Freetown: From the "Athens of West Africa" to a City Under Siege: The Rise and Fall of Sub-Saharan First Municipality

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Between March 1991 and January 2002, Sierra Leone experienced a dreadful civil war. The war began when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded the southeastern corner of the country, close to the Liberian border. The insurgents were aided by an "international brigade,"[1] sponsored by the Liberian warlord Charles Taylor,[2] many of whom had fought in the Liberian civil war. In addition, a number of socially alienated local groups opposed to the authoritarian and kleptocratic policies of the All Peoples Congress (APC) used Liberia as a launching pad to try to unseat the APC government of President Joseph Momoh. The RUF's initial demand was a return to democratic pluralism, but this demand changed after the APC was toppled by a military coup in April 1992. The young officers who overthrew Momoh believed that the rebels could be defeated with good leadership at the center. However, as the conflict spread throughout the country, and as demand grew for a return to civilian rule, the National Provisional Revolutionary Council (NPRC), as this junta was called, sought a settlement with the rebel forces. Before a settlement could be reached., largely due to pressure from the international community and domestic democratic forces, in 1996 elections were held which saw the return to power of the Sierra Leone People's Party under the leadership of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. While Kabbah sought a peaceful settlement with the leadership of the RUF, not all the major provisions of the 1996 Abidjan Accord were implemented. In particular, Kabbah refused to "reward" the rebels with a place in the government of national unity. Meanwhile, an undisciplined and restive army continued to plague the Kabbah administration. There were a number of reports of coup attempts, and by the time of the May 1997 coup which toppled the Kabbah government for the first time, several officers had been arrested and charged with treason. For the first time, Freetown, the capital, was under siege as the new military regime, calling itself the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma, invited the RUF to enter the city in order to form a unified "people's army." The AFRC unleashed widespread violence — rape, arson, mutilation, murder — on the civilian population of the overcrowded capital. The junta, which had little or no support among Freetown's residents, encountered passive resistance from the civilian population, as well as strong opposition from the Kamajors and the Nigerian-led Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which was in Sierra Leone to help the government suppress the rebellion by pushing the junta and its allies out of the capital. In February 1998, Kabbah was restored to power by ECOMOG.

By Christmas 1998, Freetown was once again under siege. This time, RUF fighters threatened to breach the city's defenses. In January 1999, for the second time Foday Sankoh's forces entered the city at tremendous cost to the civilian population. The invaders were soon routed from the city, though a rump of the former AFRC (now calling themselves the West Side Boys) moved to the outskirts, where they engaged in acts of banditry. In July 1999, a peace accord was imposed on the Sierra Leone government by the United States and the United Kingdom, under which former rebel fighters received blanket immunity from prosecution for acts of atrocities against civilians. Furthermore, rebel leader Foday Sankoh was given the substantive positions of vice-president of the country and chairmanship of the Mineral Resources Commission; a number of his commanders were also appointed to cabinet posts in the civilian-led administration. Not satisfied with these gains, the RUF leadership hatched a plot aimed at unseating the civilian president, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, in order to put the movement

in total control of the country. The killings and other acts of violence following this attempted putsch led to British military intervention under the guise of evacuating British and Commonwealth citizens. This intervention restored calm and reassured the war-weary population, as well as paved the way for UN troops to consolidate their position in order to carry out the demobilization program.

In what follows, I will outline a brief history of Freetown, from its early beginnings as a province of freedom for former slaves and as the gateway in the British project of modernity. I shall draw attention to the city's rise to prominence in the last quarter of the 19th century, when it became known as the "Athens of West Africa," and how its fortunes diminished from the early 20th century century onward, reaching a nadir in the closing years of the millennium. Throughout its turbulent history, the fate of the city was very much tied to that of the country as a whole.

The Founding of Freetown

The capital of Sierra Leone, Freetown is situated on the northern seaboard of the Freetown Peninsula, overlooking some of the finest natural harbors in the world. Sierra Leone's first contact with the West came in 1462 when the Portuguese explorer Pedro da Cintra sailed down the West African coast in his quest to circumnavigate the world. He named the territory Serra Lyoa, meaning "lion mountains," after the terrain and the roar of thunder accompanying the rainy season, which was mistaken for the sound of lions. Other visitors to this territory that would soon become Britain's gateway to modernization[3] in West Africa included the Dutch admiral De Ruyter, who inscribed his name on a stone in the harbor; Sir John Hawkins, who made his fortune from slave trading in Sierra Leone, after which he embraced Christianity and wrote the celebratory hymn *Amazing Grace*; and Sir Francis Drake.[4] From this period onward, and throughout the 15th to 18th centuries, European ships made frequent stops at Freetown to obtain fresh water[5] and to purchase slaves. In the late 18th century, following the American War of Independence, many former slaves who had fought alongside the British and had been promised manumission, migrated to Britain.[6] These Black Poor, as the new migrants were called, soon attracted racist antipathy in Elizabethan England as resentment spread against the "Blackamores in the realm." Their plight attracted the attention of philanthropists such as Granville Sharpe and Henry Smeathman. In May 1787, some 411 of these Black Poor arrived in Sierra Leone and, following agreements with local chiefs, a settlement was established called Granville Town, in honor of their benefactor Granville Sharpe. The new settlement was also known as the Province of Freedom. In 1792, the Sierra Leone Company was formed, and soon took over the running of the settlement's affairs.[7] Captain Samuel Swan, a contemporary of Sharpe who traded with West Africa, has challenged the altruistic explanation usually asserted as the reason behind the founding of Sierra Leone during this time. In his view, trade was the primary incentive.[8]

According to Fryer, the "history of these settlers is one of disaster piled upon disaster. They died like flies. Some were sold to French slave-traders."[9] They faced harsh conditions, including starvation, as the seeds they brought with them from England would not grow in the tropical soil. The settlement was attacked and burned down by local rulers who had ordered them to leave, and only sixty of the original group survived four years after arriving in Sierra Leone. However, the population was increased by internal migration from the hinterland and beyond the Sierra Leone borders, as well as by slaves rescued on the high seas by British antislavery naval vessels. The founders of the settlement were determined to rid the colony of slavery, although it continued in the hinterland. For example, E. Adeleye Ijagbemi has shown that during the 19th century, the growing demand for labor in nonagricultural sectors resulted in the intensification of slavery in the protectorate.

Following teething problems, such as the failure to "produce [a] prudent and right plan" (Fryer), in 1808 the territory was annexed as a crown colony by the British government. The population of Freetown increased from 2,500 in 1808 to around 6,000 in 1818. Migration into the colony continued as more slaves were captured and released in the Province of Freedom; many of these returnees were now Europeanized, including Africanus Horton (a banker), Sir Samuel Lewis (first African to be knighted), and Bishop Ajai Crowther (first African bishop). By 1870, the population had risen to 10,000 people, forming a cultural mosaic with several languages, African and European. The population rose to 33,000 in 1914 and stood at 55,000 in 1930.

Political and Cultural Development

Freetown became a municipality in 1799 through a charter granted to the Sierra Leone Company by the British Crown. The charter provided for a mayor, aldermen, and sheriff to be appointed by the governor and council,[10] however, by 1821 these officials lost their magisterial functions and the positions became merely honorific. The municipality was reconstituted in 1893, with powers to regulate trade, fire prevention, street trading, education, and rural planning. In this respect it was modeled on the British municipal system,[11] with administrative boundaries based on the ward system, and until 1945 voting was based on property qualification. This system, with its provision for coopted members and committees, remained in force until Siaka Stevens abrogated the system of local democracy in the 1980s, only to replace it with a management committee of appointed members.

Culturally, Freetown has been described as a city of "church and mosque,"[12] as both Christianity and Islam coexist peacefully. Religious intolerance has never been a source of conflict, perhaps because virtually every ethnic group contains Christians, Muslims, and those of African religious belief systems. Christian denominations include Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) Church, Seventh-day Adventist, as well as African revivalist churches, such as the Church of the Lord Alladurah. The Muslim groups include Islamiya and Ahmaddiya. These religious networks played a major role in elementary and secondary school provision for most of the 19th and 20th centuries. The period 1815-27 has been described as memorable because of the great cooperation between the churches and the colonial state.[13] In 1827, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) founded Fourah Bay College as an institution for the training of priests and teachers; in 1876, it became an affiliated college of the University of Durham. This was followed in 1845 by the CMS Grammar School for boys; in 1849, the Annie Walsh Memorial School (CMS) was established for girls; the Catholic mission followed by setting up Saint Edward's School for boys in the mid-19th century, and Saint Joseph's Convent for girls in 1866. The Wesleyans set up the Methodist Boys High School and the Methodist Girls High School in 1874 and 1901 respectively; the Evangelical United Brethren established the Albert Academy in 1904; and in 1925 the city's first state secondary school was established when the Prince of Wales School was opened, following the visit of Edward, Prince of Wales, to the colony. Given this cultural renaissance,[14] which had been generated by the descendants of freed slaves in the Province of Freedom, it is not surprising that Sierra Leone at this time was described as the "Athens of West Africa," as Africans from the sub-region sought entry into the city's institutions. At the time, the name Freetown was associated with the dynamic of modernity, education, and progress, in marked contrast to the status of the city at the end of the millennium.

One important feature of life in Freetown has been its extreme heterogeneity, which was stratified along income and status lines, a society with the capacity to accept innovation, change, and social mobility.[15] Like Creole culture itself, Freetown was quite cosmopolitan, suited to "the enterprising and appeal[ing] to the upwardly mobile."[16] The limited physical space of Freetown impelled many to move to the hinterland to satisfy their ambitions. The city's leaders subscribed to British urban values:

respectably orderly and respectful of the law. By the end of the 19th century, Krio had become the *lingua franca*, and many who had never been to Freetown soon learned to speak the language. By this time, the hybridized Freetown and Creole culture had become the embodiment of syncretic Afro-European cultural forms. For example, the same people who were members of the secret Oje society were also church stewards and members of exclusive Masonic lodges. Of the Creoles at this time, one commentator has observed:

> *Successful in commerce and better educated as a whole than the British population at the time, Krio held many positions in British West African administration. They resisted domination by building up their own independent organizations, like churches and Masonic lodges, and by spreading across West Africa as traders and professionals. By the end of the nineteenth century their economic success and professional opportunities began to be undermined by Lebanese traders and racist attitudes among British colonials.*[17]

Economic Development

According to Cox-George, trading and agriculture remained the twin pillars of economic growth in the colony. In the 19th century, agricultural exports included sylvan culture, especially dyewood, ivory, and hides. Cox-George has noted three distinct phases of colonial rule in the period prior to the declaration of a protectorate in 1896: 1787-1790/91, the period of "virtual self-government or the proprietorship of Granville Sharpe"; 1790/91-1807, the period of Charter Company government; 1807 and after, the period of crown colony status.[18] In the first period, the major source of revenue was via direct taxation, particularly property taxation, including houses, land, horses and carriages, domestic animals, and roads. By this time Freetown could be described as a "model colony," as revenue for its administration was based on internal fiscal policy, as opposed to dependence on the metropolitan exchequer.[19] By contrast, from 1800 onward, it became clear that the company could not finance itself from trading profits, leading to the Crown's appropriation of the duties and responsibilities of the country. Thus, revenue in the crown colony era was based on parliamentary grants-in-aid for the running of the bureaucracy and defense.

In the 19th century, the returnees — who now described themselves as Creole or Krio — contributed immensely to Sierra Leone's economic and political life and were instrumental in "opening up" the protectorate through commerce, particularly once the railway was constructed after 1898. They also worked in the colonial bureaucracy in other British territories in West Africa and were involved in commerce in such far-flung areas as Congo and Fernando Po. In the 19th century, Freetown's most important role was as an entrepot for imports, exports, and storage facilities, and as an exchange center,[20] and after 1807, it became a naval station for antislave patrols as well as the headquarters of the newly formed West African squadron of the Royal Navy.[21] From this moment in Sierra Leone's history, Freetown became the major nerve center of the nation by supplying capital, labor, organizational skills, and specialized economic services, thus facilitating and coordinating commerce in an efficient way.[22] By the late 19th century, a variety of exports passed through Freetown harbor, including palm products, rubber, rice, kola nuts, and ground nuts. By the end of the century, larger ocean-going vessels began to use the city's ports, and its safe and commodious harbor was an added boost to the city's function as an entrepôt. Freetown merchants were prominent in the produce trade, stimulated by the railway, which helped to open up the interior.[23] Among the great African names in the trade were Williams Grant, Thompson Brothers, Abraham Hebron, and Malamah Thomas. In the first two decades of the 20th century, Freetown became pivotal to the development of the urban system in Sierra Leone.

However, it is important to note that Creole society was not a homogeneous one; indeed, Creole was not necessarily an ascriptive group, as people born outside of Creoledom can achieve Creole status. There were the commercial and administrative classes created out of the prosperous trading of the 1880s, and the professional bourgeoisie; there were the poor Creoles who were looked down upon by the rich Creoles; and there were also the lumpenproletariat elements in Creole society, who blamed the migrants from the interior for their deteriorating predicament. The differential outlook at this time is epitomized in an emerging class consciousness, which impelled the first labor strike in 1892. Nonetheless, there were widespread concerns among Creoles stemming from the arrival of new competitors, first the Lebanese/Syrian traders, and, in 1893, Indian commercial interests in the produce trade, beginning with J. T. Chanrai[24] and soon followed by K. Chellaram and T. Choitram, among others. Furthermore, following the crisis in the export market after 1875, the giant European trading houses began to deal directly with African producers, thus eroding the profits of the African middleman. And a new round of racism sweeping through the colonies — caused by the competition to defend profit margins in the depression, as well as the failure of the banks to grant Africans loans, while their deposits were promptly accepted — affected even those Creoles who belonged to the administrative class, which meant that many Creoles were now being pushed out of office.

As noted above, many of the Africans freed in Freetown were now highly Europeanized, and many accepted European standards as the basis upon which Africa should proceed and be judged.[25] While some among the educated elite such as Africanus Horton and Edward W. Blyden called for self-reliance and divorce from Europe, most were loyal to Britain and saw the complementary nature of the races.[26] We shall presently see that this "new modernizing elite," who took over the reigns of government from the departing colonialists, in practice deemphasized African self-reliance and failed to rupture the ties with the colonial power; instead, they settled for a subsidiary, rent-seeking role within the postcolonial state. By the late 19th century, there emerged out of Freetown's cultural mosaic a unique status group describing themselves as Creole and their language as Krio. This group soon came to play a major role in the economy and politics of the colony, which only popular franchise put pay to. Here is how Robert July described this group:

> *They arrived in Freetown naked and abject, but after a few months of supervision were able to make substantial progress. They learned to read and write; they cultivated their own land and mastered a useful craft; they replaced ancient superstition with Christian worship; and they began to guide their actions towards each other on the basis of Christian ideas of justice, charity, fraternity and equality.*[27]

As Fyfe noted, toward the end of the 19th century, the Creoles were "busy creating and diffusing a dynamic culture of their own."[28]

Freetown in the 20th Century

The cultural and political zenith of Freetown can be traced to the last quarter of the 19th century. By the early 20th century, both Freetown and the Creoles had begun to lose what they had gained in the previous century.[29] Nonetheless, the Creoles concentrated their efforts in obtaining a good education (particularly in the liberal professions) and administrative experience; at the same time, they were barred from office. As Fyfe observed: "After Sir Samuel Lewis died in 1903, the government paid little attention to what the Creole members of the Legislative Council said. Creole hopes of achieving selfgovernment in the colony came to nothing."[30] The anti-Creole psychosis spread to other British West African territories; senior Creoles who entered government were discriminated against and thus denied seniority, as these openings were now reserved for Europeans.

The depression of the 1930s brought suffering to the people of Freetown, which was only ended by the boom of the war years. After the war, there was widespread agitation for greater participation by Sierra Leoneans and an end to racial discrimination. A new policy was implemented to end discrimination. But no sooner had the nation prepared itself for self-government than a schism erupted between the Creoles and the people of the protectorate. Mindful of the impact of majority rule on a once relatively privileged position and seeing themselves as the natural successors to the departing British, the Creole elite sought a judicial hearing on the Sierra Leone constitutional agreement laying the basis for political independence. They asked the House of Lords to declare the agreement *ultra vires*, hence, null and void. From this moment on, the decline of Freetown from its historic height in the 19th century mirrored the decline of the nation.

Colonial and Postcolonial Spatial Distribution in Freetown

In spite of the perceived intermediary role of the Creoles, the colonial situation in Freetown remained Manichaean.[31] By the early years of the 20th century, a light railway had been constructed linking central Freetown with the cooler mountainous Government Reservation Area of Hill Station. This enclave of European colonial and business functionaries was fully self-sufficient, but for colonial domestic labor. It had its own very modern hospital as well as the famous Hill Station Club. Central Freetown constituted a series of ethnic settlements: to the east end of the city lay Foulah Town (Foulah), Fourah Bay (Muslim Creole), Kossoh Town (mixed), Magazine Court (Muslim Creole), Mountain Court (Muslim Creole), Kanike (Temne), Bambara Town (Mandingo and Su Su), and Gibraltar Town (Creole). Much of inner Freetown was inhabited by Creoles in the immediate east and west directions. West-central Freetown boasted such towns as Congo Town (Creole), Kroo Town (Kroo), Soldier Town (Creole), Ginger Hall (Limba), Portuguese Town (Creole), and Grassfield/Brookfields (Creole). The villages surrounding the city also reflected the ethnic constellation, with Creoles to be found in areas such as Leicester, Regent, and Gloucester, while the Lokko settled in parts of Regent and the Temne in Lumley village. This spatial dispersal reflected not just ethnicity, but also class, status, and privilege. The central business district consisted of European, Indian, Lebanese, and Sierra Leonean businesses.

Today, in post—civil war Freetown, many small foreign exchange bureaus dot the city, most located within the central business district. To the east of the city, through Sani Abacha Street and ECOWAS Street, are located the textile market and a series of kiosks run by African petty traders. Administrative buildings are situated to the south and west of the central business district, including the City Hotel (made famous by Graham Greene in his novel, *The Heart of the Matter*), the Secretariat Building, the Ministerial Building, the Law Courts, and the House of Representatives. To the west of the city, around Brookfields and New England, we also find loci of the administration, including the Yuyi Building and various ministries. The western half of the city is usually considered the more desirable. Land use patterns have changed as the population continues to expand, and more and more dwellings are being converted to commercial use, leading to further overcrowding.

The Politics of Patrimonialism, Social Exclusion, and the Origin of the War

In order to understand the factors that impelled a group of "rebels" to attack the southeastern corner of Sierra Leone with the aim of toppling the APC government, we must look at the recent political-cum-economic history of the country. APC accession to power marked the beginnings of "the decline of politics and the politics of decline,"[32] as the economy began its long collapse in the midst of widespread corruption and rent-seeking activities.

The main causal factor behind the crisis and subsequent civil war can be traced to the corrosive effects of the personalized authoritarian rule of the APC under the leadership of Siaka Stevens, which led to the destruction of civil society, all forms of opposition, and any semblance of democratic accountability. This was paralleled by the introduction of a network of client-patron relationships, recently described as "the shadow state."[33] The activity of the shadow state and its reproduction were premised on state access to sufficient revenue in order to placate clients. Here lies the *force majeure* of "the politics of decline" in Sierra Leone. Now, by unleashing the full force of the oppressive state apparatus on civil society, as well as imposing forced savings on the peasantry (via the state-controlled Sierra Leone Marketing Board), the APC destroyed the enterprise and will of the people to be governed. The result is that peasant producers withdrew from the formal domestic market, and the educated classes and petit bourgeoisie migrated to greener pastures. Soon an informal economy and society were constructed, posing further threat to the legitimacy of the governing class. The latter's reaction was "to patrimonialize state offices and resources ... along ethno-clientelist and personalist lines,"[34] thus generating even more social and political discontent.[35] Economic decline and the destruction of democratic accountability occurred in tandem, and by 1984, the democratic mandate of Freetown, sub-Saharan Africa's oldest municipality, had been thoroughly undermined, as elected councillors were replaced by political appointments — Stevens' cronies.

One feature of this decline was the failure of the import-substitution strategy, launched in the late colonial and early postindependence period. Because of the high organic composition of capital in the capital-intensive technology, very little employment was provided. Moreover, the high-import content meant that no foreign exchange savings were realized; instead, the sector became a major drain on precious foreign exchange. The absence of forward or backward linkages between this and other sectors spelled the disarticulation of the economy. The situation was exacerbated by economic mismanagement and rampant corruption, with the result that unemployment became widespread, particularly among school leavers and graduates.

Sierra Leone at War with Itself

In 1984, an aging Siaka Stevens handed over power to his Force Commander, Major General Momoh. Recognizing the unpopularity of his predecessor, Momoh tried to distance himself from his sponsor's policies through what he called his New Order Regime. In November 1986, Momoh concluded a long-term structural adjustment agreement with the International Monetary Fund, as part of the new Economic Recovery Programme. In return for the usual macroeconomic conditionality (such as devaluation of the currency, reduction in the size of the bureaucracy, removal of subsidies on essential commodities, deregulation of rice importation, ending the state-controlled Marketing Board's monopoly on the importation of rice), the IMF provided the government with standby credit to the tune of SDR40.53 million.[36] Structural adjustment programs added in no small measure to the political economic and social difficulties the country faced.

In 1987, Momoh declared a state of economic emergency under which the government assumed wide-ranging powers to crack down on corruption, gold and diamond smuggling, as well as the hoarding of essential commodities and the local currency. The aim of these policies was to counter the thriving parallel market, to which the formal banking sector had lost millions of leones. Momoh went further than his predecessor in applying the conditionality agreement.[37] Indeed, after the IMF had unilaterally abrogated the agreement in 1990 due to the government's inability to continue payment of arrears, Momoh embarked upon a "shadow program," i.e., conditionality without the loan to cushion the worst effects. Almost immediately these policies began to take their toll, as prices of basic commodities soared to astronomical heights and inflation ate into savings and wages.

Momoh's position in the Congress was never as strong as Stevens'. He was an "imposed candidate" for the presidency and leadership of the party; he lacked a solid political base within the party; above all he was not as shrewd an operator as his predecessor. For many neutrals, Momoh was too phlegmatic, "a very indecisive, weak leader allowing ministers free reign to be corrupt,"[38] and it was not long before his image as a military strongman was transformed into that of an impotent civilian blabber. There were members of the "old brigade" who still saw him as an "ethnic upstart." Among these was his deputy and former SLPP stalwart Francis Minah, who allegedly used Momoh's growing unpopularity as the basis to organize a putsch, which resulted in Minah's execution for high treason. Earlier, he had been accused of highhandedness over the Ndogboyosi affair, a rural rebellion in which scores of peasants were killed.

Minah had been expected to succeed Momoh to the presidency and his execution incensed many people from the Southern Province, who felt that the entire episode was a plot by Northern zealots out to deprive them of power. In one fell swoop, Momoh became alienated from two of the most powerful ethnic groups in the country, the Temne in the northern and central areas and the Mende in the south. Together, these two groups account for about 60 percent of the total population. Momoh's insensitivity reached new heights when, over the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service, he called for "ethnic corporatism," urging all of his subjects to organize themselves into ethnic cabals. Indeed, in this 1990 broadcast, to the Ekutay (a Northern ethnic cabal) annual convention at Binkolo, Bombali District, Momoh confirmed what many political pundits had by now often alluded to: mainly that power had shifted from Parliament and the Cabinet to the Ekutay.[39] The growing influence of the Ekutay in affairs of state would further erode ethnic relations and speed economic decline.[40] By 1991, the first UNDP index of human development put Sierra Leone at the very bottom of the list of 165 countries. Momoh's control of state affairs soon began to slip away, and the Eastern Province, Kono District in particular, maintained its notoriety as the "Wild West of West Africa,' with a semi-permanent lawlessness in the diamond mining areas."[41]

By the early 1990s, the "democratic winds of change" were now assuming gale-force proportions across the continent. Donors conditioned official loans on a return to democratic multiparty politics. Francophone Africa had popularized the system of National Convention as a *rite de passage* to democratic transformation. Yet, in Sierra Leone, the feeble leadership assumed an ostrichlike posture in the face of popular demands for democratic pluralism, led by the Sierra Leone Bar Association, the university community, as well as school children and the unemployed.[42] Momoh's response to demands for multiparty elections was to dispatch a warning via the hawkish secretary-general of Congress, E.T Kamara, that any talk of multiparty democracy would be dealt with by the full force of the law, since all such discussions were illegal under the single-party state. The stage was now set for a bloody confrontation.

The Nihilism of the RUF

While Momoh was busy trying to preserve the ancien regime, civil war broke out in neighboring Liberia. The conflict soon engulfed much of Sierra Leone[43] when a group of Liberian "rebels" chose this moment to seek revenge against the Momoh regime. Stephen Ellis has argued that Charles Taylor, the Liberian warlord, felt aggrieved that the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) prevented him from taking control of Monrovia, the Liberian capital. In particular, Taylor was angry at Sierra Leone's double role as peacemaker and as a base from which ECOMOG bombed territories controlled by his faction. His National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) "swore to

avenge the interference in Liberia's internal affairs ... Taylor's reaction was ‚to do a RENAMO' on Sierra Leone,"[44] unleashing the RUF, under the leadership of Foday Sankoh, former corporal of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces, on the country's Eastern Province, causing widespread destruction and terror.

Paul Richards, author of *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, has argued that the RUF were revolutionaries, inspired by Gadaffi's notion of a Third Way — between Soviet-style single-party rule and Western-style democracy — and determined to bring change to their country.[45] Richards also points out that the war was the culmination of the protracted, postcolonial crisis of patrimonialism. Ibrahim Abdullah takes up the theme of the "revolutionary vanguard" and the influence of Gadaffi's *Green Book* and Kim Il Sung's *Juche* ideas.[46] He notes the coming together of "town and gown" as the children of the petit bourgeoisie were drawn into prolonged discourse with lumpen elements in the Pote, where illegal drugs were used, cementing a strong counterculture. The RUF, which provided this link, appealed to socially excluded groups and all those other social elements who felt alienated by APC rule.

The National Provisional Revolutionary Council and the Demise of the APC

Momoh was unable to bring peace to the country, and both government and rebel forces were accused of serious human rights abuse.[47] Momoh failed to exploit the opportunity for nationalist solidarity created by wanton rebel violence against civilians. By mid-1991 the economy took a nosedive, as agricultural production plummeted to an all-time low of US$10 million.[48] War casualties mounted and by early 1992 more than 10,000 people had been killed, 300,000 displaced, 200,000 forced into refugee camps in Guinea, and 400,000 trapped behind rebel lines. Meanwhile, Momoh tried to use the security situation as a pretext to delay calling a general election, which in turn infuriated opposition leaders. Troops dispatched to the front had to fight with obsolete weapons. More significantly, the cost of the war effort meant that the higher echelons of the military could no longer be protected from the worst effects of the economic crisis, which had engulfed the nation. In contrast to earlier periods, most of the spoils did not trickle down to junior officers, thus creating the conditions for a schism within the army officer corps. In addition, the policy of sending young and potentially rebellious officers to the front further alienated the younger ranks from those officers who were seen as occupying positions of opulence.

In April 1992, Momoh was removed by a group of young and relatively unknown officers led by army captain Valentine Strasser, who had escaped death after being severely injured in hand-to-hand combat with the RUF forces. In his first interview after the coup, Strasser described how he and his colleagues had to fight the enemy with "obsolete guns that will not fire," and how his friend died by his side. He was brought to the capital with shrapnel in his leg to be operated on without anaesthesia, as none was available at the main city hospitals. To add insult to injury, the authorities refused to send Strasser and other injured soldiers overseas for treatment because the country could not afford it. This was the last straw for the young officers, who thereafter took decisive measures to remove Momoh and his decadent APC from office.

Strasser condemned the opulence and corruption of the Momoh administration and its inability to prosecute the war successfully. He promised to bring peace to the nation, although his tenure as leader saw growing rebel incursions all over the country. As part of its anticorruption crusade, the NPRC set up a number of commissions to inquire into the assets of ex-ministers and senior civil servants. In the aftermath of the coup, parallels were drawn with the first Rawlings intervention in Ghana in June 1979. The NPRC used the populist rhetoric of redemption, anticorruption, and per-

sonal sacrifice. Strasser was referred to as "the redeemer." As in Ghana, economic orthodoxy was combined with a limited politics of redistribution. After an initial period of "pariah status" following the execution of 28 civilians and military officers, an accord was struck with the IFIs, and in exchange for loans, Strasser implemented the programs negotiated by his predecessor with the IMF. This gave the green light to other donors, and loans and grants quickly followed from the European Union for infrastructure development, the International Labour Organisation, and the Africa Development Bank. The stabilization program produced widespread unemployment, as over 30,000 workers were made redundant, though the figure was ameliorated by the rapid expansion of the army, mainly through conscription of "street children." On the positive side, Strasser was able to reduce inflation from over 120 percent when he seized power in 1992, to below 50 percent by the end of 1994, as well as maintain the value of the currency.

Freetown: War, Peace, and Democracy

Despite Strasser's success in stabilizing the economy (compared to his immediate predecessor), the popularity of the regime soon waned as domestic and international pressure for a return to civilian rule mounted. On the war front, rebels continued to hit targets in the interior of the country, including a brief occupation of the rich diamond fields of Kono District. The occupation of the Kono District marked a new phase in the war, as the RUF and dissidents from the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), the sobels (soldier/rebel), embarked on diamond mining. The RUF leadership was able to exchange diamonds for arms in order to prosecute their war against the government and people of Sierra Leone. On one occasion, rebel forces were reported to be only 45 kilometers from Freetown, preparing for a siege on the capital. By this time it had become clear that the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) was no match for the guerrilla rebels. In early 1995, the military government sought help from the British Army Gurkhas, who were soon embroiled in an ambush in which their Canadian commander, Colonel Robert Mackenzie, was killed.[49] Shortly after the Gurkhas left the country, they were replaced by the South African—based Executive Outcomes (E0),[50] who helped to shift the balance in favor of the NPRC by driving the rebels out of the diamond fields.[51] Nonetheless, EO was a major drain on the Sierra Leone exchequer at a cost of US$1.7 million a month.[52] Later, in 1996, after elections were held and a civilian government installed, scaled-down fighting as a result of a cease-fire and demands from the IMF to reduce payment to the organization led the government to negotiate EO's early departure. The resulting gap was filled by the emergence of a new fighting force, an adjunct of "civil society" called the Kamajors, or Mende traditional hunters.[53] The Kamajors formed the nucleus of the broader government-supported Civil Defence Force, which included the Kapras and Tamboros.

The Mende of the southeast constitute the largest ethnic group of Sierra Leone, accounting for some 30 percent of the population and traditionally providing the bulk of support for the Sierra Leone People's Party, the country's oldest political organization. The SLPP had been in the political wilderness since the 1967 elections, but won the 1996 elections. The Kamajors had distinguished themselves in 1994 in a series of encounters with RUF elements around Bo (the country's second largest town). In these clashes, the Kamajors succeeded in demystifying some of the rebels' claims of invincibility, at a time when the army had appeared incapable of confronting the RUF. As a result, the influence of the Kamajors grew, as they swapped "home-made rifles, machetes, and other crude weapons ... for more sophisticated weaponry."[54]

By early 1994, the shine had rubbed off "Strasser the redeemer." There was the scandal involving members of the junta engaged in diamond smuggling, which angered an already exasperated populace tired of the officers' youthful antics and their inability to end the war. Many saw the transition to civilian rule as a prerequisite to ending the conflict. The immediate post-1994 period was marked by a

much-contested debate concerning how to restore peace and democracy. On the one hand, the military and their sympathizers argued that peace must be negotiated before presidential and parliamentary elections were held, because free and fair elections would be impossible under war conditions. On the other hand, there were those led by civic organizations such as Women for a Morally Engaged Nation (WOMEN) as well as donors who held that a speedy return to democratic pluralism was a *sine qua non* for peace in the country. They argued that the military authorities were prevaricating on the issue of returning the country to democratic rule. In their view, Captain Strasser was trying to swap his military uniform for a civilian presidency a la President Rawlings of Ghana.

However, in January 1996, two months before the planned presidential and parliamentary elections, a schism emerged within the NPRC, which resulted in Strasser being replaced by his deputy, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio. This heightened public concerns about the intention of the junta. With civil war still raging, the transition to democratic rule reached its climax with the elections of February and March 1996. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party, was declared winner of the presidential election with almost 60 percent of the vote after a run-off with the leader of the United National Peoples' Party (UNPP), John Karefa Smart, who polled just over 40 percent. In Parliament, the SLPP won 27 of the 80 seats, and the main opposition the UNPP gained only 17 seats. Twelve seats were reserved for the Paramount Chiefs from the twelve districts. Although the SLPP did not have a majority, it could count on the support of the Paramount Chiefs.

The new government faced three major problems. First, to end the war and begin the task of national reconciliation. Second, to embark on policies of national reconstruction, including relocation of the population that had been displaced by the war. Finally, to secure discipline within the Armed Forces. In his inaugural speech, the new president referred to the three "Rs": reconstruction, reconciliation, and rehabilitation. In particular, Kabbah was very conscious of the politicized and undisciplined armed forces that he had inherited from the NPRC. Over the previous three decades, recruitment into the army had been based on ethnic and political patronage, and the army was regarded as an instrument of the ruling party, insulating it from the people. Thus, even if this party became unpopular, the army would ensure that it remained in power indefinitely.[55] Moreover, the April 1992 coup that brought down Momoh had destroyed the command structure of the army.

In order to achieve his stated goals, Kabbah formed a National Coalition Government to include the major parties in Parliament, as well as a rapprochement with Foday Sankoh, the rebel leader. Sankoh's reaction was to emphasize the point that he was willing to meet with Kabbah, not as president of Sierra Leone, but as leader of the SLPP. He called for power sharing with the new government and for "a people's budget" to include free and compulsory education, affordable housing, clean water, and a sewage system in every village. Finally, he demanded the withdrawal of all foreign troops, including those of Executive Outcomes and the Nigerian-led ECOMOG, and the absorption of some of his fighters into the national army. The government rejected Sankoh's demands, in particular his call for power sharing. Instead, the government set up the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission based on the model of South Africa's Truth Commission, to investigate and identify the causes of injustices against individuals and communities by the government. It also emphasized its determination to crack down on corrupt practices among public servants following the disappearance of 500 Sierra Leonean passports.

The government's immediate concern was to negotiate peace with the RUF, as well as to find funds (estimated at US$40 million) to facilitate the smooth demobilization and rehabilitation into civilian life of soldiers and ex-RUF fighters. The search for peace was now being conducted on two fronts: by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and by the Commonwealth, though the rapprochement with the RUF continued as both sides agreed to a cease-fire and the reciprocal release of prisoners.

Meanwhile, the economy continued to perform poorly, as the war brought agricultural and mining production to a standstill. Both the bauxite mines in Moyamba and the rutile mines in Sherbro were attacked and personnel seized by rebel forces. In September 1996, the poor economic performance prompted the IMF to demand a drastic cut in payment to Executive Outcomes before the country could receive US$200 million in foreign exchange funding for postwar reconstruction. This resulted in a new agreement with EO, and much-reduced fees for their services. In the same month, an attempted coup led to the retirement of 26 officers and 155 noncommissioned officers from the army. In December 1996, just a month after the conclusion of a peace accord with the RUF, 18 people were arrested after the revelation of another coup attempt. Despite this clear evidence of discontent within the army, in January 1997 the government cut subsidized rice supplies to the army, police, and prison services in response to demands made by the IFIs. In that same month, rice importation from South Asia alone cost the country some US$30 million; sold on the open market for Le23,000 a bag, the price of Le1,000 offered to military personnel indicates the generous subsidy this group enjoyed. Heavily subsidized rice had been the hallmark of military life since the days of Siaka Stevens. The cut in subsidies precipitated yet another coup attempt, as a result of which five officers were arrested, including Captain Paul Thomas, one of the leaders of the May 25 coup.

Growing undiscipline within the ranks of the army made the government more dependent on the Kamajors, who by now had assumed the status of an ethnic praetorian guard. This was particularly the case after the departure of Executive Outcomes and the failure of the United Nations to send peacekeeping troops to supervise the Peace Agreement.[56] Government dependence on the Kamajors worsened army-Kamajor relations, and this was reflected in the growing number of clashes between the two forces. The Kamajors saw the army as ineffective, corrupt, and unpatriotic, demonstrated by their inability to make any significant impact on the RUF and reflected in the rise of the sobels. Sobels were renegade elements of the national army who would loot private property and work the diamond fields by night, then return to soldiering by day. The army was accused of trying to undermine the first Southern-dominated government in thirty years, and was seen as an offshoot of both the APC and the NPRC. In short, the Kamajors considered the army a threat to the country's new democracy.

On the army's part, the Kamajors represented a major threat to national unity and a tool in the sectional divide, a group seeking to challenge the army's monopoly of the means of violence. For example, in March 1996, the civilian government ordered the Kamajors and the army to flush out rebels who had attacked civilians. The army felt that their role "as custodians of state security and defenders of the constitution"[57] was being challenged by the Kamajors. As such, the army saw the Kamajors as a danger to the state.

The chief link between the Kabbah administration and the Kamajors was Deputy Minister of Defence Samuel Hinga Norman, who was also leader of the Kamajors. Within a short period of time, the stature of the Kamajors rose from ethnic hunters" to quasi-national army. Their growing confidence in dealing with rebels impelled the Kamajors to confront other civic associations, particularly in the North, but also in Bo, Kenema, and Zimmi. Corporal Gborie, who announced that the military had seized power in May 1997, accused the Kabbah administration of "crying down the army," and of "tribalism." Inevitably, one of the first acts of the junta was to outlaw the Kamajors, who in turn indicated their desire to mobilize 35,000 of their number for a march on Freetown to oust the renegade soldiers. Until that moment, for much of the war, the citizens of Freetown had been relatively insulated from the excesses to which the RUF had been subjecting the people of the provinces, in particular, those to the east and south.

Kabbah was not the first to utilize an ethnic-based fighting force to govern the country. In the early 1970s, faced with a series of attempted coups, Stevens (with the help of Cuba) established the dread Internal Security Unit (ISU), later renamed the Special Security Division (SSD). This unit was used to put down demonstrations by students and trade unionists, as well as to confront rebellious elements within the army. The 1970s and ,80s witnessed a number of clashes between the army and the SSD, including a potentially bloody confrontation in the National Stadium in 1976. Stevens' grip on both forces helped contain SSD-army conflicts so that these tensions and jealousies never became a major security concern. At this time, senior officers in both the army and the SSD were incorporated into the power structure of the Congress, as members of the ruling party. Not surprisingly, the threat of intervention came, generally, not from senior officers, but from military subaltern groups consisting of junior officers and noncommissioned officers, who felt a sense of exclusion and comradeship with the lumpen elements within the RUF and the sobels.

Freetown Under Siege

A sense of economic and political insecurity among the population, the unresolved civil war, the Ka-major-army conflicts, the army's loss of privileges — all were major factors behind the military insurgency of May 25, 1997, which mounted a siege on Freetown. The rebels who had occupied a large portion of the country outside Freetown felt that their biggest prize would be the capital. Indeed, this analysis was correct, since despite the atrocities perpetuated on the rural population, there was little outcry from the government and the international community. It was only after rebels breached the defenses of capital that the world press took notice of the horrors and widespread violation of human rights by both sides in the civil war.

As far as the May 1997 coup is concerned, it is important to note that in the last instance, the army would intervene in politics largely for military reasons.[58] While the charge of corruption against ousted regimes may be true, it is a rationalization central to all dawn broadcasts following a military take-over. In the end, the military tends to intervene to remove a civilian government when corporate interests are threatened. In the case of Sierra Leone, because of the clientelistic mode of accumulation and the breakdown of the command structure, junior officers developed a sense of political and economic marginalization welded in an esprit de corps with other marginalized groups and an exaggerated perception of support among the public in general.

Bad policy on the part of an ousted regime helps to create this illusion of a popular desire for military intervention. In the case of the Kabbah regime, there were quite a few poorly conceived policies, some of which we have already discussed. The first relate to security. The dependence on the Kamajors meant that the security of "Kamajor country" (Southern and Eastern Provinces) was guaranteed, but at the expense of the security of the capital. This lapse meant that for the first time, in May 1997, rebels were able to enter Freetown after members of the AFRC released prisoners and forged an alliance with the RUF to form a "People's Army." Similarly, Kabbah's failure to punish officers accused of plotting to overthrow his government reinforced his image as a weak and indecisive leader. This perception was not helped by the abrupt curtailment of the trial of an ex—foreign minister accused of selling the Sierra Leone passports to British—Hong Kong nationals. Furthermore, the generous terms and conditions that were offered to the disgraced former president Momoh astonished many Sierra Leoneans. These included a very generous pension of Le900,000, a house, servants, car, chauffeur, and bodyguards. Momoh's triumphalist manner and speeches helped to whip up antigovernment sentiment. He claimed that he had not been allowed to face the people in general elections before the army ousted him, and he used the opportunity to announce his return to active politics.

Despite good intentions for his country, Kabbah was neither a shrewd politician nor a war leader. Many Sierra Leoneans were disappointed at the composition of Kabbah's Cabinet and his style of government. It was hoped that he would appoint young, dynamic people who had not been contaminated by the politics of kleptocracy. Instead, the Cabinet consisted of discredited (recycled) SLPP politicians. While his personal honesty and integrity were not questioned, it was felt that he was "only paying lip-service to the welfare of the people; phlegmatic and carefree to the security and financial irregularities in Government."[59] He failed to utilize his advantageous position during the 1996 negotiation in Abidjan — when his fighters controlled most of the country — to impose stricter conditions on the rebel leadership. Many commentators felt that "the pluralist politics of democratic exchanges had deteriorated to an acrimonious and divisive process of exchanges and in division in Parliament."[60] This politics of attrition was symptomatic of the "character assassination by Government stalwarts of prominent and influential figures in opposition"[61] leading to the suspension from Parliament of John Karefa Smart, the opposition leader. Opposition parties blamed Kabbah in particular for not doing enough to prevent his suspension. Finally, there was growing undiscipline within the ruling party. By the time of the 1997 coup, there was much talk of Kabbah "the northern" being replaced by a Mende from the south.

This is not to suggest that this first period of Kabbah's rule was a total failure. The SLPP was able to reduce inflation from 40 percent in March 1996 to 6 percent at the time of the coup. Gross Domestic Product grew from —10 percent at the beginning of 1996 to 5.6 percent in December 1996. Kabbah was able to attract Western financial support for his five-year socioeconomic development program costing US$760 million. By the end of March 1997, donors had pledged US$640 million, or 84 percent of the fund. Much of this had been committed to infrastructure development, such as the construction of a sewage system in Freetown. These capital projects were abandoned following the coup, as many workers had been evacuated during the mayhem of the siege on the capital.[62]

In January 1999, cadres of the RUF were able once again to breach the city's defenses. Their entry into the capital saw some of the worst atrocities in the ten-year war. Civilians were mutilated, raped, and killed, private and government buildings destroyed, including much of the colonial architecture for which Freetown was renowned: the Secretariat Building, the famous City Hotel, the Central Police and Law Court Building (now restored), Holy Trinity Church, Saint George's Cathedral, and many private dwellings. In an ironic way, Foday Sankoh's infantile revolution aided the flight of skilled personnel out of the country by finishing the job begun a decade earlier by World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs.

As noted above, one feature of the civil war is the prominent role that child combatants played. Many of these were abducted by both sides. In the case of the RUF, after a period of socialization into violence, including violence against their community and kin, these children were inducted into various areas of military life.[63] Children were considered expendable, since they did not have any dependents. In a gendered division of labor, girls and young women were used as sex slaves, while boys were used as fighters and miners in the diamond fields. Child soldiers were preferred because, it was argued, they are compliant and easy to manipulate. Moreover, their age and size render them ideal for gathering intelligence, as messengers and as spies on government positions, since they tend to attract little attention.[64] The AFRC/RUF coalition frequently pressed teenage boys into military service. Many were supplied with hallucinogenic drugs. They were forced to mingle with the crowd and hurl grenades at government soldiers. Gender and sexual victimization meant that girls were forced to become "soldiers' wives." The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children found that "as many as 80 percent of rebel soldiers are between the ages of seven and fourteen, and recent escapees from rebel camps have reported that the majority of camp members are young captive girls."[65] Furthermore, 60 percent of the 1,000 fighters recently screened by the Disarmament, Demobilisation

and Resettlement Unit set up by the Kabbah regime before the May 1997 coup consisted of women. Between 1992 and 1996, the period of the most intensive fighting, both the government and the RUF forcibly recruited some 4,500 children. When children were not involved in fighting, the quiet moments in the camp would be spent cooking or transporting water, arms, ammunition, and other hardware.

Lome and After

In July 1999, a peace accord was struck between the government and the leadership of the RUF. Under this agreement, the RUF leader Foday Sankoh became vice-president of Sierra Leone and took charge of the country's mineral resources, which the RUF had exploited to finance its war machine. In addition, a number of RUF field commanders were awarded cabinet positions. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the Lome Accord is the blanket immunity from prosecution granted to all RUF fighters. The accord was imposed upon the democratically elected president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, who was summoned to Lome by Western leaders led by US Special Presidential Adviser on Africa, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, to sign the agreement. Western leaders who had become concerned about the bloodletting in Sierra Leone, but who had no intention of sending their troops into "Africa's futile wars" after the US debacle in Somalia, were ready to accept any deal that would bring peace to this troubled land. Furthermore, Kabbah had little room to maneuver in the negotiations, since at the time some two-thirds of the country was under rebel control.

By 1999, the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Resettlement (DDR) program of ex-combatants had begun. However, the perceived lack of resolve by the international community to prosecute the rebel leadership for atrocities against the civilian population encouraged Foday Sankoh and his colleagues to seek total power in May 2000. As the last of the Nigerian ECOMOG troops departed, the RUF unleashed a putsch designed to unseat Kabbah and to install their leader as president of the country. Earlier, the RUF and its allies, the West Side Boys, had humiliated UN troops by capturing their weapons and armored vehicles, abducting them, stripping them naked, and killing a number of them. The attempted coup, in which Foday Sankoh himself was wounded and captured, caused both a humanitarian and a political emergency, which resulted in the British government sending troops to the country under the guise of evacuating British and Commonwealth citizens. The elite British Paratroops quickly secured Freetown against rebel incursions. Meanwhile, the gateway to the capital was still being menaced by banditry perpetrated by the rump of the former Sierra Leone Army/AFRC, which had staged the coup of 1997. The West Side Boys, as these thugs were called, captured and held hostage a platoon of British troops. In the ensuing battle to rescue the British soldiers, the West Side Boys were destroyed, thus heralding the true beginning of peace in Sierra Leone. The capture and destruction of their Okro Hill hideout opened the way for UN (UNAMSIL) troops to move into the interior, where they brought humanitarian supplies to the beleaguered civilian population and paved the way for government control in the area. For the first time in almost ten years, residents of Freetown felt a sense of security. Once British troops intervened, not only was the capital secured, thus ending the siege of Freetown, but as rebels surrendered to demobilization camps, it was possible for UNAMSIL to move in to fill the vacuum. By the end of the demobilization period in January 2002, over 46,000 fighters had been demobilized, more than half of them from the Civil Defence Force, the fighting arm of the government supporters; and several thousand were children who had been forced to fight on one or both sides of the divide.

The DDR experienced a host of problems: financial; a lack of confidence; repeat demobilizations; the negative attitude of parents to their returning children, many of whom had committed acts of violence. Demobilized ex-combatants were offered cash and promised training, including apprenti-

ceship; former child combatants were promised education, which many had demanded. Many of the former fighters wanted to become skilled artisans as carpenters and joiners, masons and mechanics, and were apprenticed to artisans in urban areas and offered toolkits to boot. As the country's external trade had ground to a halt, and as agricultural land and diamond fields were occupied by rebel fighters, the cost of the demobilization and reintegration program was borne by donors, many of whom were now beginning to exhibit aid fatigue. Indeed, lack of finance delayed the demobilization process and brought it to a full stop on more than one occasion. Distrust between the government and the rebels also delayed the process. Both sides were suspicious of the other's intentions, and the establishment of the Special Court to try human rights abusers created additional tension, with many young fighters fearful of speaking to adults should they incriminate themselves. Many of the children who entered UNAMSIUs demobilization camps were highly traumatized, fearful of revenge attack and rejection by friends and relations as society labeled them "rebel children." Many refused to speak and were even prepared to return to the fighting forces that had been parent surrogates for so many years. There were also allegations of misappropriation of funds destined for demobilization. For example, the NGO Cause Canada is reported to have lost $27,000 through embezzlement of money allocated for skill training. In another case reported by the *Unity Now tabloid*, officials squandered Le94,000,000 destined for ex-combatants.[66] Poor infrastructure and lack of transportation have been major impediments to the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program.[67]

In January 2002, the Sierra Leone government established a protocol for the Special Courts to try those who have been accused of human rights abuses during the decade-long war. The chief accused is the leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh, who is now incarcerated in the notorious Pademba Road Prison in Freetown. Others who may face trial include Norman Hingham, Deputy Minister of Defence and leader of the Kamajors; Johnny Paul Koroma, head of the government-sponsored Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, and former leader of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council; and elements of the Sierra Leone Army, which ousted the elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and invited the RUF into a military coalition, in order to form a Peoples' Army. The junta and its ally caused widespread destruction in the city, including arson, rape, mutilation, looting, and murder. Clearly, while the victims need justice, the Special Court could pose major problems for the consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone, as many of these warlords still have followers and it is well known that not all weapons have been turned in at the demobilization camps. The issue is made more complex by the fact that many of the perpetrators were children who were not only acting under the instructions of adults, but many were under the influence of hallucinogenic narcotics. The problem becomes more acute as it is unclear how the new British-trained army, consisting mainly of former fighters, will behave in a political emergency: Will they remain neutral and follow government directives, or will they follow the historic road of intervening directly in politics? The fact that former AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma is now a member of Parliament has further complicated the situation.

Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in May 2002 and were contested by nine political parties. The national Electoral Commission, which registered more than 2 million voters, was accused of favoritism toward the government by opposition politicians. The victorious SLPP government was accused of vote rigging and tampering with the ballot boxes, though the results were later accepted by all contesting parties.

In July 2002, British troops pulled out after two years of involvement in the country, which included providing security and training a new national army. The "loyal und royal" people of Sierra Leone felt a sense of gratitude to the Biritsh government for its part in bringing peace to the country.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to situate the historic importance of Freetown within the developmental efforts of Sierra Leone as well as within Britain's project of modernity in West Africa. I have drawn attention to the fact that Freetown retained its prominence as the bastion of modernization from the inception of the colony until the early 20th century. By the late 19th century, largely because of the city's many institutions of learning, Freetown had become known as the Athens of West Africa. The fall in the nation's fortunes paralleled the demise of Freetown as an important commercial and intellectual center. The country's precarious position within the international division of labor, in addition to the rise of authoritarian and neopatrimonial politics in the postcolonial period, impelled the country's decline. Curative measures, through IFI adjustment policies, created further social and economic problems, forcing many skilled personnel to migrate to greener pastures. All of these factors provided the backdrop to the civil war, which laid a series of sieges on the inhabitants of Freetown. Thus, the optimism that accompanied the birth of Freetown at the dawn of the 19th century is in marked contrast to the pessimism surrounding the city's future as its citizens enter the new millennium.

Alfred B. Zack-Williams. Freetown: From the "Athens of West Africa" to a City Under Siege: The Rise and Fall of Sub-Saharan First Municipality, in: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (ed.): Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos. Documenta11_Platform4. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2002, pp. 287-314.

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42 These would all be key social actors in the impending civil war.

43 For a chronology of the events leading up to the civil war in Liberia, see Stephen Ellis, "Liberia, 1989-1994: A Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence," African Affairs 94 (April 1995), pp. 165-197.

44 Alfred B. Zack-Williams and Stephen Riley, "Sierra Leone: The Coup and Its Consequences," Review of African Political Economy 20, no. 56 (March 1993), p. 93.

45 Paul Richards, "Understanding Insurgency in Sierra Leone (& Liberia)," paper presented at the Conference on Conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, University College, London, December 1995, p. 1. See also Paul Richards, Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996).

46 Ibrahim Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)," Africa Development 22, no. 3-4 (1997), pp. 45-76.

47 See Amnesty International, "Sierra Leone: The Extrajudicial Execution of Suspected Rebels and Collaborators," April 29, 1992; also, US Department of State, "Sierra Leone Country Report on Human Rights and Practices for 1997," Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, January 30, 1998.

48 See Zack-Williams and Riley, "Sierra Leone: The Coup and Its Consequences."

49 See Stephen Riley, Liberia and Sierra Leone: Anarchy or Peace in West Africa?, Conflict Studies, no. 287 (London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1996).

50 See Jeremy Harding, "The Mercenary Business: ‚Executive Outcomes," Review of African Political Economy 24, no. 71 (March 1997), pp. 87-97.

51 See Riley, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

52 See Stephen Riley, "Sierra Leone: The Militariat Strikes Again," Review of African Political Economy 24, no. 72 (1997), pp. 287-292.

53 Other ethnic fighters also joined forces against the rebels: the Kapras, Tamaboros, and Badonsos.

54 Riley, "Sierra Leone: The Militariat Strikes Again," p. 288.

55 Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, "Restoration to Democratic Civilian Rule in Sierra Leone," Conference on Sierra Leone, London, October 20, 1997.

56 These were known as the Neutral Monitoring Group, under Article 11 of the Abidjan Accord.

57 Major Johnny Paul Koroma, dawn broadcast, Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service, May 25, 1997.

58 See Ruth First, The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d'état (London:Allen Lane, 1970).

59 West Africa, June 2-8, 1997, p. 868.

60 West Africa, July 14-20, 1997, p. 1118.

61 Ibid.

62 See Zack-Williams, "The Political Economy of Civil War in Sierra Leone, 1991-98," pp. 143-146.

63 See Alfred B. Zack-Williams, "Child Soldiers in the Civil War in Sierra Leone," Review of African Political Economy 28, no. 87 (March 2001), pp. 73-82.

64 See ibid.

65 Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, "The Children's War: Towards Peace in Sierra Leone," March 26—April 16, 1997, p. 1.

66 Unity Now, August 27, 2001, p.1.

67 See Independent Observer, August 27, 2001, p. 1.