Angola and Benin, 2008), *Roma, città di mezzo*, and most recently, *Second Nature I: French Polynesia* and *Second Nature II: São Paulo* (2011 and 2012).

Amulets and Dreams: War, Youth, and Change in Africa

Guy Tillim’s joint project with fellow South African documentary photographer Omar Badsha, entitled *Amulets and Dreams: War, Youth, and Change in Africa*, was published in 2002 by South African History Online (SAHO) in cooperation with Unisa Press and the Institute for Security Studies. According to their website, SAHO was established in June 2000 as a “non-partisan people’s history project,” with the mission of offering an extensive encyclopedia of South African History. This outlet, which aims

¹ By aestheticization I mean to say that Tillim’s compositions are implicitly attractive due to his skillful framing and lighting.

to “break the silence” and help contribute to South African reconciliation (SAHO), is an interesting platform in relation to the Sierra Leone project, a country likewise compelled to undergo the process of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and establish truth and reconciliation committees in order to promote peace and justice. Images from *Amulets and Dreams* are no longer accessible through the SAHO website and publications of the project seem limited to hardcopy form; therefore, it is difficult to discern the intended audience. Furthermore, I came across no reviews while conducting this research.

Badsha, editor and Tillim’s co-author on the project, presents a poem at the opening of the book, entitled “Amulets and Dreams.” The first and second stanzas read: “Dreams etched/ on children’s foreheads,/ fashioned into amulets to ward off / the eyes of war, for the peace to come.” “Dreams crept/ through hedges of thorn and men with AKs,/ wrapped dying cultures/ in ancient parchments (Badsha 1).” Here, he highlights amulets, the bush or nature, and the gun. Emphasizing the recurring visual aspects that comprise the icon of the child soldier, the text functions artfully in congruence with Tillim’s images. After the poem comes another message written by Badsha. This note, “Constructing the Narrative, Remaking the Continent,” addresses how he and Tillim relate to the project as South Africans. He notes that these images are not meant to perpetuate an “Afro-pessimist” view, but are instead intended to encourage change and healing in Africa (Badsha 3). The forward by Amara Essy, who at the time of publication was the Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity, emphasizes the humanitarian aims of the project (Badsha 5).

After this preamble, Julia Maxted provides a narrative for understanding how child soldiers broadly relate to the unfolding struggles in Africa with the section, “Africa’s Children in War” (Badsha 7-13). This overview is broken-down into six essays, which give more specific facts and figures related to child soldiers from different countries in Africa. The six sections include accompanying photographs beginning with Sierra Leone, then Angola, Mozambique, Eritrea, Ethiopia (these photographs taken by Tillim’s partner Badsha), and Burundi.

The title of Badsha and Tillim’s project, *Amulets and Dreams*, underscores the most obvious attribute of the costume worn by CDF child soldiers. Their cultural identity is inscribed upon their clothing:

Instead of uniforms or fatigues that serve to camouflage fighters, the tendency is towards emblems of powerFor the Kamajors the points of reference were more exclusively traditional, and fighters are generally covered in amulets, charms, and specially prepared protective clothing (Włodarczyk 120)

Tillim’s photographs are accompanied by captions, which supplement the image. In the first set of images, the description reads: “CDF soldiers, demobilization camp. Koidu” (Badsha 28) (Figs. 3-1 & 3-2). These CDF soldiers wear staple adornments of the Kamajor costume, recalling earlier images of paramount chiefs. Though it is difficult to tell from the photographs, these combatants wear button-up shirts and jackets that have been elaborated with multiple amulets, which are wrapped in layers of thread, or covered by strip-woven fabric with geometric motifs, or secured using thick raffia cord. Their headdresses vary. One conical and towering hat features bulbous amulets, whereas another shows a simplified band with amulets neatly organized and packed.

Materials such as cowry shells appear sewn onto leather amulets or braided into necklaces, again recalling the garb of paramount chiefs. Draping down like the floppy

ears of an animal, one headdress could recall either the form of the *kokon dangba*, which intimidates threatening bush creatures, or the pharaonic-style headcovers, which similarly drape down to cover the neck of the wearer (Lamb 146). One boy dons a headdress securely framed around his face with amulets and dangling fibers. Lamb explains that headwear with long swathing can allow for additional support of amulets and charms, while also adding to the “dignity and mystery of the wearer’s presence, which could be considered highly desirable for ceremonial occasions” (Lamb), and in this case, war. Arguably the most modern, important, and widespread accessory depicted in the hands of child soldiers is the AK-47. Gberie has remarked on weaponry as a production in and of itself, that it “must be understood partly as ‘performance’, in which techniques of terror compensate for the lack of equipment” (Gberie 143). But whereas paramount chiefs held decorated canes or muskets as adornments—as symbols of prestige, child soldiers hold guns in the vein of the warrior/hunter, for genuine defense, offense, and intimidation.

Tillim’s child soldiers confront the gaze of the viewer. The range of expressions conveyed through the eyes, postures, and expressions of these child soldiers seems to relate to a statement made by Maxted concerning visual representations of child soldiers more generally, for images such as these “challenge us to interrogate notions of young people as either victims of manipulation or as unruly and destructive” (Maxted in Badsha 7). This line of questioning corresponds to the ambiguity of Tillim’s images. They hold weapons and confront us with their gaze and so in this respect we may interpret these child soldiers as aggressors. Conversely they are children who may likewise appear timid and vulnerable.

The photographs are quite restrained. The bodies of the youth are neatly cropped within the borders of the frame. The narrow space presses them toward the center, limiting their range of motion and therefore their poses. They may hold weapons, but the vertical orientation of the composition pushes them out into the periphery and away from the viewer. Metaphorically, the boys and their weapons have been amputated by this half-length portraiture convention, which may also read like a mugshot. Sontag describes the visceral nature of war photography declaring: “Look, the photographs say, **this** is what it’s like. This is what war **does**. And **that**, that is what it does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War **ruins**” (Sontag 8, bold my emphasis). But these are not hacked limbs. There is no indication of blood or gore. These are boys in a state of inaction, still and standing, not presently engaged in combat. Instead of criminalizing mugshots, we may instead approach these formal portraits as humanizing, for they bring us closer to the subject through detail and composition.

Although portraiture conventions in West Africa during the 1960s and 1970s brought more versatility, with sitters taking a more active role in their self-presentation (Lamunière 12), Tillim’s photographs embrace established studio techniques as the frontal pose, compositional centrality, and incorporation of backdrop and accessories seem to suggest the theatrical staging of actors. Each image appears beautifully lit and well composed. The dark and light tonalities illuminate the child soldiers from the backdrop of a solid curtain², which isolates the subject, thereby augmenting the intensity of the image. Reflecting the modern theme of individuality, photographs became a vehicle for self-definition (Lamunière 39), however, it is important to recognize the

² For a brief discussion of backdrops in studio photography see (Lamunière 32-33).

inherent difference between commissioned studio portraits and the documentary nature of Tillim's photographs.³ One must consider Tillim's active direction and control over the construction of these shots of child soldiers, for as a photojournalist he straddles realms as reporter and artist. Indeed, captions function to report on contexts beyond the surface of these photographs.

The captions accompanying some of the images reveal that these child soldiers are based at a demobilization camp. They have traveled to this particular location to surrender their guns as part of the process of DDR. And yet they still brandish weapons in their portraits. So one might ask why they still hold their weapons? Denov has provided evidence regarding the tendency of child soldiers to be portrayed in this manner: "In an effort to publicize a relief program or organization, or even make a political point, ex-child soldiers have been asked to pose with guns [and] . . . humanitarian organizations have been known to comply with requests from film makers and journalists to talk to . . . children with "more traumatic" stories" (Denov 8). This observation seems accurate given Tillim's photographs, which show ex-soldiers posed with guns. However, unlike some images of child soldiers that have been removed from their historical contexts, Tillim's photographs are accompanied by captions, which help supplement our reading of the images. For instance, without the text, these images may give the impression that these child soldiers are still active combatants. We wouldn't know solely from their portraits that they are in the process of demobilization in Sierra Leone.

³ See Stephen Sprague's article "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves" (1978) for a comparison related to self-presentation and Yoruba portraiture conventions.

The argument for the significance of captions in interpreting the overall aim of the project is perhaps more compelling in the case of another pair of photographs, in which boys are captured in an active setting (Figs. 3-3 & 3-4). These photographs show two CDF child soldiers against a backdrop of lush vegetation. The thick forest surrounds them, as the garments they wear seem to camouflage them against their natural environment. In one of the photographs, a group of young combatants progress forward (Fig. 3-4). One of the boys pauses for the camera while a line of combatants steadily trail from behind, lending the photograph an impression of spontaneity. The captions inform the viewer of their specific whereabouts, in Kono State, near the village of Meiya. In another photograph, another boy appears isolated from the group (Fig. 3-3). Eyes nearly closed, he displays his weapon for the camera by brandishing his gun across his chest. The captions note the ages of the aforementioned boys who are 11 and 16, respectively. A name is even provided along with one of the images. 16 year-old Sahr Alibbie, pressing the AK-47 across his chest, is no longer an anonymous victim (Fig. 3-3).

Badsha claims at the outset of the project: “The only answer that we can offer is that the images in this book are informed by our determination that people in a time of displacement and loss, and living under the reigns of terror unleashed by competing elites, should not vanish into the anonymity of history” (Badsha 3). Therefore, the project advocates documenting the events it presents in a responsible and sincere manner—for the purpose of creating a record, for the very act of remembering. Badsha continues: “The [images] are also informed by our belief in the need to find solutions to the unending wars, poverty, disease and the inertia of continent-wide institutions

established to steer the destiny of many” (Badsha 3). Images of child soldiers function in this work then not only to remind us of their lingering presence across Africa, but also to emphasize the child soldier as an icon. Promoting global awareness, the child soldier embodies the complex economic and political problems on the continent, which have led to armed conflict and international intervention.

Furthermore, the humanitarian angle of Badsha and Tillim’s *Amulets and Dreams* seems to underscore how child soldiers are being exploited nationally and beyond. Not wanting to contribute to the misuse of images of child soldiers, nor wanting to remain silent, Badsha recognizes the predicaments of the project, stating: “Both Tillim and I are of that generation of South Africans who had to grapple with another burdensome question: how do we ensure that our photographs do not become the musings of voyeuristic travelers who know no borders, are wedded to chance encounters, and are comfortable within the rhetoric of bearing witness?” (Badsha 3). Badsha’s conscious commentary, as well as the context provided by Maxted and the supplementary captions to Tillim’s photographs, help situate the project’s audience with pertinent information in order to control any disingenuous engagement with this serious subject.

A popular icon all over the world, the child soldier figures prominently on the continent of Africa. Images of young combatants appear alike at times. He will typically hold a weapon, usually an AK-47, and he will most likely be a *young he* (where are the girl soldiers of Sierra Leone in *Amulets and Dreams*?). In this sense, geographical boundaries are sometimes erased and historical contexts are synthesized. Many of the child soldiers from Sierra Leone photographed by Tillim wear unique headgear, display an abundance of amulets, and carry weapons. The set of photographs discussed in

Amulets and Dreams are of CDF Kamajor child soldiers in the process of demobilization, and some have names and ages. Such discrete information is relayed via captions. As a photojournalist, Tillim's images are artfully composed and can be viewed as confrontational, for the subjects directly attract the viewer's gaze. Indeed, the photographs are meant to confront the audience, for this project emerges from a humanitarian effort to bring awareness to the crime of employing child soldiers. These images are open to multiple interpretations, and one may view these photographs and pass judgment on the child soldier, questioning the degree of his innocence. But one must be concerned with this line of reasoning, for the child soldier is not a mere universal type. His identity is multivalent, as are the circumstances that have brought him to participate in war.

CHAPTER 4 REPRESENTING THE RUF AND SLA IN FILM AND LITERATURE

While the preceding chapters have focused on Kamajors and the visual representation of the CDF through dress, Chapter 4 seeks to establish how child soldiers of the RUF (Revolutionary United Front) and SLA (Sierra Leone army) have been portrayed in film and literature. An analysis of the 2006 film *Blood Diamond*, alongside a more abbreviated account of Ishmael Beah's 2007 autobiography *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, indicates a pattern in the representation of these child soldiers. While CDF forces wore clothing and adornments making reference to past modes of dress, the RUF and SLA adopted a separate appearance informed by American hip-hop, pop culture, and military personalities.

As an autobiography, Beah speaks directly about his experience as a former child soldier in Sierra Leone. His story begins in 1993, when at the age of 12 he was first "touched by war" (Beah 6). Beah's account provides an additional format for understanding the war in Sierra Leone. Unlike the film *Blood Diamond*, which projects an American (or perhaps even more broadly Western) perspective, Beah's novel is non-fiction. Supplying the reader with bits of context on the background of the Civil War, the author seeks to establish his credibility as a child looking back on past events, telling the reader "to this day, I have an excellent photographic memory that enables me to remember details of the day-to-day moments of my life indelibly" (Beah 51). In these details he strives for a sense of authenticity (even including a chronology in the back of the novel, as well as a map in the front), lending the novel a more concise historical lens that may recall the background context made available in *Amulets and Dreams*.

Blood Diamond, directed by Edward Zwick, was released in the United States on December 8, 2006, four years after the re-establishment of a centralized government in Sierra Leone. The film, set in 1999, tells the story of a Mende fisherman, Solomon Vandy (played by Beninois actor Djimon Hounsou). Vandy yearns to be reunited with his family from whom he was separated while fleeing in the wake of Sierra Leone's Civil War.¹ As Solomon's wife, daughter, and newborn end up in a Guinean refugee camp, he is captured by rebel forces and is then sent to work sifting diamonds. The two other main characters are Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio), a Zimbabwean ex-mercenary who smuggles diamonds and Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly), an American journalist bent on exposing the truth about "conflict diamonds." Each, for different reasons, work to reunite Solomon and his son Dia Vandy (Kagiso Kuypers) who was abducted by the RUF.

A review published by *The New York Times* film critic Manohla Dargis, on the opening day, explains how the film addresses the medium of photography. Dargis implicates Maddy in the following excerpt in order to simultaneously problematize the moral aims of the film and photojournalism:

If the sociopolitical context weren't so appalling, this ludicrous characterization and Ms. Connelly's equally woeful performance would be easy to laugh off. But both are insulting because they transpire against a backdrop of human suffering, suffering that Maddy sternly lectures Danny for exploiting even as she snaps another photograph of the very same . . . Any question that the filmmakers might be clued into Maddy's cluelessness, might be directly engaging the contradictions involved whenever misery becomes fodder for entertainment, is answered by the documentarylike images of children roaming a mound of garbage, by the blank-looking men and women sitting in trash-strewn streets and by the periodically brandished arm and leg stumps. The horror, the horror (Dargis).

¹ Like Dia's character in *Blood Diamond*, Beah also describes being separated from the rest of his family during a similar chaotic scene.

The shock of wartime imagery forces audiences to confront dire situations taking place abroad, but as Dargis remarks, bearing witness to suffering also becomes a form of warped entertainment. In her analysis, Dargis seems to place blame on the manufacturers of images of suffering, those who take the photographs like Maddy. However, in recalling *Amulets and Dreams*, it is important to remain critical of Dargis's claims. Here, she and the character Maddy seem to overlook the efforts of photojournalists such as Badsha and Tillim who do not utilize violent imagery to relay the conflict in Sierra Leone. Indeed, *Amulets and Dreams* is a project which consciously sought not to contribute to the kinds of images of suffering that Dargis details above.

Furthermore Maddy is critical of her line of work in the film, while at the same time aware she has contributed to the brand of "Afro-pessimism" described by Badsha in the preceding chapter (Lynch 35). For example, when Danny mocks Maddy for writing about the image she took of Solomon reuniting with his wife and children at the Tassin refugee camp in Guinea, she replies at length:

Do you think I'm exploiting his grief? You're right. It's shit. It's like one of those infomercials. You know...with the little black babies with swollen bellies and flies in their eyes. And so here I've got dead mothers. I've got severed limbs. But it's nothing new. And it might be enough to make some people cry if they read, maybe even write a check. But it's not going to be enough to make it stop. I am sick of writing about victims, but it's all I can fucking do, because I need facts. I need names. I need dates. I need pictures. I need bank accounts. People back home wouldn't buy a ring if they knew it cost someone else their hand. But I can't write that story until I get facts that can be verified, which is to say, until I find someone who will go on record.

Maddy is critical of her audience, and also her profession. Her speech vocalizes some of the setbacks she experiences as a photojournalist, claiming that she needs to provide her audience with more information in order to move them to action.

The film also places the camera in the hands of an apprehensive Solomon, perhaps unintentionally inverting the typical relationship between the photographer and the photographed. Danny instructs Solomon to pretend he is a cameraman so that they can travel more freely as members of the press. After compromising his honesty and eventually accepting the part assigned to him, Solomon finds that he gains access to privileged spaces by carrying the camera equipment. In brandishing these powerful tools, Solomon's role as cameraman may recall the symbolic accessories of paramount chiefs who likewise relayed their power through the art of display.

In addition, Solomon's performance as a cameraman reminds one of the mimetic nature of film. In other words, the idea of an actor performing a role creates a parallel to the discourse of the child soldier, whose exaggerated behavior and appearance can be interpreted as a public performance. Claiming urban space, some child soldiers drive citizens away with noise and violence. Multiple scenes in *Blood Diamond* feature RUF child soldiers in the midst of disorder and recreation, oftentimes accompanied by flames, gunfire and loud music. In this light, film can express the auditory component of the child soldier's presentation.

As the film conveys, cameras are tools resonating power, for they are instruments that can capture death, and conversely, save lives. When armed Kamajor combatants threaten Solomon, Danny, and Maddy, who are trespassing through their territory, Maddy uses her camera to defuse the situation. In this initial exchange, Solomon shouts to the Kamajors that they are their friends and that they are not with the RUF or the government. Maddy interjects between Solomon and the lead Kamajor to say: "Excuse me, excuse me. Hi I'm Maddy Bowen with *Foreign Affairs* magazine. Was

wondering if I could take your pictures. Get my camera out. I'd heard about your struggle and I'd love to know more about it."² A playful, impromptu photography session follows thereby alleviating tensions. She takes their photographs and even joins them for a group portrait, which then appears formatted for the audience in black and white, the choice color of reportage.

The audience is given an intimate and literal close-up of the Kamajors through these images, recalling the black and white portraits taken by Tillim. Before the impromptu photo session Danny explains to Maddy that they are "local militia protecting their homes." They are portrayed as quiet, steadfast heroes who reside in the forest, wearing costumes that incorporate natural elements such as plant fibers and shells. It helps that their garments camouflage them, since these Kamajor rely on subtle movement for their surprise attack, rather than the boisterous public display tactics of the RUF. After their exchange, the Kamajors lead Danny, Solomon, and Maddy to a rehabilitation compound for former child soldiers.³ Although Tillim's images expose the fact that CDF forces utilized child soldiers, *Blood Diamond* portrays the Kamajors (all

² This scene is crucial to understanding the exchange between the press, whose aim is to cover and announce important stories, and combatants, who wish to have their plight exposed to the greater public or to draw recognition and fame. An essay by humanitarian worker David Snyder entitled "Behind the Lines" recounts an episode in Sierra Leone detailing the eagerness of combatants to have their pictures taken: "Three rebels approach and, seeing my camera, ask for a photo. I'm tired of them, tired of taking their photos. I ready the camera reluctantly. One of the three slides a pistol from the waistline of his dirty jeans. They all pose, stone faced, and place their hands on the weapon like a team with a trophy (Snyder in Bergman 142)." Another similar situation is documented by Daniel Hoffman: "A Kamajor in his unit cornered my assistant, demanding to know how much money I would be paid for images of one of the most fearsome, most respected, and certainly most notorious fighting forces in the world (Hoffman 349)." This also highlights not only the consciousness of soldiers having their photograph taken for an international audience but also the economic transactions that transpire in relation to photographing conflict zones.

³ A connection can be made here to Beah's autobiography. In 1997, at age sixteen, he was removed from fighting by UNICEF and was placed in a rehabilitation center. From there he was flown to New York where he finished his schooling at the United Nation International School in New York followed by study at Oberlin College.

undoubtedly adult men), as their custodians. In keeping with the Hollywood blockbuster formula, *Blood Diamond* clearly delineates the “good guys” (the Kamajors) from the “bad guys” (the RUF).

Messages of power communicated through the mutilation of the human body cuts across media, including sculpture, film, literature and photography.⁴ Revisiting Dargis’s review, she alludes to a blunt and heinous crime exposed by the film, the “periodically brandished arm and leg stump” signifying amputation. The poignant opening scene when rebels arrive at Solomon’s fishing village, destroying property and dispersing and murdering people, recalls this popular method of intimidation utilized by the RUF for political ends.⁵ When a young man is asked in *Blood Diamond* whether he would prefer a “short sleeve or a long sleeve”—whether he would like his arm severed above or below the elbow—RUF leader Captain Poison explains to him: “Young man, young man, you must understand. The government wants you to vote, ok? And they said the future is in your hands. We now the future, so we take your hands. No more hands, no more voting. Chop him.” Maddy’s monologue, quoted earlier, describes photographs of people with severed limbs. Hence amputation materializes as a means of political propaganda as well as a display of power based on physical dominance and fear, recalling “trophy heads” in relation to the trope of the warrior/hunter.

As Kamajor initiation was discussed at length, it is important to consider the RUF and SLA initiation processes. After Dia is captured by the RUF, he is shown lying

⁴ In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag notes the circulation of photographs of “. . . the children and adults whose limbs were hacked off during the program of mass terror conducted by the RUF, the rebel forces in Sierra Leone” (Sontag 71).

⁵ Though estimates vary regarding the number of people who suffered amputation, as many as two to three thousand people became victim in Sierra Leone, with more than half ultimately dying from their wounds (Gberie 199). Beah makes reference to amputation, specifying a method known as “One Love” where all of the fingers of the hand are severed, save the thumb (Beah 21)

naked in a pile with other kidnapped boys. Beah discusses his own abduction and recruitment, recounting similar privations related to hunger, exhaustion, and loneliness. In the film, the training process begins with the breakdown of familial relations. They are told that their “parents are weak, they are the farmers, they are the fishermen.” An older RUF leader indoctrinates the children through repetitive phrases urging them to become masculine, reminding them that they are “not children anymore.” The commanding officer says that respect is gained through fear, and requires the boys to chant, in unison, “shed their blood.” Not only do these child soldiers learn to speak the same thoughts, they are made to repeat similar actions. They are all taught to use a gun by practicing on dummies before being blindfolded. Dia is called from the crowd to shoot. When he removes his blindfold he finds that he has killed a person. As the children go through the training process together, they face the same fears and humiliations. This indoctrination by the RUF, as portrayed in the film, breaks down memories and severs familial blood ties. Military commanders are shown stepping into mentor roles after gaining the trust and loyalty of youths.

In order to stand out among other members of the military unit, child soldiers cultivate their own identities through naming and dressing. For example, one RUF member was documented wearing a t-shirt that read “C.O. Cut Hand” (Commanding Officer Cut Hand), as he was known for cutting off both hands of his victims one at a time (Stovel 12).⁶ With this example, one may consider the *nom de guerre* in terms of the gruesome performance enacted by child soldiers, thereby indicating his particular

⁶ Lansana Gberie’s reportage *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* details other units whose names reflect particular crimes including the Burn House Unit, Cut Hands Commando, and Blood Shed Squad. Some of these groups had a trademark way of killing, such as Kill Man No Blood unit, whose method was to beat people to death without shedding blood or the Born Naked Squad, who stripped their victims before killing them (Gberie 130).

role within his unit. Taking a *nom de guerre* has been a common practice in modern warfare, but the adoption of the practice by child soldiers seems to be more complex, perhaps indicating a shift in terms of institutional practice. Alldridge documented, “A boy has no real name until he goes to the Poro bush, when it is given to him at his circumcision” (Alldridge 125). War names, unlike names taken at circumcision, are meant to inspire fear. Evoking recognizable despotic leaders,⁷ child soldiers draw on figures associated with mass terror and national destruction.

Blood Diamond offers examples of the *nom de guerre* ceremony. Four recently initiated boys re-introduce themselves to the audience between deadpan scenes, which are interspersed with live-action shots of their training and daily routines. The significance wrapped up in the display of weaponry is apparent in each of the four vignettes, as the boys are shown with guns or are handed one upon entering the frame. They are each set against dark, solid backgrounds recalling Guy Tillim’s portraits. The first boy, standing upright and staring blankly into the camera, presents himself as “Baby Killer.” Another boy with short dreadlocks hanging over his red bandana calls himself “Master of Disaster.” His face is covered in chalky paint, evoking Poro initiation practices or perhaps war paint more generally. The middle-aged captain’s profile looms to the right of the frame reminding us of his constant presence. Another boy dubbed “Vaughn Trap” precedes Dia who announces himself as “See Me No More.” The four boys are pulled from the group and given the “spotlight.” The replacement of their given names signals the erasure of their former lives as well as their passage into manhood. Now they may bear arms, now they can take lives. In this sense, the naming ceremony

⁷ Beah notes a soldier who called himself Corporal Gadafi (sic.) (Beah 110).

is not only a rebirth, but also a death of their former selves—the final stage of their transformation.

Between the silent stills of *Blood Diamond* are live-action scenes. In one of these segments, the audience is brought into the rebel camp. Child soldiers cavort across a concrete slab with makeshift canvas tents and metal scaffolding. One child swings back and forth on a rope through the center of the stage as others engage in drinking, dancing and smoking. Most wear hats of varying types including berets, visors, and a knit hat with a giant pom-pom, and many hold weapons. In another frame, the camera zooms in on a man wearing a sleeveless leather jacket and cowry bracelet before panning out to reveal Dia. He is situated on a couch next to Commander Rambo, whose eyes are shaded behind red sunglasses. As he injects drugs into Dia's arm, Rambo tells the boy that, "The medicine will make you strong, make you invisible to enemies. Bullets will bounce off you." This statement should recall the use of amulets employed for similar purposes. Drug usage resonates across narratives of the child soldier. In *A Long Way Gone*, Beah references marijuana and "brown brown", a mixture of cocaine mixed and gunpowder (Beah 121).

In analyzing the camp scene, Dargis notes a specific pop cultural reference:

Like the "Constant Gardener," this film betrays an almost quasi-touristic fascination with images of black Africans, who function principally as colorful scenery or, as in the gruesome scenes inside rebel training camps, manifestations of pure evil. Pure evil that, incidentally, likes to listen to rap and, in one case, wears a Snoop Dogg T-shirt along with his gat (Dargis).

This excerpt has many implications including the mainstream dress code adopted by rebels who take on gangster-like personae.⁸ Snoop Dogg signals a connection to

⁸ See George Packer's "Letter from Ivory Coast: Gangsta War" which parallels the discussion of the development of hip-hop as a persona among young people in Ivory Coast.

American hip-hop culture specifically, inferring a global connection. Wearing popular images of rap artists, coupled with the use of bandanas and gold jewelry, child soldiers intentionally make reference to figures associated with economic clout.

RUF child soldiers not only wear hip-hop attire, but they also include aspects associated with soldier uniforms such as camouflage, war paint, and berets. Rambo, a fictional American ex-military man-turned-mercenary played by Sylvester Stallone, is a key American popular culture reference often cited by child soldiers through name, action, and dress. *Blood Diamond* marks this fascination through one of the lead RUF officers whose name is in fact Captain Rambo (the same character who wears the Snoop Dogg T-shirt). Oftentimes young combatants style themselves after violent characters such as Rambo by mimicking the brutal scenes they have watched on TV or have seen at the movies (Packer 11). More generally, Rambo represents brute force and power. In film, the character effectively destroys his enemies, which makes him an ideal prototype for child soldiers.

Just as *Blood Diamond* integrates references to American rapper Snoop Dogg and the action star Rambo, Beah plots the same course. This provides a segue to focus on dress in *A Long Way Gone* for the remainder of the chapter. In his novel, Beah recalls a soldier who had donned a Tupac Shakur T-shirt with the slogan “All eyes on me” (Beah 119), and watching movies including *Rambo: First Blood*, *Rambo II*, *Commando* and “so on” (Beah 6, 121). In the same way that Beah seems to list off Rambo movies, he likewise names many American rappers,⁹ again signaling the conscious appropriation of recognizable pop-cultural figures.

⁹ Some rap groups Beah mentions are Sugarhill Gang, Eric B. & Rakim, (Beah 6) Naughty by Nature, LL Cool J, Run-D.M.C., and Heavy D & the Boyz (Beah 15).

Beah describes attire worn by both RUF and SLA combatants in the course of the novel, typically cataloging each component of an outfit in a brief, non-descriptive manner. Early on he notes two rebels whose wardrobes consist of baggy jeans, *sleepers* (flip-flops) white T-shirts, red handkerchiefs, and guns (Beah 27). A few pages later, rebels are described wearing sleeveless army shirts and jeans, red cloths, jean jackets, backwards baseball caps, Adidas sneakers, and multiple, expensive watches (Beah 31). Drawing on this distinction in the bandana's color, one might recall how "Master of Disaster" wore a red bandana around his forehead in the film, or perhaps conjure the notion of gang rivalry in the United States. Squads used color as a means to discriminate between their own unit and the opposing side.¹⁰ But when Beah subsequently chronicles his own clothing, as a member of the SLA, appearances become virtually interchangeable as RUF and SLA combatants seem to have drawn on similar styles, layering hip-hop references and brand accessories. Accumulating jewelry and name-brand clothing, child soldiers conveyed their prestige through a conception of material wealth.

More than once Beah refers to *crapes* (sneakers), and in this repetition one gets a sense of how important this particular item of clothing was to him at that time (Beah 7, 9, 18, 46, 110). Shoes not only denote status, but they also reflect mobility—one's reliance on his feet to take him away from contentious places. He recounts one particular event in which all of his old clothes are burned upon initiation into the SLA. Beah recalls his replacement shoes: "We met at the training ground and new *crapes* were distributed . . . Some people got Adidas and others Nikes. I got black Reebok

¹⁰ Scholars have noted red bandanas and shirts being worn by rebels thereby indicating a pattern (Gberie 103).

Pump and was happier about my new *crapes* than anything else that was going on (Beah 110).” He then goes on to lament the loss of his rap cassettes, which burned in the flames. By destroying possessions that signal memories of the past, the SLA and RUF ushered in a set of new beliefs—new clothing and personae founded on a fragile political motto—a rebel cry for “future” during a most uncertain present.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The costume worn by child soldiers reveals much about their complex identities. Kamajors seem to recall the traditional dress associated with the figure of the warrior/hunter. Through the incorporation of unique materials such as animal parts, plant fibers and dyes, cowries, and the abundant display of amulets, child soldiers display their power. Amulets, which often contain sacred verses from the Koran, are especially important emblems of power and protection. The display of power resonates with the figure of the warrior/hunter who is perceived as mysterious for his special skills, mastery of medicine, and secret knowledge, which aid him in the bush. He obtains these skills through a process of initiation.

Kamajor groups adopted some of the institutional practices of Poro, and were mainly responsible for conducting rituals during the Civil War. One important ritual they performed was ushering the transition of adolescence to adulthood. In the past, it had been important to announce such social transformations to the community, as these individuals were now considered responsible in the eyes of the public and were expected to fulfill a particular role within the community. Warrior/hunters were traditionally responsible for providing food for the community and for protecting his community from danger. During the war, hunters were especially adept in safeguarding the community because they had the advantage of knowing the landscape, and were therefore able to anticipate rebel attack.

The political climate was extremely unstable throughout the war. Many paramount chiefs, who held the highest seat of local authority, were being targeted. The dress of paramount chiefs provides an interesting parallel to the warrior/hunter, for each utilized

similar adornments including tunics dyed in special substances, unique headwear, and weapons or ceremonial accessories. Furthermore, it was the warriors and hunters, men of great public power, who were given the title and position of paramount chief by British administrators at the onset of colonization; thus, at one point in time the warrior/hunter and the paramount chief were one and the same.

The dress worn by warrior/hunters and paramount chiefs influenced the military garments worn by Kamajor militias. Photographs of CDF child soldiers taken by Tillim show the appropriation of certain elements, particularly amulets, headdresses, and guns. These accessories reveal concepts of masculinity that can be linked to the trope of the warrior/hunter in African art, a trope which emerges from separate historical contexts and different media. But to consider displays of power in relation to visual representations of child soldiers is highly problematic. As can be inferred from the *Amulets and Dreams* project, images of child soldiers are ambiguous since the subjects can be perceived as innocent and aggressive—culpable victims. Their age, coupled with their weaponry, creates a disturbing juxtaposition.

While Kamajors adopted a more traditional mode of dress, the RUF and SLA tended to wear clothing that made more contemporary references to American hip-hop and military culture. These costumes used familiar images of rap icons as well as bandanas, gold jewelry, flip-flops, and sneakers. Name-brand clothing and accessories helped convey a message of prestige during the war. And the gun, particularly the AK-47, was perhaps the most crucial accessory for publicizing one's power.

The child soldier has become an international icon. Grossman's review of *A Long Way Gone* underscores the popular image of the child soldier: "The kid-at-arms has

become a pop-cultural trope of late. He's in novels, movies, magazines and on TV, flaunting his Uzi like a giant foam hand at a baseball game. He's in the latest James Bond movie and *The Last King of Scotland* and is the key point of *Blood Diamond*." Indeed, images of child soldiers appear widely across various media outlets and national boundaries. He has become a symbol for the continent of Africa, representing dire and complex issues.

Projects such as *Badsha* and Tillim's underscore the humanitarian objective instantiated by images of child soldiers. *Blood Diamond*, though a generalizing narrative, functions along similar lines. The film publicizes the conflict to a broad audience and utilizes the character of Maddy to reveal its altruistic meta-narrative. As an autobiography, Beah's *A Long Way Gone* seems to issue a plea of forgiveness from his reader. Indeed, representations of child soldiers, across different media, are a call for concern. Their image supplies visual evidence to the violence and instability of developing nations. The warrior/hunter, who seeks to order his environment as well as his costume in the midst of a chaotic bush may remind us of child soldiers who present themselves through modes of representation that have become familiar to them. While Kamajor child soldiers turned more to the past, RUF and SLA child soldiers looked to the present. With these two different approaches to dress, it is clear that the child soldier's appearance reflects not only his political ties but also the diverse, and oftentimes dangerous, cultural conditions that surround him.

APPENDIX FIGURE CITATIONS

Figure 2-1. Cole, Herbert. *Icons: Ideals and Power in the Art of Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1989. pp92.

Figure 2-2. Nooter, Mary H. *Secrecy: Art that Conceals and Reveals*. New York: The Museum for African Art, 1993. pp192.

Figure 2-3. Cole, Herbert M. et al. *African Art: Permutations of Power*. Gainesville, FL: Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, 1997. pp4.

Figure 2-4. Kreamer, Christine Mullen, et al. *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art*. Washington, D.C.: National Museum of African Art, 2007. pp123.

Figure 2-5. Viditz-Ward, Vera and Roslyn A. Walker. *Paramount Chiefs of Sierra Leone*. Washington, D.C: National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1990. cover.

Figure 2-6. Lamb, Venice and Alastair. *Sierra Leone Weaving*. Hertingfordbury, Hertfordshire: Roxford Books, 1984. pp146.

Figure 2-7. Lamb, Venice and Alastair. *Sierra Leone Weaving*. Hertingfordbury, Hertfordshire: Roxford Books, 1984. pp145.

Figure 2-8. Viditz-Ward, Vera and Roslyn A. Walker. *Paramount Chiefs of Sierra Leone*. Washington, D.C: National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1990. pp4.

Figure 3-1. Badsha, Omar (Ed.). *Amulets & Dreams: War, Youth & Change in Africa*. Pretoria: SAHO; ISS; UNISA, 2002. pp28.

Figure 3-2. Badsha, Omar (Ed.). *Amulets & Dreams: War, Youth & Change in Africa*. Pretoria: SAHO; ISS; UNISA, 2002. pp29.

Figure 3-3. Badsha, Omar (Ed.). *Amulets & Dreams: War, Youth & Change in Africa*. Pretoria: SAHO; ISS; UNISA, 2002. pp23.

Figure 3-4. Badsha, Omar (Ed.). *Amulets & Dreams: War, Youth & Change in Africa*. Pretoria: SAHO; ISS; UNISA, 2002. pp22.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ashleigh P. Lynch was born in Daytona Beach, Florida. She began pursuing her degree in Art History at Florida State University before transferring to the University of Florida, Gainesville, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in 2009, with minors in both African and Asian Studies. From 2009-2010, Ms. Lynch worked as a Gallery Assistant at the Ormond Art Museum in Ormond Beach, FL before returning to the University of Florida to complete her Master of Arts degree in Art History in the summer of 2012. During her time at UF, Ms. Lynch focused on African art under the supervision of Dr. Victoria Rovine, while benefiting from the guidance and scholarship of Drs. Robin Poyner and Alioune Sow. Ms. Lynch will be continuing her Ph.D. studies in Art History at the University of California at Santa Barbara.