

# The Quest for Sustainable **Development** and **Peace**



## *The 2007 Sierra Leone Elections*

Edited by A.B. Zack-Williams  
With a Foreword by Fantu Cheru

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The Nordic Africa Institute

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The Search for Sustainable Democracy,  
Development and Peace

The Sierra Leone 2007 Elections

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*NAI Policy Dialogue* is a series of short reports on policy relevant issues concerning Africa today. Aimed at professionals working within aid agencies, ministries of foreign affairs, NGOs and media, these reports aim to inform the public debate and to generate input in the sphere of policymaking. The writers are researchers and scholars engaged in African issues from several disciplinary points of departure. Most have an institutional connection to the Nordic Africa Institute or its research networks.

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*Amputees in Sierra Leone hold their voting cards as they wait to cast their vote.*

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## Foreword

Post-independent Sierra Leone has had a tragic history, marred by extremely poor governance, gross economic mismanagement and war. The democratic, decentralized system that existed upon independence was progressively dismantled, culminating in a highly centralized regime that did away with local government and imposed one-party rule in 1978. Corruption and rent seeking by the political class helped to erode the conditions necessary for national development. The concentration of power and resources in Freetown, the capital, disenfranchised the population and deprived the rural population of infrastructure, education and health care. The period of one-party dictatorship (1978–89), which sapped the energy of the people, also witnessed an overall decline in GDP per capita by over a third. The widespread poverty and the decade-long civil war conflict must, therefore, be understood in their historical context.

In 1991, a new multi-party constitution was approved, but elections scheduled for 1992 were aborted by a military coup. Four years later, the military restored democratic rule with the election of President Kabba, head of state until the 2007 elections. But this democratic opening was short-lived. An insurrection by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) that started in 1991 from bases in neighbouring Liberia quickly spread throughout the countryside. The deteriorating security crisis was the main reason for the overthrow of President Kabba in May 1997 by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), which governed until February 1998 when ECOMOG forces ousted it and President Kabba was restored to power. Efforts by the United Nations (UN) and Economic Community of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) culminated in the signing of the Lome Peace Accords in July 1999 by President Kabba and Foday Sankoh, the leader of the RUF, which paved the way for the formation of a government of national unity in November 1999.

Implementation of the Lome Peace agreement proceeded until April 2000. With help from the international community, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants got underway. But all hopes for permanent peace were quickly dashed when the forces of the

Revolutionary United Front (RUF) opportunistically tried to exploit the departure of ECOMOG forces by attempting to establish a strategic upper-hand before the UN Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was firmly established on the ground. In the ensuing struggle, the RUF abducted hundreds of UN peacekeepers, seized a large cache of war material, re-armed hundreds of demobilized fighters in April 2000 and threatened to entirely overrun the capital Freetown. It took a contingent of British paratroopers to repulse the incursion. The presence of British troops also provided a much-needed space for the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to consolidate its presence in all areas formerly controlled by the RUF. After the Abuja Agreements (November 2000 and May 2001), the DDR process resumed in earnest and by February 2002, President Kabba officially declared that the war was over.

On January 18, 2002, almost two years after the signing of the Lome Peace Accords, Sierra Leone held its first post-war presidential election on May 12, 2002. While the 2002 (and now the 2007) elections represented a milestone for a country that came out of a deadly civil war not long before, it will take more than elections to restore public confidence in the institutions of the state. Due to previous misrule, exacerbated by the tragic memories of the civil war, public confidence in the institutions of the state has been significantly eroded. The current government and parliament, composed of some of the recycled politicians who have had a major role in the downward spiral of the country, have to demonstrate through their actions that a new democratic era has indeed arrived in Sierra Leone. But if one goes by the nature of the 2007 elections, a lot more must be done on the economic and political front before democracy and peace in Sierra Leone can truly be consolidated.

A key component of the strategy to restore the integrity of the state should include raising the efficiency and responsiveness of public institutions; eradicating corruption and rent-seeking by public officials, including the police and armed forces; and creating a climate where every citizen feels that he/she has a role to play in the development of the nation. Sustainable peace with justice will ultimately depend on good governance and elimination of the social injustices that gave rise to the armed insurrection in the first place. Rehabilitating the capacity and image of the state, however, will ultimately hinge upon the degree to which democracy translates into policies that combat mass deprivation and provide for the thousands of marginalized youth and ex-combatants an alternative to the AK-47 assault rifle. The contributors to

this volume clearly highlight that Sierra Leone remains a fragile country despite two successful post-conflict elections, and the appearance of peace and order on the surface. They rightfully point out that consolidating peace, re-launching the economy, and attacking the worst forms of human deprivation require more than holding multiparty elections. As Sierra Leone struggles to consolidate democracy and peace, it will do well – as other African countries would, to define the fundamental basis of its national project, citizenship and development in ways that connect such aspirations to a regional, continental and global quest for more progressive forms of democracy, social justice and peace.

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# Introduction

*A.B. Zack-Williams*

In May 1996, in the middle of the civil war, Sierra Leoneans, whose capital boasts the status of the oldest Western-style municipality on the continent had to be re-socialised into the art of representative governance, when for the first time in almost thirty years, they won the right to free and fair democratic elections. The country, whose capital became a municipality in 1792 under the Sierra Leone Company, had been founded for the resettlement of former slaves who had fought alongside the British in the American War of Independence in fulfilment of the freedom promised them by the British. In 1807, the settlement became a Crown Colony, due to the crisis of the Sierra Leone Company. The area soon became an outpost for the dispersal of the British ideas of modernity in the West African sub-region until it gained independence in 1961. The Independence Constitution put in place a Westminster-type, liberal democratic framework for the successor state and its functionaries. However, as Collier (1970) and Cartwright (1970), have argued, this experiment in democracy ended in failure in 1967 when following general elections that resulted in the defeat of the incumbent Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), the Force Commander, Brigadier Lansana, intervened militarily to detain the Prime Minister-elect Mr Siaka Stevens leader of the All People's Congress (APC), and prevented him from taking his office.

This military intervention marked the beginning of the political instability and economic decline of the country as witnessed by a series of military coups and alleged coups: first the 'majors' coups', which removed Brigadier Lansana who was replaced by Major Juxon-Smith within days of the original coup, who in turn was removed by Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) a year later in April 1968, who then installed Mr Siaka Stevens to the office of Prime Minister. Stevens ruled Sierra Leone with an iron fist during his almost twenty year spell as leader of his country, a period that was punctuated with allegations of coup attempts, states of emergency, treason trials

and hangings, including a former Vice President and Force Commanders. During Stevens' reign as Prime Minister and later President, the multi-party parliamentary system was replaced by the one-party dictatorship as representative democracy and local government were replaced by a series of 'nominated councils'. By the time Stevens left office in 1984, civil society had been silenced; the independent judiciary inherited from the departing colonial ruler had been transformed into an adjunct of the ruling party; both the army and civil service had been politicised, thus losing their efficiency and professionalism.

The task of informalising the state and economy started by Stevens was intensified by his hand-picked successor and Force Commander, Brigadier-General Momoh, who marginalized both parliament and his Cabinet as he strengthened the grip of the *Akutay*, an ethnic cabal, as the fountain of authority (Zack-Williams 2001:125–148). Momoh urged his people to organise themselves into ethnic corporate groups alongside the *Akutay*, meanwhile the economy continued to falter as the oppressive state apparatus was strengthened and large sections of Sierra Leone society felt estranged from the centre, including the South and south-eastern sections of the country, and the young people in particular, as the excesses of the conditionalities and economic reform policies of the IMF/World Bank-authored Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) impacted adversely upon a vulnerable population.

The foregoing, forms the backdrop to the events leading to the civil war with the exception of the spark that actually ignited the civil war, the Liberian rebel faction leader, Charles Taylor accused the Sierra Leone government of duplicity in the Liberian civil war: trying to be a peace broker, at the same time as allowing its airport to be used to bomb his troops' position as they were about to capture their greatest prize, the Liberian capital. Taylor swore revenge on his neighbour and soon organised dissident Sierra Leoneans and mercenaries from as far as Liberia, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire to invade the country's eastern border. The poor conditions of Sierra Leone's security forces and the hapless state of its people meant that neither group could effectively resist the invaders.

President Kabba, who in March 1996 was elected (under the banner of the Sierra Leone People's Party) the country's first democratic leader since 1967, disbanded the highly politicised and unruly army in the middle of

the civil war. The disbandment of the army was inevitable, given the fact that a large section of the army (the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, which invaded the capital in 1997 forcing President Kabba and his cabinet to flee) had formed an alliance with the rebel Revolutionary United Front to form a 'people's alliance'. In its place, Kabba with the help of party members, in particular his deputy as Defence Minister, Chief Hingha Norman, organised an adjunct of civil society, the Kamajors, the Mende traditional hunters from the south-eastern region of the country (an SLPP stronghold) who were soon transformed into the core of a national civil defence force. The bloody rebellion, which lasted for eleven years came to an end following intervention, first by Private Military Company (PMC) or by mercenary outfits such as the Gurkha Security Guards ((GSG) (whose Canadian Commander Colonel Robert Mackenzie was killed following an ambush by rebel units), Executive Outcomes, Sandline International, and later the West African Peacekeeping Force, the Economic Community of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group, (ECOMOG) and in May 2000 with help from British Paratroopers. On July 7, 1999, the Lomé Peace Agreement was signed between the Government of President Kabba and the rebel RUF leader Foday Sankoh, which gave in to all the demands of the rebels, who at the time had their forces occupying two-thirds of the country. As a result of the peace deal, Foday Sankoh was made substantive Vice-President and placed in charge of all mineral deposits in the country.

The RUF was clearly buoyed up by this unexpected "victory", for in less than a year after signing the Accord in Lomé, the Togolese capital, on the day the last Nigerian-led ECOMOG troops left the capital, Sankoh's fighters launched a putsch to remove Kabba from power. It was this post-Lomé debacle that provided the prelude for British intervention.

The intervention quickly brought fighting to an end as the rebels and their allies, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and the Westside Boys were pushed beyond the perimeter of the capital city, Freetown (to which they had laid siege) and further east and north, forcing the rebels to sue for peace. The role of the Diaspora in mobilising international public opinion is discussed in Wai's contribution to this collection; and that of the UN and other donors in the next chapter by Zack-Williams. With the process of demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration in full progress and with the help of the United Nations through UNAMSIL, the process of tran-

sitional justice continued with the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It also included the setting up of the Special Court, a hybrid creation of both the UN and the government of Sierra Leone to try those 'who bear greatest responsibility for the war crimes and crimes against Sierra Leone and international laws'.

In February 2002 the government officially announced the formal end to hostilities and the first post-war elections were held on May 14, 2002, which the SLPP won by capturing some 70 per cent of the votes cast. Through the image of women and children with amputated limbs and the belief that the war was caused by 'blood diamonds', Sierra Leone gained sympathy and support throughout the world. To prevent 'conflict diamonds' (which fuelled African wars) getting into the chain of legal diamonds, the 'Kimberley Process' was instituted; donors supported a number of projects, particularly the European Union and the British government through its Department for International Development (DFID). Help came from several quarters: the US, Canada and Australia to set up the special court and the TRC. The British were involved with training a 'new model army' and the police service, financing of an Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), as well as with rehabilitating the office of chieftaincy as the centrepiece of local government. It soon became clear to the international community – what the long suffering people of the country had realised much earlier – that the Kabba regime lacked the will to prosecute corruption and address the underlying causal factors of the war: the youth question, gerontocracy and the absence of social citizenship.

Even to the casual observer, life for the young and poor was characterised by resistance and contempt for the political class and their hangers on, as reflected in popular music (Zack-Williams and Wai in this volume); the young who refused to attend school, which they saw as holding no future for them; the urban squatters who have refused to return to a denuded countryside; and young men who decided to stay put in the diamond and gold mining fields scratching a living as 'tributors'. Thus by the time the Chief Electoral Commissioner announced the date for the elections, the young and dispossessed in Sierra Leone were longing to cast their votes, in order to inform the political class that even within the existing 'polyarchy' (see Wai in this volume) they would like to have a say on who their governors should be.

As the 2007 election results show (see analysis in chapter by Zack-Williams and Gbla in this volume), the ruling SLPP was caught napping by depending on their rural allies, the chiefs, who failed to deliver their people's votes to the ruling party. In the meantime, the erstwhile "unelectable" APC in 2002 rediscovered its early roots in the politics of the youth.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the SLPP was displaying the politics of arrogance in incumbency, the APC engaged with the urban *damnés de la terre*, as well as with the disenchanted middle classes and critics of the government in the Diaspora. That the All People's Congress won both Parliamentary and Presidential elections (after two rounds of voting) despite the widespread bribing of voters from all sides of the political spectrum points to the 'new sophistication' of the Sierra Leonean voter. As many Sierra Leoneans pointed out: 'we are watermelon voters, green (colour of SLPP) outside, but red inside (colour of APC)', a caveat emptor that SLPP leaders failed to listen to at their peril. While the main issue in 2002 had been a vote for peace, then represented by Kabbah's SLPP, in 2007, the issues had shifted to survival – bread and butter issues, with the people expecting democracy to deliver employment, food, basic social services and infrastructure, and 'voting out' the political party that had so clearly failed to deliver such qualitative democracy dividends.

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1. It is true that in its halcyon days, the Youth Section of the party was the most vibrant branch of the party, with firebrands like Adewale and Olufemi John, Akibo-Betts ('Akibo Power'), and later mayor of Freetown. This early emphasis on youth stemmed from the party's origin in trade unions (Stevens was a union official in the national union of miners in the mines of the Sierra Leone Development Company (DELCO)) and the radical politics of Moscow trained Isaac Theophilus Akuna Wallace Johnson.

# International Intervention and the Struggle for Democracy

*A.B. Zack-Williams*

## Introduction

On 11 August 2007, most of the 2.6 million Sierra Leoneans, of whom 40 per cent were under 27 years of age, queued in the rain and mud to elect a new House of Representatives and vote in the first round of the Presidential elections. These elections were the second since the end of the civil war in 2002 and had been described by many commentators including the International Crisis Group (ICG 2007), as the most important in the country's post-colonial history. The elections were also the first since the last of the 17,500 UN peacekeeping troops (UNAMSIL) left the country, thus posing a real test for the National Electoral Commission (NEC) of Sierra Leone to conduct credible elections, and the security forces to maintain law and order throughout the period.

Furthermore, the country has a long history of political violence during elections. Throughout its 46 years of existence as a nation, Sierra Leone has not had a successful transition of power from one civilian regime to another. The nearest the country came to a peaceful transition from one civilian regime to another, was in April 1967 when the ruling Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP) was defeated by the opposition All People's Congress (APC) only for these events to be overtaken by a military coup resulting in the victorious candidate for the position of Prime Minister, Mr Siaka Stevens, the Governor-General Sir Henry Lightfoot-Boston and the Attorney-General Mr Berthan Macauley being arrested by the Force Commander, Brigadier David Lansana at the request of the defeated Prime Minister, Sir Albert Margai. Since those events, Sierra Leone's politics had lost its innocence and

tranquillity, as all semblance of democracy was erased from public life to be replaced by the dictatorship of the one-party state and the attack upon basic freedoms in the civil society.

These events later played a major role in unleashing social forces to challenge APC rule as the party in power, under the leadership of Major-General Momoh (hand-picked by Stevens to succeed him in 1985) who was eventually ejected from power in April 1992 by young military officers led by Captain Valentine Strasser, who accused him of incompetence in prosecuting the war against the rebels. Strasser's National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) held elections in April 1996, which were won by Tejan Kabba's SLPP. In May 1997, Major Johnny Paul Koroma led a coup that forcibly removed the democratically elected government from power, and established the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) government, which also went into a form of working partnership with the RUF at a certain point. However, the combination of domestic pressures and the ECOMOG forced the AFRC from power in 1998, and Kabba was reinstated to his position as President of Sierra Leone. He then went on to win the 2002 elections.

The 2007 elections marked the end of the Proportional Representation Nationalist List (PRNL) and District Block Representation System (DBRS), in which party loyalty is the main driver for a good showing on the electoral list; and the return of the first-past-the post system, which some analysts have argued reinforces the dominance of chieftaincies in the political system. What is clear is that the new government will have to be in a position to launch a robust attack on corruption, economic mismanagement and execute a strong reform programme in order to exploit the last vestiges of international goodwill from the UK and other partners, including the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

The new government, regardless of its political colouration will have to pay attention to the problem of chiefs' abuse, the youth question (See Wai in this volume), the question of corruption and the smooth running of the British-sponsored Independent Anti-Corruption Commission. In the eyes of many commentators, a failure to address these issues may invite a return to violence. Other issues that should strengthen democracy include, the de-politicisation of the army and the judiciary. Sierra Leoneans were aware that the elections presented them with a narrow choice of leaders to take

their country forward and to consolidate the fragile democratic institutions for a sustainable peace.

In what follows, a background to the political and economic events that led to the war is provided. This draws attention to external intervention at several levels and the drive by the international community to build democracy in Sierra Leone. Attention is also drawn to a number of fallacies:

- The attempt by the international community, Britain in particular, to build democracy by seeking to modernise an essentially gerontocratic set up.
- That democracy involves much more than regular voting for either a single party or a multiparty system. If this was the case, then apartheid South Africa with all its brutality and enslavement of the Black majority could be said to have been a 'democracy' as the whites created a regular catharsis of reaffirming ethnic and racial solidarity via the ritual of elections, from which the marginalized ethnic majority were excluded. Regular voting by the electorate, though a necessary condition for a democratic polity, is not a sufficient condition for the nomenclature, democracy.
- That central to a democratic polity is the relationship between the state and civil society, with the latter acting as a counter-balance to the former's monopoly of the use of violence as well as ensuring the protection of the rights of minorities.
- In this respect democracy is premised on the need to strengthen social and political institutions that are functional to its operations, whilst reforming and or abandoning those that are dysfunctional to the smooth running of the democratic state.
- That the civil war despite its brutal and bloody trajectory was a cry by the disenfranchised and the marginalized for a voice in the affairs of the state.
- That the civil war and the peace agreements did not address the fundamental causal reasons for the war, which renders the peace process rather tentative.

## Background to the War: The Politics of Decline and the Decline of a Nation

At independence, the territory that was once described as the 'Athens of West Africa', inherited a relatively efficient civil service, an independent judiciary and an educational system that was the envy of neighbouring countries, with the premier university in Anglophone West Africa (Fourah Bay College) and many secondary schools that can trace their origin back to the nineteenth century or early twentieth century. The last pre-independence elections (and the first in which electors voted directly) were held in 1957 under a wider franchise, which gave the ruling SLPP a mandate to seek independence from Britain. In 1960, the opposition parties agreed to join with the SLPP in a coalition called the United National Front, under the leadership of Sir Milton Margai (Fyfe 1968).

Following negotiations between representatives of the United National Front and the British Government, independence was fixed for 27 April 1961 (Sierra Leone Government 1960). However, before the agreement was signed a split appeared among the delegates when Mr Siaka Stevens, erstwhile member of the People's National Party led by Sir Albert Margai left the coalition, refusing to sign the agreement on a point of principle objecting to the provision that Britain would have naval facilities in post-colonial Sierra Leone. Stevens went on to demand elections before independence in order to settle this issue. His detractors accused him of self-interestedness, as he had lost his seat following an election petition. Stevens went on to form the Election Before Independence Movement, which transmogrified into the APC, which successfully challenged the seemingly invincible SLPP, initially capturing control of the Freetown City Council and in 1967 winning the disputed general elections for Parliament.

The 1967 elections witnessed the advent of political violence in the country, perpetrated largely by young men or 'party thugs' under orders from their political masters. SLPP lost the elections largely because of mismanagement of the economy, in particular the shambolic state of the state-controlled Produce Marketing Board (Zack-Williams 1995), a major source of livelihood for the peasant producers, as well as Sir Albert's desire to declare a republic and hints of the country becoming a one-party state. The subsequent events led to the end of the first experiment in democracy (Collier 1970), leading to a military coup in March 1967, which brought to power

the junta of the National Reformation Council (NRC) under the leadership of Major Juxon-Smith. Just over a year later, Juxon-Smith was removed from office in a bloodless coup by non-commissioned officers calling themselves the Anti-Corruption Revolutionary Movement (ACRM), who then went on to invite Mr Siaka Stevens back from exile in neighbouring Guinea to form a coalition government. However, it was not long before the coalition ran into trouble as personal rule displaced democratic governance. Stevens moved quickly to neutralise the opposition by arresting his former coalition partners, declaring a state of emergency and enforcing a policy *volte-face* by declaring the country a republic and instituting a one-party state. He soon stripped society of virtually all its democratic institutions, including local government and ruled initially through a 'shadow state' i.e. a 'virtual state' as opposed to the real state, a state that cannot stand on its own (Reno 1995) and later through the ethnic cabal, the 'Akutay' (Zack-Williams 2001: 125–148).

Desperate attempts were made to fuse the state and the party into one entity. It was imperative for senior civil servants, army and police personnel to be card-carrying members of the party (APC) and the oppressive state apparatuses were strengthened. For example the size of the army rose from 2,200 in 1977 to 3,000 in 1980 and the period also witnessed the rise of personal armies including the 2,500 strong Internal Security Unit (ISU), whose name was changed to the State Security Division (SSD), trained by Cubans as the presidential guard. The SSD gained more favour from the regime than the regular army, as members of the former were all hand-picked by the party leadership, thereby creating tensions between the two security forces. Indeed, at the time the civil war broke out in March 1991, the army was poorly equipped in comparison to the SSD, which affected the ability of the army to repulse the initial attacks by the RUF. Following regular accusations of attempted coups, there was also a Palestinian unit despatched to protect the President as well as troops from Guinea, following a bilateral agreement with the Guinean President, Ahmed Sekou Toure. The Newspaper (Amendment) Act 1979 was also used to harass journalists and proprietors of opposition newspapers with a high levy on newsprint and registration fees.

If the political scene was defined by authoritarianism and exclusion, the major economic thrust was the consolidation of the economic squeeze,

which the NRC had embarked upon in 1967, by further reduction in government expenditure and the disastrous policy of phasing out the national rail-network, on the grounds that it was unviable. By late 1971, Stevens' support had started to wane due to a number of economic and political factors.

First, the mild economic recovery, which had been triggered off by the austerity policies of the NRC had started to peter out. Second, Stevens tried to rid the army of officers opposed to APC policies, including one Corporal Foday Sankoh, future leader of the rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) who was implicated in an attempted coup and subsequently dismissed from the army. A third factor was the fact that by this time a schism had emerged within the rank of the ruling APC, which led a number of APC stalwarts to defect to the newly formed United Democratic Party (UDP). Fourth, Stevens rushed through Parliament a Bill to transform the country into a republic. These all culminated in an attempted coup in March 1971. Stevens swiftly responded to these challenges by banning the UDP, arrested thirty-six of its members; and declared Sierra Leone a republic within the Commonwealth. Finally he embarked on a process of strengthening the 'shadow state' by consolidating his personal rule, using patron-client networks, the hallmark of politics in Sierra Leone.

The period of APC rule was marked by economic decline (see Table 1 below), apart from a brief improvement in 1977 due largely to a diamond price increase by De Beers Central Selling Organisation in London and to an increased volume of agricultural exports. The economy was stuck in stagflation, precipitating in 1978 a devaluation of the local currency. The table showed a growing deterioration in the average rate of growth per capita throughout the 1970s and part of the 1980s.

The large expenditure involved in hosting the annual Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Heads of State Summit meeting threw government finances into chaos, leading to a series of mini and grand budgets and visits from the IMF. This increased pressure on government revenue was not reflected in growth in government receipts as shown in Table 2 below. It also shows that from the mid-1970s government receipts declined by more than five-fold, whilst expenditure continued to rise and more than doubled between 1975/80 and 1980/85. Furthermore, the Government had to address the problem of diamond smuggling. However, by making

the Diamond Corporation West Africa (DiCorfWaf) the sole buyer of all diamonds legally produced in the country, the government further strengthened the grip of foreign multinational mining corporations in the country as well as intensifying the problem of smuggling. The nationalisation of the nation's major export earner, the diamond mining company, the Sierra Leone Selection Trust, to form the National Diamond Mining Company (NDMC) of Sierra Leone, increased sources for financing the 'shadow state', leading to the informalisation of the mining industry. These policies and those of Stevens' handpicked successor, Force Commander Brigadier General Joseph Momoh, in particular the latter's policy of 'ethnic corporatism' and the role of the *Akutay* an ethnic cabal, soon laid the basis for political contestation leading to the civil war in 1991 (Zack-Williams 2001).

Table 1. Average Rate of Growth Capital 1970–85

1970–75	1975–80	1980–85
-0.9	-0.7	-5.6

Source: United Nations, National Accounts Statistics: Analysis of Main Aggregates, 1985

Table 2. Average Annual Changes of Central Government Receipts and Expenditure (%)

Receipt			Expenditure		
1970–75	1975–80	1980–85	1970–75	1975–80	1980–85
16.68	25.93	5.54	18.40	23.34	46.67

Source: African Socio-economic Indicators, 1985, UN/ECA, p.58

## Foreign Intervention: The Civil War and Post-War Democratisation

The causal factors of the war are very much tied up to the policies of almost thirty years of APC rule. In 1984, party leader and founder Siaka Stevens decided to step down, naming his Force Commander, Major-General Joseph Momoh as his successor, a move that was rubber-stamped by the party. However, Momoh was neither a charismatic figure nor did he possess the skill and guile of his predecessor. Furthermore, he did not have a political base within the party, which impelled him to rule through *Akutay*, whilst

he urged other ethnicities to effect similar ethnic corporatism. By the time they were removed from power, the APC had turned corruption into an art and had regularly made mockery of the democratic process, in particular the electoral system. The elevation of Momoh to the highest office of state produced many enemies including his deputy Francis Minah who was hanged for his alleged part in a treason plot.

Though Minah was not a popular figure, as he was reviled and held responsible for the Ndorgbowusui uprising in Pujehun District, his death further alienated the regime from the people of the southern and eastern parts of the country, who felt that the opportunity of one of their number rising to the presidency had been thwarted. Furthermore, government policies had impacted adversely on social services, such as education and health. The huge balance of payments deficit brought in the IMF and the accompanying structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which exacerbated the situation by precipitating economic collapse and deterioration of the social and physical infrastructure. Not surprising then, that on the eve of the war the country was fast slipping down the Human Development Index. In 1985–95 only 38 per cent of Sierra Leoneans had access to health services; in 1990–95 only 34 per cent had access to safe water and in the same period only 11% had access to sanitation (UN 1996).

Into this power vacuum entered the RUF, a social movement with its origins in Libya, Monrovia and radical student politics in Sierra Leone (Abdullah 1997), claiming as its *raison d'être* the removal of the corrupt APC dictatorship and the return of the country to democratic governance. The leadership of the RUF argued that only a democratic Sierra Leone would be able to provide for its people and bring pride back to the nation. It is not clear if the war would have started when it did, but for two external factors. The first relates to the policy of the Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of aiding 'revolutionary' movements worldwide. Sankoh, and a number of radical students from the Pan African Union, a precursor to the RUF, had training in Libya and Ghana, before emerging on the Sierra Leone battlefield. Abdullah (1997:51), observed:

The Libyans entered Sierra Leone in the mid-1970s and began to make inroads into civil society by using religious as well as non-religious channels to establish their presence. They gave generous grants for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca; established links with the powerful and crafty diamond dealer J.S. Mohammed, who arranged a state visit for Siaka Stevens.

Gaddafi was allegedly angry that after supporting Stevens' request to hold the 1980 OAU summit in Freetown, the latter failed to support his candidature as Chairman for the 1982 summit and instead Stevens boycotted the meeting as a consequence of diplomatic pressure from the United States (Gberie 2004). From that moment, Gaddafi reportedly nursed a grudge against Stevens and in 1984 after Momoh had succeeded him as President and leader of the APC at the behest of Stevens, Gaddafi was reported to have described Momoh as a 'Boy Scout', since military personnel would seize power, rather than have it foisted upon them.

The second reason relates to what the Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor saw as Sierra Leone's duplicity as a peacekeeper in allowing its airport to be used by ECOMOG forces to strafe his fighters as they were about to seize Monrovia, the Liberian capital. Taylor swore revenge and went on to help organise the RUF as a fighting force to include Liberians, Bukinabes and Sierra Leonean exiles.

The long years of APC rule had resulted in the politicisation of the army and police, and the ISU/SSD had become Stevens' private army. The national army had been starved of resources and logistics because Stevens could no longer trust it and the ISU/SSD had become the main force for internal order and control. Furthermore, the coup of 1992 had led to the collapse of the army's command structure. By the time elections were held in 1996, the phenomenon of *Sobel* (rebel-soldier) had emerged. The situation was hastened by the expansion of the army, resulting in poorly trained déclassé elements being recruited to confront the rebels.

A year after war broke out in 1991, and as government forces were pushed back from their outposts close to the Liberia border, the military overthrew the Momoh regime in 1992. The new military government then decided to expand the army by recruiting large numbers of déclassé elements into the army, as well as seeking assistance from foreign mercenary outfits many with connections to the mining sector. The first was the British-based Ghurkha Security Guard commanded by the Canadian, Robert Mackenzie, whose death in the field triggered off the organisation's exit from Sierra Leone. The departure of the Gurkhas led to the arrival of another Government ally, Executive Outcome (EO), a military outfit from South Africa.

Gberie (2004:93), has argued that Sierra Leone's young leader Captain Valentine Strasser, 'was encouraged to hire EO by the British directors of

Heritage Oil and Gas, an oil firm that had taken EO into Angola and Branch Energy, a mining firm with interests in Sierra Leone's diamond deposits'. According to Gberie, the cash strapped junta could not afford the asking price of \$15 million, but an offer came from Anthony Buckingham, founder of Heritage Oil, who was willing to pay the amount in exchange for future mining concessions. In May 1995, the first group of the 150 EO contingent arrived in Sierra Leone under their Commander Colonel Roelf, who set about training units of the army and the *Kamajors* in counter-insurgency operations. Using helicopter gunboats, EO pushed the rebels out of their headquarters in Zogoda, when the IMF called time on their activities as being too expensive and something that the country could not afford, the government had to send EO away, thus increasing the pressure on the government forces.

In the middle of the war in 1996 pressure came from the international community and sections of the emerging vibrant civil society for elections. This resulted in the first democratic elections in almost 30 years (Kandeh 2004). In the wake of the debate between those who felt that elections would bring legitimacy to the political system and eventually force the combatants to return to the negotiating table and sue for peace, and those who called for a peaceful solution to ensure democratic elections, the former view prevailed. In the elections that followed, the SLPP leader Ahmed Tejan Kabba was elected president and his party won the most seats in the House of Representatives. However, just over a year after assuming power in March 1996, a faction of the national army calling itself the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, under the leadership of Major Johnny Paul Koroma, struck in May 1997 to remove President Kabba from power.

The rise of the *Kamajors* and other elements such as the Tamaboros and Dansos, forming the core of the Civil Defence Force (CDF) further alienated the army from the government, leading to the AFRC coup that temporarily removed Kabba from office (Zack-Williams 1997). Following the Koroma-led military intervention and in the middle of the war, Kabba had disbanded his disloyal army and became dependent on a section of civil society the *Kamajors*, a group of Mende ethnic hunters to protect his government. In January 1999, columns of RUF fighters invaded the capital from the east and the mountain areas in the wake of the Christmas and New Year celebrations causing widespread damage to property, looting, rape and

amputations. It was this mayhem that actually brought the problems of Sierra Leone to the attention of the international community. Not only were thousands killed, scores of Government and private buildings destroyed, but also hundreds of children and young people were seized and taken away as child soldiers and sex slaves. By this time the rebels were occupying two-thirds of the country and spreading fear throughout the country.

After several months of occupying the capital at the cost of hundreds of innocent lives, destruction of private and public buildings, human rights abuse and amputation of limbs, the AFRC and their allies were driven out of the capital by Nigerian-led ECOMOG troops. In July 1999, following pressure largely from Britain and the US, President Kabba was able to conclude a peace agreement with the RUF leadership, which not only conceded to virtually all their demands, but also gave them immunity from prosecution for human rights abuses. Though he had been put in charge of all the mineral resources of the country as Chairman of the Strategic Resources Commission, and was effectively the Vice President of the country, it seemed that rebel leader Foday Sankoh wanted total power.

Following the exit of the Nigerian-led ECOMOG forces from Sierra Leone in May 2000, Sankoh decided to make his bid for power and his troops attacked the capital, killing a number of unarmed civilians, a move that brought British paratroopers to the country. The latter under the guise of seeking to evacuate British, European and Commonwealth citizens from the country, came to the rescue of both the Kabba regime and the UN peace-keeping force (UNAMSIL), a number of whose soldiers and equipment had been captured by Sankoh's forces. The paratroopers were able to capture the airport, push back RUF and AFRC forces from the perimeter of the capital and gradually render both fighting forces ineffective. In the melee that followed the attack on the capital, Sankoh managed to escape, but he was captured by a member of the security forces a few days later and handed over to the British commanders for his safe custody.

These developments were followed by the demobilisation of thousands of fighters, including some 5,500 child soldiers, the setting up of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which called for 'introspection and a retrospective examination of the political, historical, economic, social and moral activities of both the state and the nation'. In addition, a Special Court was set up 'to prosecute persons who bear the greatest responsibility

for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996'. Once the demobilisation reconciliation and rehabilitation process was over and the civil war declared as formally over, it was time for the people of Sierra Leone to go to the polls to vote for a new government.

### International Intervention and the 2007 Elections

As noted earlier, the 2007 elections were the first to be held since the departure of the 17,500 UNAMSIL peacekeeping forces that helped in maintaining peace, as well as in the demobilisation of combatants and their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Questions had been raised about the ability of the new national army and the restructured and re-equipped police force to keep the peace and maintain law and order during this period. The international community and Britain in particular have invested through the International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT) in training the army and the police in order to re-establish state authority by improving governance and creating what the ICG (2007:12) has called 'a viable structure of coercion'. In 2006, the size of the national army stood at 10,300. There were concerns about the neutrality of the army, given the rather overwhelming number of votes cast for former army major and military head of state turned warlord Johnny Paul Koroma and his Peace and Liberation Party (ICG 2007); and the statement by another ex-military head of state, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio that the army would not accept an APC victory, though during the course of the campaign he withdrew this threat.

Since the end of the war, the Department for International Development (DFID) has invested \$40 million in retraining and restructuring the Sierra Leone Police, which now numbers some 9,500 personnel and 250 officers. It is now a much improved, better-disciplined, and better equipped force than it was in the turbulent days of APC rule. However, it seems as if these investments have made little dent in the people's perception of the police, as only 3% of the people in a Sierra Leone Police Survey in 2004 in four major towns, Freetown, Bo, Makeni and Kenema responded that they felt 'very safe' in their communities (ICG 2007). The UN Mission's police section has also been working with the force to review the curriculum and training.

Nonetheless, there are still some lingering doubts about the ability of the force to handle critical issues such as election violence. This has fuelled the view that the newfound professionalism and efficiency of the police would wither away once the British withdrew. As the election campaign progressed many of these officers were drawn from the border regions in order to deal with potential law and order issues in major towns such as Bo, Makeni, Kono and Kenema. Though there were reports of political violence and at least two shooting incidents, the police were able to maintain the peace fairly well.

Once the civil war was over, the international community decided to address issues of transitional justice and impunity. In the case of the former, this involved the setting up of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and the latter the setting up of the Special Court. The TRC is a product of the Lomé Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The work of the Commission laid the foundation for reconciliation and healing for all of those affected by the civil war. Victims and perpetrators were brought together in search of a common ground on which to stand, live and develop the country together in peace and harmony. The Report of the Commission called for an introspective examination of state and nation, as well as drawing attention to the plight of victims of violence. The Commission tried to answer the following questions: 'Why Sierra Leone?' 'What went wrong?' 'What needs to change?' 'How will we effect the change?' The Commission Report urged the nation to confront the past, to learn from it, in order to avoid repeating past mistakes. It was hoped that: 'the Report will serve as a roadmap towards the building of a new society in which all Sierra Leoneans can walk unafraid with pride and dignity'.

The Sierra Leone Special Court was set up to prosecute 'those who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996'. The Special Court whose leitmotif was 'no peace without justice' is a hybrid product incorporating Sierra Leonean and international laws. It was meant to be a deterrent to the widespread abuse of human rights, and to pave the way for a milieu of democratic engagement and tolerance. The cost of the Special Court was borne by the international community, for example, earlier on this year, the Australian Government made a further

donation of \$100,000 to aid the deliberations of the Court, thus bringing Australia's contribution to \$700,000 since 2001.

Sierra Leone came out of the war as a near-collapsed state, with virtually all export activities (apart from diamond mining) halted. The post-civil war administration of Ahmed Tejan Kabba continued to preside over a donor-driven economy, which in 2005 received the sum of US\$ 343.4 million from donors in the form of multilateral and bilateral partnerships and United Nations Agencies, a significant amount (26%) of which was channelled through Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). In the case of the US 100 per cent of its supporting funds came through NGOs. International donors have shown considerable commitment to the country's development.

The UK in particular has a strong relationship with Sierra Leone, which is reflected in high levels of trade, investment, donor aid and close diplomatic ties. The High Commissioner in Freetown on more than one occasion drew the attention of the politicians to the need for the elections to be free, fair and conducted under peaceful conditions. A warning from the Chief Electoral Commissioner that unscrupulous elements were determined to rig the 2007 elections followed these interventions. Meanwhile the UN Resident Representative, Victor Angelo also called for free and fair elections. He observed: 'There is no other option and I hope that everybody understands ... that the option of things not going well is not an option'.

The EU has continued to be the country's biggest multilateral donor, followed by the World Bank's concessional lending arm, the International Development Association (IDA). The UK remained the biggest bilateral donor, having again contributed US\$ 60.6 million in 2005. Donor support is, however, conditional on the government implementing most of its agreed economic and policy targets, including a clampdown on corruption. The failure of the government to deal firmly with corruption and the impediments placed in the path of the British financed Anti-Corruption Commission led to funding for the latter being withdrawn and the threat to withhold further aid to the government.

Concern over the rather slow pace of change has led to the country being singled out as a test case for a new initiative co-ordinated by the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which aims to prevent post-conflict countries from sliding back into war. So far, the Commission's agenda includes financial

support for efforts to tackle youth unemployment, the reform of the justice and security sector, and the strengthening of democratic processes. Meanwhile, security in the sub-region has remained fragile. The political situation in neighbouring Guinea has remained highly volatile, with the potential for either the military to challenge the government's authority or public frustration with the rapidly declining standard of living to result in rioting and anarchy. In the meantime, shortages in remote parts of Guinea are resulting in more food being sourced from Sierra Leone. The situation in Côte d'Ivoire remains unstable, but poses far less of a threat. Also, Liberia's return to democracy has improved the internal security situation.

Before the announcement of the date for the elections, which was originally fixed for July 2007 a group of international donors including the EU, DFID, Ireland, Japan and Denmark agreed to finance the Electoral Reform Project through the establishment of a mechanism of cost-sharing, creating a basket fund to be managed by UNDP. This was a novel mechanism of funding, which marked a move away from 'event-driven' to a more holistic approach, linking electoral assistance to the development of a political framework and a democratic culture based on the idea that the building of a strong and stable electoral administration capacity is better (and long term) investment than ad hoc contributions to electoral events. The success of the 1996 and 2002 elections in giving legitimacy to the government convinced donors that a successful election in 2007 would further consolidate peace.

In order to strengthen the fragile democracy, donors in Sierra Leone in 2005 decided to support the development of the institutional capacity of the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), i.e. the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and the Elections Offences Courts (EOC). For the first time in the country's history, competing parties were given equality of access to the political space and the electoral management bodies were able to function in a credible and transparent manner.

The overall objective of donor intervention is to promote and deepen democratic institutions in Sierra Leone. This move started in the last days of the civil war, when a revitalised civil society started flexing its muscles by confronting the combatants and demanding immediate elections as a means of showing the rebels that they did not have the support of the population. The end of the war saw the spread of alternative media houses to

those controlled by the government, thus giving space to alternative voices and new genres particularly among the young people alienated from gerontocracy and corrupt elites.

With the help of donors, a number of FM stations were set up. There was also access to British Forces broadcasts. Local music artists such as Emerson Bockari produced songs such as: *Borbor Belleh* (Fat Cats), *You Wa day Pwel Salone* (Those Responsible for Destroying the Country) to draw attention to the corruption among the ruling political elites. More recently at the beginning of the 2007 election campaigns, he released another number *Too Foot Arata* (Rats with Two Legs) and *Borbor Pein* (Poor Boy). K-Man another artist sang *Stone Them*, in his call for the government to be driven away by popular votes. Dry Yai Crew reassured the youth of the country with *Betteh Go Cam Wan Day*, (Things will get better some day), whilst informing the SLPP government that it was time to go with *Time Don Don*. Many other artists followed the path of Emerson with such hits as *Corruption Corruption Idu So Idu So Pack and Go, Time to Go*. Perhaps the most popular tune during the campaign was *Ejection Notice*, referring to the fact that time was up for the Government. These themes were seized upon by the long-suffering youth of the country, who during the election campaign used them as tunes for political mobilisation against what was seen as corrupt and weak government. In this way, the seeds of democratic challenges were sown and flowered in Sierra Leone.

However, the immediate and specific objective of donors' involvement was to build and increase the capacity of NEC and other electoral institutions in order to create and maintain public confidence in the electoral system as well as the EMBs, and to support a National Electoral Security Plan to ensure a peaceful milieu for conducting the elections. This was to ensure that a credible and efficient electoral system was put in place not only to meet international standards, but also to ensure it complied with international treaties signed by Sierra Leone. To ensure these objectives were fulfilled donors pledged financial and technical assistance. It was hoped that the Electoral Reform Project would help create a professional body of election administrators who would act as advocates and educators on electoral democracy and be capable of running elections and other constitutionally required tasks with little external and international involvement.

The UN too assembled a UN Electoral Assistance Team of twenty electoral advisors for the NEC headquarters, another twenty-eight district electoral advisors and one permanent advisor to the PPRC and helped the national electoral authorities organise the elections, 'by supporting the development of their institutional capacity'. This support was directed towards the Electoral Authorities, including the NEC and the PPRC; and other authorities including the security authorities and the judicial system, in particular the Electoral Offences Court and Electoral Petitions. The UN offered operational advice to the NEC and supported the development of basic tools, concept of operations, electoral budget and timetable, voter registration planning and preparations and the development of the final registration of electors. The UN also supported the candidate nomination preparations. The UN efforts also went into planning and preparations of polling, counting and announcing the results.

The elections were initially scheduled for July, but the date had to be pushed back by the NEC in order to give it more time to prepare for polling day, to 11 August 2007. Critics questioned why this date was chosen, at the height of the rainy season, in a country with very poor infrastructure. The President, Mr Ahmed Tejan Kabba, had completed two terms in office and as such was ineligible to stand for a third term and his Vice President, Solomon Berewa, was chosen as the official candidate of the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), the country's oldest political party. The choice of Berewa as presidential candidate split the party as long standing SLPP stalwart Charles Margai, son of former Prime Minister, Sir Albert Margai, left the party in anger to establish a new party, the People's Movement for Democracy and Change (PMDC). At the close of nominations, there were seven parties (see Table 5 below) that contested the elections, though only three parties stood any chance of making a good showing namely: the ruling SLPP; the official opposition All People's Congress and the newly formed PMDC.

Berewa, though very much associated with much of the criticism levelled against the Kabba regime, particularly its failure to clamp down on corruption and wasted opportunities, was identified as having the best chance of winning what was expected to be a very close contest, against the leading opposition candidate Ernest Koroma, who had unsuccessfully contested the presidency for the APC in the 2002 elections. Ernest Koroma a northern

Table 3. Names of Parties and Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates

Political Parties	Presidential Candidate	Presidential Running Mate
All Peoples Congress (APC))	Mr Ernest B. Koroma	Mr Samuel Sam-Sumana
Convention People's Party (CPP)	Mr Andrew Turay	Mr Lansana K. Conteh
National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	Alhaji Amadu Jalloh	Mrs Margaret B. Sidikie
Peace and Liberation Party (PLP)	Mr Kandeh B. Conteh	Mr Abu Tarawallie
People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC)	Mr Charles F. Margai	Dr Alhaji Tejan-Jalloh
Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)	Mr Solomon E. Berewa	Mr Momodu Koroma
United National People's Party (UNPP)	Abdul K. Karim	Mr Sei Mohammad

Source: National Electoral Commission, Freetown.

Temne and a former insurance executive, had to fight a prolonged battle for the party's leadership. Though, they made a very good showing in the local government elections in 2004, nonetheless, the APC had to rid itself of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the bloody civil war and to reconstitute itself as a new youthful vibrant entity. Alarm was raised among sections of the electorate when Koroma was quoted to have wished to return a victorious APC to the days of its founder and political tyrant Siaka Stevens. Nonetheless, the APC had the best chance of winning since 1992 when it was removed from power by the youthful junta of the NPRC led by 27 year-old Captain Valentine Strasser.

The APC was able to exploit both the unpopularity of the SLPP and the disgust felt by many traditional SLPP supporters over the treatment of the former leader of the Kamajors, Chief Hingha Norman, at the hands of the Special Court. Many SLPP critics blamed the Vice President for his arrest and detention by the Court. The APC seems to have benefited from the split in the solid block vote that the SLPP traditionally received from the Southern Province, whilst securing votes in its northern base and the Western Area, which includes Freetown (municipality), won by APC in the 2004 elections.

Charles Margai, the Presidential candidate of the PMDC is a lawyer and son of former Prime Minister, Sir Albert Margai, a Mende from the south and long-term member of the SLPP. He served briefly as interior minister after Kabba was reinstated in 1998, but was dropped from the Cabinet after announcing his intention to challenge Kabba's leadership of the SLPP in the run-up to the 2002 elections. Like his father Sir Albert Margai who left the SLPP in 1958 with Siaka Stevens to form a more radical party, the

Peoples National Party, Charles Margai left the SLPP in 2005 to form the Peoples Movement for Democratic Change, a move which, like the one in 1958 threatened to split the usual rock solid vote of the SLPP in the south. Margai has been able to mobilise support from former Kamajor fighters who blame Berewa for the plight of Chief Hingha Norman as well as the failure to deliver the peace dividend.

The choice of a running mate is an important decision to be made in a multi-ethnic society, and a bifurcated state marked by two major ethnic groups, the Temne in the north and the Mende in the south, each accounting for around 30 per cent of the total population. Given the fact that neither group can win an outright majority if votes were cast along ethnic lines, it is important for these two ethnic groups to be able to produce candidates and programmes, which can attract members from the ethnic minorities, such as the Limbas, Fullahs, Creoles, Kurankos and Konos. The leaders and Presidential candidates of the three leading parties (SLPP, APC and PMDC) are all Christians, and each chose Muslim running mates to ensure a broad appeal to the electorate. To attract votes, not only should the manifestos be designed to attract large numbers of people from different ethnic groups, but also the choice of the presidential running mate is crucial to the fortunes of all candidates. For example, Vice President Berewa's choice of Momodu Koroma (it is believed that Koroma was imposed on Berewa) a northern Temne should have augured well for his campaign, as that would have created a ticket of leaders from the two largest ethnic groups. Furthermore, Momodu Koroma, a relatively youthful individual should have been able to make a broad appeal to the young people in the country as an individual who had served the party well as an adviser to the President and as Foreign Minister. Nonetheless, Momodu Koroma's close ties with the Kabba administration may have proved a double-whammy for the SLPP: an unpopular presidential candidate and a Vice President seen as the choice of Kabba.

Charles Margai's choice of Dr Alhaji Tejan Jalloh as presidential running mate was an interesting choice. Alhaji Tejan Jalloh hails from a prominent northern family with strong historical affiliation with the SLPP. Not only was Margai's choice designed to make a big dent in the votes in the north, but it also intensified the schism within SLPP and a split in the Tejan Jalloh

family, as one faction continued to back the SLPP and others left the latter to back the PMDC.

It is important to note that the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF) did not put forward a candidate after their poor showing in 2002. There was a clear realisation on the part of the 'party faithful' that with the death of the 'Pape' (the fond name for their ex-leader Foday Sankoh), and the rest of the leadership either behind bars or detained by the Special Court, there was very little they could offer the Sierra Leone electorate. Another important feature of the election was the conspicuous absence of women candidates, with the exception of Mrs Margaret B. Sidikie, who was chosen as the running mate to Alhaji Amadu Jalloh of the National Democratic Alliance. In 2002, there was a presidential candidate in the person of civil society activist, Mrs Zainab Bangura, on the ticket of the anti-corruption Movement for Progress. The chance of the other parties winning any significant votes was quite slim as some of them were only recently assembled, some of them originating in the Sierra Leone Diaspora of North America.

The major issues of the campaign included, the question of youth unemployment, corruption in public life, and the state of the infrastructure; in particular, the crisis of the state owned Electricity Corporation, and the water crisis in the capital. Five years after the conclusion of the war, unemployment stood at 65 per cent, with tens of thousands of youths still out of work and their prospects for work remained one of the important points of discussion and major embarrassment to the government. Since many of them were former fighters, who after demobilisation decided to stay in the capital city and other towns such as Bo, Makeni and Kenema, it was feared that they constituted a human time bomb that could explode at any time.

A policy document from the Ministry of Youth and Sports describes these young men and women as largely illiterate, having migrated from the countryside, earning their living through petty trading, prostitution, drug peddling and theft. Thousands of them are being courted by politicians and a large number are used as 'political thugs' to intimidate supporters of other parties. Whilst the Ministry has instituted ad hoc programmes, such as the Youth Employment Scheme (YES), nonetheless, these programmes are not sufficient to create a multiplier effect to reduce the number of unemployed, who must be seen as a major factor in consolidating peace.

Table 4. Preliminary Results of Presidential Elections 2007

District	KOROMA (APC)	TURAY (CPP)	JALLOH (NDA)	CONTEH (PLP)	MARGAI (PMDC)	BEREWA (SLPP)	KARIM (UNPP)	District Total
Kailahun	6,997	1,452	1,130	664	19,721	102,174	392	132,530
Kenema	23,647	2,184	2,529	1,270	42,394	123,811	602	196,437
Kono	43,556	2,418	1,304	584	4,803	70,798	621	124,084
Bombali	121,715	3,087	1,055	551	2,751	15,342	641	145,142
Kambia	55,525	2,203	1,067	833	1,510	19,498	707	81,363
Koinadugu	42,027	2,087	918	525	1,500	23,719	453	71,229
Port Loko	116,131	4,065	1,301	652	2,094	22,649	765	147,657
Tonkolili	96,498	2,597	658	412	1,327	15,298	544	117,334
Bo	18,320	1,817	1,523	1,497	66,770	89,383	472	179,782
Bonthe	1,597	682	676	643	31,995	16,590	164	52,347
Moyamba	14,448	1,873	1,181	1,118	28,454	32,258	491	79,823
Pujehun	1,890	627	623	725	28,625	33,114	166	65,770
WA Rural	50,912	1,250	619	288	3,473	21,756	299	78,597
WA Urban	222,260	2,268	3,144	794	20,082	117,622	943	367,113
National	815,523	28,610	17,748	10,556	255,499	704,012	7,260	1,839,208

Source: National Electoral Commission

Table 5. Showing Preliminary Results of Parliamentary Elections 2007

District	APC	CPP	IND	NDA	PLP	PMDC	SLPP	UNPP	Total
Kailahun							8		8
Kenema							11		11
Kono	1						7		8
Bombali	9								9
Kambia	5						1		6
Koinadugu	4						2		6
Port Loko	10								10
Tonkolili	8								8
Bo						3	8		11
Bonthe						3			3
Moyamba	1					1	4		6
Pujehun						3	2		5
Western Area Rural	4								4
Western Area Urban	17								17
National	59	0	0	0	0	10	43	0	112

Source: National Electoral Commission

## Outcomes and Conclusion

The preliminary results indicate that there was a massive turnout of 75.8 per cent of registered voters. By all indications, this has been a free and fair election and the level of violence has been relatively low. The results point to a resounding victory for the APC in the parliamentary elections, and the closely fought election for the presidency. In the case of the latter, the APC won 44.3 per cent (815,523) of the total votes cast, the SLPP 38.3 per cent (704,012) and the PMDC 13.9 per cent (255,499). The failure of any party

to muster 55 per cent of the total vote means that there had to be a run-off between the APC and the SLPP candidates. Many observers felt that the second round would favour the SLPP candidate, Solomon Berewa, and that the protest vote generated by the PMDC would return to the SLPP fold. What was not expected was the fact that Charles Margai was going to advise his supporters to vote for Koroma, the APC candidate. It was feared that the results would produce cohabitation (an SLPP President and an APC Parliament), which many saw as a recipe for inefficient government.

The parliamentary votes show a clear victory for the APC winning 59 out of the 112 seats in the House of Representatives, giving them a working majority of six seats. It seems that the voters had sent a clear message to the politicians that they wanted change and action to rectify the problems of the country, such as corruption, poor infrastructure, youth alienation and a weak economy. As the results from the second round of the Presidential elections in September show, APC's Ernest Koroma won by 54.6 per cent of the votes cast, ushering the APC back into power after a prolonged stay in the political cold, where hopefully, it has learned its lessons on how to transform Sierra Leone's first successful post-war civilian to civilian transfer of power into a genuine opportunity for delivering the democracy dividends to a long-expectant Sierra Leone citizenry.

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## The Role of Youths and the Sierra Leone Diaspora in Democratic Awakening

*Zubairu Wai*

### Introduction

On August 11 2007, voters in Sierra Leone went to the polls to elect a new president and parliament for the third time since the civil war started in March 1991. The first elections took place in 1996, and initiated the democratic transition and return to multiparty politics in Sierra Leone after almost years of *de facto* one party rule under the All People's Congress (APC) and a four year military junta rule under the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). The 1996 elections took place within the context of an ongoing civil war in the country and came in the wake of the unravelling of the NPRC "revolution" and the people's frustration with their failure to rein in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), end the insurgency and revive the economy as they had promised when they overthrew the APC in April 1992, a year after the war started.

Intended as a strategy for conflict transformation in the face of escalating RUF attacks across the country, the elections, which could be described as polyarchical or a 'low-intensity and restricted elitist type of democracy' (Wai 2006; Robinson 1996), were won by the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). It largely reproduced the earlier pattern of elite domination in Sierra Leone with a weak and inept government whose method of governing was informed by what Jimmy Kande (1998) has called "the spoils logic". But more importantly, the elections contributed immensely to the exacerbation of the conflict and the deterioration of the security situation in the country (Abdullah 2004). The huge expectations placed on the elections to achieve two monumental feats – transform a conflict situation and usher in a demo-

cratic system – were partly responsible for the crises that followed these elections.

The second elections were conducted in May 2002. They were also a part of the process of conflict transformation, but unlike the 1996 elections, these elections were organized after an elaborate programme of disarmament spearheaded by the UN and the official declaration of the end of the war in February 2002. They were, in other words, the first post-conflict elections in Sierra Leone and served as a bridge in the transition from war to peace. The optimism that had followed the 1996 elections and the expectations that the Ahmed Tejan Kabba-led SLPP government would end the war and usher in a period of peace and security, had proved premature as the Abidjan Peace Accord, signed in May 1996 between the government and RUF rebel movement, months after Kabba took over the reins of government in November 1996, failed as a disaffected section of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) in collaboration with the RUF rebels, overthrew Kabba and took over the reins of government on May 25 1997. This military putsch put an end to his year-old government, and forced him into a nine-month exile in neighbouring Guinea. After months of failed negotiations, the AFRC junta, which emerged in the wake of the SLA/RUF coup headed by Major Johnny Paul Koroma, was kicked out of power by the Nigerian-led ECOMOG intervention force in February 1998.

Kabba returned to Freetown in March 1998 amidst jubilation, but his failure to consolidate the victories scored by ECOMOG against the rebels, led to increased insecurity as the war escalated to alarming proportions. Recovering from the initial shock of defeat at the hands of ECOMOG, the RUF, their AFRC allies and members of the disbanded SLA, stormed Freetown in January 1999. This was, perhaps, the most turbulent period in the history of Sierra Leone and marked the lowest point in the deterioration of the security situation in the country.

Forced by external pressures, especially from the UN, the US and UK governments to negotiate with the RUF, the government signed a peace agreement with the RUF in Lomé, Togo in July 1999. Under the provisions of the agreement, the RUF would share power with the government, disarm its forces and become a political party. With a massive UN peacekeeping force peaking at 17,500 peacekeepers, the UN was able to undertake an elaborate disarmament programme in which over 75,000 combatants were

demobilised and disarmed, but not before they had first overcome initial setbacks which threatened the entire peace process. The RUF had taken over 500 UN peacekeepers hostage and attempted to take over Freetown in May 2000, a situation that was thwarted by the joint efforts of former AFRC soldiers loyal to Major Johnny Paul Koroma and the intervention of British forces. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants then followed, at the completion of which, President Kabba declared the war officially over in February 2002. The presidential and parliamentary elections were therefore intended as part of the post-conflict transition.

Re-elected with over 70 per cent of the popular vote and 83 seats in a 112-member parliament, the SLPP appeared to have consolidated its hold on power. Jimmy Kande (2003) has attributed this electoral victory to the widespread belief among voters that the SLPP ended the war and brought peace to Sierra Leone. This point brings into focus an important aspect of the 2002 elections themselves, and makes a profound statement about voter perception and its effect on the outcome of elections. The main concern of a war-weary population devastated by a decade-long civil conflict (on pain of over-simplification) was ending the war. This concern largely dominated the popular discourse and informed the preferences of voters. While this does not suggest a uniformity of voter concern in Sierra Leone, it does point to the way in which certain dominant concerns or discourses overshadow others, and shrink the space for political dialogue on other issues in elections.

In the absence of ideological and policy differences between the main contending political parties, and a history of political neglect and mismanagement, especially by the main opposition APC when it was in power in the 1970s and 1980s, it made sense that the people would retain the government that they perceived as having fulfilled its promise of ending the war, which as has been stated, was a major concern for the electorate. However, once the issue of conflict transformation and peace had been removed from the agenda as the important voter concern, different issues were bound to become dominant. The outcome of the 2007 elections, was in my view, the effect of such a shift in voter concerns. Thus unlike 1996 and 2002, when the elections were intended as part of the conflict transformation process, and the transition from war to peace was the major concern for voters in the elections, the 2007 elections largely hinged on a different set of concerns. These ranged from questions of day-to-day survival and the general social

and economic malaise in the country to what the government was doing to improve the quality of life of its citizenry and creating opportunities for economic advancement. It was also hinged upon questions about which party was best suited to bring about social transformation in the country. It is in this sense, in part, that the 2007 elections were different from the 1996 and 2002 elections in Sierra Leone.

In the light of the foregoing, the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections are examined within the context of a deepening democratic tradition in a post-war society. The focus is specifically on the roles that two groups – youths and the Sierra Leone Diaspora – played in this deepening democratic process. These two groups, in diverse ways, helped to set the agenda for national debates on what the political purpose in the country should be. First, the 2007 elections are placed in historical context by making some general tentative observations. Second, the contributions of the Sierra Leone Diaspora are analysed in the context of democratic awakening and consolidation in Sierra Leone. It is argued that the transnational spaces from which the Sierra Leone Diaspora engages in politics back home, gives it some form of political leverage that allows its members to intervene in the politics of their homeland without fear of retribution. Third, the roles of the youth, especially that of helping to raise the political consciousness of the people/electorate, are also critically examined. In this regard, some attention is directed at the use of music as an instrument for initiating a national conversation on social change. Informed by their life experiences, and the challenges and difficulties of life in Sierra Leone generally, Sierra Leone youth have sought various ingenious ways of engaging in debates on what the political purpose in Sierra Leone should be. Such interventions have proved crucial to the outcome of the elections. In concluding this chapter, the ramifications of the 2007 elections for democratic consolidation and peace in Sierra Leone are explored.

### The 2007 Elections in Sierra Leone

From the onset, the 2007 elections in Sierra Leone were contested over the issue of change versus continuity. The ruling SLPP based its campaign on the issue of continuity; that is continuing the policies that the Tejan Kabba government had pursued since it came to power, largely built around

carrying out neo-liberal reforms of the state as dictated by the World Bank and IMF and the British government within a liberal peace framework (Duffield 2001; Fanthorpe 2005; Wai 2006). The opposition on the other hand, argued that those policies had failed and therefore advocated a break with the past. This does not however mean that the opposition necessarily articulated its concerns in opposition to the IMF and the World Bank policies. Their target was the ruling party and its officials and what they perceived as their failure to improve the quality of life of the majority of Sierra Leoneans. The APC, the party that presided over the crises in the state leading up to the civil war, reinvented itself as “new” while the PMDC predicated its founding and existence on “positive change.” In the end, voters chose change over continuity, which meant a rejection of Kabba’s policies.

Seven political parties contested the elections, of which the ruling SLPP, the opposition APC and newly formed PMDC were the main contenders. The APC traditionally draws its support predominantly from the North of the country; the SLPP’s traditional support base is in the South and East, while the PMDC, as an offshoot of the SLPP, has the same support base as the SLPP. The Western Area, where Freetown, the national capital is situated, is a traditional swing province that is very much contested with a changing and unpredictable voting pattern. In these elections, it was firmly APC territory. The seven parties fielded over 500 candidates for 112 seats in a single chamber parliament. The APC won 59 seats, up from 27 in 2002, followed by the SLPP with 43, down from 83, and first-timers, the PMDC with an impressive 10 seats.

The presidential race was mainly between Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC, Vice President Solomon Berewa of the SLPP and Charles Margai of the PMDC. Before becoming Vice President, Solomon Berewa served as Attorney General and Minister of Justice between 1996 and 2002. He was responsible for prosecuting the military officers who toppled Tejan Kabba in 1997 and collaborated with the AFRC junta that resulted from that takeover. Charles Margai, who is also an accomplished lawyer in his own right, comes from a prominent political family. He is the son of Sir Albert Magai, the second post-independence prime minister of Sierra Leone and nephew of Sir Milton Margai, who led Sierra Leone to independence in 1961 and ruled until his death in 1964. Ernest Koroma is a career insurance

broker and a successful businessman. Unlike Solomon Berewa and Charles Margai who were new to the presidential race, Koroma ran in the 2002 elections and finished second behind Tejan Kabba with 22.3 per cent of the votes cast. The parties were generally undifferentiated by ideology and policy preferences, and presented voters with very limited options to choose from in deciding who or what to vote for. Ernest Bai Koroma gained about 44 per cent of the presidential ballot, followed by Vice President Berewa of the SLPP with 38 per cent and Charles Margai of the PMDC with 14 per cent.

In the absence of a clear winner in the first round – none of the candidates was able to secure the 55 per cent of the ballot required by the constitution to avoid a run-off – the elections went to a second round between the top two candidates Ernest Bai Koroma and Vice President Solomon Berewa. Charles Margai and his PMDC threw their weight behind and formed an alliance with and supported Koroma and the APC in the run-off, which was held on September 8. With the backing of the PMDC, Koroma won the presidency. To a very large extent, the 2007 elections mirrored the 1967 general election, when the opposition APC won against the ruling SLPP. Ibrahim Abdullah (2007: 2) captures this historical parallel in the following words:

The dénouement to the 2007 elections had all the hallmarks of the 1967 general elections: an opposition party firmly ensconced in the capital city; widespread corruption by government officials at all levels; unhealthy cracks within the ruling party; a restive populace yearning for total change.

While Sir Albert Margai was at the helm as prime minister of an SLPP administration when that party lost the elections in 1967, it is his son, 40 years later, who has helped to engineer the defeat of that same party.

The idea that opposition parties seldom win elections – it is the ruling parties that lose them – is a truism that largely applies to Sierra Leone in the 2007 elections. It is interesting that the SLPP, which won with over 70 per cent of the votes (winning 83 seats in a 112 member parliament) in 2002, could squander such seemingly unassailable and widespread national support in just five years. There were numerous signs in the run up to the elections that suggested widespread voter discontent and frustration with the SLPP. However, buoyed by its landslide victory in 2002, the SLPP, both

as a party and government, became too complacent and arrogantly over-confident to pay heed to any sign of voter frustration.

First, Kabba and his supporters imposed an unpopular candidate, in the person of Solomon Berewa, the Vice President, on the party. This decision, founded on the uncritical belief that anybody who became the SLPP presidential candidate would eventually become president of the country, was completely out of sync with the popular mood in the country. Though it was obvious to most observers that this choice of presidential candidate would hurt the party, the SLPP leadership was too blinded by their misplaced confidence in their popularity to recognize it. But as one observer pointed out on a Sierra Leone Internet discussion forum, "Berewa comes across as aloof, dictatorial and vindictive, and his appointment as the SLPP's presidential candidate was perhaps the very first ingredient in the brewing disaster for that party." It is interesting that there were many people who voted for Berewa who voted for the party he represented, and not necessarily for his own sake.

The process through which Berewa was elected as the party's presidential candidate appeared to have been manipulated. Charles Margai, his main rival for the leadership contest, was more popular at the grassroots level of the party and would probably have been a better candidate given his popularity at the time. But the party hierarchy reportedly sidelined Margai because President Kabba wanted Berewa to succeed him. With the backing of the president and the SLPP establishment, Solomon Berewa, emerged victorious over Charles Margai. Months after the SLPP convention Charles Margai was urged by some of his supporters to break away from the SLPP and form his own party, the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC). It is this split, in part, that cost the SLPP the elections. Apart from imposing an unpopular candidate on the rank and file of the party, the SLPP also sought to alienate rivals of the vice president. Days after the SLPP convention for example, Joseph B. Dauda and Emanuel O. Grant, the erstwhile ministers of finance, and energy and power were sacked for allegedly opposing Vice President Berewa at the party convention. Mention has already been made of how Charles Margai left the SLPP to form the PMDC after the convention because of his dissatisfaction with the way the convention was run. Thus from the very outset, the SLPP was a divided entity and it entered the 2007 elections in that state.

Discontent with the SLPP ran deep, but instead of addressing the roots of this discontent and articulating a clear vision and explaining why they deserved another term, the party, through especially J.J. Saffa, its General Secretary, reduced the elections to a debate about personalities, and especially about Charles Margai and whether he was fit to be president. Saffa's constant refrain was "Charles Margai is not a factor in these elections". As it turned out, J.J. Saffa himself, proved largely incapable of organising an SLPP campaign that could ensure victory at the polls, while Victor Reider, the party's publicity secretary, hardly fared better. The utterances of these party executives during the election campaign mirrored the culture of arrogance that was pervasive in the SLPP, particularly among its top cadres. They never missed an opportunity to disparage their critics and taunt their opponents, usually reserving the coarsest vitriol for the opposition, and their less fortunate and underprivileged compatriots who they and their colleagues in the party variously labelled as "idlers", "unserious", "san-san boys", "low grade noise causers", "illiterates" etc. Such pejorative epithets only helped to reinforce the perception that the party was made up of pretentious snobs who had no consideration for the wishes of the ordinary people.

The party did not only dismiss its opponents, it also succeeded in alienating voters even in its traditional strongholds. One way in which they did this – and this was perhaps the most vexing issue for many people in the country and more importantly SLPP supporters – was callously giving up Chief Sam Hingha Norman, Alieu Kondewa and Moininah Fofana, the leaders of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), to be tried for "war crimes" by the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone. That the government for which they had fought and sacrificed so much did this was incomprehensible to some people in the country. To many in Sierra Leone, and especially in the traditional strongholds of the SLPP where they hailed from, these men are seen as war heroes who sacrificed everything to defend the people and their government against the brutalities of the RUF and AFRC rebels. Their arrest by the court and being placed in the same category with former RUF rebels is regarded as the highest case of betrayal. To the anger of his many supporters, while Chief Norman was dying in the custody of the Special Court indicted as a war criminal, and Alieu Kondewa and Moinina Fofana were being found guilty of war crimes, politicians like Abbas Bundu who are discredited by

being implicated in the decline and crisis of the state, and former RUF and AFRC operatives like Eldred Collins and Alieu Kamara, respectively spokesmen for the RUF and AFRC, were being lavishly welcomed into the fold of the SLPP.

But even on the question of the APC, the SLPP got it wrong. They miscalculated that the history of the APC would militate against that party in the 2007 elections. This belief is not without reason. The APC, as has already been pointed out, is regarded by most people in Sierra Leone as the party that initiated and presided over the decline of the state in the years leading to the civil war in 1991 (Zack-Williams 1999, 2001). For example, there were wild scenes of jubilation in Freetown and all over the country when the APC was toppled by the military in 1992. In fact, it has already been noted how the war in Sierra Leone was initially launched against the APC administration led by Joseph Momoh. When it contested the 1996 elections, the party only managed a paltry five per cent of the votes cast.

However, while the APC succeeded in constructing a new image of itself as the party that stood for change, the SLPP for its part failed to extricate itself from the perception that it was made up of corrupt and self-seeking politicians who had very little or no interest in improving the quality of life of the ordinary people. Part of the reason for this was the youthful nature of the voting population. The majority of voters were too young to remember what the APC did when they were in power in the 1970s and 1980s, but were however old enough to understand what life under the SLPP had been like. As a group of youths told me during a visit to the country:

We do not care about the past record of the APC. We were too young and could not even remember what they did. However with the SLPP, we know what they have been like. If the APC comes to power and behaves like the SLPP, we will vote them out in the next elections.

With such a mood among youths, the SLPP found it difficult in the end to set itself apart from the “old” APC, which it sought to blame for the problems in the country. Thus while the APC swept the ballots in the North and West of the country, the SLPP struggled to hold on to its traditional strongholds: it split the votes with the PMDC in Pujehun, Moyamba, and Bo districts, and was defeated by the PMDC in Bonthe district (the home districts of Alieu Kondewa and Moinina Fofana). Similarly, the SLPP

parliamentary candidate in the home town in Lugbu Chiefdom of Chief Norman lost to the PMDC.

Though the opposition tapped into the anger and frustration of voters and presented themselves as the way out of the political and socio-economic malaise in the country, none of this would have been possible without the heightened political consciousness of a frustrated electorate who saw the need to punish a government that was out of sync with the popular mood in the country. In this democratic awakening, two groups of Sierra Leoneans – the Sierra Leone Diasporas and youths – played significant roles, and it is to these groups that this paper must now turn.

### The Role of the Sierra Leone Diaspora

The growing recognition, both in academic and policy making circles, about the increasing importance of diasporic communities in contemporary social processes in their home countries (Zack-Williams and Mohan 2002) has however not led to serious thinking, especially in the political science field, about the complex nature of diasporas. Much of the literature which deals with diasporas, especially in conflict studies, has framed the debate in the terms of whether diasporas play positive or negative roles in their home countries (Hazel and Stares 2007). Posing the debate in such dichotomous binary terms is not only problematic, but is in fact a self-limiting move. Diasporas are not monolithic, they are a variety of fragmented and hybridised entities (Hall 1990), among whom, and within which, multiple and various overlapping, (even contradictory) tendencies exist. The terrains in which these communities operate, and the spaces that they create for social and political action, are necessarily contested. Saying this however does assume that we know exactly what a Diaspora is and we can recognise one when we see it.

The Sierra Leone Diaspora is defined here as the experiences of migrations and displacements, and the resulting socio-political and cultural formations of displaced communities of people of Sierra Leonean descent living abroad, who consciously or otherwise define their ancestry as Sierra Leonean and who construct imaginary ties and attachments to the nation-state of Sierra Leone as a homeland. Real or imagined attachment to the homeland and the conscious and unconscious processes of constructions and definitions, by

the diasporic subjects themselves (Mishra 1996, 2007), of “imaginary landscapes of dreams and fantasy” which correspond with their various desires and memories (Fludernik 2003), are important for diasporic involvement in social processes back home. JoAnn D’Alisera (2002: 74) has suggested that the individual and collective identities of the Sierra Leone diasporic subjects are constructed through negotiating the complexities of life “here” (adopted homeland), “there” (imagined homeland) and “everywhere” (the transnational space and process of moving back and forth between the two). This however does not suggest a single diaspora or diasporic community or experience.

Khalid Koser (2003, 2007) has suggested a heuristic differentiation between “old” and “new” African Diasporas. While the old Diasporas are the earlier forms of displacements of Africans as a result of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, the new Diasporas are the more recent displacements, the vast majority of which took place in the post-independence period, especially in the last two decades, as a result of increasing political and socio-economic dislocations at home. It is these categories of displaced Sierra Leoneans living abroad, who consider themselves descendants, or citizens, of Sierra Leone, that constitute the main focus of this paper. It is usually these diasporic subjects (especially the recent migrant types) that are actively involved in the politics of their home countries (Koser 2003, 2007). The reason for this may partly be for the following reason: displacements create social spaces in which the constant struggle to negotiate difference and marginality in the adopted/host country, while traversing “here” and “there”, actively plays out into the public and private arenas of diasporic life (D’Alisera 2002). This in turn, leads to a nostalgic re-presentation and re-enactment of collective memories and, here I extend D’Alisera’s point, in the case of new Diasporas, imaginary visions of homeland and what it could be or how it should be.

Negotiating difference and marginality here does not however, always, or even necessarily, equate to lack of power to influence social processes there. The location of Diasporas is in fact sometimes directly linked to the power they wield back home. This location allows Diasporas to mobilise resources and create social networks, which put them in the position to intervene in social and political processes in the homeland. Though a substantial number of Sierra Leoneans in the United Kingdom, for example, are undocumented and therefore constantly have to negotiate their position

through marginality,<sup>1</sup> they still wield enormous (real and/or imagined) power partly because of the way they are perceived in Sierra Leone, but also because of the important economic roles which living in a society that they are marginal to allows them to play in the lives of their families and communities in Sierra Leone. Most members of the Diaspora, especially those living in the West, support their families living back home economically. Because of this very important role, they have become important opinion leaders in their communities. But the Diasporas (or least the sections that get involved in politics) are also self-interested entities that do not always act out of altruism in relation to attachment to some imaginary conception of homeland. Some diasporic subjects or organisations claim to have real stakes in political processes back home and their involvement is usually a function of that self-interest.

Sierra Leone's recent history, through which a large section of the Sierra Leone Diaspora was displaced, has heightened consciousness among Sierra Leoneans living abroad of their responsibility to their communities and country. As a result, the involvement and intervention of the Diaspora in the political processes back home have greatly increased since the end of the war. Bad political leadership has been partly blamed for the country's civil war (Zack-Williams 1999), and the Sierra Leone Diaspora, especially those living in Western countries, sections of which were displaced by that war, but who are also largely insulated by their location abroad from retribution for their political views back home, are conscious of the power and privilege that their diasporic location confers on them, and aware of the possibilities of certain global power configurations which could be brought to bear on the political leadership in Sierra Leone, and have been emboldened and have come to increasingly see themselves not only as watch dogs against bad government but also as custodians of democracy in Sierra Leone.

Given that Sierra Leone is beset by a myriad of social problems some of which are largely blamed on the SLPP government and politicians who are perceived by many (both in Sierra Leone and in the Diaspora) as corrupt, incompetent, selfish, indifferent and arrogant, some members of the Diaspora

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1. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2007) estimate of the number of Sierra Leoneans living in the UK is 60,000; an IOM (2004) figure, which includes documented and undocumented migrants, puts it at 100,000. There is no accurate data on the size of the Sierra Leone Diaspora, but there are estimates indicating that it could be about 500,000 Sierra Leoneans currently living abroad

made it their duty to criticise that government, point out their mistakes and amplify their failings whenever the opportunity availed itself. A struggle developed between opponents of the government and its supporters – those who believed that the SLPP should not be blamed for every social ill in Sierra Leone. Generally for the former, the SLPP government is unfit to continue governing Sierra Leone since its ineptitude is responsible for socio-economic problems in the country. For the latter however, the real culprits for the socio-economic ills in Sierra Leone are the opposition parties, especially the APC, which is discredited by its complicity in the deep-seated crisis of the state. These debates took place in different forms, in different guises and through different media such as the Internet and print media.

The forces of globalisation and transnationalism have made it possible for various types of social dialogue to take place between distant locales. As globalisation shrinks the distance between here and there, it has become commonplace for the concerns of Diasporas and their views on issues to filter into the national discourses and debates back home. With specific reference to the Sierra Leone Diaspora, online Sierra Leone diasporic newspapers like *Cocorioco* and the *Patriotic Vanguard* (see Leonet), for example, have made sure that local Sierra Leone politics is now extensively covered, reported, made accessible, discussed and critically analysed in the Diaspora. It is now common practice for Sierra Leoneans in the Diaspora to publish articles not only on these Internet sites, but also in newspapers in Sierra Leone. An important aspect of these articles, as contested and varied as they are, is the boldness with which they intervene in the local social and political issues in Sierra Leone. The vantage point of being in the Sierra Leone Diaspora sometimes confers the privilege of being able to intervene in certain domestic debates without fear of retribution. Though the range of views expressed and the variety of subjects covered in the articles represented to some extent the diverse views and concerns of the Diaspora itself, and the supporters of the government always sought to counter views critical of the government, the boldness of the attacks and their increasing causticity against the erstwhile SLPP government were very damning and devastating in many instances. A week hardly went by without the amplification of some sort of government failure. These articles, printed off the Internet, or sometimes even published in the domestic press in Sierra Leone, generated some excitement and debates about certain issues which otherwise would

be ignored. They also helped in creating an idea of what the government's activities were and in some instances fanned the flame of anti-government sentiments.

Added to these newspapers and websites are the communicative diasporic spaces – especially Internet discussion forums like Leonenet Salone Discussion Forum and Cocorioko Forum etc – which the Sierra Leone Diaspora have used to create a virtual nation, which Robert Tynes (2007:501–2) defines as any community that communicates in cyberspace and whose collective discourse and actions are aimed at building, binding, maintaining, rebuilding or rebinding a nation. Where it is generally assumed that the Internet has the potential of weakening the power of the state, in the case of Sierra Leone, these groups perform the opposite function of contributing a symbolic dimension of that state, “which is nation-building by contributing to Sierra Leone’s informal behaviour in the public sphere” (Tynes 2007:501). This however need not be taken as the existence of a uniformity of ideas or attitudes in the Sierra Leone Diaspora in relation to how the Diaspora sees or interacts with Sierra Leone and defines its role in social transformation in the country.

These forums have not only provided a virtual community where Sierra Leoneans in the Diaspora interact, they have also provided avenues for ongoing diasporic engagement with issues pertaining to Sierra Leone, issues that range from the political and the economic, to the social and cultural. Through this engagement, the Sierra Leone Diaspora has been able to intervene in debates and discussions about the elections and what they might mean for democracy and development in Sierra Leone. All of the various political parties, their policies or lack of them, the candidates (presidential as well as parliamentary), the ways forward for the country etc, were constant issues of discussion on these forums. Every political pronouncement by the main candidates or parties, their actions, news reports from Sierra Leone etc, was reviewed, debated and scrutinised. The compositions of these discussion forums were very diverse, reflective of the cultural, ethno-linguistic, class, gender, political and socio-economic diversity of Sierra Leone. Similarly, though the bulk of the people who subscribed reside in the Diaspora, there are many members, who are resident in Sierra Leone, who take an active part in these discussions. These include doctors, lawyers, university professors, cabinet ministers, senior civil servants, businessmen,

journalists etc. For example, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and vice-presidential candidate for the SLPP, Momodu Koroma, the General Secretary of the SLPP, the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Sierra Leone, among others, subscribe to Leonenet. In such a virtual community, where most participants are faceless, issues are largely discussed without fear of retribution and intimidation. The archives of some of these discussions show the depth, but also the contested nature of diasporic discussions and engagement with Sierra Leone. They also show the level of civic engagement and the political consciousness of the Sierra Leone diasporic subject.

But the most important aspect of these diasporic communicative spaces and the virtual nations they aspire to, is that the discussions and debates that take place there do sometimes filter into the national domestic political arena, which helps to either facilitate further national conversations of some sort, or reinforce and complement existing domestic political perceptions and attitudes. What this does then is raise the level of civic engagement and consciousness about the democratic possibilities and avenues open for domestic political action and expression in Sierra Leone.

It was commonplace for people resident in Sierra Leone to write articles, opinion pieces, comments, views etc, and float them first on these forums for feedback before publishing them in Sierra Leone. Conversely, such views once expressed or published in Sierra Leone make their way onto these forums for discussion and debate. Information technology, and the way in which the Sierra Leone Diasporas have deployed it, has therefore helped not only in raising the diasporic consciousness of Sierra Leoneans and in the construction of a virtual diasporic nation – and this has significant implications for the Diaspora's relations with Sierra Leone – but it has also aided domestic democratic awakening and consciousness as a result of the Diaspora's engagement with the state.

### The Sierra Leone Diaspora and the 2007 Elections

The fact that in the run up to the elections, the leaders of the major political parties, at various times, led delegations to solicit the support of the Sierra Leoneans living abroad, shows how important Sierra Leoneans in the Diaspora have become in the politics of Sierra Leone. There is an increasing

recognition in political and socio-economic policy circles in the country that the Sierra Leone Diaspora could play a significant role in social transformation, democracy and development in the country. Similarly, there is a rising awareness among the Sierra Leone Diaspora itself that diasporic subjects and communities have a huge stake in the political and socio-economic life of the country. It is however paradoxical that, unlike in some West African countries, and despite the increasing awareness among diasporic Sierra Leoneans about the role they could play and their increasing involvement in the politics of Sierra Leone, the Sierra Leone Diaspora as a political entity does not have the vote in elections. For members of the Diaspora to vote, they have to be physically present in Sierra Leone during the voter registration period, as well as on polling day.

That notwithstanding, all of the major political parties in Sierra Leone have branches in the Diaspora. For example, there is a North America Branch of the APC, a Netherlands Branch of the PMDC and a UK branch of the SLPP among others. These chapters have come to be seen as important entities in the overall structures of the political parties in Sierra Leone and they played significant roles in the 2007 elections. Having a diasporic chapter of a political party to some extent indicates the amount of support the party enjoys, and the resources it could draw on. Due to the oftentimes favourable way in which the Diaspora is generally viewed in Sierra Leone, having diasporic branches is a sign of political prestige and clout. These chapters helped to mobilise much needed financial and material resources for the parties, and contributed to their election campaigns.

It is believed by some, that it was largely the funds raised in the Diasporas and material and economic resources provided by Diaspora groups and organisations that won the 2007 elections for the APC. While the erstwhile ruling SLPP largely depended on internally generated funds and resources, the opposition parties, especially the APC's financial base were their Diaspora chapters. The New Jersey chapter alone reportedly contributed over one hundred thousand dollars to the APC's election campaign. In addition to their economic role, the Diasporas were instrumental in helping to decide on the issues central to the parties' campaigns and in helping to sensitise voters on those issues. But apart from what could be regarded as the auxiliary support roles that these diasporic chapters played on behalf of the home-based political parties, various diasporic organisations (social,

cultural and ethno-linguistic groups) and individual diasporic subjects also engaged in the electoral process and in various ways were able to influence the terms of the debates locally and nationally in Sierra Leone. They also set the agenda of public discourse, suggested which issues the elections should be about, and helped in deciding the outcome of the elections. In fact, they were in some cases able to influence the decisions of their compatriots back home on which parties to support and which candidates to vote for in the elections.

It has been alluded to earlier that the Diasporas contributed to the democratic process in Sierra Leone through participation in political party activities. Since voting only took place in Sierra Leone, some members of the Diaspora went home to register, cast their ballots, stood as candidates in the elections and campaigned for their respective parties. For example, Moijueh Kaikai, a PMDC member from the United Kingdom (UK) was largely credited for the PMDC's success in the Southern provincial district of Pujehun. The PMDC's Publicity Secretary, Mohamed Bangura was a long-time resident of Canada who only went back home to Sierra Leone to contest the elections as a parliamentary candidate. The APC's presidential running mate, Sam Sumana, was also a long-time resident of the US who only went home a couple of years previously. In fact, the Diaspora factor was very central to the APC's overall election strategy and it greatly helped in that party's victory. A good number of the parliamentary candidates for the parties were people from the Diaspora. Through these involvements, the Diasporas were able to intervene in the political and social life of the country, while also articulating their vision of the homeland they imagined. Such interventions resonated with the popular mood in the country and contributed to awakening the anger of a frustrated voting population, especially the youth, to whom this paper now turns.

### The Role of the Youth in the Elections

The youth comprise about 65 per cent of the population of Sierra Leone. Similarly 56 per cent of the 2.6 million voters registered for the elections were aged below 32 years. This demographic distribution illustrates the significance of youths as an important voting bloc and hence significant players in the electoral process and the country's democracy. The youth factor has

always been an important factor in Sierra Leone politics. Historically, youths in Sierra Leone have, at various times, been the vanguard of the struggles for social transformation and political change in the country. In the 1970s and 1980s for example, they constituted perhaps the most powerful political opposition group to the APC as they challenged the increasing authoritarian tendencies of APC rule under Presidents Siaka Stevens and Joseph Momoh and the corrupt patronage system that their rule was based on.

Ibrahim Abdullah (1998, 2004) and Ishmail Rashid (2004) have documented how the politics of neglect and marginalisation of the youth in Sierra Leone led to the development of youthful political adventurism, and the birth of revolutionary consciousness among young people, which in turn eventually led to the birth of several radical students organisations, and the RUF. During the war itself, youth groups dominated all the warring factions, from the RUF through to the army and the civil defence forces. As both victims and perpetrators of violence and war, the youth were probably more affected by the war than any other social category in Sierra Leone.

Defining 'youth' in Sierra Leone could be a rather complex challenge. According to the UN (1993) the youth belong to "the transitional stage from childhood dependencies and vulnerabilities to the rights and duties of adults" and fall under the age bracket of fourteen to twenty-four years. In Sierra Leone however, a youth identity, generally refers to someone who is "young", but the way in which "young" is understood is quite vague, ambiguous and arbitrary. There are people who are well into their thirties who are considered youths in Sierra Leone. For example, it is interesting that none of the leaders of the youth wings of the various political parties is in their twenties. As a socially constructed category, youth is a somewhat arbitrary construct and depends on the social realities of different countries and the society that one lives in. In this paper, the temptation of seeking to impose pre-given age criteria for defining youth is resisted, in favour of a nuanced definition within the sociological and cultural context of Sierra Leone. A youth in Sierra Leone may be anybody who is regarded as "young" according to the social realities of the country. Thus, persons struggling economically, see and define themselves as youth and identify with the struggles and issues that concern 'young men and women' in the country.

Therefore, the youth identity is a social construct that is also very classed and gendered. For example, it is not every "young" person that is

considered a youth. The view is exemplified by my own personal experience, in which, based on my conversation with a group of youths in Freetown, my older brother who is unemployed qualifies as a youth, while I do not. For one to qualify as a youth, s/he has to not only be “young”, but also in a precarious economic/social situation. Similarly, the local expression “youth man” commonly deployed to refer to youths, illustrates the gendered nature of the understanding of youth in Sierra Leone. Females may well qualify as youths, but they are normally regarded as peripheral to the entire youth construct. It is interesting that “young man”, of whom the disadvantaged section is “youth man” has a female equivalent “young woman” but not a residual term to describe its disadvantaged section. Female youths therefore also get subsumed under the “youth man” label, but this just illustrates their marginal status within the youth construct. These class and gendered dimensions of Sierra Leonean youth are central to the spaces that they create for social and political action in the country.

It is public knowledge that the youth question remains a very important social and political challenge in Sierra Leone, which is recovering from a decade long civil war, and where youths (here I refer to both male and female) form the majority of the population. The war itself was partly a crisis of youth (Abdullah 1998, 2004). In its manifesto for the 2007 elections, for example, the SLPP identifies this question as “a human development and security challenge that must be given appropriate attention to help the country consolidate peace and build a prosperous nation”. Yet it is interesting how, despite this recognition, it has found itself constrained in doing much about this problem which even the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), set up to investigate and produce an impartial historical record of the war, regards as a national emergency.

In the past, frustrated by social ills and a bleak future from which there seemed to be no escape, and confronted by a general feeling of alienation and lack of avenues for social, economic and political advancement, a segment of the youth in Sierra Leone tried “revolution” and war as a means of dealing with the problems in society. The resulting war degenerated into the kind of violence, which further marginalised youths, and exacerbated the problems of poverty and unemployment in the country. The re-writing of the rules of political engagement in the form of polyarchical institutions and practice, first initiated during the war, which, though far from perfect, is however

much preferred by the majority of the people. This, coupled with the impact of the war on society has encouraged most youth to eschew violence as a political instrument and they have initiated their re-engagement with the political and democratic processes in the country. This re-engagement has, *inter alia*, helped in changing the face of politics in Sierra Leone, as was witnessed in the 2007 elections.

Sierra Leone, it is true, has made considerable progress in emerging from war, but there still remain serious social problems, some of which are core concerns for youths in the country. Sierra Leone, for example, currently ranks 177 out of 177 countries in the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI). Its unemployment rate is staggering, being variously put at between 65 and 70 per cent. Similarly, about 63 per cent of its population is said to live below the poverty line while life expectancy is put at 42 years. While these figures do not necessarily mean anything in themselves, they do, when placed within their proper historical and social contexts, raise questions about what it means to be a Sierra Leonean living in Sierra Leone today.

In addition, there are visible signs of social and economic distress for people who are in economically precarious situations and who do not have access to resources. The problem of lack of electricity supply in most parts of the country, including the capital Freetown, is palpable. There is also a lack of access to clean and safe drinking water for the majority of people in the country, despite the fact that Sierra Leone has 17 major river systems and networks of fresh water, tributaries and creeks. Life continues to be a constant daily struggle for the vast majority of the people in the country.

The realities of everyday life, the lack of opportunity for individual advancement, lack of jobs, a seemingly bleak future for many youths, have led to growing frustration and resentment by the youth of the ruling elites, who they see as not only corrupt, but also as indifferent to the problems plaguing the country. Though the sources and reasons for Sierra Leone's economic and social problems are far more complex and cannot be blamed solely on those in power, the vast majority of the youth in the country see it differently: it is the ruling elites who are responsible for the political and economic problems in Sierra Leone. But there is also a reason for them to see it this way: it is the way in which the ruling elites behave that leaves youths with no option but to hold them responsible for the problems. Poverty, hardship and socio-economic problems in Sierra Leone have thus led to a

rising consciousness among Sierra Leonean youths about their agency and the possibilities that exist for political action. The resurgence of the youth in the political and social arenas in the country is a result of that growing consciousness.

The roles that youths played in the democratic process in Sierra Leone were diverse and complex. This is partly due to the fact that, youths, as a heterogeneous entity, have a plurality of concerns, which are not necessarily always congruent with other concerns and interests. While unemployment, lack of opportunities for educational, economic and social advancement are all concerns that are core to youth interests, the way in which these issues manifest themselves in the lives of youths, in terms of gender and class, is very diverse. Their social consequences are also very diverse. Given this scenario, it is only logical to assume the multiplicity of youth concerns and a diversity of attitudes among them.

One way in which youths have contributed to democratic awakening has been through direct political party participation. Mention has already been made of how the youth were a powerful voting bloc in the elections and as such most political parties, especially the opposition APC and the PMDC, deployed considerable resources to target them. More youths and young people contested these elections as candidates than any other elections in the history of Sierra Leone. About 65 per cent of the PMDC's parliamentary candidates were young. Part of the appeal of the APC was the cadres of young people in its ranks. The belief that younger voters would identify with younger candidates was part of the reason the political parties used more youthful candidates.

But perhaps the most significant way in which the youths contributed to democratic awakening in Sierra Leone was through music. As Ibrahim Abdullah (2007) points out, "the campaign for change preceding the 2007 elections was inaugurated and conducted by an informal opposition: the musical artists". The development of the music industry in Sierra Leone has provided an avenue for political expression and a vehicle for youth empowerment through various forms of intervention in the political and social spheres. Music has become a very powerful tool in the campaign for social transformation, the struggle for human dignity and expression of the anger that the youth feel especially towards the political establishment and the leadership of the country. The consciousness of the artists is shaped

by their life experiences and the socio-economic realities that they face in the country. Poverty, hardship, apprehension about the future, and corruption in government, all core concerns for youths, are popular themes in the songs. Music has now become a major way of initiating political conversation about the country's future and the youth's role in it. Through music, spaces for social action were created, and these in turn helped in raising the consciousness of the population and drawing their attention to the myriad of problems in Sierra Leone society and to the possibilities.

In 2005, I recognised the political agency of the musical artist as an agent of change in Sierra Leone. In an article on youth, music and social change in Sierra Leone, I put forth the idea that, socio-political change in Sierra Leone would be sparked by the musical artists who were using music as a tool for social change. It was apparent then, as it is now, that music was increasingly being used as the vehicle for building awareness about political attitudes in the country. From Daddy Saj who demanded that corrupt politicians should “pack en go” in the song *Corruption; e do so* (Corruption; it's enough) which became the slogan for the anti-corruption struggle in the country; to Emerson, whose *Borboh Belleh* album became an instant hit in the country because of its daring indictment of the political system, the artists' call for change and opposition to the political establishment initiated and helped shape the debate about change.

While Baw Waw Society, for example, was complaining that *Man Dem no Gladi oh* (The people are not happy) capturing the popular mood of most youths in the country, and Wan Pot Sojas were reinforcing that mood with anger in *Ah Vex*, (I am angry); Emerson, whose fearlessness has won him the admiration of his compatriots – he appears to have nothing but disdain and scorn for the country's ruling classes – branded them *Tu Fut Arata* (that is “two-legged rats”), somehow summing up the general youth perception of corrupt officialdom in Sierra Leone. And as Ibrahim Abdullah (2007:3) points out:

The lyrics [of their songs] inaugurated a national conversation ... on positive change and the meaning of citizenship that was hard to ignore or subvert. The sounds of confrontation, the vibes of oppositional youth culture, and the demand for social citizenship were the key message.

But, as Abdullah rightly points out, while the ruling party misread the signs, or even ignored them, the opposition listened and used the complaints from below to plan and refine their strategies for capturing power. In the end, it was the forces demanding change that defeated those for continuity.

### Some Concluding Thoughts

Jimmy Kande (1998) observed of the transition to democratic rule in Sierra Leone in 1996 that, contrary to the liberal orthodoxy, the transition to democracy in Sierra Leone did not occur as a result of economic prosperity and elite competition, but by increasing anger and frustration resulting from mass deprivations as a result of the socio-political situation in the country. It is therefore safe to argue now, that just as in the past, the progress of the democratic process in Sierra Leone has not been derived from the concessions given by the governing elites, nor is it the result of economic prosperity. The adverse economic conditions in the country and the ways in which the government or ruling elites are seen as being responsible for the exacerbation of that condition is fuelling civic re-engagement with the democratic process. Sierra Leone is now consolidating the democratic gains made since the transition in 1996.

The 2007 elections in Sierra Leone illustrate the considerable progress Sierra Leone has made since the end of the civil war. They also represent considerable progress on the democratic front. The promise of a democratic transfer of power from one elected government to another through the ballot box is indeed a prospect that, within the context of post-conflict transition and the recent history of Sierra Leone, represents a profound political achievement for a country that only five years ago turned its back on war as a political instrument. But this progress did not occur in a vacuum. It had been initiated and sustained by popular participation in the democratic process and the people's re-engagement with social and political processes in the country. No matter how it is looked at, deepening democracy in Sierra Leone has not come as a gift, but something that the people have fought for through mass mobilisation, heightened awareness and the consciousness of the possibilities that exist when citizens engage in political action. As Abdullah (2007) puts it, "the heightening consciousness of the popular masses ... the vigilance and infective passion that has enveloped political

practice ... and the emergence and dominance of a conscious and oppositional youth culture that straddles the global/local in interpreting their everyday lives” are some of the reasons responsible for the consolidation of democracy in Sierra Leone.

The elections however also show the limitations of liberal democracy. The options that they present are very limited. True, seven parties contested the elections, but from the outset, only three (the SLPP, APC and PMDC) had any realistic chance of winning the elections. Both the APC and SLPP are traditional parties and have been around the longest in Sierra Leone. There is hardly any ideological or policy difference between them. Even the voting pattern in the elections underscored the traditional political/ethnic/regional divide in which the North votes predominantly APC while the South and East vote predominantly SLPP.

In fact, part of the problem for the PMDC, a new party with a charismatic leader and youthful appeal, was to make in-roads into the traditional support bases of the old parties and upset the traditional voting patterns. While they were largely successful in the South, they failed woefully elsewhere in the country. The East voted overwhelmingly SLPP, while the North and the West overwhelmingly APC. Some observers believe that if the leader of the PMDC, Charles Margai, had won the SLPP leadership and represented them at the polls, he would have won the presidency. Even when many members of the SLPP did not agree with the party’s choice of presidential candidate in the form of Solomon Berewa, they still voted not necessarily for him *per se*, but for the party.

The history of APC rule and its creation of a one party state in 1978 have meant that many politicians in Sierra Leone, including the SLPP, are former members of the APC (therefore watermelon politicians).<sup>1</sup> This is why

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1. Watermelon politician is a metaphor used in describing a politician who is SLPP (with green as the party colour) but who was either formerly APC (with red as the party colour) or in fact acts like the old APC of the 1970s and 1980s which presided over the decline of the fortunes of the state in the years preceding the civil war. Watermelon politics also refers to the art of pretending to support one party (say SLPP) showing up at election campaign rallies and party functions in order to collect money/inducements, while in reality supporting and voting for another party (say APC or PMDC). Like the watermelon – green on the outside, but red inside – politicians and voters tried to navigate the political terrain by pursuing their interests within the context of ‘survivalist’ instincts.

in some instances it has been very difficult for the SLPP to successfully separate itself from the historical baggage of the APC. While the SLPP was quick at pointing out that it was under the APC that the fortunes of the state declined, the APC, which has reconstituted itself, and now calls itself “new”, was also quick to point out that it (the APC) is a completely different and new political entity which has made a clean break with the past. It fought off the accusation of being responsible for the problems of Sierra Leone by arguing that some of those who destroyed the country when the APC was in power are now in the SLPP.

As it turns out, the youthful nature of the voting majority means that, for better or for worse, they do not carry with them the baggage of historical memory. Some were too young to remember what the APC did when it was in power in the 1970s and 1980s. All they know is here and now, embedded in what the current government of the time was doing which they were old enough to see and understand. What this means in a broader context however, is that Sierra Leone is stuck with two or more sets of competing political elites, so that voting against the SLPP for their misdeeds does not necessarily mean fundamentally changing the way politics is played in Freetown and the rest of the country. This is even more important when one considers that the parties are neither differentiated by ideology nor even policies, but rather by nomenclature. One important impediment to a ‘liberal democratic’ agenda in Sierra Leone, is the absence of internal party democracy, for example, it is doubtful if the APC, SLPP or PMDC could serve as custodian of the country’s democracy when their own internal organisation and procedures are undemocratic.

What has emerged, or is emerging is a pattern in which political elites from specific regions and ethnicities could be taking turns in leading the country without any real change in the lives of the ordinary people. This observation is not meant to diminish the democratic gains made in these elections, but it is to caution against any exaggerated expectations for a far-reaching democratic transformation of Sierra Leone. Despite the limitations of liberal democracy, having the right and the power (real or imagined) to vote an unpopular government out of office is a monumental achievement for the people of Sierra Leone, which should be defended and extended to make a real and positive qualitative difference in the lives of the people.

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## The Conduct of the Elections: Challenges of Peacebuilding and Democratisation

*A.B. Zack-Williams and Osman Gbla*

### Introductory background

The 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone were important not just for consolidating peace, but also for nurturing and sustaining a fledgling democracy.<sup>1</sup> The majority of Sierra Leoneans who turned out to vote on August 11, 2007 and the September 8, 2007, 'Presidential run-off election' were inspired by the increasing realisation that their votes would in several ways contribute to the country's development. The elections, the third (first in 1996 and second in 2002) since civil war broke out in 1991, were the second since the end of the civil war; the previous two having been won by the country's oldest party, the Sierra Leone People's Party. As contributors to this collection have noted, the war was a very brutal affair in which some 120,000 people lost their lives and thousands more had their limbs amputated and farms, mines, residential as well as government property were destroyed.

The elections held in 1996 at the height of the insurgency, also marked the transition from military to civilian rule. Many within civil society suggested that democratically held elections would persuade the rebels that theirs was a lost cause, lacking support from the mass of the Sierra Leonean people. Less than six months after former UN bureaucrat, Ahmed Tejan

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1. An estimated 8,980 election monitors from 53 domestic civil society organisations and 144 international election observers from 26 organisations (including ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union, the Commonwealth, the National Election Watch and the National Democratic Institute of the US) covered the 2007 Sierra Leone parliamentary and presidential elections.

Kabba assumed power as leader of the SLPP and the President of the country, a group of dissidents from within his own army overthrew him, forcing him into exile in neighbouring Guinea. The country's post-independence history had been a chequered one with a military coup in 1967 following the first successful attempt to unseat an incumbent president, which saw the army commander, Brigadier Lansana stepping in to arrest Prime Minister-elect, Mr Siaka Stevens, Attorney General, Mr Berthan Macauley and Governor General Sir Henry Lightfoot-Boston (see Zack-Williams in this volume for a more in-depth analysis). Lansana was not able to consolidate power before he was removed from office by middle ranking officers in the 'Majors' Coup', who in turn were swiftly removed from power by non-commissioned officers, who returned the country to civilian rule by inviting Mr Stevens to form a new administration. Stevens ruled the country with an iron fist from 1968 until he retired from office in 1984, after which he nominated his kinsman and Army Force Commander, Brigadier General Saidu Momoh, as his successor.

The phlegmatic new leader tried to distance himself from his patron, who had become terribly unpopular before leaving office and called his regime 'a new order regime'. He showed no political skills in trying to run the country and with no grassroots support within the party, Momoh had to depend heavily on the ethnic cabal, the Akutay as part of his 'shadow state'. The general's tenure in office was marked by the continued decline of the fortunes of the country, as diamond exports dropped dramatically due to smuggling and the informalisation of the industry; as well as a massive drop in agricultural exports (Zack-Williams, 1990 and in this volume). Unlike his predecessor, Momoh acquiesced to, and fully implemented, the World Bank and IMF sponsored structural adjustment policies, which triggered off mass unemployment, stagflation and the collapse of the already fragile infrastructure.

The consequences of these policies, in addition to growing corruption and isolation of the opposition regions of the south and southeast, produced discontent and the coming together of centrifugal forces, ready to challenge the ruling monolith, the APC for state hegemony. By the early 1990s, the economy had all but collapsed. For example, between 1980–1990, GDP grew by just 1.6% and between 1990–1995 it dropped to -4.2 %; average annual growth rate of agriculture fell from 4.4% to -2.8%; growth of exports fell from 2.8% to -15.2 %; and finally gross domestic investment fell from

-6.6% to -20% in the same periods World Bank 1997, p. 234). Furthermore, recorded diamond exports dropped from 2 million carats in 1970 to 595,000 carats in 1980 and a derisory 48,000 carats in 1988 (Zack-Williams 1992). Similarly, agricultural exports took a nose-dive, not only did the price of major agricultural exports fall, with cocoa dropping from \$3,000 per ton in 1977 to just \$600, but the total volume dropped from 12,000 metric tons in 1983 to 8,600 metric tons in 1986 (Zack-Williams 1993).

In the midst of the growing crisis in 1977, and facing a major disturbance led by university students, Siaka Stevens declared a one-party state. These developments helped to hasten challenges to the APC, and by the end of the 1980s, there was a loud cry for a return to multi-party democracy, which was promptly rejected by APC leadership who warned that in a one-party state any talk of multi-party elections was tantamount to treason. It was this pent up frustration that laid the basis for the rise of the RUF, which traces its roots to the student uprising of the late 1970s that impelled Siaka Stevens to declare a one-party state. By the time war broke out in 1991, Stevens had resigned and Momoh, lacking in political skill as well as being incapable of placating the rebels, presided in fact over a party that was losing its grip.

### From Civil War to the Struggle for Democracy

The trigger that sparked off the civil war was the invasion of Sierra Leone by elements of the RUF, from neighbouring Liberia in 1991. This invasion, followed allegations by Liberian warlord, Charles Taylor, who accused President Momoh of Sierra Leone of allowing his airport to be used by Nigerian Alpha jets to strafe his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel fighters' positions as they were about to capture the capital, Monrovia. Taylor swore revenge, and promptly provided support to the future RUF rebel leader and his fighters to attack Sierra Leone. The weakness of the Sierra Leone security services encouraged the RUF to continue raiding border posts and within a short period of time, the *raison d'être* of the struggle was transformed from grievance to greed as Sankoh and the RUF embarked on the task of occupying the diamondiferous districts, mining diamonds which were also exchanged for weapons. The highly politicised and undisciplined Sierra Leonean army proved no match for the RUF, furthermore, as the early stages of the war affected only the far-flung reaches

of the rural population, little or no attempt was made at either addressing the perceived cause of the rebellion, or tackling the rebels. Indeed, Momoh, the former army general, proved to be more of a 'Josephine Talker'<sup>1</sup> than a war leader. Criticisms of the government policies emerged from outside and within the government, with the army complaining of being forced to confront the rebels with outmoded weapons, whilst the political elite was enmeshed in conspicuous consumption.

The crunch came with an attack, which led to the death of one of the country's most charismatic young soldiers, Captain Prince Benjamin-Hirsch and serious injury to a number of soldiers including Captain Valentine Strasser. The death of the young captain was a major blow to the armed forces as he had been instrumental in recruiting young *déclassé* elements, including orphans from the diamond mining areas around Segbwema into the army's 'airborne division' to help confront the rebels (Gberie 2005). These young officers were convinced that the war could be won, if only the country was provided with good and patriotic leadership. Not surprisingly, these young officers struck on 29 April 1992 to remove the corrupt and incompetent government of Joseph Saidu Momoh. The officers complain of corruption and lack of supplies to front line troops and in the case of the leader of the coup, Captain Strasser, he alleged that whilst his friend and comrade Benjamin-Hirsch died by his side, in his case he had to endure operations to remove a bullet from his leg without any anaesthetic. The coup led to the intensification of recruitment of *déclassé* elements, including children, into the army. Not only did this change the political balance within an already highly politicised army, but also the coup led to the destruction of the command structure of the army.

The junta of captains named itself, the National Provisional Revolutionary Council (NPRC) and took their inspiration from the regime of Ghana's Flight Lieutenant Rollings in style and rhetoric, a mixture of populism, radical rhetoric and a call to patriotism. They managed to capture the admiration of the country's long-suffering youth, who could identify with the youthful leadership as well as many of the young people who had recently been recruited into the army. Strasser was referred to as the redeemer, a leader who promised to move the country away from the kleptocratic excesses of

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1. A name given to the President by his critics, because of his predilection for verbosity rather than action.

the All People's Congress and to bring peace to a war-weary people. The NPRC whipped up patriotic sentiments and managed to reduce inflation from over 120 per cent when they seized power in 1992, bringing it to below 50 per cent by the end of 1994 as well as maintaining the value of the currency. However, despite their avowed wish to end the war, the rebel RUF continued to capture territories, particularly in the diamond rich areas of Kono (Zack-Williams 1999).

By the mid-1990s as the rebel forces continued to push on all fronts with support from Libya's Colonel Ghadaffi and Liberia's Charles Taylor, Strasser and his colleagues decided to seek outside help initially from the British Army's Gurkha units. Later the South African based Private Military Company (PMC) Executive Outcomes (EO), helped to shift the balance in favour of the NPRC by driving the rebels out of the diamond fields. EO in conjunction with Nigerian and Ghanaian ECOWAS troops were instrumental in driving rebel forces away from the capital in March 1995.

By early 1995, there were growing demands from sections of civil society for a return to democratic governance. As rebel incursions spread, there was a call for general elections, which would force the rebels to the peace table. As plans were being put in place, in January 1996, Strasser was removed from office in a palace coup and was replaced by his second-in-command Brigadier-General Maada Bio, who accused his predecessor of prevarication on the issue of a return to democratic governance. In the ensuing election, the SLPP won on the promise of bringing peace to the people of this troubled land. Former UN bureaucrat, Ahmed Tejan Kabba emerged as the new President, with major security problems and an army full of *sobels*, i.e. soldier rebels (Keen 2005). EO was a major drain on the scanty resources of the wartorn country and it was not long before the IMF called an end to a venture that was costing the country some \$1.7 million a month (Riley 1997). The departure of EO saw the emergence of a new fighting force on the side of the government, namely the Kamajors, as the government disbanded the army.

The emergence of the Kamajors as a national army surrogate provoked a revolt in the armed forces, resulting in a coup, which led to the ousting of the President less than a year after he assumed power. Major Johnny Paul Koroma, as head of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) emerged as head of the junta and soon invited rebel leader Foday Sankoh to

merge his fighters with the AFRC to form what he called a 'a people's army'. The reign of the AFRC brought misery to the people of the country and for the first time the metropolitan areas experienced what the rural people had been going through for the best part of a decade. With the help of Nigerian-led ECOMOG forces and the newly formed Civil Defence Forces (CDF), the rebels were pushed beyond the city limits, to the outskirts around Waterloo, where they turned to banditry and thuggery. In July 1999 a peace accord was signed between President Kabba and rebel leader Foday Sankoh. The nature and content of the agreement reflected the weak position of the government, as at the time some two-thirds of the country was in rebel hands. Rebel leader Foday Sankoh became *de facto* vice president in charge of all the mineral resources in the country as Chairman of the Strategic Resources Commission.<sup>1</sup> Sankoh's dissatisfaction with the deal is reflected in his attempt to humiliate the UN peacekeeping forces, who were kidnapped and their equipment captured; and on the day the last Nigerian ECOMOG peacekeeping troops left the country, in May 2000, Sankoh's forces attacked a group of civilians in the capital in a failed putsch, which provided an opportunity for British forces to be sent to the country under the guise of evacuating European and Commonwealth citizens. In the encounter with British forces, the remnants of the AFRC, now calling itself, Westside Boys, and the units from the RUF, who were now threatening the northern limits of the capital near the international airport, were pushed away from the city and both soon became inactive fighting units.

The period 2000–2002 saw great efforts to demobilise the various fighting forces, including thousands of child combatants, many of whom had been abducted by rebel forces. In early 2002, both sides in the war announced the end of fighting and the date was set for the first post-war elections, which were won once again by the country's war leader Ahmed Tejan Kabba which was seen as an endorsement of his leadership during the war. The elections held under the supervision of the United Nations were seen as free and fair, and many Sierra Leoneans enthusiastically turned out to vote. Although the SLPP won a clear victory, the election results also show that the APC had begun to slowly recover from its rather dismal showing at the polls in the 1996 elections. Kandeh has argued that the APC in '2002 was the primary beneficiary of the disintegration of two northern-based parties' (2003:197).

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1. See Zack-Williams in this collection.

In addition there was the emergence of a new generation of leaders in the APC, including the party leader and presidential candidate in the 2002 elections and victor in the 2007 elections, Ernest Bai Koroma. Furthermore, the evidence also suggested that the APC still had its political support restricted to the north (winning in three out of five districts), while the SLPP won in the south, east and west, and two of the five districts in the north (Kandeh 2003:207). In the case of the RUF (whose leader Foday Sankoh was incarcerated in 2000), which had metamorphosed into the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF), the 2002 elections clearly showed that it had no real support base in the country. This poor showing of the RUF (1.7%) and the party of its former ally and leader of the AFRC regime, Johnny Paul Koroma, the Peace and Liberation Party (PLP) (3.0%) in the 2002 Presidential elections did not only underscore their lack of support in the country, but marked a clear contrast from neighbouring Liberia, where the leader of the main rebel army, Charles Taylor of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) turned political party, National Patriotic Party (NPP) had won a landslide victory (75.3%), as the elected President in the post-war election in 1997 (Kandeh 2003:191). Kandeh further notes that unlike other post-conflict contexts on the continent such as Angola, Mozambique and Liberia, the RUF unsuccessfully attempted to make the rebel-political party transition. It was thus not surprising that RUF did not feature in the 2007 elections in Sierra Leone (see Tables 1 and 2).

Despite winning a massive vote of confidence from his people, Kabba showed little interest in restorative justice, instead he built his policy on compromise and conciliation in line with the terms of the Abidjan peace agreement. Apart from making peace with those that plundered the country and participated in abuses, the SLPP government and members of the political elite continued the politics of spoils and the squandering of state resources. The Anti-Corruption Commission that was set up (with financial resources from Britain) to deal with misuse of state assets and corruption was constantly impeded in its activities. The country's major backers, Britain and the Secretary of State for Development, Clare Short, called for action against corruption, which continued to fall on deaf ears. Indeed, the failure to heed to these warnings led to the suspension of some of its aid to Sierra Leone by the British Department for International Development in 2007.

Another feature of the immediate post-war years was that the fragile government became dependent on UNAMSIL and the small number of British officers training the Sierra Leone National Army. Accompanying the disarmament process was the setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the causes of the war and promote national reconciliation its findings, however, were not implemented to the chagrin of many victims of the war. With pressure coming from the international community, the Special Court<sup>1</sup> was set up to try those 'who bear greatest responsibility for the war crimes and crimes against Sierra Leone and international laws'. The activities of the Court and its decision to arrest Chief Hingha Norman, former Deputy Minister of Defence and once head of the government-backed Kamajors created anger and consternation in the ruling party's stronghold in the south and south-eastern areas of the country. The death of Chief Norman, barely months before the election, was a major blow SLPP, and forced many loyal SLPP supporters to join the breakaway party from the PMDC led by former SLPP stalwart, Charles Margai, the son of former Prime Minister, Sir Albert Margai.

As 2007 approached, Sierra Leoneans, having experienced ten years of SLPP-led government braced themselves for change and many sectors of society were mobilised to express their concern as well as to ensure that the elections were free and fair. Many saw this as the last chance *for we sweet Salone* (for our sweet Sierra Leone) and were prepared to exercise their democratic rights to bring about positive change. It was hardly surprising that there was an unprecedented voter registration of 91 per cent, or 2.6 million registered voters. The cost of the election was put at 28 million US dollars, which was broken down thus: \$18 million provided by the international community \$10 million provided by the Sierra Leonean government. The large external funding points to the premium donors placed on a free, fair and peaceful election in Sierra Leone.<sup>2</sup>

One important feature of the 2007 elections was the important role played by young people in the political process, as candidates, election agents, party

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1. A hybrid court utilising international humanitarian and Sierra Leonean laws. See Zack-Williams in this volume.

2. Sierra Leone also received electoral support, technical and logistical assistance from the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the UN Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD).

cadres. They voted in large numbers as well as mobilising voters, helping the aged to vote as well as maintaining strong internal vigilance at the polling stations across the country to guard against election malpractices. Not only did they vote, they also worked hard to ensure that their votes mattered in the choice of the elected representatives of the people. This was a very important development in Sierra Leonean politics, as it should be noted that most of the youth in the country participated in, and trusted the use of, peaceful means to express their political choice, and also facilitate political change.

The elections were carefully managed by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) under the leadership of Dr. Christina Thorpe, the former Minister of Education and women's activist as its Chairperson. She was entrusted with the responsibility of organising and steering the elections through its various steps. Dr Thorpe, with the support of the officials of the electoral commission and the international community, was able to organise relatively trouble-free elections that were declared free and fair by international observers (EUOM 2007). It is also important to note that the elections were open to all those interested in participating in the democratic process.

This also explains the emergence of a new and relatively vibrant political party, the Peoples Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC), which challenged the long-established ruling Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) in their political heartland of the southeastern part of the country. Charles Margai who left the ruling SLPP to form a new party after he lost out to Vice-President Solomon Berewa, in the struggle to become the SLPP presidential candidate, led the PMDC. A son of Sierra Leone's second Prime Minister, Albert Margai (SLPP), Charles had been a former minister in the government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabba and had also lost out "on technical grounds" in an earlier attempt to become the SLPP Presidential candidate in the 2002 elections that were eventually won by Kabbah. In 2007, Charles' PMDC was able to make a big dent in the support for SLPP in the south and east, by winning 10 Parliamentary seats as well as securing the third position in the Presidential race contested by seven political parties (see Zack-Williams, in this volume).

The rest of the chapter interrogates some aspects of the Sierra Leone 2007 elections including their contribution to the consolidation of peace and

democracy. Consequently, it raises questions as to the role of the political elite and the state in consolidating democracy, peace and national development. Also, given the reality of donor-dependence, how sustainable are the various peace building initiatives and institutions? Is the international community likely to continue to fund these, and what are the prospects should the donors withdraw support? These questions also suggest that only the ability of the APC government to respond to the rather high expectations of Sierra Leoneans for socio-economic development delivered as concrete democracy dividends as well as the will to break away from the predatory elite politics of the past will brighten the prospects for political change in the country. Despite the democratic gains of the Kabba era: setting up of the National Revenue Authority (NRA), the National Insurance Social Security Trust (NASSIT) and the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Intra Political Party Commission, the National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) and the National Commission on Democracy (NCD), it was still felt that the regime failed to address the major issues that brought about the war: issues of young people's concerns and aspirations, corruption and lack of development.

What follows is a brief background to the 2007 elections in terms of infrastructural arrangements by the National Electoral Commission (NEC), with regard to the campaigning, nomination and voting processes. It is followed by an examination of the post-election peace building and democratic challenges, while the concluding section suggests a framework for consolidating democracy and peace in post-conflict Sierra Leone.

## Background to the 2007 Elections

The elections, originally scheduled for May, then July, were finally moved to August due to planning and other logistical difficulties. One of the early infrastructural problems was the setting up of constituency boundaries, as the country moved away from Proportional Representation (PR), specifically adopted to deal with some of the problems of inclusiveness thrown up by the war, to the Single Member Constituency System (SMCS). The Constituency Electoral or First-Past-the-Post System (FPTPS) replaced the Proportional Representation cum District Block Representation (DPR) systems for both the 1996 and 2002 elections respectively. It was felt that

the latter system gave too much power to the traditional leaders, whilst a return to the Constituency Electoral System, would impose responsibilities on individual candidates and their parties to relate more effectively with the voters for the 112 single member parliament (Momoh 2007:8).

The other major task to be accomplished by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) in preparation for polling day was the voter registration exercise, which was conducted during the months of February and March 2007. Voter registration was a major challenge for the NEC. The Commission had to guard against false or multiple registrations as well as face the logistical challenge of covering all districts, towns and villages in a country with a very poor communication system and transportation network, a country where until a few years earlier, half of the population was displaced either internally or were refugees in neighbouring countries. In trying to meet these challenges, the Commission outlined its voter registration objectives including voter registration security (Macauley 2007). The Commission also raised the spectre of illegal attempts to import fake ballot papers, which it quickly nipped in the bud with the support of the security agencies.

Despite these teething problems experienced during the voter registration exercise the NEC successfully recorded an unprecedented voter registration rate of 91 per cent of the (eligible) population that was of voting age, with the total number of registered voters exceeding the 2.6 million mark. The breakdown of the registered voters also showed that an unprecedented large number of women and young people registered to vote. Women, for example accounted for 48 per cent of registered voters (*The Spark* 2007). The local press also noted the role of youth and women in the elections. In this regard, *The Spark* newspaper of August 17, 2007 observed that, “youths are the largest number of voters...and they also vigilantly marshalled the process to ensure that it is free, fair and transparent in all polling stations”.

There was also a determination to promote a culture of peaceful and democratic elections in the country, as reflected in the setting up of the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) as provided for by the Political Parties Act of 2002, with support from the United States-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the IFES. The PPRC was designed to complement the work of the NEC and provided a forum where political leaders could discuss issues of mutual concern to avoid any potential conflicts.

As part of its mandate to harmonise the relationships between contending political parties, the PPRC put together the Political Parties Code of Conduct, which provided guidelines for the conduct of the electoral process especially for political parties' activities. It is however not enough to just put a code in place, it is more important to ensure that all parties adhere to its provisions.

Initially, electoral campaigning was not free from violence as zealous supporters of the three main political parties: the ruling Sierra Leone Peoples Party, the official opposition, the All Peoples Congress and the newly formed Peoples Movement for Democratic Change clashed violently on a number of occasions. For example in January 2007, clashes between the supporters of the SLPP and the breakaway PMDC in Pujehun led to the burning of houses. Some local newspapers including *For di People*, on Tuesday 1 May 2007, carried alarming headlines: 'As Party Thugs Stone Freetown City Council', 'SLPP Vows to Kill APC Organising Secretary'.

In spite of these initial concerns, the campaigns went on peacefully, with the only real drawback being the fact that the political parties were appealing to ethnic and regional sentiments as part of their strategy of winning support and appealing for votes. Even after the August elections, when it became clear that a run-off Presidential election was scheduled for September 8, violence again erupted in Kono in the diamond mining eastern part of the country, forcing the police to declare a dusk-to-dawn curfew in the town (IRIN 2007a). Regarding this, clashes between supporters of the SLPP and APC in Freetown led President Tejan Kabbah to make a nation-wide television broadcast in which he threatened to impose a state of emergency "if the current state of intimidation, molestation and violent acts is not stopped immediately" (BBC 2007b; IRIN 2007a).

On voting day, things got off to a good start, as large numbers of voters queued from early in the morning, some as early as 4 a.m., outside polling stations, not wanting to miss the opportunity of casting their votes. There were young party cadres in all polling stations to ensure that the electoral process was free, fair, transparent and devoid of malpractices. They were vigilant in trying to stop interference with ballot boxes and the unnecessary transportation of ballot papers, as vehicles were stopped and searched. Some critics however, have pointed out that these young activists were also creating a security threat especially as some mounted unauthorized road-

blocks. Party agents as well as local and international observers were posted in polling stations nationwide. On the polling day voting activities went off peacefully, without any major incident. This peaceful atmosphere was partly due to the professionalism and efficiency of the country's British-trained security forces, something that defied the prediction of the pessimists, who foresaw widespread violence. Also, the emergence of civil society groups, such as the Women for Non-Violent Elections, contributed towards ensuring peaceful elections.

Whilst regional voting patterns were confirmed, nonetheless, there was a small shift away from the traditional party loyalty, especially for the Northern bloc vote for the APC and Southeast bloc vote for the SLPP, which had made inroads into the north in the 2002 elections. In 2007, it was the APC that consolidated its hold on the north, while making some inroads into the Southeast especially in Bo, Kenema and Moyamba, all hitherto regarded as strongholds of the SLPP. There was a decline in the electoral fortunes of the SLPP in all the regions of the country, and the results point to the fact that there was a widespread feeling that the party failed to live up to its electoral promises in 2002, prompting the electorate to show it the "red card", or as the popular song reminded them it was 'time to go' (see Wai in this volume). The newly formed PMDC also made major inroads into SLPP votes in the southeastern heartland. These changes were indicative not just of the dissatisfaction with the performance of the SLPP government, but also point to the emergence of a new generation of younger voters that seek to tie their votes to the performance and ability of the politicians to deliver on their promises, rather than a blind loyalty to ethno-regional/religious solidarity or primordial considerations. Overall, however, there was broadly still a regional and ethnic pattern to voting behaviour in the country. But the changes seen in the 2007 election results indicate that the voting pattern can change as a result of the emergence of new political actors and the performance of those elected into power. It is a trend that will be critical to the future of democracy in Sierra Leone.

The counting of votes was also conducted in a transparent manner as ballots were counted in the polling stations immediately after the elections in the presence of all the electoral-cum-party agents. The radio stations, in particular the International Radio Network (IRN), played an important role, in announcing the results to an expectant nation. The Commission's

decision to centralise counting in the National Tally Centre helped to focus the mind of the nation and to preclude any form of political mischief.

Given the efficient and effective way the Commission had conducted the elections, it came as no surprise that no sooner were the results completed than the various international observers poured praise on the Commission for conducting elections, as free, fair and transparent elections. Similar adulation came from the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon; the President of the Security Council, Ambassador Leslie Kojo Christian; from ECOWAS Secretariat; and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The ECOWAS Observer Mission described the voting process in Sierra Leone as satisfactorily free, peaceful and credible (*New Vision* 2007). According to the report, Rtd General Seth Obeng, the head of the ECOWAS Mission, noted that, 'the vast majority of voters were given ample opportunity to exercise their franchise in a transparent, tranquil and orderly manner'.

Table 1. Parliamentary Election (11 August 2007)

Parties	Votes	%	Seats
All People's Congress	728,898	40.73%	59
Sierra Leone People's Party	707,608	39.54%	43
People's Movement for Democratic Change	275,435	15.39%	10
National Democratic Alliance	31,388	1.75%	0
Convention People's Party	15,303	0.86%	0
United National People's Party	14,078	0.79%	0
Independents	10,127	0.57%	0
Peace and Liberation Party	6,752	0.38%	0
Traditional chiefs		—	12
Total	1,789,589	100.00%	124
Invalid (8.94% of all votes)	175,606		
Total including invalid votes	1,965,195		

Source: National Electoral Commission (NEC)

None of the seven contesting parties was able to secure the 55% of votes to clinch the Presidency in the first round. However, the APC's Presidential candidate Mr Ernest Bai Koroma led in the first round of voting with 815,523 (44.3%), followed by the SLPP with 704,012 (38.3%), then PMDC with 255,499 (13.9%). According to Table 1, the APC also won the Parliamentary elections with 59 seats (40.7%), followed by the SLPP with 43

(39.5%) and the PMDC, with 10 seats (15.3%) in the 112 seat House of Representatives. In the subsequent run-off for the Presidency, the APC candidate with support from the PMDC got approximately 55% (950,407) of the total votes required to claim the Presidency from the SLPP, which lost the elections after it garnered just 45% (789,651) of the total votes cast (see Table 2). Based on this result, Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC was declared as the duly elected President by NEC (2007), marking the party's return to power after an absence of fifteen years.

Table 2. 2007 Presidential Elections

Candidate	Party	1st round (11 August)		2nd round 8 September	
		No. of votes	%	No. of votes	%
Ernest Bai Koroma	All People's Congress (APC)	815,523	44.34	950,407	54.62
Solomon Berewa	Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)	704,012	38.28	789,651	45.38
Charles Margai	People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDc)	255,499	13.89		
Andrew Turay	Convention People's Party (CPP)	28,610	1.56		
Amadu Jalloh	National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	17,748	0.96		
Kandeh Baba Conteh	Peace and Liberation Party (PLP)	10,556	0.57		
Abdul Kady Karim	United National People's Party (UNPP)	7,260	0.39		
Total: (turnout 75.8%)		1,839,208	100.00	1,740,058	100.00

Source: National Electoral Commission (first round), National Electoral Commission (second round).

An interesting feature of the run-off elections was the fact that election fraud was decisively dealt with as a good number of the results from polling stations found to have electoral malpractices were cancelled (NEC 2007).

### Peace Building and Democratic Challenges: Observations and Recommendations

The 2007 elections in Sierra Leone posed several challenges to peace building and democratisation in the country. Clearly, the vast majority of Sierra Leoneans were looking to a new government that would consolidate democracy, national reconciliation as well as sustainable peace by dealing with the root causes of the civil war, which the Kabbah regime had proved either unwilling or incapable of addressing. These include, the youth

question, the problem of kleptocracy, and the issue of social citizenship. Sierra Leoneans went to the polls to strike a blow at those they saw as being responsible for their country being at the bottom of the pile.

The politicians and their rich benefactors may have feted them during the election campaigns, but the young people in particular, were not prepared to compromise their demand for change. They voted for change and were vigilant in ensuring that their votes were reflected in the final results announced by NEC. In their view, they voted for a new government that would utilize the talents of all Sierra Leoneans, regardless of their political affiliation to move the country forward.

However, given the victory of the APC, which has symbolically re-emerged from the 'political wilderness' largely by cashing in on the failings of the SLPP, the first challenge relates to the question of whether the party will be magnanimous in victory, and the SLPP, graceful in accepting defeat. In this regard, the country would benefit if the political class could move away from the winner-takes-all attitude that pervades African politics, a system that tends to exclude the opposition, while the ruling party exclusively shares the spoils of electoral victory rather than forming broad-based inclusive governments that can effectively address the challenges of governance and national renewal. It has to be recognised that the Sierra Leonean people are demanding a government that will be accountable, show respect for the rule of law and the people's political and socio-economic rights. They expect a form of democratic governance that is capable of delivering tangible welfare benefits and social justice that would uplift the dignity and human security of all citizens. If this can be achieved, then this government will have contributed positively towards democratic consolidation and peace in Sierra Leone.

Another challenge that has to be addressed is that of unemployment among a largely unskilled youthful population, many of who have participated in the civil war, a group with some potential to destabilize any post-election government. The recognition of the generational factor is central to the democratic and peace agenda of the country. There is a long history of youth resisting their marginalisation within society, and struggling for survival and relevance, and to have a meaningful future in which they can claim their full rights as equal citizens with other Sierra Leoneans. Having played an active role in the war when guns gave them 'temporary power', some of the youth have in peacetime faced the trauma of unemployment

and poor living conditions – in some ways, a new form of re-marginalization – in which frustration with their lot has placed them in a vulnerable condition.

Other youth, however, have engaged in politics in the quest to elect a government that would satisfactorily address their concerns and demands. They played a major role in raising political consciousness and the search for change (Wai in this volume). Through the media of popular music, many artists have sought to articulate the frustration at the grassroots of society towards a political class that is in their view, feeding fat from the misery of the same people that elected them to power. The vigilance of the youths of the country was crucial in preventing any rigging of election results.

Clearly, one major challenge facing the new administration is how to mobilize the energy, enthusiasm and patriotism of these young people for the task of national reconstruction and democratic consolidation. For any serious engagement with this critical group the government would have to invest in education, basic services and skills sectors, in order to provide employment for them, thus giving them a stake in the *status quo*. This will involve among other things, a critical appraisal of SLPP's SABABU Education Project that reportedly received about US\$42 million in support from the World Bank and the African Development Bank (ADB), but has not yielded much in terms of value for money or a positive impact on the standard of education (IRIN 2007b).

In spite of the millions of dollars sunk into the project, the educational system has been dogged by severe shortages of qualified and trained teachers, books and classrooms, leading to parents having to incur some costs for sundry items and fees for private tutorials, even though education is purportedly free. Those involved in the implementation of the SABABU project need to be called to account, and if there are found liable, should be subjected to the full rigour of the law. The kind of educational system that Sierra Leone needs in order to meet its national priorities for development, sustainable peace and democracy, is one that is free of corruption and politicisation, and is accessible to all, and of a high quality.

It has to be emphasised, that democracy cannot be consolidated on an empty stomach, nor sustained if the future politicians and electorate are not properly educated. In order to strengthen the country's fragile democracy, the new government would have to invest in teacher-training, building

more schools with well-equipped laboratories and recreational facilities, in order to drastically reduce the level of illiteracy in the country and to produce skilled workers and nurture active and creative minds that would carry forward the task of nation-building into the future.

Some attention would have to be directed towards strengthening the institutions of the state and the economy. This would require greater commitment and a sense of service to the country on the part of the political class and the elites that are placed in charge of these institutions. Some of this will depend on the ability of the Sierra Leonean political class to evolve strong, vibrant and democratic political parties capable of designing, and mobilising people on the basis of constructive programmes, while showing a spirit of patriotism and commitment to democratic governance. It should also go along with institutional autonomy guaranteed by the rule of law, so that institutions have the freedom to operate efficiently and unhindered, which is often not the case when they are tied to powerful individuals in government or the ruling party. Many people will be looking forward to a re-invigorated Anti-Corruption Commission and the efforts of the new government to curb corruption at the highest levels of society, which will involve among other things putting in place a vibrant parliament with capacity to check the excesses of the executive and efficiently execute its oversight functions (Gbla 2006a), and a vigilant judiciary. Also relevant is the need to re-visit the local government/decentralisation system that has taken place within a donor-driven governance project in Sierra Leone (Fanthorpe 2005:27–49). It should be emphasised that people-centred political reforms directed at deepening democracy would promote Sierra Leoneans feeling that they are a part of government, and that the government listens to, and serves the interests of the people.

Closely related to the quest for democratic consolidation is the role of the Sierra Leone NEC, which played a commendable role in the success of the 2007 elections. This relates to the challenge of autonomy for this critical institution in the face of its dependency on donor funds and technical support and possible future interference from the executive arm of government. For NEC to continue to play a positive role in future elections in Sierra Leone, its autonomy should be guarded and provision made for its adequate funding without interference from the executive arm of government or external actors.

The economy remains a potent challenge to democracy and peace in development. Given Sierra Leone's consistent poor showing in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI),<sup>1</sup> and the structure of the economy as a primary product/mineral/exporting one, there is a need to link economic growth to social development and poverty reduction. Current economic programmes and legal frameworks related to mining and other economic investments will need to be scaled up, alongside the rehabilitation and expansion of basic infrastructure such as roads, water supply and electricity that will also contribute towards better communications that will impact positively on the economy. Part of the economic dimension to peace in Sierra Leone lies in the ability of the country to ensure that the benefits from its resource endowments are managed in ways that reduce any inherent conflict-generating potential linked to competition over access or distribution. This can be guaranteed through the reform of laws relating to mining and other extractive industries. It is also important that the mineral-producing regions of the country benefit from the wealth generated from their lands, in the form of gainful employment, provision of social infrastructure, and adequate compensation for environmental degradation resulting from mining activities.

The private sector at all levels: manufacturing, trade, mining, finance and the service industry as well as small-scale enterprises, need to be targeted through a basket of incentives to produce more, and generate employment opportunities for the people. However, corporate social responsibility should be built into the public-private sector partnership, so that companies invest in the social development of the communities, and respect the rights of the people in whose areas they conduct business. A major challenge however, lies with the distribution of wealth and social stability in Sierra Leone.

For Sierra Leone to effectively rise up to the democratic and developmental challenges that lie ahead, the nation cannot afford to marginalize women who constitute 51 percent of its population. For women who had to put up with violence during, and even after, the war and are the major contributors to agrarian activities in the subsistence economy to realize their full potential, they must be entitled to full citizenship rights, including rights to land, to participate in politics and decision-making, and freedom from

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1. According to the 2007/2008 UNDP Human Development Index rankings, Sierra Leone was placed in the 177th position out of 177 countries.

gerontocratic and patriarchal oppression. In particular, girls must have the same opportunity as boys to education, skills training and employment.

A point that cannot be neglected is that of security. This has two dimensions: the domestic or internal and the regional. In relation to the country's domestic security, the re-training and equipping of the security forces and the police with international support has gone some way in ensuring law and order and the safety of lives and property. However, it should be noted that long-term stability in Sierra Leone will also depend on human or social security, in which the people's sense of self-worth and dignity are protected through policies directed at facilitating social justice and development. In that way a strong basis that can sustain the democratic and peace processes can be laid.

In relation to regional security and peace, the government should continue and build upon the good and co-operative relationship with its neighbours in the Mano River Union (Liberia and Guinea), Côte d'Ivoire and with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Cross-border security to curb arms proliferation and other forms of trafficking is of topmost priority. The case of Yenga, a border town in Sierra Leone that was occupied by Guinean forces in 1999 during Sierra Leone's war, ostensibly to prevent RUF incursions into Guinea, needs to be addressed in favour of the retreat of Guinean troops from Sierra Leone soil. The situation that has contributed to tensions in Kailahun, and drawn the attention of the United Nations as well as other regional actors needs to be given urgent attention by the new government as an important step towards reducing the threat of insecurity on the nation's eastern and northern borders.

As mentioned elsewhere, Sierra Leone needs to advocate for a regional Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (DDRP) that will deal with the problem of regionally mobile youth fighters, that have been a feature of the wars in West Africa (Gbla 2006b). It is equally important that the international community remains engaged with the processes of democratic support and peace building. While some Sierra Leoneans have voiced concern about the donor-dependent nature of the design and implementation of the peace agenda in the country, and have demanded national ownership of the peace and developmental processes, this would require some considerable time, prioritisation and phased implementation by a transformed and 'developmental' Sierra Leone state. This should form the core concern of the Sierra Leone political elite, and the new

government should engage the Sierra Leonean people in building a collective, equitable and sustainable national-democratic project (which should be based on a long-term perspective).

The starting point, will be a recognition that electoral democracy only represents a political opportunity for change, the real challenge is to transform the opportunity through democratic and good governance into concrete welfare gains for the Sierra Leone people, and put an end to the political culture of predation, corruption, opportunism and intimidation, that has robbed them of their immense potential for development, prosperity and peace. Anything short of this will lead to the undermining of the people's faith in democracy, with adverse consequences that are better imagined than experienced.

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**POST-CONFLICT AFRICAN STATES** such as Sierra Leone, face critical challenges as they embark on the complex tasks of reconciliation, peace and the rebuilding of war-torn societies. Conflict transformation ultimately depends on the democratisation of society, in ways that promote equitable inclusiveness in the political process, social justice and the promotion of citizenship rights.

This collection of three essays explores the significance of Sierra Leone's 2007 elections in the light of the quest of the people for a democracy that is responsive to social demands, welfare and popular aspirations. It provides first-hand information and analysis of the struggles of the Sierra Leonean citizens to overcome the legacy of a traumatic past, by using their vote to sanction bad governance, and choose a path to a good life and sustainable democracy as the most viable guarantee for peace and development.

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