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Roman Catholic Missionaries in Sierra Leone in the Nineteenth Century - Sean Fallon

From early in the nineteenth century Christian missionary activity, first in West Africa and later in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, became a significant feature of most European Christian churches. Sierra Leone was one of the first West African settlements to experience sustained evangelisation by European missionaries, to begin with by Protestant missionaries, mainly Anglicans and Methodists. Roman Catholic missionaries did not arrive in Sierra Leone until towards the middle of the century. This article discusses and assesses the early phases of their missionary endeavours in the country.

Phase 1 - Pre-1860

While evidence exists of some Roman Catholic missionary activity along the West African coast from the early seventeenth century, it was desultory and lacked organisational drive.¹ It was not until the nineteenth century that determined efforts were made to develop concerted missionary activity among communities living along that coast. At the time new missionary congregations were being established in several European countries to meet the challenge of Christian evangelisation which easier access to coastal communities offered. Congregations

¹ Kup, Peter, *A History of Sierra Leone 1400-1787*, London, 1961, p.67.

like the Holy Ghost, today known as the Spiritans, the Society of African Missions, the White fathers, and the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny, all French foundations, date from this period and by the middle of the century their missionary endeavours in Africa were gathering pace.

The arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries in Sierra Leone occurred in a rather round-about way and they came from the USA, not Europe. In the early 1820s many religious and philanthropic groups in the USA, especially the American Colonization Society² which campaigned for the liberation of enslaved people, supported the establishment of what became the independent state of Liberia as a home for former slaves, somewhat along the lines followed in Sierra Leone several decades previously. In the course of debate around this proposition, the Roman Catholic Bishop John England of the diocese of Charleston wrote to Pope Gregory XVI in 1833, suggesting that missionaries be sent to the ‘free blacks’ of Liberia.³ Eventually, in 1841, the Vatican asked the bishops of Charleston, Philadelphia, and New York to send missionaries from their dioceses to Liberia. Among those to respond was Fr Edward Barron an Irish priest who was ministering in Philadelphia at the time and who was an associate of the Holy Ghost congregation.

Barron was appointed a bishop and left for West Africa in 1841 accompanied by a Fr John Kelly from New York and a lay catechist from Baltimore. His jurisdiction was extended from Liberia to include Sierra Leone and the whole of West Africa and he became known as the “Bishop of the Two Guineas,” a generic name given to the sub-Saharan region of the West African coast. Bishop Barron’s contact with Sierra Leone was, however, brief. He visited Freetown in 1842 where he met a small and, according to Fyfe, ‘a priestless Roman Catholic community chiefly Jolof and a few recaptives from Portuguese colonies’.⁴ Unfortunately, Bishop Barron became seriously ill soon afterwards and resigned his jurisdiction leaving no permanent mission behind.

Sixteen years elapsed before another attempt was made to establish a mission in Sierra Leone. Then, following the creation of the Vicariate of Sierra Leone in 1858,⁵ a group of three missionaries from the recently formed Society of African Missions, arrived in Freetown

² The American Colonization Society (in full, The Society for the Colonization of Free People of Colour of America), founded in 1816, was the primary vehicle to support the return of free African Americans to what was considered greater freedom in Africa. It helped to found the colony of Liberia in 1821–22 as a place for freedmen

³ Dunne, James, *Creoles and Catholics in Freetown 1864-1896*, unpublished dissertation, Fordham University NY, 1993. Copy in archives of Irish Spiritans, Dublin.

⁴ Fyfe, Christopher, *History of Sierra Leone*, p. 288.

⁵ Vicariate is the title given to an ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Roman Catholic Church which has not yet become a diocese.

from Dakar in January 1859. They were all French and were joined, in May, by the founder of the society, Mons. de Marion Brésillac accompanied by two other missionaries. Tragically, all but one of this group succumbed to yellow fever within six weeks of each other and, with their deaths, ended the first planned Roman Catholic mission to Sierra Leone. In a spirit of what today would be described as ecumenism, the funeral rites for last of the group, Mons. Brésillac, were presided over by a priest of the Anglican community in Freetown. The surviving member of the group returned to Dakar and the mission closed.

Phase 2 - Mission Revived

The next phase of Catholic missionary activity in Sierra Leone commenced when, in 1863, the Holy Ghost congregation⁶ assumed responsibility for the mission at the request of the Office for the Propagation of the Faith, the Vatican body charged with overall responsibility for the Catholic Church's missionary initiatives. That office described the territory in very unflattering terms as having 'a pitiless climate, a native population degraded by long years of paganism and characterised by the worst features of a tropical seaboard, a campaign of the most intense opposition organised by the native sorcerer, the Mohamedan Alman and Protestant proselytiser'.⁷ However, contrary to this image, Sierra Leone, a British Crown Colony since 1808, had been developing its own very distinctive character, and by the middle of the century had a mixed population of approximately 15,000 living in Freetown and the surrounding peninsular territory, many descendants of former slaves liberated from their slave ships by naval patrols stationed at Freetown. From the early days of the colony, the authorities had encouraged European missionaries to go to Sierra Leone with the result that by the middle of the nineteenth century a number of Protestant churches were firmly established in Freetown, and were conducting schools, while Fourah Bay College functioned, primarily to train a local clergy.

The Holy Ghost congregation had among its principal objectives the evangelisation of sub-Saharan Africa and was to become one of the largest Roman Catholic missionary societies working in Africa over the next one hundred and fifty years. However, the congregation's early members being mainly French, it was realised that to work effectively in those parts of Africa like Sierra Leone that were coming under British control, the congregation needed

⁶ The Holy Ghost congregation was an amalgamation in 1848 of a society, founded in 1709 In Paris by Claude Francois Poullard des Places, with a congregation founded by Francis Libermann in 1842.

⁷ Dunne, op.cit., chap.1.

English speaking members. With that objective in mind the congregation established a number of secondary schools in Ireland, then part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, predominantly English speaking and Catholic. There it was hoped young men could be attracted to the congregation.

The arrival of the congregation in Ireland coincided with and contributed to what would become a remarkable growth in missionary activity that would eventually take Irish men and women to the four corners of the world, mainly the English speaking world and, in particular to British colonies in Africa. That missionary movement was encouraged by the huge emigration from Ireland that followed the tragic famines of the 1840s and which created large migrant communities in America and Australia, and also by European imperialist expansion into Africa and elsewhere across the globe. Interest in the Catholic Church's missionary activity was encouraged by the establishment in many parts of the country of support organisations like the Association for the Propagation of the Faith whose aims included fund raising, helping to recruit potential missionaries, and spreading information about the work of various missionary congregations.

The Holy Ghost congregation's first foundations in Ireland were made when a number of French members opened schools in Dublin (1859), and at Rockwell in County Tipperary (1864). However, when the congregation assumed responsibility for the Sierra Leone mission there were, as yet, few Irish members and, until the early years of the twentieth century, the mission would consist of more French than Irish members. In 1864 the first four Holy Ghost missionaries arrived in Freetown, led by Fr Edouard Blanchet, who was accompanied by Fr Koeberlé, Bro. Wurm and an Irishman, Bro Mathews. Fr Blanchet's missionary career was to be, in nineteenth century West African terms a very long one, though not all of it in Sierra Leone. He didn't retire until in 1892. Fr Blanchet had previously worked at St Louis, in what would later become the Senegal, while Bro Mathews had worked in the Gambia.

Before discussing their work in Sierra Leone, it may be helpful to offer a brief account of the approach to evangelisation which informed Catholic missionary activity of the period.

Approach to Evangelisation

Like all Christian churches, the Catholic mission's basic motivation was a concern for the eternal destiny of people and its conviction that membership of the Roman Catholic Church was the key to ensuring that destiny would be in Heaven. To this end, it was also a mission,

‘which while it acknowledged its European cultural trappings also recognised the need to cultivate local leadership’.⁸ According to James Dunne, the approach of the Holy Ghost missionaries was set out by one of the congregation’s founders, Fr Francis Liebermann, who ‘had insisted to his missionaries that a self-sustaining Christian community had to be rooted in the mentality, customs and culture of the local community. Missionaries were to avoid disturbing these customs and were to lead the people to be more perfect in their own way according to their own customs’.⁹ Consequently, Liebermann directed his missionaries to spend their first year listening, observing and learning local languages and, as part of their approach, were to become involved in education, agriculture and technology.¹⁰

So, while the main missionary emphasis was on ensuring as far as possible the ‘eternal destiny’ of those to whom the Christian gospel was preached, practical ways of winning local converts had to be found. These were mainly through the establishment of schools, orphanages and medical centres. Among those targeted were former slaves, particularly in Sierra Leone. The founder of the St Joseph of Cluny congregation a number of whose members would establish a mission in the country, Mother Anne-Marie Jahouvey devoted herself to this task. Mother Jahouvey had visited Freetown in 1823 at the invitation of Governor McCarthy where she had reorganised the Liberated African hospital and had cared for victims of yellow fever that was raging at the time, and of which she almost became a victim herself.¹¹

The extent to which Liebermann’s advice was heeded and local customs respected by his missionaries, whether in Sierra Leone or elsewhere, is a matter of judgement.

Mission established

On February 12th, 1864, the four Holy Ghost missionaries came ashore at Freetown and were given residence in premises at Rawdon Street where they slept on the bare floor for sometime due to a lack of furniture. On the following Sunday, they said mass for a congregation of fourteen Catholics though the total number of Catholics in the town was said to be between sixty and seventy. The house in which they lodged was later leased by Fr Blanchet at sixty-four pounds a year and the first chapel was established there. In 1865 Fr Blanchet opened a

⁸ Dunne, op.cit., chap.3.

⁹ Dunne, op.cit. chap.3.

¹⁰ Quoted by Edward Hamelberg, ‘The History of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone’ in *Centenary Souvenir of Holy Ghost Fathers in Sierra Leone 1864-1964*, Sierra Leone, 1964, p.35.

¹¹ Fyfe, op.cit., p.151

primary school at Rawdon Street and named it after St. Edward the Confessor. Due to the lack of Catholic teachers, he hired Protestant teachers until the following year when Bro Claver, a native of Mauritius, arrived to take over responsibility as school principal. Fr Blanchet also provided a small dispensary from which he distributed medicines every morning.

A year later, two Irish men, Fr Thomas Bracken and Bro Christian Foley arrived to strengthen the mission. Fr Bracken, replaced Fr Koeberlé who had died quite suddenly. By then the Rawdon Street premises had become too small and on October 13th, 1867, work commenced on a permanent mission house at Howe Street. The building was completed in 1868.

Bro Foley only stayed a short time before returning to Ireland in 1869 and, tragically, Fr Bracken died within eight months, leaving Fr Blanchet as the only Catholic missionary in Freetown. In his short period in Freetown Fr Bracken had become quite well known, especially among the Irish soldiers attached to the West Indian Regiment stationed there for whom he was chaplain. His funeral was an occasion of mourning not just among the Catholic congregation in the town, but more widely as well. According to Blanchet 'The funeral of Fr Bracken was a triumph for the Catholic Mission. We never realised till then how much sympathy the whole population of Freetown had for us'.¹²

In a letter to his superior in Paris Fr Bracken described a typical day for a missionary.¹³ He rose at five, said morning prayers, celebrated mass, read his breviary (book of prayers), took breakfast, and spent the rest of the morning reading, writing, receiving visitors, and preparing for his instruction classes, before having lunch and taking recreation (mainly resting in his room). In the afternoon he would go for a walk during which he would visit local people, members of the European community, the hospital and the army barracks. Instructions of persons preparing for the sacraments took place in the evening about seven, at times well attended, at others frustratingly poorly attended. Dinner followed and then, after evening prayer, he would retire.

Bracken and Koberlé's early deaths underlined the fact that life expectancy for Europeans in Sierra Leone was frequently very short, although there were notable exceptions such as Fr

¹² Hamelberg, *op.cit.* p.36.

¹³ Letter, in French, dated Fete de la Circoncision, Janvier 1867, in Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

Blanchet. Following Bracken's death, over succeeding decades several other missionaries succumbed after quite short periods in Sierra Leone. The effect of their loss was to impede the work of the mission, especially in education.

Girls' Education

In 1866 three Sisters of Cluny arrived in Freetown. Like the Holy Ghost congregation, the Cluny sisters were anxious to recruit members from Ireland and, in 1864 had established their first school there.¹⁴ Two of the three were Irish, Srs Kearney and Sheridan. Such was the novelty of the sisters that when they arrived five 'gendarmes' were needed to prevent the crowd that had gathered from 'envahir l'église' (invading the church) to see the 'sisters of mercy'.¹⁵ The main focus of the sisters' work was to be the education of girls and soon after their arrival they established a primary school.

The two mission schools quickly attracted considerable numbers of pupils, especially from among the poorer sections of Freetown's society. According to Fyfe 'The Roman Catholic mission looked after the poor more than the Protestant churches which, based so firmly on the prosperous laity, tended to succumb to the temptation ... of ministering too much to the self-esteem of the successful'.¹⁶ From an enrolment of 113 in 1868 the boys' school expanded to 212 a year later, while the girls' school grew from 80 in 1867 to 200 in 1869. Reports on the two Catholic schools compiled as part of a survey of the colony's education provision by a J. Stuart Laurie, an inspector sent from London at the British government's request, reveal that the boys' school had three teachers, one educated in Mauritius, the second educated in Ireland, and the third, a lay person, educated in Barbados.¹⁷ The school had 114 registered at the time of Laurie's visit and offered the following subjects: English language, composition and grammar, history, reading, writing, drawing, arithmetic, scripture, Christian 'politeness' and singing. Annual expenditure on the school was recorded as £180.

The girls' school was described as catering for boarders as well as day scholars. The former were charged £2 per month if full boarders and £1 if half-boarders. A similar range of subjects to that in the boys' school was offered with the addition of knitting. There were 65 pupils registered at the time of the survey and the staff consisted of the two Irish sisters.

¹⁴ Mount Sackville School, on the western outskirts of Dublin.

¹⁵ Letter from Blanchet to Mother House, in Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

¹⁶ Fyfe, *op.cit.* p.326.

¹⁷ CO/267

Annual expenditure on the school amounted to £120. In neither school were tuition fees levied and in both schools the textbooks in use included titles from the Irish National School list as well as from that of the Irish Christian Brothers, texts then widely used in the English speaking world.

In these early years the reputation of the Catholic mission's schools was such that at a meeting of principals of Protestant schools in 1872, the Director of Public Instruction was reported as saying, 'If I had any advice for the Government it would be to confide our schools to the Catholics. It was among them that I noted progress and only among them'.¹⁸

Inter-Church Rivalries

The reputation of the Catholic mission did not, however, remain unsullied. Given Sierra Leone's already quite developed Protestant presence the arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries was the cause of some suspicions and tensions heightened by more general events in the Catholic Church at the time. Catholic missionaries regarded their Protestant counter-parts to be teaching profoundly erroneous interpretations of the Christian message, and had, therefore, to be challenged in whatever ways possible. They aimed therefore, to seek conversions not simply from among non-Christians, but from among the Protestant community as well. They did so, wherever possible, not only by preaching the 'true' faith, but also by trying to demonstrate a better quality in the services they provided compared with those offered by other missionaries, especially in their schools. Comments like those of the Director of Public Instruction together with the enrolment of Protestant pupils strengthened their schools' reputation especially that of the girls' school.

In some Protestant circles, attitudes towards the Catholic mission were, at times, quite hostile – the initials RC were often translated to read 'Roman cockroaches' while others viewed the missionaries as 'jesuits' 'who would stop at nothing to achieve their goal'.¹⁹ Fueling the rivalry between the churches was the Catholic determinations to win as many converts from Protestantism as possible. Writing about the Protestant pupils who had enrolled in the convent school, Sr Marie-Therese claimed that they would soon become Catholics, noting that 'elles ne savent pas même ce que c'est le protestantisme' (they do not know what

¹⁸ Report cited in communication to the Holy Ghost Mother House, Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

¹⁹ Observer, 14 Feb. 1867.

Protestantism is).²⁰ Her companion Sr Kearney claimed that it was only the Protestant ministers and, by implication, not the ordinary people who were ‘furieux contre nous. Ils disent toute sorte de mal contre nous. Surtout, ils disent que nous sommes des idolâtres et que nous obligeons tout le monde à être catholique (.. who are furious with us. They speak all sorts of evil against us. Above all, they say we are idolaters and want to make the whole world Catholic).²¹

In these early years inter-church tensions were directly raised by a letter issued by Pope Pius IX in 1869 as part of his preparations for the Vatican Council then about to be convened in Rome. Addressed to ‘all Protestants and non-Catholics’, the Pope wrote ‘we cannot restrain ourselves on the occasion of the future council from addressing our apostolic and paternal words to all those who, though acknowledging the same Jesus Christ as Redeemer and glorying in the name of Christians, nonetheless do not profess the true faith of Jesus Christ, and do not follow the communion of the Catholic Church’, and he called on them to recognise the error of their ways and to acknowledge that the Catholic Church was the one true church of Jesus Christ.²² Fr Fritsch, Bracken’s successor at the Catholic mission, circulated an English version of the letter in the hope that it would ‘bring forth the most salutary fruits of salvation in the hearts of all those who shall read it with a reflective and unprejudiced mind’.²³ On the contrary the letter provoked considerable hostility from the Protestant churches. A series of thirteen sermons was preached condemning the letter at Christ Church, Pademba Road. In one, the Principal of Fourah Bay College, Rev. Henry J. Alcock, claimed in quite extravagant terms: ‘... that mere zeal will no more prove him (the Pope) right or myself, than it would prove a worshipper of the Indian idol Juggernaut right, who after spending his life serving that false god, ends it by crushing himself to death beneath the wheels of his car’.²⁴

After the positive start and the respect for the mission demonstrated at Bracken’s funeral, this controversy put the Catholic Church in Freetown on the defensive, and, to a certain extent would contribute to a decline in enrolments in its newly opened schools. Nevertheless there were also those who recognised that the Catholic missionaries were working hard at getting

²⁰ 11 Nov. 1867 in Boite 12 11.2a.1, Archives des Spiritains, Paris

²¹ Ibid, July, 1867.

²² Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

²³ Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

²⁴ *Course of Sermons on the Errors of the Roman Catholic Church preached at Christ Church, Pademba Road, Freetown, 1869.*

to know the people of Freetown. Writing about these early years in an unpublished *Chroniques des Missions*, the unnamed author quotes a local journal which stated that the missionaries, ‘gagnent l’esprit de la population par la bonté, l’indulgence et l’affection de la population qu’ils lui témoignent et de plus ils ne sont pas aveuglés par les étroits préjugés de couleur’ (...win the minds of the population with their charity, with the indulgence and affection which they manifest towards them, moreover they are not blinded by the narrow prejudices of colour).²⁵

Phase Three - Mission Develops

Despite this hostility, the mission continued to develop. It received a boost when Governor John Pope Hennessy (1872-3), an Irish man and a Catholic, and his wife became regular participants in church services, albeit for a very short time. Their attendance conferred a form of unofficial acceptance of the mission into the colony’s life. Notwithstanding this boost in status, developing the mission was slow work, not least because the toll on missionaries’ health was severe. Furthermore, internal tensions surfaced occasionally, suggesting that relationships between members of the mission were not always smooth and, at times, were quite fraught. Mission superior, Fr Gommenginger, who arrived in 1873, wrote to the Mother House in Paris that it would be better, despite the shortage of missionaries, if one or two of his colleagues should leave Sierra Leone voluntarily, or be recalled because they were not, in his opinion, suitable for missionary work.

One missionary who fell foul of his superiors was Bro Eugene Sullivan, who served in Sierra Leone in the 1870s. A highly regarded teacher in the boys’ school, he strongly complained to the Mother House about the mission’s failure to provide secondary education. Despite being told that secondary education was not a priority in the mission’s plans for evangelisation, he argued its importance, and warned that the Catholic people would be the losers for not having educated men in public life as a result of this inaction. Bro Sullivan pressed his case but was later transferred to a new mission in Monrovia where he died some years later. It would be nearly fifty years before second level education would be provided by the mission. Meantime Catholic boys and girls who sought second level schooling were obliged to attend schools under the auspices of other agencies and other churches. The absence of a second level school probably explains some of the failure to recruit any Sierra Leoneans to the Catholic clergy

²⁵ Cited in ‘Aperçues de la mission’, 1931.Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

until well into the next century, whereas the rival Protestant churches had for long been educating local clergy.

Later the behaviour of a Fr Muller caused a number of parishioners in Freetown to sign a letter to Paris complaining and asking that he be called home.²⁶ The letter talked of the ‘very sad and awful conduct of our present Acting Superior Fr Muller’ who had berated the choir boys for singing a wrong note during the benediction service. The fact that there were several Protestants present who, as the letter also states, ‘were laughing heartily’ only added to the scandal. The letter recommended that Fr Muller be replaced by ‘our well dear Fr Cosgrove’, an Irish missionary. Perhaps not surprisingly, Fr Cosgrove had himself been the subject of some criticism by Muller in one of the latter’s reports to the congregation’s superior in Paris saying that he was ‘not a missionary’.

In 1888 Fr Haas complained that the sisters needed to control their budget and that they were not observing their congregation’s religious rule, describing it as ‘une lettre morte’ (a dead letter) and that they lacked ‘la charité mutuelle’ (sisterly love).²⁷ Other concerns provoked a letter dated 9 April 1891 from Fr Boyce to the Holy Ghost Superior in Paris.²⁸ In it Boyce complained that the boys’ school in Freetown was being badly managed; that the principal teacher was a Protestant separated from his wife and living with a Catholic girl. Boyce also referred to money being spent foolishly on buildings and spoke of the principal of the girls’ school as having no English despite having lived in the country for ten years. He also claimed that Fr Blanchet, the superior in Freetown, was unapproachable on these matters and suggested he willingly tolerated laxities.

A year later, a Fr Tom O’Carroll wrote bitterly about what he had heard being said about him in Paris, apparently by Fr Lorbor, his local superior.²⁹ He had decided to maintain his silence for the sake of the mission but now that his priestly role was ‘en jeu’ (at risk); he would do so no longer. It is never completely clear from the correspondence what O’Carroll’s problems were, though a fondness for alcohol may well have been the issue.

²⁶ Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

²⁷ Letter from Fr Haas to the Mother House, 10 May 1888, Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

²⁸ Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

²⁹ Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

Living as they were in very small groups with few social outlets and in climatic conditions that posed serious risks to their health; it is hardly surprising that such tensions and conflicts would arise. However, despite these problems, the mission progressed as the number of Catholics gradually increased. The Catholic Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, the foundation stone of which was laid in 1884 and towards the cost of which many of Freetown's Protestants contributed, was solemnly inaugurated in 1887 in the presence of the colony's dignitaries including the acting Governor and the consular representatives of France, Germany, Portugal and Spain. At the inauguration 'a fine sermon' was preached by Fr. Frawley.³⁰ Fr Frawley wrote about the 'people coming in great numbers to be instructed' saying that 'last year we instructed sixty adults and hope to exceed this number this year'.³¹ On a personal note and with no hint of any tensions, he added that 'since coming to Sierra Leone I have been very happy ... I like this mission very much'.³²

The provision of educational opportunities was still the mission's main social service, but the favourable start in the late 1860s and early 1870s did not persist, at least not in the case of the boys' school which lost its earlier good reputation. In 1888 Fr Haas complained that the school was 'not clean and that attendance was low'.³³ Consequently parents were sending their children elsewhere. Another petition, signed by over forty prominent Freetown Catholics and submitted to the Superior of the Holy Ghost congregation in October 1890, pointed to the serious decline in numbers, from 200 to 20 and claimed the education provided was of the 'lowest standards'.³⁴ The petition deplored the fact that Catholic parents were sending their children to Protestant schools and that there were 'no Catholic young men holding any social positions with which young ladies leaving the convent could marry'. On the contrary, the girls' school was described as thriving with many Protestant parents choosing it as the preferred institution for their daughters' education. Indeed, according to an associate professor at Columbia Teachers' College in the US who had visited Sierra Leone, 'The best mission school seen here and the best primary school in all of West Africa was St Joseph's Convent for girls under the direction of Irish Catholic sisters'.³⁵ With such a reputation for the girls' school, it was no wonder that the petitioners were pressing for

³⁰ Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

³¹ Letter to Mother House, 3 September, 1886, Boite 12 I 1, 2a 3, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

³² Ibid.

³³ Haas, op.cit.

³⁴ Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris.

³⁵ Walker, RF, *The Holy Ghost Fathers in Africa*, Dublin, 1933.

improvements to the boys' school. Their letter recalled the days when Christian Brothers taught in the school and requested their return. Change came with the appointment of a new superior of the mission.

Phase 4 – Pro-Vicar Apostolic James Browne

In 1894 after Fr Blanchet had retired, another petition called for the appointment of a bishop, Irish or English (obviously a native speaker of English was preferred).³⁶ The petition acknowledged the good work of Fr James Browne who had arrived in Freetown in 1893 as mission superior following ministry in Ireland, Trinidad and the USA. Browne who would serve for the next ten years was to prove an energetic leader of the mission and was the obvious choice of the petitioners. However, the petition was not responded to and, while appointed superior, Browne was not immediately appointed as bishop, though he would be some years later.³⁷

Under Browne's leadership boys' education improved and mission stations were established in the Protectorate, declared in 1896. Early attempts to establish such stations had not met with any success. One attempt in 1881 at Benty in the Melacorrie region met with considerable opposition from Protestant missionaries in the area and it was considered prudent to withdraw.³⁸ A mission at Rio Pongo in the North, which Fr Gommenginger established in 1876, also struggled and did not become a permanent establishment. Within the colony a mission station at Murray Town was opened in 1880 and it too struggled for a considerable period before eventually being firmly established. The main mission station to be established outside of Freetown before Browne's arrival was developed by Fr Blanchet at Bonthe on Sherbro Island in 1893. There, schools for boys and girls as well as an orphanage were established, the latter under the care of the St Joseph of Cluny sisters. However, the sisters were unable to provide personnel for the orphanage for very long and concentrated instead on the school.

Browne made exploratory visits to several areas to talk with local people about establishing schools and missions. He describes one such visit by canoe up the River Bum when he was

³⁶ Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris

³⁷ Farragher, Seán, 'James Browne' in *Irish Spiritans Remembered*, www.spiritans.ie/irish_spiritans_remembered.pdf.

³⁸ Boite 12 I i 16, Archives des Spiritains, Paris

accompanied by a Fr Touhy, who could speak Mende.³⁹ Everywhere they went they were asked to open schools. As result an out-station to Bonthe was established at Bamani in 1897, the first of several to be established over the following decade.

Browne was eventually appointed Pro-Vicar Apostolic in 1898 with the authority of a bishop, a much delayed acknowledgement of the growth of the mission and of Browne's energetic contribution to that growth. His letters reveal a man of considerable enthusiasm with an urgency to get things done. He frequently wrote with a scarcely revealed frustration of the need for more missionaries, of the need to replace those who died unexpectedly, or those who had to be allowed home to recuperate from illness and fatigue. One of Fr Browne's letters reveals the commitment to building and the need for tools.⁴⁰ He wrote asking a Br Regis who was preparing to travel to join the Sierra Leone mission and who had worked with him in Trinidad, to bring with him 'an inch chisel, a couple of turn screws and a couple of bradawls and gimlets'. He also requested table knives, a table lamp (oil) with a good reflector, three dozen Sacred Heart medals, school songs, canticles and hymns and, in a p.s., added 'a small harmonium for our school, price five or six pounds'.

Browne had contact with a society in Paris that raised funds for the missions for which he annually completed a detailed questionnaire providing information about the mission's work. He frequently wrote about his visits into the Protectorate, and the conditions of the ordinary people. He described the homes of the Mende being poorly constructed, and not well kept. He also mentions cannibalism and domestic slavery still practiced in some places and hoped they could be eliminated. Emphasising the demand for schools, he told of the large attendance of local chiefs at the opening of a mission chapel at Mogumbo in 1900, and of the enrolment of many children in the school alongside it.

Hut Tax Wars

Although missionaries benefited from European colonial expansion, they did not always find themselves in agreement with the policies or decisions of the colonial administrations. In Sierra Leone, one of the consequences of Britain's extension of its jurisdiction beyond the original colony was the decision to impose a new tax, the 'hut tax', to pay for the new administration. The tax was a house tax but, however necessary the colonial administration

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

viewed the tax, the implication for those affected was that they did not own their houses, an implication widely resented. As a result the tax was resisted and a bitter conflict broke out led by the Temne chief, Bai Bureh, in the North and by several Mende chiefs in the South and East. While resentment of the 'hut tax' was directed against the colonial authorities, missionaries in a number of places also suffered in the ensuing violence, notwithstanding the clear opposition some expressed towards the tax. In 1898 Fr Browne wrote that the 'hut tax' was harsh and unjustified', but he and others also spoke out against cannibalism and slavery. This criticism was resented by those responsible for the practices and placed its critics in considerable danger.⁴¹

Fr Tuohy, based at Bonthe, wrote an account of the situation there following the outbreak of the war.⁴² According to Tuohy violent resistance to the tax occurred when the colonial authorities started to imprison chiefs who were leading the anti-tax protests. Attacks on European owned property on the mainland forced many to flee down river to seek refuge at Bonthe. People gathered at the mission for protection against the feared arrival of rebel forces. Luckily, the failure to acquire a sufficient number of boats to take the rebels to Bonthe spared the refugees. Once the uprising had been put down, missionary activity resumed in the areas affected without any apparent long-term effects.

Conclusion

After a sustained presence of forty years by the close of the century the Roman Catholic mission in Sierra Leone had developed firm roots, not just in Freetown and Bonthe but also in several locations in the Protectorate. When Browne died in 1903 permanent mission stations were functioning at Moyamba and Mobe with a number of out-stations attached to each. To these would soon be added stations at Gerihun in 1904 and at Serabu and Blama in 1905. In the colony, apart from Freetown itself, mission stations were located at Ascension Town and Murray Town. The Catholic mission then consisted of eleven priests, four brothers and eleven sisters caring for a total Catholic population of nearly 3,000 with 900 children enrolled in their schools.

From the humble and inauspicious beginnings in 1864 when Blanchet and his companions stepped ashore to establish the first permanent mission growth had been slow but steady.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Letter from Fr Tuohy in *Les Missions Catholiques*, Bulletin Hebdomadaire, 1 July, 1898, published by the Office for the Propagation of the Faith, p.301.

Relationships with the wider community were now quite harmonious, another contrast with the situation just a few decades earlier. With respect to the latter it had been of significance that several of the colony's governors after Hennessy had also been Catholic and had regularly attended Catholic services. The missionaries had reciprocated and had gradually abandoned the more stand-offish earlier approach which had kept many of them apart from the wider European and African communities. As happened when Fr Bracken died, but on a far greater scale, Browne's funeral occasioned a very large demonstration of public respect for him and the Catholic mission. Civil authorities, merchants, traders of Freetown and the army - for which he had acted as chaplain, and members of non-Catholic communities joined their Catholic citizens at the ceremonies.⁴³ Leading Catholics in the colony wrote to Paris paying tribute to Browne saying 'we cannot let this occasion pass without placing on record our high appreciation of the services he has rendered in furthering the cause of the Catholic religion, namely by the opening of missions in the hinterland and by bringing together that bond of friendship between our separated brethren and the Catholic Church'.⁴⁴ It was a fitting tribute not just to Browne, but all who served the mission over the previous half-century.

Note on author

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⁴³ Farragher, op.cit.

⁴⁴ Boite 12 I 1,1a7, Archives des Spiritains, Paris

Irish-Sierra Leonean Connections 1750-1960 (Dublin, Sierra Leone-Ireland Partnership, 2011).

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Forced displacement during the Sierra Leonean civil war, 1991-2002 -Amie Kamanda

Abstract

This paper investigates the extent of forced displacement during the Sierra Leonean civil war. The armed conflict is notorious for its brutality and human rights violations. Thus far, less attention has been given to its demographic impact, which when undertaken would assess its short and long term impact on fertility, mortality and migration, the three components of population change. The goal of a demographic analysis of armed conflict might vary from historical documentation to an effort to honour the victims.

A demographic analysis of the civil war in Sierra Leone is long overdue. In a conflict where more than 40,000 counts of human rights violations against the civilian population has been documented, an estimated excess mortality of up to 460,000 deaths has been projected and supposedly 2 million persons forcibly displaced, there is impetus for more research into this aspect of the conflict.

This study will concentrate on one of the demographic components, forced migration. The component is important because the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that of the 17 human rights violations committed during the civil war, forced displacement was the most obvious. The violation was non-discriminatory. Moreover, of the three components of demographic change, data is readily available for this particular element. Finally, forced displacement is chosen for analysis because it is often quoted categorically without reference to any official sources that the civil war displaced anywhere between 1 to 2 million people of whom, 500,000 were refugees. The accuracy of this statement will be interrogated.

Using data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the estimate of three types of forcibly displaced persons is assessed from 1991 to 2002. The estimates of IDPs from 1993-2002 ranged from 250,000 to 1.3 million. Comparatively, estimates of refugees from 1991-2002 range from approximately 140,000 to 487,000.

1.1 Introduction

During the Sierra Leonean civil war (1991-2002), forced displacement was the dominant form of human rights violation (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, henceforth SLTRC 2004). Displacement was indiscriminate and unlike economic migration, it was largely unselective. This means that Sierra Leoneans of all ages, sex and from every

administrative district were forcibly displaced. A number of studies have documented the scale of displacement during the country's internal strife (Black and Sesay 1997; Van Damme 1999). However, there is a lack of understanding of the scale of displacement over time.

The aim of this study is to assess the number of forcibly displaced persons during the civil war from 1991 to 2002 and three categories of displaced persons are analysed here: these are internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and returnees. IDPs are persons who 'have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border' (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2001a, p.1). In contrast, according to a well-established international definition, a refugee is an individual who:

'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country' (1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 1, Paragraph 2).

The third group under study in this paper is a returnee, a person who was a refugee, but who was a refugee, but who has recently returned to his/her country of origin (United Nations 2001). The decision to return is often based on a change in circumstances relating to a diminished risk of the fear of persecution that had forced them to flee in the first place or deterioration in security in the country of refuge which is greater than the risk of returning home.

In the following sections of this paper, the background to the Sierra Leonean civil war is outlined in Section 1.2, followed by an overview of previous estimates of forced displacement (Section 1.3). The data and method discuss how annual estimates of displaced persons were gathered from the UNHCR statistical publication (Section 1.4). This is followed by the results (Section 1.5). Finally, the conclusion highlights the limitations of the study and contribution of the analysis.

1.2 Background of the Sierra Leonean civil war

The Sierra Leone civil war started on 27 March 1991 following a border incursion into the Kailahun and Pujehun Districts by the rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The RUF contested the power of the state following years of political repression, economic stagnation and social injustice (Richards 1996). After years of fighting which impeded health indicators in the country, caused destruction of infrastructure and large scale poverty, the war finally came to an end on 18 January 2002. While the RUF justified their struggle as the only route to instituting political and socio-economic reforms, as the war unfolded, the civilian population increasingly became the primary victims of their attacks (Park 2006, Betancourt et al. 2010, Denov 2010). As such, the conflict is notable for its extensive human rights abuses of which forced displacement is prominent.

Despite the civil war spanning over a decade, it differed in intensity by year and this is reflected in the pattern of human rights violations documented, especially population displacement. Categorising the duration of the war into three phases, (i) Phase I: Conventional warfare; (ii) Phase II: Guerrilla warfare; and (iii) Phase III: Power struggles and peace efforts, the SLTRC (2004) has shown that the most violent periods of the civil war were in the later stages of Phase II and early stages of Phase III because by this time the number of conflict actors proliferated and the civil war had engulfed every administrative district. Prior to 1993, Phase I (Conventional warfare) had seen the war confined in only two districts where the initial border incursion had taken place. The dynamic of the civil war changed following the first coup d'état in 1992 and the presidential elections in 1996. By the coup d'état in 1997, the civil war had engulfed the fourteen administrative districts in Sierra Leone and the RUF was engaged in guerrilla warfare, indiscriminately orchestrating military attacks in residential areas, predominantly in the Eastern and Southern Provinces. These attacks caused large scale population movements from villages and towns to urban areas in district headquarters and the capital city, Freetown, as well as across the border into Guinea (Van Damme 1999). Still, the most intense phase in the civil war was not until January 1999, during a two week period when the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) - A group of Sierra Leone soldiers that allied itself with the rebel Revolutionary United Front in late 1990's. They briefly controlled the country in 1998; it was driven from capital by a coalition of West African troops. It was no longer a coherent and effective organisation by the elections of 1992 - engaged in fierce battle with Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) forces during the Battle for Freetown.

By 6 January 1999, the SLTRC (Volume 3A 2004, p.325) contends that half of Sierra Leone's population was "squeezed" into the capital city, Freetown. Meaning that approximately 1.8 million people were in Freetown according to the 1985 census total population estimate of 3.5 million (Kandeh and Ramachandran 1995). There was such an influx into the capital because by 1999, it had become the only safe haven for those people displaced in the provinces outside of the Western Area.

The civil war was punctuated by periods of relative peace following peace accords. In total, five peace accords were signed including the Abidjan Peace Accord (1996), Conakry Peace Plan (1997), Lomé Peace Accords (1999) and Abuja I and II accords (2000 and 2001). During these periods of relative peace, refugees were repatriated to the country, only to be displaced after the resumption of conflict. The Conakry Peace Plan and the Lomé Peace Accord specified the return of refugees and displaced persons, thus recognising the scale of population displacement caused by the civil war. The conflict blurred the line between war and peace transitions from 1991 to 2002. Despite this however, previous studies have failed to take into account the temporal variation in patterns of forced displacement.

1.3 Overview of previous estimates of forced migration

The overall estimated of forced displacement during the conflict in Sierra Leone range between 1.4 to 2.1 million (Table 1). This lack of consensus in the estimates so far could be attributed to the use of lack of reliable sources of information, non-transparent methodologies and variation in the time coverage pertaining to estimates. In order to investigate the disparity, published data referring to estimates of forced displacement which takes into account IDPs and refugees is reviewed through examination of their methodology.

In sum, four studies are reviewed. Only one of these studies considered the duration of the war in its entirety. Two of the studies published by the Government of Sierra Leone (2001 and 2006) did not discuss their methodology. In contrast, two studies provided uneven detail of the methodology applied. Firstly, Beattie (1998) reviewed the government of Sierra Leone's National Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Programme which was collected before 1997 and extracts a total displacement estimate of 2.1 million. Of this estimate, 1.7 million were categorised as IDPs and 375,000 as refugees. The second study reviewed is by Hansch (2001) who undertook documentary analysis of a variety of data

including interviews, published literature and news wires. He only focuses on the period 1992-1998. Due to the shortening of the conflict's duration, the figure for forced displacement seems to be an underestimate relative to the other data in Table 1. Two sources were reviewed by the Government of Sierra Leone, both of which were not explicit about their methodologies. Both sources quote a refugee estimate of 500,000 with similar figures for IDPs of 1.2 and 1.5 million.

The conclusion from the statistics presented in Table 1 is that forced displacement was extensive during the civil war forcibly uprooting over 50% of the country's 1985 population of 3.5 million. The estimates also suggest that cumulatively, internal displacement surpassed international displacement during the conflict. Evaluation of the published estimates suggests that the number of IDPs was more than doubled the total number of refugees in the duration of the civil war. Despite these findings, the oft published statistic of 2 million Sierra Leoneans displaced of which 500,000 were refugees is uncertain since it lacks an empirical basis. Rarely do authors of this statistic quote its origin. Moreover, while an overall estimate of forced displacement is presented, the temporal variation in these figures has not been discussed to date. This study aims to ascertain the number of Sierra Leoneans displaced as IDPs and refugees. To accomplish this aim, publications by the UNHCR are reviewed.

Table 1: Estimates of forced displacement in Sierra Leone, 1991-2002

	Source			
	Beattie (1998)	Hansch (2001)	Government of Sierra Leone, Resettlement Strategy (2001)	Sesay et al. (2006)
Period	1991-1997	1992-1998	1991-2001	1991-2002
Displacement, overall	2,100,000	1,140,000	1,700,000	2,000,000
IDPs	1,725,000	700,000	1,200,000	1,500,000
Refugees	375,000	440,000	500,000	500,000

1.4 Data and methodology

To examine the extent of forced displacement in Sierra Leone, statistics on IDPs, refugees and returnees is examined using cumulative data on the three aforementioned groups from published statistics in UNHCR statistical publications. The published estimates are verified

over time for internal consistency to assess the figures published by the UNHCR. Before presenting the result, the quality of the UNHCR data is evaluated.

Though there is an official definition of a refugee, there are often divergent opinions on who is a refugee especially among nationals fleeing a conflict, the host government and the UN refugee agency (UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2003, p.68). According to the UNHCR (Ibid), its statistics generally reflect the views of the host country. This policy could possibly underestimate refugees especially in cases when a host country refuses to grant asylum to persons fleeing persecution. A second problem which is relevant for the Sierra Leonean case is that in many developing countries, the flow of refugees tends to occur en masse making it impossible to individually record who has been granted asylum. The use of surveys, especially in refugee camp contexts is the standard practice in estimating the refugee population. However, in the initial stages of the civil war, the majority of Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea were self-settled, meaning that the UNHCR might not have captured them in surveys undertaken in refugee camps. Related to this point is the fact that not all individuals who flee conflict seek asylum after crossing an international border which might underestimate the total number of refugees. Finally, in contexts where registration is linked to the provision of services and benefits, such as in a refugee camp setting, it is argued that 'administrative records tend to overestimate the actual number of persons, because it is easier to register than to de-register persons' (Ibid). However, despite these shortcomings, statistics published by the UNHCR is a good starting point for documenting forced displacement.

1.5 Results

1.5.1 Internally displaced persons, 1993 - 2002

Estimates of IDPs are available only from 1993 to 2002 (Table 2). The estimates represent stocks of IDPs overtime hence the cumulative total number of people displaced at the end of the year during the war. The year 1994 is noticeable for the highest stock of IDPs with an estimated 1.3 million Sierra Leoneans documented as internally displaced. The adoption of guerrilla warfare tactics by RUF in 1994 could explain this sudden increase in IDPs. This change in strategy increased the population at risk of population displacement relative to when the rebel's activities were restricted to only two districts (Kailahun and Pujehun). From 1993 to 1999, the total number of IDPs was more than half a million. The reliability of these figures is assessed by comparing and contrasting them with estimates published in 2004.

The figures in Table 2 are compared to estimates of IDPs published in the *UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2002 (2004)* as shown in Table 3. From a comparative point of view, the estimate of IDPs in 1993 in the 2004 publication is more than double that published in 1994, while the 1994 IDP estimate is lower because it excludes the 532,000 IDPs that were assisted by the UNHCR. The remaining estimate of IDPs from 1995 to 2002 corresponds showing a high level of internal consistency. The variation in the estimates published in 1994 compared to 2004 might be the result of the UNHCR categorising the IDPs into assisted and non-assisted. Nevertheless, the difference between 532,000 and 250,000 for 1993 and 1.3 million as compared to 782,000 is substantial for 1994.

Table 2: Assisted, non-assisted and total estimates of internally displaced persons in Sierra Leone, 1993-2002

End of Year	Assisted	Non-assisted	Total
1993			250,000
1994	532,000	782,000	1,314,000
1995	0	654,600	654,600
1996			654,600
1997			670,000
1998			670,000
1999			500,000
2000			300,000
2001			-
2002			-

Sources: Various UNHCR Statistical Yearbooks, 1994 - 2004.

Table 3: End of year population of internally displaced persons in Sierra Leone, 1991-2002

Year	Internally Displaced persons
1993	532,000
1994	782,000
1995	654,600
1996	654,600
1997	670,000
1998	670,000
1999	500,000
2000	300,000
2001	-
2002	-

Source: UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, 2002.

1.5.2 Sierra Leonean refugees, 1991 - 2002

UNHCR estimate of refugees relate to end of year stock. Estimates of Sierra Leonean refugees for the period of the war vary from 142,600 in 1992 to 487,200 in 1999 (Table 4). The total number of refugees in 1991 was 142,600 and increased incrementally to 311,000 in 1993. A decline occurred after 1993 but this was not sustained because in 1996, the total estimate of refugees increased again to 374,374. There is a decline in 1997 followed by an increase from 1998 to 1999. From 2000 onwards, the total estimate of refugees declined gradually until its lowest level in 2002, at 141,362.

Table 4: Assisted, non-assisted and total estimates of refugees from Sierra Leone at the end of the year, 1991-2002

Year	Assisted	Non-assisted	Total
1991			142,600
1992			253,600
1993	311,100	-	311,000
1994	275,000	100	275,100
1995			295,100
1996	370,559	3,815	374,374
1997	208,400	120,000	328,200
1998	340,900	68,000	408,900
1999	417,200	70,000	487,200
2000	357,394	45,402	402,796
2001	103,645	75,387	179,032
2002	74,450	66,912	141,362

Source: Various UNHCR Statistical Yearbooks, 1994 - 2004.

The estimates in Table 4, which are extracted from annual statistical yearbooks (1994 -2002), can be compared to estimates published in the statistical yearbooks for 2000 and 2003 because total stocks of refugees at the end of the year were provided in these publications. While the estimates in Table 4 refer to Sierra Leonean refugees in general, those used for comparative purposes in Table 5 pertain predominantly to Sierra Leone refugees who had been granted asylum in three West African countries: Gambia, Guinea and Liberia. The exception is the last column of Table 5 which refers to refugees from Sierra Leone in Guinea, Liberia, Gambia, United States and 'Other' countries, 1993-2002. As such, it is expected that the estimates will be similar because the majority of Sierra Leonean refugees sought asylum in the nearest neighbouring countries which are Guinea and Liberia.

A comparison of the estimates provided in Table 4 and Table 5 shows that in fact, the figures of refugees from 1991 to 1994 is indistinguishable since they relate to Sierra Leonean

refugees in Gambia, Guinea and Liberia. A year in which there is a major discrepancy in the estimate of Sierra Leonean refugees is 1995 because whereas the 1995 UNHCR publication note that 295,100 refugees originated from Sierra Leone, estimates in the subsequent years quote a substantially higher figure of approximately 380,000 persons. It is uncertain why the discrepancy exists, however, it might relate to the distinction between assisted and non-assisted refugees. Comparisons of the various estimates from 1996 to 2002 are similar, with minor differences attributable to the range of countries taken into consideration.

Table 5: A comparison of published UNHCR estimates of total number of refugees from Sierra Leone at the end of the year, 1991-2002

Year	Total Sierra Leone refugee population in Gambia, Guinea and Liberia, 1991-2000 ^a	Refugees from Sierra Leone in Guinea, Liberia, Gambia, United States and 'Other' countries, 1993-2002 ^b
1991	142,600	
1992	253,600	
1993	311,100	311,183
1994	274,900	275,302
1995	378,200	379,495
1996	373,100	375,104
1997	324,400	329,327
1998	398,900	406,077
1999	478,900	490,061
2000	386,900	402,807
2001		179,113
2002		141,362

^a Author's calculation based on UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, 2000.

^b Author's calculation based on UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, 2002.

1.5.3 Total number of displaced persons, 1991-2002

It is often quoted unreservedly that the total number of Sierra Leoneans displaced as a result of the civil war was between one and two million. Of this estimate, it is stated that the majority was comprised of internally displaced persons. A crude approximation of the annual displaced persons can be obtained by adding the total IDP stock to the annual refugee stock. The result of such an approximation is shown in Table 6. According to UNHCR data, the highest overall displacement is approximately 1.1 million. That is, at least approximately one third of the country's 1985 total population was displaced by 1994, 1996 and 1998. It is less than the 2.0 million quoted by the Government of Sierra Leone. Of the 1.1 million forcibly displaced persons, the majority were internally displaced persons. It is not until 2000 that the end of year refugee stock surpasses that of the refugees.

Table 6: IDP, refugees and total displaced persons, Sierra Leone civil war, 1991-2002

Year	IDPs	Refugees	Total
1991	-	142,600	142,600
1992	-	253,600	253,600
1993	532,000	311,000	843,000
1994	782,000	275,100	1,057,100
1995	654,600	295,100	949,700
1996	654,600	374,374	1,028,974
1997	670,000	328,200	998,200
1998	670,000	408,900	1,078,900
1999	500,000	487,200	987,200
2000	300,000	402,796	702,796
2001	-	179,032	179,032
2002	-	141,362	141,362

Source: IDP and refugee figures are in Table 3 and 4 above. The total is based on the author's calculation from the figures.

1.5.4 Returnee population to Sierra Leone, 1994-2002

The final category of displaced persons to be examined is the returnee population. As shown in Table 7, refugees originating from Sierra Leone started to return to their country of origin in 1994. It is estimated by the UNHCR that 100,000 Sierra Leonean refugees had repatriated by 1994, 90% of who were assisted. No figures are provided for 1995 and only 490 persons returned in 1996. The largest returnee population is estimated for 1998, 194,600 Sierra Leoneans returned that year. The size of this repatriation reflects the fact that in 1998 the country was restored to civilian rule following the ECOMOG intervention in May 1997. Moreover, the Conakry Peace Plan (1998, Article 4) made provisions for the return of refugees and displaced persons as of 1 December 1997. After 1998, the estimates of returnees declined substantially to 3,500 in 1999, only to recuperate in 2000 to 40,900 persons and again to 92,330 in 2001. This recuperation might have resulted from the signing of the Lomé Accord (1999, Articles XXII-XXIII) which encouraged the planned voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Sierra Leonean refugees. In 2002, 75,978 returnees had repatriated. In order to assess the internal reliability of the estimates of returnees to Sierra Leone from 1994-2002, the figures in Table 7 were compared to the total number of refugees voluntarily repatriated to Sierra Leone in subsequent UNHCR publications.

Table 7: Returnee population to Sierra Leone at the end of the year, 1991-2002

Year	Assisted	Non-assisted	Total
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1991			
1992			
1993			
1994	100	300	400
1995	-	-	-
1996	250		490
1997	1,800		3,800
1998	14,800		194,600
1999	-		3,500
2000	24,900		40,900
2001			92,330
2002	55,757		75,978

Sources: Various UNHCR Statistical Yearbooks, 1994 - 2004.

Table 8 shows that generally, there is consistency in the UNHCR estimates of refugees repatriated to Sierra Leone from 1993-2002. The estimate of 13,000 returnees in 1992 could not be compared to any other figure because they are non-existent. While all the figures of returnees generally are in consensus, a discrepancy exists between the figures for 1994 since one publication notes the total returnee population as 100,000 and others quote 100 to 400. The lower figure is presented because the majority of a number of UNHCR publications quote this figure.

Table 8: A comparison of published UNHCR estimates of returnee population, repatriated refugees and voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leone refugees, 1991-2002

Year	Total number of Sierra Leonean refugees voluntarily repatriated to Sierra Leone, 1991-2001 ^a	End of year population of returned refugees in Sierra Leone, 1991-2002 ^b	Repatriated refugees ^c
1991			
1992	13,000		
1993	2,900	2,889	2,900
1994	100	113	100

1995	-	-	-
1996	500	504	500
1997	1,800	1,800	1,800
1998	194,600	194,639	194,600
1999	3,500	3,502	3,500
2000	40,900	40,900	40,900
2001	92,300	92,330	92,300
2002		75,978	76,000

^a Author's calculation based on UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, 2001.

^b Author's calculation based on UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, 2002.

^c Author's calculation based on B UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, 2003.

1.6 Discussions and limitations

The result shows that during 1994, 1996 and 1998 there was a peak in the total number of displaced persons exceeding 1 million annually. From 1993-1999, the number of IDPs surpassed, in some cases more than doubled the number of refugees. This situation changed in 1999 when the end of year stock of IDPs and refugees were equal. By 2000, the situation reversed as there were more refugees than IDPs. The pattern in displacement corresponds with the nature of the intensity in confrontation during the civil war. By adopting guerrilla warfare tactics in 1993, the RUF exposed civilians in every district to the risk of displacement. By conducting military attacks in every district in Sierra Leone, the rebel organisation broadened the population at risk of an attack, thereby displacing approximately a third of the enumerated population in 1985. The vast majority of this displaced population were internally displaced.

While this study confirms that the majority of displaced persons during the Sierra Leonean civil war were internally displaced, it did not reach a conclusive finding on the estimated overall 2 million displaced as a result of the war. It is posited that the oft cited estimate of 500,000 refugees stems from the end of year refugee population of 487,200 in 1999 which might have been rounded to the nearest thousand of 500,000 (Table 4 and 5). By adding the annual refugee stock and IDP stock together, this study obtained a crude estimate of the overall displaced persons from 1991 to 2002. At its peak in 1994, 1996 and 1998, the total number of displaced persons was 1.1 million approximately. So where does the estimate of 2.0 million originate? The clue to this question might relate to a limitation of the UNHCR data used in this study.

The UNHCR publishes official statistics on populations of concern. As such, the refugee agency does not count those unregistered IDPs and displaced persons in a country other than their own. Nmoma (1997, p.26) raises this point when she notes that in December 1992:

‘...some 260,000 Sierra Leoneans had sought asylum in the surrounding nations. While approximately 400,000 of the displaced were in camps, other displacees, nearly 400,000 did not reside in camps’.

Variation in estimate of 1 million and 2 million might relate to the fact that the UNHCR is concerned with registered IDPs and refugees meaning that any displaced person who is not registered with the agency is not counted. The consequence of such a situation where only “officially” displaced persons are counted and represented in the published statistics might be an undercount of the total number of persons displaced as a result of the civil war. Despite this limitation, the statistical reports by the UNHCR (1994-2002) provide the most comprehensive documentation which can enable an analysis of the pattern of forced displacement during the Sierra Leonean civil war.

1.7 Conclusion

This paper investigated the extent of forced displacement during the Sierra Leonean civil war, 1991-2002 by analysing the UNHCR statistical data. The annual end of year stocks of IDPs from 1993-2002 ranged from 250,000 in 1993 to 1,314,000 in 1994. Comparatively, estimates of refugees stocks from 1991 to 2002 range from approximately 140,000 in 1991 and 2002 to 487,000 in 1999. While the study confirmed that approximately 500,000 Sierra Leoneans were displaced as refugees, estimates of IDPs remained below 1 million. Variation in the total number of Sierra Leoneans displaced as a result of the war might be due to nature of the data published by the UNHCR which only takes into consideration displaced persons who are officially registered as IDPs and refugees. Despite this variation, the statistics published by the UNHCR has been important in charting the pattern in population displacement during the eleven year civil war.

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Something a little different – for scholars present and future

Sierra Leoneans in London 1944-1946



Miss A Caulker from Mambo Shengea, Sierra Leone, reads a Government White Paper in the common room at the London School of Economics (LSE). According to the original caption, Miss Caulker was headmistress of a girls' school, specialising in welfare work among women, midwifery and domestic science. She will work for the Government when she returns to Sierra Leone



Everyday Life at the Colonial Club, Russell Square, London, England, UK, 1944
In the games room at the Colonial Centre at 17 Russell Square, London, Miss Rosamund Harding (a student teacher) watches as Mr D A Thomas (right) and Mr C O E Cole (centre, playing his shot) enjoy a game of billiards. Both men are law students and all three are from Sierra Leone.



In the basement restaurant of the Colonial Centre at 17 Russell Square, men and women enjoy a meal. Mr P Thorpe (left) leans across to speak to Miss Rosamund Harding, sitting at a table with Mr D A Thomas and Mr C O E Cole. All four are from Sierra Leone: Mr Thorpe is the chief fire-officer back home, Miss Harding is a student teacher, and Mr Thomas and Mr Cole are law students. The original caption states that the restaurant is painted bright yellow



Everyday Life at the Colonial Club, Russell Square, London, England, UK, 1944
Mr D A Thomas (a law student) and Miss Rosamund Harding (a student teacher) enjoy the view from the sunny balcony of the Colonial Centre at 17 Russell Square, London. Both students are from Sierra Leone. The large building in the background is the Russell Hotel. Just above Rosamund's head, a barrage balloon can be seen, illustrating the fact that the war is never far away.

A link to follow:

http://www.slate.com/articles/life/history_lesson/2013/06/george_w_bush_and_slavery_the_president_and_his_father_are_descendants_of.single.html

In this article, written by Joe Opala, it is noted that the Bush family, who at the time of writing this edition of The Journal had provided two US Presidents were related to slave traders.

http://www.sierraleoneheritage.org/CI/index.php/item/item_xml/index/424c3a4335312f32393831

A recording made by Northcote Whitridge Thomas of Mende people singing a Poro Song, Kenema 1914

<http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/reel2real/index.php/collections-thomas>

A Balangi (Xylophone Duet), Kabala, Sierra Leone 1915