

ENGLISH: *CREATIVE PIECE*

'Conflict results from a struggle of power'

Fish swim, and their capacity for swimming makes no sense without water. Birds fly; their entire structure testifies to the sea of air in which they live. And we humans fight; we navigate a sea of conflict and power.

The putrid aroma of mud and faeces were pungent, arousing the distaste of all the men. Sweat mixed with moist air swirled around like a whirlwind, destroying all remnants of sanitation and hygiene. The sun had reached its zenith, glaring wickedly upon the water and reflecting backwards into the abyss of trees. The river meandered off into the distance and the undulating ground made the land seem barren and desolate. There was no life, just us, if we were to be considered alive. Death seemed like a better alternative, like a wish that couldn't be granted. Everyone was scattered throughout the river, searching desperately for what seemed like their life; a way out. The water was the coolest place to be, providing a shield from the scorching sun and non-existent breeze. Men with automatic machine guns wandered aimlessly on the bank of the river, carefully watching our every move. We were under the control of a power that could not be reckoned with and could not be defeated. The RUF enforced authority and gained power through physical force, sweeping through the villages one by one until fear was the only emotion that existed. The captured would come to this river and forced to dig until they could no longer dig. We were all victims of a power struggle; a conflict that was far beyond us.

Everyone feared the RUF; they would do anything to possess and control all power. They wanted to territorialise the entire continent by raiding villages and capturing or killing everyone in them. Just mentioning their name, everyone would start running. The worst that could happen was the "cut". If you were cut, you would rather die because there was no purpose anymore, just a nihilistic existence. They would drag you out into the middle of the village and chain your hands so tightly that bones would start to crush. One child out of the group would emerge slowly with an innocent grin upon their face. A sharpened machete, with one quick swipe, would leave two hands lying on the floor and the victim screaming in pain. It was a symbol of power; their struggle for power. It was a violent protest against the election slogan that we had "the power in our hands". No hands equalled no voting which equalled more power. Intervention by the UN increased this power struggle, but at the same time increased the frequency of cuts and attacks. There was no understanding. It was just the RUF, their struggle for power, and us, the innocent, who were forced to be involved.

If you were lucky, you would be captured, like me. If you weren't, you would be captured and cut like some of the men here already. We would just wander through the warm water while the child soldiers closely watched us, ready to shoot at any moment. It was in these times, that we questioned our entire belief system, our entire culture. Could God exist? Who could believe in God? Death was the only absolute, it was even more certain than God. There was no reason for existence if this was all there was to life for. Nihilism; this became our belief. But being captured cannot be oversimplified; it meant that your whole family was probably dead. When the RUF attacked my village, they took my wife and cut her, forcing me to watch. As she screamed in pain, two child soldiers put two bullets into her head and she dropped dead instantly. They then took my newborn child, placing her upon an altar of jagged rocks and then fired a series of bullets. No more wife, no more child. My only son, they kidnapped and trained to become one of their own. They desensitised him to killing by forcing him to kill his grandmother. Though he initially said no, they started slicing one of his legs off until he eventually shot, killing my mother. So how could there be a God? There isn't. There is just power, and the struggle to attain it within every conflict.

There is no other reality except the one where you wander around in the water, desperately searching. Men move strenuously, particularly the cut men, who dig with only one hand. The serrated rocks at the bottom of the river pierce the foot as you move around. There is blood, but it just flows down the river like the rest of our pains. In the unlikely moment that we find one of these treasured diamonds from beneath the rocks, you must make the decision to give it to the RUF or keep it and run. And if you run, death is inevitable, if not by the soldiers then by starvation or dehydration. There is no use, though everyone tries it. We have nothing to live for; death is an adequate alternative, even enjoyable.

Even so, while I moved throughout the river, I had come across an object beneath the water, too sharp to be a rock. Surreptitiously, I took a glance to see a shining diamond larger than any stone I had seen. The soldiers still moved on the banks of the river, carefully watching us. I slipped the diamond beneath my toes under the river and started walking, yelling that I needed a toilet break. As I moved out of the sight of the soldier, I started digging into the ground fast, trying to make a hole for the diamond. The sun then started to fade around me; a shadow. The leader of the RUF saw me, looked at me, shot me and took the diamond. And this was all for the diamonds of Sierra Leone; the blood diamonds of power.

Written Explanation:

I wrote this piece in a short story form directed at a general audience. In relation to The Quiet American, I draw on Fowler's disposition to question ethics and religion. My protagonist, though his entire culture is based on Christianity, starts to question if there is a God, just as Fowler does. He concludes, like Fowler, that death is "the only absolute" because "it was even more certain than God". These death wishes correspond to the thoughts of Fowler. My piece also extrapolates on the notion of innocence in the novel, where my character is an innocent man who is forced into a conflict, just as Phuong is. In relation to the prompt, the struggle for the RUF to control all the power in Africa crystallises how conflict results from a power struggle. Other forces like the UN tried to intervene which created a greater power struggle, thus resulting in a great conflict. Structurally, my piece moves from a complex image at the beginning about the nature of humanity, to a more descriptive introduction to the scenery, and then finally to a more poignant view on the struggle of power. The diamonds are symbolic for the power struggle as this is what the RUF are killing for. As an entirety, my story draws on real world happenings to not only shows how conflict results from a power struggle but also to question the nature of humanity.