

**The Role of the Media in  
Peacebuilding: Public Service  
Broadcasting in Sierra Leone**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

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## **SUMMARY**

Over the last twenty years, in most of its peace missions around the world, the UN has set up a media operation or ‘public information campaign’ as a priority to communicate with the people affected by its intervention. Once the peacekeeping mission closes, the dilemma has been what to do with these operations, usually radio stations but sometimes involving television and community outreach facilities.

In Sierra Leone, the UN came up with the ambitious plan of merging its own radio station with that of the government owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) to form an independent public service broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). This was meant to be a key element in the UN’s exit strategy after fifteen years of involvement in the country. It was also seen to be a possible template for peace media operations elsewhere in the world.

The UN had hoped that SLBC would be fully functioning in time for the General Election in November 2012. Instead, it limped into the campaign period, almost bankrupt, crippled by staff unrest, major technical hurdles and a serious lack of vision, leadership and capacity at all levels. Furthermore, its election coverage was heavily biased in favour of the ruling APC government.

The SLBC experiment reveals the challenges of institution building in postconflict societies where neopatrimonial norms and values are at odds with technical approaches emanating from the West.

Its failure teaches us much about the gap between stated intentions and every day realities on the ground.

### **DECLARATION**

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

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This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of .....(insert MCh, MD, MPhil, PhD etc, as appropriate)

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### **STATEMENT 2**

This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.  
Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. The views expressed are my own.

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My family, friends and neighbours have offered constant support, encouragement and food along the way and will, no doubt, be as relieved as I am to come to the end of this journey.

The list of friends and colleagues in Sierra Leone is long but, for pressing reasons, I shall refrain from giving any names. You know who you are and I hope that you see this thesis as a genuine tribute to the work we undertook together in difficult times.

Finally, I must pay tribute to my neighbours in Cackle Bay, the district in west Freetown which was my home for nearly three years. Your quiet dignity, resolve and cheerfulness in the face of relentless hardship taught me more about postconflict survival than any UN report or academic tome. From the bottom of my heart I say 'thank you' to you and the players of FC Linda — especially No. 9.



Map No. 3902 Rev. 5 UNITED NATIONS  
January 2004

Department for Peacekeeping Operations  
Cartographic Section

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AFRC</b>	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
<b>APC</b>	All Peoples Congress Party
<b>BBC WST</b>	BBC World Service Trust, later BBC Media Action
<b>CDF</b>	Civil Defence Force
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
<b>DPKO</b>	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
<b>DPA</b>	Department of Political Affairs
<b>ECOMOG</b>	Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch
<b>ICG</b>	International Crisis Group
<b>IMC</b>	Independent Media Commission
<b>IRN</b>	Independent Radio Network
<b>NDA</b>	National Democratic Alliance
<b>NPRC</b>	National Provisional Ruling Council
<b>PI</b>	UN's Public Information function
<b>PSB</b>	Public service broadcasting
<b>RUF</b>	Revolutionary United Front
<b>SLPP</b>	Sierra Leone People's Party
<b>SLBC</b>	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation
<b>SLBS</b>	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (to 25/4/2010)
<b>UNAMSIL</b>	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNIOSIL</b>	United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone
<b>UNIPSIL</b>	United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone
<b>UNOMSIL</b>	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

## Chapter 1 Introduction

It is July 2005. I am standing in the grounds of the luxury Mammy Yoko Hotel on Aberdeen Beach on the outskirts of Freetown, with the rest of my colleagues on a study trip from the Peace Studies Department at Bradford University. We are all Masters students from different countries and backgrounds but we are here because we are interested in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. Peace had come to Sierra Leone in 2002 after eleven years of civil war courtesy of first, the military force of the Economic Union of West Africa, led by Nigeria and now, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). At its height, UNAMSIL had been the largest and most expensive peacekeeping mission in the history of the UN, numbering at one stage nearly 17,500. But now it is in its 'dog days', preparing for its closure in December. We are visiting UNAMSIL's headquarters and right now, we are observing the operations of the mission's radio station which, for the first time, has brought round the clock broadcasting to the majority of people in the country.

In my former 'life' I had been a journalist for nearly 25 years and so should be relishing this opportunity to see the media in action in a peacebuilding mission. But it has been a long day. I am suffering with the heat and humidity of the tropical rainy season and have lost several nights' sleep due to the aggressive attention of the mosquitoes in our guesthouse. All I want to do is to sit down with a cool drink. But here we are, nearly two dozen sweaty travelling students, huddled into the cramped interior of the portakabin which acts as the main transmission studio for Radio UNAMSIL. I peer through the glass separating the production area from the studio to see a young, shaven headed man speaking into a microphone. We are told he is a locally recruited reporter who presents the early-evening phone-in request programme.

Presenter: Hello Caller! What's your name? Who do you want a request for?

Caller: Hello. My name is Ibrahim. I'm calling from Rokel.

Presenter: How are you today, Ibrahim?

Caller: I'm fine, thanks be to God. We suffered a lot during the war but things are much better now. Thanks be to God.

Presenter: So, Ibrahim, who do you want to say hello to today?

Caller: I want to greet my mother. I want to greet all my brothers and sisters. I want to say hello to my wife and all the people of Rokel. I want to greet all my friends and all the people in church. I want to call on Almighty God to bless them all.

Presenter: My brother, I can hear that you are a good man. And because of that I'm going to play something really special for you, for your family and all the good people in Rokel.

Caller: Yes....?

Presenter: Something so special it's really going to make you happy.

Caller: Yes...?

Presenter: Ibrahim, for you and your family and friends -

Caller: Yes.....?

Presenter: For all the good people of Rokel I have....  
Westlife!

My companions and I smirk knowingly at each other. What was this presenter thinking? Westlife? What on earth did this mediocre Irish boy band have to say to an audience picking up the pieces after a bloody civil war? Critical thoughts of cultural insensitivity and media imperialism begin to race through my mind. They suddenly stop.

Caller: (Screeches in delight) Aaarrghhh! That's SO special! I LOVE Westlife...thank you, thank you, thanks be to God!

Presenter: You're welcome, my brother. Keep listening to Radio UNAMSIL!

(Conversation fades over opening bars of *Flying Without Wings* by Westlife).

That brief exchange stayed with me beyond my return to the UK. Because of what I saw on that trip, the people I met and my many demolished assumptions, I decided to embark on a PhD looking at the role of the media in peacebuilding. I was accepted by the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University but my academic career was far from smooth. A serious injury after a fall meant I needed major surgery leading to a break in my studies of nearly two years. Then, after my fieldwork in 2009/10, I was offered a senior post with the UN peace mission in Freetown which meant living and working in Sierra Leone from late 2010 to 2013.

The received wisdom advises PhD researchers not to accept jobs before finishing a thesis but the opportunity to be involved at a senior level in a ground-breaking project — the creation of an independent public service broadcaster in a post conflict country — was too attractive to turn down. The advantages of the post of Radio Management Advisor, based in UNAMSIL, included an active role in the capacity building of the media industry; the opportunity to observe international decision-making and intervention ‘from the inside’; and the chance to work alongside local professionals who embraced the potential of the media, particularly radio, to change things for the better. I had already met many of the main media actors during my field trip and had been impressed by their skills and experience. I was convinced that with international support, the technical and financial backing available and the expressions of political goodwill from the government, a positive outcome was virtually guaranteed.

With hindsight, I can see how I had fallen prey to the ‘temptation of the technical’, the belief that some measure of transformation in poor countries can be achieved by timely doses of capital and technical knowledge while “maintaining a comfortably clinical distance from these countries’ internal political life” (Carothers 2013: 3). Despite my optimism, my commitment and hard work and the efforts of so many people — the initiative to create an independent public service broadcaster for Sierra Leone was a disappointing failure. Returning to the UK to pick up the threads of my thesis, I realised that I could not continue with the theme of analysing the role of the media in a

peacebuilding context. My original thesis had been predicated on an objective 'arms length' analysis of the research data. Now, after three years' employment with the UN, to adopt the same stance would be akin to an FA Cup final in which the referee pulls on a team jersey at the start of the second half.

Instead of being able to analyse the situation from outside I had now become an integral part of the situation. It seemed both dishonest and disingenuous not to reveal this 'professional participant' perspective from the outset and so, I chose to foreground my experience and my observations. I therefore own the assumptions, the analysis and conclusions. The 'I' who writes in retrospect is the same 'I' who lived through the project that forms the basis of this thesis. At the same time, it is a somewhat different 'I' to the postgraduate who first travelled to Freetown: I have been deeply affected by what I saw and am now more aware through what I have learnt. In constructing an autoethnographic narrative, I explore an episode that could be painted as 'just another development failure' but which, in fact, offers valuable lessons across a number of fields: the technical vs the political in peacebuilding, the ever-present issue of elite capture of projects, elite resistance and the hybrid peace, media bias in African broadcasting and a lack of coherent strategy inside the UN.

### **Living in Cackle Bay**

It would be remiss of me to omit from the introduction an explanation of how much I was affected by the area in which I lived. My first trip to Freetown in November 2009 was as a cash-strapped, self-financing postgraduate. I found a small flat in Cackle Bay, a poor area of the city, about twenty minutes from the city centre but only ten minutes from the beach. The place was perfect: quiet, safe, convenient and cheap. In the three months I stayed there, I was very happy and after a short while, I became a recognised part of the community. Everyone knew me as 'Auntie Linda' or 'Mammy Linda' and I couldn't go far without someone calling out my name by way of greeting. Living side by side with ordinary Sierra Leoneans, I became aware of the difficulties of their everyday lives. I could now put a face and a name to

demographic data on poverty and maternal and child mortality. I understood the daily impact of living without regular supplies of clean water and electricity and the constraints of rundown schools and poor health facilities.

I've always loved children and I would spend some time every day playing with the toddlers in the neighbourhood or talking and reading with the older boys and girls. I became very attached to them and when I was due to travel back to the UK, I resolved to buy them something special. When I asked them what they would like, they had already decided: a football kit. Even the girls in the neighbourhood were in agreement. I hesitated because cash was tight but — a promise is a promise — so I ended up buying a cheap Manchester United strip from the market downtown. Later, I discovered the reason it was so cheap was because all the shirts were marked 'Rooney, No. 9'. The boys showed their gratitude by naming their team, 'FC Linda', a move that was both heart-warming and embarrassing.

I had been back in the UK just six months when I was offered a short term contract at the Freetown headquarters of the UN's peacebuilding mission, UNIPSIL. Naturally, I decided to return to Cackle Bay. Within a week of starting work, I was invited to apply for a more permanent job. I saw no reason to change where I lived even though my salary meant I could afford a bigger, more luxurious apartment in a better part of town, closer to expatriate colleagues and the usual international 'hangouts'.

For nearly three years, Cackle Bay was my home and I became the proud manager of 'FC Linda' with two teams registered to play in the Craig Bellamy National Football League established by the Welsh footballer. It was an enlightening, exhausting but enriching experience that changed me profoundly. It also threw into sharp relief the contradictions and idiosyncrasies of my professional life. My detractors in government and the Ministry of Information criticised my dogged approach to work and labelled it 'political insensitivity' and 'lack of diplomatic nous'. The fact was that their unreasonable behaviour and demands were, in my opinion, far removed from the expectations of my friends and neighbours in Cackle Bay. Like the caller

from Rokel at the start of the chapter who had suffered so much during the war, the ordinary people of Sierra Leone deserved more from the hard-won peace. Everyday, I was exposed to the greedy excesses of the powerful at work and every evening, I would return home to more stories of everyday struggle and resilience. I became increasingly frustrated by the fact that SLBC was letting down the citizens of Cockle Bay by failing to tell their stories to focus instead on political actors. There seemed to be two faces to Sierra Leonean society but the UN and SLBC irritated me by seeming to focus on only one, that of the political elite.

### **Overview of the thesis**

When it was launched by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in June 2010, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) was hailed as yet another important milestone in the unfolding story of the country's recent history. Created by the merger of UNIPSIL's media operation with the government owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS), SLBC was seen as only the second independent national broadcaster in Africa, after SABC. Buoyed by considerable technical and financial support from the UN, immense goodwill amongst the international community as well as great expectation amongst Sierra Leoneans, SLBC seemed destined for success. Yet little more than twelve months after its high profile launch, the fledgling broadcaster was on its knees, brought down by bitter strikes, financial mismanagement and political interference. Worse still, its performance during the crucial 2012 elections was deemed by local and international observers to be "significantly unbalanced" (EUEOM 2013:25) and "partisan" (COG 2012: 32), thereby invalidating the considerable time, money and effort invested in it. By comparison, the Independent Radio Network made up of 28 local and community radio stations which had received a fraction of the international money and technical support showered on SLBC performed noticeably better. What had gone wrong in the first twelve months and could the final débacle have been foreseen and possibly avoided?

**Research questions:**

- Is it possible to create an effective functioning public sector institution — in this case a public service broadcaster — in a post conflict society like Sierra Leone?
- Which factors — whether political, social, historical or economic — might affect the success or failure of such a project?
- What potential is there for a public service broadcaster to play a role in nation-building as a means of peacebuilding following conflict?

**Why does it matter?**

It would be easy to dismiss SLBC as ‘just another failure’ in a long line of institutional failures in Africa but that would be to overlook the important lessons to be learned from the unfolding process. Firstly, setting up a media operation is an accepted early step in establishing UN peace missions. The abiding challenge facing the Security Council is what to do with these media operations when the peacekeeping missions close or evolve into political missions. Haiti, South Sudan, Somalia, Côte d’Ivoire, DRC, CAR and Liberia — all of these operations looked to Sierra Leone as offering a model to replicate. The failure of the SLBC merger means that they must consider alternatives. Currently, there is little discussion of the impact that UN peace missions have on local media environments. The most capable journalists are drawn into the media system by salaries which, while not matching international standards, are often three to four times higher than local rates.

Other media outlets suffer the impact of losing the most talented staff and are often forced to continue with a dramatic drop in capacity. As UN media operations are supported financially and technically by the peacekeeping budget, they are not required to ask for ‘transmission fees’ for programme content. This ‘pay for play’ system in which NGOs and other UN bodies pay for airtime to transmit public information messages generates significant income for local newspapers and community radio stations and the UN’s ‘free to air’ practices may subtly skew the political economy of the local media

environment. When the UN leaves, the media industry may be left more vulnerable than ever to political and financial pressures.

Secondly, the SLBC project highlights significant organisational contradictions within the UN itself. For example, the lack of clarity regarding the role of communications or 'public information' as it is known in the UN leads to inconsistent support for the public information function in peace missions, depending on the personal preferences of the head of mission. Once the UN handed over its radio station, there was no media strategy in place. Consequently, the mission was left vulnerable at a time of great political sensitivity in the run up to the 2012 elections. Similarly, the short term contractual nature of employment in the field leads to a lack of continuity in long term projects with field staff chasing jobs outside the mission, regardless of the point reached in the lifecycle of that project. The early stages of planning for the SLBC project went awry from the UN's perspective with experienced staff who were responsible in the initial stages moving on to employment elsewhere before a clear roadmap for transition had been drawn up.

As an example of knowledge management, the SLBC project demonstrates serious shortcomings in intra-organisational communication and consultation. Within the UN, UNESCO is deemed to be the lead organisation on media policy and development but has few experts in the field (Orme 2010). On the other hand, the UN's development arm, the UNDP, has carried out a significant level of media development activity and has formulated a communications and information audit as the first step before full-scale involvement in media work (UNDP 2006). The audit presents a useful way for gauging the information needs of a population from the grassroots up and also offers a basic methodology for measuring current communication provision. As far as I was able to ascertain, no reference was made to the communication and information audit throughout my time in Sierra Leone. In addition, the World Bank has made forays into the media arena with the establishment in 2006 of its *Communications for Governance and*

*Accountability Programme (CommGAP)*. Again, no reference was made to World Bank activity in this area during my time in Sierra Leone.

Rebuilding the public sphere is an important aspect of social reconstruction in countries emerging from civil war. A society that has been fragmented by anomic violence and whose citizens still bear the scars must regain a sense of national identity in order to legitimise the state system that is under (re)-construction. Appropriate media systems in line with current technological and cultural norms enable citizens to discuss and define aspects of national identity. While a functioning public service broadcaster has a role to play in the unifying process, a dysfunctional, partisan broadcast service has the potential to divide and sow dissent. This was clearly demonstrated by the main opposition party's decision to boycott SLBC during the electoral campaign period because of its perceived pro-government bias.

While Sierra Leone is described as the “the face of modern, liberal peacebuilding” (Labonte 2011: 90), the reality is that most of the factors which led to the civil war have not been adequately addressed: youth unemployment, child and maternal mortality, glaring social inequality and ethnic factionalism continue to dog the day to day existence for ordinary Sierra Leoneans. Such factors are not easily covered by the liberal peacebuilding tendency which favours top-down approaches regularly captured by local élites, of which the SLBC project is simply another example. By contrast, the locally owned, grassroots based Independent Radio Network may offer a more fruitful and sustainable template for media development in Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

Furthermore, the SLBC project is a useful study in public sector reform. The government owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) — the dominant partner in the proposed merger — displayed all the administrative weaknesses commonly found throughout the public sector in failed states: inadequate financial record-keeping, untrained, badly motivated staff, lack of service ethos, weak management and so on. For example, the resistance to the recruitment campaign was widespread, both amongst staff and senior

political figures. Naturally, staff feared the prospect of unemployment but for politicians and senior ministerial staff, the concept of open and fair recruitment based on merit threatened to close off a major source of patronage in a society where patrimonial networks were deeply entrenched. More worrying for them was the thought of an independent, critical media voice in the run-up to the general election in 2012.

Finally, the lack of progress and eventual paralysis within SLBC clearly demonstrate the blurring of the ‘technical’ and ‘political’ in post conflict environments. As Andrews (2013) points out, in politically sensitive environments, governments that are heavily dependent on donor support may publicly acquiesce to technical projects for political reasons with the intention of practically impeding progress once the project begins. There are lessons to be drawn out of a close reading of the SLBC project which might support better management of similar projects in future such as greater material disclosure by all parties at the outset; gradual distribution of resources according to achievement of agreed objectives; performance monitoring of all staff, especially senior management. And, above all, the suggestion that perhaps a model of media management transplanted from the West might be less suitable than sustainable home grown approaches to communications.

### **Original contribution**

The everyday ‘nuts and bolts’ of peacebuilding are rarely examined closely even though the attendant political, cultural and organisational challenges and paradoxes are many. The resulting ‘hybrid’ outcomes —whether in the form of processes or institutions — tell us more about the interaction between local and international actors than any project report (see Mac Ginty 2011a; Paris 2004). Regarding the present case, the merger of a UN radio operation with a government owned broadcaster has never previously been attempted and so the fundamental premise on which this thesis is based is itself original. While some writers have produced studies of media operations in peace missions (for example, Egleder 2012; Eurich 2010; Hunt 2006; Lindley 2004), there has been little attention paid to the political ordering and institutional logics which impact on media projects in post conflict environments. By analysing the

'behind the scenes' decisions and details, I attempt to explain why the SLBC project went so badly wrong.

There has been much discussion of the role of a public service broadcaster as a *channel* for disseminating programme content that promotes peace and the practice of 'civic virtue'. I go further by suggesting that a functioning public service broadcaster has the potential to be *instrumental* in building peace by demonstrating best practice in meritocratic recruitment, open staff and financial management alongside its core duty of producing impartial, informative programming. Had senior figures within the UN maintained the distinction between 'technical' and 'political' challenges and approached the merger differently, the SLBC project had the potential to offer up a new management model for Sierra Leone.

### **Breakdown of chapters**

The interdisciplinary nature of the thesis has required much reading in a number of different areas: the politics and economics of post conflict reconstruction, African history generally and that of Sierra Leone specifically, organisational theory and institutional logic, human resource management especially as practised in developing societies, media theory and communications in conflict settings with a preference given where possible to African writers. The review of the literature and relevant theory therefore covers three chapters.

**Chapter Two** outlines the history of the nation state in Africa with a discussion of the lasting impact of colonialism on governance. **Chapter Three** considers the evolution of the nation state in Sierra Leone and the socio-economic impact of neopatrimonialism. **Chapter Four** focuses on Galtung's theories on peace and violence and their relevance to Sierra Leone today. There is also an examination of the theory of public service broadcasting and its applicability to the African context. **Chapter Five** expands on the methodologies I used, in particular my choice of autoethnography.

In the first two empirical chapters, I paint a picture of Sierra Leone, twelve years after the end of the war in order to better understand the environment into which a national public service broadcaster was launched. In **Chapter Six** I explore the thoughts of Sierra Leoneans on their country as a nation.

Despite the ubiquitous signs of nationhood — the flag, the national anthem, the green, white and blue painted flagstones and walls — I found there was an underlying sense of deepening ethnic division. This factionalism is ironic given that the civil war was not fought along ethnic lines. It results from the patrimonial practices of the ruling APC party who attempted to recast all aspects of the state, including the allegedly independent SLBC, into configurations more sympathetic to party aims. **Chapter Seven** examines three media operations which, at different times in the country's recent history, proved to be valuable sources of information and powerful mobilisers of the population: Radio Democracy 98.1 FM established during the period of the AFRC military junta; Radio Moa, the community radio station serving the eastern town of Kailahun; and UN Radio, formerly Radio UNAMSIL, set up primarily to re-brand a failing peacekeeping mission.

**Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten** recount the narrative of the SLBC project from its earliest days and my arrival in Freetown to the corporation's disastrous coverage of the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections. This highly technical operation was constrained by the fact that it was operating within the confines of a political mission. Furthermore, it soon became clear that senior political figures at ministerial and cabinet level had not fully disclosed their true ambition for SLBC. Constant delays in mounting a credible recruitment campaign mean that no fresh talent was brought into the organisation. Using literature on institutional logic and organisational theory I show that the apparently irrational behaviour of SLBC management and political actors demonstrates a logical choice in keeping with the norms of a patrimonial society despite the best efforts of the UN to introduce internationally accepted standards and practices for public service broadcasting. Following the staff strike on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2011 President Ernest Bai Koroma established a Committee of Inquiry to address the perceived weaknesses of SLBC. At the same time, the UN initiated two separate audits:

one on the capacity of the corporation to deliver its public service mandate and the other, on the corporation's accounts. **Chapter Nine** compares the three reports to reveal interesting similarities and differences, especially with regard to the conclusions. Three different perspectives are observed: the priorities and interests of the local political elite; the gap between project aims and outcomes for the international/institutional approach, and the professional and technical norms of the multinational corporate. The polls of 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012 were significant in that they were the first elections to be conducted without the widely valued contribution of UN Radio. It had been envisaged that a fully functioning SLBC would have taken the place of the UN station as an impartial, professional broadcaster delivering to voters the information on which they based their voting preferences. **Chapter Ten** shows how SLBC failed to live up to expectations and was considered by both local and international observers to be heavily biased in favour of the ruling APC. By contrast, the Independent Radio Network, made up of 28 local and community stations around the country, performed far better despite receiving a fraction of the attention, effort and funds which had been lavished on SLBC. Finally, **Chapter Eleven** presents a brief overview of my findings and observations, addresses my research questions and offers up a list of possible areas for future research.

## Chapter 2 *Semper aliquid novi Africam adferre: the African context*

### Introduction

The above Latin quote is attributed to Pliny the Elder (23 – 79 AD) and may be roughly translated as "Africa always brings us something new". Even today, in situations of postconflict peacebuilding and reconstruction, it is an observation worth remembering. In attempting to answer my first two research questions — on the possibility of creating an effective, functioning public service broadcaster and the factors affecting the outcome of such a project — it is crucial to bear in mind that post-conflict African societies do not conform to the accepted Western notions of the Weberian state (Taylor 2007: 562). As Hutton observes, given the renewed emphasis in postconflict peacebuilding on overcoming state failure and incapacity, there is a renewed significance in exploring the dynamics of statehood in Africa as a field of study (2014:1). Undertaking such a journey enables us to understand the historical precedents that contributed to the current mismatch between Western expectations of the state in Africa and the reality on the ground.

Africa's rich history did not begin with the arrival of the slave-traders or the colonists and, in former times, different societies within the continent developed such political notions as ruling by consensus and equality of representation (Davidson 1969). Yet, many of the continent's present political woes date back to the colonial period and independence because, paradoxically, it was only when the colonists left that the toxicity of their political legacy became apparent (Mazrui and Tidy 1984). Transplanting Westphalia to the tropics was a bold if misguided venture and the upheavals on the continent seem to bear witness to this (see Buzan and Waever, below). However, there is no shortcut through history and, compared to the West, African nations have had a fraction of the time in which they could build their nations and establish their states. In many cases, the notion of nationhood was not sufficiently articulated, with the resulting loss of legitimacy for the state. I suggest that one way forward is to reclaim the term *nation-building* from the US and NATO who seem to have appropriated the term to cover

post-conflict statebuilding following military intervention. Revisiting concepts of nationbuilding has the potential to transform public dialogue in societies struggling to recover after civil conflict. Similarly, such an exercise would open up the space for integration of a greater sense of national identity, communicated through, for example, the media as touched upon in my third research question.

### **The roots and challenges of the post-colonial nation-state in Africa**

Paradoxically, any effective analysis of the nation-state in Africa should include an examination of the evolution of the nation-state in Europe as that was the eventual model transplanted to the colonies, regardless of suitability or adaptability (Chazan et al 1999: 42; Gordon 2007: 62; Grovogui 2010: 177; Mazrui 1983: 25; Mutua 1994: 1114; O'Connell 1967: 184; Tilly 1975: 4). As if to underline this point, Englebert summed up the contemporary African state as being “neither African nor state” (1997: 767). Pointing to “the numerous instances of state failure in Africa”, he cited its “very exogeneity ... its lack of embeddedness, its divorce from underlying norms and networks of social organisation” (ibid). In describing sub-Saharan Africa as “a pessimist’s paradise”, Buzan and Waever underline a single cause:

“At the centre of the problem lies the post-colonial state which is the price to be paid for rapid decolonisation. Transplanting European-style states, modes of economic development and forms of Westphalian international relations to non-European peoples was not easy anywhere. But, while in much of Asia, the new states and their system of political economy eventually took root, in most of Africa, the transplant has to varying degrees failed” (2003: 219).

Traditionally, the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which brought to an end the Thirty Years’ War in Europe was considered “the progenitor of modern nation-state sovereignty” (see for example Farr 2005: 156; Gross 1948: 20). By linking religious identity to state identity, Westphalia was part of a long-term process that led to the ideology of nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the primary identification of most ordinary Europeans with their nation-states (Cruz 2005: 151). Though the degree of significance of the “Westphalian

model” is disputed (see Krasner 1995; Macrae 2005), the broad consensus is that European politics thereafter entered a new period in which such entities as the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic Church could no longer dominate (Farr 2005: 156-7). Out of this historical process, the modern system of international relations was born but what is often forgotten in the clamour to criticise modern African states is the slow, arduous and violent nature of that process:

“The building of states in Western Europe cost tremendously in death, suffering, loss of rights and unwilling surrender of land, goods or labour...Building differentiated, autonomous, centralized organizations with effective control of territories entailed eliminating or subordinating thousands of semiautonomous authorities... Most of the European population resisted each phase of the creation of strong states” (Tilly 1975:71).

Furthermore, the renowned historian Joseph Strayer believed that the roots of the modern European state go back to the barbarian *regna* or dominant warrior groups ruling subject populations which arose in the period following the collapse of the Roman Empire (1976: 109). If such conjecture is to be believed, then the European nation state may trace its lineage back more than fifteen hundred years. However, according to Tilly, the tendency to “stateness” began much later and even during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, different governments moved at different rates (1975: 34). Into this fluid situation, the Peace of Westphalia launched the “crystallization of a *system* of states” in which each acknowledged and guaranteed each other’s existence through the notion of ‘sovereignty’. It was this system which the Europeans imposed on the rest of the world over the next three hundred years (Tilly 1975: 45). So, whether one opts for Strayer’s fifteen hundred years of European nation-state evolution or Tilly’s five hundred years, as a comparator, the fifty years of independent African governance since decolonisation seems almost paltry.

Yet, when one considers the bloody, protracted history of European state formation, it becomes clear that African politicians were without two important elements: the luxury of time and the opportunity to coerce the disparate peoples under their rule to first, accept their rule and thereafter the legitimacy

of the territorial boundaries and institutions imposed on them (Ayoob 1995: 29). Furthermore, attempting to fit such a lengthy evolutionary process into a matter of decades clearly distorts that process, burdening the political systems concerned to such a degree that they risk serious instability (op.cit 32). It should also be noted that European state-making did not take place under the glare of the media, in an interlinked international system nominally beholden to human rights norms and the rule of law. Thus, some observers argue, Africa is being held up to an assumed standard which Europe itself did not meet (Ayoob 1995: 30; Gilroy 2004: 52; Richards 2002: 29; Tilly 1975:71).

Mazrui makes the important point that the compound nature of the 'nation-state' fuses the concept of the nation with the concept of the state, while concentrating sovereignty at the centre (1983: 26). As Europe moved to consolidate its 'stateness', to use Tilly's term, individual European states were also moving toward greater internal integration and increasing homogeneity, although not without struggle (Anderson 2006: 71; Laakso and Olukoshi 1996:12). By contrast, when transplanting the idea of the 'state' into African territories carved up on a map during the Congress of Berlin in 1884-5, no thought was given to aligning 'states' with 'nations' amongst the disparate populations within those territories:

“There was little quest for cultural congruence between the unit of the state and the national unit or even for cultural similarities among the different units being ruled by the same colonial government. Very few of the new territorial units which were carved as countries could be described as nations in the classical European sense which inspired many Germans under Bismarck and later under Hitler and which inspired romantic and nationalistic Italians under Mazzini” (Mazrui 1983:26)

Not that Africans passively accepted the dividing up of their continent amongst the French, British, Germans, Portuguese, Belgians, Spanish and Italians. Contrary to the hegemonic ideas of the colonial school of African historiography, the great majority of African rulers and their peoples chose to defend their sovereignty and independence despite the odds against them (Boahen 1990 and 2011). The encyclopaedic eight volume *General History of*

*Africa* produced by UNESCO over a period of 25 years devotes seven chapters to detailing the extent of African resistance, a story that is rarely told.

It is often forgotten that, even though its legacy was profound and long-lasting, the colonial period in Africa lasted barely eighty years, from 1880 until the period of decolonisation and independence in the 1960s (Boahen 1990: 393). Although the colonising powers collectively agreed on the supremacy of Western civilisation and the necessity of imposing its values on their subject peoples, there were clearly discernible differences in approach from one regime to another (Wallerstein 2005a: 63). For example, whereas the French upheld the Jacobin tradition of egalitarianism and promoted the concept of 'assimilation' through direct rule, British paternalism leaned in favour of preserving custom and indirect rule through locally appointed representatives especially in the rural areas in order to "maintain distance between Britain and Africa, between Briton and African" (Wallerstein, op.cit: 65). Essentially, indirect rule may be defined as the policy of "allowing the powers of traditional rulers to remain intact to the maximum degree consonant with imperial rule" (Wallerstein op cit: 64). Kilson argues that indirect rule was a form of administration better suited to "*controlling* backward populations undergoing colonial change than it was for *facilitating* the depth and scale of such change" (1966:33, original emphasis). However, its instrumentality in collecting taxes and developing trade tended to 'blind' the colonial authorities to the wilful excesses of local chiefs, headmen and elders (Reno 1995: 37). In Sierra Leone, the profligacy of these local 'Big Men' and the perceived injustice of their authority was a major factor in the eventual collapse of the state (Berman 1998: 321; Collier 1970: 86; Keen 2005:60; Riddell 2005:117).

### **Independence and beyond**

Pakenham notes that the 'Scramble *out* of Africa' in the eleven years between 1957 and 1968 took place with the same undignified haste that had characterised the 'Scramble *into* Africa' from the 1880s onwards (1991: 671). Changing attitudes in the worlds of politics and commerce following the end of World War II meant that colonialism was no longer defensible nor feasible (op.cit: 673). The irony of the massive participation of the colonies in a war

against Nazi tyranny abroad was not lost on veterans returning to oppression at home (Wallerstein 2005a: 56). The Nigerian scholar, Francis Nyamnjoh has written forcefully about the hypocrisy of those times:

....."the double standard of preaching pluralism and freedom of information back home in the West but clamping down on nationalists struggling for exactly the same rights in the colonies; or enlisting a dominated people to fight against possible domination of Europe by Hitler" (2005:45).

The newly established United Nations which replaced the failed League of Nations in 1945 had enshrined "the principle of equal rights and self-determination" in Article 1 of its Charter and reiterated it in Article 55 where it referred to "international economic and social co-operation" (Jackson 1990: 76). When India eventually achieved its long-promised independence in 1948, it was clear that other colonies would surely follow. In truth, Britain had misjudged the time it would take for its colonies to achieve independence. In a parliamentary debate in the House of Commons in 1938 the Secretary of State for Colonies, Malcolm McDonald admitted as much:

"The great purpose of the British Empire is the gradual spread of freedom among all His Majesty's subjects in whatever part of the world they live. That spread of freedom is a slow, evolutionary process...In some colonies...the gaining of freedom has already gone very far. In others it is necessarily a much slower process. It may take generations, or even centuries, for the peoples in some parts of the Colonial empire to achieve self-government" (quoted in Jackson 1990: 86).

Nevertheless, following the entry of the virulently anti-colonialist US into the war in 1941, the colonial powers were required to draw up plans for decolonisation (Jackson, op cit: 88). Pakenham vividly describes the antics of the colonial authorities at the time:

"In desperation Britain launched a crash programme in nation-building. Constitutions were borrowed from elsewhere or hammered out overnight, parliaments thrown up like theatre props (designed on the Westminster model down to the Speaker's wig), elections held, Prime Ministers lectured on the intricacies of the British democracy. The trickiest problem was to design the federal constitution of Nigeria...Like everything, the constitution was a desperate expedient. Euphoria

seized all regions, as Nigeria stretched out a fumbling hand to take its freedom” (op.cit: 676; see also Chazan et al 1999: 43)

Looking back through the distorting lens of recent history, it is difficult to paint an accurate picture of African colonies in the exhilarating period just after the departure of the colonists. Depending on whether one believes that colonialism was inherently good or bad, the African nationalists’ early attempts at self-governance will be judged accordingly (Adedeji 1999a: 393; Coquery-Vidrovitch 1999: 285; Easterly 2006: 237; Gellar 1995:151; Rodney 1981: 203; Thomson 2004:11). As Davidson rightly points out, the myth prevailed, especially among the British, that the colonial masters had “prepared the way for African self-rule” (1973: 94). On the contrary, it gradually became clear that the decades of foreign rule had brought limited development of Africa’s primary sector in agriculture and mining. The fledgling nations had to step onto the world stage with only the most basic infrastructure in place. Profits had routinely been exported back to the West, not re-invested locally. Highly specialised export economies depending often on one or two crops, a negligible industrial base, a lack of access to technology and expertise, and populations where few were trained in business, social services or public administration represented a poor foundation on which to build a bright, new future (Ekeh 1975: 1999; Sachs 2005:189; Thomson 2004:179; Tsikata 2006:100). Rodney is scathing about claims that colonialism ‘modernised’ Africa: “the vast majority of Africans went into colonialism with a hoe and came out with a hoe” (1981: 219).

Kwame Nkrumah, under whose leadership Ghana was the first British colony to gain independence in 1957, described in detail the true level of underdevelopment left behind by the British upon their departure:

“All over the country, great tracts of open land lay untilled and uninhabited, while nutritional diseases were rife among our people. Our roads were meagre, our railways short. There was much ignorance and few skills. Over 80 per cent of the people were illiterate, and our existing schools were fed on imperialist pap, completely unrelated to our needs. Trade and commerce were controlled, directed and run entirely by Europeans”

(*Africa Must Unite* (1964) quoted in Davidson 1973: 93).

Boahen (2011) audited the main aspects of the colonial legacy in society and politics with some notable conclusions. In the social field, colonialism facilitated the spread of religion — both Christianity and Islam — initiated urbanisation and indirectly supported population growth at an estimated rate of 37%, due largely to health campaigns and the prevention of inter-ethnic group warfare, the massive casualties in the wars of resistance notwithstanding. It also introduced new social structures which marginalised traditional practices and drove a wedge between the urban and rural populations. Boahen also argues that colonialism downgraded the status of women in Africa, relegating them to positions as petty traders or farmers. While acknowledging the limited introduction of education, he points out that the vast majority of Africans, especially in the rural areas remained illiterate and those who did make it through the 'liberal education' system, were disciplined to despise African culture and were thus alienated from the masses. With some honourable exceptions, it was this alienated elite who dominated political discussions in the run up to independence and beyond (op.cit pp 103 – 107; see also Amadiume 1997: 104; Ekeh 1975: 104; Habte, Wagaw and Ajayi 1999: 678; Mazrui and White 1991: 353; Rodney 1981: 227).

However, it was in the field of politics that colonialism left its greatest mark with African states still struggling with the enduring legacy of empire. The first issue is the fundamental artificiality of the African state, its boundaries "arbitrarily drawn" on maps of Africa in the seats of imperial power in Europe (Boahen 2011: 96). Little or no reference was made to pre-existing nations, kingdoms and empires with the result that peoples such as the Bakongo in central Africa, the Ewe and Akan in West Africa and the Somali in the Horn of Africa were all distributed amongst two or more countries with the inevitable border disputes arising in later years (ibid). Geographically, many of the boundaries carved out 'illogical territories", that simply did not make sense on the ground. For example, ten countries, including Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana have no access to the sea. There is great discrepancy in scale between different countries ranging from the giant Sudan, including modern

South Sudan, with an area of approximately 937,000 square miles, to Nigeria with 357,000 square miles and, at the other end of the scale, Lesotho and Burundi with 11,000 square miles and Gambia occupying both sides of an estuary with only 4,000 square miles. Some countries like Sierra Leone are blessed with mineral resources and fertile land while others are mostly desert: Niger, Chad, most of Sudan, Algeria and Egypt. Finally, while some countries like the Gambia and Somalia had one or two borders to police, the former Congo had seven (Boahen op.cit: 97; see also Dixon 2002: 31; Hyden 2006: 19; Pakenham 1991: 671; Thomson 2004: 13).

Three innovations introduced by the colonialists have had lasting impact on African societies: the judiciary, the civil service and the notion of a standing army. Mamdani (1996) has discussed in great detail the dual nature of the legal systems in the colonies with the distinction between 'white man's law' and 'custom law'. Regarding the civil service and the army, Chazan et al (1999) maintain that the colonial state was effectively a "military-administrative unit" with the colonial police or troops on standby to quell any dissent.

According to Kasfir:

"The political culture bequeathed by colonialism contained the notions that authoritarianism was an appropriate mode of rule and that political activity was merely a disguised form of self-interest, subversive of the public welfare (1983, quoted in Chazan et al 1999: 43).

Ekeh's theory of 'the two publics' — the civic and primordial — in the African state and the different 'moralities' associated with either is essential to understanding the complexities of the modern African nation-state. The civic is that which pertains to the state and the public realm while the primordial refers to one's ethnic and kin obligations. This ambivalence to the ruling authorities, according to Ekeh, dates back directly to the days of colonialism when most colonial administrators were drawn from the rising bourgeois class in Europe and thus represented the civic public (op. cit: 93). Although Britain attempted to 'Africanise' the civil service in West Africa during the 1940s and 1950s, only half of all administrative posts were held by local personnel. In East Africa, the figure was much lower, possibly as low as 10% (Chazan et al 1999: 43). Therefore, as long as a considerable number of colonial

administrators were perceived as 'foreign', it became an acceptable part of independence ideology to subvert the workings of the hated colonial state (Boahen 2011:108; Ekeh 1975: 102; Hyden 2006: 65).

Thus, nationalism in the 1940s and 1950s could be defined more accurately as 'collective anti-colonialism' rather than a positive cohesive sentiment out of which a modern nation-state could be forged (Boahen 2011: 98). Later, during the 1950s and 1960s, nation-building and national development strategies, as part of an overall US-led modernisation programme, were more geared to "issues of redistribution and addressing the uneven development both within nation-states and between them" (Berger 2006: 19).

This was partly what motivated Julius Nyerere when he led the disparate peoples of the former Tanganyika to independence in 1961. For him and the millions of Africans living under colonial rule, the essence of 'nation-building' was to take the future firmly into their own hands and mould it into something that was recognisably theirs and truly '*African*.' The paradox was that they hoped to build something African on the foundation of something explicitly alien, that is the territorial boundaries largely laid down when the colonial powers carved up Africa amongst themselves at the Berlin Conference during the winter of 1884-5. The pragmatic reasoning behind the eventual partitioning was to avoid violent conflict amongst Europeans over access to Africa's resources. Africans themselves were never consulted. As a result, traditional nations and ethnic groups dating back centuries were divided with no thought given to their collective cultures or history: the Akan were split between today's Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The Ewe people were divided between Togo and Ghana and the Yoruba between Nigeria and Benin (Asante 2007: 220). Furthermore, if, in the smallest nations of Anderson's (2006) *imagined communities* there are "members who may never know their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them," in the newly emerging African states there were ethnic groups who had previously only known each other through conflict and were now expected to come together as compatriots.

In addition, with the ready-made territories came the inherited colonial administrative practices. These had been administered in the colonies as part of the authoritarian regimes by a rigid centralised bureaucracy that made no allowance for participation or democracy at the local level. This resulted in two risky facts: there was no understanding and little skill and experience about the day to day running of a country; secondly, the entrenched attitudes of the chiefs, particularly in rural areas, meant they would be reluctant to relinquish their authority. There arose what Davidson alludes to as the clash between “the inherited privileges of chieftaincy” and the “acquired privileges of education”, that is indigenous aristocracy versus urban educated elite (Kimble quoted in Davidson 1992: 103). This distracting class struggle for pre-eminence in the early days of independence was exacerbated by another phenomenon. While the anti-colonialist struggle had united peoples behind a single cause — independence and self-determination — for the vast majority of new voters the primary concerns were food, healthcare and education.

Once the battle for independence was won and national sovereignties clarified, the stage was set for the rivalry over the scarce resources that would satisfy the appetites of the masses (Ake 2000: 37). As the elites clamoured for power that enabled them to plunder the state resources in order to retain power, the state as the main deliverer of social welfare and public goods was diminished (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 6; Tangri 1985: 39). In place of skilled, ordered bureaucracies, the public sector was bloated by nepotism, clan loyalty and clientelistic networks (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 7; Tangri 1999: 24). So long as primary commodities held their prices on the global market, enough foreign exchange was found to prop up this house of cards (Faini 1994: 335; Helleiner 1994: 22; Thomson 2004: 182). However, following the oil crises of the 1970s and the slump in commodities, many governments had to endure the exigencies of structural adjustment programmes imposed by IFIs in return for expensive loans and bailouts (Demery 1994: 27; Englebert and Dunn 2013: 235). Beset with economic threats externally and insurrection and dissent internally, “the centre could not hold” (Laakso and Olukoshi 1996: 21; UNDP Kenya 2010:1). No longer able to exert authority over the whole of their territory, the political elites withdrew to the confines of the capital

conurbations or even abroad, taking their share of the plundered state assets with them (Abraham 1995: 97ff; Collier 2007: 120). Although the colonial period was relatively brief, these negative effects were to prove long lasting and underpin many of the problems plaguing the continent today (Boahen 2011; Davidson 1992; Thomson 2004).

### **Sierra Leone at independence: not yet a nation?**

A number of scholars have commented that the political malaise in Sierra Leone is “deep-rooted and contextual” (Taylor 2009: 174), suggesting that a significant cause may be a lack of national integration:

“... a feeling or rationale in which all of the people of Sierra Leone see themselves as citizens of the nation-state first, members of its several ethnic components second and loyal to a chiefdom and settlement third” (Riddell 2005: 126).

Clapham believes that the most fundamental source of Sierra Leone’s present woes is “a deeply-rooted sense of cultural insecurity and dependence”. He cites a “profound lack of leadership” which has failed to generate any effective alternative or vision to the colonial template handed down at independence (2003: 10). He demonstrates that the country never developed any vibrant or self-confident nationalist movement and that independence came about much more as “a consequence of voluntary withdrawal” by the British rather than a passionate struggle on behalf of Sierra Leoneans. Kandeh et al highlight the fact that anticolonial nationalism in Sierra Leone never achieved the “transformative” and “socially emancipatory” potential witnessed in other African nations, never rising above the “minimum requirements” of an independence movement (2005:195). Meanwhile Collier paints an interesting picture of the low-key transfer of power in 1961:

“The atmosphere did not exude that high excitement and high expectancy one normally associates with such an historic impending event. This was largely because independence did not come as the result of a particularly difficult national struggle. No deep emotions had been aroused and no major battles won, nor had there been any outpouring of national emotions in response to great rallying cries from national leaders. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of the people were totally oblivious of what was happening: they were not in anyway

personally and individually involved nor did they have strong sentiments for independence” (1970: 97).

The lack of involvement on the part of ordinary Sierra Leoneans was echoed during a parliamentary debate on the Sierra Leone Independence Bill on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1961 when H.A Marquand, MP for Middlesborough East described the warm welcome he had received as part of a delegation to the country the previous December:

“With that, however, there was undeniably some feeling of apprehension and as we went around some people asked, "Why are you leaving us?" That was how they expressed it to us. It seemed as though many persons in a variety of occupations and in different places had a feeling of uneasiness. That did not exist among the Ministers, of course. It did not exist among the chiefs. Those people are powerful and are self- confident in their new mission...Nevertheless, we felt that there was a feeling of doubt, possibly because it was only three years between the establishment of a Ministerial system and the giving of full independence. Perhaps the people did not expect it to come quite so soon. Readers' correspondence in the newspapers showed that there was, if not misapprehension, at any rate a good deal of misunderstanding about what independence involved”

(*Hansard 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1961* quoted in *Journal of Sierra Leone Studies* Vol 3:1 2014).

While Sierra Leone may have had great material advantages at the time of independence, it was certainly lacking in one regard: a powerful charismatic leader who could unite the nation around a common understanding of what it meant to be Sierra Leonean. As the political elites rushed to the starting line on Independence Day, less thought was given to consolidating a sense of nationhood than sharing out the tokens of power (Harris 2013:45). The first Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai, while being a cautious, mature administrator, was no Nkrumah or Nyerere. He was conservative in the extreme, averse to change and his deep reverence for traditional values, including respect for age and experience, led him to freeze out younger, more innovative political figures from his cabinet (Alie 1990: 226). Margai certainly did not possess the charisma or the desire to fire up the population behind the notion of an inclusive nationhood, by which parochial concerns around

ethnicity might be displaced in favour of grander themes such as modernisation or socialism (Harris 2013: 50). But as Riddell notes, such nation building is an integral aspect of development without which citizens feel alienated from the nation-state (2005: 126; see also Thompson and Potter 1997: 140). In its absence, the masses are unlikely to see themselves as 'partners' and 'co-builders' of national growth, betterment and cohesion. When such non-involvement on the part of citizens is met over time by predation, corruption and kleptocracy on the part of their leaders as in Sierra Leone, the result is a weak state unable to deliver essential public services or protect its citizens from internal or external security threats. State collapse is therefore inevitable (Gberie 2005:36; Harris 2013:81; Keen 2005: 25; Kandeh et al 2005: 202). Eliagwu (1999) neatly encapsulates this tension:

“Africa’s supreme political struggle in the post-colonial era can be reduced to two paramount longings — a striving to give greater coherence to African *nationhood*, and a striving to lend greater stability to African *statehood*. The crisis of nationhood is a crisis of flawed collective *identity*. The crisis of statehood is a crisis of unstable *authority*. The two dramas are inter-related but each has a logic of its own” (p435, original emphasis).

Indeed, Sierra Leone has yet to resolve both the crisis of nationhood and that of statehood and, throughout fifty years of independence, it seems its leaders have been more intent on capturing state resources and consolidating power than grappling with either issue. As with other emerging nations around the continent, the country was a political patchwork with a relatively short history as a unitary territory even under colonialism. The first attempt to bring the two territories together was the 1924 Constitution which formed a unicameral legislature with representatives from both the Colony and the Protectorate (Gberie 2005:190). This was an unhappy union as the Krios in the colony despised the inhabitants of the Protectorate: the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* at the time went so far as to describe them as “unwashed aborigines” and “unredeemable savages” (Keen 2005:14; Kandeh 1992: 85; Kandeh et al 2005: 186). Decades later, Krio contempt for their ‘compatriots’ was still evident in an attempt by some high profile Krio figures to attempt to have the Constitutional Order in Council — by which the country had gained its independence — declared invalid. The case was thrown out by the British

court in which it was served on the grounds that it was “legally hopeless since it concerned the independence of a sovereign nation” (Cubitt 2012: 13; Gberie 2005: 22).

Academics and intellectuals from the Protectorate were equally scathing about the Krios whom they criticised for daring to speak on behalf of the whole country. Milton Margai caustically remarked:

“Sierra Leone which has been the foremost of all the West African colonies, is still saddled with [an] archaic constitution with official majority (sic). The reason for this backwardness is evidently due to the fact that our forefathers, I very much regret to say, had given shelter to a handful of foreigners, who have no will to co-operate with us and imagine themselves to be our superiors because they are aping the Western mode of living and have never breathed the true spirit of independence” (quoted in Bangura 2009:589).

Such deep-seated hostility between the Krio leaders in the Colony and those in the Protectorate undoubtedly slowed the pace of decolonisation and hampered the development of a truly national consciousness (Kandeh et al 2005: 194). Although Krio influence was to wane in the years after independence, it lived on in the centralised nature of government and the ‘urban-bias’ policies of Siaka Stevens and the APC one party regime which concentrated development in the greater Freetown area where the benefits were restricted to a small elite in government, business, bureaucracy and the military (Riddell 2005: 117). It was argued that having a central locus of growth would stimulate the national economy and lead to a positive ‘trickle-down’ effect in the rural areas. In addition, the Stevens regime was deeply fearful of the urban masses who might riot if adversely affected by the negative aspects of an economic downturn. Stevens therefore instituted a series of measures which included subsidised rice for urban dwellers, currency overvaluation leading to cheaper imports and more expensive exports of cash crops, minimum wage legislation for urban workers and the capture of state resources leading to the movement of money abroad by the elite and a collapse in public service provision all over the countryside (Gberie 2005: 33; Keen 2005:25; Riddell 2005:119).

Needless to say, the expected 'trickle-down' to the countryside never happened as Stevens and his successor Momoh oversaw a transfer of state resources not to national development but to fostering elite privilege (Riddell 2005: 117). The result was a massive disparity in living standards between the urban and rural areas with Freetown eventually losing control of the hinterland. Clapham argues that when Sierra Leone came under armed challenge in the 1990s it became clear that there was, in fact, no 'state' as it is properly understood:

“...in the sense of an institution concerned with the provision of public goods. Instead, there were a set of essentially private operators, using the mythology of statehood as one of a collection of resources, along with management of the diamond market and control over parts of a fragmented military, through which to receive personal goals of survival, wealth and recognition (2003: 13).

### **Theorising the concept of nation building: now and then**

“I say these things because we do not want to be misunderstood. It is not from any false pride, or from blindness that we have been telling our people...the war against our ignorance, poverty and disease is *our* war. It can only be won by *our own* sweat and toil. It is simply because we have seen the warning of the past; we have seen that it would be unwise to pin our hopes too much on assistance from outside” (Julius Nyerere, quoted in Melady 1961:70, original emphasis).

“Nation-building, as it is commonly referred to in the United States, involves the use of armed force as part of a broader effort to promote political and economic reforms with the objective of transforming a society emerging from conflict into one at peace with itself and its neighbors” (Dobbins et al *The Beginner's Guide to Nation Building* 2005: xvii).

At first glance, the two quotes above would seem to have nothing in common given that they belong to two periods so far apart. In fact, both refer to the concept of 'nation-building', an expansive term that has been applied to activities as distinctive as 'state-building' and 'foreign occupation'. Berger (2006) has attempted to place the US-led campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq in historical perspective by examining the use of the term following the end of

the Second World War. Certainly, the extensive reconstruction efforts in Germany and Japan were considered to be 'nation-building' *par excellence*. Although Paine (2010) makes the interesting point that, in truth, the US did not carry out 'nation building' or 'statebuilding' in either country because both had strong national identities which survived World War II. In addition, both had strong pre-war political and economic institutional legacies to fall back on (p8). Instead, the US carried out essentially a *reconstruction* or *rebuilding* of what had been there before:

“Thus re-creation can leverage the legitimacy conferred by tradition and the expertise and experience acquired in the past, in order to rebuild rapidly and with comparatively little controversy...although *reconstruction* can take place within one generation, even rapid statebuilding and economic development generally take two to three generations. Both state building and economic development require stability, which, in such situations, tends to be in short supply” (p9).

Later, Berger shows how US military campaigns aimed at containing the Communist threat 'captured' the term 'nation-building'. There is an urgent need, he argues, in favour of contextualising the idea and practice of 'nation-building', from the period of decolonisation up to the era of globalisation. Notably, he goes on to explain that nation-building and state-building “can encompass formal military occupation, counter-insurgency, peacekeeping, national reconstruction, foreign aid and the use of stabilisation forces under the auspices of the USA, Britain, France, NATO, the UN or another international organisation” (ibid). To sum up, nation building today emphasises security and the expansion of the neo-liberal economy rather than the expressed wishes of the nation that is being 'built'. The drivers are *exogenous* concerns, not *endogenous* needs.

Following on from this, Hopp and Kloke-Lesch, writing from a development policy perspective, distinguish between indigenous *nation-forming* and *constructional nation-building* influenced from outside (2005: 141). For them, nation-forming represents:

“the continuous development of an integrated society based on shared values and goals with recourse to a functioning statism and infrastructure that it can also shape according to its own will” (ibid).

It is these ideas of 'continuous development' and integration which raise the prospect of nation-building (in the former sense) as one possible device in peacebuilding.

### **Revisiting nation building: the answer for the failed state?**

Hippler is amongst a small group of scholars who suggest that the fundamentals of 'nation-building' may offer one way of transforming conflict situations, particularly in the context of failed or weak states (2002; 2005; see also Macauley 2012; Onuoha 2011). Like Berger, he clarifies the term before deconstructing the concept. He argues that nation building is both a 'process of socio-political development' and a 'political objective as well as a strategy' (2005: 6).

Nation building as a process allows previously unconnected communities to become a 'common society' with a corresponding nation-state. Such a process usually takes place over time though its outcome is not guaranteed. This process may involve varying elements from economic and cultural integration and bureaucratic control to military conquest, repression and even acts of 'ethnic cleansing (ibid.) On the other hand, nation building as a political objective involves internal or external actors attempting to create or strengthen a political or social system within a nation-state for the purposes of stability or economic development. Hippler suggests that whether the actors are internal or external determines whether the strategy is perceived for the purposes of development or extending imperial control (ibid).

Both 'nation building as process' and 'nation building as objective' have three core elements. Firstly, an integrative ideology is needed to bind all the disparate elements within the nation-state. The example Hippler gives is of a Pakistani or Afghan who is also a Pashtun or Shiite, where it is ideologically permitted. The key is that the primary identification is with the nation and then the ethnic group or clan (Hippler 2005: 8). Collier (2010) cites the profoundly successful nation building efforts of Julius Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania. *Mwalimu* or 'Teacher' as he was known hammered home the

primacy of national identity: people were Tanzanian first and foremost. Ethnicity was not suppressed but rather downplayed. He instituted the use of Kiswahili across the whole country and re-organised the education system so that children everywhere received a consistent version of history (see also Mazrui and Tidy 1984:97).

Secondly, successful nation building relies on determined efforts to integrate within a single society the disparate groups of which it is formed. The idea of belonging to the nation must be seen as a 'given' and the administrative and socio-political functions must demonstrate this. For example, in Sierra Leone the disparity in experience between the relatively wealthy capital Freetown on the coast and the impoverished rural hinterland was dramatic. Until recently the road network was so poor that it could take up to nine hours to travel from Freetown to Kailahun in the east, a distance of approximately 300 km. So cut off was the east during the early years of the war that government officials in Freetown did not accept there was an on-going conflict (Hanlon 2005).

Integration relies on frequent communication between groups as well as within groups. The creation of a vibrant public sphere through the arts and cultural activities as well as the mass media is an obvious way in which such integration may be achieved (Hippler 2005: 9). The role of the media in nation building has been articulated by a number of writers over the years: Amienyi (2005) on Africa, DeLugan (2012) on post-conflict El Salvador, Mazrui (1972) on East Africa and Postill (2005) on Malaysia and, more generally, Putzel and van der Zwan (2006). Anderson's concept of 'print capitalism' is not easily imported into the oral traditions of the African continent though the more general points about 'unified fields of exchange and communication' and 'languages-of-power' are applicable in certain circumstances (2006: 40,44,45).

Finally, in Hippler's view, successful nation building needs a 'functional state apparatus' capable of controlling the national territory. This affirms the existence of the society as a 'political society', able to exert authority and deliver public goods across its territory. Crucially, Hippler underlines 'statebuilding' as a *core aspect* of successful nation building (p9, emphasis

added). This would seem to refute the prevailing neo-liberal theories focusing on the (re)construction of the state at the expense of the fundamental idea of nationhood. Hippler is also at pains to point out that while certain elements such as the construction of infrastructure, may be provided by external actors, essential elements like an integrative ideology or social integration projects can only be initiated internally:

As a rule, external players will consequently make nation building easier or harder, but hardly ever be able to force it or completely prevent it where the internal factors stand in the way of this (p9).

Paine maintains that nation-building, state building and economic development are linked (2010). In fact, Amienyi (2005) asks why national integration or nation building is so rarely linked to development planning when the costs of irredentist conflict to development are so high. He offers three possible reasons: firstly, African leaders have yet to take direct control over every aspect of the direction and shape of their country's development when the international financial institutions wield so much power (p3). Secondly, he describes the national integration construct as so complex and multi-faceted that development organisations believe they are automatically addressing these concerns when they tackle socio-cultural, political and economic issues when, in fact, national integration may touch on all these areas but still require further attention (p4). Finally, he suggests that national integration operates "at an emotive state of human behaviour", making it difficult to strategise or quantify (p4). Indeed, it is easier to point to evidence of its absence rather than evaluate progress towards its achievement. As more writers examine the links between conflict, security and development (see Beswick and Jackson 2011; Mac Ginty and Williams 2009), perhaps national integration will emerge as an issue worth exploring.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter began by looking at the particularities of the postcolonial African state through the lens of Westphalia, arguing that Africans have attempted to achieve in fifty years what it has taken Europeans up to fifteen hundred years to work through. Similarly, African nation-states emerged against a very

different background to the bloody feudalism of the Middle Ages when oppression, exploitation and brutality were widespread. In particular, the post-independence history of Sierra Leone shows how the lack of strong, effective leadership at the 'birth' of a nation may impact negatively on a people's capacity or desire to promote strong feelings of nationhood.

Exploring African history in such detail has helped to define the parameters in which modern peacebuilding is carried out. As Hutton (2014) notes, such revisiting of the past is important if we are to understand the present challenges of statebuilding and the creation of institutions in societies like Sierra Leone. If external peacebuilders hope to transplant Western-held notions of institutions into states that do not hold to Weberian values of effectiveness and efficiency (Taylor 2007), then, the question must be asked, what kind of peace is being built? Given the specific historical factors of the colonial legacy (Boahen 1990 and 2011), the lacklustre governance of the early years following independence in Sierra Leone (Alie 1990; Kandeh 2005) and the absence of an inclusive concept of nationhood (Clapham 2003), the weak state in Sierra Leone was probably not the most fertile of soils in which to plant new institutions, especially institutions that depended on public and political support to survive. The next chapter will discuss the extent to which ethnicity in Sierra Leone has been 'politicised' (Kandeh 1992) and how the state has been virtually 'hollowed out' by the predatory excesses of neopatrimonialism.

## **Chapter 3            Sierra Leone: from dreams of freedom to postconflict (UN) ‘blues’**

### **Introduction**

With the closing of the final UN peacebuilding mission in Freetown in May 2014, Sierra Leone has been hailed as ‘the poster child’ of post conflict peacebuilding and an undeniable success (Labonte 2011: 90; Moore 2011: 304). However, the continuing poverty of the majority of her citizens would seem to be at odds with this view and to belie the \$17 billion the UN has spent in the country since 1999 (Francis 2012: 16). It is perhaps ironic that a country founded on an early humanitarian impulse by British philanthropists in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century should find itself once again at the mercy of international interveners at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Within the broader context of modern African history, this chapter will examine the specific factors — political, social, historical and economic — that have shaped the state in Sierra Leone, especially the neopatrimonialism which has ravaged the public sector and the corruption that has destroyed the public services upon which the majority of Sierra Leoneans depend.

### **‘Peace’ in our time**

Sierra Leone lies on Africa’s Atlantic coast, bordered by Guinea to the north and east and by Liberia to the south. This small country, about three times the size of Wales, has been blessed with beautiful sandy beaches, lush tropical rain forest and fertile soil. With its extensive mineral resources of diamonds, titanium ore, bauxite, iron ore, platinum and latterly oil, it is potentially one of the richest countries on the continent (Davies 2000: 349; *Mining Journal* June 2013:8). Paradoxically, it languishes in the depths of the UN’s Development Index, ranked 177 out of 187 countries measured. More than half its population of just under six million lives in severe poverty. More people die from malaria here than anywhere else in the world, especially children under five. The country has the highest rates of maternal mortality and one of the lowest levels of life expectancy at just 48 years. The number of physicians per 1000 citizens is so low that it is registered as zero. The adult literacy rate is 42% while the population with at least secondary education is just under 15%.

(UNDP *Human Development Report 2013*). It is unlikely to meet any of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 (DFID 2012: 2).

Yet, as Clapham observes, Sierra Leone was “not an obvious candidate for state collapse” (2003:9). The outlook was extremely positive on that sunny morning on 27<sup>th</sup> April in 1961 when the country declared its independence from Britain. *Pathé News* footage shows Queen Elizabeth’s representative, a youthful Duke of Kent, graciously waving to thousands of cheering Sierra Leoneans lining the route from the airport to the city. Who would have imagined that, almost exactly thirty years to the day, on 23 March 1991, the border with Liberia would be breached by a bunch of mercenaries, dissidents and supporters of the regional warlord, Charles Taylor – and that this was the opening gambit in a conflict that would last eleven years? During that time, nearly 70,000 lives would be lost; over half the population would be forced to flee their homes, and countless numbers of innocent civilians would endure rape, violent assault and mutilation (Hanlon 2005: 2; HRW 1999).

### **Historical roots of present woes: the settlers**

Sierra Leone owes its very existence to an early humanitarian intervention on the part of the British in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Perplexed by the growing popular antagonism towards slavery and the presence on the streets of London of scores of indigent ex-slaves who had fought for the British in the American War of Independence, a handful of single-minded philanthropists and businessmen conceived the idea of resettling these individuals in Africa (Kilson 1966:1; Schama 2005: 180). A fleet of three ships, the *Atlantic*, *Belisarius* and *Vernon*, together with their naval escort the *Nautilus* set out from Plymouth for West Africa on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1787. A month later, on the 10<sup>th</sup> May, the *Nautilus*, under the command of Captain T. Bouldon Thompson of the British navy, anchored in ‘Frenchman’s Bay’ soon to be renamed ‘St George’s Bay’ (Schama 2005: 194). These early pioneers — or ‘Original Settlers’ as they came to be known — set about establishing the settlement named Granville Town, in honour of their benefactor Granville Sharp (Alie 1990: 53). The land was ‘bought’ from King Tom, the local Koya Temne chief on the Sierra Leone peninsula, in exchange for some £59 worth of beads,

tobacco, iron bars and rum (ibid). This dubious transaction was to underpin the subsequent conflicts of later years between the new arrivals and the indigenous peoples of the hinterland and coast.

The next wave of settlers was known as the 'Nova Scotians'. They too had fought for the British in exchange for freedom and land but the American victory meant they had to take refuge in another British territory, Nova Scotia in Canada. There, persistent racist abuse and frustrated ambitions led them to seek a better future in Africa. Persuaded by Navy Lieutenant John Clarkson that they could enjoy personal freedom and the right to worship as they chose, 1200 black loyalists elected to join his expedition and arrived in Sierra Leone in March 1792. Undaunted by the deaths of sixty-five of their number during the crossing, they began reordering the settlement, renaming the old 'Granville Town', 'Free Town' as a token of their hopes and aspirations for the future (Alie 1990:57).

The third wave of pioneer settlers was made up of 550 Maroons or Jamaican slaves who had either escaped from or were released by the Spanish before the British invaded Jamaica in 1655. They made their way to the hilly interior of the island where they set up independent communities. One such settlement at Trelawny Town declared war on the British as they felt that they had not honoured their side of a treaty. Tricked into coming to terms, these Maroons were overcome in 1796 and eventually deported to cold, bleak Nova Scotia. Some amongst them could not bear the conditions and at their own request were transported to the new settlement in Sierra Leone in 1800 (Alie 1990:61; Hirsch 2001:23; Schama 2005:378).

Over the next eighty years, however, these settlers would be outnumbered in Freetown and its environs by large numbers of 'recaptives' or liberated slaves (Curtin and Vansina 1964:187). Following the outlawing of the slave trade by the British government in March 1807, more venal minds determined that other nations, such as France, Spain and Portugal, should not benefit from the apparent economic benefits of trading in slaves. So, a base was set up in Freetown from which Royal Navy vessels sailed and intercepted foreign ships

en route to the Americas with the aim of setting the captives free (Mamdani 1996: 75; Schama 2005:388; Walvin 2001:266). Freetown's strategic position on the extreme west coast of Africa and her natural harbour were considered ideal for the task.

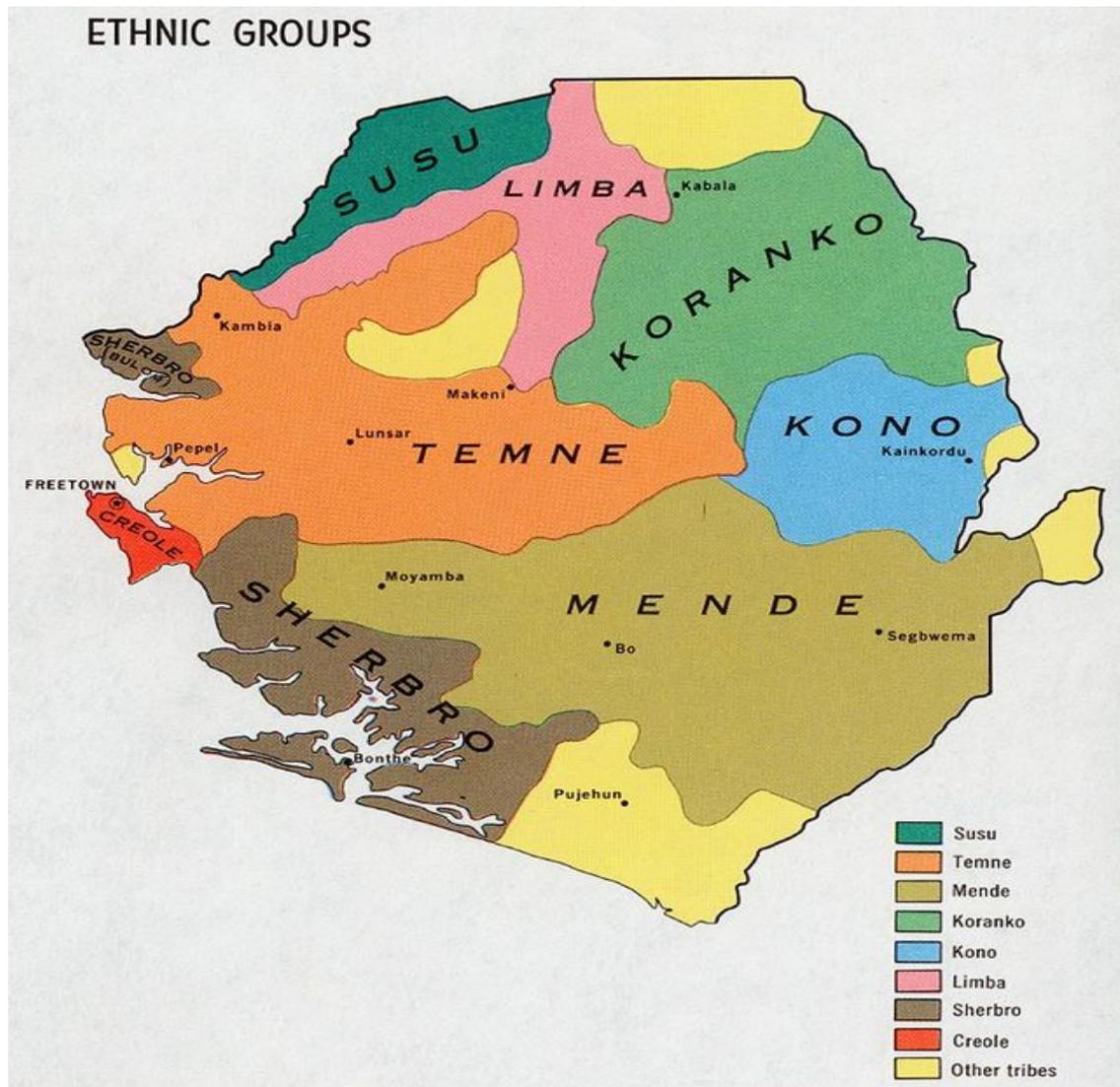
### **Resistance from the indigenous population**

Unfortunately, the well intentioned humanitarians who sought to resettle former slaves in these coastal territories paid no heed to those peoples who were already there, either living near the coast or in the hinterland. This was no *terra nullius*. Archaeological remains discovered in a cave in Yengema in the Kono district indicate small settlements dating back to around 2500 BCE. By the arrival of Portuguese traders in the fifteenth century, certain ethnic groups had already established small communities. Among them were the Baga, Bullom, Krim and Vai, collectively known to the Portuguese as 'Sapes'. In the north-west were the Temne and Loko and further north, the Limba. To the south west lived the Banta and in the east, the Kissi and Kono (Alie 1990:6; see Fig 2:1). The Mandinka or Mandingo people were the ruling ethnic group of the Mali Empire who moved into what is today known as Sierra Leone between the thirteenth and fifteenth century. They travelled as Islamic scholars, scribes and merchants with the result that Islam came to dominate the northern territories though some animist traditions survived (Hirsch 2001: 22).

From the outset, relations between the local peoples and the arrivals were strained. The earliest settlements were under constant attack and although the British believed they had bought the land around Granville Town — later Freetown — it was clear that this was not what had been understood by King Tom with whom they had opened negotiations (Schama 2005:200). Eventually, incursions by local groups led to the sacking of the settlements and together with the outbreak of tropical diseases and food shortages due to crop failures, these might have spelt the end for the Freetown settlement had the British government not established an official Crown Colony in 1808, confined to a narrow strip along the West African coast. The hinterland was

defined as ‘foreign countries adjoining the colony’ and this situation persisted until 1896 when the authorities annexed the territory and declared it a ‘Protectorate’ (Fyfe 1961:541; Gberie 2005:19). This was not motivated by any altruism on the part of the British: rather it was to enforce a modicum of control on the rural ethnic groups whose in-fighting over trade and the capture of slaves had begun to impinge on life in the colony (Rodney 1970, quoted in Shaw 2002: 32). Equally, the presence of a British protectorate extending hundreds of miles inland acted as a bulwark against French expansionism in Guinea. Besides, gaining access to the resources of the interior – agricultural, material and human – would have been another consideration (Kilson 1966:14).

During the so-called ‘Scramble for Africa’ during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was a pattern that was repeated along the coastline from Lagos Island to the Gambia: coastal settlements were turned into beachheads from which were launched campaigns to penetrate the hinterland and gain control of huge swathes of territory (Hirsch 2001:23; Keen 2005:9; Mamdani 1996:75; Shaw 2002:40). As constitutional experts have noted, from 1896 until 1924, Sierra Leone was “an administrative combination of two legally heterogeneous territories”, that is two areas with distinctly different legal systems (Thompson and Potter 1997: 140; Mamdani 1996:17). The British made no effort whatsoever to encourage the idea of a single unitary state, nor did they attempt to introduce even rudimentary aspects of democracy (Gberie 2005:19; Keen 2005:10). In fact, the two territories differed widely in the method of governance: the Colony was ruled directly by a formally structured bureaucracy dominated by expatriates but with the increasing involvement of the local Creole (Krio) population over time. On the other hand, the Protectorate was under indirect rule, via the authority of the local Paramount Chiefs, in the words of Mamdani,



**Fig 2.1 Map showing distribution of ethnic groups in Sierra Leone (University of Texas, 1969)**

“a mediated or decentralized despotism”(1996:17). The effect was, in Berman’s words that:

“..... the colonial state allowed chiefs, headmen and elders to define a customary law that asserted and legitimated their power and control over the allocation of resources *against the interests of juniors, women and migrants* (1998:321, emphasis added).

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
<b>Mende</b>	Most of south eastern Sierra Leone and parts of Western Liberia	About 30% of population	Descendants from the Sudan, Ivory Coast and Ghana entered coastal Sierra Leone in the mid-16 <sup>th</sup> century	<b>SLPP NPRC</b>
<b>Krio</b>	Freetown Peninsula	About 3 to 10% of population	Descendants of freed slaves of various ethnic backgrounds	
<b>Limba</b>	Northern Sierra Leone	About 10% of population	Amongst the country's original inhabitants	<b>APC AFRC</b>
<b>Lokko</b>	Northern Sierra Leone, below Futa Jallon Region	About 3% of population	Related to the Mende but cut off from them by the Temne during 19 <sup>th</sup> century ethnic wars	
<b>Temne</b>	Northern Sierra Leone (particularly Bombali, Tonkolili and Port Loko)	About 30% of population	Closely related to the Landuma and Baga ethnic groups from Guinea	<b>APC AFRC ACRM</b>

**Table 2.1 Sierra Leone's Major Ethnic Groups  
Adapted from Kandeh et al (2005:182)**

The roots of the Sierra Leonean state's continued debilitation and eventual collapse during the civil war of 1991-2002 may be traced to this bifurcated administration. As Mamdani recognises, the duality in legal theory highlights

two distinct, though related, forms of power: the centrally located state and the locally organised Native Authority (1996:109).

The British made the chieftancy a lifetime and inheritable position: this reduced the option of seceding from a chiefdom, or even withholding payment or compulsory labour from a chief. It was effectively a win-win situation for both the chiefs and the British. For the chiefs, the system virtually suppressed all opposition for the chieftaincy from local rivals and provided ample opportunity for incumbents to line their pockets by diverting house tax payments. This was in spite of the fact that later, under the Native Administration Act, Paramount Chiefs would receive generous salaries. Between 1949 and 1952, salary payments to chiefs doubled from £23,070 to £42,681 (Kandeh et al 2005:189; Keen 2005:10). For the British, stable local administration that facilitated the collection of taxes and the development of trade was of the utmost importance. If the price to be paid for such an outcome was overlooking the excessive practises of those chiefs who dominated the hinterland, so be it (Reno 1995:37).

Secondly, such a system accorded chiefs considerable autonomy together with more certain means of attaining wealth than war in pre-colonial times (Reno 1995:45). Chiefs regularly kept large numbers of slaves well into the 20th century – ironic in view of the history of the coastal colony – and domestic slavery was only officially abolished in 1928 (Keen 2005:10). Furthermore, forced labour was a fact of every day life in the rural areas and was officially recognised by the British in 1902:

“Every Paramount Chief in his capacity as chief.....shall have the same powers with respect to labour as they heretofore possessed”  
(*Laws of Sierra Leone* Cap. 170 Part II, ‘Forced Labour’, quoted in Reno 1995: 37).

Not surprisingly, forced labour was bitterly resented by all those affected, especially young men with little education, no land and no prospects. It remained a common practice and as late as the 1950s was a factor in localised riots (Reno 1995:44). Decades later, the Revolutionary United Front

(RUF) would find thousands of recruits in the rural areas amongst young men and women angry and despairing of their exploitation under the chieftaincy system. When the rebels attacked villages, the local chiefs were often the first to be singled out for humiliation and violent abuse (see Conciliation Resources 2000:5; Keen 2005:60; Riddell 2005:117).

### **The blessing and curse of diamonds**

“It is strange to say, but I believe without diamonds this country couldn't have been in this state of exploitation and degradation”.

(Desmond Luke, politician quoted in Reno 1998: 113)

Since diamonds were discovered in the 1930s, they have been the most important extractable resource in the country and the cause of much political competition and violence. As Clapham points out, diamonds are “perfectly adapted to the requirements of illicit resource extraction” (2003:17). They carry an exceptionally high unit value; they are easily extracted with the most basic technology; they are quickly transported, widely accepted and, as they are legal products at the point of use, are easily laundered by being absorbed into legitimate trading networks (*ibid*). In the 1930s, when diamonds were discovered, Sierra Leone was an “impoverished, barely self-sustaining colony” relying largely on subsistence agriculture and cash crops such as palm oil, ginger and groundnuts (Gberie 2005:23). When it was revealed that the diamond mining areas were to cover an estimated 7,700 square miles of the country's total landmass of 27,000 square miles, there soon followed a ‘diamond rush’ in which a large shifting migrant population was drawn to the area (Clapham 1976:11; Forna 2003:38; Gberie 2005:24).

Although the Sierra Leone Selection Trust Ltd (SLST) legally held the diamond mining areas, by the 1950s there were an estimated 75,000 illicit miners in the eastern Kono district alone. The miners came from all over the country and elsewhere and soon had the diamond areas “verging on anarchy, with armed bands of as many as 400 to 500 men raiding SLST areas, and on occasion doing battle with the police” (Cartwright 1970:69). Labour Department statistics show that as many young men left their rural homes in

three years to seek their fortune in the diamond mining areas as had sought wage employment in the capital in the previous half century (ibid). Rice production slumped and Sierra Leone became a net importer rather than exporter of rice (Gberie 2005:24). Diamonds were smuggled on a vast scale leading to a general breakdown in law and order (Smillie et al 2000:40). The Sierra Leone Police Force launched several military-like campaigns to clamp down on the worst excesses but to no avail.

As Hirsch (2001) insightfully puts it, the patterns set in place between the 1930's and the time of independence in 1961, sowed the seeds for the catastrophic conflict of the 1990's (p28). Eventually, the economy and governance, even the stability of the Sierra Leonean state itself would be eroded by diamonds – by the demand on the international market and the rush inside the country to supply that demand. From the highest office holder to the most impecunious of rural workers, thousands became caught up in the illicit diamond trade (Campbell 2004; Gberie 2005; Hirsch 2001; Reno 1995, 1998; Richards 1996; Smillie et al 2000). As Berman observes, during the civil war all parties, apart from international organisations, depended on diamonds as a major source of revenue:

“...the Sierra Leone government, the various mercenary forces...that have been brought in to assist it, the RUF, its Liberian backers, soldiers and local militias operating on their own accounts and indeed significant elements in the ECOMOG and UNAMSIL forces which have been plausibly accused of exchanging their own weapons for diamonds” (Berman 2001, quoted in Clapham 2003:17).

The presence of a precious commodity in a situation of protracted violence led some observers to question whether profiteering was the main motive — the well-known greed or grievance debate. Its most high profile proponent was Paul Collier, one time Director of the Development Research Group at the World Bank who claimed unequivocally “Conflicts are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance” (2000: 91). Collier's status within the World Bank and his professorship at Oxford University together with the quantitative analysis that was a feature of his work meant that his views had an inordinate influence on international policymaking within

the UN (Ballentine and Sherman 2003: 3). Keen and others challenge the usefulness of the greed/grievance dichotomy and in particular the apparent refusal to investigate why groups should turn to violence:

“ The civil war in Sierra Leone cannot really be understood without comprehending the deep sense of anger at lack of good government and education opportunities (the significance of the latter suggesting a problem with taking lack of education as a proxy for greed rather than grievance”) [2000:35].

Later, the “methodological and analytical shortcomings” of Collier’s work came under fire (Ballentine and Nitzscke 2005:4; Berdal 2005: 688), however not before the ‘greed not grievance’ theory had swayed many policy makers and analysts into believing that civil war was caused exclusively by rebel greed:

“The unexplored assumption was that “rebels — not state actors — cause conflict”, leading to a pro-state bias in analysis and policy action. Theories of rebellion thus provide only an incomplete picture of conflict onset. Neglecting an analysis of state behaviour may in fact legitimise repressive and corrupt state elites who may also profit from war at the expense of the population” (Ballentine and Nitzschke 2005: 4).

This mistaken reading of the Sierra Leone civil war led, in some cases, to an over-reliance on the state as the means by which stability and order can be maintained (Hutton 2014: 4). Within this thesis, space does not permit a detailed narrative of the conflict: this has been skilfully tackled elsewhere (see amongst others Abdullah 2004; Bangura 2004; Gberie 2005; Kandeh 1999; Keen 2005; Reno 2003; Zack-Williams 1997 and 1999). Yet, according to these authors and the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up to investigate the causes of the war, the decades of bad government, endemic corruption and denial of human rights that followed independence meant the conflict was inevitable (TRC 2004 Vol 1 §11 p10).

### **‘The goat eats where it is tethered’ — corruption in Sierra Leone**

Bayart, in his seminal work on the African state, *“La politique du ventre”*, literally “The politics of the belly”, examines the popular connection made in Cameroon between politics, power, and resources as “a meal ticket” (1993: xvii). In Sierra Leone also, there is the street phrase *“Dey go chop we money”*,

“They are going to ‘eat’ ie steal our money”, referring to corrupt politicians or officials. In fact, the ‘goat phrase’ above was frequently used by the former President Siaka Stevens, probably the country’s ‘kleptocrat-in-chief’. The irony of the language was not lost on Sierra Leoneans struggling to feed their families while surviving at subsistence levels of poverty.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the root of the word ‘corruption’ is the Latin verb *corrumpere* meaning ‘to destroy, ruin or falsify’. Certainly, many Sierra Leoneans agree with Zack-Williams’s view that it was not the RUF who destroyed the country during eleven years of war but 25 years of kleptocratic dictatorship and mismanagement of the state under the APC. Furthermore, he contends that the war was not caused by greed or squabbling over diamonds: rather, it was “the lack of political space and the ailing economy that drove young people into the bush” (2012:ix, 247; see also Macauley 2012). This view seems to support Ake’s controversial contention that the crisis that overwhelmed Sierra Leone and other states on the continent was essentially *political* in nature: even though the economic consequences were serious they were nevertheless incidental (1991: 316). It follows then that focusing on the immense damage caused by corruption is to address the symptom and not the underlying cause: understanding and addressing corruption therefore requires a political rather than economic approach (Kpundeh 1994 and 2004; Persson et al 2013).

At this point it would be useful to examine the terminology in the area of corruption as so many words are used interchangeably. In their detailed study of the modern African state and its challenges, Chabal and Daloz take as their starting point the Weberian notion that the public and private spheres become functionally distinct and that the holders of political power do not possess any legitimate claim on the assets or resources they administer (1999: 5). They argue that this is simply not true in Africa where the informalisation of politics has meant that the state has not been ‘institutionalised’. The development of the modern state, they believe, “implies the emergence of a notion of citizenship binding individuals directly to the state — above and beyond the more proximate ties of kinship, community or faction” (p6). By contrast in Africa, there has been an “instrumentally profitable lack of distinction”

between the civic and private spheres. In such circumstances, rulers allocate political office to 'clients' on the basis of 'patronage', rather than according to the criteria of professionalism and competence as in a modern functioning bureaucracy (ibid). In such 'patrimonial' systems, an individual rules "by dint of prestige and power":

"Authority is entirely personalised, shaped by the ruler's preferences rather than by any codified system of laws. The ruler ensures the political stability of the regime and personal political survival by providing a zone of security in an uncertain environment and by selectively distributing favours and material benefits to loyal followers who are not citizens of the polity so much as the ruler's *clients*"

(Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 61, emphasis added)

'Clientelism' is therefore a system in which a 'Big Man' distributes selective benefits in the form of jobs, resources (or opportunities to capture both) to his 'clients' or followers in return for political or practical support. A 'patrimonial' system is one in which a 'Big Man' is able to allocate resources according to his personal preferences, often making no distinction between public resources and private wealth. However, in referring to many African states, political scientists have coined the term *neopatrimonialism* to convey the idea of hybridity in those states where the patrimonial exists alongside the bureaucratic:

"Outwardly the state has all the trappings of a Weberian rational-legal system, with a clear distinction between the public and private realm, with written laws and a constitutional order. However, this official order is constantly subverted by a patrimonial logic, in which officeholders almost systematically appropriate public resources for their own uses..." (van de Walle 2001: 52).

It is difficult for outsiders to comprehend the extent to which corruption pervades everyday life in some African societies and the many different forms it may take. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Association for Public Administration and Management jointly undertook research into 'unethical behaviour' at the governmental level. The list of negative behaviours they considered included:

“...bribery, corruption, abuse of office, patronage, nepotism, conflict of interest, influence peddling, using of official position for personal pleasure, favours to relatives and friends, divided loyalty, slowness, late-coming, partiality, partisanship, absenteeism, insubordination, misuse of government property, leaking or misusing government information and ‘engaging in any unsanctioned activity’” (quoted in Thompson and Potter 1997:137).

Similarly, de Sardan (1999) broadens the notion of corruption to formulate the idea of a ‘corruption complex’ to include “nepotism, abuse of power, embezzlement and various forms of misappropriation, influence-peddling, prevarication, insider-trading and abuse of the public purse”. This, he explains, is in order to more closely consider what these activities have in common, what links them together and to what extent they are woven into the fabric of customary social norms and attitudes (p27).

Recently, Justesen and Bjørnskov demonstrated that while most research focuses on the causes and consequences of corruption at the macro-level, there is little understanding of what they term the ‘micro-foundation’ of corruption. They argue that poor people are more likely to be victims of corrupt behaviour by street-level bureaucrats since the poor rely more heavily on services provided by governments (2014: 106). Soliman and Cable (2011) considered the characteristics of those states associated with corruption and discovered five major traits. First, *the greater the permeability of a political system to economic elites, the more likely is corruption*. As Jain suggests, such a system leads wealth-owners to collaborate with holders of political power to circumvent the spirit, if not the letter of the rules by which a society has agreed to govern (2001:77). This was certainly the case in Sierra Leone where for example, Siaka Stevens turned over most of the diamond and fishing industries to his close associate and business partner Jamil Sahid Mohammed. Although neither a minister nor an elected member of parliament, Mohammed attended cabinet meetings where he occasionally vetoed ministerial appointments and reversed ministerial decisions. He was also allowed to maintain a heavily armed 500-strong personal security force

made up largely of Lebanese and Palestinians (Gberie 2005: 31; Kandeh 1999: 351).

Secondly, *the weaker the competition amongst politicians, the more likely is corruption*. Simply put, in fully functioning democracies, voters can reject politicians at the ballot box (Jain 2001:82). Once Siaka Stevens was sworn in as Prime Minister in 1968 following the 1967 military coup, he and his APC cohorts immediately began eliminating as many Mendes as possible from the officer corps to ensure the army's loyalty (Cox 1976, quoted in Kandeh et al 2005: 199). The next step in 1978 was to impose a one party system which, through a paramilitary body known as the 'Special Security Division', harassed and terrorised students, workers, peasants and other government opponents. Both society and state were subordinated to the interests of the only recognised party and any discussion of political alternatives was considered treasonable (ibid). As a number of observers have noted, during the period of the greatest repression in Sierra Leone, corruption was at its height (Kpundeh 2004: 91; Thompson and Potter 1997: 138; Zack-Williams 2012: 247).

Next, *the greater the government's intervention in the economy, the more likely is corruption*. In 1979, Siaka Stevens was under pressure to make regular payments to multilateral creditors in order to become eligible for a Paris Club debt rescheduling of around \$120 million. At the same time, his own personal desire to host the 1980 Organisation of African Union Conference required an input of approximately \$200 million, which represented most of the budgeted outlay on development initiatives and public services (Reno 1995:137).

<b>FINDINGS</b>	<b>AUTHORS</b>
Corruption slows economic development through lowered tax revenues	Gupta et al 2001; Johnston et al 1999; Tanzi and Davoodi 1997; UI Haque and Sahay 1996; Sekkat and Méon 2005; Shleifer and Vishny 1993
Corruption slows economic growth through increased military spending	Gupta et al 2000
Corruption detracts from economic growth because the likelihood of bribery influences the government's choice of projects to undertake	Mauro 1998
Corruption leads officials to allocate public funds in ways that have negative economic impacts	Tanzi and Davoodi 1997
Corruption can change private investors' assessments of the merits of a project because of the potential 'corruption payments' they may be forced to make	Jain 2001
Corruption reduces tax revenues thus adversely affecting service provision. It leads to price escalation and reduced investment in human capital, forcing government to spend less on health care, education and medicine	Gupta et al 1998, 2001; Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi 2005; Mauro 1998; Tanzi and Davoodi 1997
Corruption directly increases income inequality by forcing the poor to pay higher proportions of their incomes in bribes	Gupta et al 1998; Uslaner 2008
Corruption worsens the impact of natural disasters	Aybar and Lapavitsas 2001; Green 2005; Olson et al 1999;
Corruption endangers lives as bribery encourages officials to overlook the contravention of health and safety regulations in transport and construction	Soliman and Cable 2011

**Table 2.2 Major effects of corruption on developing societies  
(Adapted from Justesen and Bjørnskov 2014; Persson et al 2013; Soliman and Cable 2011)**

In order to cover the extravagant costs of the conference — installing a Presidential lounge at the airport, three new ferries, street lighting, a new conference hall, two luxury hotels, sixty well-appointed villas and new roads — Stevens needed an extra injection of foreign exchange, outside the official financial records, and so turned to his network of Lebanese business associates and cronies. In return, they were awarded all the contracts for construction and the import of luxury goods (Gberie 2005: 32). The unofficial slogan for the conference became ‘OAU today, IOU tomorrow’ (Reno 1995: 137). The principled Governor of the Bank of Sierra Leone Sam Bangura objected to this abuse of power which involved, for instance, secret agreements for the storage of toxic waste and illegal foreign currency deals. Just before the conference, Bangura was thrown out of his upper storey office window allegedly by thugs acting at the President’s behest (Clapham 2003:13; Reno 1995:137).

A more recent example of government intervention in the economy was the agreement signed in 2009 between the UK based company London Mining and the APC government under Ernest Koroma regarding development of an iron ore mine at Marampa, east of Freetown. The agreement was widely criticised for the concessions it gave the company which included paying just 6% tax for 10 years compared to the usual 30% and the ability to prevent future governments raising the company’s taxes without its agreement. Such was the outcry that a revised agreement was signed in 2011 but which retained lower rates of taxes, import duty and royalties on profit, in contravention of the government’s own Mines and Minerals Act of 2009. London Mining argues that the government will receive in excess of \$200 million over a 10-year period from the working of the Marampa mine. However, this bespoke agreement sets a bad precedent for the government’s negotiations with other mining companies who are likely also to seek tax exemptions ([www.christianaid.org](http://www.christianaid.org) 27/3/2012).

*The greater the public official’s discretionary power to allocate resources, the more likely is corruption.* If one understands ‘resources’ as ‘public sector jobs’ the activities of Steven’s presidential secretary Abdul Karim who was also

head of the civil service provide an illuminating example. Karim regularly 'patrimonialised' the civil service by operating a system of appointments and promotions based on bribes:

"To be appointed district officer in the diamond mining town of Kono, a civil servant had to pay Karim an initial bribe of SLL 10,000 (the equivalent of \$10,000 at the time) and monthly payments of SLL 8,000 to keep the job. Appointments and retention of provincial and district administrators in non-mining areas were based on the same corrupt, neofeudalist formula, with appointment bribes of SLL 7,000 and monthly retention payments of SLL 3,000. Assistant district officers paid SLL 5,000 and SLL 2,000 to be appointed and retained respectively (*Globe* 12/4/1982 p 1,3 quoted in Kandeh 1999: 352).

Kandeh shows that, underwriting this 'tribute mode of accumulation' by civil service staff was the direct embezzlement of public outlays and resources. Salaries for 'ghost' workers especially teachers and nurses were paid into the accounts of senior bureaucrats. Public construction materials would be diverted for private use. The managing directors of public enterprises or parastatals like the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board and the Rice Corporation were handpicked by Stevens and answerable only to him. And, more recently, when the APC came to power in 2007, an estimated 80% of the state bureaucracy was removed in order to make way for APC sympathisers with no regard for the resultant negative impact on development of so great a loss of skill, expertise and knowledge (Cubitt 2012: 151; ICG 2008: 11). Such a short term, politically motivated move wiped out, at a stroke, five years of international investment in post-conflict capacity building. Yet, for the APC, it was seen as one way of securing loyalty amongst its networks: such posts are regarded as rewards for ethnic clients, carrots for political opponents and a means of silencing potentially restive communities (Kandeh 1992: 94). In a similar way, jobs at SLBC were distributed not to the most skilled or experienced candidates but those deemed to be more deserving of political recognition and reward.

Finally, of most relevance to this thesis, *the greater the government's control of information, the more likely is corruption*. According to Montinola and Jackman, the freedom of information and association characteristic of

democracies helps in monitoring public officials, thereby limiting their opportunities for corrupt behavior (2002:151). In discussing the situation in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Pradhan et al maintain that the media, when free and open, remain the most persistent institution in the fight against corruption (2000: 46). Throughout the long history of the media in Sierra Leone — the first newspaper started in 1801 and the first radio station in 1931 — relations with the government have varied depending on the regime. For instance, agitation against colonial abuses led to the development of the independent press, perhaps best exemplified by the *West African Standard* under the leadership of the trade unionist and Pan Africanist I.T. A. Wallace- Johnson. So effective was his campaigning journalism that the colonial authorities established legal grounds on which they could detain him, at least for the duration of the Second World War (Gordon 2004: 182). After independence, when Sir Albert Margai succeeded his mild-mannered deferential brother Milton, within two years parliament had passed the Public Order Act which made libel a criminal offence, covering printing houses as well as editors and journalists. And, as a hint of what was to come, on the eve of the 1967 elections, Sir Albert's SLPP instructed the only state-owned radio station not to give any publicity to the opposition party (Sesay and Hughes 2005: 92).

Under the APC one party system, press repression was taken to new extremes when newspaper premises were ransacked, journalists arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned and the Newspaper Amendment Act passed which set the cost of registering a newspaper at \$2,000, a prohibitive sum at the time. Later, both the NPRC and AFRC regimes resented press coverage of their apparent excesses and corrupt activities but the private media battled on. Like M'Bayo and Moge kwu (2000), Gordon argues that the private media represent an independent body of small holders engaged in the production of a specific consumer product, namely media content:

“...the smallholders of the print media in Sierra Leone know very well what sells; the exposure of corruption and underhand dealings of the denizens on the corridors of power. One only has to glance at the headlines of Freetown's independent press over the years to verify this

over-concentration on corruption/rumours of corruption which is what brings the independent press head-to-head with the powers that be on a consistent basis over the years” (2004: 183).

Gordon wryly notes that the political class has denounced so-called ‘negative’ press reporting about corruption on the grounds that it drives away foreign investors: “The state cannot deny the existence of corruption — it just seeks to stop the press writing about it” (ibid). In October 2013, the arrest of two journalists from the *Independent Observer* on the orders of President Koroma seems to have brought the APC full circle. The paper’s front page reported on the apparent souring of relations between the President and the Vice President, Samuel Sam Sumana, alleging that Sumana had funded Koroma’s bid for power in 2007. Interestingly, the two journalists were arrested on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, just days before Koroma himself gave assent to the Right to Access Information Act 2013 on 31<sup>st</sup> October (*Politico* 6/11/13). Sierra Leonean journalists had long campaigned on two issues: the repeal of the Public Order Act and the introduction of a Freedom of Information bill. It remains to be seen how Koroma’s seemingly contradictory actions will impact on the media environment and the ability of the media to expose the excesses of those in power and their minions.

When considering the role of the media and freedom of information in tackling corruption, Rønning (2009) asks how the press can make any meaningful contribution to tackling corruption other than by exposure, the modern equivalent of “putting people in the pillory” (p165). He argues that the real challenge lies in seeing corruption in context alongside other social institutions and practices. Thus, the stress moves from being stigmatised in the press to being prosecuted by the law:

“When there is little risk of being arrested and charged, put on trial and found guilty of breaches of laws on corruption that are enforced irrespective of who you are, corrupt officials will continue their activities with impunity. *It is not enough to be put to shame in the public eye.* This is particularly the case when what constitutes shame is a relative concept. Those involved often consider it less shameful to be

stigmatised in the public sphere than *not* contribute to the welfare or affluence of one's family and clan" (ibid, emphasis added).

Therefore, the fight against corruption does not begin and end with the media. To expect the full force of the law to come crashing down on perpetrators exposed in a front-page 'splash' or leading story is to accord to state institutions in Sierra Leone an authority and singularity of purpose which they do not merit. Neither are media organisations themselves exempt from corrupt practices though the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, the Independent Media Commission and the Guild of Editors are working hard to raise standards and inculcate a sense of professional ethics. However, the reality is that the media cannot fight corruption without the support of the judiciary, an open government and an active civil society (Rønning 2009: 169). And, without a professional, ethical and effective media industry, working on different platforms, the issue of corruption might not make it onto the national agenda (Cobb and Elder 1971; Fourie 2011; McCombs 2005; McQuail 2005; Walgrave and van Aelst 2006).

Despite the expectation that the postconflict peace would transform Sierra Leonean society for the better, many citizens have found that for them and their families the status quo continues. A recent Afrobarometer poll carried out in the country showed that 63% of the population had paid a bribe in the previous twelve months to obtain a service or avoid a problem. Reinforcing Justesen and Bjørnskov's argument that corruption impacts the poor most, 35% of those Sierra Leoneans who had paid a bribe for a permit or document in the previous 12 months had also gone without food on at least one occasion. 69% said that most or all of the police were corrupt, 57% believed most or all tax officials were corrupt while 51% said most or all government officials were corrupt. Nevertheless, 54% said they thought the government was doing well or fairly well in its fight against corruption (Afrobarometer 2013 *Governments Falter in Fight to Curb Corruption*). Philp argues that peacebuilding contexts are uniquely prone to corruption because of "the existence of multiple, competing sets of rules, norms and expectations of public office" (2008:310). He goes on to suggest that the resulting corruption

is simply an indication of the “lack of shared norms” that would be expected to support the order that peacebuilding is trying to impose (p317).

### **Postcolonial discourse on corruption**

A number of postcolonial theorists have suggested alternative ways of considering corruption. Bardhan and Mookherjee (2005) have suggested for instance that corruption may be one way of bypassing inefficiency in centralized bureaucratic systems (p676). Bardhan (1997) claims the literature generally overlooks the distributional implications of corruption (p1336). For Pierce (2006) writing on northern Nigeria, corrupt practices are “ a contingent product of contemporary social structures rather than the result of some kind of African or Nigerian dysfunction” (p888). de Maria finds that public administration can be subverted to the agenda of business by the way the measurement and management of African “corruption” is manipulated to serve Western interests. He criticises the most popular measure of corruption, Transparency International’s *Corruption Perception Index* as oblivious to cultural variance and business-centric in style and philosophy (2008:184). Mac Ginty and Williams (2009) ask whether corruption can be said to exist in situations where the formal economy has broken down and people need to rely on informal market mechanisms simply to exist? (p 36). And finally, to return to Ekeh’s concept of the two publics — the civic and the primordial, where it was acceptable to undermine the workings of the hated colonial state. Quite different approaches are required for each realm if an individual is to survive and thrive:

“To put your fingers in the till of the local authority will not unduly burden your conscience and people may well think you are a smart fellow and envy you your opportunities. To steal the funds of the union (or ethnic association) would offend the public conscience and ostracise you from society” (Wraith and Simpkins 1963, quoted in Ekeh 1975: 111).

Nevertheless, whatever alternative postcolonial justification may be offered for corruption, it should not be forgotten that it is the poorest who suffer most by paying a greater proportion of their income in bribes. Equally, it is they who

depend most heavily on the provision of public services where the excesses of predatory neopatrimonialism are most clearly visible.

## **Conclusion**

The contrast between the upbeat, optimistic discourse at the international level and the continuing hardship of everyday life for millions of ordinary Sierra Leoneans is stark. It underlines the mismatch in expectations between the drivers of international interventions and the subjects of their attention (Cubitt 2012: 3). The historical split between the Colony on the coast and the Protectorate covering the rural hinterland hampered the development of an effective and efficient system of governance and the emergence of an inclusive national identity. As a result of the politicisation of ethnicity (Kandeh 1992) and the fractured sense of nationhood, (Clapham 2003) politics in Sierra Leone has become a zero-sum game in which the winner takes all. Access to power means access to resources which means access to power and so on. The distinction between the public and private realm has become skewed to the point where those in power regularly appropriate state resources for their own use (van de Walle 2001:52). Consequently, the vast majority of transactions between individuals have become 'patrimonialised' and the entire state bureaucracy has become a vast clientelistic network in which any meritocratic considerations have long given way to patronage and ethnopolitical concerns. The emphasis in governance is not on raising the standard of living for the majority of citizens but increasing the opportunities for self-enrichment for a handful of elites.

This is the environment into which the UN's peacebuilding strategy was launched with the aim of rebuilding a state equipped with effective, functioning institutions. But, as Clapham observes, there was no state as it is properly understood: any institutions that were created were built on the 'shifting sands' of clientelistic networks and neopatrimonial priorities with no thought for the provision of public goods or services. Without due regard for meritocratic recruitment, fiscal probity, accountability and transparent governance, an institution may somehow manage to survive. However, it is clear that it will never thrive nor deliver the goods and services required to

meet the needs of the people. Into this maelstrom of liberal ideology, international pragmatism, elite greed and mass deprivation, the project to create a national public service broadcaster was launched.

## **Chapter 4            Peace and public service broadcasting: what fit in Sierra Leone?**

### **Introduction**

At the heart of this thesis is a small West African country, just off the geopolitical radar, which endured a vicious civil war between 1991 and 2002. In the interregnum between the end of the Cold War and 9/11, it seemed as though a new world beckoned with the UN coming into its own as the foremost guardian of the peace. Over the years, Sierra Leone has seemed like a giant petrie dish into which the international community has conducted its ongoing experiments: structural adjustment, economic sanctions, poverty reduction strategies, institution-building, state-building, peacebuilding, and so on.

This chapter begins with the theory surrounding such ideas as peace and peacebuilding, discussing key concepts such as neoliberalism and good governance. The second half of the chapter looks at the theory of public service broadcasting, which proved so attractive to former British colonies on account of the strong links with the BBC. It shows that radio remains the medium of choice for the majority of citizens throughout Africa. The chapter closes with a discussion of the link between media development, peace and democracy, a connection which is seen as axiomatic in some quarters. Together, these divergent strands will address the research questions about the environment into which Sierra Leone's new public service broadcaster was launched and its potential to address the pressing challenges of a post conflict society, including nation building.

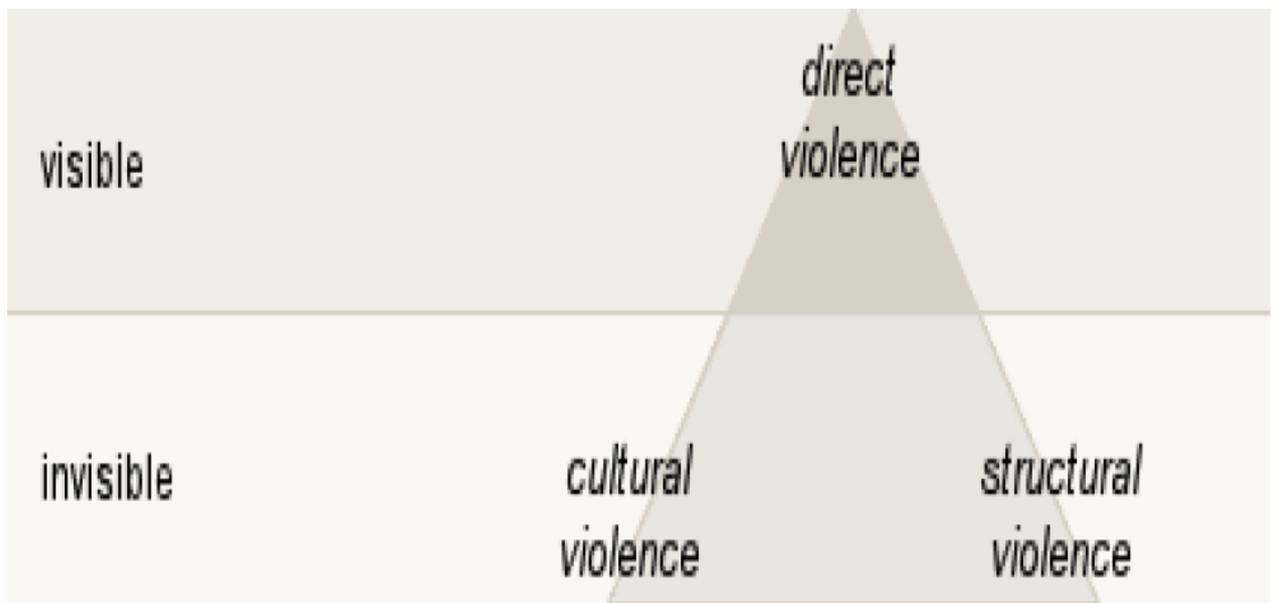
### **Peace: positive or negative?**

Although most political commentators point to the 1992 publication of *Agenda for Peace* by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as the pivotal point in the debate on the meaning of peace in UN operations, peace researchers claim the early work of Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung laid the conceptual foundations for such discussions. In particular, his ideas on 'negative peace', 'positive peace', 'direct' and 'structural' violence are worth exploring in the context of post-conflict peacebuilding in Sierra Leone. In the opening editorial to the first ever edition of the *Journal of Peace Research*,

Galtung defined 'negative peace' as "the absence of violence, absence of war" and 'positive peace' as "the integration of human society" (1964: 2). For Galtung and his fellow peace researchers, it was necessary that their endeavours were not limited to 'peaceful means of peace-keeping', that is, 'negative' peace. They believed there was an abundance of diverse methods by which positive, sustainable peace could be attained:

...from efforts to change the minds of men, change their ideas about other groups, improved contact through exchange, improved understanding through studies, peace research itself, semantic analyses, improved communication — especially news communication — changes in the economic order of society, and so on to functional co-operation between groups or nations through technical and cultural co-operation or trade policies, to institutional fusion with superordinate bureaucracies, police forces, courts and governments... (op.cit p3).

Even though Galtung was writing against the background of the Cold War — the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban missile crisis had taken place in the previous three years — he was still aware of an "avalanche" of possibilities regarding the approach to peace. Closely linked to these concepts of peace are Galtung's theories about 'direct' and 'structural violence'. 'Direct' violence may be understood as visible aggression, corresponding to wars and physical attacks on a person, or persons. Its effects are usually manifest quickly, are evident and the responsible agent is discernible (see Davies-Vengoechea 2004: 12). It may be observed through bodily injury and/or pain (Barash and Webel 2009: 7). 'Structural' violence, on the other hand, is related to social and economic inequalities: it has the same power to harm but operates at a slower pace (Davies-Vengoechea, *ibid*). Structural violence occurs in situations where some individuals are unable to realise the full potential of their "capacities or capabilities", especially when they are unable to do so to the same extent as others in their society, as frequently occurs where there is ethno-political or social stratification (Gupta 2012: 20).



([www.turningthetide.org](http://www.turningthetide.org))

**Fig 4.1 Galtung's classification of violence**

Galtung graphically describes the manifestation of structural violence and the moral dilemma of international intervention:

“What if Hitler had said, “I do not want to kill (the Jews) suddenly, but slowly: exposing them to malnutrition and protein deficiency, slum conditions, no health facilities, no education, the most menial and dangerous work?” He would have put into words what many societies actually practise. The plight sounds worse when intended and verbalized but the consequences for the victims are about the same. Why should not this be a case for intervention?...Does structural violence have to be converted into direct violence that can be seen as a threat to the outside world as well?” (1976: 107).

His conclusion is that “to keep peace” in the sense of merely ensuring an absence of direct violence is inadequate: legitimate intervention should also involve the abolition of structural violence wherever it is found (ibid). Later, Galtung expanded his theories to include the concept of ‘cultural violence’ (see Fig. 4.1 above), that is, whatever blinds us to the violence around us or seeks to justify it:

“By cultural violence, we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence — exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) — that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or

structural violence. Stars, crosses and crescents; flags, anthems and military parades; the ubiquitous portrait of the Leader; inflammatory speeches and posters — all these come to mind...Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel right — or at least, not wrong” (1990: 291; see also Lynch and McGoldrick 2005: 59; Ramsbotham et al 2011: 11).

After years spent in the field in Haiti, Farmer argues that the chief victims of structural violence are the world’s poor: not only are they more likely to suffer but they are also more likely to have their suffering silenced (1996: 280). In the same vein, anthropologist Akhil Gupta carried out an extensive ethnographic study of the state bureaucracy in Uttar Pradesh in northern India and concluded that extreme poverty should be viewed as a “direct and culpable form of killing” made possible by state policies and practices, affecting an estimated two million Indian citizens each year (2012: 5). Despite the obvious differences between India and Sierra Leone — India has the world’s fourth largest economy — the implications of Gupta’s work in the aftermath of more than a decade of peacebuilding in Sierra Leone are clear:

“How does one think about not only deliberate acts of violence such as police brutality, but also political, administrative, and judicial action or inaction that prevents poor people from making a living, obtaining medical aid, and securing such necessities of life as food, clothing, shelter and sanitation? Why is faster, more effective state intervention not forthcoming to relieve the suffering of millions of the poorest and most disempowered?” (ibid).

Gupta demonstrates that the paradox of the violence of poverty in India is that the poor are killed despite their inclusion in projects of national sovereignty and despite their centrality to democratic politics and state legitimacy (op.cit p6). Similarly, the millions of Sierra Leoneans still struggling to live on little more than \$1 a day have been persuaded that, following international intervention, their active participation in the political process and the accompanying economic reforms would result in an enhanced quality of life for them and their children. That this has palpably not been the case for the majority of citizens undermines the validity of peacebuilding as delivered in Sierra Leone over the last twelve years (see Castañeda 2012: 139; Cubitt 2012: 175; Verkoren and Junne 2012: 75). To conclude, it would seem that

the 'peace' that has been built is essentially, a 'negative peace' in which the overt signs of direct conflict may be absent but the injustices and inequality that characterise structural violence remain. Moreover, the lack of representation of the majority of citizens and their plight in the output of SLBC — itself a UN creation — perpetuates the cultural violence that underpins the negative peace.

### **Good governance and peacebuilding – ideas to change the world?**

Between 1989 and 1994 three ideas emerged from the collective consciousness of the international community: good governance, peacebuilding and human security would profoundly change attitudes and approaches to development aid and humanitarian intervention, creating new norms and practices which would shape expectations and preplanned outcomes. However, it must be remembered that these three notions developed against the backdrop of neoliberalism which had taken hold in the corridors of power with Margaret Thatcher taking office in Downing Street in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in the White House in 1981. On both sides of the Atlantic there arose strong antagonism towards the welfare state on the grounds that it eroded individual discipline and initiative. It was held that state interference in the economy only stymied private enterprise and trade union power restricted flexibility in the workplace (Smith et al. 2008: 1; Thomas 2000: 42). Another influential idea was the “Washington Consensus”, a term coined by John Williamson of the Institute of International Economics to cover a list of reforms being “urged” on Latin American economies (Williamson 1993: 1329). Krugman defined the ‘consensus’ thus:

“It is the belief that Victorian virtue in economic policy — free markets and sound money — is the key to economic development. Liberalize trade, privatize state enterprises, balance the budget, peg the exchange rate, and one will have laid the foundations for an economic takeoff; find a country that has done these things, and there one may confidently expect to realize high returns on investments (1995: 29)

More important, Krugman expanded on Williamson’s use of the term ‘Washington’ to mean not only the US government but also institutions like the

World Bank and the IMF, “think tanks, politically sophisticated investment bankers, and worldly finance ministers, all those who meet each other in Washington and collectively define the conventional wisdom of the moment” (ibid). Within a decade, neoliberalism hurried along by its conceptual twin globalisation, had become the new orthodoxy, the basis for “the common sense approach” to political and economic reform at home and abroad:

...”the ideological and promotional work of the right has been absolutely brilliant. They have spent hundreds of millions of dollars, but the result has been worth every penny to them because they have made neo-liberalism seem as if it were the natural and normal condition of humankind...” (George 1999. see also Baylis and Smith 2001; Fourie 2007: 351ff; Giddens 1999; Held 2004; Held and McGrew 2003; Held et al.1999; Krishna 2009: 2; McQuail 2005: 256; Mensah 2008).

### **Good governance**

The earliest articulation of the notion of ‘good governance’ was in the World Bank’s 1989 report *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth – A Long-Term Perspective Study*. While bluntly assessing the scale of Africa’s economic failure and showing that Africans were as poor then as they were thirty years ago (p1) it was the first report to focus on failures in governance:

“Underlying the litany of Africa’s development problems is a crisis of governance. By governance is meant the exercise of political power to manage a nation’s affairs” (p60).

The Bank concluded that rapid economic growth was crucial for development but such growth required an ‘enabling environment’, that is, reform of the public sector:

“A root cause of weak economic performance in the past has been the failure of public institutions. Private sector initiative and market mechanisms are important, but they go hand in hand with governance

(pxii).

George (1995) has questioned why the World Bank should opt for such an arcane term as 'governance' and concluded that while the Bank's regulations prohibit it from involvement in the politics of member states (see Articles I and IV), the Bank's own definition of 'governance' is so broad as to legitimate its concern in the area:

“Governance is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Good governance, for the World Bank, is synonymous with sound development management. The Bank's experience has shown that the programs and projects it helps to finance may be technically sound, but *fail to deliver anticipated results for reasons connected to the quality of government action*”

(World Bank 1992 *Governance and Development* p1, emphasis added). Governance, especially when it is deemed to be 'bad' is the 'escape clause' for the Bank, “the way it will cover up its next big failure” (1995: 206). But as Hayter's research on World Bank projects in Latin America between the 1960s and 1980s shows, the Bank along with the IMF has never been politically neutral and seeks always to promote the interests of its major funders in the capital markets, especially Wall Street (2005: 94). Indeed, it was the insistence of these Bretton Woods institutions on structural adjustment programmes in Africa that had led to the 1980s being described as 'the lost decade' with millions of Africans suffering under drastic public service cuts (Adepoju 1993: 3; see also Ferguson 2006; Mensah 2008: 3; Reno 1996; Saba 2005: 174; Shaw 1997: 36; Thomas 2000: 57ff; Tlemçani 2005: 31; Young 2012: 24).

### **The birth of peacebuilding**

Alongside the accepted notions of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping, Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace* (1992) introduced the additional concept of 'peacebuilding' which he identified as “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” (§21). Further on there is an expansion

of what peacebuilding might entail, crucially “technical assistance” and “support” to transform deficient national structures and capabilities and to strengthen new democratic institutions:

“The authority of the United Nations system to act in this field would rest on the consensus that *social peace is as important as strategic or political peace*. There is an obvious connection between democratic practices — such as the rule of law and transparency in decision-making — and the achievement of true peace and security in any new and stable political order. These elements of good governance need to be promoted at all levels of international and national political communities” (§59).

Despite the fact that *Agenda for Peace* was key to the introduction and eventual institutionalisation of peacebuilding, the document does not discuss the concept in detail. There is little guidance on what peacebuilding actually entailed or how it could be ‘operationalised’ in the field. That was left to the supplementary edition of *Agenda for Peace* in 1995, produced in the sombre days following negative outcomes in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia. As Sabaratnam (2011:15) points out, this latter document discusses the changing nature of conflicts from inter-state to intrastate and seeks to rationalise past failures by highlighting their anomic, disorganised nature. (§ 10-15). Again, there is the reiteration of the idea that such fractured societies need radical reworking:

“only sustained efforts to resolve underlying socio-economic, cultural and humanitarian problems can place an achieved peace on a durable foundation (§22).

Later, the so-called ‘Brahimi Report’ (2000), named after Lakhdar Brahimi, chair of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, pointed out that greater political will was needed on the part of member states to support the UN “politically, financially and operationally” if it were to gain any measure of credibility as a legitimate force for peace (pviii). Henceforth, peacebuilding became institutionalised and the subsequent pile of UN documents produced in the intervening years have tended to deal not with the ‘whys’ but with the ‘hows’ (see Annex I). For example, in the wake of 9/11 and subsequent military forays into Afghanistan and Iraq, the peacebuilding agenda was

subsumed by the concept of 'failed states' and the practicalities of 'statebuilding' (Brown et al. 2010: 99; Sabaratnam 2011: 23). The parallel trend towards 'good governance' in the area of economic development outlined above has resulted in a convergence of the peacebuilding/statebuilding agenda with the development/security agenda. The result is an agenda driven by exogenous concerns and priorities not endogenous need. Hence the disparity between the international community's promotion on Sierra Leone as a 'successful' model of peacebuilding while 70% of the population remain in abject poverty (Francis 2012: 17).

### **Public service broadcasting and its application to Africa**

It was the *African Charter on Broadcasting 2001*, a follow up to the historic *1991 Windhoek Conference on Press Freedom in Africa*, which called for all state- and government-controlled broadcasters to be transformed into "public service broadcasters ... accountable to all strata of the people" (Part II §1). Next came the *Marrakech Declaration of 2004*, written after a conference entitled *The Role and Place of the Media in the Information Society in Africa and the Arab Region*. Here, delegates demanded that:

"State-controlled broadcasting outlets must be transformed into public service entities with statutes of editorial independence and where journalists have autonomous professional status".

These demands for public service broadcasting arose in the wake of a dramatic democratic wave sweeping over Africa during the 1990s in which many authoritarian regimes embarked on transition to civil rule and multiparty democracy (Adebanwi and Obadare 2012: 53; Young 12: 26; see also Huntington 1991; Lynch and Crawford 2012). An interesting parallel could be observed in the newly emerging democracies in Eastern Europe, where it was decided by both local policy makers and international advisors to remould, wherever possible, the bloated bureaucratic state broadcasters into public service broadcasters on the grounds that fledgling democracies need a national broadcaster which serves the public interest by educating and informing citizens (Voltmer 2013: 153). Crucially, in Africa this 'third wave of democratization', to use Huntington's term, was accompanied more by an

expansion in private media than an increase in public service broadcasters (Nyamnjoh 2005: 54; Sandbrook 2000: 42; Voltmer 2013: 170). On the other hand, public service *broadcasting* received a boost as more governments acceded to requests from international organisations such as the BBC and RFI to install FM antennae in order to relay their output via greatly enhanced signals (Nyamnjoh, *ibid*).

But why the clamour for public service broadcasting (PSB) in so many corners of the continent? The answer lies in the principles of PSB formulated by John Reith, the first Director General of the BBC and the enduring legacy of the organisation he led: the quintessentially *British* Broadcasting Corporation, for so long linked to the Empire, colonialism and later the Commonwealth (Bourgault 1995: 69; Mytton 1983: 53; Reeves 1993: 4). Ironically, the phrase most linked in the public's mind with the BBC — 'to inform, educate and entertain' — was coined not by Reith but by the American broadcasting pioneer David Sarnoff in 1922 (*History of the BBC* [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)). However, as Scannell and Cardiff point out, "the definition of broadcasting as a public utility to be developed as a national service in the public interest came from the state", following the deliberations of the first ever Broadcasting Committee set up by the Post Office in 1923 (1991: 6). Nevertheless, it was Reith above all others who developed and refined the concept for practical application to programme making (*op.cit*: p7):

"The service must not be used for entertainment purposes alone. Broadcasting had a responsibility to bring into the greatest possible number of homes in the fullest degree all that was best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement. The preservation of a high moral tone, the avoidance of the vulgar and hurtful, was of paramount importance. Broadcasting should give a lead to public taste rather than pander to it...Broadcasting had an educative role and the broadcasters had developed contact with the great educational movements and institutions of the day in order to develop the use of the medium of radio to foster the spread of knowledge" (Scannell and Cardiff 1991:7).

Reith envisaged broadcasting as uniting the country by bringing all classes together as one big audience for major national ceremonies and events, whether linked to sport, culture, the royal family or affairs of state. Another

important consideration was the emergence of “a new and mighty weight of public opinion” where broadcasting played a crucial role in “the formation of an informed and reasoned public opinion as an essential part of the political process in a mass democratic society” (John Reith quoted in Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 8). However, the introduction of the principles of PSB into newly emerging African nation-states was complicated by two other factors particular to the context in which the BBC developed: the funding by licence fee and a monopoly in British broadcasting that lasted until 1954 with the creation of the Independent Television Authority (Briggs and Burke 2005:192). The emergence of broadcasting in Africa was influenced by these last two factors in ways that continued to haunt the media on the continent for decades to come. Broadcasting, as Bourgault and others show, was introduced largely by the colonialists for their own purposes and according to their tastes (Ainslie 1966: 154; Bourgault 1995: 42; Fanon 1965: 71; van der Veur 2002: 82). When independence came, national governments stepped into the shoes of the former colonial masters and took control of the fledgling broadcast services. In the absence of a licence fee, state funding was the substitute and with state funding there naturally followed state control with broadcasters coming under the aegis of the civil service (Bourgault 1995: 4). Some advertising took place but was hampered by the poorly performing economies (Ziegler and Asante 1992: 60). The monopoly enjoyed by the BBC in its first thirty years was mirrored in the newly independent African states: it was not until the liberalisation and deregulation of the airwaves in the 1990s that private media operators entered the arena (Camara 2008: 213; Kasoma 1995: 537; Tettey 2001 and 2002).

More recently, Tracey has isolated eight principles which he and his colleagues see as defining PSB in the modern era (1998: 26-32). These are explored below along with the comparative context in Africa as discussed in the literature in order to gain a better understanding of why the writers of the *African Charter on Broadcasting 2001* and the *Marrakech Declaration of 2004* should demand public service status for all state owned broadcasting entities.

### *1. Universality of availability*

Regardless of income, status or location, each citizen should be able to access the output of their national public service broadcaster. However, in Africa, most state broadcasters focused on the capital city and urban areas. Rural areas were largely ignored (Bourgault 1995: 42; Mytton 1983: 19). Hyden et al argue that the problem of communication development in Africa was never purely technical: so long as the primary objective of media systems was to consolidate elite power, usually centred around the capital, all other considerations were overlooked (2002: 15). Certainly, in Sierra Leone, Radio UNAMSIL, later renamed UN Radio, was able to broadcast to areas previously unreachable by the government owned SLBS. Today, a network of community radio stations is offering a valuable service to areas not served by the national broadcaster or private stations (AMDI 2006; Myers 2000; Opoku-Mensah 2000).

### *2. Universality of appeal*

Tracey believes that PSB should serve the many different tastes and interests of the different groups that make up a society, while maintaining the best quality at all times. By contrast, Bourgault describes African broadcasting as “narrowcasting”, targeting — either by intent or unconscious omission — the better educated, more affluent urban dwellers (1995: 43). As Domatob (1991) points out:

“...the views, activities, trials and triumphs of the vast majority who are peasants, laborers, farmers, shepherds and market traders are usually excluded from the media (quoted in Bourgault 1995: 49).

Often state broadcasters would broadcast in the language of the colonial authority whether English, French or Portuguese, thereby placing programmes beyond the mass of listeners who spoke only the local vernacular (Blankson 2005: 2; Chibita 2009: 299; Mytton 1983: 37 see also Mazrui 1993). Indeed in Sierra Leone, SLBS insisted on broadcasting in English up to the late 1990s with only occasional bulletins in Mende or Temne, the two main local languages (Holmes 1999).

### *3. Provision for minorities, especially those disadvantaged by physical or social circumstance*

Tracey underlines the dual role of PSB regarding the representation of minority groups: firstly, it should give voice to marginalised groups to enable them to communicate amongst themselves and secondly, to reflect the issues and concerns of such groups to the majority (1998: 28). Their case was argued clearly though rather patronisingly by Hoggart:

“There are some minorities who do not necessarily have either great purchasing power or much political clout. They are minorities not of taste but of the accidents of nature: the disabled, the blind, the deaf, the immigrants, the very old and the very young, the indigent. To broadcasters whose eyes are on maximising profits such people and groups will not seem worth the wooing. Yet manifestly, their needs are at least as great, and the comfort they may draw from broadcasting even greater, than those of the hale and prosperous. Public service broadcasting recognises them as special cases with special needs” (1983, quoted in Tracey 1998: 28).

As discussed above, African media systems, skewed towards the consolidation of elite power, rarely acknowledged the needs of minority groups. For example, disabled people in Sierra Leone, whose numbers were swelled by thousands of amputees during the war, turned to their own station, *Voice of the Handicapped 96.2FM*, set up by the visually impaired broadcaster, James Cullen in the 1990s (*Disability World* July-August 2001). Occasional broadcasts with a strong developmental theme aimed at women were aired by SLBS but did not address the serious issues affecting them such as under-representation in politics, low attendance of girls in school and illiteracy (Holmes 1999). Later, UNICEF Sierra Leone set up the *Voice of Children* programme in 2003 which involved children reporting on issues of interest to them but over time the project floundered due to poor planning and lack of oversight (personal communication).

### *4. Serving the public sphere*

Habermas developed the notion of ‘the public sphere’ as:

“ first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle

to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public...Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicise their opinions freely (2009: 45).

While the concept of the public sphere in Africa is contested by writers such as Mustapha (2012), Santos (2012) and Willems (2012), Habermas himself admitted that it was “a limited and Eurocentric vision” with the flagrant absence of women, workers and ‘non-proprietors’ (quoted in Santos 2012: 46). Nevertheless, Tracey maintains that it is in the nature of public broadcasting to “nurture the public sphere as a means of serving the public good” (op.cit: 29). Teer-Tomaselli (1996) agrees, declaring that “Conceptually, the public sphere is the right place for a public service broadcaster to be” (p2). Logically, it should be accepted that Africans have always had multiple public spheres that bore no resemblance to the European bourgeois male-dominated coffeehouses in Habermas’s original formulation of the public sphere (Santos 2012: 12). In pre-colonial times when local rule was based on consensus, people regularly came together to discuss matters of importance, mobilised by traditional forms of communication (Wilson 1987: 100). By way of illustration, Barber details the various forms in which African arts — music, dance, costume, mime, song and speech — have become important communicative acts, whose power is demonstrated by the frequency and degree to which they have been repressed (1987:2). These cultural forms of expression have gained significance because, in many cases, they may be the only channel of public communication available:

“In Africa ordinary people tend to be invisible and inaudible. In most African states, numerically tiny elites not only consume a vastly disproportionate share of the national wealth, they also take up all the light. Newspapers, radio and television offer a magnified image of the class that controls them. Not only does the ruling elite make the news, it is the news — as endless verbatim reports of politicians’ speeches, accounts of elite weddings and birthday parties, and the pages and pages of expensive obituaries testify...The populist rhetoric of political elites has in most African countries become further and further

removed from any real contact with the wishes of the people as the temporary unanimity produced by the struggle for independence recedes into the past” (Barber op.cit: 3).

Cole points out that an important albeit negative legacy of colonialism in Sierra Leone was the belief that indigenous cultures and traditions were inferior. This led to the rejection by the British and local elites of such longstanding means of communication as the town crier, traditional poets, the talking drum, mass meetings and secret societies. By the time of independence in 1961, these methods had been “completely discarded”. The result was that with the mainstream media systems focused on the seat of power in the capital and the wealthy urban elite, three quarters of the population was left in almost total media blackout (1984: 16). Such a gaping black hole in the nation’s communications was to prove disastrous during the years of the civil war (Sesay and Hughes 2005: 91).

Clearly, once independence came and the newly emerging nation-states sought to stamp their authority throughout their territories, something bigger and more encompassing was needed to stand alongside traditional communications systems. At this point, it is useful to return to Habermas’ views on the public sphere:

“When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today, newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere” (2009: 45).

So, the rulers of the newly independent nation-states enthusiastically embraced the media forms bequeathed to them, in many cases, by their colonial masters as a means to speak more readily with their peoples. As Tracey comments, this view of broadcasting with its special relationship to a sense of national identity and broad community, is an increasingly vital principle in the work of PSB. “Any nation is a patchwork of localities and regions, but it is also a nation, heterogeneous and homogenous to a remarkable degree at one and the same time” (1998: 29). This last observation is crucial to understanding the nation-building potential of the media, especially public service broadcasting. Broadly speaking, the public

sphere is where citizens come together to ask questions such as “who are we?”, “what matters to us?”, “how are we governed?”. It is where the ‘I’ of the private individual becomes the ‘we’ of public citizenry (see Putnam 1993).

##### *5. A commitment to the education of the public*

Tracey sees the commitment to education at every level — “to the audience-as-citizen” — as a crucial part of PSB. Literacy in the fields of politics, social awareness and, of course, “literal literacy” are essential prerequisites for the effective functioning of democratic citizens, especially in Africa where recent waves of democratization have brought millions of novice voters to the polling booths (Mukhongo 2010; Takirambudde 1995). Takirambudde argues that in democracies, the formation and declaration of political opinion require two elements: the freedom to express political opinion and access to political information. Under autocratic rule in Africa, he says, governing regimes perpetrated “a massive suppression of freedom of expression, systematic fabrication of information and dissemination of misinformation” (1995: 19). Quoting Chen (1985) he claims that freedom of expression

“is indispensable to securing a flow of dependable, comprehensive and pertinent information and knowledge that will permit the making of rational decisions and choices, enable the individual person to develop his latent capabilities to the fullest, and sustain democratic processes in communities” (ibid).

And so, reliable, relevant, accurate information is the lifeblood of a democracy, enabling citizens to make rational decisions regarding the functioning and wellbeing of the polity (see also Norris 2008: 186; Sandbrook 2000: 40; Smith 2012: 14; van der Veur 2002: 81; Voltmer 2013: 27). Thus *political* education is a primary duty of PSB. But what of *general* education in a society like Sierra Leone where illiteracy stymies opportunities and restricts choices for more than half the population? If all are equal within the public sphere — the illiterate farm worker beside the aspiring university educated bureaucrat — then PSB bears some responsibility in offering to the farmworker a chance to learn a little more about the world in which he lives. Women, too, are often excluded from the public sphere because of cultural

and political limitations: “too many women are too weighed down by survivalist drudgery to have any time to partake in public affairs” (Mustapha 2012: 5).

‘Education’ in its broadest terms was seen as one of the ways in which post-colonial states could literally ‘bridge the gap’ between their societies and those of the west (Lerner 1958). It was assumed that there was one form of ‘development’, that of Western societies, and that by replicating their economic, political and social norms, Third World countries would achieve democracy, rising levels of productivity and industrialisation, higher literacy rates and longer life expectancy (see amongst others Deutsch 1961; Inkeles 1969; Rostow 1960; Shils 1960). ‘Development communication’ is the application of communication strategies and principles aimed at changing attitudes and behaviours in order to bring about these goals (Waisbord 2001:1). Using a variety of means — traditional art forms, electronic media and extension work in the field — development communication has been used to address poverty, illiteracy, poor health and the challenges of inadequate infrastructure. Over the years, as development itself has evolved from modernisation theory and the dominant paradigm to embrace more participatory methods, acknowledging the agency and tacit knowledge of indigenous peoples, so have the means of communication evolved to include social marketing, social mobilisation, media advocacy and education-entertainment (Huesca 2005; Mefalopulos 2008; Melkote and Steeves 2001; Waisbord 2001). PSB in Africa naturally embraces development for communication and in this, it sits comfortably within Tracey’s “commitment to the education of the public”.

#### *6. Public broadcasting should be distanced from all vested interests*

Tracey states clearly that:

“The whole history of public broadcasting has been dominated by the commitment to the idea that it can best serve the nation when it remains distanced from any particular commitment to any particular power structure inside the nation...In the making of programmes for public broadcasting, there should be no ulterior purpose or motive. It is axiomatic to this principle that the funding of public broadcasting should be such, in total amount and in the absence of any strings attached, as to encourage rather than negate the independence enjoyed“ (1998:31).

This is undoubtedly one of the biggest obstacles facing public service broadcasting in Africa and elsewhere. As Barton points out, the paradox of the press in Africa is that as political freedom came to the continent, press freedom disappeared (1979: ix). At independence, many countries with a British colonial legacy inherited broadcast operations modelled along the lines of the BBC. Although these corporations would have enjoyed a certain level of autonomy due to their design, most of them were abolished and absorbed into government information ministries (Bourgault 1995: 44). In the first period of independence, governments became used to controlling the media in the interests of national unity and development, leaving no room for debate or critique of state policies and strategy (Hyden et al 2002: 8). Aside from the political control, financial control of PSB is an ever present risk, as in the old adage 'He who pays the piper calls the tune'. Even established broadcasters like the BBC and Japan's NHK ultimately experience government pressure when discussions about their future funding become due (Smith 2012: 51). Nevertheless, away from guaranteed state funding, public service broadcasters find it difficult to survive, especially in developing countries. The economy may not be sufficiently strong to support a steady stream of advertising income and other funding opportunities may be rare. Some countries take a more creative approach to PSB funding as with Thailand's 'Sin Tax' on alcohol and tobacco. The Pacific Islands tax radio and TV sets at the point of sale, a measure considered at one stage by the Sierra Leonean government (Smith, *ibid*). The further towards a commercial model a broadcaster moves, the more likely is the temptation to produce programming that will maximise the number of viewers (Tracey *op.cit*: 31).

To conclude, PSB — and ultimately the nation — is best served when it enjoys a level of autonomy guaranteed by independent oversight and a sustainable income stream not overly vulnerable to political or commercial concerns. Despite the obvious appetite for PSB in Africa, the recent gains in political liberalisation may be wiped out by the overwhelming financial practicalities. For many media operations, whether national, private or community, long term sustainability is still a distant dream.

*7. Broadcasting should be so structured as to encourage competition in good programming rather than competition for numbers.*

Tracey maintains that an essential principle of PSB is to deliver programmes of the highest possible quality, regardless of content or audience (op.cit: 31). Like independence, programme quality is often linked to finance and given the political economy of the globalised media market, it is usually cheaper to buy in foreign imports than make relevant, quality programming locally. Through the 1970's and 1980s, champions of African culture looked on in horror as the few locally-produced programmes were dotted into television schedules padded out by hours and hours of racy foreign offerings such as *I Love Lucy*, *Bonanza* and *Perry Mason* (Ainslie 1966:190; Bourgault 1995:107; Ziegler and Asante 1992: 97).

In reality, the issues of independence and programme quality are inextricably linked with broadcasters needing to manage their operations efficiently and effectively so that expenditure on overheads is trimmed and resources and attention focused on those areas which matter most: programmes and programme makers (see Banerjee and Seneviratne 2005; Barbuio 2008; Carlos 2009; Open Society Institute 2010).

*8. The rules of broadcasting should liberate rather than restrict the programme-maker*

Tracey maintains that the legislative environment in which PSB operates should deliver a degree of freedom for the programme-maker:

“Part of that understanding would be the need for experiment and innovation in broadcasting, the need to provide a focus for a society's quarrel with itself, the recognition that mistakes will be made but as such may signify the health of the system. Perhaps above all else, such leadership should be helped to understand that experiment, innovation, quarrel and mistake are likely to come from the younger programme maker, without whom the system is in danger of institutional arteriosclerosis” (op.cit 32).

In the African context, such aspirations seem overly ambitious. First, in many cases the legal provision surrounding the media has been generally repressive. The nature of many autocratic regimes left little or no room for the media to express criticism or dissent (Ogbondah 2002:56). Despite the fact that many African constitutions enshrine ‘freedom of speech’ as an inalienable right for citizens, in practice, the reverse is true. For example, the 1961 Sierra Leone Constitution states:

25. (1) Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, and for the purpose of this section the said freedom includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, freedom from interference with his correspondence, freedom to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions, and academic freedom in institutions of learning

Such freedom is curtailed by the provisions for ‘seditious libel’ in §25 and §26 of the Public Order Act 1965. Using these clauses, politicians and other figures in authority have been able to intimidate, threaten and imprison media workers for discussing matters that the former deemed ‘unsuitable’ (Gordon 2004: 181; Reporters Without Borders 14/2/2014; Sesay and Hughes 2005: 54; Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006 and 2008: 8).

Secondly, the management of many media organisations is such that journalists and programme makers work in circumscribed ways, avoiding certain taboo topics and ‘untouchable’ personalities for fear of offending either management or those in authority, This is particularly sensitive when one works in a privately owned entity and the owner is a politician or business person with strong political ties. In such cases, journalists have little ‘elbow room’ to operate professionally:

“When they take their hands off negative stories about the proprietors, their network of friends and relatives, their political parties and businesses, the pool from which to fish becomes quite narrow” (Ojebode 2013: 306).

In these circumstances, it is no wonder that media workers adopt a code of self –censorship through fear of detention or bodily harm (Ziegler and Asante

1992: 106). Such self-imposed restraint often proves more effective as a gag on the press than either legislation or state censorship. Under these conditions, the ‘experiment and innovation’ hailed by Tracey come at far too high a price.

To conclude this section, the principles of modern PSB as laid out above could indeed be considered desirable for journalists, media workers and activists in newly democratising countries in Africa. However, the particular circumstances prevailing in Africa — political, technological, economic and social — may work against the transformation of existing state owned broadcasters into freestanding, independent, effective and sustainable public service *broadcasters*. Indeed, the failure of SLBC would seem to suggest as much. In the digital age, it is therefore more practical, as Berger suggests, to delink the *content* from the *producer* in order to nurture the growth of public service *broadcasting*, that is, content on various platforms conforming to many of the principles listed above, but produced and transmitted by a variety of entities working in a regulated system (Berger 2009: 8; see also Collins 2010; Fourie 2004). In Sierra Leone, the successful coverage of the Independent Radio Network of local and community stations during the 2012 election campaign might offer a useful example. Ultimately, the tragedy of SLBC is that it was an attractive project whose time had come and gone, despite the best efforts of the UN. As Tracey might have put it, it was based on an institutional model born in one age and a specific context, badly adapted to survive in another completely different age and context (1998:11).

### **Radio rules!**

“In Africa, where rates of illiteracy are among the highest in the world, radio is practically indispensable to modern life. Newspapers may reach the educated in the cities and the towns, but few in the villages. Television, where it exists, may excite those within the radius of a transmitter, if they have access to a set. But for the mass of the people, workers in the town and peasants in the countryside, radio is the one sure means of contact with the rest of the country, and with the outside world” (Ainslie 1966: 152)

It is a sobering thought to consider that, while Ainslie's passage was published nearly fifty years ago, many of her observations are still true. Across the continent of Africa there is a general understanding that, even during the present 'dash for digital' and the roll-out of mobile telephony, radio remains the most important medium of all (Camara 2008; Fardon and Furniss 2000; Gunner et al 2011; Mano 2011; Myers 2009; Randall 1993; Spitulnik 2000; van der Veur 2002). Even the *Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa* notes that "oral traditions, which are rooted in African cultures, lend themselves particularly well to radio broadcasting" (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2002).

On a practical basis, radio is able to overcome the main barriers to communication in Africa: poverty, illiteracy, linguistic diversity (Mano 2011: 103; Ziegler and Asante 1992: 56) and distance (Mytton 1983: 5). While radio technology was prohibitively expensive at one stage, small portable battery-operated sets from Japan and China especially have flooded the market and brought radio within the grasp of many (*Article 19* 2005: 1; Mytton 2000: 30; Nyamnjoh: 2005: 55; Orgeret and Rønning 2009: 11; Reeves 1993: 55; Spitulnik 2000: 149). Mano argues that radio has "more resonance with local life than other media" and is readily adaptable to rapidly changing living conditions on the continent. For example, in the digital age, although traditional analogue radio is likely to be pushed aside by interactive 'audio streams' available via television sets, computers, phones and other mobile devices, these new forms of delivery will only serve to "cement" the position of 'radio' as the continent's main mass medium (2011: 106, 102). Indeed, as Myers points out, for women, radio may remain the most popular form of technology for some time due to its mobility, affordability, accessibility and simplicity (2009: 13).

On a more conceptual level, Gunner et al. link the enduring importance of radio in Africa to the "oral and aural in the history and cultural practices of the continent" (2011: 1). Indeed Bourgault points out that the extent to which the Western World was influenced by the Gutenberg revolution which ushered in the age of print is often forgotten:

“Printing brought about linear thinking, the use of logical syllogisms and the paramountcy of logically derived principles in the acquisition of knowledge. Printing has also distanced readers, the users of information from the source of information, thereby engendering the critical spirit which has been a hallmark which has been a hallmark of western scholarship, and by diffusion, Western thinking since the Age of Reason” (1995: 7; see also Finnegan 2007).

By contrast, Ong describes a primary oral culture as one in which “no-one has ever ‘looked up’ anything” (1982:31):

“Without writing, words as such have no visual presence, even when the objects they represent are visual. They are sounds. You might ‘call’ them back — ‘recall’ them. But there is nowhere to look for them....neither is it surprising that oral peoples commonly, and probably universally, consider words to have great power. Sound cannot be sounding without the use of power...In this sense, all sound, and especially oral utterance, which comes from inside living organisms, is ‘dynamic’ (pp 31-32).

While it might seem essentialist to discuss African orality in these terms, Bourgault maintains that the discourse style and value systems arising out of the oral tradition survived both colonialism and the period of independence:

“African traditional culture simply became intermixed with the alien forms thrust upon it. African traditional forms are, *prima facie*, forms for communication, and they are suffused in and through both the practices and the content of the mass media in Africa” (1995: 20).

Hence, it is difficult for those of us in a chirographic culture — where writing and literacy are highly esteemed — to comprehend the true impact and value of radio culture in Africa. Its ability to combine the everyday with “moments of high national and cultural drama”, to link the local with the transnational and to produce new social meanings amongst citizens and communities may be lost on those of us in the mature, liberal democracies of the media-saturated West (see Gunner et al 2011: 4; Ong 1982: 2).

### **Changing attitudes towards media development**

At the time of writing, twenty years have passed since the genocide in Rwanda but its impact endures in the debate around media in fragile states

(Price and Thompson 2002; Thompson 2007). Rwanda remains a scar on the conscience of the UN and the international community which failed to intervene to prevent the massacre of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis by their Hutu compatriots (Dallaire 2004; Edwards 2008; Hatzfeld 2009; Willum 1999). Equally it stands as an indictment on the local and international media, both of which in their own ways failed the people of Rwanda (Frère 2007; Melvern 2001; Mironko 2007; Somerville 2012).

Tellingly, some of the most incisive comments on the role of the media in the months leading up to the massacre and beyond were made not by a journalist nor by an academic but by a professional soldier, a UN peacekeeper caught up in a maelstrom of ethnopolitical violence. Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire was in charge of UNAMIR, the UN peacekeeping force mandated to ensure the fulfilment of the Arusha Peace Accords of 1993 (*UN Security Council Resolution 872 (1993)*). Dallaire makes two important points about UNAMIR: its inability to monitor local broadcasts and its lack of capacity to inform Rwandans about the true nature of their mandate:

“The local media, particularly the extremist radio station Radio-Télévision Libre des Milles Collines (RTLM), were literally part of the genocide. The *genocidaires* used the media like a weapon. The haunting image of killers with a machete in the one hand and a radio in the other never leaves you (Dallaire, quoted in Thompson 2007: 12).

While Dallaire’s personal conviction about the role of RTML in the genocide should be respected, Straus argues convincingly that, in the circumstances, radio had “conditional and marginal effects”:

“..the positive evidence of radio media effects is that radio instigated a limited number of acts of violence, catalysed some key actors, co-ordinated elites, and bolstered local messages of violence...Radio did not cause the genocide or have direct massive effects. Rather radio emboldened hard-liners and reinforced face-to-face mobilization, which helped those who advocated violence assert dominance and carry out the genocide...In articulating hard-liners’ positions, signalling who had power, and setting a tone of war and belligerence, hate radio narrowed the choices some individuals believed they had and reinforced the choices they faced in their communities — at least where RTML was heard” (2007: 631-2).

Despite Straus's research and the weight of communication theory against the 'hypodermic' model of media effects (McQuail 2005: 456 – 478; see also Schoemaker and Stremlau 2014), public information became ever more important in UN peace missions over time, first in an effort to counteract any form of negative propaganda and secondly to tell the UN's own story (Alleyne 2003: 135). Furthermore, possibly stung by its perceived inaction over RTML, the international community insisted on pouring millions of dollars into media development programmes under the simplistic belief that if media could do so much harm, they might also be able to do a significant level of good (CIMA 2008; Hume 2002).

Kumar maintains the first international media assistance programmes in the 1980s took place largely in Latin America and were relatively modest, low key initiatives (2006: 653). According to Hume, media development in foreign countries began in earnest after the collapse of the Berlin Wall when hundreds of Americans rushed to the former Soviet territories to "spread the gospel of democracy" and possibly start-up newly independent media. Between 1989 and 2002, the US government and private organisations are believed to have spent over \$600 million on media development initiatives (2002: 11). In 1991, Huntington's influential work *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century* briefly discussed the 'demonstration effect' of the international media by which citizens of one country learnt how the citizens of another toppled authoritarian regime. Randall (1993 and 1998) refined the theory by examining the role of the media in successive stages of the democratisation process (1993: 626). Later, Snyder and Ballentine, mindful of RTLM's hate broadcasts, cautioned against promoting unconditional freedom of public debate in newly democratising societies, arguing that the danger of bloody outbursts of popular nationalism was greatest precisely when the government's press monopoly was breaking down (1996: 6).

The increase in the level of civil conflicts, including the Balkans and Sierra Leone, led to an unprecedented level of peacebuilding activity during which

many practitioners instinctively believed that domestic media especially could play a positive role:

“The media have an essential role in the rebuilding of civil society, and it is often, once active conflict has ended, that the media may be most effective” (Gardner 2001: 306).

“Journalists have nearly unparalleled access to parties in a conflict and often the power to bring them to the table to begin dialogue around conflictual issues in the media and presumably off the record” (Baumann and Siebert 2001: 319).

“The media is a double-edged sword... The fact is that media has become so pervasive and influential that anyone currently working in the field of conflict resolution must consider both edges of the sword. A project that launches without examining the media environment is more liable to fail” (Howard et al 2003: 21).

Increasingly, the role of the media became linked to the good governance agenda actively promoted by the World Bank throughout the 1990s. The Bank’s unit responsible for media research was known as the *Communication for Governance and Accountability Programme*, or CommGAP for short. Its colourful introductory flyer states:

“Communication links citizens, civil society, the media system and government, forming a framework for national dialogue through which informed public opinion is shaped. Understanding the structural and process aspects of communication is critical to effective governance reform” (nd).

Clearly, the UK government agreed with such a bold statement since CommGAP was set up in 2006 with a grant of £5 million from the Department of International Development ([r4d.dfid.gov.uk](http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk) DFID Project Record Code: 112021). DFID’s commitment to communication issues has remained strong: in 2011 it approved a five year ‘global grant’ of £90 million to the BBC’s international charity, BBC Media Action to reach 200million people in 14

countries, including Sierra Leone (*r4d.dfid.gov.uk DFID Project Record Code: 202629*). Announcing the award, Andrew Mitchell, Secretary of State for International Development insisted:

“The grant will help ordinary citizens have the ability to hold the authorities to account by taking part in programmes that engage with the powers that be” (BBC Media Action ‘*Global Grant strengthens media’s role in development*’).

More recently, doubts have been raised about the efficacy of media development programmes on a number of different grounds. Waisbord bemoans the absence of “solid, sophisticated models” to inform these programmes. He also complains that it is bureaucratic imperatives rather than situation assessments or theoretical models that determine programme content and delivery (2011: 322). An analysis of media development programmes delivered by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), the International Women’s Media Fund (IWMF), Internews and the Media Development Loan Fund (MDLF) revealed conceptual vagueness about goals, the lack of a clear model of media change, discrepancy between objectives and programmatic goals and an absence of measurement of long-term impact (Jones and Waisbord 2009). Hume also criticises the lack of long-term commitment pointing out that in difficult even dangerous conditions, a decade is hardly time enough to foster a robust professional media culture (2002:11).

In a radical exploration of the field of media and conflict, involving 19 major journal databases identifying 22,000 potentially relevant papers, Schoemaker and Stremlau attempted to produce an evidence base as free from bias as possible. One objective was a shared methodology across evidence papers establishing a baseline that could be repeated by others as a means of assessing changes in the field (2014: 183). The authors discovered that most evidence about the link between media and conflict or peace was to be found in ‘grey literature’, that is internal reports or documents, and often based on a single case study. Usually, these findings are not peer-reviewed

nor are they based on data that has been systematically collected and analysed. Instead, they offer arguments or anecdotes about the role of the media in conflict or crisis situations (p184):

“The idea of media as a democratizing and liberating force continues to dominate much of the development and democratization literature. And while media as a liberating force has developed a body of expertise, approaches and ‘best practices’, there remains little substantive evidence beyond anecdote and the reliance of normative indicators for the actual impact of this work” (p187).

Critically, Schoemaker and Stremlau found that most of the papers identified in their database search assumed that the media directly influenced the audience with no in depth analysis of the broader context or environment. Straus’s study of Rwanda (2007, see above) and the work of Bratic (2006 and 2008) are notable exceptions. One peer reviewer attached to the study observed a renewed effort to ‘prove’ the link between a ‘free media’ and democratization as part of the development community’s emphasis on the ‘good governance’ agenda led by the World Bank, DFID and others. At some stage, the World Bank must have felt the need to engage in the debate about media effects as, in an unexpected move for a Bretton Woods institution, CommGAP brought out its own six page leaflet on the subject (*CommGAP Towards a New Agora Media Effects* nd).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the fields of peace and peacebuilding, public service broadcasting and media development in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing the SLBC project. Mention has been made of the disparity between the positive views of the country held by the international peacebuilding ‘brigade’ and the expectations and hopes of the people, 70% of whom remain in poverty. Would the creation of an independent public service broadcaster have been included in a list of their post-war priorities? No doubt, the concept of PSB remains an attractive idea to the many thousands of listeners in Sierra Leone who tune in daily to the BBC World Service but given a choice between seeing millions of dollars spent on creating SLBC and the same amount of money spent on schools, or

clinics or roads, which would they choose? Perhaps, given the parlous state of the public sector, most Sierra Leoneans would consider any choice a risky investment in view of the predatory nature of the political elite. Certainly, according to Galtung's ideas on cultural and structural violence, a public service broadcaster has a major contribution to make in addressing the people's most pressing concerns: by giving a voice to the voiceless, the angry silence that underpins cultural violence is shattered. By shoring up the public sphere in which all citizens "may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicise their opinions" (Habermas 2009: 45), PSB might also strengthen ideas of unity and nationhood. Still, it should not be forgotten that the potential 'public good' of a public service broadcaster depends on its efficient and effective functioning as an institution in its own right. Debates about funding and regulation are redundant if the broadcaster is caught up in the same clientelistic snares it would seek to report on. In the 'negative peace' that characterises Sierra Leone today, perhaps the 'monster' that is SLBC is the best that the UN's 'Frankenstein' could have expected.

## **Chapter 5: Methods**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I outline the ‘evolution’ of my research topic as it was adapted to the change in my personal circumstances and the resulting change in the conditions for my research. One challenge has been marrying the data collection methods I used in my fieldwork with the wealth of material gleaned from my autoethnographic narrative. Equally, marrying the macro perspectives of the literature review with the micro-detail of my case study proved complex. I discuss the reasons for choosing an autoethnographic approach after much deliberation and explain why it was so important that my voice was clearly heard throughout the empirical chapters.

All social research presents challenges, none more so than working in a country emerging from war. The ethical considerations are many, including issues of informed consent and payment to participants. Equally daunting are the practical and material considerations of working in an environment where so much of what we take for granted in the UK is either unavailable or faulty. This chapter describes the methods I eventually used — autoethnography, questionnaires, document analysis and semi-structured interviews — and the reasons behind that selection.

### **Research topic**

When I started my thesis, my primary aim was to investigate the role of the media in peacebuilding in post-conflict societies, taking Sierra Leone as my case study. As research conditions changed in line with my employment at the UN, the focus shifted from the output of the Sierra Leonean media generally to the process of creating a public service broadcaster in a post-conflict society. The SLBC project reveals much about the yawning gap between intention and delivery in international peacebuilding interventions. My experiences and observations form the basis of this thesis. At this point, it would be useful to restate my research questions:

- Is it possible to create an effective functioning public sector institution — in this case a public service broadcaster — in a post conflict society like Sierra Leone?
- Which factors — whether political, social, historical or economic — might affect the success or failure of such a project?
- What potential is there for a public service broadcaster to play a role in nation-building as a means of peacebuilding following conflict?

### **Factors affecting approach and selection of methods**

In a keynote address on communications research, the renowned Cameroonian scholar Francis Nyamnjoh (2010) argued that, generally, African researchers have adopted research techniques designed to answer to the needs of Western societies which do not always suit African cultures or societies that are, in the main, rural and non-literate. This means that, for most of the time, communication scholars have either been asking the right questions of the wrong people or asking the wrong questions altogether. Similarly, Ugboajah has argued that many areas of social science research in Africa have suffered from

“...erratic conclusions, wild generalizations and foreign dominance. Sometimes quite erroneous results have been drawn from data analysed by academics who have had little or no experience of Africa” (1987: 9).

Communication research especially, he maintains, should emphasise case studies and observational approaches which avoid the pitfalls of untested, imported models and methods (op.cit: 10). By contrast, Bulmer and Warwick question the value of case study research since so much depends on the capacity and personality of the observer (1993: 10). Clearly, context is all and, as with all research projects, the researcher is responsible for choosing the most appropriate methods of data collection for the study at hand. Not every method is suitable for all research projects. Criteria such as reliability, validity and generalizability must weigh heavily on the selection process as do more prosaic factors such as administrative convenience. However, in an ongoing process of political and organisational change such as that taking place at

SLBC, the motives and actions of key players warrant the kind of close investigation that is a feature of the case study.

The Oxford Dictionary defines 'case study' as "a process or record of research into the development of a particular person, group or situation over a period of time". Additionally, it is "a particular instance of something used or analysed in order to illustrate a thesis or principle" (oxforddictionaries.com). Thomas (2011) states that the case study is about the particular rather than the general; sampling techniques so relevant in other forms of research have no place here. The case study *is* 'the sample' and, as such, its selection needs to be justified.

Amongst the most energetic supporters of the case study as a powerful research method within the social sciences is Bent Flyvbjerg. His first in-depth case study — on urban politics and planning in the city of Aalborg in Denmark (1998) — demonstrated the importance of 'drilling down' in a particular context to reveal the minutiae and everyday realities of a situation, what Nietzsche describes as 'a discreet and apparently insignificant truth' (quoted in Flyvbjerg 2006: 240). His approach of telling the story in all its diversity, "allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories that actors in the case have told me (ibid)", seemed particularly valuable in the context of SLBC. While I may have travelled to Sierra Leone armed with several hypotheses (including trenchant views on Westlife), the slowly emerging truth of what was happening on the ground seemed far more interesting and important than a mere verification of commonly held academic ideas on peacebuilding and institutions.

However, in order to reveal the wealth of detail necessary to arrive at a level of awareness and understanding not found in summaries, concepts or theoretical formulas, I had to construct an all-encompassing narrative (Flyvbjerg 2001: 86). Telling the story of what I saw in Freetown between 2010 and 2013 was no easy task. Over three years, I amassed a wealth of data which had to be sifted, pruned, ordered and edited. Despite an apparent

lack of support or understanding of what I was attempting, I persisted. I was encouraged by Flyvberg's views on such an approach:

“The sociologist William Labov writes that when a good narrative is over “it should be unthinkable for a bystander to say, ‘So what?’ ”. Every good narrator is continually warding off this question. A narrative that lacks a moral that can be independently and briefly stated, is not necessarily pointless. And a narrative is not successful just because it allows a brief moral. A successful narrative does not allow the question to be raised at all. The narrative has already supplied the answer before the question is asked. The narrative itself is the answer (op.cit: 86).”

On the question of generalizability, Flyvbjerg argues that, as a source of scientific development, formal generalisation is overvalued. By contrast, ‘the force of example’ is underestimated (2006: 231). Pointing to the work of Galileo, Newton and Einstein in the natural sciences, he underlines the importance of carefully selected experiments and cases in the deepening of their understanding (2001: 74-5). Furthermore he revisits Beveridge's (1951) early observation, in the days before quantitative methods overwhelmed the social sciences, that “more discoveries have arisen from intense observation of very limited material than from statistics applied to large groups” (2001: 75). Geertz's term of “thick description” is particularly apt in this context: as Flyvbjerg observes, the focus on minutiae arises out of a fundamental phenomenological stance, “that small questions often lead to big answers” (2001:133).

Finally, after much thought, I decided that, in order to permit what Denzin (1988) refers to as ‘methodological triangulation’, I should use a mixed methodology with both quantitative and qualitative methods. In this way, a primarily qualitative approach is supported by quantitative results with multiple methods addressing different but complementary questions within the same study (see Hansen et al 1998:1 and Robson 2002: 174). Therefore, in order to construct the narrative of the case study, I chose to use autoethnography, document analysis, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

## **1. Autoethnography**

Once I had decided to rethink the scope of my thesis, my dilemma was deciding which observational stance I should adopt: could I truthfully continue to consider myself as a 'participant observer'? Kawulich (2005) has neatly summarised some of the thinking in this area by building on Gold's four observational stances: complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, complete observer, each varying in the degree of membership of the group being studied and the level of awareness of the group to the fact that it is being studied. Kawulich suggests that the most ethical of the roles is that of the 'observer as participant' since the nature of the researcher's role is known to the group and the emphasis is on data collection rather than participation (2005: §22). Crucially, this stance remains fixed as the researcher's role within the group remains constant. Also, while the researcher may have access to many different people in this situation, the group members control the level of information given (Merriam 1998, quoted in Kawulich, §23).

After careful consideration, I decided that neither this role, 'observer as participant', nor any of the others adequately captured the nuances of my situation. The moral and professional obligations of a full-time paid employee of the UN with a job description and objectives — to oversee the transformation of SLBC — meant that I was already committed to a stated outcome. I was there to manage a process on behalf of the international community which had committed millions of dollars in order to achieve a specific result. I could therefore not be considered either an 'observer' or a 'participant'. In addition, I had been delegated a degree of authority and responsibility that worked against my participation in the project as an 'equal'. It would have been unethical to overlook this fact or to hide it from the reader.

Another factor that became increasingly salient over time was my awareness of my position as an 'outsider' within the UN. As I grew to question so much of the organisation's procedures and protocol, I realised I was operating in a context of 'dual alterity': an outsider to both Sierra Leonean society and the institution in which I was situated. Two different sets of values — that of the

society around me and the organisation in which I worked — together with the questions I wanted to pose of both would have complicated the presentation of my study. I therefore decided to adopt an ‘autoethnographic’ stance, foregrounding my own feelings and reactions. Amongst so many disparate elements, mine is the unifying narrative voice, linking the macro themes of the literature review with the micro-detail of everyday reality.

According to Anderson (2006), “there has always been an autoethnographic element to qualitative sociological research” (p375). From the early years of American sociology after World War I, the Chicago School of sociology encouraged students to research settings with which they had a particular affinity. As Deegan writes,

“The student sociologists [at the University of Chicago] often lived in the settings studied, walked the streets, collected quantitative and qualitative data, worked for local agencies, and had autobiographical experience emerging from these locales or ones similar to them” (2001:20, quoted in Anderson 2006: 375).

However, as Anderson notes, no matter how closely connected these students were to the settings they studied, they rarely engaged in “explicit and reflexive self-observation” (ibid). Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013) attribute the gradual emergence of autoethnography to four interrelated historical factors: a recognition of the limits of scientific knowledge and a growing appreciation for qualitative research; a heightened concern about the politics and ethics of research; a greater recognition of and appreciation for narrative, the literary and aesthetic, emotions and the body; and the increased importance of social identity and identity politics (p25). In view of my sense of ‘dual alterity’, this last factor resonates particularly strongly.

As in other areas of qualitative research, the issue of ethics in autoethnography is a topic of much debate. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) have attempted to draw up a framework for ethics differentiating between ‘procedural ethics’ which usually means seeking approval from a relevant ethics committee to undertake research involving humans and ‘ethics in practice’, that is, those ethical issues that arise in everyday practice which

may or may not have been foreseen (p263). Although the authors raise the topic of professional codes of ethics or conduct, they suggest that such codes may be irrelevant in actual research practice (ibid). Building on this foundation, Carolyn Ellis points to the work on 'relational ethics' in the field of health care and argues that it would be wise for researchers to carry such sensibility into the field. Relational ethics, she writes, "recognises and values mutual respect, dignity and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work" (2007:4). This stance would seem to recognise that autoethnography's concentration on self may obscure for the researcher the impact on others involved in the narrative, a frequent criticism from those who stress the empirical and analytical role of sociology:

"Autoethnography is almost impossible to write and publish *ethically* ... Other actors cannot be disguised or protected. Readers will always wish to read autoethnography as an authentic, and therefore 'true' account of the writer's life, and therefore the other actors will be, whatever disclaimers, or statements about fictions are included, be identifiable and identified" (Delamont 2007:2, emphasis in the original).

Ellis directly addresses such criticism, detailing the angry reaction to her study on isolated fishing communities in Chesapeake Bay:

"When I returned to Fishneck, my friends there confronted me with the words I had written; they reacted strongly to my descriptions of their smelling like fish, taking infrequent baths, being overweight, making little money, wearing mismatched clothing, having sex at an early age, and being uneducated. The Fishneckerers had little difficulty deciphering the identities of my characters. My strategy of inventing pseudonyms starting with the same letters as the double names of the Fishneckerers had made it easy for them. However, even without these clues, they recognized the stories they had told me and themselves as the characters. Although they knew I was writing about them, some said they thought we "were friends, just talkin'," and never thought I'd write down the things they told me" (2007:11).

With hindsight, Ellis admits that the stance she had taken of 'friend', while opening up channels for more intimate communication, required a reciprocity on her part that she was not prepared to give.

“While I cared for the Fisher Folk, my loyalties were not to them. I was trying to find my place in academia, build my career, and contribute to sociological knowledge, goals no doubt nurtured by my graduate education. I believed my job as an ethnographer was to learn as much as I could about this community and write an interesting and informative dissertation. I was writing for the sociological community, members of whom commended me for getting to the hidden lives of the Fisher Folk ... In my mind, the dissertation and book that followed were separate from my relationship with the Fisher Folk. Thus, I failed to consider sufficiently how my blunt disclosures in print might affect the lives of the people about whom I wrote. Instead I cared about how committee members reacted to my dissertation and whether my manuscript would be published as a book” (op.cit: 10).

Herbert Gans believes that the researcher can be “friendly but not friends with those you study” (quoted in Ellis, op.cit 9), confirming that the primary role remains that of ‘researcher’. Ellis is frank about the blurring of the roles during her fieldwork and attributes it to a lack of experience and understanding about research ethics. While she regrets hurting her participants, she believes that the angry response from the Fishneckers made her rethink her attitude not only to research but also to life (op.cit: 13). Similarly, it was an angry outburst from a grieving man in Bosnia that caused Elizabeth Dauphinee to re-examine her motives for research in the field:

“I have built my career on the Bosnian war. I have built it, in fact, on war more generally. Let’s not pretend anymore that we who write International Relations are doing something different. Ours is a discipline built on the deaths and losses of others, and these are deaths and losses that we never personally experience” (2010: 802).

Dauphinee goes on to justify her decision to write an autoethnographic account of her time in Bosnia. It is an explanation with parallels to my own emotional state of mind on my return to the UK from Freetown:

“...if we don’t show our motives, they cannot be evaluated by our readers. I write out of love. I also sometimes write out of guilt. In all cases, I write because I become aware that something is not the way I thought it was. Something has hurt me. Something has made me angry or sleepless or aggrieved in some way” (op.cit: 808).

I was fortunate in that my professional role as ‘Media Management Advisor’ for the UN’s peacebuilding mission was explicit. No matter how friendly relations might be between myself and some members of staff, we were not ‘friends’ in the most widely understood sense. On the other hand, my relations with senior management were more fraught. It was my professional responsibility to call them to account for actions which were contrary to what had been agreed between the UN and the government of Sierra Leone. Throughout, I have worked hard to construct a comprehensive and comprehensible narrative, in which those with the biggest roles are most easily identified. There was only *one* Director-General, *one* Deputy Director General and *one* Board Chairman: it would have been pointless to pretend otherwise. Frequently, their statements and actions were a matter of public record. However, with less powerful figures further down the SLBC hierarchy, I have attempted to disguise their identities by changing their names though anyone acquainted with the SLBC story might soon recognise them.

### **On writing autoethnography**

Ellis, Adams and Bochner define autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” [2011:§1]. Thus, they suggest, autoethnography is both *process* and *product* (ibid, emphasis added). Certainly, as I struggled to make sense of the multiple layers of meaning during my time in Freetown and the competing political, social, organisational and moral pressures, the *process* of writing (both then and now) helped clarify my thinking. This thesis is the *product*. But while autoethnography facilitated my efforts of self-expression, there are clearly contexts for which it is unsuitable. Where traditional statistical evidence is required to make a case, autoethnography may not be enough.

Dauphinee is correct in asserting that, as an emerging method of research, autoethnography in International Relations (IR) does not have all the answers. However, like her, I now believe that it has the potential to lead us to explore, amongst other things, the “place of the self in writing and the ethical risks of ignoring this” (op.cit: 818). More important, autoethnography prompts us “to

think about our relationship to those whose lives we research” (ibid). An autoethnographic approach allows me to reveal the ‘messiness’ of the day-to-day reality I met and my ensuing emotions: in doing so, I am forced to examine my preconceptions and, in all humility, reveal what I have learnt and come to understand through my interactions with others.

Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013) show that, at first, autoethnographic inquiry incorporates many of the standard forms of traditional qualitative data collection such as field notes, interviews and personal documents (p58). The difference with autoethnography, however, is the way in which the data is integrated to include “the visibility of researcher’s self, strong reflexivity, relational engagement (and) personal vulnerability” (ibid). My field notes consisted of my official diary which recorded appointments, meetings, deadlines and a series of official notebooks for minutes of meetings, planning notes, ad hoc monitoring of news events and SLBC coverage.

In addition, the UN system requires a detailed weekly report of events, actions and developments in each area of its operations which is sent to headquarters in New York. On my return to the UK, this proved to be both a useful record and *aide-memoire* of my work in the mission. A significant part of my data collection was the journal in which I recorded in detail my personal emotions, ideas and impressions. This was where I tried to make sense of the puzzlement I felt as the project unravelled before my eyes. Alongside my official diary, notebooks and the weekly reports, the journal ‘filled in the blanks’, providing the subjective, personal element for the ‘auto’ in the autoethnography. Like Dauphinee, I needed to record the fact that things were not as I thought they would be in the professional sense. Like her, I felt hurt, angry and aggrieved (2010: 808).

It was with the passage of time that I realised the value of not only exploring why the SLBC project failed but also of telling the story through the filter of my experience. On my return to the UK, the autoethnography gradually took shape through several drafts with the narrative emerging from the mass of official and personal data I had collected. I also felt the need to rewrite my literature review to take account of the different emphasis of the case study

and also to augment my observations. As Chang remarks, “the literature review gives autoethnography an identity as social science research, intersecting the subjectivity of the inner world with the objectivity of the outer world (2008: 110).

It would be dishonest of me to move on from this section on autoethnography without describing the torturous writing process. More than fifty years ago, Lévi-Strauss noted that :

“Writing is a strange thing...(it) might be regarded as a form of artificial memory, whose development should be accompanied by a deeper knowledge of the past and, therefore, by a *greater ability to organize the present and the future*“ (1961:291, emphasis added).

If we are to claim for ourselves this “greater ability to organize the future”, or, in academic parlance, “make an original contribution to knowledge”, then surely we bear the responsibility of making what we write matter. Like Laurel Richardson, I have to confess to a disappointment in the way so many sociological texts are written, as though writing-up were “just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project” (1994: 516). Anxious to produce a text that met the usual academic criteria but equally keen to make my voice heard, I felt I was walking a tightrope from which I regularly slipped and fell. But, with each new pared-down draft, I felt I was getting closer to the story, that is, *my* story. In the process, I discovered writing both as “a method of inquiry” and a “way of knowing”. As Richardson suggests,

“By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable” (ibid).

## **2. Inside the UN: document analysis and institutional ‘archaeology’**

O’Leary defines document analysis as “the collection, review, interrogation and analysis of various forms of text as a primary source of research data” (2004: 177). By contrast, Bowen sees document analysis more as data *selection* rather than data collection (2009: 31). The essential point about

documents is that they are pre-produced texts generated by a source other than the researcher (O'Leary, *ibid*). In addition they are 'non-reactive' in that they are not affected by the research process. Bowen (*ibid*) claims this method is less time-consuming but I would have to disagree: poor internet access, a lack of consistency and order in organising material and the absence of resources to facilitate the ordering of material eg files, shelves, stationery etc can hinder the collection and review of material. Bowen also claims that the availability and stability of documents are further advantages. Normally, I would agree, however, I must confess to an overwhelming sense of frustration on finding that the personnel records for the former SLBS had been burnt by rebels in a military coup and that the sound archives had been ravaged by rats. O'Leary also cautions against two forms of bias: first, on the part of the author of the document who produced the document for a specific purpose or agenda. The second form of bias may be found in the researcher and the personal biases which inform their document selection. The first bias may be countered by critical analysis and interrogation of all aspects of the document; the second bias, that of the researcher, calls for a degree of reflexivity throughout the process of data collection.

It is surprising that, in such a bureaucratic organisation as the UN, knowledge management is poorly developed. In the course of my work I was keen to find out what had gone on in the SLBC project prior to my arrival. Retrieving this information meant spending hours on my hands and knees, going through hundreds of files that had become musty in the moist tropical air. Occasionally I managed to track down people I needed to speak to in New York, Kabul, Monrovia and Kinshasa. The contractual nature of employment in the field meant that people rarely stayed in post more than a few years. Once they moved on, their institutional insight and experience moved with them. Despite this obvious difficulty, I was determined to recreate to my own satisfaction the narrative of what had gone on before I arrived.

Mostly, as an insider, I made use of the 'grey literature' that is available to UN staff, that is, both published and unpublished material which does not have either an International Standard Book Number (ISBN) or an International

Standard Serial Number (ISSN) (O’Leary 2004: 68). UN organisations such as UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) often produce ‘practice notes’ or ‘briefing papers’ on a wide range of topics. I sought out anything on media development, human resource management in Africa, financial sustainability of community radio stations, international regulation regarding digital migration and so on. Information relating to the Security Council, the Secretary General and the General Assembly is well-documented and readily accessible to the public on the UN’s website (<http://www.un.org>). Internally, I asked to be included on a number of email lists that kept me updated on events and reports that touched on my areas of interests.

Outside the UN, my data collection covered newspaper cuttings, graffiti, popular songs, Facebook postings and radio phone-ins. In particular, during the election campaigning period, my attention was drawn to campaign posters, slogans on t-shirts and campaign songs. Another feature of Sierran Leonean politics was the deliberate use of colour to denote party affiliation: red for the APC and green for the SLPP with the other parties opting variously for orange, purple and yellow. This data was essential in writing Chapters Six and Seven which paint a picture of the environment into which the SLBC project was launched.

### **3. Questionnaires**

All social research begins with questions and the challenge lies in selecting the most appropriate method of delivering those questions, ranging from the highly structured printed self-completion questionnaire to the highly unstructured non-directive face to face interview in a free format (Deacon et al 2007:65). Bulmer defines questionnaires as:

“any structured research instrument which is used to collect social research data in a face to face interview, self-completion survey, telephone interview or web survey” (2004: XIV).

While all the options listed above take time and effort to develop, the field conditions in Sierra Leone were more favourable for self-completion surveys

and face-to-face interviews. Although the data collection period is shortest with telephone interviews (Robson 2002:236), the unreliability and poor quality of the mobile phone network in the country at the time were major factors to consider. The situation has vastly improved in the last few years but in 2009-10 some parts of the country were not covered by the phone networks despite the advertising campaigns hinting otherwise. Equally, an intermittent power supply and low internet access would have hindered a web survey.

Before embarking on my initial field trip in November 2009, I had assumed that questionnaires would form part of my data collection. So, having accepted the invitation to lecture second year Broadcast Journalism students at the University of Sierra Leone (Fourah Bay campus) for the second half of the winter semester, I seized the opportunity to distribute a questionnaire amongst all the undergraduates in the Department of Mass Communications. Clearly, this group was not representative of the population as a whole. First, their education to university level set them apart from the vast majority of the citizens in a country where illiteracy reaches almost 50% (UNDP *Human Development Report* 2014). The majority came from the Western Area region around Freetown, Bo and Makeni with few from the rural east.

It was difficult to specify the number of students who were actively attending classes compared to those who were enrolled. Following advice from staff members and students, I distributed 130 questionnaires of which 74 were completed and returned (see p344). I asked a mature student in my class to distribute and collect the questionnaires. My intention was to carry out a minimal statistical analysis using SPSS software. Ideally, to obtain a Confidence Level of 95% with a Confidence Interval of  $\pm 5\%$  I would have needed 97 completed questionnaires. However, the number received would give some indication of the views of the next generation of journalists even if not as representative as I might have wished.

The questionnaires consisted of a series of closed questions regarding attitudes to the political situation, the media and its role in rebuilding the country after the war. Participants were asked to name the most pressing issues facing the country out of a given list; to describe their media usage and

suggest ways in which the media could be improved. The language was kept as clear and concise as possible although it was not unreasonable to assume that participants, as undergraduates in Mass Communications, had a good grasp of English and the issues under discussion. The respondents had the option to remain anonymous although some insisted on giving their name, class and phone number.

#### **4. Semi-structured interviews**

One of the most interesting aspects of my fieldwork was the opportunity to talk to individuals at length about their experiences during and after the war and their attitudes towards the media. As a relative newcomer to the field of post-conflict studies and an outsider in Sierra Leone, I did not want to make any assumptions based on my personal and professional experiences so I began with the basic question '*is there a role for the media in peacebuilding?*'. I posed this question to all interviewees as part of the semi-structured interviews I carried out. It also appeared in the questionnaires I distributed amongst the students in the Department of Mass Communications at the Fourah Bay campus of the University of Sierra Leone.

As Holliday maintains, research questions adapt and evolve from the initial concept but are useful in leading the researcher in a specific direction (2007: 33). Posing this basic question to a number of Sierra Leoneans assured me, first, that there was a potential area for investigation. Secondly, it enabled me to explore in detail why participants accorded the media such significance and to unpick the role of the media in their personal or professional experience.

Yates (2004) defines the interview as a way of developing a shared perspective and understanding between two or more people (p156). Kvale agrees:

“An interview is literally an inter-view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest.” (1996:14, emphasis in the original)

Woodhouse poses the stark question: “Why find out from people?” (1998: 128) He suggests that interviews are suitable for finding out two types of information in particular. Firstly, there is “knowledge not available elsewhere”, with examples such as oral histories, details of customary rule or indigenous technical knowledge. Secondly, researchers may need to know more about the perceptions of individuals or groups (ibid). Willis (2006) argues that although facts may be gleaned from interviews, particularly those pertaining to personal experience and testimony, interviews are preferred for their inherent capacity to draw out qualitative dimensions: evaluation, thought processes, motivations, feelings, beliefs and behaviours (p146).

It was Polanyi (1966) who first introduced the concept of ‘tacit knowledge’, - “we know more than we can tell” - a backdrop against which all actions are understood. Research in the field of knowledge management suggests that such tacit knowledge cannot be transmitted on paper or even ‘electronically’: it requires the kind of person-to-person contact of social encounters, of which interviews are just one example (Stenmark 2002: 7).

Interviews are a flexible and adaptable way of finding out things about people (Robson 2002:272). Interviews are used to explore people’s beliefs about the future as well as their recollections of the past (Briggs 1986:1) Interviews are used as a resource for understanding how individuals make sense of their social world and act within it (May 2004:142). As Denzin writes, “the interview functions as a narrative device which allows persons who are so inclined to tell stories about themselves” (2001: 25). Notwithstanding the acknowledged subjective nature of the data harvested from interviews, researchers must accord respect to what they see and hear:

“Those of us who aim to understand and document others’ understandings choose qualitative interviewing because it provides us with a means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality” (Miller and Glassner 1997 quoted in May 2004:127)

Furthermore, having spent a good deal of my professional career interviewing people for radio and television, I was comfortable with the method. I felt confident with the technical side of recording and because I was able to relax and 'forget' about the equipment, my interviewees were also able to do so to a certain extent. There have been a number of comparative studies looking at the work of journalists and anthropologists, in particular, the apparent overlap in methods such as interviewing (Awad 2006; Fillmore 1985; Lett 1987). Awad's article opens with the sweeping criticism: "In journalism, maltreatment of sources seems to be part and parcel of the job" (2006: 922). However, she and the other writers are considering the North American model of professional journalism. I worked for years under the strict editorial guidelines of the BBC's public service mandate where I was required to take seriously issues of confidentiality and respect for interviewees or 'sources'. One issue I was keenly aware of was the difference between journalistic and ethnographic interviewing. In a journalistic interview, one rarely goes in not knowing what to expect and the questions will be aimed at drawing out the precise information and response required. By contrast, an ethnographic interview is far more open and exploratory, usually, but not always, free from the time and editorial constraints of news. It is usually more respectful of the response that the interviewee makes to the data collection exercise as a whole rather than assessing it on its 'sound-bite value'. Equally, an ethnographic interview seeks to gather as much data as possible about a 'way of life', about an individual's worldview and value system.

I decided on the semi-structured format as opposed to standardised interviews as I wanted to build a rapport with the people I spoke to. In addition, a semi-structured interview provides the means to explore further areas of relevance to the field of study once the standardised questions have been asked. As Willis (2006) and Robson (2002) point out, this allows for some standardization for purposes of analysis but also permits digression into related areas which may yield a wealth of interesting material. The interviewer needs to direct proceedings although the interviewee can exercise some autonomy in touching on topics of importance to them. This variation is more

time-consuming than the structured interview but far less so than the unstructured interview.

53 semi-structured interviews were carried out between November 2009 and February 2010 using a small hand held voice recorder. Of the 53 interviewees, only 12 were women, three expatriates and nine Sierra Leonean. I was disappointed with the gender balance despite strenuous efforts on my part to find more women interviewees. On the other hand, these figures fairly represent the representation of women in positions of authority in civil society and media enterprises as a whole. Although most of the interviews took place in Freetown, I travelled to all four regions of the country to gather a range of views. Ethnic difference increasingly overshadows modern Sierra Leone and the ethnic divide cuts the country virtually in half, pitting Temne north west against Mende south east.

The interviewees were drawn from a variety of backgrounds. Media houses were well represented: radio station managers, journalists, newspaper editors and vendors. I chose also to speak to members of groups or organisations who regularly used the media for outreach purposes. For example, the Special Court had an extensive network of co-ordinators who travelled throughout communities explaining the Court's deliberations and decisions through radio, video recordings and village meetings, usually in the local languages. I interviewed four of their co-ordinators. Similarly, I was keen to speak to local community workers from non-governmental organisations like *Campaign for Good Governance*, *Women in Governance* and *Network Movement for Justice and Development*. Besides being important links into the remotest rural communities whom I could not access because of distance and time, these individuals shared views and concerns about everyday life in the countryside which I would not have heard back in Freetown.

All interviews began with the interviewees introducing themselves, describing their work, where they lived and sharing other personal details for example

their ethnicity or their marital status. If they did not work directly in the media or an associated field, I asked how important the media were to their work. The journalists, editors, university lecturers and policymakers were asked about their training, experience and beliefs and opinions regarding the media in Sierra Leone. The semi-structured format meant that people could bring in rich autobiographical detail referring to the war, their experiences under the military junta, even the time they spent in jail or exile. They offered up fascinating examples and insights for which my reading and planning could not have prepared me. All interviewees were given the option to raise any issue that mattered to them that I had not previously touched on. Finally, because of the central issue of national identity and peacebuilding, all interviewees were asked the same question at the end of the interview:

“In your opinion, what is it that holds Sierra Leone together?” There were as many different responses as interviewees and these will be explored in the following chapters.

### **Challenges of data collection in the field**

For this project, the period in which I collected data is as significant as the methods used. As stated earlier, when I began the research I was a PhD researcher on a limited budget. I was introduced to contributors by my research associate, Abdul-Karim Bah, known to everyone as Karim. Born and brought up in the deprived east end of Freetown, he is the atheist, Pan-African Socialist son of an imam and a journalist of some ten years' experience whom I met while we were studying Development and Communication at Swansea University. Karim had also worked with local NGOs in Freetown, Bo and Kenema. He is intelligent, outgoing and, as a committed political activist, enjoys a wide circle of friends, acquaintances and colleagues who took an interest in my work and were willing to help. And so, during the time I spent in Sierra Leone between November 2009 and February 2010, I was mixing and socialising mainly with local people.

Apart from those individuals I had met at a Peace Studies conference in Leuven two years earlier – the communications specialists Mohammed Sheriff

and Julius Spencer – most people knew me as a trusted friend and colleague of Karim's. Undoubtedly, in economic terms, the power relations were unequal but I do not believe that they skewed the data collected inordinately. I was simply somebody interested in what they, the contributors, knew and they seemed happy to share their knowledge and experiences. I remained friends with a number of the people I met during this time. It was fortunate therefore that I carried out the questionnaires and the interviews during this period.

When I next returned to Freetown in August 2010, it was as a senior professional, a Media Management Advisor for the UN's Integrated Peacebuilding Mission in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL). Few people in the country are equanimous towards the UN. Civil society activists especially tend to be scathing about the mission's role in reconstruction after the war. It would have been almost impossible to carry out the interviews in the same informal way as on my previous visit. No matter what assurances might be given, contributors would consider any exchange of information as 'official', as taking place between their organisation and the international community. To be seen talking to a visiting PhD researcher soon to return home was very different to being 'caught' talking to a staff member of UNIPSIL. With the UN seen as intervening – even meddling - in the affairs of state, the political fallout, especially in the run up to the elections, was potentially serious for any individual. In a country still clinging to its clientelist networks, this could be disastrous for one's livelihood.

On a more practical level, working conditions in Sierra Leone remain challenging after the war. Many roads, particularly in the countryside are in a state of such disrepair that they are unpassable in the rainy season. Unless one works for a large international organisation with its own generators, the unpredictable electricity supply with its intermittent blackouts and surges is harmful to most modern office machinery. Despite the landing of the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine cable, the long-awaited fast broadband connection has failed to materialise and access to the internet is expensive and unreliable. While the use of mobile telephones has spread rapidly throughout the country, some regions are not covered by all companies and

calling one network from another is expensive. This led to the strange sight of seeing people with two or more mobile phones with SIMs from different networks. Stationery was expensive and office consumables such as print cartridges and toner were hard to obtain. Even though I worked at the UN, I was still so frustrated with rusty paperclips and faulty pens and staplers that I provided my own from the UK.

### **Further ethical considerations**

All social science research raises ethical issues but in the context of transcultural projects where poverty is endemic and the barriers to mutual understanding may be implicit as well as explicit, the potential for a negative outcome or even harm to one or more of the involved parties is far greater. A discussion paper for the ESRC on social science research in developing countries and contexts emphasised the ethical risks of working with some of the world's least powerful and most vulnerable people (Brown et al 2004). These included unique sampling difficulties which might undermine the validity of any findings; the power differentials between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' which might give rise to problems of bias; the issues of ethnocentrism and elitism consistently affecting interpretation and analysis of findings; the fact that vulnerable citizens are poorly placed to exercise their right to choose and give consent to participation in research; and the question of property and appropriation of the knowledge that is ultimately produced (p1). Clearly, geopolitical and economic realities vest the researcher from outside — the so-called 'safari-scholar' (Bulmer 1993:21) — with privilege and knowledge linked to power.

Within social science research, 'informed consent' is an important issue which should cause any responsible researcher working with poor communities to be doubly vigilant that participants are fully informed in an appropriate matter. Language barriers, illiteracy and cultural difference may hinder attempts to communicate the reason for the research. The writers go on to define the three elements of ethical informed consent in the traditional western view as: sufficient knowledge given to inform the consentee; sufficient capacity of the

consentee to assimilate that knowledge and freedom of the consentee to make a choice without coercion (Brown et al. op.cit: 463). This was not a problem I encountered. Contributors could choose *for themselves* whether to participate or not. They were able to express themselves well in English and indicated that they understood and supported the project.

The issue of money when working in a poor country is complex and, for me personally, one of the most stressful. There are those who believe that any kind of payment to participants amounts to coercion and interferes with their right to decide freely on participating (Crigger et al 2001: 464). Payment may also affect the relationship between participant and researcher. The participant may feel 'eager to please' and therefore not respond honestly but give answers which they assume the researcher wants to hear.

While not usually considered alongside 'payment', hospitality also demands careful consideration. It is a tragic irony that hospitality is often warmest in those societies with the least to spare. The relatively small amounts of money spent on soft drinks or snacks to welcome guests might have come from an already overstretched budget: some important daily need may have been overlooked. There is no easy answer. The Centre for Chronic Poverty Research (CPRC) urges caution when being entertained, reminding researchers that the money spent on cold drinks or cigarettes might have been spent on school fees instead (CPRC '*Practice Guidelines*' [www.chronicpoverty.org](http://www.chronicpoverty.org)). However, I also felt obliged not to offend traditional attitudes towards guests or to deny a participant the opportunity to exercise dignity and treat me the privileged outsider, as a social equal.

Wherever possible I attempted to include women amongst my interviewees and contributors, allowing them to remain anonymous if they preferred for reasons of personal security. However, there are occasions when it simply is not possible to guarantee gender balance due to pre-existing structural and cultural norms. In those circumstances, I considered it practical and respectful to fall in with what I found.

## Conclusion

I started this thesis as a self-financing postgraduate researcher with the intention of adopting a detached stance to my data collection. However, my circumstances changed when I took up the post of Media Management Advisor with the UN's peacebuilding mission in Freetown. I was the senior technical 'expert' responsible for the merger of the UN's radio station with the government owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service. At first, I thought that it would be possible to remain a 'detached observer' as the new public service broadcaster began its work. Unfortunately, the merger was a major failure and I found myself drawn in more and more to the political, financial and corporate wranglings of the project, unable to remain detached due to my professional responsibility. I was therefore persuaded that it was more ethical and less misleading to adopt an autoethnographic approach to the narrative. Even so, the data collected through other methods such as content analysis, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews was still valuable in corroborating what I had seen and heard for myself. And, of course, while the narrative is driven by my voice, I cannot deprive others of the right to express theirs.

The ethical and practical challenges of working in Sierra Leone are considerable. Issues of power, status and 'economic clout' can disrupt research in the field in so many ways some of them indiscernible to the 'safari scholar'. I was fortunate to be guided by a close Sierra Leonean friend who was trusted and respected by many. Materially, the country remains very poor and the factors that are so often taken for granted in the UK work environment — transport, electricity, internet, stationery, telephones — may not be readily available or if they are, as with phones and photocopiers, may not function effectively.

Despite the personal and professional difficulties I faced and the disappointment in seeing a high profile project fail so badly, I believe that the SLBC story is instructive as an example of institution-building in a post-conflict environment and that autoethnography, supplemented by data from document analysis, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews was the most effective and ethical approach to tell that story.

## Chapter 6      Sierra Leone Today

### Introduction

In the context of a fragile state emerging from the ashes of a vicious civil war, questions of national identity are crucial. Although the war itself was not fought along ethnic lines, there is evidence that politics is becoming more and more ethnicised, a worrying hindrance to greater national integration and nation building as part of peacebuilding. This would have clear implications for any public institution with a national mandate but for a public service broadcaster, mandated 'to inform, educate and entertain' the whole nation, these developments were a major concern. Although the trappings of patriotism were everywhere, particularly in the run-up to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence celebrations, I wanted to see how deeply the feelings of patriotism ran. What I found was that, although expressions of patriotism trip easily off the tongue, when individuals are placed in positions of responsibility, the temptation to plunder state resources is often too great to resist. In addition, widespread debate about nationhood concealed the ever-widening divisions between ethnic groups orchestrated by the ruling APC ahead of the elections in November 2012.

Just as neopatrimonialism — that is, patrimonialism hiding behind the trappings of a state (van de Walle 2001: 51) — blurred the distinctions between the private and public when it came to state resources, so the discourse about 'the nation' and 'the people' conflates the interests of the government with those of all Sierra Leoneans. The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of independence were an ideal opportunity to sell President Koroma as the *de facto* 'face of the country' and to brand the festivities as a mark of the party's success. Three examples are given of opportunities to mobilise the people around the central idea of nationhood: the organisation of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, the appointment of a new President of the Sierra Leone Football Association and the creation of a public service broadcaster. But these three events which, in many other societies would

have brought people together, in Sierra Leone were eventually marred by self-interest, ethnic consideration and patrimonial plunder.

Using a mix of autoethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews and references to the relevant literature, I paint a picture of the challenges facing citizens in Sierra Leone today, the pressing need for bridges to be built and a suggestion that appropriate media may be one way forward of promoting the dialogue necessary for a greater sense of nationhood.

### Sierra Leone: a nation once more or never before?

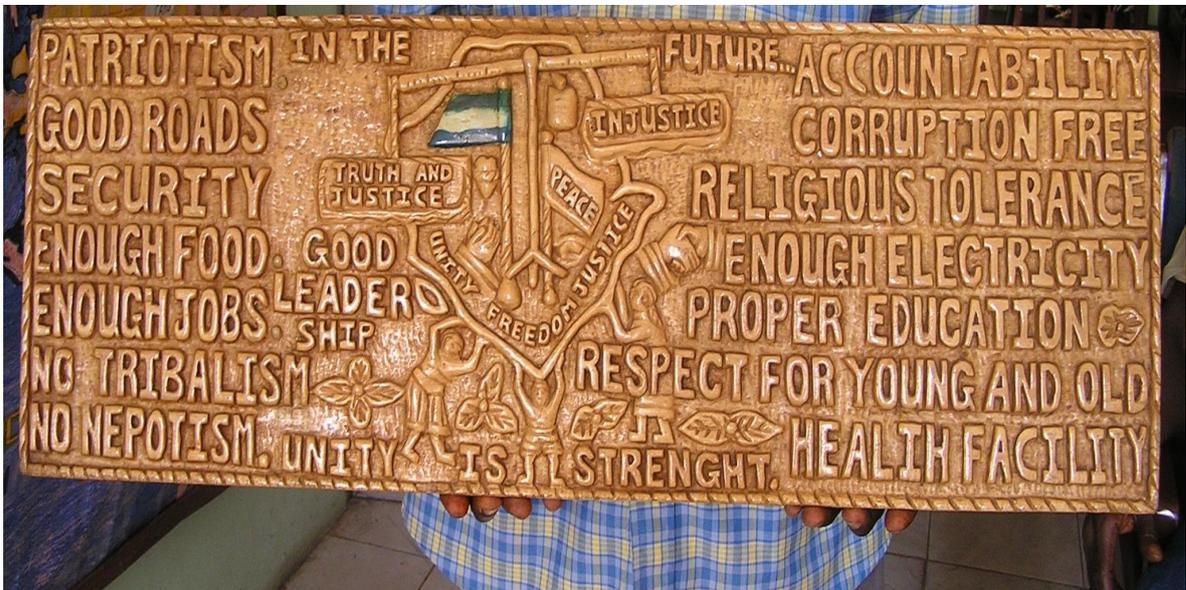


Fig 7.1 Contribution to the National Vision exhibition organised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

*High we exalt thee realm of the free.  
Great is the love we have for thee.  
Firmly united, ever we stand  
Singing thy praise, Oh native land.  
We raise up our hearts and voices on high;  
The hills and the valleys re-echo our cry.  
Blessing and peace be ever thine own,  
Land that we love, our Sierra Leone  
(Sierra Leone National Anthem)*

Less than a decade after the end of the civil war, I was intrigued to hear the thoughts of Sierra Leoneans on their country as a *nation*. Was there a strong sense of what it meant to be 'Sierra Leonean'? Everywhere I noticed patriotic trappings and the tokens of nationhood. The national broadcaster opened and closed its transmissions with the national anthem, (as BBC Radio 4 continues to do). The colours of the flag — green, white and blue — were painted on walls, on paving stones and even on trees. During the run-up to the celebrations for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence in 2011, it seemed Freetown was awash with patriotism. Car tyres, rubbish bins, kerbstones, and the corrugated roofs of shacks — if it was stationary, it was painted. As Amienyi points out:

“National flags are more than just colourful pieces of cloth. They are representations of a country’s history, culture, philosophy, geography and hopes for the future. They can express the unity of a nation, as well as the divisiveness and oppressive policies of a ruling majority. That is why they can communicate joy, sorrow, courage or bravery (2005:42).

Children in Sierra Leone are exposed from an early age to the flag, the national anthem and pledge. They learn that the green symbolises the hills and mountains and fertile land, the white stands for unity and justice and the blue for the sea and sky. The school day starts with the national anthem and throughout the day, they encounter a curriculum presenting an anodyne view of the country’s history, with text books printed before the outbreak of war in 1991, barely touching on the horrors of the recent past or their causes.



**Figure 7.2 Standard issue school exercise books**

One particular incident remains etched in my memory. I was rushing to work one morning desperately searching in my oversized handbag for my phone so I could alert colleagues to my late arrival. At first, I was too preoccupied with what I was doing but then I became aware that everyone in the muddy lane was standing still and erect. I wondered what had happened. Some people even had their right hand held over their heart.

“Stop, Aunt Linda! De national anthem. You must respect it”, a neighbour hissed. I looked ahead and saw the pupils from the local church school, dazzlingly bright in their pink shirts and maroon caps, singing their hearts out. I could just make out the words ....”Firmly united, ever we stand....”. I was used to hearing them singing hymns each morning as I made my way past the church onto the busy main road where I caught my taxi to work. Just as soon as the pupils stopped singing, everything went back to normal. The women traders resumed their cries, the local mechanic started revving up the engine he was working on and I carried on looking for my phone. I was struck by this overt show of patriotism. I had not seen anything similar since I attended a

cinema in Belfast during the 1980s. After the film finished, I started getting my coat on. I barely noticed that the rest of the audience was on its feet singing “God save the Queen.” My boyfriend at the time virtually dragged me to my feet and urged me to join in. We did not go out very much longer after that.

Occasionally, in Sierra Leone there were ‘National Cleaning Days’ where everyone was expected to help in sprucing up their neighbourhood, a practice that was introduced in the early days of the NPRC regime (Gberie 2005:75; Keen 2005: 94; Opala 1994:195). Although we expats weren’t expected to participate, local officials strongly disapproved of us carrying on as usual. Generally, driving was discouraged and most businesses, even the street traders, kept a low profile. Such initiatives were sold to the people as part of their patriotic duty, to help rebuild the country. Later, in the weeks leading up to the election, similar exercises sold as part of a ‘national initiative’, took on an unpleasant party political nature. I remember one Sunday morning I was surprised to see the young woman from whom I bought fabric setting out her wares on the street. I greeted her and asked, “Hey, Salamatu, why you work today?”

*“I no work, mi pikindem no go foh eat!”* came the reply. “If I don’t work, my children don’t eat”. She explained that a local official from the ruling party had come around and threatened the street traders to shut up shop the previous day or else be driven away from their usual spot for good. The quiet of the empty streets was sold through the media as evidence of the widespread support for President Koroma’s stated intentions to *‘mak di contri go bettah!’*, or drive national progress. The truth of the matter was far more banal. Ahead of the upcoming elections, the APC party and its flagbearer Koroma wanted to take advantage of their incumbency to mount a pre-emptive strike against the opposition. The footage and reportage of quiet streets devoid traders and traffic would be ‘spun’ as evidence of widespread support for Koroma but who would tell Salamatu’s story and reflect the opinions of hundreds of thousands like her around the country? Like many of her fellow traders, Salamatu was the main earner in her family and could not afford to miss out on a day’s income. If she did not work Saturday for whatever reason, then she must work

Sunday. I knew the threat must have been serious. In the three years I lived in the area, I saw Salamatu working through tropical flu, malaria, and severe diarrhoea. Without the safety net of sickness benefit or even another breadwinner in the family, there was little standing between Salamatu's family and destitution. If a local official told her to shut up shop — whether for patriotic or political reasons — she acquiesced but she would still have to make up for lost earnings.

### **'Firmly united, ever we stand'?**

A question I put to all my interviewees — what holds Sierra Leone together? — was met with almost as many different responses as interviewees. For instance, Former Minister of Information and now Managing Director of Premier Media Consultancy, Julius Spencer believes that what holds Sierra Leoneans together is the fact that there's nowhere else to go:

“If you look at Sierra Leone, okay, we're all living within the same geographic space so we call ourselves Sierra Leoneans, but there is nowhere a sense of national unity because we don't have what it is that binds us together as a nation. If you ask a Sierra Leonean what is it that makes you specifically Sierra Leonean, they'd say I was born here; that's all there is to it, and my parents were born here as well”  
(Personal interview).

Spencer's scepticism regarding national identity is striking. He could certainly be described as patriotic having returned from the US during the war years to set up Radio Democracy, a clandestine radio station broadcasting anti-junta programmes (see next chapter). He has extensive experience in communication for development and regularly took dancers and drama groups into the countryside to promote development and behavioural change messages. At one stage, he was the Minister responsible for broadcasting vital information to the citizens during the war. He had also drafted a national cultural policy paper in which he stated that although the country had sixteen distinct ethno-linguistic groupings there was, at the same time, a remarkable similarity in the socio-cultural institutions and values of each. This distinctive character, he argued, enabled the country “to uphold its unity in diversity” and should be nurtured in order to foster a sense of national identity (National

Cultural Policy §1.5.1 'The Rationale for a Policy on Culture). Although the draft policy was shared at the highest levels, it failed to make an impact. Reading Spencer's words again, I am struck by how much potential he believed there was to promote a sense of national identity if only there were the political understanding and will to match.

Another individual who had reason to consider issues of nationhood and identity was the sociologist Ibrahim Abdullah, currently advisor to the President on social services, covering education, health, labour, HIV/AIDS and social welfare. He had an in-depth understanding of the historical origins of the country and was persuaded that the artificial boundaries imposed by the colonists continued to plague modern Africa. These boundaries hold little meaning for the communities living in the border areas between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia:

“Let me give you an example; there is a village in Pujehun called Dar-es-Salaam; I went there about six years ago to do some research. It's separated by a river – Sierra Leone, Liberia (*gesturing*). When it's a really dry season, you can cross the river and the water will be just about knee length. So I was asking them, what is it about the other side that is of interest to you? They said no, the other side is us. Those over there are relatives. They have always been their relatives. I said what do you mean by that? This is Sierra Leone, this is Liberia. They said, no, it's for you coming from Freetown and then they told me that when the war started in Liberia, relatives across that water came over here. When the war came to Sierra Leone, we followed them over here. So that does not exist for them. So the notion of Sierra Leone and the notion of Liberia or the notion of the nation, the way people access it or realise it in their everyday life is different from what people out there think ...

There are areas in Kabala where they use the Guinean Franc as their currency... So the notion of, say, the nation states – that's where Pan-Africans have a point. The borders for those who live on the edges of those communities do not exist” (Personal interview).

I could certainly testify to these views on Kabala, an attractive town just under 140 miles north east of Freetown. When I interviewed workers at the local radio station, Radio Bintumani, they told me how many of the people in the locality regularly listened to radio programmes from Guinea. Because of the

topography — Kabala is surrounded by hills — it was difficult for Radio Bintumani to reach all audiences in its ‘patch’. The Guinean stations were adequately funded so they used better equipment with stronger signals. In addition, the programme content was culturally in-tune with many Kabala residents who had strong family ties with Guineans in the border area. SLBS, the national broadcaster, had trouble broadcasting there because of its weak transmitters. Even the boosted signal of UN Radio could only be heard with difficulty. Yet, what bothered the people I spoke to most was the difficulty in tuning into the BBC World Service.

### **The fractured state: ethnicity and tribalism**

At the time of writing, a political storm is brewing over the release of an album by the popular musician Emmerson. The 27 year old is known for writing hard-hitting lyrics with overt political content. His 2005 hit *Borbor Belleh* (‘Big Belly Man’) was accompanied by a video showing a fat man carrying a suitcase full of money surrounded by hungry people. It was widely interpreted as an indictment of the ruling SLPP who went on to lose the 2007 election.

Emmerson would not respond to allegations that he was an APC stooge and in 2010, he released *Yesterday Betteh Pass Tiday* (‘Yesterday was better than today’), widely seen as critical of the APC government. The most recent track to cause consternation amongst APC supporters is *Kokobeh*, a Krio word with its root in the Twi term for ‘leprosy’. The track, taken from the album *Last Man Standing* is 24 minutes long and is a fierce diatribe against the two main political parties for their deep seated corruption, their nepotism and their relentless drive for self-enrichment at the expense of the poor. Emmerson provocatively accuses the two largest ethnic groups, the Temnes and the Mendes, as only interested in looking after their own.

Himself a Mende, Emmerson raises the sensitive topic of ‘party clearances’, where a party new to power will clear all positions under their control of opposition supporters. For example, State House will remove all drivers, cleaners, secretaries, security guards and so on who are known, or believed, to be sympathetic to the old regime. In fact, during his first twelve months in power, President Koroma is said to have removed an estimated 200 middle to

high ranking regional officials from the opposition heartlands in the South and East — many of them Mendes — and replaced them with Northerners, Temnes and Limbas, mostly from his home district of Bombali (Gberie 2010: 5).

Sometimes, one's political allegiance is guessed on the basis of one's name; for example, the surname 'Bah' is a Fullah name from the north of the country, an APC stronghold. However, the National Democratic Alliance, a radical left of centre party, has many members with the surname Bah and is referred to as 'that Fullah party' by its detractors. Surnames such as 'Sesay' or 'Koroma' may belong to any one of a number of ethnic groups: Temne, Limba, Loko, Susu, Yalunka, Mandingo or Kuranko. Names such as 'Massaquoi' or 'Fasuluku' are considered typical south eastern names and therefore Mende. Despite the huge investment in time and energy on the part of the international community in statebuilding, it seems that Sierra Leoneans are still far from seeing themselves as part of a single nation. In addressing the UN Security Council in March 2010, the Head of UNIPSIL Michael von der Schulenburg was forced to admit the enduring ethnic schisms:

“Unfortunately, politics in Sierra Leone have become increasingly ethnic based and the country is today largely divided North – South along tribal and political loyalties. Recent by-elections would indicate that this divide is further deepening (*Sierra Leone, Statement to the Security Council 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2010*).

In the November 2012 elections, Barrie demonstrates that, apart from the ethnically diverse constituencies in Freetown and the surrounding areas, the greater proportion of candidates in each of the electoral districts were drawn from the main ethnic groups in their particular districts (*this is sierraleone.com* 15<sup>th</sup> December 2012). He shows that it is difficult for ethnic minority candidates to win 'party symbols' —, the party nomination to stand in an election — in areas where another ethnic group forms the majority. Not surprisingly, it is even more difficult for ethnic minority women to break through the political ranks (Barrie, *ibid*).

### **Party politics: red vs green**

Early on, I became aware of the great sensitivity in the area of ethnicity and politics. People would comment on the colours I was wearing, reading into them a kind of tacit political support depending on whether I was wearing red (APC) or green (SLPP). It was an issue that could be shrugged off as a foreigner's ignorance early on but in the run-up to the elections, UN staff, especially Sierra Leoneans, were explicitly warned about wearing specific colours. It became increasingly difficult as more parties officially declared their intention to run: PMDC (yellow), UDM (purple), PDP (light blue) and so forth. UN male members of staff seemed to appear in white or pink shirts while the women ended up in black and white. A high profile member of the diplomatic community was severely discomfited following a visit to a local hairdresser. She had asked for an ash blonde rinse but she eventually emerged with a shocking red bob that was difficult to explain away in the course of her official duties. Despite her protestations, the local rumour was that her dramatic new hair colour was, in fact, a political statement in support of the ruling APC.

Amongst Sierra Leoneans, there was always a steely edge beneath the banter:



“Ha, let me go sit under de tree!” — the SLPP symbol is a palm tree.



“Look at de sun...how it shines on us” — the APC symbol is the sun.

Whenever these phrases or similar ‘knockabout’ language were used amongst colleagues at SLBC, I knew that subtle and not so subtle political points were being scored. For some, it was an irritating and unsophisticated aspect of national politics which trivialised the debate. For others, it was a

sign that either politics in Sierra Leone was trenchantly ethnicised, or that ethnicity itself had become politicised: either way, the situation was irredeemable (see Kandeh 1992, 2008; King 2013). Communications expert Mohamed Sheriff was amongst those who wanted to see the political discourse shift to a higher plane:

“... we’ve often talked about tribalism in this country but I’ve never noticed it so acute as it is now, and this manifested by the results of the last election. The northern tribes vote for the ruling party now and the south and eastern tribes vote for the party that was in power which lost. And unfortunately the party now is rewarding those who supported it and, as a result, it’s the northerners and maybe, to some extent, people in the west, who seem to be having all the key positions. And those who were in positions with the past Government, most of them have been dropped from their offices.

And this is creating a lot of tension and, unfortunately, people don’t want to talk about it because of fear that if you raise the issue, they think you are being tribalistic. But it is something that we need to talk about, something we need to address because the war as a whole happened for 11 years but it was not a tribal war, and that has helped a lot in healing wounds because we are not divided into factions. But if, for any reason, blood is split along tribal lines, to settle that will be very difficult” (Personal interview).

Sheriff’s belief that the civil war was not an ethnic or tribal war was borne out by many people I spoke to and also supported by the literature (see amongst others Brown et al 2006: 10; Kandeh et al 2005: 179; Keen 2005: 2; Richards 1996: xix). And yet, ethnic cleavages were becoming more apparent all around the country according to Julius Spencer, Lansana Gberie, Rebecca Stringer and others.

Gberie’s analysis of the so-called ‘youth crisis’ is interesting in a country where more than 50% of the population is under 35 and more than 70% of this group is unemployed (UNDP HDR 2014). He believes that young people are exploited by political ‘big men’ as henchmen and informal security guards during political marches and rallies in exchange for small sums of money, drugs or alcohol (Personal interview). Both young men and women will wear party colours in the election season, again for money, food or drugs. This was

also confirmed to me in conversations with the young people in Cackle Bay who cynically described how they kept different colour t-shirts to appease whichever political figure was after their support on any particular day, a phenomenon described as ‘watermelon politics’, green on the outside and red inside. Christensen and Utas vividly describe how youths may be used as ‘pawns’ by politicians but, at the same time, how they ‘navigate’ the treacherous political terrain for their own gain, rather like my young neighbours (2008: 517).

Gberie’s experiences as a journalist during the war and as a researcher in the post-conflict period have led him to believe that national unity is more important than ever and he emphasised the role of political leadership in uniting a country, in particular the President:

“A united nation in Sierra Leone actually has to be symbolic and it has to be symbolised I think by the President. If the President doesn’t act as though he’s leading a united country, then there is a problem and thank God, I think this President is now waking up to that and I think that’s fundamental, in the absence of the kind of resources that will build railways and roads and hospitals and police stations across Sierra Leone and give people jobs...I think it has to be this kind of symbolic Presidency that thinks as a nation, not as a faction, not as somebody from Bombali or Makeni or one of these other places but as a nation”  
(Personal interview).

These comments echo Liu’s thoughts on ‘vertical integration’ which implies that the rulers and the ruled share a common vision, values and purpose (1971, quoted in Amienyi 2005:55). This common belief in the same “socio-cultural attributes” is a powerful promoter of a sense of community in diverse political units (ibid). Throughout Africa, positive examples of such vertical integration have been found in Ghana with Kwame Nkrumah, in Tanzania with Julius Nyerere and in Zambia with Kenneth Kaunda. The belief that the leader or President is motivated to improve their social and economic conditions will mobilise disparate groups to throw in their lot behind that figure, thereby creating the stable environment in which development may take place. This is especially important in developing societies where pre-existing poverty and

ethnic schisms may provoke violent conflict which obstructs development (Amienyi 2005: 5; see also Chisiza 1963; Mac Ginty and Williams 2009; Sen 1999). Perhaps the closest that Sierra Leone came to this mobilisation behind a leader was the outpouring of support for the youthful leadership of the NPRC military regime which overthrew the corrupt regime of Joseph Momoh in 1992 (Opala 1994). It was during this time that the idea of national street cleaning campaigns took hold (p196). The citizens of Freetown seemed to be overwhelmed by so great a rush of patriotic fervour that a mass of nationalistic art was produced: "...wall paintings, cement sculptures, public monuments and road-side decorations in the shape of military weapons painted in army camouflage" (p197). I wondered what could inspire Sierra Leoneans to express such patriotism again.

Joshua Nicol is Editor in Chief of the Cotton Tree News project based at the Department of Mass Communications, Fourah Bay College. He believes that the work of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up after the war remains unfinished:

"Reconciliation has not taken place at grass roots level, only within the ranks of the political elite, who will use the people and say that, 'I speak on behalf of my people. When I go to my people, my people, they vote me in that I should come and represent them.' But within the respective communities, reconciliation has not taken place. There was the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Reconciliation is an ongoing process; it's not an event in itself and there are no mechanisms in place to take the reconciliation process forward after the conclusion and the presentation of the report" (Personal interview).

Peace academic and activist John Paul Lederach describes the extraordinary dual nature of reconciliation as "both a place we are trying to reach and a journey we take to get there" (1999: 25). In both cases — on the journey and at the destination — inspiring and inspired leadership is required but where is that to be found? Paine maintains that brilliant domestic leadership can overcome "daunting combinations of problems", one of its key attributes being the ability to "create an environment in which citizens can develop and use their own talents to the fullest and desire to do so" (2010: 309). One thinks of

historical figures like Patrice Lumumba of the Congo or Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and most recently of South Africa's Nelson Mandela. Needless to say, such towering figures are in short supply. Gberie accuses President Koroma of substituting "soapbox platitudes about 'attitudinal change' for the more prosaic but important work of actively promoting reconciliation in a country scarred by years of war" (2010:1).

How then can the country move forward? Brown et al maintain that voters focus on local and regional matters and support those politicians who are most likely to deliver locally rather than the idealists who may champion national issues (2006: 7). Their dispiriting conclusion is that:

"Issue-driven politics are unlikely to make any headway in Sierra Leone while the majority of the electorate continue to view the State as an instrument for directing scarce resources towards their localities" (op.cit: p12).

So long as the state is seen more as 'piggy-bank' for those in power rather than provider of public services, there will be little incentive to change. The dilemma is, which is the greater challenge for Sierra Leone: state failure or nation-failure? Clearly, Sierra Leone in the lead up to the civil war was a 'failed state' in the sense that it was unable to discharge the commonly accepted functions of a state:

- Defend its nationals or citizens from external enemies through the use of an effective army
- Regulate crime and disorder through the use of a police force
- Develop an effective civilian bureaucracy to administer the functions of the state
- Raise revenue and create an economic infrastructure to pay its army, its police force and its civilian bureaucracy
- Resolve disputes through a system of law and a judiciary that enforces the law
- Create laws through a legislative process
- Provide public services such as safety, education, health care, transportation and roads, and postal service
- Acquire and sustain political legitimacy (legitimacy enables the state to govern with lower attendant costs (Larémont 2005: 5).

‘State building’ therefore means the establishment, re-establishment and strengthening of a public structure in a given territory capable of delivering public goods as listed above (von Bogdandy et al 2005: 583). I contend, on the basis of my observations and interviews, however, that *nation-failure* is as pressing an issue for modern Sierra Leone as state failure. Nation-failure occurs when the requirements of normal politics, the social substratum essential for the acceptance of majority and redistribution decisions disappear (von Bogdandy 2005: 585). When the nation on which the state structure is built fails, no amount of state reconstruction — whether endogenous or exogenous — will suffice.

Nation-building therefore is an “essentially indigenous process” which projects a meaningful future as well as a meaningful past; it redefines existing traditions, institutions and customs as “national characteristics” which not only support the nation’s claim to sovereignty but also legitimate the power wielded through state structures for the benefit of the majority of the people (see von Bogdandy 2005: 586). Paine defines nation-building as “the development and strengthening of a shared set of overarching values and an overarching common identity among the inhabitants of a country with a sovereign government” (2010: 7). He goes on to suggest that when people cannot agree on a national identity, domestic unrest and even civil war often ensue (ibid).

### Hijacking patriotism



Fig 7.3 Logo for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence Celebrations

Strangely, despite the growing ethnic fissures, most people would be proud to call themselves 'Sierra Leonean'. Everywhere, there are the 'trappings' of nationhood: the flag, the anthem, the national pledge solemnly recited by school children each morning. Yet, beneath the surface there appear few traces of deep love for country above family, clan or community and little evidence of patriotic duty. Initiatives that might have mobilised citizens in other nations have floundered badly in Sierra Leone. The much discussed 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations of the country's independence in 1961 slowly shrank from a nationwide extravaganza of carnivals and concerts to a day long ceremony in the National Stadium in Freetown mainly due to corruption. The indictment of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Organising Committee for 'financial mismanagement' was headline news for days. Funding for the festivities was leached into personal 'per diems', the amorphous, all embracing term for expenses incurred in the course of duties. These expenses can mean anything from legitimate expenditure on fuel and lunch 'on the road' through to brand new 4x4 vehicles, iPads and first class airfare, destination unknown.

### **The 'not-so beautiful' game**

In a football loving country like Sierra Leone, one would have imagined the election of the President of the country's Football Association (SLFA) to have attracted, as well as a great deal of interest, candidates of a certain calibre. In 2004, former international player Nahim Khadi was appointed President, a post he held until 2011 when he suddenly disappeared to the UK, citing "a medical condition", although there are indications that the Anti-Corruption Commission was about to request an interview (*sierraexpressmedia.com* 27/6/21011). His absence continued until July 2012, the end of his second term in office. Without a successor to take his place, the SLFA was paralyzed (*politicosl.com/2012/07/slfa-in-limbo*). However, the election process to find someone to succeed him was poisoned by ethnically partisan speeches with one of the candidates declaring in Krio at a supporters' rally, "This is war. We will show them who Mama Salone belongs to!" (Confidential communication). Khadi had left the SLFA finances in chaos with the takings from dangerously overcrowded games at the National Stadium in Freetown mysteriously disappearing and the subventions from FIFA never accounted for (*bbc.co.uk*

10/4/2001; *standardtimespress.org* 26/6/2009; Bloomfield 2010: 230). The chaos continued with the embarrassing spectacle of Sierra Leone sending not one but two team coaches and managers to the Cup of Nations fixture in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the SLFA and the Ministry of Youth and Sport having argued over who ran the national team (*politicosl.com* 9/10/14).

### **Not broadcasting, but ‘narrowcasting’**

Still another example, the most relevant to this thesis, is the creation of a national public service broadcaster out of the merger of the UN’s radio station and the government owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service. In this brave and much anticipated experiment, media activists and academics all over Africa awaited the creation of what would have been the continent’s second public service broadcaster after SABC in Africa. With nearly \$4million dollars, technical expertise and immense international goodwill, it seemed as though the new corporation could not fail. The UN Secretary General himself came to Freetown to launch the new venture alongside President Koroma on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2010. Yet, within a year it was struggling with massive debts, a bloated payroll, bitter staff strikes, major technical lapses and a politically biased output that belied its public service mandate. Just another national initiative destroyed by greedy elites focused on short term gain rather than long term investment. While Sierra Leoneans generally may value the idea of a ‘nation’, few in power seem willing to adopt the discipline or make the personal sacrifices necessary for the good of ‘nationhood’.

And yet it seems to me that rebuilding the nation after civil war is an essential part of building a sustainable peace. The nation is the ‘crucible’ within which reconciliation takes place as well as the ‘vehicle’ which will move a people forward. Calhoun asks, “Is it time to be post-national?” and responds that the answer seems to be “no” (2007: 25). He takes issue with those advocates of cosmopolitanism who would remake the world through “ethical, political, socio-psychological, and cultural orientations in which individual freedom and appropriations of the larger world would require no strong commitment to intervening solidarities” (p24). In a time of globalisation, such cosmopolitan theories seem to ignore the fact that different groups of people experience the

phenomenon of globalisation differently and that because of this, they may choose to retain their ties to 'intervening solidarities' such as national, ethnic, and community (ibid).

Calhoun is right to suggest that, no matter how attractive cosmopolitanism seems in some ways, it is compromised by its formulation in liberal individualist terms that block appreciation of the importance of social solidarity (ibid). Furthermore, it is nationalism — not cosmopolitanism — which has underwritten most successful projects of economic distribution (p18). I would also add that, for middle class intellectuals living in mature liberal democracies with universal suffrage and high standards of living, the cosmopolitan ideal of dismantling the nation-state may hint at the possibility of universal freedom and justice. It does not, however, recognise the hardship of those millions who have no other recourse other than the nation-state for their basic needs. And while, in many cases, nation-states may be failing their citizens, the world system offers up no real alternative for consistently delivering the basics of life, humanitarian intervention and Band Aid notwithstanding.

This is not to ignore the negative features of nationalism. As Calhoun maintains, we should recognise "its limits, illusions and potential for abuse" (p1). He refers to the work of Hans Kohn in which a distinction is drawn between 'ethnic nationalism' and 'civic nationalism' (p41). Here, ethnic nationalism is based on race, kinship or language, clearly delineating 'insiders' from the rest. On the other hand civic nationalism is understood as "the loyalty of individuals to a state based purely on *political* identity" (ibid, emphasis added). This is particularly germane to Sierra Leone where "persons of non-Negro African descent" are excluded from natural citizenship under the Citizenship Act of 1973, the Citizenship (amended) Act of 1976, the 1991 Constitution and the Citizenship (amended) Act of 2006. Such legislation excludes Lebanese living in Sierra Leone whose families may have migrated to West Africa as far back as 1919 from acquiring citizenship at birth (Beydoun 2013: 112). I would suggest that amending the constitution would represent a positive step towards nation building as citizenship would not then

be predicated on ethnicity alone. In addition, it would provoke a long overdue 'national conversation' about the nature of citizenship, nationhood, identity and belonging.

Finally, in trawling the literature for work on 'peacebuilding and nation-building' I discovered little in the way of academic writing. However, I did find two relevant quasi-official documents, both produced by individuals actively involved in peacebuilding. The first piece arose out of a project in Sri Lanka in which organisers brought together 500 young people from different ethnic groups:

"Can interpersonal relationships be enough to cultivate a cohesive national identity in a society still reeling from conflict?...

Witnessing young people from all over the country chant '*Sri Lanka unites!*' was indeed a heart-warming sight and a stark contrast to the view of Sri Lankan youth held in the diaspora. However, despite the social interaction and verbalised cohesion, the relationship between unity and equality for all communities remains undefined (Perera 2012).

Perera shows that while such initiatives are laudable they may not be enough. Indeed, as Lederach explains, in the world of peacebuilding the dilemma seems to be: is social change fundamentally a process of personal or systemic transformation? Building on the pedagogic work of Paolo Freire (1970), Lederach argues that both are needed (1995: 19). So Perera's work with the 500 young people at the grassroots level in Sri Lanka would need to be matched by similar initiatives at different levels throughout society and clear commitment from the national leadership. The second piece was a goodwill message sent out at Christmas by Teresita Quintos Deles, the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process in the Philippines:

"As we mark a Babe's birth, and greet the New Year, let us remember that peace building, in essence, is nation-building. We must rise from the rubble and learn to dream anew. This we must pledge not as a Taclobanon or Waray or Davaoeno or Bol-anon or Chavacano or Bisaya or Tausug or Yakan or Samal. This we must pledge as one body politic, as Filipinos who, with our different cultures and histories,

are united by birth and blood, unbent by foreign yoke and unbowed by killer quake and storm.

Peace on earth and good will to all. *Assalam allaikum*"

(Deles 2013)

Deles' goodwill message may offer an example of the kind of leadership required for systemic transformation. Without essentialising a whole peace process from one public message, it seems to point to the active commitment to build one people, one nation out of different groups and faiths. It also implies that responsibility for personal change lies with individuals. This is the starting point for systemic change, if all are to "rise from the rubble and learn to dream anew". It is a lesson that Sierra Leone has yet to learn.

### **Media and peacebuilding: the views of the next generation**

During my first trip to Sierra Leone I was fortunate to be invited to lecture second year students in the Mass Communications Department at the Fourah Bay College campus of the University of Sierra Leone. For three hours every Thursday morning during the autumn semester, I ran classes for those second year students who had chosen the broadcast journalism module. It was a mixed group of students ranging from mature students — a former police officer and two civil servants — to youngsters who were still unsure about which career path to choose but thought a degree in journalism was a safe bet. I was horrified when I first entered the class to see thirty pens poised to start writing as soon as I had said "Good morning". It took a while for them to understand that I was not simply going to dictate material for hours at a stretch. I explained that they would gain more if we discussed ideas. At first, no-one spoke. Then, with a little encouragement everyone spoke at the same time. Finally, after several weeks we were able to hold useful, informed debates about news and current affairs in which the students listened respectfully to each other. I was dismayed at hearing that some students faced the hard choice between eating or paying the transport fare to get to campus. Sometimes, it was eating or paying for internet access to research,

write and print coursework. Other times, there were no either/or choices because there was no money.

I was interested to hear their views about the media and the way that journalists covered the critical issues of the day. Beyond a basic understanding of how the constitution worked, there was little critical analysis of political affairs at the beginning. It seemed that people were reluctant to reveal what they truly thought for fear of being labelled as belonging to one political camp or another. Again, after a few weeks during which I pushed them to go a little deeper in their analysis of the media, their perspective on the stories they were exposed to seemed to open up. A popular part of the class was 'Contrast and Compare' where we looked together at the same story in different newspapers to 'compare and contrast' the treatment it received. Sometimes, the stories were verbatim copies of each other, clearly taken from corporate press releases: on other occasions there was no mention of the story in question and we debated whether this was deliberate or simply a question of not enough space in the sparse tabloids that represented the daily newspapers. Comparison was also made with the electronic media to see how local radio stations and even SLBS had tackled the issues.

During these sessions I was also learning: about the information sources that people trusted most, about the degree to which people might be willing to question those in authority (generally very little) and the role people thought the media played in peacebuilding. Undoubtedly, the journalism degree programme represented a major step forward for the media in the country but there were still worrying gaps in the students' general knowledge and indeed, no opportunity to gain detailed understanding in a specialist area such as education or health. Before they graduated, students were required to undertake a placement in a public sector organisation but I saw no strategic thinking about how best to use and develop them. In fact, when two students were later allocated to my unit at UNIPSIL, I was irritated by the irresponsible

approach of the colleague who had made the arrangements. Either one or both interns ended up with mundane tasks such as tackling his expenses or picking up his dry cleaning. No real thought was given to developing their understanding of the public information function in a major international organisation such as the UN. I believed it was a wasted opportunity although both interns seemed to be extremely grateful for the experience.

As part of my research, I asked students throughout the whole Mass Communications Department, not just the second year Broadcast module class which I taught, to complete a questionnaire on their attitudes towards the media and patterns of usage. I asked staff how many students were actually enrolled in the Department of Mass Communications and they explained that there was often a difference between numbers enrolled and numbers attending. I had seen this for myself in the class I was teaching. The number varied from week to week due to transport difficulties or financial hardship.

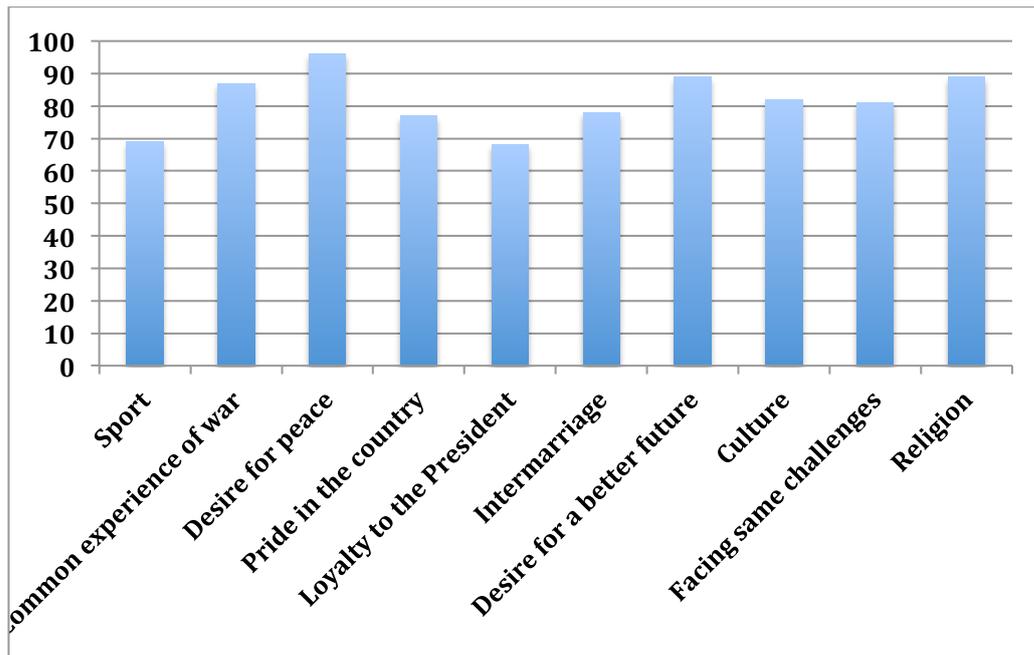
Following advice, I printed and distributed 130 questionnaires. (See Appendix 3). Ideally, to obtain a Confidence Level of 95% with a Confidence Interval of  $\pm 5\%$  I would have needed 97 completed questionnaires. In the end, 74 completed questionnaires were returned which, I was assured, was a creditable result. I concluded that while the confidence level of my findings was not as high as I would have liked, the results would give some indication of the views of the country's next generation of journalists. Still, it must be emphasised that the students were not representative of the population as a whole and it would be mistaken to extrapolate from their views the opinions of the general population, or even youths from less affluent social backgrounds such as farmworkers or *ocada* riders, the ubiquitous motor cycle taxis found in the bigger towns and cities.

I began the questionnaire by asking about the period following the war: although many of the students would have been very young throughout the conflict, their families would certainly have been affected by events. And, as

young citizens preparing to vote for the first time in the 2012 elections, they would certainly have opinions about how the peace had been 'constructed' since 2002. When asked, "What do you think are the most important issues facing Sierra Leone" 94% said that the weak economy was either 'very important' or 'quite important'. On the issue of tension within society 57% believed *political* tension was either 'very important' or 'quite important', but fewer than 22% believed that *ethnic* tension was important and even fewer, just under 5% thought that *religious* tension was important. This is an important point as it shows that the students were able to distinguish between genuine ethnic strife and tension that was described as 'ethnic' but which was, in fact, politically motivated. This topic was the theme of Emerson's songs which were discussed above and is in line with the following finding on popular music.

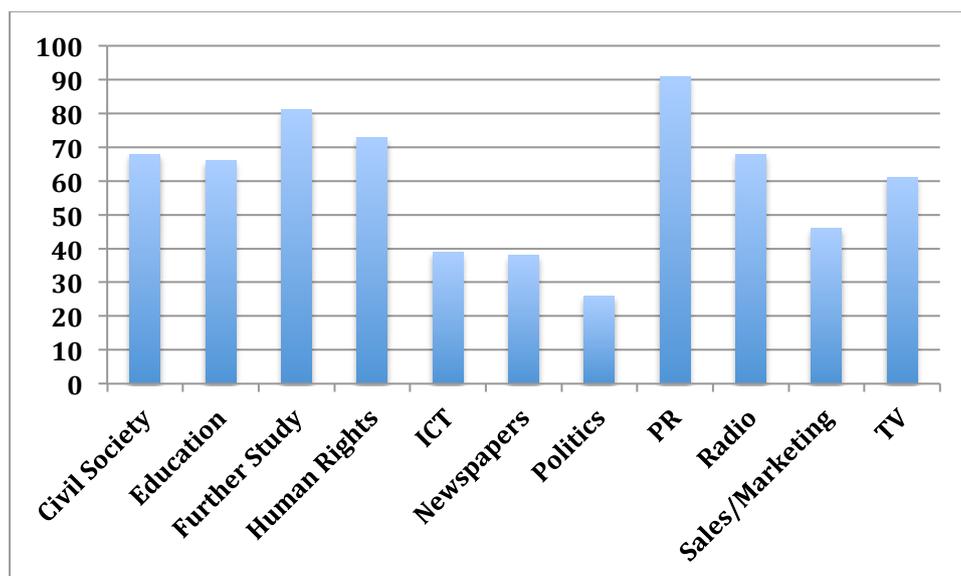
Unsurprisingly, perhaps, nearly 88% believed that youth unemployment was a pressing issue, with just over 93% highlighting corruption as a matter of the greatest concern. When asked how well the media were tackling these issues, 74% thought that newspapers were doing 'well' or 'extremely well', whereas 93% thought that radio was doing 'well' or 'extremely well'. In this area, popular music scored more highly than newspapers with nearly 83% of respondents believing pop songs covered important national news well compared to 53% for television, 32% for the internet and 16% for the cinema.

When discussing the topic of national unity since the end of the war in 2002, 49% thought the country is more united with 37% believing it is about the same and 14% believing it is less united. When asked, "which factors are important for holding the country together?", respondents were able to identify more than one option but the results are interesting in that a number of issues were rated equally highly:



**Fig 7.9 Important factors holding the country together**

Rated as least important were 'Loyalty to the President' at 68% and 'Sport' with 69%. Most important factors according to the students were 'Desire for peace' at 96%, the 'Desire for a better future' and 'Religion', both ranking 90%. Clearly, these young people believe that there is no single 'magic formula' for building national unity and it is interesting to see how highly religion was rated as a unifying factor.



**Fig 7.8 Future career choices amongst FBC Mass Comms students**

Finally, when asked about their future career plans, a surprising number of students were hoping for a career in public relations with 90% saying it was 'quite likely' or 'extremely likely' that they would choose a career in this field. This was due, no doubt, to the fact that many of the big international companies moving into the country opted for local PR representatives. The conditions of work were far better than in other areas of the media, the pay was higher and — more important — regularly paid. On the questionnaire the career question offered multiple options to respondents. Even so, the responses for other areas were not as high for PR. The option of going into newspapers rated 38% as "quite likely" or 'extremely likely'; radio 67%; television 60%; sales or marketing 46% and further study 81%.

This was a sobering thought. For years, the criticism of the country's media industry had been the lack of trained, educated journalists. Now, just as the university was turning out dozens of educated and trained journalists, the political economy of the industry was steering the majority towards public relations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has tried to paint a picture of the society into which the project to create a national public service broadcaster was launched. Sierra Leone is shown to be a society that is outwardly patriotic but where personal patrimonial loyalties still run deep. Everywhere, the blatant symbols of nationhood — the flag, the anthem, the rhetoric — are evident but the practicalities of true patriotism are scarce. There are few examples of individuals putting the national well being above their own desire for profit. Three examples were put forward: the highly anticipated 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence celebrations were dramatically cut back as a result of financial mismanagement; the election of the President of the Sierra Leone Football Association in this football-mad country descended into a vicious ethno-political slanging match; and the creation of a national public service broadcaster, the basis of this thesis, was perverted by narrow sectarian interests and greed.

Certainly, the evidence would seem to point to the need for a 'national conversation' about identity and nationhood. Such a radical re-examination of the country's notion of 'selfhood' requires safe platforms and arenas in which such explosive ideas may be discussed. In an oral/aural community such as Sierra Leone, where the illiteracy rate exceeds 60%, urban-based newspapers are not the answer. They merely 'super-serve' the political elite and the expatriate communities, overlooking the rural masses. Authentic discussion amongst the people needs to be grassroots-based and led with a national broadcaster integrating these smaller publics into one larger national unified public sphere which is "Conceptually...the right place for a public broadcaster to be" (Teer-Tomaselli 1996:2).

## Chapter 7 Serving the people: real world media in Sierra Leone

### Introduction

While the debate continues in academic circles about the effects of the media in peacebuilding and the transition to democracy (see for example, Price et al 2011; Schoemaker and Stremlau 2014) there is empirical evidence to show that at crucial points in Sierra Leone's recent history, media operations in different forms have influenced situations to some degree (Fourie 2007: 264; Ozoh 1995: 230; Taylor 1995: 214).

Here, I present three examples of media operations which, at different times, proved to be valuable sources of information and powerful mobilisers of the population. *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM* was the brainwave of the British High Commissioner and a local academic, Dr Julius Spencer. During the nine months of the military junta, while the democratically elected Kabbah government was in exile, Radio Democracy provided the people with important updates, assured them of international support and taunted the junta. Later, in the latter stages of the civil war, *Radio Moa* in the eastern district of Kailahun coaxed former combatants to come out of the bush and lay down their arms. Through dialogue and facilitation, it helped reconcile opposing groups and offered a platform for religious and cultural expression. The third example is *UN Radio*, formerly *Radio UNAMSIL*, which was the most popular aspect of the UN's peace operations in the country and which was later merged with the government owned SLBS to form SLBC.

One enduring challenge of the media environment in Sierra Leone is its hybrid modernity. So, I show how a filmmaker friend who produced a hard-hitting video film of great relevance to young people then hired a town-crier to advertise screenings around the town of Bo. Similarly, the newspaper industry in the capital Freetown is both bolstered and hindered by the tightly-organised Newspaper Vendors Association, many of whose members are illiterate and thus unable to read the newspapers they sell.

These examples are presented to show how positively Sierra Leoneans have responded in the past to media operations offering timely and relevant output. In addition, the public service mandate of a national broadcaster potentially offers equality of access to its output regardless of class, geography, education or status, a vital contribution to the peacebuilding — and nation building — agenda.

### ***Radio Democracy 98.1 FM***

The first example of positive media influence was during the period of the military junta, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council who seized power from the democratically elected Abdul Tejan Kabbah on 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1997. The coup was a major setback for the people of Sierra Leone who had, until then, endured years of war and had fervently hoped that the Abidjan Peace Accord between the RUF and the government and the election process which followed would finally end their troubles. The coup was led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma, freshly sprung from Pademba Road Prison in the centre of Freetown, who immediately took to the airwaves to announce what had happened and declared a dusk to dawn curfew. The President and his aides were forced to flee to neighbouring Guinea where they set up a temporary 'cabinet in exile' in the capital Conakry.

Peter Penfold, the British High Commissioner in Freetown at the time, was delegated to support the Kabbah government in exile in Conakry. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office was keen to restore democracy to the country based not only on the legitimacy of the 1996 elections but also on the expressed will of the people of Sierra Leone who showed their contempt for the coup by alternately staying away from work and protesting on the streets (2012: 50). In Washington DC, a crowd of 1500 expatriates and supporters demonstrated on the streets while back in Sierra Leone university students organised a nationwide strike against the junta with the support of different civil society groups (Gberie 2005:111). Penfold concluded that standing with Sierra Leoneans was the right thing to do. After discussing the situation with colleagues, he decided to fund "a clandestine pro-democracy radio station".

Julius Spencer, one of the country's leading academics and a seasoned newspaper editor was brought back from the US to set up the operation (2012: 51).

*Radio Democracy 98.1* as the new station was named was a huge success with the general public, many of whom opposed the AFRC regime. Broadcasting sixteen hours a day, it brought news of international support for Sierra Leoneans in their struggle and repeated calls for the junta to stand down (ibid). Julius Spencer told me that the station was based outside Freetown at the airport in Lungi, the scene of some of the worst fighting between the rebels and the ECOMOG troops sent to stabilise the country:

“We broadcast in the morning – the evening by the time we went to broadcast, the rebels started attacking the location. So for a few days, we had to be broadcasting under fire. We were in a tent and I wish I had been able to get that tent and keep it as a souvenir; there are bullet holes on the tent, and we had to actually lie down on the ground. I remember we had to try to do something to throw them off the scent because they were convinced we were there.

So at the height of the fighting, we shut down the mike so obviously gunfire wouldn't go through our playing music, and when the firing died down, I very quickly turned on the mike and said something like, 'we hear they are attacking Lungi but we are nowhere near there, we are broadcasting from another location.' And after a while, they got confused. They weren't sure exactly where we were and they were searching all over the place for us, checking, looking at houses, searching all over Freetown and trying to find the location of the radio station...in terms of reducing the morale of the Junta, we did so many things. For example, (the coup leaders) would be having a meeting at State House ...we could call people to get information ... and we would go and say they were having a meeting and discussing such and such, and they'd get scared and they'd abandon the meeting...

If the radio station hadn't come on, most people would have just given up because there had been coups before in the country and after a while, even if there are protests, they have died out and everybody had to go back to work and so on. But because of the radio station and the constant reminder that this coup was not going to last and that they were going to be thrown out, people should not cooperate with them,

people refused to cooperate. Teachers refused to go and teach, pupils did not go to school, shops and banks, most of them remained closed, for months on end” (Personal Interview).

Penfold testifies to the impact of Radio 98.1 but admits that the British government’s support had to remain secret for fear of reprisals taken against High Commission staff and property back in Freetown:

“Thanks to an effective network of informers in Freetown, mainly students, the station was able to report in detail on the activities of the AFRC and the RUF, highlighting their crimes and misdeeds... Radio 98.1 really got up the noses of Koroma and his cohorts. The junta was continually trying to discover from where the radio station was broadcasting. They warned people not to listen to it. One 80 year old woman was killed just for doing so. Along with the BBC’s *Focus on Africa*, Radio 98.1 became the main source of information to the Sierra Leone people about what was going on in their country and outside. It was a source of much strength and encouragement to the citizens of Freetown, who went to bed with their radios underneath their pillows to dampen reception, listening to Spencer and his colleagues”

(Penfold 2012: 51)

The great attachment to *Radio 98.1* demonstrated the appetite of Sierra Leoneans for information and how essential the media were and still are to the struggle for democracy in Sierra Leone. The state broadcaster failed to meet expectations as, once again, it became a mouthpiece for the powerful. After the AFRC cadres burst out of prison, their first stop on the way to State House was Broadcasting House to spread the news of what had happened. All through the dark months of the junta with its criminal excesses and random violence, Radio 98.1 continued broadcasting and giving Sierra Leoneans hope. When Kabbah was later restored to office on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1998 he credited the station for its role in his return:

“For example, the staff and management of FM 98.1 have demonstrated true patriotism. Not a single one of them is a member of my party, the SLPP....But because of their strong belief in democracy, and the ideals of national integration, they have sacrificed their professional pursuits and family commitments in order to defend and uphold the wishes of the people of Sierra Leone. Without exaggeration

I want to say that the men and women of FM 98.1 should be given credit for seventy per cent of the efforts we made towards the restoration of democracy and constitutional order in our country. We owe them deep gratitude” (quoted in Holmes 1999:149).

However, it was not without controversy: the station was accused by the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission of occasionally broadcasting inflammatory material which ‘created the context for mob justice’ (TRC Vol 2 Chap 2 §28 p 168). Factors explaining this might be the difficulty in verifying factual evidence during the period of the junta and also the period immediately after its removal when Freetown was caught up in a wave of anger and desire for revenge. *Radio 98.1* continues to broadcast today and is respected as a positive force in the country’s pluralistic media environment. It played a major role during the coverage of the 2012 elections as the broadcasting hub for the Independent Radio Network.

### **Eastwards to Kailahun: peacebuilding with Radio Moa**

For the purposes of my research, I felt it was important to travel outside Freetown in order to better understand the impact of the media on Sierra Leoneans and to gauge their media usage. I know from my own experiences at the BBC that messages and content generated at the metropolitan centre may be perceived differently the further they have to travel. One place I was keen to visit as part of my fieldwork was Kailahun in the far east of the country. It was the site of the first incursion by a group of rebels across the Liberian border on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1991 in the opening salvo of the civil war (Gberie 2005: 59). My neighbour Ernest Mannah grew up in one of the villages under attack and he described how his family and his neighbours were dumbstruck when they first heard the sound of guns:

“We stood still. We didn’t run at first because we did not know what war was...we had no idea. You see how peaceful life had been for us. It was only when we saw people falling on the ground that we began to understand what was happening. Then we ran to the forest to hide” (Personal conversation).

Ernest and his family eventually came as ‘internally displaced persons’, to use the official term, to take refuge in Freetown and have been in the capital ever since. He has since trained as an accountant but is also a self-taught film maker and one of the organisers of the Sierra Leone International Film Festival. Now married with a son, Ernest longs to go back and resettle in Kailahun but he admits it would be difficult to make a living. He described Kailahun before the war as ‘a completely different world’ to Freetown and often talked about how difficult it had been getting used to life in the capital.

Kailahun is just over 270 miles from Freetown and since independence has been loyal to the SLPP. This party affiliation was one of the reasons behind the APC’s Siaka Stevens uprooting the railway line that linked Kailahun district — and its voters — to the capital. German donor funds meant to build a network of tarred roads to replace the railway were diverted elsewhere under Steven’s kleptocratic rule and residents of Kailahun and its surrounding areas became increasingly isolated, looking more to Monrovia in neighbouring Liberia which could be reached by taxi in a day rather than to Freetown. Although Freetown was closer, the journey involved manoeuvring over abysmally bad ‘bush roads’, virtually unpassable in the rainy season (Gberie 2005: 34; Richards 1996: 43). I can personally testify to their dreadful conditions. I made the journey in January 2010 in the middle of the dry season. I travelled first to Kenema from Freetown which took three and half hours in a four wheeled drive vehicle belonging to a local NGO. I then stayed overnight in Kenema before taking public transport to Kailahun, in a converted Commer van with fourteen adults, three children and two chickens. Although conditions were dry, the roads were almost impassable in places. On several occasions, we the passengers were forced to get down and push the vehicle over some of the potholes it would not have managed when laden.

After nearly six hours, I arrived in Kailahun, aching and exhausted, covered in dust but with an insight into the degree of separation between this district town and the capital. The ‘integration of a society’ that Hippler describes as crucial to the success of the nation-building project had not taken place in

Sierra Leone (2005: 9). The transport and communications infrastructure was failing the people of the eastern region badly (Sesay and Huges 2005: 51). For example, back in 1992 the authorities in Freetown dismissed rumours of war in the east of the country for months and, in the absence of strong communication links, life continued as usual on the coast until the military coup of 29<sup>th</sup> April prompted a reassessment of the situation.

All through the war, Kailahun district was an operational base for the RUF and witnessed some of the fiercest fighting (Gberie 2005: 60). However as hostilities ceased, it was also the scene for remarkable acts of reconciliation facilitated by the local community station, Radio Moa 105.5. These came about after Foday Saguma, a member of the Civil Defence Force (CDF) and Idriss, a Revolutionary United Front (RUF) commander, devised a radio programme to persuade their former colleagues to come out of the bush and disarm. Saguma describes his initial hesitancy:

“I started to imagine how I could work with a former enemy but indeed we were able to work. But how did it happen? We were left on our own and we started to chat together...we came to realise in fact that we are relatives. I am from the Eastern Region, his father is from the Southern Region but his mother is also from the Eastern region, from the same town... so from that point he started to call me ‘Uncle’ and so he was my nephew... So, I started to imagine that this whole thing was a nonsense, that we were fighting against each other. This man was my nephew” (Personal interview).

Foday’s experience with Idriss was echoed many times during the period of reconciliation following the war. Sierra Leone is small, a little over 71,000 square km, with a tightly woven network of extended families and kinship ties. It was not unusual to find people from the same familial clan on opposite sides of the war, whether in the army, the Civil Defence Force or amongst the RUF, particularly in the latter stages when forced abductions of children and young people were common. Since the war was not fought along ethnic lines, allegiances and experiences cut across ethnic groupings. The pairing of Foday and Idriss to coax their colleagues out of the bush reinforces the belief of many media observers in Africa that in cultures where oramedia are strong, personal appeals via the media have a special resonance ( Awa 1995; Ozoh 1995). The respect accorded to Foday and Idriss by their colleagues was key

to initiating the disarmament process. Without those two leading the way, other voices might not have been so successful in persuading former combatants to give up their arms. As a result of its history and the strictly inclusive approach of Foday and his colleagues, Radio Moa enjoys great support amongst the community. I was shown a sheet of paper listing individual contributions:

- |                   |           |             |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1. Abdulai Lahai  | Farmer    | SLL 2000    |
| 2. Bockarie Amadu | Farmer    | SLL1000     |
| 3. Jue Abdulai    | Housewife | SLL 1000    |
| 4. Assie Sam      | Student   | SLL 500 ... |

and so on, up to thirty contributions of varying amounts. In front of the station, a piece of ground is used to grow pineapples as a supplementary source of income. Financial sustainability is a constant worry for community radio stations all over the world. and each must find their own solutions according to the social, political and economic context in which they are situated (OSISA 2013; SFCG 2012).

By coincidence, I met Christopher Hamblett who was stationed in Kailahun with the US Peace Corps during the 1980s and was on a brief visit. After his term in the Peace Corps was over, he had returned to Rhode Island to set up the *Foundation for West Africa* and raised funds for Radio Moa in its early days:

“The amount I raised totalled around \$15,000 and for what it does I think it’s a remarkable investment. To get people’s voices on the air that historically have never been heard...When Radio Moa started, Kailahun was in disarray. A lot of people were still too afraid to come back from refugee camps. It was finished, as someone said. There wasn’t much here in the way of food or services so this radio station really helped the process of bringing people home in a new and different way...It’s a community station that actually celebrates culture, traditional and indigenous culture, but they also really get at issues like what about our culture is great and what about our culture is problematic and even led to the conflict we went through?”  
(Personal interview).



**Fig 7.5 Radio Moya's broadcast studios in Kailahun District**

Hamblett touches on the desolation and despair of the residents of Kailahun during and after the war. And, once more, a radio station is seen to be instrumental in affecting a situation for the better. As with *Radio 98.1* discussed above, *Radio Moya* became a trusted source of information. Equally important, it opened the airwaves to citizens whose voices might not normally be heard on the government owned SLBS. On a number of occasions, *Radio Moya* facilitated processes of conflict management and reconciliation through dialogue. And these healing conversations were broadcast directly into people's homes, in local languages that made the voices seem even closer (Blankson 2005; Dalby 1981). The \$15,000 that was invested in *Radio Moya* to refurbish a building, install a studio, set up a transmitter and purchase other consumables represents extraordinary value for money when one analyses the 'cost per listener' rate against the sums invested over the life of the radio station (AFFRI 2008: 12; AGREN 2003: 1).

### **The UN and radio in Sierra Leone**

From its establishment in 1946, the UN has always had a Public Information (PI) division at its headquarters which, in the beginning, was ranked alongside key areas such as 'Security Council Affairs', 'Economic Affairs' and 'Legal Affairs'. Ingrid Lehmann, a former senior UN official with more than thirty five years' experience at UNHQ and in the field, defines public information as:

The policy and practices of the United Nations and other international organisations to disseminate their information materials (print, audio, visual) worldwide, through media contacts, direct mailing and a system of information centres in key capitals, as well as the field headquarters of peacekeeping missions (1998:4).

Significantly, she distinguishes between ‘public relations’, and ‘political communication’. Public relations implies the ‘intent to persuade and influence attitudes and behaviour’ whereas ‘political communication’ involves ‘the exchange of symbols and messages that have been shaped by and have consequences for international organisations and their field operations’ 1998:4-5. Crucially, communication in the field may have far-reaching implications, particularly in the volatile environment of a peacekeeping mission. Events in the theatre of operations and information and interpretation of those events will impact on the civilians caught up in the conflict, neighbouring countries, regional and international bodies as well as the troop-contributing countries (TCCs) — a vital constituency for the UN along with those countries who constitute the Security Council, the ultimate shapers of a peace mission’s mandate (op.cit:5).

There can be little doubt about the growing importance of the PI function. For example, the 2000 Brahimi Report on the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, a key document in the UN’s evolving peacekeeping strategy, declares that:

“(a)n effective public information and communications capacity in mission areas is an operational necessity for virtually all United Nations peace operations. Effective communication helps to dispel rumour, to counter disinformation and to secure the cooperation of local populations. It is thus essential that *every peace operation formulate public information campaign strategies, particularly for key aspects of a mission’s mandate*, and that such strategies and the personnel required to implement them be included in the very first elements deployed to help start up a new mission (§146 emphasis added).

The UN has had a presence in Sierra Leone in one form or another since the days of the NPRC regime when Captain Valentine Strasser requested ‘the

good offices' of the UN Secretary General in November 1994 to help in negotiations with the RUF, aimed at bringing the civil war to an end (S/1995/975 21 November 1995). By May 2000, however, the UN was facing a crisis of negative perception amongst Sierra Leoneans and other African populations in the midst of violent conflict, the international community especially human rights activists and even amongst the rebels and remnants of the AFRC who now believed they had the foremost global organisation at their mercy.

May 2000 proved a disastrous month for UNAMSIL. By the time the Secretary General had presented his report to the Security Council, the RUF had shown its contempt for UNAMSIL by obstructing the DDR process all over the country and engaging UN troops in skirmishes. On 2<sup>nd</sup> May, two DDR camps — at Makeni and Magburaka in the north — were destroyed (§59 S/2000/455 19<sup>th</sup> May 2000). That same day in Kailahun in the east, the RUF took thirty UN personnel hostage as well as the crew and passengers of a UN helicopter (op.cit: §60). As tension increased, rumours circulated that the RUF were preparing for another assault on Freetown. The UN spokesperson on the ground in Freetown was authorised by New York to make a statement confirming the imminent attack and the Americans started evacuating personnel. By the time UNAMSIL's military commander could confirm by air reconnaissance that no such attack was forthcoming, the damage to UNAMSIL's reputation was almost irreparable. On the streets of Freetown children were heard calling out 'UNAMSILLY' and the local press referred to the mission as "a toothless bulldog" or 'UNASTY' (Coker 2003: 3). The peacekeepers were known initially as 'beach-keepers' since that was where they seemed to spend a lot of their time. Paddy's Bar near the beach in the west of Freetown was frequented by the UN forces, and became known as the 'Second HQ of U-Nasty'" (Gberie 2005: 167).

There was no alternative: the UN mission needed both a rethink and a 'rebranding' in the eyes of the Sierra Leonean public. Between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> June, the Secretary General sent a high level multi-disciplinary assessment team to review UNAMSIL's operations, processes and procedures. The report

revealed a serious lack of cohesion within the Mission. Despite extensive briefings at Headquarters, there was no commonly shared understanding of the mandate or the rules of engagement. Significantly, it was recommended that the Mission's public information efforts and relations with the general public should be improved (§54 S/2000/751 31<sup>st</sup> July 2000).

Soon after, Margaret Novicki, an American former journalist with extensive experience in Africa was appointed as the Chief of Public Information and the mission's Spokesperson. Having one individual charged with this dual responsibility ensured a coherence in the management and dissemination of messages that proved transformative for the mission (Coker 2003:7; Hunt 2006: 32). Novicki re-organised the PI function and recruited staff for Radio UNAMSIL, the print unit and a multi-skilled Community Outreach unit. Radio UNAMSIL — 'The Voice of Peace' — under the management of Jamaican producer Sheila Dallas quickly went from broadcasting 8 hours a day to round-the clock output, seven days a week. This proved crucial in reaching combatants, especially the RUF, who would listen to radio throughout the night and absorbed the constant messages about disarmament and reintegration. UN investment in 'frequency boosters' to propel the FM signal over the country's hilly terrain meant that Radio UNAMSIL was covering 95% of the national territory. (Hunt 2006: 38).

Building on the oral traditions of Sierra Leone and communal methods of listening and sharing information, UNAMSIL's Community Outreach unit combined music, comedy, drama and sport to communities, refugee and demobilisation camps around the country with programmes carefully crafted for the audiences. On one memorable occasion, the unit arranged a music concert in Makeni in the north featuring the biggest pop star at the time, Jimmie B. UNAMSIL peacekeepers had by then been deployed to the area which was still occupied by the RUF. The atmosphere was still tense and there was nervousness and mistrust on all sides. In order to break down barriers, the Community Outreach Unit brought ten government ministers to the concert, the first time they had entered rebel territory. Alongside the ministers, the senior ranks of the RUF were invited. Both the RUF and the

ministers ended up dancing together on stage to the strains of *Salone, Mi Land* ('Salone, My Country'). This extraordinary event was captured on camera and broadcast on national television on a regular programme produced by the PI team (Coker 2003.6-7). Margaret Novicki credited the Secretary General with the approach:

“This kind of coordinated public information strategy was really Kofi Annan’s initiative. Before Annan, no-one in the United Nations thought seriously about it. Public perception of the United Nations mission is often as important in its ultimate success as the kind of resources available for it. And the singularly tragic event of May 2000 made this all the more compelling” (quoted in Gberie 2005: 171).

Slowly, attitudes towards UNAMSIL changed. Following the chaotic sequence of events in May 2000, the mission became more aggressive, engaging the RUF on a number of occasions and inflicting severe casualties (IPI 2003:77, quoted in Gberie). And crucially, the Security Council increased the number of troops on the ground to 23,000 — at the time, the largest ever UN peacekeeping force. This more forceful, authoritative approach resulted in a more effective DDR programme. By January 2002, 47,076 combatants, RUF, AFRC/SLA and CDF, had been disarmed with a total of 15,840 weapons and 2 million rounds of ammunition (§13 S/2002/267 14<sup>th</sup> March 2002).

On 14<sup>th</sup> May 2002, elections were held with an overwhelming victory for the SLPP under President Kabbah. Radio UNAMSIL provided 24 hour live coverage with their network of reporters around the country. By December the UN was already discussing plans for UNAMSIL’s gradual withdrawal and replacement by UNIOSIL (§1 S/2002/1417 24<sup>th</sup> December 2002). The successor mission was charged with, amongst other duties:

“promoting a culture of peace, dialogue and participation in critical national issues through a strategic approach to public information and communication, including through building an independent and capable radio capacity” (§1(a) (vii) UN Security Council Resolution 1620 (2005) 31<sup>st</sup> August 2005).

A survey carried out by Yale University on the attitude of Sierra Leoneans to UNAMSIL was overwhelmingly positive with 94% of those surveyed saying the station was 'good' or 'very good' at getting information out to the people (<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/lessons/>). The success of Radio UNAMSIL presented the UN with a dilemma that it had never before encountered: UNIOSIL represented the first time that a peacekeeping media operation had been funded beyond the life of the mission itself. Under Resolution 1620, UNIOSIL had been established for an initial twelve months. How could the UN withdraw from its media activities without leaving a vacuum in Sierra Leone's media environment? It was the first time that the Security Council had formally acknowledged the contribution and impact of a UN radio station in the peacebuilding environment and ordered that independent media development be made "a democratization priority" (Orme 2010: 55). By mid-2006, the SLPP Government had completed an assessment as a first step to drawing up a communication strategy which included transferring UN Radio to national ownership. The UNDP in Freetown approved \$500,000 to support the project. The Secretary General's report added:

"United Nations Radio currently produces programmes that are aimed at engaging all segments of the Sierra Leonean public in a national dialogue on critical issues of peace consolidation. *It is an instrument for building social cohesion and promoting a culture of dialogue, tolerance and a better understanding of the democratic process*" (§64 S/2006/695 29<sup>th</sup> August 2006, *emphasis added*).

Thus, there was wide recognition of the contribution that UN Radio had made to the country but now, the dilemma was how to preserve that legacy once the UN mission closed. It would take another five years and nearly \$4 million of public money before Sierra Leoneans and the UN came close to answering that question.

### **Sierra Leone's media landscape: where old meets new**

My research took me to the country's second city Bo, about 148 miles from the capital in the heart of the SLPP's southern heartlands. By contrast with the journey to Kailahun, the road to Bo was one of the best in the country and the journey from where I was staying took just under four hours in a four-wheel

drive vehicle. I was accompanying my friend and colleague, Abdul Karim Bah as he travelled around the country to publicise his film, *Babylon Illusion* which he had made to address the yearning of young Sierra Leoneans to go abroad. The term 'Babylon' refers to the ancient kingdom where the conquered Israelites were exiled and whose experiences were narrated in the Old Testament (see for example Psalm 137). By extension, 'Babylon' is the generic term used in Rastafarianism and reggae music to refer to the Western world as a place of exile for people of African descent. It is also used metaphorically to define the hellish existence of oppressed people everywhere (see Toynbee 2007).

Karim's film was shot on location in London and Freetown and was aimed at persuading young Sierra Leoneans that life abroad, specifically in the UK or US, was not necessarily better than life at home. Karim interviewed a number of Sierra Leoneans living in London who described the stark reality of their lives. One woman performed a litany of her financial outgoings:

"Mi council rent, mi poll tax, mi light bill, mi gas bill, mi water bill, mi television licence, mi travelcard, mi food bill...di money no deh! I go work three jobs. I don get a BSc in cleanin'!"

Another man in his thirties was living in a squat in Hackney. He had originally travelled to the UK on a tourist visa but had decided to stay illegally and painted a bleak picture of existing 'below the radar' of the immigration authorities. He was unable to find work as recent UK legislation dictated that he prove his legal status in the country. His passport had expired and he had no means of renewing it. He had neither the financial means to return home nor the desire to. He explained that his pride simply would not allow him to return as it would be tantamount to admitting failure before his family. The film lingered over the tiny details of his miserable existence in the condemned flat in which he stayed: the mouldy walls and lack of electricity, the rancid milk stored in a dirty, unpowered fridge, the rags under which he slept on freezing nights. Most poignant of all was the story of a young widow whose husband had died in his forties, exhausted by working long hours not only to pay his

domestic bills in London but also to supply the constant demand for money and consumer goods from relatives back home. She listed the requests:

“Send for me iPad, send for me Smartphone, send for me computer, send for me trainers. I get school fees, I get hospital bill...”

Karim’s intention was to inform young people that life in the UK or US was not the ‘bling-filled party’ they had been led to believe from music videos and interviews with star footballers. Simply getting to the US or UK would not necessarily change their lives for the better but would bring new and different challenges for which they were quite unprepared. Equally, he wanted to hold up a mirror to young Sierra Leoneans at home who would be putting the same material pressures on relatives living abroad as they would have done had they still been in the country. He wanted young people to think more positively about life in Sierra Leone, tough as it is. The answer, he believed, was not to run away but to stay and rebuild the country, their home. It was a strong, positive message with a sub-text of nation-building but it would only be effective if the film reached its target audiences: restless young men and women who were looking to escape what they saw as a hopeless future.

As the film was financed by the NGO Christian Aid, there was the required ‘official’ screening in the impressive auditorium of the British Council’s headquarters in Freetown, a beautiful building situated on Tower Hill, overlooking the sea. However, as a social activist and a resident of the East End of Freetown, the capital’s roughest and most deprived district, Karim knew where to find his potential audience. He had dozens of DVD copies of the film made and distributed them free to the ‘cassette boys’, young men who sold pirated copies of the latest releases from Hollywood and Nollywood — as the Nigerian film industry is known — around the streets of Freetown and the other urban areas. He went to the *ataya* bases, where youths gathered ostensibly to drink Chinese Green Tea and socialise throughout the day and night. A recent article suggested there might be as many as 1500 *ataya* bases around the country, with just over 500 in Freetown and its environs (globaltimes-sl.com 26/11/2013). Once amongst the youths, Karim would

show the film and conduct informal debates, answering queries and supporting individuals wherever he could.

His intention to publicise the film took him first to a popular community centre in Bo. There were no dedicated film facilities: simply a large empty room with chairs and a sheet stuck to a wall at the other end. The most surprising element for me was the way in which the event would be publicised around town: by means of a town-crier. I was bemused to sit in on the meeting in which Mohammed, the professional town crier was briefed about what was required. However, I was astounded to see Mohammed in action on the streets. Holding his carefully written notes in one hand and the loudspeaker in the other, he announced in grandiose tones the screenings that were to take place. His gestures and his mannerisms were so exaggerated that he was a spectacle in his own right, drawing interested onlookers wherever he walked. Karim and I accompanied him, with Karim answering queries from more interested bystanders. We walked along the busy streets in the city centre but not along the main street through the town which was teeming with market stalls, cars and *ocadas*, the motorcycle taxis which were the main source of income for the numerous former combatants in and around Bo. Any doubts I might have had about the wisdom of using a town crier were quickly laid aside by the size of the audience attending the screenings. It was explained to me that, apart from the fact that Sierra Leone is a predominantly oral society and that people prefer to be told information rather than read it via newspapers or flyers, newspapers were mainly a Freetown phenomenon. Equally, the war had disrupted the education of so many people, especially in the rural areas, that illiteracy undermined the capacity of large numbers of citizens to be informed through the print media. Hence, the popularity of performance channels for the conveying of information: dance, music, street art, film and, of course, town criers.

According to Wilson (1987), 'town-crier' is a popular misnomer for a traditional role which encompassed a range of activities in earlier times: "news reporters, correspondents...messengers, spokesmen, envoys, contactmen, couriers, postmen broadcasters, heralds..." (p 91). Wilson is critical of the basic

assumption amongst some development theorists that define such traditional methods of communication as 'impediments to change' and obstacles standing in the way of modernisation (p88). Despite the pace at which change was taking place when he was writing during the 1980s, he maintained that far from being unwelcome impediments, such traditional methods "essentially sustain the information needs of the rural" (ibid). Surprisingly, nearly thirty years later, a local filmmaker like Karim with an in-depth understanding of the communication needs of the local population still chooses to blend the old with the new to maximum effect.

Another striking juxtaposition of the old and the new awaited me in Bo. I was staying some miles outside the town centre with a friend who encouraged me to explore the surrounding area on foot. Reminders of the war remained on the landscape in the form of bullet holes in bridges and the occasional abandoned vehicle. Bo had been a centre for the civil defence movement under Chief Hinga Norman and had had to fight off a number of serious attacks. In addition, there had been a large displacement camp with up to 80,000 internal refugees at Gondama not far from the town (Gberie 2005: 86; Keen 2005: 134). I set off for my walk and after a while, I turned off the road and followed a path into the forest for about a mile. Everywhere I looked I was surrounded by the lush deep green of the tropical rainforest but in the distance, some way off, I could see a small clearing with a circle of huts. I made my way through the undergrowth and stopped when I reached the open space. What greeted my eyes was a small family settlement of a few hand built huts with grass roofs and a group of several generations busy with the tasks of the day.

The children were gathering wood, the father was attending to the crops in the area just behind the huts, the young mother was sweeping the ground in front while the grandmother stirred a huge pot over an open fire. Grandfather sat quietly, looking into the distance. In a seemingly bizarre juxtaposition, what I actually *heard*, looking at this typical rural scene, was the sound of the local radio station, Kiss FM blasting out music and advertising jingles. Regardless

of the 21<sup>st</sup> century soundtrack, the family extended the traditional courtesy and hospitality.

“*Bua*, Auntie!” came the traditional Mende greeting. “*Bua*” I responded. The father hurriedly stopped what he was doing and rushed over to pick up a wooden bench for me to sit down.

“You like Kiss FM?” I asked, pointing to the radio. “*Aaa boku, boku*”, (Very much, very much) said the father and the rest of the family nodded in agreement. The conversation that followed was friendly enough, if a little stilted due to my halting Krio and ignorance of the Mende language. I stayed another half an hour or so before leaving, anxious not to make my way back through the woods in the dark.



**Fig 7.5 Mohamed, the town crier in Bo**

While I was with the family, I felt like I was witnessing two worlds, usually separated by space and time, joined together in the here and now. And throughout my time in the country, I witnessed several such 'functional encounters' between the old and the new. When visiting the office of Mohammed Sheriff, I was shown the digital timer on his computer which alerted him, a devout Muslim, to observe the times of prayer throughout the

day. On another occasion, at the traditional wedding ceremony of my colleague Basiru, alongside the calabashes, the drums and bank notes tied to the bride's elaborate robes I noticed a cousin concentrating on capturing the scene on an iPad, thoughtfully brought from the US for the occasion (see Abu-Lughod 2012; Dussel 1995: 66).

### **Selling newspapers old-style**

Another more pernicious fusion of the old and the new is the continuing influence of the Newspaper Vendors' Association on the struggling print industry in Freetown. This well-organised trade union numbers some 200 members—the vast majority in Freetown — each of whom pay a monthly subscription of SLL 4,000. The vendors walk the streets of the capital, concentrating mainly on the affluent west and central business district, selling papers to passing motorists and pedestrians. The practical hardships facing the print industry have been analysed elsewhere (Bah 2007; Cole 1995; Sesay and Hughes 2005; Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006 and 2008; Wurie Khan 1998). For this study, I was more interested in the alleged stranglehold that the newspaper vendors have over newspapers. According to the editors of *Awoko*, *Concord Times*, *Premier News* and *Awareness Times*, it is a “serious love-hate relationship”, with newspapers relying heavily on the vendors to distribute their product. It is a business model that works strongly in the vendors' favour. The bigger newspapers are sold to the vendors for SLL 1000 but then sold on the streets for SLL 1500, giving the vendors a SLL 500 return with no outlay on tax, staff, rent, electricity or consumables. For the smaller newspapers, the model is even more stringent: the papers are distributed to the vendors who sell them for SLL 1000, retaining at least SLL 300 as commission. If a paper does not sell, it is returned to the editor, with no risk or penalty to the vendor.

The editors I spoke to claimed that the vendors are responsible for the absence of papers at the weekend because they only want to work Monday to Friday. Abdul Fonti of *Awareness Times* maintained that there are even vendors who contact editors to give them feedback on their stories and suggest future editorial lines. Kelvin Lewis of *Awoko* tried to break the

stranglehold by refusing to publish papers for an entire week in order to bring the vendors to the negotiating table regarding their commission. In addition, a number of papers tried to organise an alternative distribution system via supermarkets which has yet to make an impact on sales. Yet, it seems that the public is sympathetic to the vendors' cause and reluctant to move towards alternative methods. They prefer to support an individual vendor by regularly purchasing their papers from him, rather than supporting a marketing initiative that would remove the personal contact involved in the transaction, whatever the perceived impact (Personal interview).

Before the war, there had been reliable countrywide distribution but since the 1990s, it has become difficult to purchase up to date newspapers in some regions. *Awoko* now travels to Bo and Kenema by public transport and is usually available after midday. Although there have been tentative forays into the world of online journalism and news by SMS, newspapers remain an important news medium for Freetown's élite, especially the sizeable international community who cannot access local radio broadcasts in Krio. When I met the newspaper vendors, they were remarkably open about their retail methods and their unique insight into the local media scene. The Secretary General of the Newspaper Vendors Association (NVA), Alimamy Sesay, shared his views:

“In this country there are two types of readers, the APC and the SLPP. The SLPP opposition, they read more newspapers, they like papers. The APC, they don't like to read. In Sierra Leone, everybody likes politics. Without politics, your paper will never sell. They (the readers) don't like health, they don't like education, all they want to read is politics. When some papers deviate from politics, they find it difficult to sell” (Personal interview).

NVA Treasurer Ibrahim Sesay agreed, maintaining that the quality of debate was sometimes unsatisfactory:

“The journalists are divided, some the SLPP, some the APC. I believe that most belong to a political party. That is not good, you are not getting a balanced view. We tell them this is a noble profession, you should know what to write, not this one abusing this one and that one abusing that one. That is not good” (Personal interview).

I was surprised by the frank admission by all the vendors I spoke to that about 40% of their number are illiterate, and totally unable to comprehend the papers they are selling. Alimamy Sesay shrugged his shoulders:

“I can read and write so I read the articles every morning before I sell my papers. I know by the headlines which paper will sell. Yes, we have illiterates but they manage.”

Ibrahim Sesay believes that illiteracy is no bar to selling papers:

“When they get accustomed to the business, some illiterates know which papers are selling, better than we who can read and write. They have a gift from God. They see the headlines and they know”.

During my time in Freetown, I became friendly with a handful of vendors who gradually opened up to me. They would acknowledge that although vending was a decent and reliable way of making money, none of them wanted their children to follow in their footsteps. The money they earned enabled them to fund decent education for their families and hopefully, a way into the professions. As Alimamy declared to me one morning as I bought my papers:

“I have been a news vendor since 1985 but I don’t want my children to be news vendors. I want them to be educated. Where I find myself, I do not wish my children to come there.”

To date, there seems to be no way out of the impasse for the newspaper industry. Until wider distribution takes papers further afield, profits will depend on the efforts of the news vendors who, in their struggle to protect their livelihoods, enjoy great public support. So, an industry pressured by globalisation, experimenting with digital technology and an internet presence is tied to individual workers, some of whom cannot read what they sell, who tramp the streets of Freetown in all weathers and refuse to work at weekends.

Such functional encounters of the old and new — the town-crier publicising a film, Kiss FM in the forest, the digital call to prayer, the iPad and the wedding calabash and the street vendors holding the print industry to ransom — can probably be found in many developing societies where tradition meets technology. They undermine the notion of modernity as *linear* socioeconomic

and technical progression (Geschiere et al 2008:1; Inglehart 1997:11). Indeed, in the globalised context in which Sierra Leone finds itself, these incidents show that such progression is not even *uniform*. It is not simply a case of ‘the modern’ driving away all that is ‘traditional’, a view held by those who perceive modernity as a ‘temporal rupture’ opening up an abyss between ‘then’ and ‘now’ (Geschiere et al 2008 3). These encounters seem to indicate an agency on the part of the indigenous population to choose amongst the options that are available — whether old or new, traditional or modern — to create a cultural hybrid peculiar to a specific community in that time, in that place. As Pickering and Keightley observe,

“Modernity is the experience of life lived in fragments...This can create the sense of contemporary life floating free from the past, becoming temporally unmoored and adrift...Relinkings of past and present can be sought after and newly elevated symbolic importance may be attached to various forms of time’s traces in the present” (2006: 924).

Whether by default, through choice or necessity this ‘negotiating of modernity’ is a marked feature of life in Sierra Leone today. However, it should not be overlooked that in most of the above examples, there is a necessary negotiation around *inequality*. The town-crier is necessary because many people in Bo cannot read; the radio playing Kiss FM will grow silent when, during the ‘hungry season’, a choice must be made between food or batteries, and so on. It is easy to be seduced by the trappings of modernity into thinking that profound economic and social change has already taken place. As Geschiere et al point out, although academics may have disputed the notion of linear progression since the 1960s, it has remained “a basic feature of the thinking and practice of international donor agencies, African élites and people in the street” (2008: 3; see also Servaes and Verschooten 2008:43).

Such thinking hinders those charged with improving the quality of life in developing societies from truly comprehending the nuances of inequality. This is particularly relevant when discussing the issue of media provision: often the urban elite will become ‘super-served’ while the needs of the rural majority are overlooked. This was evident during the 1960s and 70s in newly independent

African countries with the rush to introduce television to the capital cities and their environs while overlooking the fact that radio had yet to reach large swathes of their populations (Bourgault 1995: 105; Tunstall 1977: 115). The phenomenon is still evident today with the 'dash for digital' in which the emphasis is on delivering ever greater connectivity to urban areas while not considering the developmental potential of consolidating radio and introducing new media into rural areas. Nevertheless, when the opportunity to gain access to new technology arises, Sierra Leoneans, like Africans elsewhere on the continent, are creative in their usage and "it suffices for a single individual to be connected for whole groups to benefit" (Nyamnjoh 2005: 205). For example, one mobile phone is enough to keep a whole community in contact with the outside world and radio and television consumption remain communal activities.

### **Mixed media, mixed messages?**

At some point in the 1990s, Sierra Leone earned the nickname 'the nation without a voice'. According to Cole (1994), the government owned radio and television had already been showing signs of disrepair by 1987. Television had been suspended in 1988 and by 1990, radio was more off-air than on (p47). Worn out parts, dilapidated transmitters, intermittent power supplies and lack of technical skill gradually took their toll. Instead of addressing this dire situation, the Minister of Information opted to encourage the setting up of a rival commercial radio station, FM94 alongside other ministers and senior civil servants. An inquiry report criticised his actions thus:

"It is lamentable that a Minister entrusted with the responsibility of broadcasting lent his support to a rival radio station (FM94) by being one of its shareholders; that Radio FM94 was exclusively commercial and fully functional, whilst the SLBS under his care remained virtually silent" (Government White Paper 1993:21, quoted in Cole 1994:48).

This Freetown bias of the media, run for and by urban elites with no concern for the information needs of the majority of the population left nearly three-fifths of the population in almost total media blackout (Cole 1995: 49). Against this paucity of information and news, a vicious civil war played out with

citizens having only the BBC World Service and later *Radio Democracy 98.1* to guide them (Mytton 2000: 22; Penfold 2012: 51; TRC Vol 3A Chap 2 § 105 p 65). This patchy media provision was one of the factors behind the decision in 2009 to merge the national broadcaster SLBS with the popular UN Radio to create Africa's second public service broadcaster after SABC (see next chapter).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown the positive role that media have played for the people of Sierra Leone in trying circumstances during conflict and immediately afterwards. Two local examples — *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM* and *Radio Moa* — were discussed alongside UN Radio, the media operation attached first to UNAMSIL, then UNIOSIL, the peace missions brought into to pacify the country after the civil war. All three initiatives were deemed to have brought much-valued sources of information and some comfort to listeners, desperate for updates and guidance. This selection of media operations was based on my own empirical observation and the recommendations of my interviewees. What is noticeable about these selected radio stations is their clear sense of purpose, responsible staff and management who, by and large, committed the station's resources to the fulfilment of its purpose rather than self-enrichment. Together with the keen appetite for information displayed by those who flocked to the screenings of Karim's film, the financial and material support in the community for Radio Moa, the hundreds of callers to UN Radio each week and the many hundreds of thousands of listeners around the country — all these would seem to indicate a hunger for a national independent public service broadcaster. PSB's universality of appeal and accessibility, the creation of a credible public sphere as well as the attention paid to minority groups and the commitment to 'inform, educate and entertain' were eminently suitable for the situation facing Sierra Leone in 2010 when the SLBC project was launched.

However, what must not be overlooked is the fact that none of these media initiatives discussed above, including Karim's film and Kiss FM, are in the

public sector. Although they deliver a clear public good — public service broadcasting — they are not publicly owned. The discussion on (neo)patrimonialism has demonstrated the “instrumentally profitable lack of distinction between the civic and the private spheres” (Chabal and Daloz 1999:6). Could it be that the above media organisations effectively fulfilled their public service remit precisely because they were *not* part of the public sector? This simple fact will take on greater significance as the narrative of SLBC unfolds.

## **Chapter 8 ‘Unhappy Marriage: the first year of the SLBC project**

### **Introduction**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2010, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon stood on the steps of Broadcasting House, President Koroma by his side and announced:

“SLBC is born from a marriage of UN Radio and the country’s state-controlled radio. It is a historic gift to every man, woman and child in Sierra Leone”.

Naturally, expectations were running high as UN Radio had been a popular feature of UN operations and the merger with the government owned SLBS was seen as one way of preserving it for years to come. In addition, it seemed natural that this newly created public service broadcaster should be positioned firmly in the public sector, with a Board of Trustees to guarantee its independence as laid out in the 2010 SLBC Act. However, within months, the UN’s carefully drafted technical roadmap was abandoned by the Board, senior management and government officials in favour of a strategy more in line with the ruling APC’s ambitions. Far from being an effective, functioning public sector institution, in time SLBC was displaying the worst traits of neopatrimonialism while the UN management seemed satisfied to stand by and watch. It soon became apparent that this was an example of elite capture on a grand scale to the dismay of many Sierra Leoneans, especially those, like myself, who had hoped that out of the ruins of the civil war, a new voice of the people would emerge to take the country forward. Using an autoethnographic approach supplemented by document analysis, I tell the story of the first twelve months of the SLBC saga.

### **Welcome to Cabenda Lodge: four-star peacebuilding**

A website promoting tourism in Sierra Leone describes UNIPSIL’s location:

*“Hotel Cabenda is a delightful escape from the bustle of Freetown, just ten minutes drive from the city centre or the heliport. Nestled on the hillside above Congo Town, the hotel offers spectacular views of Whiteman’s Bay and Central Freetown from most of its elegantly appointed rooms. Its secluded location, and mature tropical gardens,*

*combine to give the peacefulness of a country estate and home away from home – wherever you hail from”.*

(<http://www.seastravel.com/africa/sierraleone/hotelcabenda>)



*(Photo: Seas Travel)*

**Fig 8.1 Grounds of Cabenda Lodge, UNIPSIL’s base**

The first time I had visited Sierra Leone back in 2005, the UN mission at the time (UNAMSIL) had been based in the four star Mammy Yoko Hotel near the beach. With the passage of time and the evolution of the peacebuilding mission — UNIPSIL — it was decided that the reduction in staffing called for smaller, cheaper premises so the UN headquarters in Sierra Leone were moved to another four star hotel — Cabenda Lodge — roughly a twenty minute drive from downtown. I had already visited the premises during my field trip back in January 2010. The woman running UN Radio had invited me to lunch to discuss some training she wanted me to deliver. We chatted, overlooking the pool and gardens. I had no idea that peacebuilding could be so luxurious. As I feasted on fish and fresh fruit salad I wondered if I would ever land a UN job. As my grandmother often said, “Be careful what you wish for”. The next time I sat beside the swimming pool nearly seven months had passed. My lunch companion had left, driven out by the conflicting pressures of working for the UN and dealing with the project in hand, namely the merger of UN Radio and the government-owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service.

She was instrumental in my recruitment, strongly recommending me for the post she was keen to vacate.

**The Project: creating Africa's second public service broadcaster**

For two years, the UN, the Government of Sierra Leone, international and national stakeholders had been discussing the fate of UN Radio and its transfer to national ownership. More strategy documents were drawn up, more meetings were held until March 2009 when the worst outbreak of political violence since the war underscored the fragility of the peace in Sierra Leone and focused attention on the role of the media in fomenting conflict. Between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> March and in the run-up to a local council by-election in Pujehun in the south, there were violent clashes between supporters of the SLPP and APC, leading to the postponement of the by-election. A few days later, the SLPP headquarters were surrounded by an angry crowd who ransacked the building, attacking SLPP supporters inside. It is alleged that some women were raped or sexually assaulted. The police were apparently overwhelmed and ill equipped to deal with the situation ((§ 3-4 S/2009/267 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2009).

At the root of the problem were the provocative broadcasts from the local radio stations owned by the two main parties, the APC and the SLPP (§5). As the violence spread around the country and the broadcasts became even more inflammatory, the Vice President Sam Sumana — the President was temporarily out of the country — suspended the stations' operations from 14<sup>th</sup> March until further notice. This suspension was later confirmed by the IMC and their licences revoked. The international community led by the Executive Representative of the Secretary General (ERSG) immediately rushed to contain the situation, initiating dialogue between the two major parties and their followers. The result was a Joint Communiqué signed by the party leaders on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2009. Both party leaders addressed the underlying causes of the conflict and committed to work together to establish:

“an independent public broadcasting corporation for Sierra Leone that operates on the basis of internationally accepted standards and gives equal access to the views and arguments of all political parties (§7 *Joint Communiqué 2009*).

Following the suspension of the party political radio stations, the Cabinet formally approved draft legislation for the creation of an autonomous independent public broadcasting corporation (*§54 S/2009/267 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2009*). By the end of 2009 the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation bill was before Parliament. Subsequently, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation Act was passed unanimously with the new entity— merging the former Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) and UN Radio — due to begin broadcasting on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010, the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the country's independence (Orme 2010: 51).

No two entities could have been more different. SLBS as of September 30<sup>th</sup> 2008 had 176 members of staff but no details were furnished to a World Bank audit team concerning its capital base, its turnover or the government equity holding even though the Government of Sierra Leone owned it 100%. In 2000, a KPMG audit reported that most of the staff lacked the experience, training and skills required in a dynamic and financially viable broadcasting institution (quoted in Thomas 2007:182). SLBS radio output stood at 18 hours daily with 50% music and approximately 23% news, current affairs and phone-ins (Thomas 2007: 241). SLBS television began transmission at 6pm every evening until midnight. It relied heavily on foreign produced programmes e.g. CNN, sporting events and films and was prone to government interference (Wai 2002:177).

UN Radio employed 18 members of staff, one international station manager and 17 Sierra Leoneans (Smith 2007:9-10). It was broadcasting 24 hours a day, seven days a week with six hours daily input from Fondation Hironnelle's Cotton Tree News project based at the Fourah Bay College campus. Estimated annual running costs for UN Radio were approximately \$635,000 though it was difficult to quantify in cash terms the administrative, technical and personnel support provided by the UN system while it operated as part of UNIOSIL. This included access to a UN helicopter, 24/7 security, fuel, electricity, mobile bandwidth and telephony (Smith 2007:7).

A Transitional Management Team had been set up to begin the process of merging the two bodies but little progress was made beyond auditing staff members in SLBS and determining termination payments.

### **The Job: Management Advisor, Radio or Media?**

Several issues need to be highlighted here. First, my job title at the point of recruitment was 'Radio Management Advisor', a senior professional post in the 'Public Information' (PI) category of UN employment. The varied duties as listed in the job description below called for a number of different skills not usually found amongst Public Information Officers (PIO). I was fortunate that my 'portfolio' career to date included the necessary management, media and organisational experiences that the post required. Besides which, the instability and chaos that were to come required me to call upon skills I had not used for a while, such as contract drafting and payroll administration.

#### **PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER (RADIO MANAGEMENT ADVISOR) P4**

##### **Responsibilities**

Under the direct supervision of the Chief of the Democratic Institutions Unit, the Radio Management Advisor will contribute to the activities of UNIPSIL related to the complete handover of the UN Radio and its assets to the newly established Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) and help build the capacity of the SLBC, including through the following: Act as overall focal point for all substantive, technical, logistical, and personnel aspects for the successful completion of the handover of the UN radio and all assets to the SLBC, including harmonization of programming; Act as liaison with regard to the day-to-day relations between UNIPSIL and SLBC; Support the SLBC board in the establishment of SLBC structures and business processes; Monitor the work of the SLBC to ensure that it continues as an independent public broadcaster and an accurate source of news and information for the people of Sierra Leone; Provide and facilitate as necessary capacity building support, and training to the SLBC board and staff; Facilitate regular meetings and contacts between key stakeholders, including SLBC, the IMC, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Fondation Hironnelle, BBC World Service Trust, donors, Cotton Tree News, the Hironnelle Foundation, and Fourah Bay College; Work in close collaboration with UNDP-SL in the implementation of existing projects to support the establishment and functioning of the SLBC; Create, develop and manage funding proposals to ensure the sustainability of the SLBC as an independent public; Coordinate the work of technical consultants and expertise temporarily contracted by UNIPSIL to support the establishment and effective functioning of SLBC.

#### **Box 8.1 LM's Job Description**

As presented here, it appears that the core responsibilities of the post had already been approved by the Transitional Management Team, the government and SLBC. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Those colleagues who had been recruited prior to my arrival described how the Chairman of the Board and the Government had considered any UN involvement beyond that of 'paymaster' as redundant. I was not expected to contribute much.

In a matter of weeks, my job title had morphed into 'Media Management Advisor', an indicator of the 'mission creep' of the SLBC project. 'Mission creep' is a military term meaning 'the phenomenon in which military operations expand beyond the original mission resulting in additional military tasks which directly conflict with the intended military and political outcomes' (Beech 1996:3). Lind (1995) refers to catastrophe following early success in achieving narrowly defined goals when ambitions expand (p20). This perfectly captures the later confusion and collapse of the SLBC project. As explained above, the UN had committed to merging the staff and assets of its successful radio operation with the government owned SLBS to create a national public service broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation. UN Security Council Resolution 1620 [31<sup>st</sup> August 2005 §19a) (vii)] had committed UNIOSIL, the preceding peace mission to UNIPSIL, to:

promoting a culture of peace, dialogue and participation in critical national issues through a strategic approach to public information and communication, including through *building an independent and capable public radio capacity* (emphasis added);

The activities of the UN's hired specialist team were geared towards building an administrative and technical structure for a 'corporation', of which radio was simply one part, albeit the most effective part in terms of communicating to the majority of Sierra Leoneans. Gradually, over the coming months, the project became more and more laden down with the previously unstated ambitions of the government: rebranding the country internationally, expanding programming around the clock and opening a second television channel. These add-ons combined with the predatory nature of certain

political actors at ministerial and cabinet level eventually led to the project's collapse.

Secondly, the attitude and approach of the UN project team was purely technical. For my part, I considered that I had been employed for my professional expertise and I committed myself wholeheartedly to working with my colleagues to produce what I felt was the best possible outcome for the people of Sierra Leone. I fervently believed that if SLBC could be transformed into a successful independent public service broadcaster, it would positively influence not just the national public sphere and media landscape but also the public sector. Open recruitment, transparent staff management, credible and honest financial procedures — all these could serve as an example to other public enterprises. It would also enhance the government's efforts towards attitudinal change, a key element in its governance programme. However, this technical team brought together to work on a technical project was operating in a *political* mission. Although there was a significant level of support for the project's stated objectives at the highest levels in UNIPSIL, amongst the diplomatic community in Sierra Leone and back in UN headquarters in New York, when the first cracks began to appear because of clear technical lapses, no-one was willing to expend political capital to steer the project back on-track.

A final point worth noting is that during my field trip to Sierra Leone (November 2009 to January 2010), I had met with the Acting Director General of SLBS, Ivan Ajibola Thomas. His substantive post was Director of Public Education and External Outreach at the Anti-Corruption Commission where he had set up the public relations department. Previously, he had worked at SLBS for more than twenty years as a senior producer, drawing praise for his frontline reporting during the civil war. Later he had pursued a PhD at Leicester University on the topic of the changing media landscape in Sierra Leone. The announcement of his temporary appointment on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2009 was made by the National Commission for Privatisation in consultation with the Government and the Ministry of Information. During my field trip, he had been especially welcoming to me as a fellow media researcher and granted

me access to SLBS's headquarters to come and go as I pleased. In return, I carried out a number of training sessions with staff and management on the role of a public service broadcaster. Privately, Ivan confessed that although he enjoyed the challenges of the post immensely, he was facing increasing pressure from 'the men in the ministry' to hand over SLBS's commercial income. He spoke of the angry phonecalls from State House berating particular reports or reporters. In the face of growing hostility, he never wavered. He stood his ground and defended his staff, earning their deep loyalty. However, his reluctance to comply with the 'Big Men' and their demands eventually cost him the job. When the permanent post was advertised, despite his experience, his insight and strategic input, he was passed over.

On my arrival in Freetown I was disappointed to hear that he was no longer with the corporation: his replacement as Acting Director General was a former head of the National Power Authority who had previously been implicated in a scam involving the Nigerian government. A contact in the World Bank informed me that the episode had cost the Sierra Leone Treasury approximately \$30 million.

### **The UNIPSIL Project Team**

By the time I arrived in Freetown, UNIPSIL had already set up a team of specialist consultants whose sole focus was to put in place the different 'pillars' of a corporate structure for the new broadcaster. Leading the team was George K, a senior US consultant with many years experience in Africa and South Asia. He had worked with another American media development consultant from New York on drafting the legislative structure, the funding bids and the proposed business plan. Together they had looked at international best practice in public service broadcasting around the world and had drawn up a blueprint including a five year financial forecast.

The human resource aspect of the project was managed by Ramira M, a Kenyan Muslim woman now settled in South Africa. She was an

internationally renowned consultant who had won an award for her work on a culture-change programme for Kenya Airways. Her experience and insight in the African context enabled her to incorporate a cultural sensibility alongside corporate pragmatism. We would spend hours discussing staff developments at SLBC and she would point out whether my expectations were realistic or hopelessly misplaced “Western assumptions”. By the end of her three month contract, she had produced two HR manuals, one for staff and one for managers, aligning both international best practice and local labour laws; she had researched and written more than eighty job descriptions including key competencies and personal specifications; she had compared scores of job descriptions and responsibilities at all levels within the Sierra Leonean public sector to arrive at a salary scale for SLBC that was reasonable and transparent. Finally, she drew up a step-by-step schedule for recruiting all posts, starting from the placing of announcements in the press to the signing of contracts for the successful candidates.

Donald S, a British broadcast engineer who had worked off and on in the country for nearly ten years was brought in to supervise the technical aspects of the project. Shortly after I arrived, he undertook an intensive countrywide tour of all SLBC’s technical facilities to determine the most efficient and cost effective method of boosting its signals. Accompanied by three of SLBC’s own engineers, he inspected the regional offices and transmitter sites and produced a detailed report which was presented to the Board of Trustees and management. It was for them to choose the most appropriate method for enhancing the quality of signal, based on this report. Donald had a real love for the country, demonstrated by the fact that he had invested in Capital Radio, one of the more successful local radio stations based in Freetown. Donald’s professional judgement was highly respected by SLBC’s engineers who often confided matters to him which they would never have revealed to me as a UN employee.

One of the most formidable tasks facing the team was the reform of SLBC’s finances, a project awarded to Derek B who had established a successful accountancy firm downtown with his brother. It was their wish to see a new

generation of home grown public sector accountants take the place of the old 'book keepers' who were used to simply 'drawing up' accounts to match whatever funds were left after mismanagement, corruption and kleptocratic excesses. As a government owned entity, there had been no financial controls or monitoring at SLBS before the merger. It was impossible to gauge the true level of income and expenditure as the book keeping process was unlike any modern accounting procedure. It was decided that the most practical way to tackle these longstanding practices was to hire a local expert— in this case Derek B — who understood the 'traditional' way of doing things but who was also proficient in modern financial management practices.

In tackling the financial operations of SLBC, I believe that Derek had the hardest job of all. I later understood that he had received veiled threats for striking at the most sensitive part of the organisation: the money.

Nevertheless, he eagerly set about his task and produced a set of financial guidelines and principles to move from public sector cost based bookkeeping to a modern computerised system of financial management linked to the HR recording system. Derek told me that on many occasions those SLBC staff who resisted change would sit back and mock his efforts, saying "*You go tire! you go tire!*", meaning, "You'll get exhausted and fed up soon enough!" He was at the office from eight in the morning, often until seven at night. He also worked weekends. Naturally, he was tired but the idea that he was contributing something important kept him going. It certainly wasn't the money as the UN fees for local consultants were a fraction of what he earned in his private practice.

Despite weeks of enduring snide comments, obstruction and threats, Derek managed to produce a ninety page manual on financial principles, reporting and management procedures that reflected international best practice. He had also attempted to introduce the staff in the accounts office to the principles of modern financial management but they were unwilling to learn. The former SLBS had not even practised double-entry book keeping, the most basic method of recording credits and debits; there had been no rationalisation of

income and expenditure and it was unclear at any one time how many staff were actually formally employed and the total cost of the wage bill.

At the time of the merger, SLBS had yet to enter the digital age. There were no IT systems in place whether for communication or the management of information in finance and personnel. It was quickly agreed therefore that installing an intranet, email and a website was a priority. George, the team leader oversaw all aspects of IT with the assistance of Yusuf who was responsible for the practical installation work. He spent his time on SLBC's premises laying cables, testing connections, clearing up viruses and installing the basics for a modern IT system. However, like Derek, he also suffered as a Sierra Leonean. Access to the internet was a novelty to the SLBC staff in New England but unfortunately, they lacked the discipline to use the system responsibly. The constant use of infected memory sticks by reporters, producers, freelancers and even visitors meant that viruses regularly brought the system to a halt. Yusuf then had to go round individual computers and 'debug' them. Precious bandwidth was taken up with checking *YouTube* and *Facebook*. On one occasion, Yusuf had to write an official letter of complaint after he had been verbally abused for remonstrating with a member of staff who was downloading a porn movie in the main news editing suite in the middle of the day. Fortunately, for every SLBC employee who sniped at and refused to co-operate with Derek or Yusuf, there were others who encouraged and supported them. We, the international members of the team, were rarely shown the levels of animosity that our local colleagues endured, an indicator, perhaps, of the underlying dynamics of Sierra Leonean society where great value is placed on loyalty (Bolten 2012; Ferme 2001).

It had always been a key part of the project to recruit a new team for SLBC, made up of the best talent from around the country and in the diaspora. Naturally, this would mean that a large proportion of the present staff would lose their jobs. As locals recruited by the UN, Derek and Yusuf were seen by some to be partly responsible for the imminent "sackings" and so received the emotional backlash of those who felt 'betrayed' by fellow Sierra Leoneans for the sake of 'the white man's dollar'.

### **Looking for leaders: appointing the Board and senior managers**

The first significant appointment was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Septimus Kaikai on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2010. A native of Kailahun in the east of the country, he had been a tenured professor of economics at Catonsville Community College in Maryland for 29 years when he answered the call from President Kabbah back in 1997 to return to serve his country (*Baltimore Sun* 1/7/1998). Unfortunately, this was shortly before the AFRC's military coup and Kaikai was forced to flee to Guinea with the President and the rest of the cabinet. Following the restoration of democracy after the war and Kabbah's victory in 2002, Kaikai served as Minister of Information and Communications in the SLPP government, a period during which the incorporatisation of SLBS was often discussed but never accepted. Since Kaikai had been a prominent member of the opposition government, his appointment seemed to confirm the non-partisan nature of the new corporation.

§3 (1) (b) of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Act 2010 states that the Board of Trustees should be made up of representatives from different areas of civil society, 'elected by their respective governing bodies'. These groups were the Council of Paramount Chiefs, the Inter-Religious Council, the Women's Forum, the Sierra Leone Bar Association, the Engineering Department of the University of Sierra Leone, the Youth Council, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and Civil Society Sierra Leone. Although the different bodies nominated their respective representatives, the Minister of Information Alhaji Ibrahim Ben ('IB') Kargbo took it upon himself to vet their suggestions, even though it was up to Parliament and ultimately the President to approve.

In the case of the SLAJ nominee, Julius Spencer, Kargbo vigorously disapproved. Spencer had himself had been Minister of Information for the SLPP before Kaikai and was widely respected for his work with Radio Democracy 98.1. The reason given for rejecting Spencer's nomination was that he was Chief Executive of Premier Media Consultancy and himself a newspaper proprietor and owner of a radio station. Kargbo said it was inappropriate to have someone with such a conflict of interest on the Board of

the national broadcaster. My personal opinion is that Kargbo was reluctant to have such an experienced businessman with independent editorial judgement sitting amongst the Trustees: Spencer would have contested rigorously some of the short-sighted editorial decisions and lax financial practices of the Trustees. SLAJ insisted that Spencer was their choice and the impasse continued for months until a rather more placid nominee who was acceptable to the Minister could be found.

Early on, it became clear that the individual Board members did not understand their roles or their responsibilities. As a gesture of goodwill and support, the BBC World Service Trust had brought over an experienced consultant and former Controller of Editorial Policy at the BBC to train the Board members ahead of SLBC's launch. The original plan was to deliver the Board's training over two sessions with the first session looking at the issues of governing programme content in public service broadcasting. There were sections exploring accuracy and impartiality; guidance was given on protecting minors and the privacy of individuals and so on. The problem was that the second workshop on the more practical aspects — what does a Board actually do? — never took place due to an administrative oversight so the Trustees remained confused about the true nature of their role, governance and oversight. As a result, the Trustees arrogated to themselves responsibility for major decisions on staffing and finances but as they met only once a week, the corporation was frequently put on hold waiting for the board to make a decision. Some weeks there was no quorum, so decisions were postponed. Yoshi S, my UNDP colleague and myself were quizzed for nine hours over three separate Board meetings over three weeks about past project expenditure. We were accused of spending money frivolously without the Board's knowledge or consent. No matter how much we tried to explain that items like the refurbishment of the ground floor in Broadcasting House and the Board Room itself and equipment procurement had been mutually agreed with SLBC management, the Trustees, spurred on by Kaikai, accused us of lying and wasting funds on consultants. It soon emerged that part of the difficulty was the inability of some of the Trustees to understand the accounts

that were presented. Kaikai, who was well versed in accounting matters, had chosen to misrepresent our case to his colleagues.

### **The Management**

§13 of the SLBC Act states that the Director General shall be responsible for “the day to day management of the corporation and the administration, organisation and control of the other staff of the corporation” [3 (a) (b)]. It is the key position in the Corporation requiring an individual with a keen editorial sense and a deep understanding of and commitment to the public service ethos. Also, courage is needed to stand up to aggrieved politicians and ‘big men’ unhappy with hirings and the output. The first Director General of SLBC needed to be a figure with vision, exceptional leadership qualities and a degree of business acumen. There were, undoubtedly, a number of Sierra Leonean men and women at home and in the diaspora who possessed these qualities but they were never seriously considered, even if they had expressed interest by applying for the job, as had Ivan Ajibola Thomas.

Instead, it was Elvis Gbanabom Hallowell who was selected to lead the SLBC into a new age of public service broadcasting. He hailed from the same region as the President and some people say that this was why he was selected for the job. There were rumours that their fathers had been close. He was a poet of some renown and when things became difficult he would lock himself away in his office writing poetry. Once, I was alarmed to see him putting the finishing touches to his latest collection while chairing a workshop on SLBC’s role in the forthcoming elections. The required qualifications for the Director General’s post included a Master’s Degree in media management or a related field and at least ten years’ experience in broadcast management.

Gbanabom, as he preferred to be known, had neither. He had, however, run a newspaper in Freetown which had closed several years earlier, leaving the staff unpaid. He had also worked as Country Director for the Canadian NGO, *Journalists for Human Rights* at their office in Freetown where his contract was not renewed due to “worrying gaps in the accounts” (*confidential source*). He had plenty of ideas but lacked the necessary technical understanding and production experience to see them realised in any meaningful way. For

example, he was keen to see drama introduced into the schedule but had no concept of the cost or production 'run-up' time. Not wishing to burden himself with the responsibility of supporting the national drama scene, as a short term alternative, he commissioned the repeated showing of two much-hyped, lowbrow soaps, *Second Chance* from Brazil and *Jewel in the Palace* from South Korea. Similarly, the early evening schedule was peppered with phone-in talk shows like *The Love Factor* discussing relationships or dated foreign documentaries on 'African' topics, clearly not aimed at a local audience.

The Deputy Director General, Sanna Samura was a retired inspector of schools whose only media experience was as a one-time member of a board for the nearby community radio station in Kabala, in the north. When he was appointed, there was more of a media splash than for the announcement of the Director General. He was described as a "true son of the soil" which meant he never forgot his ethnic or political roots. It was also a coded sign to the APC faithful in the north that the government was looking after its own. My colleague George had been accorded 'observer status' and had sat in on the interviews for the post of Deputy Director General. He was dismayed at Mr Samura's appointment and immediately wrote to the heads of UNIPSIL and UNDP:

"In the interview, (Samura) did not understand the concept of being a team player when asked the question by the Board. Other candidates were much better qualified and did better in the interviews. Out of the various key responsibilities listed in the job description, he has no experience that would indicate he has the capacity to perform them... His was the worst interview of the DDG candidates... At this stage, I would suggest that, rather than embarrass the Board by asking them to withdraw the name, that they continue with the appointment, but to underscore that the appointment must be probationary and that he must be evaluated, as should the DG, in three-months' time, and again after 6 months. Based on, what I assume will be poor performance, he can be terminated, and then they can re-post and search for a DDG." (Confidential document).

Needless to say, there was no probation period and when I left Sierra Leone nearly three years later, Mr Samura was still happily settled in his comfortable

office, receiving guests and relatives, with his overflowing in-tray tucked away discreetly in a corner on the floor.

When Mr Samura first came down to Freetown, he brought twelve relatives and friends who were immediately found 'freelance' jobs within SLBC, off the official payroll but at much higher rates than regular SLBC staff. They were strategically placed in the newsroom, the HR department and marketing. Thus, the party faithful were able to monitor which news stories were being produced, who was being hired or fired and where the most fruitful openings for creaming off advertising revenue could be found. Not only did this depress the former UN staff who had previously worked at SLBS; it also reinforced the 'civil servant mentality' amongst existing SLBS staff. In the face of such blatant flaunting of the basic rules of public service broadcasting regarding open, meritocratic recruitment, workers realised that the rhetoric might have changed but in their everyday reality, it was business as usual.

As a representative of the UN, I was allowed to observe the interviews for the Directors' posts in Media and Public Affairs, Engineering, Human Resources, Finance and Marketing. Apart from Human Resources, Engineering and Finance, the eventual appointees were broadly disappointing. Thomas Sowa, the man selected to become Director of HR was an honest and meticulously organised professional who had returned home after a successful career in health care management in the US to take up this post. He was one of SLBC's best assets but later became increasingly marginalised because he was a southerner, and therefore perceived by State House and more partisan staff to be an SLPP supporter. The Board even managed to recruit a Director of Marketing with no previous experience in marketing: she had been working for Islington Council selling parking permits. It later transpired she was the niece of the Minister of Information.

### **Problems with the output**

Although the other Trustees had been nominated by their various organisations and approved by Parliament, they seemed to accord an

unhealthy and unhelpful degree of deference towards the Chairman. This was partly due to Kaikai's age and the respect traditionally given to seniors in African societies. Nevertheless, there were times when the attitude of the other Board members seemed overly trusting, subservient even. Such an atmosphere did not facilitate open discussion about important matters of national interest. For example, shortly after I arrived there were two bad examples of programming which — in a fully functioning public service broadcaster — would not have been allowed to proceed.

The first was the broadcast of the long awaited Africa Cup of Nations Group G qualifying match between Sierra Leone and Egypt in Cairo's International Stadium on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2010. Despite the fact that the Sierra Leone Football Association and the relevant staff in SLBC had known about the match for months, no technical or administrative preparations had been put in place. It is customary for national broadcasters to be allowed to show Africa Cup matches without charge. However, instead of going through the legal channels and requesting an official 'feed' of a signal from the match, SLBC staff adjusted their aerial to pick up the signal from another broadcaster. Not only was the quality unacceptably bad but the manoeuvre also interrupted programming either side of the match, resulting in blank screens. Two additional factors rendered a bad situation worse: the month of September at this latitude is known to bring violent electric storms and a bolt of lightning struck the aerial, putting it permanently out of commission. Secondly, the aerial was struck minutes before Sierra Leone scored an important equaliser in a crucial away match. The resulting blank screens frustrated football fans all over the country — including the President — and many of them were forced to turn to the BBC World Service for confirmation of the result. The UN too was embarrassed as SLBC was still using its satellite tower for transmission and such 'pirate' broadcasts were in contravention of the regulations laid out by another UN body, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). Over the next few days, the newspapers were scathing in their coverage, packed with rumours describing the President as "furious" with SLBC.

The second and more worrying indication of the Board's inability to fulfil its mandate was the transmission in the week beginning 6<sup>th</sup> September of a series of nightly primetime programmes celebrating the ruling APC's third anniversary in office. Each night, a designated Minister was given the opportunity to discuss the achievements of his Ministry to date:

“Good evening Minister. Thank you for joining us as we celebrate the third anniversary of the APC taking office. What would you like to talk about this evening?”

These were not interviews in the strictest sense: the government had vetoed certain presenters in favour of known supporters who simply threw 'softball' questions which were answered as the Minister saw fit: “As Minister for Health, what are your day to day responsibilities?” or “As Minister for Education, how pleased are you with the progress you have made so far this year?” There were no 'follow ups', that is, more probing secondary questions prompted by the first response as a way of exploring more deeply what has been stated: the programmes were effectively a series of monologues praising the APC generally and President Koroma in particular.

This was a different scenario to that described by the Chairman in a prior meeting with senior UN staff held at his home on 6<sup>th</sup> September at which I was present. The UN had heard about the programmes beforehand and, concerned that the broadcasts were not in keeping with the spirit of independent, impartial broadcasting, wished to consult the Chairman. He reassured us that the programmes would be “first-rate political debates” with the best of SLBC's presenters. To the contrary, I was later informed that the obvious candidates, two seasoned journalists with an informed understanding of politics, had been rejected as possible presenters in favour of less experienced, more 'amenable' interlocutors.

Later that week, mid-series, the Minister of Information proudly announced that the government had done nothing wrong, claiming they had paid for the programmes as SLBC was now independent. He was wrong on two counts: §10 (1) c of the SLBC Act 2010 states that no funding should be accepted

“from political, ethnic or religious groups or institutions”. Secondly, the funds never arrived in SLBC’s accounts. Again, there was no comment or explanation from the Board of Trustees whose role was precisely to defend the impartiality, objectivity and professionalism of SLBC. More worryingly, it revealed a tendency on the part of the Chairman to change his statements to suit whomever he was talking to. In this, he was not alone. The Minister of Information, ‘IB’ Kargbo was an adept political operator who regularly assured the UN and other international partners about his own honourable intentions and those of the President.

### **Theorising elite resistance**

To understand this misleading behaviour on the part of the Chairman, the Minister of Information and other senior players in the SLBC saga, one needs to look at the literature on institutional theory and logic. In his detailed work on institutional reform in developing countries, Andrews (2013) examines the reasons why reforms rarely produce functional or effective institutions even with the passage of time. He suggests that reforms and talk of reforms may be introduced as “signals” in an attempt to “improve short-term external perceptions of government effectiveness with little focus on fostering better long-term results”:

“The signalling game means that countries commit to best practice reforms but seldom succeed in implementing them (especially when contexts are prohibitive) (p28).

He goes on to explain that developing countries who depend on external donors and the support of organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF are especially prone to ‘signalling’, which reassures donors about a government’s intention to reform thereby ensuring continuing assistance. At the time of the SLBC merger, 70% of public sector expenditure depended on foreign aid (OECD 2010: 3), so ‘signalling’ was a necessary ploy. The ‘prohibitive context’ to which Andrews alludes above is evident in Sierra Leone in the tradition of neopatrimonialism in which rent-seeking elites impede reform and development by distributing state resources as their own

personal largesse (see Chabal and Daloz 1999; Reno 1995 and 2003; Tangri 1999).

Further light is thrown on the puzzle of such misleading behaviour by Ashworth et al (2007) who argue that one reason why institutions pursue change is to gain greater legitimacy and “to conform to the expectations of key stakeholders in their environment” (p165). Again this would explain why the external messages or ‘signalling’ to the stakeholders in the donor community and civil society would be at variance with what senior figures in government and SLBC actually did: the financial gain and legitimacy accruing from a perceived commitment to change did not necessarily herald practical steps towards change. And, as Andrews points out, “the intention is to make government look better, not to make better government” (2013: 33). Within the norms of a clientelistic society, such behaviour would be deemed ‘rational’ as its objective would be protecting the public funds on which elite patronage depended, irrespective of the longer-term impact on the institution or society in question.

### **Lack of transparency**

Unusually, the SLBC Act states that the Director General should be an *ex-officio* member of the Board as well as Secretary. It is his responsibility to take minutes of all Board meetings, have them ratified by the Chairman and then kept as a public record [§8(9)]. This never happened for two reasons: the administrative weakness of the Director General who understandably found it difficult to record proceedings and participate at the same time. Also, for reasons of status, it would have been inconceivable for the Board to have someone as junior as a secretary present, even if they were there to take notes. Additionally, had the proceedings been minuted as the law required, some of the decisions taken at the Board meetings would have been exposed as contrary to what had been explicitly stated to the UN and the rest of the international community.

On the one hand, politicians, Board members and SLBC management wanted to retain the rewards that commitment to reform and greater legitimacy would

attract. On the other hand, they did not wish to reveal their true agenda: to appropriate the resources of SLBC for their own clientelistic networks and to maintain political control of the corporation's output and staff. These covert aims would later involve such dubious activities as appointing two consultants who by-passed management and only reported to the Board; the summary appointment of the Heads of Television, Radio and News without an open recruitment process; the purchase of over-priced equipment and services outside the provisions of the National Procurement Act together with a lavish catering budget for the weekly Board meetings which included wine at breakfast. Such practices were *ultra vires* and at worst, illegal.

Naturally, there was little appetite for transparency in such circumstances even though it was frequently pointed out that it was a requirement of public service broadcasters. As a result, there were no formal minutes in the accepted sense of Board meetings and the decisions taken. Indeed, there were no records at all. Certainly, no information was ever shared with stakeholders or the wider public. This lack of a concrete record also meant that later, when the organization came under close external scrutiny through financial and capacity audits, a post hoc paper trail was laid to present a fictitious, legal 'history' to conform to accepted standards. The elites preferred to continue this 'sleight of hand' for as long as possible, openly declaring their ongoing efforts towards creating a credible, independent public service broadcaster while all the while carrying on business as usual.

### **UN management of the SLBC project**

Meanwhile, the political nature of the UN's mission was becoming explicit in management's handling of the SLBC project. At first, the lead was taken by UNIPSIL's Chief of Staff who was on temporary assignment from New York and keen to prove himself in this senior position. At the weekly meetings between the UN and SLBC, he interrogated each individual about the progress they had made in the previous seven days and pressed harder and harder until he received the answer he wanted. He was keen to push the project until it was out of the UN's hands and did not want to concern himself with the finer details. It was a tendency often found in political missions when

senior staff were charged with executing or supervising a technical task or project outside their area of expertise or interest. The broader requirements of UN Security Council resolutions map out the objectives of a peacebuilding mission, requiring reports from the Head of Mission (usually the Executive or Special Representative of the Secretary General) every six months on what has been achieved. These 'overviews' adopt a broad-brush stroke approach and are rarely nuanced enough to take into account the complexities of working in post-conflict scenarios (Autesserre 2014:27).

Add to this the bureaucratic demands of the UN's narrowly bounded organisational culture, and the result is a dualistic, transactional form of management. Here, managers are responsive not proactive, they are required to deliver previously stated objectives passed down from 'above' which they cannot modify or influence; they are interested only in results not problems; outcomes, not challenges (see Bass 1990; Odumeru and Ogbonna 2013). A manager's job in such hierarchical organisations is to polish the reputation of his/her own manager by squeezing results out of their team. This pattern is repeated up the corporate ladder, all the way to the Security Council. Praise is 'vacuumed' up and blame cascades down. Successful operators 'surf' the results of their teams thereby enhancing their own profile as well as that of their superiors (see Pitt and Weiss 1986; Righter 1995; Weiss 2012).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had been working in Sierra Leone since 1965 and was committed to helping the country work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the government's own development priorities as set out in its strategy papers *Agenda for Change (2008-2012)* and *Agenda for Prosperity (2013 – 2017)* [[www.sl.undp.org](http://www.sl.undp.org)]. Under UN rules the UNDP traditionally takes the key role in co-ordinating donor funds for electoral assistance and other development activities. In a situation where there is an integrated political mission, as with UNIPSIL in Sierra Leone, the Executive Representative of the Secretary General (ERSG) is responsible for overall political co-ordination but responsibility for financial matters still rests with UNDP (see *Management response to the evaluation of the UNDP contribution to strengthening electoral*

*systems and processes DP/2012/22 14<sup>th</sup> June 2012*). Thus, even though UNIPSIL was a 'peacebuilding' mission, it could not directly receive funding from the UN Peacebuilding Commission, for example. All monies were channelled through UNDP who would ultimately be answerable to the auditors.

Another consideration with the funding for the SLBC project was the method of implementation. In countries in 'special development situations' such as Sierra Leone where national authorities lack the capacity to manage a project or it cannot be carried out by another UN agency, the UNDP will directly administer the disbursement of all monies. In such cases, UN regulations demand transparency and accountability in all processes, particularly recruitment and procurement. UNDP insistence on compliance in these two areas led to a number of disagreements with SLBC and, by implication, the government, thereby slowing progress to a virtual halt.

Furthermore, as Orme points out, UNESCO is the designated 'lead' body for UN media policy but it has few media development specialists in the field. Neither the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) nor the Department for Political Affairs (DPA), which oversees UNIPSIL, had any precedent for media development (2010: 55). The SLBC project was therefore a 'first', keenly observed in many quarters, as a possible template for the media operations attached to other UN peace missions around the world in Liberia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Haiti. Yet it was this very novelty that meant such a technical project did not find a natural home in an essentially political mission.

Carothers and de Gramont discuss at length the efforts that development agencies have taken in the past to remain 'apolitical', believing that restricting themselves to the technical will help them avoid controversy and overcome local suspicions (2013: 4). As a newcomer to the UN, I must confess that, at the outset, that had also been my attitude. However, I soon came to realise, how utterly political was the environment in which I found myself. Worse, it became clear, that the SLBC merger was essentially, a political decision in

answer to a political dilemma “What shall we do with UN Radio?” The technical complexity of the project, with its inevitable hurdles, was of little interest to senior managers. And when problems arose caused by elite capture of the project and political resistance on the part of the ruling party and its followers, no-one in the UN was prepared to spend political capital dealing with them.

### **SLBC’s other ventures: Transtech, the satellite and an overdraft**

The lack of regular formal meetings between UNIPSIL and SLBC meant that I had to keep informed of developments at SLBC through more informal channels. I liked and respected many of the staff and they understood that I was committed to making public service broadcasting work for the people of Sierra Leone. One of the issues puzzling me was why the Board of Trustees seemed reluctant to make a final decision about the options presented in the technical report from Donald, the engineering consultant. After handing over UN Radio and its assets, the UN expected all broadcasting from its satellite installation to cease from 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010. By mid-November, I was worried that the deadline was approaching and the Board had yet to make a decision. I mentioned this to one of the engineering staff and he introduced me to a Lebanese engineer whom I thought had come to maintain SLBC’s existing equipment. The engineer explained to me that, unbeknownst to the UN, the government had had extensive plans to extend SLBC’s television coverage outside Freetown using maps that had been drawn up some years previously then put on hold during the war years. The project had been kept secret because the government wished to avoid going through an official procurement process, the only legal method open to them. The plans were so secret that the engineers could only consult them at Ministry headquarters and were forbidden to make photocopies.

Furthermore, there were also plans in place to invest in a satellite which would enable SLBC’s programmes to be shown internationally, part of the President’s plans to ‘rebrand’ the country as open to investors. Early on, Donald S had ruled out the idea of a satellite for radio on the grounds that the initial capital outlay (\$130,000/£83,000) and monthly rental of satellite space

(\$4,000/£2,550) were far too expensive. Here, SLBC was investing both in the hardware and committing itself to enough bandwidth for radio and television. The eventual cost on top of an over large wage bill would be ruinous.

Gradually, through snatched conversations and hurried glances at confidential documents, a worrying picture emerged. In October, just a few weeks into his tenure, the Director General had shown me the rough ledger of bills— they could hardly be called management accounts — drawn up by the previous administration. There was a recurring monthly entry of Le 1.5 million (about \$375/£235) to a firm called ‘Transtech International’ for ‘cleaning the IT equipment’. I had already received a complaint from Yusuf, our IT consultant, about some individuals who clearly did not understand technology, coming in with crude washing materials to clean the computers. Concerned that they might damage the sensitive, expensive equipment, Yusuf had quarrelled with them and, as a result, the Director General had stopped the account. The company then sent an angry letter, claiming that the agreement had been signed and approved by the Board of Trustees and that the Director General was not authorised to cancel the contract. The letter even quoted the SLBC Act. I thought it was little more than a small scale scam that was so common in Freetown when donor funds flowed into an organisation. I was wrong.

The next incident involved Transtech International being brought in as consultants to carry out an assessment regarding the procurement of a satellite. Again, this was an illegal tendering process as it was not openly advertised to allow other individuals or companies to bid. In an extraordinary move, Transtech themselves were then given the contract to procure, install and maintain a satellite dish and necessary auxiliary equipment which, they claimed, was only available in the US. This necessitated numerous business class trips back and forth across the Atlantic by a handful of unnamed individuals. The initial outlay for the satellite dish was \$400,000 (£254,000) with almost as much again in expenses, consultancy fees and so on. Transtech also arranged the monthly rental of satellite space costing \$26,000 (£16,500) from Satlink Limited, a company based in Israel. It later emerged that this was a risky undertaking as SLBC paid the cash to Transtech who

acted as intermediaries between them and Satlink. Somehow, the cash was not passed onto Satlink.

On his next trip to Freetown, Donald S inspected the satellite equipment and estimated it was worth about \$65,000 (£41,300) and was probably second-hand. He guessed from the poor quality materials that it would have a shelf life of two to three years. In fact, the satellite dish was only operational for three months. It could not be repaired because SLBC did not have the money to pay for the replacement parts. Nor did it have the cash to pay for the satellite space rental after two months, so its programmes were removed. Again, it was pointed out that the average monthly payment for the level of satellite bandwidth SLBC required was \$9,000 (£5,700). The corporation had been expected to pay nearly three times the market average in a savagely exploitative deal that virtually bankrupted it. The President himself was forced to persuade the Bank of Sierra Leone not to call in SLBC's overdraft which, by this stage, had reached the equivalent of \$900,000 (£572,000).

The Chief Executive of Transtech International was Momoh Conteh. He was later named as a Ministerial 'gofer' in an Al Jazeera documentary on illegal timber exports which implicated Vice-President Sam Sumana. To make matters worse, an acquaintance who worked at the National Telecommunications Commission (NatCom) said that early in 2010 the Commission had approved a grant of nearly \$1.5million (£953,000) to the Ministry of Information to acquire a satellite for SLBC. This sum of money had never reached SLBC and could not be accounted for.

### **Corporate culture and mergers: a discussion**

Of great significance is the notion of SLBC arising out of the 'merger' of SLBS and UN Radio. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon himself had spoken of a 'marriage' in his inauguration speech in June 2010, hinting at a "partnership of equals". At that stage, it was still reasonable to consider that SLBC would be a completely different entity with different staff, procedures, management ethic and corporate culture. The UN staff would bring with them "the best practices of broadcasting" and integrate them with the traditions and goodwill

of SLBS to produce something that reflected a new image of Sierra Leone: peaceful, united, aspiring, honourable, dedicated and efficient. However, as time passed, it became increasingly evident that all the values represented by UN Radio were subsumed by the prevailing norms of an earlier Sierra Leone, one in which patronage and clientelism dictated not so much the pace of change, more the degree of stasis leading to decay.

A common definition of 'merger' is 'the consolidation of one firm or trading company with another' (Oxford English Dictionary). Another definition states: 'the voluntary amalgamation of two firms on roughly equal terms into one new legal entity' (businessdictionary.com). Even though great care and attention is paid to the process, many mergers fail to meet pre-merger objectives because of insufficient emphasis on post-merger relationships (Mittleton-Kelly 2006: 36). The business press and management academics argue that in mergers, consolidation or "organisational integration" is by far the most difficult hurdle (Smeets et al 2007: 2). Organisational integration depends to a large extent on the compatibility of the corporate cultures of the organisations involved where culture in the corporate sense is defined as the organisation's 'personality', its shared beliefs, values and behaviours (Perrault 2013:3). Theorists and practitioners place great emphasis on the development of a different emergent culture to support the new organisational form with leadership seen as the single most powerful variable in determining the success or failure of a merger process (Archer 2007: 1; Mittleton-Kelly *ibid*). There are high profile examples of failed mergers: the two motor manufacturers Daimler and Chrysler in the late 1990s, AOL and Time Warner in 2000, HP and Compaq in 2001. In each of these cases, widely differing corporate cultures undermined what were deemed to be potentially successful business mergers (Jacobsen 2012).

Looking back, it seems obvious that insufficient attention was paid to the concept of 'organisational culture' in the merger: either the clear differences between UN Radio and SLBS or the emergent culture that would be needed to embed the public service ethos in the new entity. UN Radio, as part of a large hierarchical organisation, was marked by its 'role culture' in which

individuals have clearly delineated jobs to do (Handy 1993:180). In such organisations individuals closely follow their job descriptions and rarely deviate from what is expected of them. On the other hand, SLBS could be said to operate as a 'power culture' in which one or more individuals dominate the organisations by making the key decisions (Handy, *ibid*). This form of organisational culture is the most widespread in societies organised along patrimonial lines. Ideally, the new entity SLBC would have been closer to a role culture but would also have embodied elements of a 'task' culture in which teams are empowered to make decisions and produce innovative creative outcomes in line with the corporation's service ethos. It was assumed that with the structures, finance, policies and procedures in place, everything else would follow — a common but mistaken assumption in many mergers (Mittleton-Kelly 2006: 37). The technical approach which pervades liberal peacebuilding assumes that projects worked out on paper are easily reproduced in real life but, in reality, organisations with workers and a particular culture are complex human systems, quite unlike buildings or products (*op.cit*: 38).

Therefore, in the absence of "expected outcomes" the need for authoritative and visionary leadership comes to the fore, something sadly lacking in SLBC. As Archer maintains, any kind of organisational change brings ambiguity throughout the whole organisation (2007: 3). Such change may be interpreted through the lens of anxiety or positive expectation, depending on the individual. It is for the leadership to create and share a common vision, to gain trust and enthuse and empower individual workers to align themselves with the new entity. In mergers, Archer argues, "weak leadership, combined with a controlling attitude, lack of clear vision and direction is a recipe for failure" (*ibid*). Evidently, SLBC lacked strong leadership, whether from the Director-General and his management team or the Board of Trustees. Furthermore, research carried out in the area of change shows that, where there is uncertainty, especially regarding the identities of gainers and losers, there will be a strong bias towards the status quo (Fernandez and Rodrik 1991: 1154).

## Conclusion

With hindsight, it is relatively easy to discern the process by which the SLBC project was so thoroughly captured by elite interests. However, at the time, it was bewildering to reconcile previously stated commitments on the part of the government, Board and management with the blatant misinformation and acts of betrayal I witnessed. Even more puzzling was the UN's nonchalance as its carefully laid technical plans unravelled.

Within the UN there was a marked disparity between, on the one hand, the technical team who were focused on the project and brought to bear their professional skills and expertise to ensure delivery and, on the other hand, the leadership of UNIPSIL who seemed more concerned about “not rocking the boat”. It should not be forgotten that the idea for the merger of SLBS and UN Radio arose out of the vicious political clashes in March 2009. As Hutton (2014) observes, the emphasis in peacebuilding is on security and political stabilisation at all costs (p6; see also Duffield 2001). So, the promise of a public service broadcaster seemed a small price to pay for the short term prospect of beating down political violence. Out of this kneejerk *political* reaction, an expansive *technical* fix is suggested with no real thought given to the ongoing support needed to see it through to completion. Whenever technical hurdles appeared because of political machinations by the government or Board, no political support was forthcoming from the UN. Keeping the SLBC project on track would have required the UN challenging state authority to some degree but no senior figure was willing to expend the necessary political capital with the result that the project eventually stalled. Had the SLBC project been placed in another UN body further removed from the mission's leadership — UNDP for example — there might have been greater flexibility in the UN's approach.

Meanwhile, the ruling APC and its acolytes in the Ministry of Information and SLBS relaxed in the face of what they considered UN indifference and became more brazen in their approach. Having already concealed plans to expand SLBC's output, they proceeded with the ill-advised purchase of the satellite. My commitment to deliver a successful outcome to the project and

my professional understanding of the challenges in the first twelve months of any new venture meant I failed to understand the huge risks that management and the politicians were taking with the long term sustainability of the corporation. It had been a mantra amongst the UN's technical team that SLBC should 'start small, consolidate then expand' while its management seemed intent on doing everything at once. I failed to understand that in such a context, short term political gain 'trumped' long term strategy and sustainability every time (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 113).

## **Chapter 9 One corporation, three inquiries**

### **Introduction**

Within weeks, the SLBC project had become paralysed by a number of factors: the Board's insistence on meddling, the management's apparent inability to make a decision and the government's concern to push through its priorities. In terms of an 'effective and functioning public sector institution', it was clear that SLBC was neither. Such corporate chaos could never hope to fulfil a public service mandate. At the time I found it difficult to comprehend why so many obviously bad decisions were being taken. I failed to understand the deeper social and cultural implications of the drama that was unfolding before me.

Over the months, the tensions arising out of cash flow problems, late payment of salaries and the skewed recruitment campaign eventually spilled over into an angry staff strike leading to not one but three inquiries. A Presidential Inquiry 'uncovered' strong anti-APC sentiments rampant within the organisation and recommended a flawed list of applicants. It also made a blatant appeal for further funding despite the clear findings of the other two inquiries — one by KPMG and the other by an internationally renowned expert on public service broadcasting — that the corporation was incapable of fulfilling its mandate due to gross mismanagement, corruption and a lack of capacity at all levels.

Using an autoethnographic approach and detailed document analysis, this chapter narrates the unfolding of these events and reveals even more clearly the determination to capture the resources of SLBC whether cash, jobs or airtime. It also shows how much the elites depend on the trappings of the rational-legal order to give them authority while, at the same time, they are consciously and deliberately subverting that system (Taylor 2009:168).

### **Early signs of dysfunction and discontent**

On 6<sup>th</sup> February 2011, a letter appeared in the Freetown newspaper, the *Concord Times*, bemoaning the chaotic state of affairs at SLBC. Signed ‘Concerned staff members of SLBC’, it listed a number of complaints about management and the Board of Trustees. I knew the identity of the chief instigator and found him to be anything but a ‘rabble-rouser’ or ‘demagogue’ as claimed by some of his detractors. Known by his initials ‘ABC’, he had previously been employed at UN Radio where he had shown himself to be intelligent, hard working and committed to becoming a professional journalist. He had excelled in his studies at the University’s Department of Mass Communications and, while not relishing the thought of working at the newly incorporated SLBC, he had wholeheartedly thrown himself into the project, determined to see it succeed. It was not surprising then that he had been angry and demoralised at the direction in which the organisation seemed to be moving. The letter started with an ominous hint of what was to come:

“A time bomb seems to be ticking at the SLBC with staff secretly planning a (*sic*) strike action if the present trend in the recruitment process continues” (‘Letter to the Editor’ *Concord Times* 6/2/11 p11).

The letter pointed out that the 160 core staff paid by the UN had not yet received their salaries for the previous month “because the UN is protesting against what it calls the politics in the recruitment process”. Next, it criticised the appointment of the Director of Media and Public Affairs: “the least fitted person was appointed because of his affiliation to a very close friend of the chairman”. It then goes on to describe the anomalous situation regarding freelancers:

“The board has just been appointing people without going through the right procedures to the dismay of the staff and disapproval of the UN...the freelance list which was about twenty in July has risen to almost a hundred...Ironically, these freelancers receive more in terms of salary than regular workers...and even though only three of them come to work regularly, they are paid SLL 1.5 million every month while reporters get SLL600, 000, admin assistants SLL400, 000 and drivers

SLL300, 000...Every month, the SLBC spends hundreds of millions from its coffers to pay these freelancers and for the past few months the corporation has been in so much debt that it cannot afford to spend any money on programmes, even to buy things like bulbs or locks for doors, or phone cards to call guests for programmes...” (op.cit)

The observations in the letter are partly true. I had been depressed by the appointment of an SLBS ‘lifer’ as the Director of Media. It was a key post and, after the Director General, the most important in determining the broadcaster’s future. Raymond K, the appointee, was an affable man but he lacked drive and vision. He was not respected by his staff or the wider community of journalists. I felt his appointment was a major ‘own goal’ on the part of the Board of Trustees but, at that time, I still thought the Board had the corporation’s best interests at heart. On the matter of freelancers, there had certainly been a rapid increase in their number and they were promptly paid in cash through a separate account. The Deputy Director General himself brought 12 new employees to the corporation when he took up his post in October 2010. It was not possible to find an official register of all their names as this was kept hidden by Joretta B, the most senior woman in the Finance Office. She denied access to everyone, even her own line manager but was eventually forced to open up when the auditors began their work some months later.

### **‘Cash is king’: financial constraints begin to bite**

By this stage, the Corporation’s staff list had grown to more than 260, including ‘freelancers’ and individuals awarded contracts without any competitive process. SLBC found itself in the anomalous situation where the Directors and Heads of Departments, Consultants and Board Trustees, 21 in total, earned SLL 194,560,000 per month and the remaining official members of staff, 137 in total, earned SLL 122,571,000 per month (SLBC Draft Business Plan 22/7/11). Unfortunately, the straitened financial circumstances to which the staff letter refers were set to become much worse due to the fiscal indiscipline of the Ministry of Information and the SLBC Board. Just

before Christmas, there had been a terse exchange of letters between the UN and SLBC over the details of the SLBC budget for the forthcoming year, 2011. What SLBC had sent bore no resemblance to a corporate budget: it was simply a list of outgoings and planned expenditure. Their 'financial statement' showed that in the coming year they were going to spend SLL 3.9 billion or approximately £570,000 on salaries, about 80% more than the UN's current level of salary support. Other intended lines of expenditure included SLL 312 million (£46,000) on consultants, SLL 98 million (£14,000) on international travel and SLL 1.2 billion (£175,000) on fence construction. There was another unexplained reference to planned capital expenditure of SLL 2.5 billion (£365,000) on an "expansion of media project".

The "expansion of media services project" was never officially explained but my own enquiries and subsequent events revealed that it referred to the ill-fated satellite project and its attendant costs. This was a truly short-sighted initiative on the part of the Ministry of Information and the Board on two counts. First, the nature of UN missions and their reliance on secure communications means that they employ some of the most-experienced and skilled satellite engineers and technicians in the world. Had it been known that SLBC would be investing in satellite equipment, UNIPSIL's staff would have been able to advise and design the most appropriate system as well as help procure and install it at a fraction of the price charged by Transtech International. Secondly, the start-up budget had allocated approximately \$300,000 (£190,000) to procure technical equipment, much of it to strengthen SLBC's transmission signal around the country, especially the rural hinterland. Many of the procured items would not have been bought if it had been known that a satellite system was planned; the freed up funds could have been invested directly in programming.

It was a 'no-win' situation as far as the correspondents to the *Concord Times* were concerned: the UN would not —indeed *could* not — pay salaries without better understanding how, the organisational structure of SLBC would eventually look. At the same time the Board and the management were unwilling to reveal too many details of what was actually going on, knowing it

was illegal, corrupt and unsustainable. Regrettably, it was the staff who suffered with the delay in salaries although I made it a personal commitment to ensure that everyone received what they were due to be paid, even if it arrived late. This laborious process involved printing off 160 individual contracts to be signed by the core staff whom the UN was paying. These contracts then had to be signed by the Chairman and delivered to the UNDP offices whose audit staff would check them against their register. Due to UNDP and local banking procedures, the bundle of contracts had to be complete or else a memo noting the new total to be paid had to be drawn up by myself and signed by the Head of UNDP and delivered to the bank. I spent hours, sometimes days, racing around trying to get contracts signed because I knew how much people relied on receiving their salaries on time. I was embarrassed when, through no fault of theirs or mine, they were paid late. On learning about the regularity with which the newly arrived freelancers were paid, I became angry at the injustice and unfairness of a system I could not hope to change.

### **Disagreements over the corporation's structure**

During the planning stages of the SLBC project, a suggested 'organogram' was drawn up by the lead consultant, laying out the overall structure of the organisation and individual departments and listing the job titles and 'reporting lines' in each. It was a useful planning tool for determining job function and also the number of posts to be filled by recruitment. It was hoped that there would be mutual agreement on the organogram by September 2010 so that preparations for recruitment could begin. For some reason, the Board and later the Director General seemed unwilling to agree to the organogram put forward by the UN. Of course, this was their prerogative but they also, strangely, were reluctant to produce one of their own. From October 2010 to February 2011, letters regarding the organogram went back and forth between UNIPSIL and SLBC whose management seemed as reticent about the corporation's structure as they were about its budget.

My colleagues and I were becoming increasingly frustrated by this 'stonewalling' as we knew that, without a further injection of funds, SLBC would probably be bankrupt by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010.

The Head of Mission had made a desperate bid to the UN's Peacebuilding Commission for extra funding for SLBC and by early January he could announce that a further \$800,000 (£508,000) had been made available for the two year period 2011-13. This sudden windfall immediately raised the spirits of the Chairman who believed the sum would soon make its way into SLBC's depleted bank account. The corporation had only just managed to stave off bankruptcy through the President's personal intervention with the Bank of Sierra Leone. It was explained to the Board that the money came with certain conditions attached, including agreement on an organogram and open, transparent recruitment.

At last, the Board produced an organogram which raised some worrying points when compared to the original UN proposal. The most obvious point was the inclusion of the two consultants who would report directly to the Board with no apparent reporting lines to the Director General or his deputy. Secondly, whereas the UN structure contained the posts of Ombudsman and Legal Consultant, these were absent in the SLBC organogram. This seemed to imply a dismissal of two significant functions for a public service broadcaster: first, that it maintain an open channel of communication for complaints through an Ombudsman; and secondly, that its advocacy and investigation on behalf of ordinary citizens would take it into difficult legal areas for which the guidance of a legal consultant would be necessary.

The organisational structure was further skewed by the introduction of another layer of management: whereas the UN model had proposed Heads of the functional units, the SLBC model now had Directors as well as Heads thereby creating a 'steeper' hierarchy with further distance between managers and staff. Not only did this stretch even further an already strained salary bill; it also bloated the senior management team beyond the leadership capabilities of the Director General.

Other matters for concern included the positions of Cashier and Debt Collector within the marketing department, distancing the money collection activities from the accounting process. Best practice would have seen the finance department collecting and recording all monies once instead of having the process initiated in marketing and then repeated by finance. Such a system also facilitated the 'disappearance' of funds which were never formally recorded by the finance department and therefore not formally counted. The amalgamation of the human resource function with administration was also short-sighted. This resulted in requests for consumables such as batteries and toilet paper and complaints about transport being routed through the HR department while it was grappling with the complex task of setting up a modern staff management system with computerised records and a performance appraisal programme.

Early in September 2010, the Chairman had shared with me a report on government communications he had written, dating back to the 1990s. It showed an organogram for SLBS, at that time still firmly rooted within the Ministry of Information when he himself was Minister. I was reminded of that report when I looked at the proposed SLBC organogram which closely resembled the 20 year old model for SLBS. Instead of dividing the media activities according to *content*, eg news and current affairs and general programming, media activities were now divided according to *channel of delivery*, ie radio and television plus news and current affairs. Apart from being an old-fashioned, unwieldy construction, it did not build into the staff structure the concept of multimedia platforms for delivering material. So, instead of having one reporter or producer creating a health or education story and then tailoring it for each medium, including the website, the SLBC system now required a duplication of effort with reporters working in virtual 'silos', for either radio or television and subject to multiple reporting lines and production overlap.

The proposed structure from SLBC appeared old-fashioned and retrograde with specific job titles such as 'newsreaders' and 'journalists/presenters'. This approach to managing a newsroom narrowed down job specifications and

roles and tied individuals to restricted areas of activities, completely ignoring the careful job analysis carried out by Ramira the HR consultant and myself. It also had the effect of 'deskilling' the job of 'newsreader' leading to scores of applications from unskilled and inexperienced 'wannabes'. In one or two cases, posts were given to attractive young women rumoured to be romantically linked to certain 'Big Men'. During the transitional stage, it had been envisaged that recruitment would bring in a team of people with education, previous experience and an ability to multitask according to the demands in each department. However, without open meritocratic recruitment, SLBC would replicate the same old SLBS with its occupational 'silos' and oversimplified job functions, resulting in the same old 'scratchy', government-biased output and patronage-based hiring practices.

### **Flaws in the recruitment and selection process**

From the beginning of the SLBC project, the single factor causing most anxiety and resentment was the issue of recruitment. It had always been assumed by those leading the project in the UN that, at some stage, all SLBS staff contracts would be terminated and all posts advertised under an open and transparent recruitment campaign. Inevitably, some people would lose their jobs. As the project document maintained, "After its legal establishment, SLBC will recruit the best of UN Radio and SLBS staff as well as talent from other institutions" (*Development of an Independent National Public Broadcasting Service for Sierra Leone* 16<sup>th</sup> September 2008 p3).

As a first step towards this, termination payments amounting to \$158,286 (£101,000) were paid to 170 existing SLBS staff. About 12 months after my arrival, I was told that, in an early meeting with the President to discuss a possible merger, the Head of Mission had brushed aside all suggestions that people would actually lose their jobs. Later, I was informed by two credible sources that just after the merger, some SLBC staff had pleaded to the Minister of Information that he protect their jobs and livelihoods and that the Minister had readily agreed. Naturally, such protection came at a cost and this would have been clearly understood by staff members and the Minister. In the run-up to a general election, it would have been useful having a number of

journalists inside the national broadcaster personally indebted to him and his political whims.

These covert manoeuvrings undermined a central tenet of the project: that the national broadcaster was to be transformed, not tied to the status quo, churning out 'business as usual'. As a local commentator put it, "SLBC was hurriedly created out of an old, failed, and discredited structure by using the same old senior managers, most of whom are entangled in the old template of pro-establishment journalism" (Tamba Lebbie *Politico* 27/11/12). Apart from the handful of staff transferred from UN Radio, no more than 23 in all, the workforce at SLBC consisted largely of the same civil servants employed by SLBS together with 'freelancers' brought in by senior APC figures, including the Deputy Director General.

According to Bratton and Gold:

*Recruitment* is the process of generating a pool of capable people to apply for employment to an organisation. *Selection* is the process by which managers and others use specific instruments to choose from a pool of applicants a person or persons more likely to succeed in the job(s), given management goals and legal requirements (2007:239).

I was determined to make sure that even if I could not influence the *selection* process, the *recruitment* process would go ahead as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Once, the job ads appeared in the newspapers and were announced on air, I was surprised at how quickly the application forms came in. Following on from an edict from the Chairman, existing SLBC staff could apply for as many posts as they wished, knowing they would automatically be shortlisted and many of them put in multiple applications, even in areas in which they were neither trained nor experienced. By contrast, there was an appreciable number of applications from external candidates with creditable experience in journalism, finance, procurement and engineering. After the war, there had been a massive expansion in NGOs both local and international who had offered training and professional experience in a number of different administrative

fields. Also, the University's Mass Communications department had produced scores of graduates now working in local and community radio stations who were excited about the prospect of public service broadcasting at a national level. On a less positive note, the tension amongst the former SLBS staff was growing, understandable in view of the mixed messages they had received. On the one hand, the President, the Minister of Information I B Kargbo and the UN's Head of Mission, had given tacit assurances that they would not lose their jobs; on the other hand, they were faced with the prospect, possibly for the first time in their working lives, of filling in an application form which required them to prove their suitability for a job in terms of education, skills and experience.

Because of the political sensitivity of the process, I did not wish to be accused of interfering. I decided to go on home leave to the UK for three weeks knowing that the administrative side of the process was in good hands. My colleague Stephen Douglas and I had recruited a support team of final year students from the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM), a branch of the University of Sierra Leone. This team was managed by a local UN colleague, Abu Sesay, an IT expert and a gifted administrator. However, that did not stop some members of SLBC staff from calling me in the UK to complain about perceived unfairness in the system and requesting that I intervene. On my return, I read the report written by Abu and the IPAM team and was horrified. As expected, the Chairman's edict that SLBC staff would be shortlisted for any job they applied for — irrespective of skills or experience — had crowded out far better external candidates. Apparently, the two consultants recruited by the Chairman were involved in all the interviewing panels which slowed down the whole process. In order to regain momentum, it was decided to pack as many as twenty interviews into a day, leaving little time to explore candidates' ability. Some interviews lasted only ten minutes while in other cases, candidates would be called for interview in the morning and left waiting until the end of the day or even told to return the next day. There were further discrepancies in the process which meant that some candidates were asked to carry out tests alongside their interview, while others were simply interviewed.

The interviews which had been scheduled to last six weeks eventually stretched over ten and still there was no resolution of the employment situation. The final results would not be made known until the Board had had time to consider the results. As a result, the atmosphere in SLBC had been soured by the recruitment process and yet the organisation seemed to have made no progress whatsoever. All of us in the recruitment team discussed at length what more could have been done. Stephen and I found it difficult to understand why the consultants and the Directors should want to be party to less than optimal recruitment choices. As a compromise, I could understand that managers might have preference for one candidate over another, but surely it was prudent to see that that your candidate was capable in the first place? But, as I was learning, that was not the Sierra Leonean way. As locals, Thomas S, Abu and the IPAM team were disappointed but not unduly so. They shrugged their shoulders and said "*How fer do?*" which roughly translates as "What can you do about it?" Resistance on the part of individuals like Thomas and Abu was futile, counter-productive even. In the local context, making a stand against predatory practices would have far greater repercussions than losing one's job, although that in itself would be catastrophic in the present job climate. 'Big men' tended to have long memories and one's family and friends could also be seen as guilty by association. In reality, there was very little anyone could do about the situation. Leadership at the UN seemed unwilling to intervene and so, the Ministry of Information pressed on with its own agenda of remodelling 'public service broadcasting' into a format more to its own liking.

Many long-term workers within the corporation became anxious and resentful when faced with the prospect of an open meritocratic recruitment process. A number of them complained to their 'patrons' in government and in the Ministry. Tension peaked when I wrote a letter to the Board asking for clarification about the automatic shortlisting of SLBC members of staff. Instinctively, on this occasion, I distributed copies to individual members of the Board, instead of assuming the Chairman would discuss the matter with his fellow Trustees. I could not have envisioned a more dramatic fallout. It

seemed that, for months, the rest of the Board had been kept in the dark by the Chairman and they had no knowledge of the manipulations of the recruitment process. There was an angry confrontation between the Chairman and his colleagues following which the other board members began a close examination of all the recruitment decisions presented for their approval by the two consultants. The number of anomalies and suspicious recommendations within these appointments led them to revise the list to include applicants they believed to be better suited for the post. Obviously, this was at the expense of existing members of staff. Somehow, these amendments were leaked and those staff who had previously believed they were 'untouchable' due to their connections were shocked to find themselves facing imminent redundancy.

At the same time, it was reported that the Ministry of Information had refused to fund SLBC salaries in future unless its preferred list of candidates — that is the list presented by the consultants — was approved. I was told that when the Director General and the Deputy had visited the Ministry to discuss the pressing issue of salaries, the Permanent Secretary had openly declared, "For this list of candidates we can find the money, for these other names, no". Once more, we were at an impasse.

On 29<sup>th</sup> July 2011, the staff expressed their frustration by going on strike, as predicted by the writers of the letter to *Concord Times*. However, the main instigators of the strike were not those employees who had been eagerly anticipating the prospect of an open recruitment campaign; it was the old stalwarts of SLBS, many of whom had received generous termination payments, who insisted on their right to be permanently employed, no matter their unsuitability or lack of capacity.

Clearly discomfited by the events at SLBC, the President agreed to meet with the strikers. After listening to their grievances, he persuaded them to return to work and announced that he would set up a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the developments at SLBC leading up to the strike. Meanwhile, it had already been decided between UNIPSIL and UNDP that what was

needed was two separate reports: a standard financial audit of the organisation's accounts and a 'capacity assessment' of SLBC's strengths and weaknesses. The UN had already begun the tendering process for the two audits, when the Presidential Commission of Inquiry was announced. The prospect of participating in not one but three audits investigating the floundering corporation he led was obviously too much for the Chairman. At the end of one of the weekly Board meetings in September, he made the surprise announcement that he was leaving the next day for the United States 'on medical grounds' and did not know when he would return. It was left to his shocked and bewildered colleagues on the Board to find a way through the organisational maelstrom he had left behind.

### **One corporation, three inquiries, one outcome**

The Committee of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the problems of SLBC began sitting on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011. It was an all-male affair with representatives from SLBC Board, management and staff, the UN and the Ministry of Information. The position of Chair was taken by the incoming head of the Independent Media Commission. On paper, the breadth of representation seems ideal. However, appearances can be deceptive and within days, the weaknesses became apparent. The SLBC Board representative was the member for the Youth Council who took great offence at a group of Presidential nominees questioning the authority of the Board. After several angry outbursts, he refused to attend any further meetings. The UNIPSIL representative, Paul T, was a drinking buddy of the Minister of Information and put in only sporadic appearances. More worrying still was the fact that SLBC staff were represented by the main instigator of the strike, a presenter who knew that he met none of the criteria for the journalist posts. In fact, because of his lengthy tenure at SLBS, he had received the largest termination payment of all. Despite this, he still refused to accept that he did not have a right to permanent employment at SLBC.

Even though it had planned to meet daily, the Committee did not present its findings until mid November. There was an official presentation ceremony at State House on the morning of 17<sup>th</sup> November 2011 — exactly one year

before the elections — during which the final report was handed to the President. Strangely, only the Ministry representative had seen the final version before it was presented. When the Director of HR, Thomas S eventually saw the report he was mortified to read, in the hastily included annexes, a list of unsupported allegations of tribalism in his own department. The complaints, all from APC supporters who had been introduced to the corporation by the Deputy Director General, implied that he and his assistant were vocal SLPP adherents who put their political beliefs before their professional duties. There were other worrying elements, including a plea for more cash for the struggling corporation and a clearly stated declaration that the consultants' list of appointees be finally approved.

Meanwhile, the tendering process for the financial audit had been won by the Freetown branch of the multinational firm, KPMG. I would have preferred to see an outside firm appointed, worried that a local company would be unduly influenced by local politics and connections. However, once the team of young accountants — led by two more senior figures — began their work, I was reassured. Early on, they alerted the UN to the fact that SLBC's financial affairs were in such disarray that they would need an extra four weeks simply to compile a comprehensible record of income and outgoings. They requested no fee for this extension, even though their team would be tied up a month longer than expected. The eventual report published on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011 showed that SLBC's financial controls were “very ineffective or non-existent”, its cash position was “unhealthy”, there were inadequate records for its income and expenditure and questions were raised about the unofficial recruitment of staff from October 2011. There were inadequate records regarding the finances of the regional radio stations, incomplete staff files and billions of Leones in income and expenditure that could not be accounted for (KPMG *Management Letter for SLBC* 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011 pp3-6). The auditors observed:

“Our review of the financial statement and accounting records revealed that the financial statements were not prepared in accordance with any recognized accounting framework and best practices” (op.cit: p16).

The tender for the capacity assessment exercise looking at SLBC's strength and weaknesses was won by Elizabeth Smith, former Secretary General of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association. She had sixteen years' experience in working at a strategic level with state broadcasters all over the Commonwealth and was familiar with the challenges of broadcasting in developing societies under sometimes difficult political conditions. Smith set herself up with a laptop and mobile phone in the Boardroom at SLBC where she could conduct her lengthy and quite searching interviews in private. As an older woman, she would customarily have been accorded a degree of respect but what was so surprising was the sometimes 'confessional' nature of the encounters with staff in which a wide range of misdemeanours and failings within the corporation were revealed. While Smith was unfailingly polite and considerate in her dealings with staff, management and Board members, the eventual report was surprisingly frank:

"The record of both the Board, the Director General and the Deputy Director General in setting up SLBC as a public service broadcaster and in controlling its finances, has been very unsuccessful. The breakdown in the relationship between the Board and the Management is paralyzing the organisation... It has since become clear that one of the reasons behind the organisation's failure is the fact that personnel at all levels are simply not equipped for the job. This has led to the disastrous situation in which the organisation has lacked direction, credibility and impact" (Elizabeth Smith, *Capacity Assessment of SLBC* 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2011, Executive Summary p3).

The three reports present an interesting 'triangulated' perspective on the situation at SLBC and their similarities and differences bear further consideration. The Presidential Commission of Inquiry represents the local Sierra Leonean approach, influenced by local political concerns and interests. By contrast, the KPMG audit was written from the 'multinational corporate' perspective of a global brand with member firms in 155 countries that seeks to impose 'consistency of service quality' through a 'Global Code of Conduct' and a 'Transparency Report' ([www.kpmg.com](http://www.kpmg.com)). The KPMG team approached the task of auditing the corporation's finances with an internationally accepted

understanding of financial best practice and showed that the corporation was failing badly. With her experience in BBC News and the World Service and her leadership of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, Elizabeth Smith demonstrated a commitment to the 'international/ institutional' approach to the capacity assessment. When compared, these three approaches — the local, the multinational corporate and the international/institution — highlight important points of agreement and disagreement in their overall conclusions: the priorities and interests of the local political elite, the gap between project aims and outcomes for the international/institutional approach and the professional and technical norms of the multinational corporate. For example, all three reports broadly concur on the failure of management and the Board to provide the vision and leadership necessary to steer SLBC through its difficult first year.

Regarding the SLBC Board, all three reports criticise the payment of salaries as well as sitting fees to Board members, even when they did not attend. The Presidential Commission pointed out that:

“The Board of Trustees receives gross monthly salaries of between 10 million and 5 million Leones, representing 11% of the total wage bill, in addition to sitting fees. Similarly, the Breakfast/Lunch monthly bill of the Board amounted to 1.06 million Leones (£150) in July 2011, the highest being 4.98 million Leones (£745) in November 2010 (\$6.2 *Board of Trustees Expenses*).

In the capacity assessment exercise, Smith recommends that the Board should only receive the same rate of remuneration as in other comparable bodies and they should only meet once a month (op.cit p 19). In addition KPMG found that having the Chairman and other Board members approve all expenditure over SLL 1 million (£150) effectively turned them into executive directors, involved in the day to day running of the corporation which should be the responsibility of the Director General and his management team (KPMG op.cit p3).

Similarly, all three reports are scathing on the subject of the satellite project and the huge financial burden it imposed on the fledgling broadcaster with KPMG questioning the legality of the purchase:

The corporation and management are clearly in breach of the Public Procurement Act 2004 and the failure of the consultant to deliver as contracted may be tantamount to fraud. The entire procurement process relating to the purchase of the satellite uplink should be thoroughly investigated and corrective action taken as appropriate (KPMG op cit pp 29-30).

The Presidential Commission departs from the other two reports — possibly because of its broader remit — in listing “the multi-faceted challenges” affecting SLBC: “lack of transparency, intra- and inter-conflicts in the Board, Management, Departments, Units and Sections of the Corporation, conflicts of interest, organizational issues, unproductive investments, undue influence, poor working environment and conditions of service” (§3.2 *Critical Issues*). Another significant difference is the emphasis that the Presidential Commission places on factionalism at the corporation:

“Perhaps the biggest challenges cited by staff who gave evidence to the committee which have potentials (sic) for instability and chaos, with only one year to Presidential and General elections, are alleged cases of suppression, marginalization, tribalism and political victimization by Staff, members of Management and the Board of Trustees, mostly perpetrated on Staff (ibid).

As evidence, the report refers to two Annexes containing allegations of anti-APC and anti-Northern behaviour and harassment in the Human Resources Department. As mentioned above, Thomas S, himself a member of the Committee which produced the report, had not had sight of these allegations and had no opportunity to respond. The implication of the report and its recommendations was that SLBC, as currently constituted, was a hotbed of SLPP oppositional activities and that accepting the recruitment list of the consultants would positively contribute to resolving the situation, ahead of the elections. The Presidential Commission report therefore represented a ‘coup

de grâce’, understood as “a final blow or shot given to kill a wounded person or animal”. In this case, the wounded ‘entity’ was the hope that SLBC would adequately fulfil its mandate as an independent public service broadcaster and offer its audiences the quality output they deserved.

While KPMG and Elizabeth Smith, as outsiders paid for by the UN, also examined the management and structural failings of SLBC, I believe the Presidential Commission Inquiry was mandated to safeguard future international support for the corporation by ostensibly examining its weaknesses in public while practically doing little to address the fundamental causes of those weaknesses. It was another example of what Andrews defines as ‘signalling’, where countries talk of reform rather than implement it in order to impress key stakeholders (2013:28). Organisations that do not implement accepted and legitimated best practice mechanisms, as suggested by KPMG and Smith, are “open to claims of being negligent, irrational or even unnecessary” (Di Maggio and Powell 1983 :148). Andrews argues that such claims can be threatening to an organisation’s very existence in an environment in which it is heavily dependent on external support as in SLBC’s case with the UN and international donors (2013:69). In view of this, the following recommendation from the Presidential Commission Inquiry report is revealing:

**Financial Sustainability**

§18 In view of the critical role of SLBC in promoting Good Governance, Peace and Unity, we strongly recommend that Government and its Development Partners provide the necessary Financial and Technical support that would enable the Public Broadcaster to play its rightful role fully, with strict neutrality and thereby give credibility to the 2012 Presidential and General Elections process.

The critical phrases that would appeal to the donors — “Good Governance, Peace and Unity”, “strict neutrality” and “credibility” are included to underpin the real objective of the report, the request for “the necessary Financial and Technical Support”. As well as the desire for continued funding, I also contend that the ultimate aim of the Inquiry was to steer the broadcaster onto a course more closely aligned to APC political ambitions with a Board, management

and staff cowed into compliance. With State House underwriting salaries and costs, there were fewer and fewer individuals at SLBC willing to “bite the hand that feeds”, thereby losing all potential for open and honest debate in the run up to the elections. And all this was carried out behind “the trappings of the rational-legal order”, that is a Presidential Inquiry, which the elite would do so much to subvert (Taylor 2009: 168).

### **The bigger picture: the state, neopatrimonialism and failed development**

Back in 1981, the political scientist Robert Bates in his examination of agricultural policies in Africa asked the searching question, “Why should reasonable men adopt public policies that have harmful consequences for the societies they govern?” (p3). He went on to make the logical assumption that political action is purposeful behaviour aligned to the pursuit of certain objectives and the resources needed to achieve them. Time and time again, I found myself applying Bates’s question to the SLBC situation and wondering why a process as critical as recruitment and selection should be so severely thwarted that the individual eventually chosen was not the best available in terms of capacity, skills and experience.

The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, the UK’s foremost professional association for the HR profession, claims that recruitment is “the process of having the right person, in the right place, at the right time and is crucial to organisational performance” (CIPD 2013). For Pilbeam and Corbridge, the recruitment and selection of workers is “fundamental to the functioning of an organization and there are compelling reasons for getting it right” (2010:142). Owusu and Ohemeng argue that in the most effective public service organisations, employees are the most important resource and the key to its success (2012: 142). Cooke (2001) shares their view on the importance of the workforce. Yet, as Jenkins (1997) points out, in societies marked by what he calls ‘ethnic categorization’, ie the identification (often negative or pejorative) of others as a collectivity based on ethnicity, the recruitment process is a form of ‘gatekeeping’. In such societies,

“ethnic categorization is a powerful criterion governing the allocation of

job-seekers to jobs by those authorized to make recruitment decisions”  
(p67).

In such situations, Jenkins observes, the key moment during recruitment is the interview:

“...no matter how perfunctory it may be. Although formalized diagnostic testing is becoming more influential in initial screening, interviewing and committee decision-making are central to processes of *administrative allocation*...It is the discretionary nature of these gatekeeping encounters, within a permissive bureaucratic framework, which allows ethnic categorization its inevitable entry into the process — whether explicitly or implicitly” (ibid, original emphasis).

Although my colleagues and I repeatedly tried to introduce practical methods of screening candidates such as written tests, news quizzes for journalists, in-tray exercises for administrative assistants, accounts to be tallied for finance staff and so on, our suggestions were ignored. The single occasion I witnessed a written test included was as part of the interview process for senior news editors. However, the whole interview process was so skewed as to render practical tests invalid, as I noted to the Presidential Commission shortly afterwards:

#### **Interview for Senior Editor, News and Current Affairs (April 21st 2011)**

The objections I raised about the scores awarded to the first candidate in the Senior Editor interviews relate to the fact that his interview responses were awkward and monosyllabic. Of course, it is clear that this post does not involve presenting but, in my view, it did demand a demonstrable understanding of the responsibilities and the nuances of public service broadcasting. In my opinion the candidate did not demonstrate any understanding or indeed, any real ability to explain issues. For such a key leadership role, I found this worrying.

Furthermore, I disagreed with the marks awarded in the writing test. I was informed that this particular candidate had more than thirty years' experience. In that case, I would have expected his writing test to far surpass the others in quality and style. It was simply shorter than the others who exceeded the 90 word limit. Of the 66 words he produced,

42 were in the first sentence: it was clumsy, inelegant writing that broke the basic rules of broadcast journalism.

In the interviews for Senior Editor highlighted above, I was struck by the unfairness of the process. The first and clear favourite of the interviewers was asked questions as anodyne as “what do you think this job involves?” and “what would be the first thing you would do when coming into the office in the morning?” compared to the rather more searching questions posed to the other candidates such as “explain the difference between news and current affairs”, “what do you understand by objectivity?”, and “how can you make sure a news programme is impartial?”. Shortly after his appointment, the favoured candidate was caught accepting money from a government figure for ‘placing’ a story. Such an example proves the ease with which the interview process might be derailed for political purposes. It also reveals the apparent lack of interest in how such an amoral, poor performer in a management position would negatively influence the rest of the team. Clearly, appointing such an individual would do nothing to change the prevailing culture: rather it would drive home the message of ‘business as usual’.

The reluctance to use selection methods above and beyond the interview is widespread throughout Africa. In their examination of human resource management in two hundred organisations in Ghana and Nigeria, Arthur et al found that 90% of respondents relied on interviews alone as a method of selection with only 32% occasionally using written tests (1995: 353). More recent work by Aryee (2004), Beugré, (2004), Kamoche et al (2004) in Ghana, Ivory Coast and Kenya demonstrates that this practice persists although Owusu and Ohemeng (2012) and Tettey (2012) are amongst a growing number who are clamouring for change in this area. In the so-called ‘tiger economies’ of East Asia, efficient and effective public sectors contributed positively to the successful development of their societies according to Evans:

“Meritocratic recruitment was important, not only to promote competence but to give state employees a sense of *esprit de corps* and belief in the worthiness of their profession” (2010:4, quoted in Owusu and Ohemeng op cit p 141).

As Jenkins suggests, the *discretionary* nature of interviewing facilitates biased selection (1997: 67). Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Africa where recruitment to public sector posts at all levels is based on loyalty — ethnic, familial or communal — to the ruling elites rather than qualification or competence (Bates 2008: 47; Chabal and Daloz 1999: 6). In Sierra Leone, the situation had become embedded during the 1980s and 90s under the one party system introduced by the APC. During this time, the Head of the Civil Service who was also Secretary to the President ensured that prominent government positions were held by political appointees (Kpundeh 1994: 150). In fact, the ruling party's constitution clearly stated that no-one could be appointed or continue to be a permanent secretary unless he were a member "of the recognized party", ie the APC (Kpundeh 1995: 65). Kandeh shows that the ethnicization of the scramble for cabinet appointments and posts in the bureaucratic and security apparatus of the state contaminated the political environment to the extent that there was no room for debate on policy or ideology (Kandeh 1992: 94). The continued practice of patronage and clientelism is demonstrated by the fact that when the APC came to power in 2007, an estimated 80% of the state bureaucracy was removed in order to make way for APC sympathisers with no regard for the resultant negative impact on development of so great a loss of skill, expertise and knowledge (Cubitt 2012: 151; ICG 2008: 11). Such a short term, politically motivated move wiped out, at a stroke, five years of international investment in post-conflict capacity building. However, as Chabal and Daloz argue, in Africa what is seen as important is not the capitalist notion of steady growth and investment relying on deferred reward but rather the immediate display of material gain, consumption rather than production:

"At a most fundamental level...the logic of the notion of success is antithetical to the economic 'mentality' underpinning development"  
(1999: 160).

In other words, the priority is not on the long-term benefit of the state and Sierra Leoneans but on the immediate gain of one's clientelistic network. In an even more glaring example of such patronage, *Africa Confidential* reported the advantages to the Koroma family of having Ernest Bai Koroma win the

2007 election: first cousin Edward was appointed to head the Ministry of Finance, elder sister Admire left the civil service to become a government contractor while younger brother Sylvanus was permitted an overdraft facility for millions of dollars at the state-owned Sierra Leone Commercial Bank (*Africa Confidential*, Who's Who profile, Ernest Bai Koroma).

The effects of such practices on the state and its institutions are long term and pernicious. According to Mulinge and Munyae, once members of a particular group enjoy privileges under such a system they come to regard themselves as the "legitimate owners and controllers of the state" and will do anything to preserve their status. Consequently, once a particular group dominates the strategic positions in the hierarchy of various institutions,

"the floodgates are opened for their fellow ethnics to penetrate lower level positions through entrenched ethnic appointments of lower cadre employees as the president's power brokers practice favouritism and nepotism (2000:145).

Ayoade maintains that whenever the state is captured by the political élite it becomes 'soft', leading to "a shrinkage of competence, credibility and probity" (1988:141; see also Young 2012:80). He goes on to quote the words of Justice Brandeis from 1928 who concluded that:

"...crime is contagious. If the government becomes a lawbreaker, it breeds contempt for the law; it invites every man to become a law unto himself; it invites anarchy" (ibid).

There are many who would argue that the vicious civil war and the anomic violence which it brought in its wake was an inevitable outcome of the unbridled venality of the political elite (Cramer 2006; Gberie 2005; Keen 2005). The RUF's own manifesto implies as much:

"We can no longer leave the destiny of our country in the hands of a generation of crooked politicians and military adventurers...It is our right and duty to change the present political system in the name of national salvation and liberation...This task is the historical responsibility of every patriot...We must be prepared to struggle until the decadent, backward and oppressive regime is thrown into the dustbin of history (Foreword, *Footpaths to Democracy*).

While not upholding the RUF's own justification for its acts, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission conceded that the political élite of successive regimes in the post-independence period were responsible for creating the conditions for conflict:

“The Commission finds that the central cause of the war was endemic greed, corruption and nepotism that deprived the nation of its dignity and reduced most people to a state of poverty. Successive political élites plundered the nation's assets, including its mineral riches, at the expense of the national good. Government accountability was non-existent. Institutions meant to uphold human rights, such as the courts and civil society, were thoroughly co-opted by the executive. This context provided ripe breeding grounds for opportunists who unleashed a wave of violence and mayhem that was to sweep through the country” (Final Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Vol Two, Chap 2 § 12-16).

Undoubtedly, one of the institutions “thoroughly co-opted by the executive” would have been the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service. It is ironic then and perhaps inevitable, that an important means of addressing the root causes of state decay in Sierra Leone — the possibility of a national independent public service broadcaster — should be so totally engulfed by the same negative forces that gnawed away at the foundations of the state, so called ‘elite capture’.

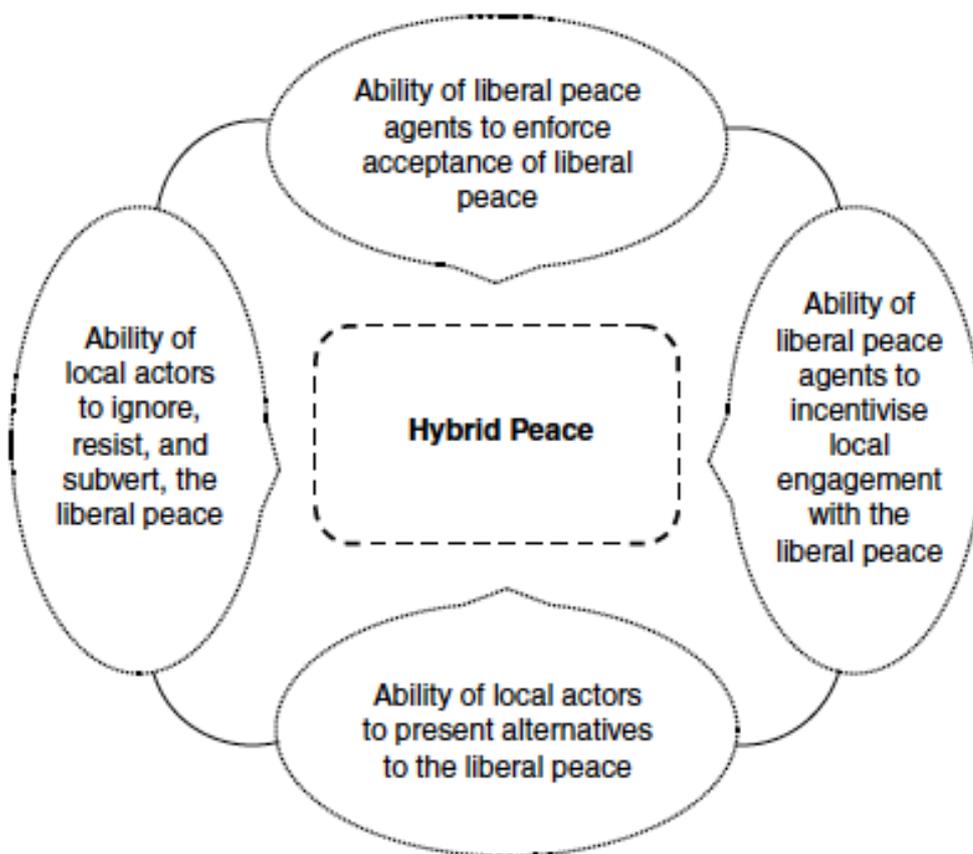
In its discussion of community driven development projects, the World Bank defines elite capture as:

“situations where elites shape development processes according to their own priorities and /or appropriate development resources for private gain (2008:1)

It goes on to say that elite capture may be either harmful or benevolent and the key to avoiding potential derailment is the introduction of “correct checks and balances’ such as community involvement at all stages of the project, democratic selection of project leadership, complaint handling mechanisms and participatory monitoring and evaluation methods involving all stakeholders (pp 4-5). One wonders what might be the parallel checks and balances with a national project like SLBC? Again, writing about community

development, Wong describes the two choices facing donors hoping to avoid elite capture: the 'counter-elite' approach which explicitly excludes elites from the decision-making process and the 'co-opt elite' approach which absorbs local elites into management committees. Both have their weaknesses: the 'counter-elite' approach overlooks the simple fact of elite domination and the profound structural asset dependence of the poor people on elites. The 'co-opt' elite approach risks legitimising the authority of local elites and implementing 'anti-poor' policies either by reasserting the status quo or skewing future outcomes in favour of elites (2010 pp 1-5).

In conceptualising the 'hybrid peace' which emerges as a result of local resistance to international peacebuilding efforts, Mac Ginty has devised an analytical framework which neatly encapsulates the 'messiness' of the SLBC project and the interplay among the four factors making up hybrid forms of peace:



**Fig 9.1 The Hybrid Peace Model (Mac Ginty 2011a: 9)**

- the compliance powers of liberal peace agents, networks and structures
- the incentivising powers of liberal peace agents, networks and structures
- the ability of local actors to resist, ignore or adapt liberal peace interventions
- the ability of local actors, networks and structures to present and maintain alternative forms of peacemaking

First, I had assumed that the *compliance* powers of the UN would be strong enough to deflect capture or derailing of the SLBC project. Protocol regarding sovereignty of states show that this is not so: the Head of the Mission, the Executive Representative of the Secretary General, Michael von der Schulenberg was summarily dismissed by the President and declared *persona non grata* on the grounds that he was working towards a level playing field for all parties in the up coming election (Schulenberg Letter to Under-Secretary General, Department of Political Affairs 22/12/11). Hutton maintains that this incident proves how little space there is within the UN system when it comes to having realistic conversations about state authority.

Second, the *incentivising* powers seemed to go no further than handing over the money and expecting demonstrable accountability in how it was spent. This was one reason why the UNDP disbursed funds to SLBC on a 'Direct Implementation Method', as there had been no prior evidence of the ability to maintain adequate financial records. The UN's assumptions, like my own, were misplaced. Next, the 'ability of local actors to resist, ignore or adapt liberal peace interventions' has, in the SLBC case, been shown to be strong. Whatever declarations of independence may have been voiced or communiqués signed, it eventually became clear that the Government of Sierra Leone had no intention of giving up control of the national broadcaster. From the lack of disclosure to its prior plans for expansion and the 'secret' and ultimately disastrous purchase of a substandard satellite to the skewed,

stalled recruitment process, the story of SLBC is one of elite resistance and adaptation.

Finally, the 'ability of local actors to present and maintain alternative forms of peacemaking' was demonstrated with remarkable effect by the Independent Radio Network. During the election period, this coalition of 28 local and community radio stations stepped into the vacuum that was left by SLBC's complete inability to deliver its public service mandate. The *raison d'être* for its creation, to have a national independent and impartial broadcaster ahead of the 2012 elections was completely stymied by the political machinations of the ruling APC. After a total expenditure of nearly \$4 million (£2.5 million) and nearly three years' consultation, SLBC was finally deemed to be a failure.

## **Conclusion**

Mac Ginty's model of the hybrid peace model (2011) comes closest to explaining the 'shifting sands' of the SLBC project. The hybrid peace represents a complicated balancing act between what local and international actors can and cannot do, whatever their publicly declared intentions. For the UN, its declared aim of creating an independent broadcasting corporation by merging UN Radio with SLBS was hailed as a bold innovation. In reality, it was a stop gap measure, a sop to the two main political parties once their inflammatory private radio stations were closed. It became clear that the mission's leadership, either in Freetown or New York, would not challenge government authority, not even when the KPMG report and the capacity assessment showed how 'off-target' the project was. In reality, the UN had little in the way of 'compliance power', a fact clearly demonstrated in February 2012 when the Head of UNIPSIL, Michael von der Schulenburg, the Executive Representative of the Secretary General, was removed from office apparently at the President's request. It seems that Schulenburg's push for greater transparency in the mining industry and respect for human rights was not appreciated at State House (Hutton 2014). His dismissal ushered in a dark period of uncertainty for the UN and its agencies in Sierra Leone. There was widespread disappointment that the organisation had been seen to be

humiliated by the Government, thus losing the respect needed to force compliance in the SLBC project.

By contrast, once Schulenberg was dismissed, it seemed as if there were no constraints on the government's interference in SLBC, except perhaps the fact that the corporation was on its knees, unable to pay its staff or its suppliers, including the National Power Authority. Government resistance had all but destroyed the 'great blue hope' but still, as an apparently logical conclusion in the report of the Presidential Inquiry, came the request for

“the necessary Financial and Technical support that would enable the Public Broadcaster to play its rightful role fully, with strict neutrality and thereby give credibility to the 2012 Presidential and General Elections process (§18).

So, having embezzled a large percentage of the \$4million (£2.5 million) budget and ignored the technical advice of the project team, the Ministry of Information, with no hint of irony, believed it was now entitled to ask for more.

In answer to the research question, is it possible to create an effective, functioning public sector institution in a postconflict society like Sierra Leone, I can only respond “It depends.” It depends on the level of political commitment on the part of both local and international actors. The UN must be aware of the need for long term technical, financial and political support for such radical projects in fragile states. All through 2011 and 2012, the elites played a waiting game which saw them deflect any challenges to their control of SLBC — whether through its funding, its staff or its output. Had the corporation been allowed to mature to the point where it could defend itself against interference and hold up a mirror to Sierra Leonean society, its output might have kick-started an authentic debate leading to profound, long lasting change in the aftermath of a vicious civil war. Instead, the organisation lurched towards the November 2012 elections heavily indebted, editorially compromised and with a workforce bloated by political 'add-ons' and survivors.

## **Chapter 10      2012 General Elections and aftermath**

### **Introduction**

Amidst the labyrinthine workings of SLBC and the UN, it is easy to forget that one of the primary reasons a public service broadcaster was created was to provide a level playing field for all political parties before and during the 2012 election. Traditionally, elections are the acid test for broadcasters as free and fair media are deemed to underpin the democratic process (Cushion 2012; Lange and Ward 2004; O’Neil 1998; Scannell 1989). From the early days of the project, it looked as though SLBC would have difficulty fulfilling its role in this regard. Despite the extensive financial and technical support from the UN and partnerships with international organisations like the Knight Foundation, Deutsche Welle and BBC Media Action, SLBC had failed to move on from its previous incarnation as a government appendage. As predicted, it performed dismally during the elections, its radio and television coverage clearly favourable to the ruling APC. By contrast, the output of the Independent Radio Network was far more in keeping with a public service remit. Through its simulcasting, this ‘electoral hub’ of 28 local and community radio stations formed a parallel ‘national broadcaster’ to the flawed SLBC, due to its reach and penetration at the grassroots and in the rural hinterland. Moreover, IRN’s output seemed more to the liking of listeners.

In the days and weeks following the elections which passed off relatively peacefully, serious consideration was given to the UN’s investment in SLBC. From my own research perspective, it became clear that in its present guise, SLBC could not positively contribute to nation building or even peacebuilding when its impartiality and basic trustworthiness were in doubt. Equally, the organisational wrangles that had preceded the election seemed to throw new light on the relationship between form and function, especially in the area of public service broadcasting. Through autoethnography, document analysis and monitoring of SLBC’s output, I describe the tense period in the run up to the 2012 elections and beyond.

### **Looking ahead to elections**

By the time the elections arrived, Sierra Leone was facing a democratic crisis with the APC elite becoming ever more anxious to use all means to mobilise

popular support, including hijacking the SLBC experiment. And, in another turn of events, the President's aides held out the tantalising promise of a US style Presidential debate which never took place, thereby "avoiding debate in a common forum" (Snyder and Ballentine 1996: 14).

In the eyes of many observers, the ultimate test for SLBC as a newly formed public service broadcaster was its performance during the elections of November 2012. Instead of being simply a government mouthpiece as SLBS had been considered in the past, it was hoped that SLBC would display its independence and professionalism by creating a level playing field for all political parties. To this end, its international partnerships with Deutsche Welle Akademie and BBC Media Action would be crucial. The relationship with the Knight Foundation in Washington had soured somewhat since the *débat* over recruitment. However, it was local actors who demonstrated a genuine concern for democratic debate when they organised an apparently insignificant but truly remarkable meeting on the morning of Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2012. A small group of Sierra Leonean media workers plus one UN official gathered in an airy production office in the centre of Freetown to discuss the role of the media in the upcoming elections. Nearly every aspect of the country's media was represented: the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the Cotton Tree News Project, the Independent Radio Network, Search for Common Ground, BBC Media Action (formerly the World Service Trust) and the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation. The print industry however was not represented. Kelvin Lewis, Chairman of the UN-sponsored Guild of Editors was suffering with malaria and had sent his apologies. At later meetings, however, he was an active and enthusiastic participant.

Nominally, the group had convened to discuss individual initiatives and common challenges. In reality, the aim of the meeting was to find ways in which they could collectively support the ailing national broadcaster. All present agreed that SLBC was not up to the task of impartial political coverage. Had I not been present at the meeting myself I could not have imagined a scenario where concerned media professionals would agree to rally round a corporation which they had so often vilified. While there was all

round agreement to the idea of supporting SLBC, BBC Media Action, a leading media development partner, was slightly more cautious and expressed the fear of senior managers in London that working closely with SLBC “might tarnish its brand”. The National Co-ordinator of the Independent Radio Network, whose members struggled daily to maintain their impartiality in the face of political bullies and ‘Big Men’, described their widespread disillusionment at SLBC’s output. The President of SLAJ described SLBC simply as a ‘lost cause’.

Listening to all this was Jonathan K, the Head of News and Current Affairs at SLBC, who had arrived before his manager, the Director of Media and Public Affairs. This weary young man took his time to spell out the corporation’s utter lack of preparedness. He listed the incidents of mismanagement and unprofessionalism, including the recent suspension of the Senior News Editor for accepting money to broadcast a report favourable to a political aspirant. He described the long, drawn out process of setting up an election committee where the brightest and most outspoken journalists had been side-lined in favour of mediocre partisans including one young woman whom, he said, “had difficulty writing her name in a hurry.” He recounted the example of one of SLBC’s most promising presenters who was marginalised for interviewing an opposition spokesperson with no governing party contribution. It transpired that the government figure had been unavoidably delayed and had telephoned SLBC to explain that the fault was his rather than the presenter’s. Still, the journalist in question had been relieved of many of his responsibilities. Jonathan continued:

“It’s important that people from outside have some hand in keeping the election coverage impartial because if SLBC is left to its own devices I fear what will happen. The UN has to be involved in some way... Everyone is rushing to be seen on television but for most people radio is by far the most important thing”.

Whatever Jonathan thought, it was at variance with opinions amongst managers at SLBC and officials in State House who seemed determined to keep ‘outsiders’ — that is, anyone with a fresh eye and independent

perspective — away from the elections team. It should be noted that Jonathan had worked at the UN Radio operation for several years before it had been handed over in the merger. He had been part of the UN team that had worked on elections in the past and spoke proudly of his practical experience. By contrast, the majority of SLBS staff remained in place due to the flawed recruitment process. These workers had never been exposed to the rigours of covering an election impartially and objectively. They had little concept of equal access for all political parties, or political debate based on issues rather than personality. It was almost impossible to get newsroom staff to engage with the idea of questioning the ‘advantage of incumbency’ during an election campaign. And when someone questioned the approach to a story involving the President or a key government figure, they were shouted down and derided as ‘SLPP’.

In light of this, I determined to monitor the output of SLBC with more focus and I was horrified at what I saw and heard. It was as if the merger with UN Radio had never happened. My analysis showed that the news in particular was strongly slanted in favour of the President and the government. The correspondent at State House was a woman with years of experience reporting under the SLBS system. It was clear that the transition to public service broadcasting had not affected her approach in any way. Her reports consisted of static shots of the President sitting at his desk, receiving guests. Whether the visits involved foreign diplomats, civil society groups or party activists, the shots remained the same. In some reports, the camera operator attempted a variety of shots but invariably these were done without a tripod and the effect was blurry and shaky. Then there was the verbatim script, voiced over by the correspondent herself. The script was badly written, often repetitive and lacking clarity. She stumbled over her own words and when the viewer was treated to actual synchronised speech from the President, it was usually a repeat of something the script had mentioned earlier. Her reports were so bad that they embarrassed the press officers at State House who confided as much to me.

Another particularly bad example was *Newshour*, the main evening news bulletin broadcast at 9pm on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> October. This was the third day of the election campaign period and the top story featured both the APC and SLPP mobilising their supporters in their outreach efforts. The APC stories, transmitted without any technical hitches, showed the President addressing supporters in Freetown and another report featured the Minister of Interior Affairs Musa Tarawallie talking to supporters in Port Loko. The studio presenter read the cue to the SLPP report but it was clear there was a technical problem and it could not be shown. After 10 minutes of reporting on the APC, the SLPP report was reduced to a mere one page script, read in studio without any accompanying footage or stills. To compound the insult to the feelings of the SLPP, later in the programme there was an extended interview with a Nigerian stand-up comedian who was appearing over the weekend in Freetown. Following this, the sports round up closing the bulletin was announced with the lead story on the rise of squash in the country, due mainly to the President's preference. The voiceover paid compliment after compliment to the President's fitness played over shots of the President himself playing squash. It was a pointless, badly produced piece of propaganda shamelessly disguised as a sports feature. Such careless disregard for the notion of 'a level playing field', particularly during an election campaign angered the SLPP who had threatened to boycott SLBC over what it saw as the explicit pro-APC bias in its output.

Government manipulation of SLBC's television output had begun months previously with pro-APC programmes slotted in at unexpected times. One example is the drama series *Police Case*. Written and produced by the NGO *AdvocAid*, which helps women gain access to justice, this outstanding four part series was aimed at educating viewers about their rights if arrested, when in custody and before a jury. It was beautifully shot by a professional camera operator who captured a moody, grainy image of Freetown that I had not seen before. The soundtrack was professionally mixed and featured samples of well-known music tracks (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqjszZ0pF2c> accessed 4/2/2014).

However, the most compelling part of the production was the storyline as it followed Adama, a woman caught up in a corrupt justice system after lashing out at her abusive husband. The drama segments were followed by a phone-in programme in which legal experts answered questions posed by viewers. For three weeks, the programme aired on Thursday evenings at 10pm, increasing its audience week by week through word of mouth. Inexplicably, in the fourth and final week, it was moved to make way for a discussion programme with the Minister of Information outlining the achievements of the present government, deferentially interviewed by an acquiescent SLBC freelancer.

Another worrying example of media bias concerns the UN directly. For more than a year, I chaired the UN Communications Group which brought together press officers and media representatives of all the UN bodies working in Sierra Leone. I enjoyed these monthly meetings as we discussed the activities of each organisation. The representatives were all Sierra Leonean and I learnt a great deal from their strategies and insight into local traditions and customs. However, there was one project that was greatly unsettling. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) worked closely with the Office of the First Lady on issues of contraception, neonatal and maternal health. These were issues that Mrs Koroma was interested in, having worked in the medical field while living in the UK. Money was made available by UNFPA to produce a film highlighting the joint activities of the First Lady's Office and the UNFPA. Rather than taking a lead in the production process, the UNFPA media officer unconditionally handed the money over to the press officer representing Mrs Koroma.

Instead of a fact-based, 'on the ground' documentary showing the shared work of the two organisations, what was produced was a thirty minute promotion of Mrs Koroma herself. Without graphics or a commentary, no facts were shared about the activities carried out or the money spent on some of the most urgent health issues facing the country. For approximately \$20,000 (£12,700) the UNFPA logo was attached to a political hagiography. This would have been uncomfortable at any other time but during an election

campaign period, it was extremely risky for the UN to be presented as anything other than impartial. I brought this to the attention of senior managers but nothing was done and the film continued to be aired sometimes twice a day.

Within this context, the ailing national broadcaster was approaching a contentious election with an incumbent President determined to remain in office, a controversial opposition leader, a disputed electoral process and concerns about the ability of a struggling police force to maintain law and order. The corporation's much vaunted 'election guidelines' had yet to be produced even though a two day workshop costing nearly \$10,000 (£6,350) had been organised six weeks earlier to showcase them. There was no sign of an election committee even though the topic had been raised on many occasions over the previous ten months.

The UN leadership seemed unconcerned by the approaching storm, something that both frustrated and angered me. SLBC was largely a UN creation, formed after the mission leadership had persuaded the leaders of the two main parties to sign a Joint Communiqué calling for an independent national broadcaster. Now, it looked as though one of those signatories, the SLPP, was about to walk away from the national broadcaster. Instead of the UN being seen as an impartial political partner, the whole episode painted the organisation as a partisan stooge to the Machiavellian antics of the ruling party, just weeks before an election. The implication from my manager and others was that I was 'overreacting' but fortunately, other local actors understood the gravity of the situation. Justice Tolla-Thompson, Chair of the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) which governed the conduct of politicians and campaigns, took it upon himself to broker a meeting at his home between SLBC management and senior figures within the SLPP on 14<sup>th</sup> October, the day before the diplomatic meeting. He listened to the SLPP's grievances and urged SLBC to consider its public service mandate more closely. The following day, SLBC met again with SLPP figures, this time at New Broadcasting House, and issued a press release, claiming that the impasse was at an end and that both parties had reconciled. Just four days

later, the programmes described above were transmitted, with no sign or comment of disapproval from the UN leadership or the diplomatic community, making UNIPSIL seem more complicit than ever.

### **Who leads? What follows?**

The most worrying thing for me and other observers of the media was that SLBC went into the 2012 elections with its journalism unchanged from the days when it was SLBS. As the election approached, APC incumbency was everything. SLBC's reporters could not or perhaps, would not judge a story on its news value and chose not to edit out any electioneering statements or activities in the course of a routine report which invariably focused on cabinet activities. The late Zimbabwean journalist Willie Musururwa aptly described the rigid structure of so much journalism emanating from government owned media thus:

“The honourable minister was warmly welcomed to X  
The minister said...  
The minister added...  
To warm applause, the minister concluded...”

(quoted in Martin 1998:70)

Ordinarily, such a stilted format was the basis for most news reports from SLBC, radio and television. During the election period, these reports would contain images of the audience and the relevant minister wearing party colours with party anthems sung in the background. SLBC's own monitoring did not include such reports as they were not seen to be 'electioneering'. Opposition leaders, having no role in government and therefore presenting no reason to be covered, would only be included when editors were looking for examples of political campaigning. These reports would then be matched by reports of similar length for the ruling party, regardless of how many 'the minister said' pieces had gone before. In addition, the commercial break within the news programmes and either side would often contain expensively produced political advertising for the ruling party which was also omitted from SLBC's monitoring. As a result, the corporation's programme logs showed 'equal' airtime given to political campaigning from all parties while the average

listener and viewer was, in fact, bombarded with material from the ruling APC party.

Frère suggests that one of the main challenges facing journalists during the electoral period is distinguishing between electoral information, political information, political communication and advertising (2011: 127). Clearly, this was not the case with SLBC and had not been a traditional practice of SLBS. Another worrying factor linked to this was the lack of an election manifesto from any of the political parties, thereby reducing the ground on which serious political debate could be held, leaving discussion to be hijacked by ethnic factionalism and demagoguery. SLBC was viewed as an open channel through which electioneering content from the APC easily flowed as journalists abdicated their role both as ‘gatekeepers’, not distinguishing which material hit the airwaves and ‘watchdogs’, not questioning the material or politicians during broadcasts (Fourie 2003: 171; McQuail 2005: 284; Shoemaker et al 2009: 73).

In her anthropological study of journalists and the political culture in Ghana, Hasty describes the concept of “who-leads, what follows’ in which reporters at state-owned media enterprises invariably saw officials as ‘the real newsmakers’ who make the only statements that count:

“This logic is not merely circular, but rather also indicates a complex array of notions involving discursive authority, performativity, propriety and public interpretation” (2005: 51).

So, the more that journalists and producers focused on the political ‘big men’, the less inclined they were to feature members of the public as they were deemed unimportant. And the less they actively courted public opinion or covered public experiences, the less informed they were of what was really happening outside party political circles. It was a dispiriting, ever decreasing cycle of political ‘praise-singing’ and press release recycling. This conviction was played out time and time again in SLBC’s news output. Staff believed that politics began and ended with politicians: there was little attention paid to the people on whose behalf these politicians were supposed to be acting. Hasty

points to Foucault's work on language, in particular the "rules serving to control discourse" (1972: 224). Specifically, Hasty emphasises the thought that:

"none may enter into discourse on a specific subject unless he has satisfied certain conditions or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so" (op.cit 225).

Similarly, ordinary people, in the minds of SLBC journalists, were not 'qualified' to comment, even on issues of importance to them; they had no discursive voice. "Politics", it was believed, "should be left to the politicians". This is particularly ironic in view of SLBC's marketing slogan as "the voice of the voiceless". By focusing on the elections as an *event* in which the politicians were the 'star performers', SLBC completely ignored democracy as an on-going *process*, thereby disregarding its own responsibility as a public service broadcaster acting as the main interlocutor between the government and the governed. The closer the elections, the less concerned SLBC seemed with perpetuating its public service charade. As firmly in the control of the government as in the days of SLBS, its newsroom fell back into political default mode: the President leads, everyone else follows.

### **Preparing for elections**

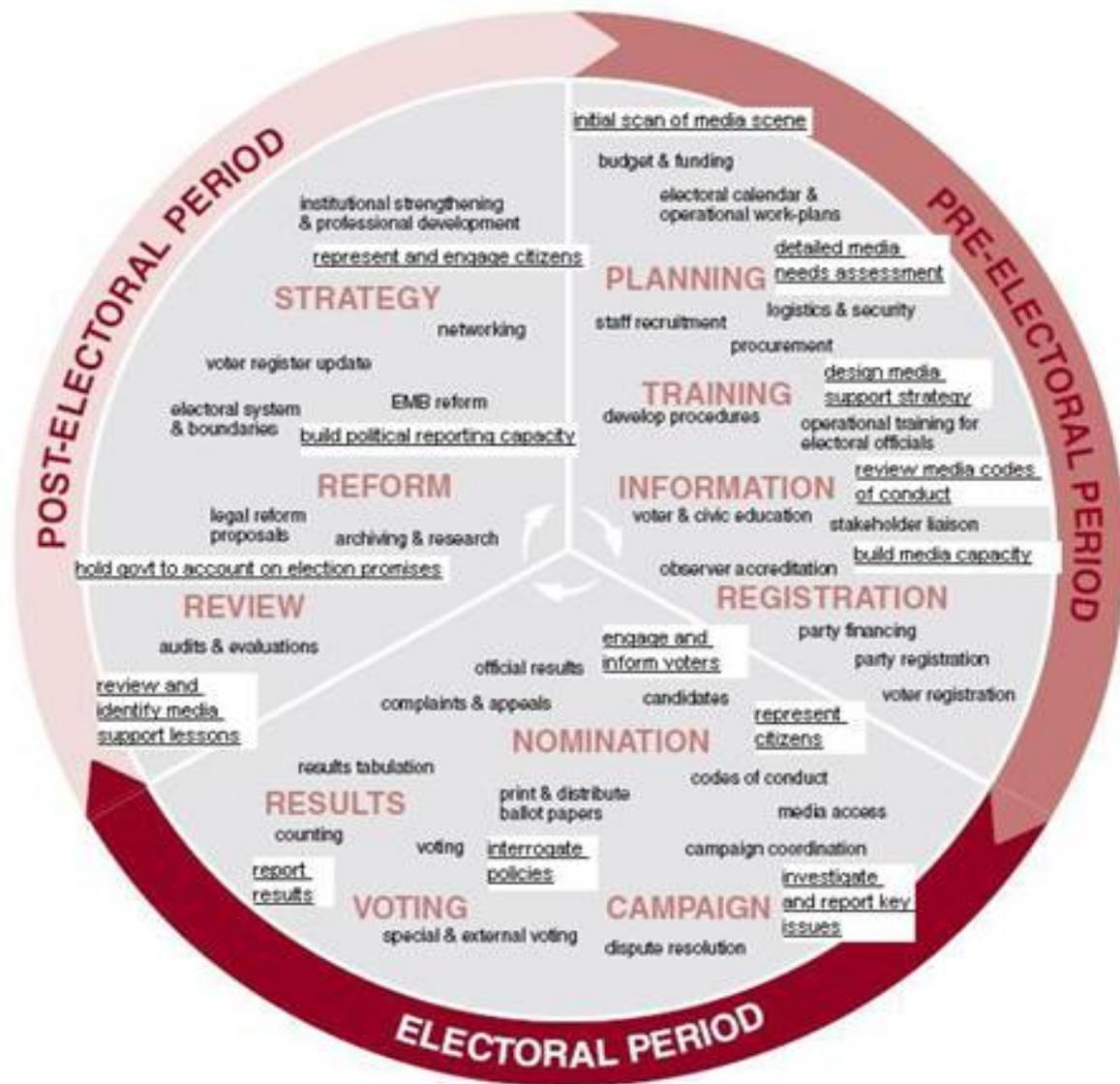
As discussed, for the international community, elections in a post-conflict country represent an important landmark. Depending on the time lag between the polls and the termination of hostilities, elections are seen as a gauge of the progress of the transition process or a possible exit point. Sierra Leone had already had three elections since the end of the war, each significant in their own way. The first post war election on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2002 was just four months after the declaration of peace and the disarmament of 72,000 former combatants. It was marked by skirmishes between party supporters and on the last Saturday before the polls, a major confrontation broke out between the SLPP and the RUF, as both had been given permission to march through the centre of Freetown on the same day (Harris 2012:104). The tense security situation was managed by UNAMSIL troops whose number still exceeded 17,500. There were clear signs of the access to government

resources enjoyed by the incumbent SLPP with lavish, giant posters depicting Tejan Kabbah at significant points throughout the capital and countryside. Although SLBS, Radio Democracy and UN Radio (still called Radio UNAMSIL at this stage) provided regular updates, the EU Observer Mission at the time noted a tendency on the part of SLBS to focus on government activities (reported in Harris 2012: 104).

The second post-conflict elections took place on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2007 with a reported 76% turnout and a change in fortune for the incumbent SLPP. Tejan Kabbah was required by the national constitution to step down after two terms and the party was split by the leadership selection process. Kabbah's Vice President Solomon Berewa was successful in winning the leadership but his rival Charles Margai left the SLPP to set up the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC). The move shrank the SLPP's representation in Parliament by half and when no candidate gained the required 50+% in the Presidential election, Margai threw his support behind the APC for the run off, thereby ensuring Koroma's victory and a complete overturn in traditional regional and political loyalties (Harris 2012; 124). These polls were significant not just for the change in regime but also for the fact that the massive UN military presence had been withdrawn and they took place under the aegis of the state's security forces. It should also be noted that for the first time, the political parties' own radio stations had become active although that of the SLPP lagged behind that of the APC by some six months (Harris 2012:125).

For Sierra Leone, this third post-war election was seen as a definite exit point for the UN's peacebuilding and political contingent. International and local election planning made use of the 'electoral cycle approach' (Fig 10.1) which sees elections not as a single event but as part of a continuous process that underpins democratisation (UNDP 2007:21). It is an approach that has been endorsed by UNDP and the EU and its value lies in its utility as a planning tool for various stages of the electoral cycle. Support to the electoral cycle in Sierra Leone amounted to \$40 million (£25 million) with contributions from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the European Commission, Irish Aid, Germany, Japan and the UN's Peacebuilding Fund.

Fig 10.1: The Electoral Reform Cycle (BBC Media Action adapted from UNDP 2007:21)



Clearly, the UN and its backers needed a successful election with ‘success’ measured in terms of a peaceful process with a notable absence of violence, reasonably efficient electoral systems and a credible result that was deemed legitimate by the voters. SLBC’s role was considered a crucial element in the democratisation process. For the last two elections, UN Radio had dominated

the airwaves, offering all political parties an equal voice. Now, UN Radio was no more and although some of its former workers endeavoured to deliver a professional service within SLBC they were constrained by the enduring structures and culture of the former government owned SLBS.

In truth, SLBC could no longer claim to be “Africa’s second independent public service broadcaster” (after SABC, though the independence of that broadcaster is now disputed). Despite an investment of nearly \$4 million (£2.55 million) and two years of international training and support, the people of Sierra Leone were left to face the crucial election of 17<sup>th</sup> November with no UN Radio and ‘SLBS-lite’. The institution in which had been vested all hopes for conventional public service broadcasting was a failure.

### **Sierra Leoneans organise: National Electoral Watch**

While the donor community contemplated what to do next, civil society had been organising its own valid alternative to what it perceived as the bloated excesses of donor supported institutions. The ‘National Electoral Watch’ or NEW as it was known was a loose collective of civil society groups and NGOs who first came together to observe the Presidential elections in 1997. Membership included the Sierra Leone Bar Association, the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, the Women’s Forum, the Academic Staff Association of the University of Sierra Leone and the Centre for Co-ordination of Youth Activities. Building on its experiences in subsequent elections at national and district levels, NEW established over time a decentralised structure to ensure close contact with voters at the grassroots level. For the 2012 elections, it organised a Citizen’s Situation Room and 9,493 trained observers, one for each polling station throughout the country. Observers would text information on results, electoral processes and notable incidents into a central control room enabling a specialist team to monitor the voting process as it progressed throughout the day. The aims of the Situation Room were to “provide information to the public and other stakeholders that is designed to increase voter participation, increase confidence in the electoral process, reduce tension and violence” (NEW press release 12<sup>th</sup> November

2012). Throughout the electoral cycle, from the period of voter registration to the announcement of results, NEW had formed a strategic partnership with the Independent Radio Network (IRN) representing 25 (later 28) independent community and private radio stations across Sierra Leone's 14 districts. IRN had proved its worth during the 2007 elections during which it had provided a reliable source of impartial reporting. In the rural areas like Kabala and Kailahun, many of the stations were staffed by volunteers. They received programmes on a syndicated basis from CTN, the international NGO Search for Common Ground and BBC Media Action. These pre-recorded programmes had high production standards and dealt with a range of issues of national interest from health, education and human rights to essential civic education.

Although IRN's output was significant throughout the electoral cycle, it was especially useful during the registration period when, for the first time, biometric registration of voters was introduced in an attempt to avoid the allegations of poll rigging that had been a feature of past elections. I had observed a high level of misinformation and confusion in the newspapers and on some SLBC reports: there had been references to 'electronic voting' and the possibility of voting abroad. The fact was that, while the registration process was to be computerised, the traditional key action of marking one's vote on the ballot paper remained unchanged. However, it was crucial that voters were aware that they had to register with a photograph and thumbprints in their home district and return to pick up a registration card without which they could not vote.

The huge task of registering voters began in January 2012 for a three month period and was carried out by the National Electoral Commission (NEC). It was a daunting undertaking, involving 800 specially designed voter registration computers each with their own generator because of the lack of electricity in the regions. The process was further hampered by weaknesses in NEC's own media and outreach departments. Nevertheless, after the registration data had undergone a number of verification procedures in Belgium — due to the lack of data analysis capacity in Sierra Leone — the

final number of registered voters was announced as 2,701,299. Undoubtedly, IRN's efforts in the area of voter education had been invaluable.

### **International support for local media during the elections**

In the meantime, BBC Media Action and Deutsche Welle were still committed to supporting SLBC's news staff and managers as they assumed responsibility for covering the election. The Country Director for BBC Media Action, George Ferguson had drawn up a comprehensive document analysing the risks of the upcoming election and highlighting those areas where co-operation amongst stakeholders would be valuable. Risk factors for 17<sup>th</sup> November included the fact that not one but four elections would be taking place on the same day: presidential, parliamentary, district councils and mayoral. The potential for administrative fallout and technical and security lapses was huge. In addition, if no presidential candidate managed to gain more than 55% of the votes cast, then there would be a run-off at a later date exacerbating an already tense situation (Ferguson 2010: 4).

As Ferguson suggests, the election itself would be an enormous administrative hurdle for the statutory bodies charged with its management. Added to this was the fact that many of the root causes of the eleven year conflict had not been adequately addressed: youth unemployment remained high at 70%, adult literacy had barely risen above 35% and governance issues such as systemic corruption, poor infrastructure, inferior public services and abuses of power still dogged the day to day existence of Sierra Leoneans (p1). Ferguson argued that all media organisations in the country faced a variety of challenges — whether it was print journalists struggling to make an honest living or community radio stations scrabbling around for fuel for thirsty generators in order to remain on air — and he tactfully referred to the “significant technical, management and governance challenges at SLBC” (p1).

What was proposed was a comprehensive and strategic framework in which donors, stakeholders and media organisations worked together to co-ordinate research, share information and plan together for the elections. It was a detailed, well-thought out strategy which unfortunately did not receive the

support it merited. Had the UN's Head of Mission shown that he was in favour at an early stage, then the rest of the diplomatic community might have been persuaded. Adequate funding could have been found and SLBC would have been positively 'enmeshed' in a media network, surrounded on all sides by media workers and civil society activists who might have kept the corporation in line with the project's stated aims.

One evening, the Director-General called me at home to explain that he did not want to work with any other media, that SLBC was not going to collaborate with anyone as "we really have to prove our independence at this time" — this from a man who had sent his organisation's Election Guidelines to the Minister of Information for approval. The substance of the call was in direct contravention of an agreement reached some weeks earlier in which the Board of Trustees, SLBC's senior management and the UN had recommended that the corporation pool its resources with other media organisations and work together to produce a comprehensive package to avoid duplication and gaps in the overall election coverage. Gbanabom had not been at that meeting, citing a pressing engagement elsewhere. He was represented by his deputy Mr Samura who clearly did not understand the proceedings of the meeting and either chose or forgot to inform him of what had been agreed.

This phonecall came a few days after Gbanabom had done an 'about-turn' on an agreement with Deutsche Welle to deliver business and political training to his senior management and newsroom executives. It was a particularly embarrassing incident: while Gbanabom angrily explained to his staff why the training should not go ahead, one of the trainers was sitting in front of him, having travelled eighteen hours to get to Freetown. At the time, a number of people commented that it was a deliberate move on the part of the Director-General to avoid having newsroom staff exposed to best practice political journalism because he knew that SLBC would not be conforming to those standards. During August, I was ambivalent, seeing the incident as just another empty gesture on Gbanabom's part. However, as the elections approached a pattern seemed to be building up. Jonathan K, the Head of

News and Current Affairs, who was widely respected around Freetown for his intelligence and professionalism was directed away from any involvement in the election by Gbanabom, whom I and others suspected of acting on orders from State House. The Head of Television was chosen to lead the Elections Unit and immediately drew up grandiose, impractical plans to take over half of the first floor of Broadcasting House, to employ a team of 150 including 80 freelancers and to extend election programming to at least six hours a day, with himself as the main political presenter.

The last hope for any semblance of fairness in output disappeared with the resignation of the Head of Radio who had also worked at the UN. She was a formidable figure, fluent in German and Russian, having gained two Master's degrees in Journalism Theory and Practice studying abroad. She was outspoken and fearless, a person of great integrity who refused to acknowledge the corrupt system of appointments within SLBC. When she was promoted to the post of Head of Radio without any open or transparent recruitment procedures having taken place, she refused for nearly a year to take the additional salary. She resigned to take up a production post with BBC Media Action alongside Hassan Arouni, the well-known presenter of *Focus on Africa* and himself a Sierra Leonean. Looking back, I can see SLBC's loss was IRN's gain.

Although Ferguson had not been able to secure support or funding for his 'media umbrella' project to cover the elections, in November 2011 BBC Media Action globally had secured funding from DFID amounting to £90 million over 5 years. It was agreed that the work in Sierra Leone be extended due to the positive results and feedback the project was receiving.

The local team had already been producing a popular weekly talk show on matters of governance, health and education. *Fo Rod* or 'At the Crossroads' was syndicated on local radio stations around the country and chose as its theme whichever topics were the most burning issue for ordinary people. Had SLBC been fulfilling its mandate as a public service broadcaster, this was precisely the kind of material that it would have been producing and

transmitting. It was informative, relevant and useful, targeting farmers in the rural hinterland and situated firmly on the social and economic development agenda.



*(Photo: BBC Media Action)*

**Fig 10.2 Hassan Arouni interviewing fishermen on Lumley Beach**

In early September I had travelled back to the UK for home leave and, as usual, I stocked up on stationery and other items not readily available in Freetown. I was constantly searching for things that would be useful and appropriate for the climate and intermittent power supply. Browsing through the Internet, I discovered a useful product called a 'magic whiteboard' which consisted of a roll of detachable sheets of white plastic that would stick to any flat surface, forming a temporary whiteboard. They could be wiped clean, re-used many times over and easily moved without damaging walls. They were perfect for ad hoc planning boards and I ordered a roll to share between IRN and SLBC. As soon as I delivered the goods to the IRN hub, there was a buzz of excitement as people discussed where to place the sheets, what to write on them, which colours to use for what and so on. When I returned the next day, the walls were full of schedules, contact numbers and programme clocks, positioned where everyone could see them.

I took the same items — sheets of magic whiteboard, pens, reams of different colour paper for reporting district, parliamentary or presidential results —to SLBC’s election operation. The scene that greeted me was rather poignant. The Head of Television had not succeeded in taking over half of the first floor as he had wished. Instead, the election unit now occupied two damp derelict offices at the end of the first floor corridor which had previously been unused because of the dire condition. A small amount of money had been sliced from the remaining UN funding to pay for a printer and an extra computer. The government must have paid for the rewiring and hurried painting as I knew that SLBC’s cashflow situation was negative. The Head of Television (and ‘Election Co-ordinator’) looked embarrassed as he greeted me and gestured for me to sit down on the other chair in the room.

I glanced around and noticed that at the end of the office was an alternative entrance into the smaller radio studio of the three in operation at SLBC. This was intended as the main output point for the radio broadcasts but was also used for storing the clutter that had been cleared to make way for the election team. There were signs of damp creeping through the recently applied lemon paint and around the windows there were dark patches of sticky mould that had stained the yellow chintzy drapes. Despite the recent high profile recruitment campaign which had added an extra 80 freelance reporters and technicians to the payroll, there were few people about. The next time I visited, the day after voting, there were even fewer people in the office. There were two ‘magic whiteboard’ sheets on the wall, with one scribbled telephone number. The reams of coloured paper were unopened.

### **Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012: Election Day**

I had never seen an election in Africa before now and I was moved by the commitment of the people to exercise their democratic vote. NEC had called for a ban on all private vehicles on the day to avoid the possibility of gangs of party supporters driving from one booth to another, intimidating the public. It undoubtedly lowered the tension but it had proved a burden for voters who

had registered near their place of work, thinking that public transport would be available on the day. For example, hundreds of market women who spent their days in the centre of the city but lived far out in the East End of Freetown had registered downtown, thinking they would be able to work that day. As a result, many had had to leave their homes before dawn to walk several miles into town to cast their vote. They then faced the same hard journey home again, often with babies on their back and children by their side.

The streets were eerily quiet apart from the police vans and UN vehicles that sped up and down, chasing rumours of violence and counter-rumours. In my area of Cackle Bay, the polling station was based at the local secondary school and many people started queuing from dawn. I was touched by the quiet resolute dignity of voters as they lined up in their hundreds, patiently waiting. There were delays and long queues due mainly to the fact that the newly recruited National Electoral Commission (NEC) staff were not entirely confident in their responsibilities. But there was no sense of impatience or irritation on the part of those who were forced to wait in the glare of the sunshine. “Aah, dey do try, dey do try”, “They’re doing their best”, was the comment I heard time after time throughout the day. Resourceful as ever, the women in my neighbourhood could not miss this opportunity to make a few extra leones to feed their families. They came dressed up as if going to church or to the mosque, bearing on their heads large plastic bowls full of iced water and ginger beer.

As a senior employee of the UN, I was designated an official election observer. This meant that I could enter the grounds but not the back rooms of any polling station I chose. I also wore a white T-shirt thoughtfully provided by NEC with the date of the election in large letters across my back. I walked from the secondary school to the next polling station along the road. I greeted my neighbours along the way and chatted to other local observers once there. I laughed when a senior citizen from Cackle Bay shouted after me:

*“Mammy Linda, Mammy Linda, ah do lok fer your name but ah no see!”*

“ I looked for your name, Mammy Linda but I couldn’t see it”.

I remembered her. She was the grandmother of one of the younger boys in my football team. He had been very sick with a parasitic infection and I had paid for him to be treated by a private doctor as I was worried he might not get well. His grandmother had thought I had done it to win votes and was now willing to fulfil her part of the clientelistic bargain. It was not the first time that my community activities had been perceived as a precursor to a run for office.

### **Waiting for results**

Tension had been high in the days running up to the election, but the week following the vote was far worse. There had been widespread concern as to whether the National Electoral Commission (NEC), under its controversial chair Dr Christiana Thorpe was up to the task of overseeing an electronic biometric registration process as well as accurately collecting and tallying all votes cast. During the 2007 election, Dr Thorpe had annulled returns from 8% of the polling stations, mainly in the heartlands of the ruling SLPP causing party officials to claim the election was rigged in favour of the opposition APC (EUEOM 2007: 4). This time, amidst the mounting tension, it took six days for NEC to declare the results. At 5.30 in the evening of Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November in front of an invited audience, Dr Thorpe stood up to make her announcement which was broadcast live on radio and television. The average national turnout was 87.3% with a total number of 2,350,626 votes cast. The APC's Ernest Bai Koroma was declared the winner of the presidential poll with 58.7%, narrowly avoiding the need for a run-off. The SLPP's Julius Maada Bio received 37.4%. No doubt aware that the SLPP would immediately cry 'foul', the upper ranks of the APC rushed off to hurriedly organise a swearing-in ceremony.

In the end, most observers, domestic and international, believed the process was generally fair and transparent with isolated administrative weaknesses such as late opening of polling offices and a shortage of voting materials in some places. According to the codes of conduct drawn up by the Independent Media Commission and the National Electoral Commission, there should be a mandatory 'cooling off period' the day before the polls open during which there should be no campaigning in the field or any party political broadcasts

carried in the media. Overall, this had been respected by the politicians though the Commonwealth Observer Group witnessed campaigning activity in the APC stronghold of Kono and provocative behaviour by a prominent APC figure on polling day (COG Election Report p 17).

The number of observers, both local and international, ran into hundreds. Amongst the foreign organisations sending missions were the Carter Centre based in Atlanta, Georgia, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme. Regional bodies included the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). There were representatives from such local groups as National Elections Watch (NEW), the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone Teachers' Union. The larger foreign missions produced comprehensive reports following the elections and their comments regarding the media are worth examining in detail. Although the Carter Centre did not formally carry out a media monitoring programme, it noted that:

“the incumbent president and the ruling party received considerably more coverage than opposition parties from the SLBC and other outlets, providing them with an unfair advantage during the campaign period” (Carter Centre Observer Mission Report p2).

Similar comments may be found in other observer mission reports. The African Union described the media environment as “highly polarised” while noting that the ruling party received “preferential media coverage” (AUOM Report: Sierra Leone p 15). ECOWAS, the regional grouping of West African states declared that:

“Except in a few cases, the media was polarized, partisan, and intemperate, reflecting the sharp Red - Green divide of the country's political landscape between the All Peoples Congress and the Sierra Leone Peoples Party” (ECOWAS Observation Mission Report p2).

### **Monitoring of SLBC's output**

I had begun monitoring SLBC's output with a team of three Sierra Leoneans

— two journalists and a librarian —who monitored from home. It was an uneven exercise, fraught with difficulties, not least the regular blackouts that the monitors experienced in the areas in which they lived. Unlike the EU Observer Mission which only monitored news broadcasts and election programming, we looked at all of SLBC's output, including paid programming, political advertising and light entertainment. These findings revealed even more biased programming in favour of the APC. For example, on Fridays, the Muslim day of prayer, SLBC regularly carries Islamic religious programming which may include a service, reading of the Koran or even a discussion programme with local sheiks and believers. On Friday 9<sup>th</sup> November, the Islamic Programming from 12.56 to 14.55 on radio covered the visit of President Koroma — a Christian — to one of the biggest mosques in Freetown. Later that day, the political programme *Salone Satellite* from 16.58 – 17.44 featured just one report, on the APC. Meanwhile on television, that same day *Juma Report*, normally a religious programme covered the same mosque visit as radio but the programme was shorter, lasting from 13.03 to 14.30. The result was that, on certain days, in the week before the election coverage of the APC constituted nearly 80% of all political content on SLBC.

The APC had also invested heavily in paid programming and advertising. *Campainment*, a flashy animated programme featuring popular music was broadcast at peak hours, 18.30 -19.00 throughout the weeks beginning 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> November until Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November, the official 'cooling off' period. SLBC breached the legal condition banning political campaigning in the media in the last 24hours before the election and on the day of the polls on two occasions: firstly, by broadcasting during the day on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> a studio interview in which the UNPP flag bearer and the CDP Secretary General openly endorsed Koroma as the APC's presidential candidate. Secondly, and far more serious, was an 8 minute interview with the President himself during *We Yus*, an extremely popular talk show broadcast between 20.00 and 20.55 on the Friday evening before Election Day.

According to the EU findings, the APC spent SLL 24,555,000 (£3,500) on political advertising on SLBC TV, compared to SLL 80,000 (£12) spent by the

PMDC and RUF (EUEOM Final Report 2013: 26). However, the price of airtime would have been dwarfed by the production costs of the APC political advertisements. Though there were variations, many of them featured an animated character called Mr Tazz who hears a strange noise and goes looking for the source only to find it is a huge crowd of people shouting “*Worl best, worl best*”, a reference to the APC campaigning slogan of President Koroma as “*Di Worl Best*”, “The World’s Best”. The advertisement itself was well made and entertaining but was played repeatedly in the run up to the election. When SLBC ran out of transmission material, as they often did, they would play Mr Tazz advertisements back to back. The media monitoring carried out by my colleagues and myself showed that, on some days during the campaign period, when all political content and advertising was taken into account, the ruling APC accounted for more than 80% of the total coverage.

### **The findings of the EU Observer Mission regarding the media**

The most in-depth monitoring of the media was carried out by the European Union’s Election Observation Mission. A team of five local monitors trained in quantitative and qualitative analysis monitored a representative sample of eleven media outlets. In the electronic media they selected SLBC Radio and Television, Radio Democracy 98.1, Star Radio and CTN. In the local press they focused on the following newspapers: *The Exclusive*, *Global Times*, *Awoko*, *Concord Times*, *Standard Times* and *Awareness Times*. The timeframe selected for analysis was 17<sup>th</sup> October to 15<sup>th</sup> November with the objective of assessing whether political parties and candidates obtained equitable access to the media and whether the media abided by the rules and regulations for media coverage during an election campaign (EUEOM Final Report 2013: 25).

I had gone to Bintumani to meet with the head of the EU’s media monitoring team. He had been a little wary of meeting me, thinking that I would be defensive about SLBC’s poor performance during the elections. He was relieved to hear that I shared all his concerns and that none of his team’s findings had held any surprise. He also explained that before beginning any monitoring at all, he had met with all media stakeholders, including the IMC

and the Director-General of SLBC. He had shown them the monitoring forms and explained in minute detail what the exercise entailed. The Director-General introduced him to SLBC's Election Co-ordinator and they had discussed at length which programmes it would be most useful to monitor. Therefore, the Director-General's angry tirade that followed the publication of the findings was a surprise to everyone. He appeared several times a day on television between Monday 19<sup>th</sup> and Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November condemning the EU mission and disputing their results. Accompanying Gbanabom's repeated television appearances was a taped news report shown several times in the week following the elections. The report was edited to show the Head of the EU Mission Richard Howitt fulsomely greeting the SLPP's Presidential candidate Julius Maada Bio and later, judiciously ignoring President Koroma.

The implication was that the EU's monitoring findings were slanted because the whole mission was supporting a regime change that would see the SLPP return to power. For myself and many others, it was conclusive proof that the UN's ambitious project to create an independent public service broadcaster for the people of Sierra Leone had failed. Here was a broadcasting corporation that had not only been shown to be biased in favour of government in its electoral coverage; when incontrovertible proof of the fact was presented, they dismissed it and even went as far as trying to besmirch the international observer mission that had collected the evidence.

Later, in its final report, the EU produced a series of recommendations on different aspects of the elections, including the media. There was a call for the regulatory role of the IMC to be strengthened so that it was better able to monitor compliance with the Media Code of Practice. It was suggested that

### **EU Electoral Observer Mission Media Monitoring Findings**

#### **On SLBC**

...the public broadcaster Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) gave access to all political parties on radio and to nine political parties on television...Contestants were granted two hours of free airtime to present their political proposals on the

public TV channel during the election period although only PMDC, UDM, SLPP, RUFPP and PDP made use of it.

SLBC national and regional radio stations also offered free airtime to political parties and local candidates to address their messages to voters.

However in key areas such as news bulletins and election related programmes, SLBC showed significant quantitative unbalance in favour of the ruling party. EU EOM's media monitoring findings showed that SLBC allocated double the amount of airtime (40.4%) to APC than to SLPP (17.9%). On top of that, an additional 21% of airtime was devoted to APC led government activities, meaning that 61.4% of all electoral coverage by SLBC TV was devoted to the governing party. As for the qualitative analysis, 23% and 27.5% of news aired by SLBC TV related to APC and to the government respectively were presented in a positive tone. Regarding the remaining parties, UDM was allocated 7.6% of airtime, NDA 4.4%, while all the other smaller parties together received below 3.5% of coverage on SLBC TV.

On SLBC Radio the unbalance was slightly lower, with APC receiving 40.5% of total airtime on news bulletins and election related programmes, and SLPP being afforded 22.8% of share. UDM, PMDC and NDA were allocated 8.4%, 8.1% and 6.5% respectively of airtime while all the remaining parties received in total below 5% of airtime on SLBC Radio. The tone of the electoral coverage on public radio was generally neutral.

### **On IRN**

The radio stations Radio Democracy and Cotton Tree News (CTN) offered balanced and neutral coverage of the campaign period, both in amount of airtime and tone devoted to political parties...After the polls, 28 radio stations operating around the country under the umbrella of the Independent Radio network (IRN) conducted work which the Mission considers commendable in providing provisional results of polling stations to the general public.

*(EU Election Observation Mission Sierra Leone 2012 Final Report p25 -26)*

the Public Order Act of 1965 be revisited especially the current provisions for up to seven years' imprisonment for journalists found guilty of libel and defamation. As expected there were strongly worded recommendations regarding SLBC and its performance during the election period. The corporation was required to "make all efforts" to fulfil its obligations as a public service broadcaster in line with the SLBC Act and the Media Code of Practice.

### **SLBC vs IRN: performance analysis**

In the weeks leading up to the election and results, the programming from IRN's electoral hub seemed to have struck a chord with the public. Wherever I went in Freetown and beyond, I heard the same output: in the streets, in the market, in taxis, in shops and offices. IRN seemed to be the chosen channel for the majority of the people during that critical time. Even when the programming seemed to consist of a long stream of results from polling stations around the country, the wider audience was still hungry to hear. UN offices around the country reported a deep penetration of IRN output, far more than SLBC. Apart from the fact that IRN's content was deemed more trustworthy, outlying rural areas were more likely to receive a signal from their community station than from SLBC's rather haphazard approach to transmission. In one particular instance, violent conflict seemed a certainty in the southern region around Zimmi close to the border with Liberia. Apparently, Sierra Leoneans living across the border were prevented from crossing back to vote by die-hard SLPP supporters who feared that the incomers might vote APC. There had been confirmed reports of such incidents at different border points in the north and east. Despite requests in the months leading up to the election, SLBC had done nothing to strengthen its signal from the transmitter serving that area. The UN was forced to turn to the local radio station, Radio Wanjei, to ensure local residents were informed of the voter registration programme and the arrangements for election day. Additional help was requested from UNAMIL, the peacekeeping mission in Liberia whose radio station broadcast public information announcements targeting voters in that remote area.

Individually, IRN stations are far from perfect given their low level of skills and

the scarcity of resources. Their vulnerability to harassment by local big men is an ever present challenge but Network Co-ordinator Ransford Wright believes this is where the network of stations has a useful role to play:

“...then there is this strength when we are together. It’s not easy for us to be defeated in a sense because when we are together, we are stronger and there is this sense of belonging and they know that it’s not just one radio station that you can just pounce on ... They belong to a group where other stations can take up issues, and things like that have happened in the past, where stations have been challenged or attacked or things like that but then as a network, we are able to rise up and support them. And we just foster that relationship, garner the support and just get them to know that they are not alone.”

(Personal interview)

In terms of value for money, IRN seems to be a far more attractive option than SLBC. The network received direct funding of \$39,995 (£25,500) from UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) to enhance its election coverage. As part of the National Electoral Watch, it would also have indirectly benefitted from funding allocated under “*Support to radio based news reporting*”: this amounted to \$580,000 (£370,000) over four years and was shared between SLBC, the Cotton Tree News project based at Mount Aureol and members of IRN.

The utility of IRN for the democratic project in Sierra Leone lies in its penetration and reach to the grassroots and, at the same time, its unifying potential at the national level. As media researcher and consultant Batilloi Warritay points out,

“The IRN was by far the most objective and helpful media institutional network during the elections. With funding injected prior and almost during the elections, volunteers and stringers of IRN were able to traverse the country far and wide and provide relevant information during the elections. Their reportage was considered objective and timely. Without IRN, many people would have doubted what was coming from the papers and the SLBC.” (Personal correspondence)

Like many local observers, Warritay felt that democratic debate throughout Sierra Leone would benefit from continued support to IRN:

“The investments made in pre-planning and pre-training of staff, stringers and volunteers made a major difference. Unfortunately, one would like to see this level of work in between elections and not only around the hype periods of electioneering and the actual process.”

Just before I left Sierra Leone, I had a number of meetings with Afcom, a major supplier of internet connectivity services. Unwilling to wait for the much heralded fibre optic cable to arrive, the company had constructed its own dedicated wireless network linking Freetown with major towns around the country: Bo, Lunsar, Makeni, Kenema and Kono. At my request, the Managing Director drafted a plan which would have linked all 28 IRN stations via the wireless network with small on-site linking units for an initial investment of \$26,000 (£16,600) plus monthly fees of \$1500 (£960). This would enable simulcasting on all stations as well as monitoring the output of any individual station at any time. It would also mean that the impact of the electoral hub could have been maintained to offer a parallel national alternative to SLBC for a fraction of the cost. When I explored the possibility of funding such an initiative I was informed that there was no more money to be spent on media projects in the short to mid-term future: SLBC had exhausted all resources.

## **Conclusion**

The UN had eagerly anticipated the 2012 elections, believing that they would represent a suitable exit point after nearly 14 years in Sierra Leone. The elections would also be a major test of SLBC’s credentials as a public service broadcaster. The corporation failed miserably. The media monitoring carried out by the EU’s Election Observer Mission showed that both SLBC television and radio were biased in favour of the government, a fact strenuously denied by the Director General. So affronted was he by the criticisms of the output that he made several appearances on television in the week after the polls, defending the corporation.

By contrast, the Independent Radio Network with a fraction of the money, infrastructure and staffing of SLBC performed creditably well, a fact acknowledged by international electoral observers and local audiences alike.

The success of IRN and the failure of SLBC highlighted a number of important issues. First, the UN had invested heavily in one organisation to deliver public service broadcasting when in fact, a network of smaller, less well-funded local and community stations had proved itself more effective at both the grassroots and national levels.

Second, IRN was a local initiative, founded with support from the international NGO *Search for Common Ground*. While not being without its weaknesses, IRN demonstrated an understanding of local needs and interests and adjusted its output accordingly. For example, the non-stop broadcasting of results from individual stations all over the country, hour after hour, was a ‘tough listen’ for my international colleagues and myself but Sierra Leoneans viewed it as an important part of the political process and were fascinated by the output.

Finally, after investing all its resources — financial, technical and human — in the SLBC project, the UN had nothing left to support the IRN. In effect, an unsustainable SLBC was supported at the cost of a sustainable, locally-based indigenous media initiative which enjoyed widespread support. The implications of the SLBC project for post conflict peacebuilding and the UN in particular are many and will be discussed in the following concluding chapter.

### Introduction

This thesis opened with my mistaken assumption about Westlife's fanbase in Sierra Leone. Throughout, I have tried to present more of my mistaken assumptions and those of the UN too. Although the SLBC project failed, its failure has much to teach the UN and observers about post conflict intervention and media development in Africa. In the last twenty years, much faith has been placed in the 'imported template' approach in which whatever structures, institutions and methods worked in one place are assumed to be equally effective elsewhere (Autesserre 2014; Putzel and van der Zwan 2006; Taylor 2009). A significant feature of the SLBC project is the fact that another potential 'template' — the merger of a UN radio operation with a government broadcaster ahead of the UN's exit from a peacebuilding environment — was stymied by elite capture and resistance to the alternative values and norms necessary to see the merger progress. Had SLBC succeeded, we should now be considering the merger of Radio Okapi in the DR Congo and Radio Miraya in South Sudan with their government owned counterparts.

Ultimately, comparing the performance of SLBC during the elections with that of IRN prompts a discussion of public service broadcasting as a *genre* versus the concept of public service broadcasting as the *function of an institution*, the public service broadcaster. The dilemma remains: which best serves the need of fragile, post conflict societies? And which might prove more effective in bridging the gap between endogenous nation-building and exogenous state-building?

This concluding chapter will link the broader theoretical themes of the literature review with the micro-detail of the case study, highlighting what has been learnt from the story of SLBC and my contribution to the academic debates.

## Overview

The role of the media in conflict has been much discussed (see amongst others, Frère 2007; Gilboa 2007; Minear et al 1996; Robinson 2002; Seib 2005). However, the role of the media in peace is much less explored, in particular the impact of the media in the period leading from the cessation of hostilities to the creation of a sustainable peace. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, emphasised the potential of the media to consolidate peace in post conflict situations:

“By giving voice and visibility to all people — including and especially the poor, the marginalized and members of minorities — the media can help remedy the inequalities, the corruption, the ethnic tensions and the human rights abuses that form the root causes of so many conflicts” (SG/SM/7750 26<sup>th</sup> March 2001).

It was with these lofty ideals that the project to create the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation was launched. Ever since discussions had started about the withdrawal of the United Nation’s peacekeeping force in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, questions were raised about what to do with the UN’s own radio station. Since it began broadcasting round the clock in the summer of 2000, UN Radio, as it later became known, had been one of the most popular aspects of the UN in the country. For the first time, listeners around the provinces were linked to a national broadcaster with professional production values and an eclectic mix of news, current affairs and light entertainment.

In 2007, the controversial second post-conflict election saw a change of government from the SLPP to the APC following the annulment of several hundred thousand votes in SLPP heartlands which were deemed by the National Electoral Commissioner to be fraudulent. The SLPP and its followers reluctantly accepted the ruling and remained relatively quiet until March 2009 and the worst outbreak of violence since the end of the war. The catalyst for the confrontations was the vitriolic output of the private radio stations belonging to the APC and the SLPP. In both cases, inflammatory broadcasts and hate speech were deemed to have incited followers to attack each other. The UN and the local diplomatic community quickly intervened to mediate between the parties and an agreement was reached that, after the closure of

the party political radio stations, an independent public broadcasting corporation should be established “that operates on the basis of internationally accepted standards and gives equal access to the views and arguments of all political parties” (*Joint APC-SLPP Communiqué, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2009*). This new independent entity was to be created by merging the UN’s radio station with the government owned SLBS. To the UN leadership locally, this merger seemed ideal. It solved the dilemma of what to do with UN Radio after the departure of the UN peace mission; it consolidated the agreement in the Joint Communiqué and it would guarantee an impartial effective broadcast presence for the upcoming elections in 2012. However, after nearly three years of consultations, the implementation of the project was far from smooth.

From the beginning, it was clear that the APC government was not keen to lose control of its main broadcasting outlet, having given up its private radio station as part of the Joint Communiqué. Senior figures at ministerial and cabinet level soon revealed their true intention: to manipulate workers at the corporation in order to maintain political control and capture the considerable resources flowing into the corporation. Management appointments reflected the ethnic make-up of the ruling party. The Director General was a poet and journalist from the Northern region, the APC’s stronghold who did not possess the required qualifications or broadcast management experience as laid out in the job description. The Deputy-Director General, on the other hand, had no broadcast experience whatsoever apart from once sitting as a trustee on a community radio station.

Constant disagreements over organisational structure delayed the crucial recruitment process which would have brought in fresh new management and journalistic talent. A massive investment in an over priced, unsuitable satellite system virtually bankrupted the corporation. More telling, a \$1.5 million grant from the National Telecommunications Commission to pay for this same satellite went missing and was never accounted for. Over the months, the staff gradually become demoralised by over-work, late salaries, bad management and uncertainty about the future. They expressed their

frustration by going on strike leading the President to set up a Commission of Inquiry into what had gone wrong. All this within the first twelve months of SLBC's existence. The UN did little but stand by and watch as SLBC slowly meandered towards the edge of a corporate cliff. It was only saved from actual bankruptcy by the President asking the Bank of Sierra Leone not to call in its overdraft. The corporation limped along until the elections in November 2012 when the EU Observer Mission's media monitoring team showed that SLBC had allocated twice as much airtime to the ruling APC as to the opposition SLPP, despite its own in-house code of conduct and that of the Independent Media Commission.

After more than three years' of planning and strategic input, not to mention \$2.5 million of international funds and \$1.5 million of Sierra Leonean public funds, SLBC had turned out to be a bankrupt partisan failure with the potential to cause even more controversy than its ill-funded predecessor mainly due to the UN's investment.

### **Addressing the research questions**

- ***Is it possible to create an effective functioning public sector institution — in this case, a public service broadcaster — in a postconflict society like Sierra Leone?***

Just months after the end of the war in 2002, the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) set about the gargantuan tasks of investigating the reasons behind the war, mapping the history of the conflict and suggesting ways in which the country could move forward. The Commission concluded that years of bad governance, endemic corruption and the denial of basic human rights meant conflict was inevitable:

“Successive regimes became increasingly impervious to the wishes and needs of the majority. Instead of implementing positive and progressive policies, each regime perpetuated the ills and self-serving machinations left behind by its predecessor. By the start of the conflict, the nation had been stripped of its dignity. Institutional collapse reduced the vast majority of people into a state of deprivation.

Government accountability was non-existent. Political expression and dissent had been crushed. Democracy and the rule of law were dead. By 1991, Sierra Leone was a deeply divided society and full of the potential for violence. It required only the slightest spark for this violence to be ignited” (TRC 2004 Vol I §11 p10).

Compounding this political dystopia was the aftermath of a bloody civil war in which nearly 70,000 lives were lost; over half the population were forced to flee their homes, and countless numbers of innocent civilians endured rape, violent assault and mutilation (Hanlon 2005: 2; HRW 1999). Institution building is difficult even in peaceful, favourable conditions but in a traumatised, impoverished society like Sierra Leone, the challenges were enormous. And yet, if one considers the rationale behind the UN’s peacebuilding doctrine — “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” — so too were the opportunities. Postconflict reconstruction offers the possibility of addressing long standing injustices like the marginalisation of women and youths. In addition, overhauling the public sector could have led to a leaner, more efficient civil service with new instruments of financial management and governance.

The reasonable expectation was a public sector that better served the poor who depend on it for the delivery of such key services as health and education. Yet, an uncomfortable truth that is rarely recognised is that nearly fifteen years of international intervention in Sierra Leone has resulted in few institutions achieving the required capacity and stability to operate independently. Some observers might consider the police or army as ‘stable institutions’ but ordinary citizens would strongly disagree, pointing to the level of harassment and demands for bribes they suffer on a daily basis. Even the National Electoral Commission which oversaw the 2012 polls required careful ‘hand-holding’ throughout the campaign process from the beginning of the registration period to the announcement of results.

At the root of the problem of institution-building is a fundamental mismatch between the needs and expectations of the long-suffering people, the ambition of the international community to impose a system of governance

more recognizably Western and 'Weberian' in function and appearance and the deeply-held desire of the elites to retain as much of the status quo as they need in order to retain their grip on power and sources of patronage.

Giovannetti et al summarise this predicament succinctly:

“Redrawing the understanding and arrangements that underpin the polity and bind state and society together requires getting to the heart of embedded power structures and fundamentally altering them. This is likely to be extremely difficult and sensitive, especially given that, in a very real sense, the drive behind state-building, especially in postconflict settings, inevitably lies in negotiation and compromise rather than in fundamental transformation” (2009: 100).

As an example of institution-building, SLBC perfectly demonstrates the tension between the best interests of the people, international intentions and the predatory preferences of the elite. A functioning public service broadcaster with a mandate to 'inform, educate and entertain' would have been a positive asset for the country's citizens. However, this would have required a complete transformation of the former SLBS, a technical reality beyond the 'negotiation and compromise' preferred by UNIPSIL's leadership. Furthermore, this complex situation was further aggravated by the duplicity of the government and SLBC management whose apparently irrational actions stemmed from a rational desire to maintain editorial control of the corporation while plundering its assets.

Often the most effective form of support to new institutions is international partnerships with the placement of international staff working side by side with their local counterparts imparting tacit knowledge and 'know-how'. In some areas, for example Radio Okapi in the DRC, a media development organisation Fondation Hironnelle manages the project on behalf of the UN. In Sierra Leone, a crucial decision was taken early on in the planning stages that no external agency should be involved in the running of the new corporation. The President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Umaru Fofana angrily dismissed such a suggestion when I interviewed him, saying that it was patronising to suggest that Sierra Leoneans could not run their own broadcaster. The irony of the situation was that neither SLAJ nor any other

civil society organisation was strong enough to intervene when the government was actively interfering in the management of SLBC.

When I arrived in Freetown, the apparent plan was to hand over everything from UN Radio — assets, people and programming— to the newly merged venture. As described in Chapter 8, the UN set in place the necessary technical and financial support including business forecasts, organisational charts and IT programmes, believing that the staff who could make use of it would soon be hired. Indeed, there was ample evidence of suitably skilled people in the workforce and the thousands of application forms received showed there was great interest in working for SLBC. In my opinion, this was the point when the project was derailed, falling into the dead space between two institution building alternatives. Either the SLBS staff could be retained together with their UN colleagues under a senior leadership with the capacity to put the resources to good use and change the organisational culture. This probably would have involved senior international personnel, but not necessarily from the West: other African countries or Asia have a growing number of skilled and experienced media executives. Or, the corporation could have shut down completely for a short time in order to recruit a totally new workforce with the necessary skills, experience and attitude to make the organisation work. Neither option was adopted: instead, SLBC ended up with the same workforce, further bloated by political appointees and Big Men's paramours but without the skilled management and visionary leadership necessary to make it work.

Paris (2004) was one of the first commentators to suggest that the gradual development of strong effective, institutions was the best way of stabilising a postconflict society before introducing the potentially divisive elements of liberal democracy and marketization (p205). However, this 'institutionalisation before liberalisation' approach (IBL) necessarily takes a long term commitment of resources, time and attention, far in excess of the international community's attention span. In the case of Sierra Leone, the UN was looking for a convenient exit point and the conclusion of the third post conflict elections in November 2012 seemed to present such an opportunity. By that

stage, postconflict reconstruction had been underway for nearly fifteen years. By contrast, Paris shows that while the US built the institutional structures of democracy and capitalism in Germany and Japan during the five or so years of its formal occupation of these countries, the continuing presence of its troops over several decades in these territories exerted a stabilising influence that could not be achieved by any other means (op.cit. p207). Paine agrees, arguing that even rapid statebuilding and economic development can take up to three generations (2010:9). One wonders whether a modern postconflict intervention such as that in Sierra Leone would be granted a similar level of resources over a similar period of time in order to support the embedding of institutional structures. Certainly, the sorry saga of SLBC shows that little more than three years — from the signing of the Joint Communiqué in April 2009 until the November 2012 elections — was far too short a period in which to create a functioning corporation in the face of the UN's apparent diffidence and the malevolent interference of the government. One wonders what might have emerged if the fledgling broadcaster had not been swimming against the political tide.

- ***Which factors — whether political, social, historical or economic — might affect the success or failure of such a project?***

In a critical essay entitled “Earth calling liberals...”, Taylor harshly upbraids those in the international community who would impose on Sierra Leone institutional templates conceived in the West, assuming that the rational-bureaucratic framework of the Weberian state already exists there (2009: 159). It is as wrong to assume political ‘buy-in’ to liberal principles on the part of the political elites as it is to consider the country as a *tabula rasa*, upon which Western political ideals may be imposed. Just as the civil war arose out of deeply entrenched political, social, historical and economic factors, so sustainable peace can only be built by taking those same factors into account. Similarly, institutions merging out of Western liberal ideas will be affected by what has gone before and the ever present struggle of the political class to maintain the status quo. As Taylor trenchantly observes, “the likelihood that

Freetown's elites will commit class suicide in the furtherance of the liberal peace agenda is viewed with some doubt "(op. cit 160).

*Political factors: national*

For this case study, two categories of politics should be considered: national and international. For most African states, the two would have been inextricably linked during colonialism as the attitudes and instruments of the colonisers would have influenced the state that eventually emerged following independence. Dependency theorists would argue that the international system has always been and remains skewed against the interests of developing societies in favour of richer industrialised nations. Nevertheless, for a postconflict country like Sierra Leone, international priorities have once more come to the fore in the process of reconstruction, in what some commentators have labelled the 'new imperialism' (see amongst others, Chandler 2006 and 2011; Duffield 2007; Taylor 2010). Chapter Two examined the particularities of the postcolonial African state through the lens of Westphalia, arguing that Africans have attempted to achieve in fifty years what it had taken Europeans up to fifteen hundred years to work through. I argue that the lack of strong, effective leadership at the 'birth' of a nation, as demonstrated by the post-independence history of Sierra Leone negatively influences a people's capacity or desire to promote strong feelings of nationhood. Further compounding the clash between indigenous political culture and imported ideas was the 'politicization of ethnicity' (Kandeh 1992) which has reduced politics in Sierra Leone to a zero-sum game where the winner takes all. As Chapter Six shows, Sierra Leone is a society awash with patriotism but in reality, this 'patriotic patina' usually cracks under the weight of neopatrimonialism. In the rural areas especially, ethnic ties exert a pull across national borders that political citizenry cannot match. Particularly in the run up to the 2012 elections, party politics were played out along ethnic divides, an unfortunate phenomenon in the fragile peace, given that ethnicity played little to no part in the civil war.

Three examples were highlighted to demonstrate the preference given to personal and clientelistic concerns over the national interest: the highly

anticipated 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence celebrations; the election of the President of the Sierra Leone Football Association; and the creation of a national public service broadcaster. In many other societies, three such events would have brought people together but in Sierra Leone they were hijacked by self-interest, ethnic consideration and patrimonial plunder. Chapter Three outlines in detail the scourge of corruption and its corrosive influence on all strata of society, especially the poorest who rely most on public services so have to pay a larger proportion of their income to access them. Yet, as Ake contends, the crisis that overwhelmed Sierra Leone and threatens the postconflict recovery was essentially *political* in nature: even though the economic consequences were and remain serious they were nevertheless incidental (1991: 316). It follows then that focusing on the immense damage caused by corruption is to address the symptom and not the underlying cause: understanding and addressing corruption requires a political rather than economic approach (Kpundeh 1994 and 2004; Persson et al 2013).

*Political factors: international*

The role of international politics was underlined by the fact that the SLBC project was managed by a political integrated peace mission — the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone or UNIPSIL. The high profile, high-level nature of UNIPSIL's activities brought into play protocols and diplomatic norms that saw projects frozen for weeks, even months rather than upset the delicate equilibrium between the mission's senior management and State House. An unavoidable consequence was the rapidly shrinking space for challenging state authority as demonstrated by the expulsion of the Executive Representative of the Secretary General and Head of Mission in Sierra Leone, Michael von der Schulenburg. He had championed cross party co-operation and was keen to see the main opposition SLPP and others represented in such groups as the All Political Parties Women's Association. But while international interventionists see cross-party talks and peaceful regime change following elections as indicators of a healthy democracy, ruling parties in neopatrimonial systems consider these ideas a threat to their continuing hold on power and access to resources. Schulenburg was

therefore removed at the President's request, although this was later denied by State House.

In the juggling of tasks facing any diplomat, some issues demand more attention than others. Schulenburg faced many challenges, not least helping to consolidate the fragile hard-won peace. While SLBC might not have been a priority for him latterly, he had been one of the main instigators of the project in the first place. It is possible that he chose to overlook APC interference in SLBC, preferring to lock horns with the government over other issues. Whatever the truth of the matter, it raises the question of sovereignty in postconflict scenarios: how much authority does the head of a UN mission wield in the face of government excess? And how far does national sovereignty stretch before international authority — possibly under the banner of the 'responsibility to protect' —legitimately steps in?

### *Social factors*

At the heart of this study is a fundamental clash between organisational cultures. SLBS could be said to be operating as a 'power culture' in which one or more individuals dominate the organisations by making all key decisions (Handy 1993: 180). This form of organisational culture is the most widespread in societies organised along patrimonial lines. On the other hand, UN Radio, as part of a large hierarchical organisation, was marked by its 'role culture' in which individuals have clearly delineated jobs to do (Handy, *ibid*). In such organisations, individuals closely follow their job descriptions and rarely deviate from what is expected of them. However, within the UN mission, there was a marked disparity between, on the one hand, the technical team of consultants who were focused on the SLBC project and brought to bear their professional skills and expertise to ensure delivery and, on the other hand, the leadership of UNIPSIL who seemed more concerned about "not rocking the boat". As Hutton (2014) observes, the emphasis in peacebuilding is on security and political stabilisation at all costs (p6; see also Duffield 2001). So, whenever technical hurdles appeared because of political machinations by the government or Board, no political support was forthcoming from the UN.

In the area of management, Andrews' work on 'signalling' (Chapter Eight) is particularly useful in explaining why reforms rarely produce functional or effective institutions even with the passage of time. The 'signalling game' involves governments verbally committing to reform and best practice in order to secure donor assistance but seldom following through on implementation. As he points out, "the intention is to make government look better, not to make better government" (2013: 33). Within the norms of a clientelistic society, such behaviour would be deemed 'rational' as its objective would be protecting the public funds on which elite patronage depended, irrespective of the longer-term impact on the institution or society in question. In April 2009, the APC government had 'signalled' its intention to establish "an independent public broadcasting corporation" which "operates on the basis of internationally accepted standards" (§7 *Joint APC-SLPP Communiqué, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2009*). It is clear that without due regard for meritocratic recruitment, fiscal probity, strategic management, visionary leadership, accountability and transparent governance, no broadcaster could survive, let alone gain the legitimacy required to question the society in which it operated. Ironically, SLBC's failure did not arise out of a lack of capacity: I helped organise the hundreds of job applications received and witnessed the availability of talented journalists, finance professionals, HR specialists, IT administrators and so on. SLBC failed because the political elite, while depending on the trappings of the rational-legal order to give them authority, at the same time consciously and deliberately subverted the management norms of that order. As Jenkins (1997) points out, in societies marked by what he calls 'ethnic categorization', ie the identification (often negative or pejorative) of others as a collectivity based on ethnicity, the recruitment process especially the interview is a form of 'gatekeeping', key to the distribution of clientelistic favours. Far from operating "on the basis of internationally accepted standards", SLBC's demise shows that in neopatrimonial settings, short term gain trumps effective delivery of services and long term sustainability every time (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 113).

### *Historical factors*

Reference has already been made to the legacy of colonialism and the lack of inspirational leadership at the time of independence. The country itself is an artificial construct, dating back to the founding of a colony on the coast for freed slaves in 1787. Built on the most fanciful of humanitarian whims, the earliest settlers paid no mind to the fact that the land was already occupied and had been since around 2500 BCE. Over time, the British established a 'Protectorate' over the rural hinterland but continued to govern it and the colony on the coast separately with two distinct legal systems. Indirect rule was introduced into the Protectorate giving local chiefs absolute authority over their areas. In certain instances, the heavy handed, predatory approach of some chiefs led to rebellions and during the civil war, some chiefs were singled out for execution or amputations as retribution for perceived injustices. The history of Sierra Leone as a single unified entity goes back only as far as 1924 when a new Constitution brought the Colony and the Protectorate together for the first time, though only a handful of rural chiefs were nominated as representatives. This apparent 'disconnect' between Freetown and the rest of the country remains and was further heightened by the corrupt and ineffective governance of the post war years, exemplified by the kleptocratic rule of Siaka Stevens who initiated single party rule. As the authority of the hollowed out state waned in the countryside, the elites withdrew to the capital and focused their energies on satisfying their clientelistic networks in the city. SLBC's own management mirrored this pattern, with its six district stations operating as independent fiefdoms. There was no common strategy on editorial matters, staffing, administration or financing. KPMG's independent audit showed a worrying disparity in management and journalistic capacity. As the situation at the headquarters in Freetown deteriorated, the station staff continued their independent ways, raising revenue wherever possible, broadcasting whatever they saw fit and travelling to Freetown only to collect salaries on the rare occasions they were available.

This lack of congruence between the capital and the regions had two effects: firstly, the message about the changed status of the new independent

broadcaster was never fully disseminated around the country either through direct marketing methods or even a perceived variation in output. Secondly, the hoped-for effect of bringing the country together under the banner of one people, as with UN Radio, never materialised and the regions maintained their historic distinctiveness, untroubled by thoughts of nationhood.

### *Economic factors*

Despite the fact that the country possesses extensive mineral resources of diamonds, titanium ore, bauxite, iron ore, platinum and latterly oil, the people remain essentially impoverished. 60% of the population live on less than £1 a day and the unemployment level amongst youths up to the age of 35 is 70% (*SL.UNDP.org*). It is therefore understandable that for the existing SLBS staff, the prospect of unemployment was frightening. However, as a public sector organisation under the aegis of the Ministry of Information, the former SLBS displayed the worst aspects of parastatal organisations: a payroll bloated with ghost workers, negligible financial accountability and no strategic management. Many workers regularly absented themselves in order to take up paid employment elsewhere while still nominally part of SLBS's workforce. The corporation's facilities and assets were regularly plundered, an activity justified in the eyes of many staff by the fact that salaries were meagre and often paid late. On a smaller scale, these workers were displaying the same behaviour so common amongst the political elite: a complete disregard for the distinction between the public and private realms (van de Walle 2001: 52). As the late Siaka Stevens often remarked, "The goat eats where it is tethered". If salaries were not forthcoming, then individuals would have to find money-making opportunities wherever they could, including the workplace. At SLBC, the pilfering took many forms: from the theft of batteries, soap and toilet paper at one level to the mismanagement of advertising revenue and the sumptuous hospitality enjoyed by the Board members at the highest level. In the absence of clear financial management — or "internationally accepted standards" — a black hole soon opened up in the accounts. Whereas previously, the vacuum would have been filled by a shift in cash and paperwork from one government department to another, within the newly 'independent' corporation, such deficiencies could not be covered up and bankruptcy soon threatened. There

seemed to be little or no understanding of the economic and financial realities of life outside the government system. There was no perceptible change in the attitudes or behaviour of staff or management: someone, somewhere, somehow, would always bail out the organisation.

Similarly, the APC government was emboldened by the improving economic situation in the run-up to the election. Although the country was heavily dependent on aid with 50% of public investment programmes financed by external resources, the proportion of GDP from mining increased from just 3% in 2009 to over 20% in 2014 ([www.africaneconomicoutlook.org](http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org)). With the prospect of mining revenues rising and the recent oil discovery, President Koroma felt confident enough to exert his personal will and expel the UN's Head of Mission. Inevitably, such a brazen move angered the international community but their leverage counted for less as mineral revenues flowed into the treasury. Needless to say, without a senior figure at the helm, the UN floundered for nearly six months, unable to move forward with policy reform and powerless to halt government interference in SLBC.

- ***What potential is there for a public service broadcaster to play a role in nation-building as a means of peacebuilding following conflict?***

National integration, alongside socioeconomic modernisation and cultural creativity, was considered one of the key contributions of the media in developing societies (Katz and Wedell 1977:7). However, as modernisation theories were increasingly criticised as 'imperialist' and unsuited to the prevailing conditions in newly independent countries, national integration too was sidelined by African leaders seeking to focus the media more narrowly on their own interests and by the 'participatory turn' amongst communication theorists and practitioners (Waisbord 2001: 17). To an extent this has hindered the radical rebuilding of the national psyche following civil war. It is particularly acute in Sierra Leone's case where, as Clapham believes, the most fundamental source of Sierra Leone's present woes is "a deeply-rooted

sense of cultural insecurity and dependence” (2003: 10). Kandeh et al highlight the fact that anticolonial nationalism in Sierra Leone never achieved the “transformative” and “socially emancipatory” potential witnessed in other African nations (2005:195). Meanwhile, Riddell argues that Sierra Leoneans fail to see themselves primarily as citizens of a nation-state before any loyalty to ethnic group or chieftaincy (2005: 126). Clapham refers to a profound lack of leadership over the years that has failed to generate an alternative vision to the colonial template handed down at independence (ibid). I argue that building the peace following the civil war in 2002 presented a second opportunity to create the “transformative” and “socially emancipatory” national movement that was so clearly absent following independence.

But what are the elements needed for building peace in a country like Sierra Leone, just emerging from more than a decade of civil war? According to Reychler and Paffenholz (2001), an essential factor is effective communication, consultation and negotiation at different levels and between major stakeholders. There is also a need for what they call ‘peace-enhancing structures’ like a consolidated democracy and a legitimate, restorative justice system. Objective and subjective security are crucial to maintain conditions in which ordinary people feel safe enough to return to their homes and settle back into their daily lives. Underlying all this is the notion of an *integrative moral-political climate* in which there is an overwhelming sense of ‘we’ as opposed to ‘them and us’, in which any conflict that arises can be dealt with peacefully and positively (pp12-14). As channels of information and dissemination, facilitators of dialogue and bridge builders, public service media can frame the debate and set agendas. They are a major pillar in the ‘public sphere’, alongside civil society and the state, in ensuring that the marginalised are heard, that transparency and integrity are brought back into public life and that the powerful are accountable to those they govern.

Chapter Three opened with a description of the chronic poverty in Sierra Leone which is ranked 177 out of 187 countries measured in the UN’s Development Index. The country has the highest rates of maternal mortality

and one of the lowest levels of life expectancy at just 48 years. It is struggling to meet any of the Millennium Development Goals. And yet, as Hutton observes, the emphasis in peacebuilding is on security and political stabilisation at all costs (2014: 6; see also Duffield 2001). Indeed, Sierra Leone has been hailed as ‘the poster child’ of post conflict peacebuilding and an undeniable success (Labonte 2011: 90; Moore 2011: 304). Evidently, there is a glaring mismatch in expectations between the drivers of international interventions and the subjects of their attention (Cubitt 2012: 3).

In Chapter Four I referred to Galtung’s distinction between “negative peace”, defined as “the absence of violence, absence of war” and ‘positive peace’ defined as “the integration of human society” (1964: 2). For Galtung and his fellow peace researchers, it was necessary that their endeavours were not limited to ‘peaceful means of peace-keeping’, that is, “negative peace”. By contrast, in the context of Sierra Leone, I would argue that the international community *is* satisfied with a “negative peace”, where the guns are silent, the trappings of a functional state are apparent and a superficial stability ensues. Crucially, the anarchy of what was once considered a “barbaric state” no longer threatens to spill over national borders (see Kaplan 1994).

But for the citizens of Sierra Leone, the current peace may not be adequate. Regardless of the perceived success of Sierra Leone as an experiment in peacebuilding, the human security aspect of daily life appears little improved from the period immediately preceding the war. At the time of writing, the country is battling a major Ebola outbreak hampered by an inadequate health system. Why, after 15 years of peacebuilding intervention and more than \$16 billion, does the country have just 150 doctors for a population of more than 6 million people? Currently, the death rate for Ebola in West Africa stands at 4951 (WHO Situation Report 31/10/14) yet during 2012 in the same area, malaria killed 21,000 people, 95% of them children under 5 (Chan 2014).

Equally pertinent here are Galtung’s theories about “direct” and “structural violence”. “Direct” violence may be understood as visible aggression, corresponding to wars and physical attacks on a person, or persons.

'Structural' violence, on the other hand, is related to social and economic inequalities: it has the same power to harm but operates at a slower pace (Davies-Vengoechea 2004). Galtung concludes that "to keep peace" in the sense of merely ensuring an absence of direct violence is inadequate: legitimate intervention should also involve the abolition of structural violence wherever it is found (1976: 107). Farmer argues that the chief victims of structural violence are the world's poor: not only are they more likely to suffer but they are also more likely to have their suffering silenced (1996: 280).

I believe these theories are directly applicable to Sierra Leone where the negative peace imposed by the international community arises out of a concern to suppress the "direct violence" of the civil war, without addressing the "structural violence" that caused the conflict in the first place.

Later, Galtung expanded his theories to include the concept of "cultural violence", that is, whatever blinds us to the violence around us or seeks to justify it: "Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel right — or at least, not wrong" (1990: 291). Despite the lofty intentions of my colleagues and I, the output of SLBC exemplified "cultural violence". Its programmes were as partisan and pro-government as in the days of SLBS. Staff believed that politics began and ended with politicians: there was little attention paid to the people on whose behalf these politicians were supposed to be acting. Ordinary people, in the minds of SLBC journalists, were not 'qualified' to comment, even on issues of importance to them; they had no discursive voice. "Politics", it was believed, "should be left to the politicians". As Hasty observed in her ethnographic study of Ghanaian journalists, "none may enter into discourse on a specific subject unless he has satisfied certain conditions or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so" (2005: 225).

This was a far cry from the stated aims of public service broadcasting, namely to inform, to educate and to entertain. Broadly speaking, the public sphere is where citizens come together to ask questions such as "who are we?", "what matters to us?", "how are we governed?". It is where the 'I' of the private individual becomes the 'we' of public citizenry (see Putnam 1993). It is for

these reasons that the writers of the *African Charter on Broadcasting 2001* and the *Marrakech Declaration of 2004* should demand public service status for all state owned broadcasting entities in Africa. It also explains my commitment to the SLBC project alongside many Sierra Leoneans. Looking back on the undoubted success of *Radio Democracy*, *Radio Moa* and *UN Radio*, we believed that the new corporation would be a clear 'public good' for the country.

Chapter Four discusses in detail the eight principles which Michael Tracey (1998) believed defined public service broadcasting (PSB) in the modern era. Alongside ideas such as universality of access and appeal, provision for minorities and emphasis on quality, PSB should also enjoy freedom from vested interests. Such views seem quite naïve in view of what later transpired with SLBC. However, the sterling performance of the Independent Radio Network (IRN) during the election campaigns seemed to confirm the value of public service *broadcasting*. By contrast, the particular circumstances prevailing in Africa — political, historical, economic and social — may work against the transformation of existing state owned broadcasters into freestanding, independent, effective and sustainable public service *broadcasters*. I therefore support Berger's suggestion that it would be more practical to delink the *content* from the *producer* in order to nurture the growth of public service *broadcasting*, that is, content on various platforms conforming to many of the principles listed above, but produced and transmitted by a variety of entities working in a regulated system (Berger 2009: 8; see also Collins 2010; Fourie 2004).

In the overall trend of broadcasting in Africa, the SLBC experiment could be seen as a retrograde step, an expensive, disruptive process that simply breathed new life into a failing dinosaur (Kivikuru 2006). Expensive in that it diverted much needed funds into a single institution and disruptive in that it skewed the media landscape by securing tenure for the below par workforce of SLBC while, at the same time, marginalising better educated, better trained and more committed journalists. In addition, the project ran counter to the

prevailing trend of political decentralisation, where authority for delivering public services was transferred to the regions.

However, the alternative was to leave Sierra Leone's fragile post-war democracy to the mercy of the marketplace. As Raboy maintains, public service broadcasting represents "the last best hope for socially purposeful media acting in the public interest" (2003: 46). Yet, such broadcasting need not be limited to a single institution. On the contrary, it is to a nation's benefit if its media environment is regulated in such a manner that all media operators conform to certain standards in output. Taking South Africa as his frame of reference, Fourie suggests that "in defining PSB as a genre the ideal content principles of PSB could be used as a cornerstone" (2004:27). This is not such a strange idea. For example, when the BBC was legally required to adopt a quota of 25% of programmes to be produced by independent companies, those companies were required to abide by the BBC's own editorial guidelines ([www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning](http://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning)). And as demonstrated in Sierra Leone, IRN's output was closer to fulfilling a public service mandate than SLBC, the public service broadcaster.

To conclude, the potential for a public service broadcaster to play a role in nation-building remains only if the broadcaster stays true to its public service mandate and, in the case of SLBC, this was clearly not the case. Had senior figures within the UN maintained the distinction between 'technical' and 'political' challenges and approached the merger differently, I believe that SLBC had the potential to be *instrumental* in building peace by demonstrating best practice in meritocratic recruitment, open staff and financial management alongside its core duty of producing impartial, informative programming. This would have offered up a new management model for the country. In reality, the prevailing conditions in Africa may no longer permit the creation of single independent public service broadcasters however, there is still a need for media that 'inform, educate and entertain' and, as previously discussed, a need in post-conflict societies for content that contributes to the process of nation building or "national integration" as defined by Amienyi (2005). In seeking to reflect all citizens, authentic public service broadcasting would cut

through the parameters of cultural violence as defined by Galtung, to reveal and address the structural violence that lies beneath. Using the content principles of PSB as the foundation, it is possible to think of alternative models where the emphasis is on the *function* of public service broadcasting not on the *form* of the public service *broadcaster*. IRN's coalition of community and local radio stations, each serving their own locale and audience, but coming together to simulcast during the election period, perfectly illustrates one such model.

### **Contribution to academic debates**

Never before has a UN peace mission attempted to merge its media operation with a government owned broadcaster so this case study itself breaks new academic ground. Similarly, by analysing the SLBC project in detail, I have highlighted the many challenges of institution-building in post conflict contexts, particularly those dominated by neopatrimonial practices. If transplanting Westphalia to the tropics failed, then exporting institutional templates may, in the long run, prove a costly mistake. In particular, transforming the organisational culture of public sector organisations to enable them to deliver services more efficiently and effectively may require more time, effort and resources than the international community is willing to commit.

Revisiting Galtung's theories on negative/positive peace and direct/cultural/structural violence, I reveal the mismatch between the statebuilding ambitions of the international community and the hunger for human security on the part of ordinary citizens. The abject insecurity of everyday life for Sierra Leoneans has been highlighted by the speed with which the Ebola virus swept through the country; this, after \$17 billion and 15 years of international intervention. I show how endogenous nation-building has been overtaken equally by statebuilding and the predatory excesses of the political elite who have placed personal status and gain over national interest and public good.

Through my autoethnographic observations, and interviews, I show how the country has become increasingly divided along ethno-political lines and how,

despite the best intentions, a partisan national broadcaster may exacerbate such a fragile situation. Far from uniting a postconflict country under a single notion of nationhood — a recognised function of national broadcasters — a pro-government broadcaster can prove dangerously disruptive in the run-up to a general election.

While postconflict Sierra Leone demonstrated a clear need for the integrative function of a public service broadcaster, this mandate was not fulfilled by SLBC but by IRN's coalition of 28 community and local radio stations. This case study shows how societies in Africa and elsewhere may be best served by delinking the *function* of public service broadcasting from the *form* of the public service broadcaster.

Working inside the UN I was able to observe the political ordering and institutional logics of the organisation on a daily basis. The case study highlights the grey area between national sovereignty and the UN's right to intervene. The overriding desire for stability and an unwillingness to 'rock the boat' may persuade mission management that there is no merit in responding to state manipulation of a UN-backed project.

Media development is one area where the lack of synergy amongst UN bodies becomes apparent. As an example of knowledge management, the SLBC project demonstrates serious shortcomings in intra-organisational communication and consultation within the UN. As shown, the World Bank has been active in the field of media and communication but the UN agency charged with oversight for media development is the Paris-based UNESCO. However, it has few media experts in the field and its regional offices cover such large areas that they are unable to commit to close oversight of individual projects. By contrast, the development arm of the UN — UNDP — works on the ground in more than 170 countries with an annual operating budget of more than \$900 million ([www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)). It has substantial experience in media development but its approach is markedly different to that adopted by UNIPSIL. It favours working at the grassroots to ensure ownership and a voice for the most vulnerable groups.

The short term contractual nature of employment in the field leads to a lack of continuity in long term projects with field staff chasing jobs outside the mission, regardless of the point reached in the lifecycle of that project. The early stages of planning for the SLBC project went awry from the UN's perspective with experienced staff who were responsible in the initial stages moving on to employment elsewhere before a clear roadmap for transition had been drawn up. Interestingly, it is financially more beneficial to move to another mission, rather than remaining in the same location. The International Civil Service Commission which oversees working conditions for the UN 'common system' (<http://icsc.un.org/>), tends to reward mobility rather more than commitment, resulting in a lack of continuity, lack of institutional memory and follow-through in projects. More important, such a system opens up the possibility for a serious lack of accountability.

The SLBC story matters because it may be followed by other examples. In the last two decades UN peace missions have routinely set up professional standard radio operations, often the first of their kind in the conflict zones in which they are operating. The usual practice was to close the media operations along with the missions but Sierra Leone saw the first occasion when a UN radio station outlived the mission which created it when UNAMSIL was closed in 2005 and continued under UNIOSIL. Throughout Africa, from Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire to South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, UN missions are contemplating what to do with their own radio operations (Orme 2010:9). Following the failure of the SLBC experiment, policymakers will need to think again about the fate of media operations attached to peace missions.

From a UN perspective, one more point needs to be emphasised. The presence of an effective UN radio operation is not just an asset in the external facing public information sense: it is also a vital tool for the *intra-organisational* communication process in which UN personnel are scattered across a country where topography and climate pose problems for transport and telecommunications. Once UN Radio was closed, UNIPSIL was left with two

distinct challenges: first, how to communicate its messages to the people of Sierra Leone and second, how to effectively brief its own staff at the Freetown headquarters and in the regional outposts. In the period following the dismissal of the Head of Mission and in the run up to elections, this lack of a public information function was decidedly risky.

## Epilogue

In the beginning, Sierra Leone's media community were deeply appreciative and supportive of the SLBC project but grew more frustrated and angry as its weaknesses became apparent. So many of them were struggling on a daily basis with such practical problems as the cost of consumables eg ink and newsprint, batteries, recorders and stationery together with the constant worry over unreliable power supplies. They stood by and watched incredulously as a seemingly endless supply of resources poured into SLBC with no discernible result. It is only reasonable to leave the final comment to them:

### **SIERRA LEONE NEWS: THE SLBC EXPERIMENT**

Ban Ki Moon arrives today at the start of a two-day visit to Sierra Leone. This visit is largely to celebrate 15 years of UN peace keeping and peace building operations in Sierra Leone, which comes to an end on the 31st March 2014... However most people will link Ban Ki Moon's last visit on 15th June 2010 to the change over from the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) to the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). The view was that there should be a national broadcaster autonomous from Government's overbearing control such that impartial and equal coverage will be given to politicians from all different parties and the ordinary man as well. However this experiment seems to have fallen flat and it is time that the authorities admit that it is not working... for SLBC to still be going cap in hand begging for salaries to be paid by government means that the project has failed... we think that this government must now make a decision on the way forward for SLBS/SLBC. Would it be practical to just go back to what it was (SLBS) and allow the government to 'pay the piper and call the tunes,' or should it continue to be the lie it is and still pose as being a Corporation ... For us we suggest a complete overhaul of the whole system. Let there be no hypocrisy if no one is comfortable with the Corporation then let it be a government service, at least we will be sure, we know what to expect. May God help Sierra Leone!

*(Awoko News 4/3/2014)*

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### UN SECRETARIAT

#### **Selected Security Council Resolutions**

S/RES 872 (1993) 5<sup>th</sup> October 1993

Established United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR) to help implement the conditions of the Arusha Agreement

S/RES 1132 (1997) 8<sup>th</sup> October 1997

Imposed sanctions against the AFRC military junta and banned the sales of arms and petroleum

S/RES 1270 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1999

Established the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)

S/RES 1289 7<sup>th</sup> February 2000

Authorised expansion of UNAMSIL

S/RES 1299 19<sup>th</sup> May 2000

Authorised an increase in number of troops for UNAMSIL

S/RES 1315 14<sup>th</sup> August 2000

Requested the Secretary General to negotiate with the Government of Sierra Leone to create an independent Special Court

S/RES 1610 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005

UNAMSIL's mandate extended for a final six months until 31st December 2005

S/RES/1620 31<sup>st</sup> August 2005

Established the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) for an initial period of twelve months from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2006

S/RES 1734 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2006

Extended UNIOSIL's mandate until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007

S/RES 1793 21<sup>st</sup> Dec 2007

Calls for the termination of UNIOSIL's mandate by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2008 and the creation of an integrated mission to continue the work of peacebuilding in the country

S/RES 1829 4<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Established the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Mission in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) to assist the Government of Sierra Leone in the area of good governance, the promotion of human rights and the fight against transnational organised crime and drug trafficking.

S/RES 2097            26<sup>th</sup> March 2013  
Extended UNIPSIL's mandate for the final time and scheduled closure of the mission on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014

**Selected reports of the Secretary General**

S/1995/975            21<sup>st</sup> November 1995  
Records the request from Captain Valentine Strasser, head of the NPRC junta, for the good offices of the Secretary General in mediating in the civil war.

S/2000/186            7<sup>th</sup> March 2000  
Third Report on UNAMSIL

S/2000/455            19<sup>th</sup> May 2000  
Fourth Report on UNAMSIL

S/2000/751            31<sup>st</sup> July 2000  
Fifth Report on UNAMSIL

S/2002/267            14<sup>th</sup> March 2002  
Thirteenth Report on UNAMSIL

S/2006/695            29<sup>th</sup> August 2006  
Second Report on UNIOSIL

S/2007/704            4<sup>th</sup> December 2007  
Fifth Report on UNIOSIL

S/2009/267            22<sup>nd</sup> May 2009  
Second Report on UNIPSIL

S/2014/192            17<sup>th</sup> March 2014  
Final Report on UNIPSIL

**Press Releases**

SG/SM/7750            23<sup>rd</sup> March 2001  
*"Secretary General (Kofi Annan) says work for peace must engage everyone"*

**UN News Centre**    26<sup>th</sup> March 2014  
*"Sierra Leone is a success story built on steady progress", Security Council told.*

**Other**

S/1999/1257            15<sup>th</sup> December 1999  
*Report of the Independent Inquiry into the actions taken by the UN during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda*

## UNDP

### Human Development Reports:

- 1994 *New Dimensions of Human Security*
- 2002 *Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*
- 2013 *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World*
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- 2004 *Supporting Public Service Broadcasting: Learning from Bosnia and Herzegovina's experience*  
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- 2002 *Right to Tell: The Role of the Mass Media in Economic Development* by Roumeen Islam, Simeon Djankov, Caralee Roumee McLeish,
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- 2008 *Broadcasting, Voice and Accountability: A Public Interest Approach to Policy Law and Regulation* by Steve Buckley, Kreszentia Duer, Toby Mendel, Seán Ó Siochrú with Monroe E Price and Marc Raboy
- 2008 *Community Driven Development and Elite Capture: Reframing the Conversation* Social Development How To Series Vol 3 February 2008
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### **WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION**

2014 *Ebola Response Road Map* Situation Report 31<sup>st</sup> October 2014

### **JOINT APC –SLPP COMMUNIQUÉ OF 2<sup>ND</sup> APRIL 2009**

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### **SPEECHES**

#### **Tony Blair**

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#### **Mikhail Gorbachev**

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<a href="http://www.disabilityworld.com">www.disabilityworld.com</a>	<i>Voice of the Handicapped FM (Jul-Aug 2001)</i>
<a href="http://www.osisa.org">www.osisa.org</a>	<i>Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa</i>
<a href="http://www.rand.org">www.rand.org</a>	<i>The Beginners Guide to Nationbuilding (2005)</i>
<a href="http://www.sfcg.org">www.sfcg.org</a>	<i>Radio for Peacebuilding in Africa</i>

### **Newspaper websites in Sierra Leone**

[thisissierraleone.com](http://thisissierraleone.com)  
[sierraexpressmedia.com](http://sierraexpressmedia.com)  
[politicosl.com](http://politicosl.com)  
[globaltimes-sl.com](http://globaltimes-sl.com)

### **Newspaper articles**

***Baltimore Sun 'The Education Beat' 1/7/1998 by Mike Bowler***  
*'A patriotic professor puts school on hold in Catonsville: His college is wondering when — or if — the tenured business professor will return from being spokesman for Sierra Leone's president'*

It's the case of the (almost) vanishing professor.

Septimus Kaikai was teaching a business course and chairing a major academic division at Catonsville Community College early last March when he asked for a few days' leave to attend to his ailing father in Sierra Leone.

Several days later, he appeared in news reports as the spokesman for Sierra Leone President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Overthrown in a 1997 coup, Kabbah had just been reinstated after ousting a military junta in the West African nation.

Kaikai, 56, remains in Sierra Leone, where numerous attempts to reach him by telephone have been unsuccessful. So far as is known, his only contact with friends and associates in the United States, including his employer, is a handwritten fax to Catonsville President Frederick J. Walsh in early June...

**Newsweek An Editorial by Rev Jesse Jackson 7/7/1999**

**A Tale of Two Countries**

While we have every moral obligation to defend the people in Kosovo, who have been driven out of their homeland by ethnic cleansing and genocide, it is morally wrong and repugnant for us to stand idly by and ignore the devastation in Africa"... I appeal to President Clinton and the congressional foreign-relations committees to provide more aid to Sierra Leone and for the press to cover the story.

Please allow the American people the chance to become engaged. ... I have found that many politicians under the light behave differently than politicians in the dark. As long as the media allow politicians to operate in the dark, politicians can continue their double standards"...

**POLICY DECLARATIONS**

*African Charter on Broadcasting Windhoek 2001*

Available at:

[http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/5628/10343523830african\\_charter.pdf/african%2Bcharter.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/5628/10343523830african_charter.pdf/african%2Bcharter.pdf) (accessed 12/11/2014)

*Marrakech Declaration of 2004*

Available at:

[http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/wsis\\_official\\_declaration\\_marrakech.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/wsis_official_declaration_marrakech.pdf) (accessed 12/11/2014)

*Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa Banjul 2002*

Available at:

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/achpr/expressionfreedomdec.html> (accessed 12/11/2014)

**GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS**

**US Government**

*Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-25*

3<sup>rd</sup> May 1994

Available at:

<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB53/rw050394.pdf> (accessed 12/11/2014)

**Government of Sierra Leone**

*Agenda for Change: 2<sup>nd</sup> Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP II) [2008- 2012]*

Available at:

[http://unipsil.unmissions.org/portals/unipsil/media/publications/agenda\\_for\\_change.pdf](http://unipsil.unmissions.org/portals/unipsil/media/publications/agenda_for_change.pdf)  
(accessed 12/11/2014)

*Agenda for Prosperity: The Road to Middle Income Status (2013 – 2017)*

Available at:

[http://www.undp.org/content/dam/sierraleone/docs/projectdocuments/povreduction/undp\\_sle\\_The%20Agenda%20for%20Prosperity%20.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/sierraleone/docs/projectdocuments/povreduction/undp_sle_The%20Agenda%20for%20Prosperity%20.pdf)  
(accessed 12/11/2014)

**Government of South Africa**

*Defence in a Democracy* White Paper on National Defence for the Republic of South Africa May 1965

Available at:

<http://www.dod.mil.za/documents/WhitePaperonDef/whitepaper%20on%20defence1996.pdf>  
(accessed 12/11/2014)

## BRIEF HISTORY OF SIERRA LEONE

Archaeological explorations show that the area now occupied by modern Sierra Leone has been inhabited since 2500 BCE. At the time of the earliest contact with European traders in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Baga, Bullom, Krim and Vai communities had settled on the coast. The Temne, Loko and Limba peoples lived in the north while the Banta had settled in the south east and the Kissi and Kono had inhabited the east (Alie 1990:6).

- 1462 Portuguese explorer Pedro da Cintra catches sight of the hills overlooking what is now Freetown harbour and names the range *Serra Lyoa*
- 1759 Bunce Island becomes an important slave port under British control and the major transit point for slaves to North America
- 1787 Four ships carrying freed slaves and former Black soldiers who set sail from Plymouth and land on the coast, establishing the settlement of Granville Town, later renamed 'Free Town'
- 1807 Britain outlaws the so-called 'Triangular Trade' between Africa, the Americas and the home country.
- 1808 Freetown is declared a Crown Colony
- 1833 The British Parliament votes to make the institution of slavery illegal
- 1896 The rural hinterland is made a 'protectorate' under the authority of the British Crown
- 1898 The Hut Tax War breaks out in Port Loko after the colonial authorities attempt to collect taxes
- 1914 Rail network completed linking diamond areas and hinterland with the coast
- 1947 The British authorities introduce measures linking the Crown Colony on the coast with the Protectorate covering the rural interior
- 1953 Introduction by the British of a new administrative system leading to greater powers for local chiefs
- 1961 Independence declared on 25<sup>th</sup> April. Sierra Leone is admitted to the United Nations as its 100<sup>th</sup> member

- 1964 First elected Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai dies and is succeeded by his brother, Sir Albert Margai who attempts to create a one party state but fails
- 1967 APC's Siaka Stevens wins elections but is prevented from taking office by a military coup
- 1968 Non-commissioned officers stage another coup, the third in thirteen months. Siaka Stevens is returned to power
- 1971 Sierra Leone adopts a new constitution and becomes a republic
- 1978 Stevens introduces a single party constitution
- 1985 Stevens retires and hand picks his successor, Major General Joseph Momoh
- 1990 Momoh takes office and proposes a return to multiparty democracy with elections scheduled for 1992
- 1991 A band of 100 fighters made up of Sierra Leoneans, Liberian and Burkinabes invade Kailahun District in the east. Responsibility for the attack is claimed by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).
- 1992 Momoh is ousted from office by a handful of Junior officers led by Captain Valentine Strasser who is later named leader of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC)
- 1995 The UN Secretary General appoints a special envoy to work with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to negotiate a settlement to the conflict.
- 1996 Valentine Strasser is deposed by Brigadier-General Maada Bio. Run-off elections see Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the SLPP win and the NPRC junta hand over power. UN Special envoy negotiates the Abidjan Accord between the government and the RUF
- 1997 Dissident soldiers side with rebels to mount a coup. Kabbah and his cabinet flee to Conakry in Guinea. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) takes power under Major Johnny Paul Koroma.
- 1998 After fierce fighting between ECOMOG troops and the rebels, Kabbah's government is reinstated. The AFRC and RUF fighters retreat to the countryside. The United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) is launched with 70 observers.

- 1999 The AFRC/RUF junta launch a surprise attack on Freetown, overwhelming ECOMOG forces who lose hundreds of soldiers. Thousands of cases of human rights abuse against civilians are recorded including rape, mutilation and murder. Thousands of children are abducted by rebels. The Lomé peace process is negotiated between the government and the rebels, mediated by the US, the UK, the UN and others. The eventual agreement sees rebel leader Foday Sankoh installed as minister in charge of mineral deposits including diamonds and the rebels allocated a further eight cabinet posts. The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) begins to deploy with an initial 6,000 troops.
- 2000 UNAMSIL troop level is expanded to 11,000. The Lomé peace agreement unravels as RUF shoot 20 civilians in Freetown. UK dispatches 800 strong paratroop mission to Freetown to evacuate foreign civilians. These troops eventually provide logistical support to the UN peacekeepers. Sankoh flees but is arrested. The government and the RUF sign a new peace agreement in Abuja which requires the RUF to undergo a complete process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).
- 2001 Alarm spreads in the US over a *Washington Post* article linking Al Qaeda to RUF diamond smuggling
- 2002 The UN and the government agree to establish a Special Court. Kabbah is re-elected President. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is set up. UNAMSIL's troop level reaches 17,500, making it the largest and most expensive peacekeeping mission ever.
- 2003 The Special Court indicts the main leaders of the RUF, the AFRC and the civil defence force (CDF). Former Liberian President Charles Taylor is also indicted for his role in the war.
- 2004 The national DDR process concludes with 72,000 combatants giving up their arms, including 6,800 children.
- 2005 UNAMSIL completes its mission and full withdrawal is scheduled
- 2006 The United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) begins its work with a mandate to build an independent and capable public radio capacity. It inherits Radio UNAMSIL, the station set up by the previous mission, the first time that a media operation has outlived its 'mother mission'.
- 2007 Second post-war election sees the SLPP ousted by Ernest Bai Koroma's APC. The regime change is hailed as a positive step towards consolidating peace and democracy.

- 2008 The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) takes over from UNIOSIL with the mandate of supporting the government in key areas such as human rights, governance reforms and the rule of law.
- 2009 The worst outbreak of political violence since the end of the war sees the police overwhelmed and ill-equipped to contain the situation. Provocative broadcasts by the private radio stations owned by the two main political parties are seen to be the root cause. Later, party leaders sign a Joint Communiqué with the UN as moral guarantor in which they agree to give up their stations in order to work together to establish an independent public broadcaster operating to international standards and giving equal access to all views.
- 2010 The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation Act is passed by Parliament. Together with President Koroma, the UN Secretary General officially launches SLBC on 15<sup>th</sup> June.
- 2011 25<sup>th</sup> April sees the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence but SLBC is unable to mount credible coverage of the events. The stalled recruitment process and crippling financial debts lead to the first of several staff strikes. Three inquiries are launched into SLBC's perceived failure.
- 2012 Presidential and parliamentary elections of 17<sup>th</sup> November are won by the APC. SLBC's coverage is considered to be partisan by several observer missions.
- 2013 UN Security Council instigates an official inspection trip to investigate UNIPSIL's performance against its mandate in order to schedule the mission's closure.
- 2014 UNIPSIL completes its Security Council mandate on 31<sup>st</sup> March following an official ceremony attended by the Secretary General. All responsibilities are transferred to the UN Country team consisting of 19 different agencies, funds and programmes.

(Collated from Alie 1990; Hirsch 2001; Olonisakin 2008; Pham 2005)

## KEY UN DOCUMENTS RELATING TO PEACE 1992 - 2014

1992	<i>Agenda for Peace</i>	Introduced 'peacebuilding' as a UN activity alongside preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping.
1994	<i>Agenda for Development</i>	Emphasised the need to link security, development, democratization and human rights agendas.
1994	UNDP Human Development Report	
1995	<i>Agenda for Democratization</i>	Attempted to address the challenges facing peace operations in the uncertain conditions following the end of the Cold war
	Supplement to <i>Agenda for Peace</i>	
1996	Inventory of Peacebuilding Activities	Highlighted the building blocks of post-conflict peacebuilding
2000	Brahimi Report	Key conditions of success are political support, rapid deployment and sound strategy. Highlighted challenges and made many recommendations for improving field operations.
	UN Security Council Resolution 1325	Reaffirms the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. Stresses the importance of their equal participation and involvement in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.
2001	<i>No Exit Without Strategy</i>	Security Council Report identified three peacebuilding objectives: consolidating internal and external security; strengthening political institutions and good governance; promoting economic and social rehabilitation and transformation
2003	Review of Technical Cooperation in the United Nations	Detailed examination of the activities of UN bodies in key areas including peacebuilding with a view to streamlining programmes and making optimal use of

		funding and expertise
2004	<i>A More Secure World</i>	Suggested models for Security Council reform and recommended the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission
2005	<i>In Larger Freedom</i>	Reinforced the link between development, security and human rights
	World Summit Outcome	Establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Support Office
2007	Policy Committee decision May 2007	Provided a “conceptual” basis for peacebuilding
2008	Capstone Doctrine	Formalised principles and guidelines based on UN’s 60 years’ experience in peace operations. Declared that sustainable peace is based on security, rule of law, legitimate political institutions and social and economic development
2009	Report of the Secretary General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict	Highlighted the opportunities for building sustainable peace in the first two years following conflict and the challenges arising in this period. Emphasised the importance of national ownership’ Listed seven priority areas for rapid intervention including basic safety and security and provision of services such as water, sanitation, health and education
2010	<i>UN Peacebuilding: an Orientation</i>	Practical guidance and lessons learnt in peacebuilding with real-life examples. Emphasis on national ownership, national capacity development and inclusivity, especially in the early planning stages
2012	Report of the Secretary General on Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict	Identified inclusivity and institution-building as critical in preventing relapse into violent conflict. Need to restore core governance functions and equitable service delivery
2013	First Report of the Secretary General on UN Political Missions	Examined the broad range of activities undertaken by special political missions and highlighted a number of important elements of success including flexibility,

		rapid response and partnerships with regional and subregional organisations
2014	Report of the Secretary General on Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict	Further emphasis on sustainable national institutions that provide citizens with political representation, justice, security and economic opportunities. Call for greater regional and South-South co-operation

### **Appendix 1**

Media Initiative	Strategy	Indicators
Type One	Basic training in standard ABC skills of newsgathering: accuracy, balance and context.	Extent of violations of privacy rights or libel laws if existent. Number of professional journalist associations.
	Support for professional journalist associations, conduct codes. Partnership support for indigenous training facilities. Seminars, forums for local journalists on professionalism.	Presence of codes of professionalism, number of training institutions.
	Support for independent media protection and regulation within legislation, regulations.	Presence of free speech and free media legislation. Number of journalists imprisoned, harassed, intimidated, de-accredited, censored. Extent of content piracy and plagiarism. Extent of access to government information.
	Encouragement of diverse, independent media outlets.	Presence of independent reporting. Number of independent media outlets, number of privately-owned outlets, number of alternative media outlets, number of media licences granted, refused. Percentage of indigenous versus foreign advertisers.
	Provision of technical support and equipment, especially for essential facilities/new technology.	Quality and reliability of production and distribution and reach of diverse media. Number of internet connections, service providers, printing presses, transmitters.
	Appraisal of membership of the media.	Percentage of female and minority journalists, in management, in training courses.
	Media monitoring.	Content analysis.
Type Two	As in Type One stage plus advanced journalism training, in investigations, economic reporting, information access, election coverage, gender and ethnic neutrality.	As in Type One stage plus number of specialist journalists, commentators and analysts. Number of daily news reports on politics, military issues, legal proceedings, human rights, gender. Content analysis: extent of demonizing, stereotyping, sensationalizing, violations of privacy rights.
	Provide rationale, models for environment: legislation, courts, regulatory bodies.	Media and public support for independent media enshrinement and regulation within legislation, regulations.
	Support for introduction of media accountability – press councils, libel/slander legislation.	Number of lawsuits for slander/libel. Disposition of complaints against media. Diversity within individual outlets' staff. Evidence of differing editorial viewpoint, commentary, audience feedback.
	Support for autonomous/commercial operations.	Number of financially autonomous outlets.
	Support for wider distribution of local/regional news. Funding for relayed international broadcasters.	Media monitoring for credibility, balance.

**Appendix 2**  
**Typology of postconflict media interventions**  
**(Howard 2002: 13,14)**

Media Initiative	Strategy	Indicators
Type Three	Conflict resolution sensitizing and training.	Content analysis of conflict reporting: focus on violence versus reconciliation.
	Support for enhanced investigative reporting.	Percentage of conflict reports, lurid crime reports, versus reports of humanitarian information, peaceful resolutions, positive models and interventions.
	Seminars, forums for international media on indigenous situation. Seminars, forums for local media on media coverage and conflict. Fund/encourage international media coverage.	
Type Four	Creation of humanitarian needs-based media outlets. Meet needs of affected populations such as: emergency relief, relocation facilities, health advisories, warnings about landmines.	Audience ratings. Qualitative studies feedback. Responsiveness of media outlets to public requests for programming, information.
	Define relationship to peacekeeping force.	
	Establish temporary media productions and distribution facilities.	
	Counter hate radio.	
	Recruit local staff, local suppliers to build economic engagement. Seminars, forums for local journalists on professionalism.	
Type Five	Provide programming speaking directly to conflict issues, presenting new or alternative sources of information, issues and factors behind the conflict, shared effects of conflict, presentation of opposing views, discussion of stereotypes, promotion of tolerance, reconciliation, democratization.	Audience ratings, reactions. Outcome assessment of issues or actions focused on. Surveys identifying individual and group perception of others.  Percentage change in multi-faction or multi-ethnic community dialogues, organizations, activities, in target group or across society. Percentage changes in audience attitudes and in comprehension of message.
	Integration of local partners into programming.	Extent of local partnership in decision-making and content programming. Ethnic and factional balance in staff and content.
	Development of local markets, local capacity for programming.	Extent of collaboration with government institutions, agencies, civil society and nongovernmental organizations.
	Develop diversified channels of communication appropriate to local environment.	Number of outlets and channels conveying conflict resolution messages.

**Typology of postconflict media interventions  
(Howard 2002: 13,14)**

## Survey Questionnaire for Fourah Bay College Mass Comms students

My name is Linda Mitchell and I'm a PhD researcher from Cardiff University in the UK. I'm looking at the role of media and communication in post-conflict societies and my case study is Sierra Leone. I would be grateful if you could help me with my research by completing the following questionnaire. All answers will be treated in the strictest confidence and you can choose to remain anonymous. However, it would help me to know which year you are in and which qualification you are working towards.

**1. It is now 8 years since the end of war was declared. What do you think are the most important issues facing Sierra Leone? Please circle your answer with 1 = not important at all and 5 = extremely important.**

Weak economy	1	2	3	4	5
Poor use of national resources	1	2	3	4	5
Political tension	1	2	3	4	5
Ethnic tension	1	2	3	4	5
Religious tension	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of reconciliation after war	1	2	3	4	5
Youth unemployment	1	2	3	4	5
Poor housing	1	2	3	4	5
Poor infrastructure	1	2	3	4	5
Inadequate health care	1	2	3	4	5
Unreliable electricity supplies	1	2	3	4	5
Access to clean water	1	2	3	4	5
Low pay	1	2	3	4	5
Cost of food and other basics	1	2	3	4	5
Under age pregnancy	1	2	3	4	5
HIV/AIDS	1	2	3	4	5
Falling educational standards	1	2	3	4	5
Weakened family structures	1	2	3	4	5

Negative attitudes	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of political leadership	1	2	3	4	5
Freedom of expression	1	2	3	4	5
Disability rights	1	2	3	4	5
Corruption	1	2	3	4	5
Public transport	1	2	3	4	5
Traffic congestion	1	2	3	4	5
Levels of taxation	1	2	3	4	5

Any other issues not mentioned above — please give details:

**2. How well do you think the media are dealing with these issues in terms of highlighting, explaining and investigating? Please circle your answer with 1 = extremely badly and 5 = extremely well.**

Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
Radio	1	2	3	4	5
TV	1	2	3	4	5
Internet	1	2	3	4	5
Cinema	1	2	3	4	5
Popular music	1	2	3	4	5

Please add any other form of communication not included above which you think contributes to the political and social debate in this country.

**3 Which forms of media are you most likely to use to find out what's happening in Sierra Leone? Please circle your answer 1 = never and 5 = every day**

<u>Newspapers</u>	1	2	3	4	5
-------------------	---	---	---	---	---

Please circle your answer 1 = never and 5 = every day

Which newspapers do you read?

How often do you read them?            1        2        3        4        5

**Radio**    1        2        3        4        5

Please circle your answer 1 = never and 5 = every day

Which stations do you listen to?

Please name any programmes to which you regularly listen:

How often do you listen to these programmes?            1        2        3        4        5

Where do you listen to these programmes?

**Television**    1        2        3        4        5

Please circle your answer 1 = never and 5 = every day

Which stations do you watch?

Please name any programmes that you regularly watch:

How often do you watch these programmes?            1        2        3        4        5

Where do you watch these programmes?

**Internet**

Please circle your answer 1 = never and 5 = every day

Which sites do you read?

If you contribute to any sites, please name them:

How often do you surf the internet?    1        2        3        4        5

Where do you have access to the internet?

4. What do you think would improve the media in Sierra Leone? Please circle your answer with 1 = not important at all and 5 = extremely important.

**Newspapers**

Better distribution	1	2	3	4	5
Clearer layout	1	2	3	4	5
Separation of fact from opinion	1	2	3	4	5
Clearly stated political loyalties	1	2	3	4	5
Better <b>trained</b> journalists	1	2	3	4	5
Better <b>educated</b> journalists	1	2	3	4	5
Better <b>paid</b> journalists	1	2	3	4	5
More news from outside Freetown	1	2	3	4	5
Better quality writing	1	2	3	4	5

**Radio**

Clearer reception	1	2	3	4	5
More information about schedules	1	2	3	4	5
Separation of fact from opinion	1	2	3	4	5
Wider range of contributors	1	2	3	4	5
Greater variety of stations	1	2	3	4	5
More coverage from outside F'town	1	2	3	4	5
Greater variety of content eg live broadcasts	1	2	3	4	5
Better <b>trained</b> journalists	1	2	3	4	5
Better <b>educated</b> journalists	1	2	3	4	5
Better <b>paid</b> journalists	1	2	3	4	5

### Television

Clearer reception	1	2	3	4	5
More information about schedules	1	2	3	4	5
Separation of fact from opinion	1	2	3	4	5
Wider range of contributors	1	2	3	4	5
Greater variety of stations	1	2	3	4	5
More coverage from outside F'town	1	2	3	4	5
Greater variety of content eg live broadcasts	1	2	3	4	5
Better <b>trained</b> journalists	1	2	3	4	5
Better <b>educated</b> journalists	1	2	3	4	5
Better <b>paid</b> journalists	1	2	3	4	5

### All media

More open legal framework	1	2	3	4	5
Tighter regulation	1	2	3	4	5
More relaxed regulation	1	2	3	4	5
Greater professionalism in choice of stories	1	2	3	4	5
Less coverage of political stories	1	2	3	4	5
Greater coverage of political stories	1	2	3	4	5

Please add any other issues which you think would improve the media in Sierra Leone which are not mentioned above:

5. How well do you think the media have done in helping this country recover from war? Please circle your answer with 1 = extremely badly and 5 = extremely well.

Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
Radio	1	2	3	4	5
TV	1	2	3	4	5
Internet	1	2	3	4	5

6. Do you think this country is more united today than it was in 2002 or less united? Please circle your answer 1 = much less united to 5 = much more united

1      2      3      4      5

7. How much have the media contributed to peace and reconciliation in this country? Please circle your answer 1 = nothing at all to 5 = an exceptional amount.

Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
Radio	1	2	3	4	5
TV	1	2	3	4	5
Internet	1	2	3	4	5
Cinema	1	2	3	4	5
Popular music	1	2	3	4	5

Please add any other form of communication not included above which you think has contributed to peacebuilding and reconciliation in this country:

Can you give an example of where media has contributed to peacebuilding and reconciliation?

**7. What do you think holds this country together? Please circle your answer 1 = not at all important to 5 = extremely important. Please tick all that apply.**

Sport	1	2	3	4	5
Common experience of war	1	2	3	4	5
Desire for lasting peace	1	2	3	4	5
Pride in country	1	2	3	4	5
Loyalty to the President	1	2	3	4	5
Inter-marriage	1	2	3	4	5
Belief in a better future	1	2	3	4	5
Cultural issues eg language, music	1	2	3	4	5
All facing same challenges	1	2	3	4	5
Religious beliefs	1	2	3	4	5

Please add any other factor which you think is important but which is not mentioned here:

**8. Finally, what career are you likely to choose when you leave FBC? Please circle your answer 1 = not likely at all to 5 = extremely likely.**

Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
Radio	1	2	3	4	5
TV	1	2	3	4	5
Press/Public Relations	1	2	3	4	5
Information Technology	1	2	3	4	5
Sales/Marketing	1	2	3	4	5
Further study	1	2	3	4	5
Education	1	2	3	4	5

Civil society/NGO	1	2	3	4	5
Human Rights	1	2	3	4	5
Health	1	2	3	4	5
Politics	1	2	3	4	5

Any other field not mentioned above:

Name (optional)

Course of study:

Year of study:

If you want further information or you'd like to speak to me in person, these are my contact details:

**Mitchell14@mac.com** or 033 112 053