The violence of peace and the role of education: Insights from Sierra Leone

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Abstract

Research on peacebuilding has mushroomed over the last decade and there is a growing interest in the role of education in supporting peacebuilding processes. This paper engages with these debates, UN peacebuilding activities and the location of education initiatives therein, through a case study of Sierra Leone. In the first part we explore the complex and multi-dimensional nature of violence in post-conflict Sierra Leone. In the second, we critically address the role of education in the conflict and post-conflict period highlighting education's centrality as a catalyst to conflict and then reflect on the failure of the post-conflict reconstruction process to adequately transform the education system into one that could support a process of sustainable peacebuilding. Finally we conclude by exploring the ways that greater investment and focus, both financial and human, in the education sector might in the long term better contribute to a sustainable and socially just peace.

INTRODUCTION

In a country often hailed as an example of the successes of liberal peacebuilding, the 2014 outbreak of the Ebola virus exposed the chronic weaknesses of Sierra Leonean social services, the human tragedy of the unmet needs of the population and raised issues which are particularly relevant to this paper's focus on the violence of peace and the promise of education. While resentment at the state's inability to deliver social services including health and education was a key driver of the conflict, 12 years after the Peace Agreement, the inability to contain the virus has highlighted the chronic infrastructural weaknesses and regional inequalities of the country's healthcare provision. Reports of the lack of treatment centres, trained and committed doctors and nurses, basic equipment, resources and expertise to enable epidemiological surveillance all testify to a hugely under-resourced public health system (Amman, 2014; MacDougall, 2014). Moreover, demonstrations of local communities outside hospitals attempting to treat suspected carriers of the disease, attacks on health workers and a widespread refusal to co-operate with available treatment, bear witness to a deep rooted distrust of public service provision. As commentators have noted (Shepler, 2014; Amman, 2014), such responses indicate the persistence of a historically entrenched and pervasive disconnection between the Sierra Leonean state and its citizens.

Highlighting the persistence of pre-conflict structural and societal weaknesses, the Ebola outbreak has also drawn attention to the failures of the international community whose response has been characterised by the head of Medecin Sans Frontier as 'slow, derisory and irresponsible' (Nierle & Jochum, 2014). Such critiques point to a global failure to recognise the scale of the health challenge and to respond with sufficient speed, cultural sensitivity or awareness of the fragility of local health care systems. Reports that the World Health Organisation sent text messages to illiterate citizens in rural West Africa and organised burials without traditional funeral rites (Amman, 2014) underscore this inattention to cultural context. Moreover, within the western media, decontextualized perceptions of local people's recourse to superstitious beliefs and practices or religious faith as a function of their 'ignorance', rather than as demonstrating a plausible response to their long experience of the failures of state provision (Shepler, 2014), also evince a doctrinaire rather than contextually rooted understanding. The outbreak of Ebola thus reveals multiple dimensions of violence at the heart of peace. It evidences the failures of peacebuilding to repair state-society relations or to address the structural and service-related roots of conflict and alienation. It also exposes misrecognition of local needs and contexts by the international community and spotlights the widespread human misery endured by Sierra Leoneans. These dimensions of violence – and their undercutting of peacebuilding aims in relation to education – are explored in this paper.

Peacebuilding research has mushroomed over the last decade, and produced a rich and varied body of literature that both defends and critiques current theories, models and practices (c.f. Paris 2004; Richmond, 2012). There is also a growing interest in the role and potential of education in peacebuilding processes from academic and practitioner circles at global, regional, national and local levels (c.f. Smith, 2011; Novelli & Smith, 2011). This paper seeks to engage with these debates, UN peacebuilding activities and education initiatives therein, through drawing upon a critical review of the literature on education in Sierra Leone, including drawing upon our own work carried out since 2010.

In the first part we want to explore the complex and multi-dimensional nature of violence in post-conflict Sierra Leone (referred to throughout as SL). In this we draw upon a broad definition of violence that incorporates structural, symbolic and cultural aspects to make the case that the type of peace constructed through and by the UN and its international backers, and the respective post-conflict administrations in SL, was a thin form of 'negative peace' (Galtung, 1976) which while ensuring the non-return to major armed conflict, has failed to sufficiently address the underpinning and diverse modes of violence and grievances that underpinned the outbreak of conflict in the 1990s, and which if left unaddressed are storing up problems for the future. In the second part of the article, we critically address the role of education in the conflict and post-conflict period highlighting education's centrality as a catalyst to conflict and reflect on the failure of the post-conflict reconstruction process to adequately transform the education system into one that could support a process of sustainable peacebuilding. Finally we conclude by suggesting the need for greater investment and focus in the education sector that is locally grounded and informed and targets the entire education system to address the multiple dimensions of the violence of peace. Prior to this we begin with a short background to the conflict in SL to better ground the subsequent discussion.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT IN SIERRA LEONE

The war in SL began in 1991 when members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attacked towns in Kailahun District, near the Liberian border. The RUF claimed its mission was to overthrow the one-party regime of the All People's Congress (APC), in power since 1968, and bring democracy. Some commentators found no coherent cause behind the RUF (Keen 2005), while others (Richards 1996) saw its rise as a response by youth (especially rural youth) to the failure of Sierra Leonean society to offer them access to opportunity and social mobility in a society riven with inequalities, patronage and deprivation. Initially, the RUF were pitted against the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and soon after the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) – known as the 'kamajors', the latter emerging as a civilian response to the perceived failure of the SLA to mount a robust challenge to the RUF. As the conflict developed, the SLA grew from 3,000 ill-equipped and poorly trained soldiers to 14,000, drawing on the recruitment of local youth. These ill-equipped, poorly trained and underpaid soldiers often appeared to have little loyalty to the state and became known as 'sobels' – soldiers by day and rebels by night, contributing

to the general insecurity felt by the population, rather than protecting them (Keen 2005). Similarly, the CDF grew from a set of loosely linked anti-RUF paramilitaries to a fighting force of more than 20,000 members. The RUF's progress was halted in 1995 when the Government of Sierra Leone hired Executive Outcomes, a South African private security company, to repel the rebels. After a series of aborted peace agreements, a final agreement was reached in January 2002.

While 'peace' has persisted, the war took a heavy toll. Between 50,000 and 75,000 people were killed as a result of the conflict and more than half of the country's population was displaced, either internally or externally (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2004). The UNDP Human Development Report (2010) estimated that average income was reduced by 50 per cent after 11 years of war. The conflict in SL is internationally renowned for the mass abduction and use of child soldiers, drug use among combatants, and the widespread use of rape and sexual violence. Similarly, amputation, as a weapon of war, left thousands without limbs. However, while the amputees represented the most visible victims of the conflict, the psychological scars of the conflict were more widespread and deeper.

EDUCATION AFTER WAR

Education was dramatically affected by the civil war, particularly in the country's rural areas, where it was almost entirely halted. While statistics in SL are often unreliable, it is estimated that up to 70 per cent of the school-aged population had limited or no access to education during the war (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2004), leaving a legacy of a lost generation of non-school-goers. During the conflict, hundreds of schools were severely damaged or destroyed. In Freetown, it was estimated that 70 per cent of schools were destroyed (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2004). Initially, the destruction of educational institutions was concentrated outside of Freetown, but as the conflict entered Freetown its urban schools were also targeted. Higher Education was not immune to these attacks. Njala University was the target of violence and destruction. Other higher education institutions in Makeni, Port Loko and elsewhere were also closed throughout the conflict (Alghali et al. 2005), with many occupied by the rebels, and then later Economic Community Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) soldiers, with devastating effects (Wright 1997; Novelli, 2011). The World Bank estimated that by 2001, only 13 per cent of SL's schools were usable, 35 per cent required total reconstruction and more than half required refurbishment (World Bank 2007).

Thousands of teachers and children were killed, maimed or displaced and many more were either forcibly or voluntarily recruited into the ranks of the different warring parties (Wright 1997). The combined effects of more than a decade of war, the psychosocial trauma of victims and perpetrators, the destruction of educational infrastructure and materials, and the displacement of both students and teachers meant that the reconstruction of the education system was a monumental task.

THE VIOLENCE OF PEACE: THE SECURITY-FIRST APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING AND THE LIBERAL PEACE THESIS

Post-war reconstruction has been a huge challenge for all involved, with the country devastated by 11 years of war and the resultant human, financial and psychosocial damage. At the end of the war, SL was at the foot of the UNDP's Human Development Index, with social services destroyed, large amounts of the population displaced and infrastructure shattered (World Bank 2007). This post-war period is seen as a success by many commentators, not least because peace has been maintained, several elections have been held, and much infrastructure has been rebuilt (GOSL 2013). In light of the discrediting and collapse of the RUF as a political force in SL after the war, the APC and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) have presided over the post-war political landscape and remained the dominant political forces in the country. In May 2002, President Kabbah, of the SLPP, was re-elected to a five-year term. In 2007, in the second post-war elections, President Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC was elected and in 2012 he was re-elected for a second and final term.

Interview data suggests that both the national Government and the international community in SL saw security as the a-priori objective upon which all other processes were constructed in the country in the immediate post-conflict period. One senior representative of a major bilateral donor noted that:

> *The security sector starts off early and gets more profile partly because it's more high risk, partly because there are gunmen … the emphasis is different. I think in Sierra Leone in particular we were talking about getting the social sector, the ministries sorted out later, that's for sure (cited in Novelli, 2011: 14).*

A representative of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) – the biggest single donor in Sierra Leone – noted that in the immediate post-war period the agency placed:

> *... a big emphasis on particularly the military, on the kind of security side but also justice and Magistrate's Courts and so on and prisons. There was an element in there of education and training as there still is with the army, and basic human rights awareness, literacy, that kind of stuff, but by and large the two things have been rather separate (cited in Novelli, 2011: 14).*

While this emphasis on security does not necessarily preclude a focus on redressing the huge geographical and social inequalities, poverty reduction and improving social services, it does, however, emphasize the chronological order of the importance of security versus social reforms, one commentator notes:

'Security first' denotes the idea that before one can sustainably engage in development, a basic level of security must be established. A secure environment will ensure that development efforts are less likely to be disrupted or diverted by conflict, and that stability will attract investors who would otherwise be dissuaded by volatility. In this way, security is a precondition of development (Denney 2011: 279)

In line with other post-Cold War international interventions, the security-first agenda is closely linked to the implementation of what Paris (2004) calls the 'liberal peace thesis', which prioritizes the introduction of liberal democracy and market forces as key drivers of stability once security has been achieved. According to Castaneda (2009), this approach can be conceptualized as 'trickle-down peace', whereby you first aim to obtain a 'negative peace', then democracy, and these two factors will then encourage foreign direct investment, which will then lead to economic growth. However, just as trickle-down economics failed to reach many of the most vulnerable sections of the population in the 1980s, and provided a catalyst to the conflict in SL, so it is not clear that 'trickle-down peace' was a sufficiently robust development model to address the marginalized majority in SL.

Denney (2011) suggests that rather than security and development occurring symbiotically in SL, it increasingly appears that security has not been followed by development, but rather an uneasy co-existence of security and misery. This minimalist security agenda, followed by the liberal peace thesis, frames much of the international discourse on SL and its reported post-war success, and can help us to understand why investment in social services such as health, education and welfare in UN peacebuilding programmes lag behind those of security and democracy promotion (McCandless, 2011). Only in 2010 did DFID, the country's biggest donor, begin to focus on the importance of education and committed £30 million during the subsequent three years (Novelli, 2011).

The privileging of security within the logic of liberal peacebuilding has foreclosed systematic and prompt attention to the nexus between educational inequality and violence which underpinned the outbreak of conflict in SL. Unpacking some of this process leads us to reflect on the way national and international elites conceptualise violence, emphasising visible manifestations of overt violence and obscuring cultural, structural, symbolic and other forms of violence that while less visible are often closely linked to the public spectacle of overt armed conflict. As Stewart (2009; 2014) notes vertical inequalities (between individuals) and horizontal inequalities (between groups) often lie at the root of contemporary conflicts. The violence of economic deprivation, racism and prejudice, regional disparities, elitism, corruption can often be found as powerful underpinning catalysts for the manifestation of armed conflicts. Their avoidance leads to international actors targeting symptoms (public expressions of violence) rather than the underpinning causes. Galtung (1973) talked of this in terms of the difference between negative and positive peace, with the former referring to the cessation of armed violence and the latter to addressing the underlying factors that underpinned this

outbreak. Galtung emphasised those 'pervasive' forms of violence that are 'built into' structures, institutions, ideologies and histories (Dilts, 2010: 191). Aiming to broaden our understanding of the category of violence beyond direct physical violence, Galtung sought to direct attention to inequalities of power, resources and life opportunities that lie beneath the outbreak of armed conflict. As noted recently, one of the strengths of Galtung's categorisation is its opening up of the notion of violence to recognise its multi-dimensionality to include 'poverty, hunger, subordination and social exclusion' (Winter, 2012: 195). Within such a framework, 'Galtung argues that the failure to prevent injury, pain and suffering is as relevant to social and political analysis as is their perpetration' (Winter, 2012: 195). This understanding of violence points to the complex ways that injustices and inequalities are linked to the outbreak of armed conflict.

If we judge success in post-conflict reconstruction on the basis of the absence of a return to violence and the establishment of democracy and free markets, then SL is rightly seen as a good case of post-conflict reconstruction. However, if we measure success on the basis of addressing the causes of conflict, restoring justice and addressing inequalities, then perhaps the minimalist security agenda needs to be challenged with a more equity-focused approach. Currently available data on levels of poverty, unemployment, access to healthcare and education underlines the continued existence of widespread human suffering especially in the provincial and rural areas as well as the continuation of pre-war regional inequalities in access to social services.

While emphasising the country's economic growth over the decade since the end of the war, the 'Agenda for Prosperity' recently published by the Government of SL (GOSL 2014) acknowledges that 'over half the population live in poverty, 45% of households are food insecure (GOSL 2014: xvi) and malnutrition is widespread'. Moreover, the report points out that 'social protection services… are fragmented and inadequate in coverage and targeting' (ibid.). Data from the 2011 SL Integrated Household Survey makes clear the uneven geographic distribution of these high levels of poverty with stark contrasts between Freetown and the provinces: the report concludes that 'poverty remains deep in the rural areas, where the average individual in poverty falls short by 21% of their basic needs' (GOSL, 2014:12). High levels of unemployment and underemployment, especially among youth and women are also identified as a continuing national challenge. The implications for education of the continuity of pre-war inequalities are evident in the conclusions of the Sierra Leone Education Country Status Report (GOSL 2013). It notes that while there have been many improvements over the period 2000-2013 e.g. in primary and secondary school enrolment, the 'distribution of education resources continues to favour the wealthy and children living in urban areas' (2013: xxxv). These facts and figures have resulted in SL being placed 183rd of 187 countries in the United Nation's Human Development Index (UNDP 2014).

In relation to the argument of this paper, what this data draws attention to is the failure of the post-conflict period to address some of the key underlying drivers of conflict, especially in relation to the equitable provision of social services. This failure results in part from the rationale and priorities of interventions rooted in the logic of the 'liberal' peacebuilding model. As Cubitt (2012) has pointed out, 'shrinking the state does not conflate well with the enormous challenge of building state capacity to fulfil its core functions, including much needed welfare provision, which remains a serious challenge for peace' (2012: 113).

In the next section we explore the education sector and the way education, rather than a vehicle for sustainable peacebuilding, was itself a catalyst to war.

EDUCATION AS LEVER OF CONFLICT

SL's educational history is firmly rooted in its colonial past. The first examples of Western-style education in sub-Saharan Africa were found in SL with the first school for boys founded in 1845 and the first school for girls in 1849. The first tertiary institution in sub-Saharan Africa, Fourah Bay College, was founded in Freetown in 1827 (GOS-MEYS 2010). This educational legacy was highly elitist and accessible only to a small minority of the population. Even after 1896, when the rest of what is now called SL became a protectorate, the colonial administration was disproportionately concerned with the colony (Freetown) rather than the protectorate (the rest of the country), driving tensions including in educational access, between the capital region and the 'up-country' regions (Ibid.).

In 1936, more than 50 per cent of children in the colony of Freetown attended school, while less than 3 per cent of those in the protectorate did. By 1954, the percentage of children in school in the protectorate increased only to 8 per cent, while in Freetown approximately 85 per cent of children attended school (Hilliard 1957). The Krio-speaking population in Freetown – freed slaves and their descendants – were privileged in educational opportunities and access to jobs from the colonial period onward. Regional disparities in access were still present immediately after the conflict, with Freetown's Western region having a 75 per cent enrolment, the Southern region enrolling 48 per cent, the Eastern region 35 per cent and the Northern region only 25 per cent (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2004). As Banya notes:

> The modern education system's development was quite uneven in Sierra Leone. It first developed in and has remained largely confined to, urban centres. Rural areas, where the vast majority of Sierra Leoneans live, were left largely unaffected by the modern education system. This imbalance can be traced to the historical pattern of educational development during British rule. …. The imbalance between higher education, on the one hand, and secondary and primary schools, on the other, is one of the enduring legacies of British rule. … Independence further exacerbated the bias towards higher education as the urban middle and upper classes who had benefitted from the previous system became the political

leaders… Despite nearly 30 years of formal independence, the educational system of Sierra Leone has not changed (Banya, 1993:163).

What we learn from this historical legacy is education's pivotal role in regulating social mobility, and that its uneven and elitist nature clearly served as one of the drivers of the conflict when it broke out in 1991. By the late 1980s, the education system had deteriorated to such an extent that only approximately 400,000 children were enrolled in primary school – approximately 55 per cent of the relevant student cohort (MEYS 2010; Republic of SL 2001). In many rural areas, schooling had all but collapsed due to austerity measures imposed during the structural adjustment period and the lack of priority placed on education by the Government. Education, rather than a vehicle for developing social cohesion, equity and opportunity, had itself become a key conflict driver.

For many commentators "the war in Sierra Leone is [was] a tussle for the hearts and minds of young people" (Richards 1995:87), with youth exclusion a core conflict driver. War offered an opportunity to reverse entrenched power structures and gave these young people (particularly men) something to do (Keen 2005; Richards 1995). Keen (2005), and Richards (1995) highlight young people's anger at educational (and other forms of) exclusion, as well as their great desire to access education and the opportunities it promised. Interestingly, the call for free education was 'one of the few explicit demands' by the RUF leadership (Wright 1997), which began to target the highly educated as well as educational institutions as the war began. RUF's foundational documents, prepared in 1989, make reference to education as a core contributory factor in the country's demise and critiqued its elitist and colonial nature:

> *There is a need for a complete overhauling of the present educational system. The prevailing system is a major contributing factor to our current state of industrial and technological backwardness. The educational system was initially a colonial imposition, which did not take into consideration the aspirations and needs of our people. The sole intention was to train passive and obedient Africans to man the colonial state structure. What was expected of any serious-minded African ruling class was to radically alter the inherited educational system immediately after the attainment of independence. In our country, the ruling class simply continued from where the British colonialist left.* (Basic Document of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL): The Second Liberation of Africa**,** prepared in 1989)

THE VIOLENCE OF PEACEBUILDING: EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS IN POST-CONFLICT SIERRA LEONE

A recent report on the political economy of education systems in conflict-affected contexts highlighted a disjunction between education's transformatory potential and the narrow framing of education policy and programming within the global agendas of international aid organisations committed to the liberal peacebuilding model (Novelli et al, 2014). As a result of this disjunction,

education policy and programmes are often framed within narrow, technical parameters – for instance, access or efficiency - that bypass pivotal peace-related issues in post-conflict societies, including the rectification of social and cultural inequalities and recognition of the identities of marginalised groups. Key education-related drivers of conflict such as economic and political exclusion go unaddressed.

Insights from studies of a variety of educational interventions in SL since the Peace Agreement in 2002 powerfully support these assertions, indicating how well intentioned global agendas have undermined the potential of education to achieve peacebuilding objectives and contribute to context-responsive social transformation. This section reflects on recent evidence within three key policy areas of post-conflict education programming. The first is gender inequity, the second the management and deployment of teachers and the third is youth programming. While not exhaustive, they are offered as illustrative examples of the way education programming often fails to achieve its peacebuilding potential.

GENDER INEQUITY

A study of the implementation of policies to rectify gender inequities in SL by Denov and Maclure (2009) notes that policy-making frameworks, both international and national, have been centred on 'reconstruction' and the expansion of girls' access to schooling as a priority of educational reconstruction. The study recognises the success of such initiatives in expanding female enrolment rates; thus between 2001 and 2004, the number of children attending primary school doubled, rising from an estimated 650,000 to 1.3 million, with girls accounting for 45 percent of all primary school enrolments. However, the prioritisation of access and quantitative targets, including the number of schools built, teachers hired and students enrolled, is they argue, 'unlikely to foster the rectification of entrenched gender disparities' (Maclure and Denov, 2009:613). They draw attention to the limitations of such narrowly target-driven educational interventions alone in transforming gender relations, given the persistence of 'deep seated socio-cultural constraints which exist both within education and in the wider social contexts impacting on educational structures and procedures' (ibid). On the one hand, the study draws attention to the neglect of curricular reforms to integrate domestic violence and discrimination against women, as well as the reform of teacher training, to ensure the promotion of gender equity through classroom teaching and learning. On the other hand, the predominantly patriarchal arrangements that infuse social, economic and political relations throughout SL, as well as continuing widespread violence against women and girls in and outside of classrooms, are emphasised. Moreover, the fragility of SL's economy means a lack of job opportunities for youth, which will impact more negatively on girls than boys 'given the interconnections between the scramble for work and the prevalence of patriarchal power relations'. By contrast with the failure of such interventions to inform and equip boys and girls, through

education, to challenge deep-rooted patriarchal cultural attitudes and practices, the report also singles out the very different approaches of some local womens' organisations – the 50/50 group and the Forum for African Women Educationalists. 'These organisations', argue Maclure & Denov, ' are focusing on girls' education not as a neutral end in itself, but rather as an integral component of a broad based, politicised struggle to advance the cause of women's participation in all aspects of national life' (Maclure & Denov, 2009: 619). Going beyond a concern with increasing access and enrolment, these groups mobilise girls education 'to enable women to more effectively confront and contest gendered inequalities and injustices that are embedded in the larger society' (Maclure & Denov,2009:619). Positioning the post-war concern of gender equity policy with achieving quantitative targets to enhance girls access to education in relation to a more politicised understanding of the potential of girls education 'as integral to economic and political actions aimed at challenging the hegemony of patriarchy and gendered violence' (ibid. 619), the study draws attention to the weaknesses of an overly technical framing of educational interventions that foreclose their potential to contribute to deep-rooted social change.

TEACHER MANAGEMENT

Insights from recent studies of the management of teachers – their salaries, working conditions and deployment - reveals a similar post-conflict narrative in which global imperatives – this time neoliberal macroeconomic policies – trump the possibility of interventions to address structural factors which constrain their potential to contribute to peacebuilding. The pivotal role of teachers in educational reconstruction is widely recognised within national policy and programming. Despite this, 12 years after the Peace Agreement, studies of the morale, motivation and conditions of service of Sierra Leonean teachers paint a depressing picture of daily immiseration. A recent study concluded that 'on the whole teaching in SL is an unattractive and unappreciated profession with teachers contending with low pay, late pay or...no pay at all', problems which are 'exacerbated for teachers working in the Northern, Southern and Eastern provinces, far from the Freetown area' (Amman & O'Donnell, 2011: 60: see also Turrent, 2012:7). The problems of low and irregular or late pay are exacerbated by the length of time it takes for teachers to be admitted onto the government payroll so that many work for a year or longer before receiving payment (Harding & Mansaray, 2005). Thompson, (2010) notes that while there are over 30,000 teachers on the government payroll, a report released by the SLTU says up to 2000 teachers had not received salaries for the previous two years. He reports that in real terms, teacher's pay had fallen by over a half since the mid-1990s, but workloads increased appreciably. Not surprisingly, the profession is reported to suffer high rates of attrition 'with many teachers leaving after four year's service due to chronic delay or absence of pay and poor working conditions' (Turrent, 2012, 7: Action Aid, 2007, Shepler, 2010).

These studies bear witness to the constraints on teachers' personal and professional agency resulting from their daily exposure to conditions of precarity and vulnerability. Evidence indicating that most arrive at school hungry (Harding & Mansaray, 2005), that their pay, if it arrives, only partially covers household expenditure for food and basic needs, that most take a second job to make ends meet (Harding & Mansaray 2006: 7), and that most worry about looking after their families, all underscore the relentless personal hardship attending the daily existence of SL's teachers. 'Teachers are not paid living wages and barely live from one pay check to the next' is the conclusion of a recent report on educational provision in the Kono district (Mbayo, 2010:14) . These constraints also extend into their classroom spaces: the same report notes that a ' lack of adequate infrastructure, furniture and washing facilities was widespread in the 50 primary schools assessed leading to overcrowding of classrooms and safety concerns in some' as was a shortage or more commonly an absence of learning materials and textbooks (2010:14,20). Other reports note that classroom overcrowding is commonplace, particularly at the primary school level with the average teacher-student ratio of one teacher per 66 primary school students (Marphatia, 2009). This grim picture of professional disempowerment and personal vulnerability is confirmed by the SLTU which reported that 'many teachers are demotivated by low wages or delay/lack of salaries altogether, demoralised by the crowded classrooms and their lack of training or access to professional development opportunities (cited in Marphatia 2009: xxx).

Alongside insights into the micro realities of teachers' lives, education sector wide studies also draw attention to their positioning within systemic educational inequities that serve to continue the very conditions that generated alienation and conflict. A chronic lack of trained and qualified teachers to meet the post-war upsurge in school enrolment, an over reliance on untrained and unqualified 'community' teachers who are not on the government payroll and paid by community handouts/stipends and a shortage of teachers in rural areas are repeated concerns (Turrent, 2012). The findings of a recent study of educational provision in Kono region, an area which was at the epicentre of the conflict (Mbayo, 2010:22), noted that among teachers 'across the 50 primary schools assessed only 35% had the required teaching certificate'.

While the instrumentalisation of teachers as peacebuilders is thus undermined by a chronic shortage of teachers as well as poor salaries and working conditions, a report by Action Aid: 'Confronting the Contradictions; the IMF, Wage Bill Caps and the Case for Teachers' (2007) draws attention to the limitations on the capacity of the national government to address these challenges given its commitment to annual ceilings on the wage bill for public employees set by the International Monetary Fund. Action Aid (2005, 21) reported that in 2005 the government of SL took the decision to decrease the public sector wage bill from 8.4% to 5.8 % by 2008 as a result of IMF advice. Although an estimated 8000 teachers were needed to help the country deal with a massive out of school

population after the brutal civil war, only 3000 could be hired in 2004. The country's 2007, 10 year Education Sector Plan is explicit on the reasons for its limited ability to address the teacher shortage: 'the country averages 60 pupils a teacher and 112 pupils per qualified teacher. There is an obvious need to hire more qualified teachers but a ceiling on teacher employment made necessary by the Ministry of Finance and IMF requirements has made that impossible' (quoted in Marphatia, 2009:35). Evaluating the relationships between the IMF and government ministries of Finance and Education, Youth and Schools and local civil society, Action Aid also highlighted the lack of consultations or collaborative analysis of the level of the wage ceiling or of the needs of the post-conflict education sector in relation to the recruitment and management of teachers (Action Aid, 2007: 11). We may conclude that in the case of teacher numbers and salaries, peacebuilding needs and their analysis are marginalised by the national government's accommodation to the IMF's macro-economic targets. As a result 'policies continue to be divorced from the reality on the ground, failing to take into account the persisting teacher shortage and its devastating impact on the quality of education' (Action Aid, 2007: vi). Constrained by priorities defined within global financial imperatives, the SL government's ability to address the precarious conditions in which teachers live and work – thereby enhancing their peacebuilding agency - has been drastically undermined.

YOUTH

Insights into the current predicament of Sierra Leonean youth also underscore the limitations of interventions framed by the macro-economic and securitisation priorities of liberal peacebuilding. Over a decade ago SL's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was unequivocal in emphasising the urgent attention needed to be given to the plight of conflict-affected youth. 'Many of the dire conditions that gave rise to the conflict in 1991 remain in 2004' its report warned: 'as in the late 1980s, many young adults continue to occupy urban ghettoes where they languish in a twilight zone of unemployment and despair' (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2004: vol.2, chapter 3, 165). Since then, many other commentators (Hanlon, 2005; Cubitt, 2011, 2012, 2013; Peters, 2011) have lamented the persistence into the post-conflict period of the very conditions that generated pre-conflict youth alienation, while also pointing to the collusion of international policymaking in creating such disappointing outcomes. The questions that form the titles of such analyses, for instance - 'Is the International Community helping to create the preconditions for war in SL? (Hanlon 2005) and 'Employment in SL: what happened to post-conflict job creation? (Cubbitt, 2011) - underscore their message of international responsibility and failed expectations. Recent calls for urgent measures to address the economic marginalisation of Sierra Leone's rural and urban youth suggests that their plight continues to remain essentially unaddressed. A report produced for SL's National Youth Commission (National Youth Commission, 2012) concludes that 'the high levels of poverty and unemployment and underemployment that characterise more than 70% of the country's

population, a large share of whom are youth, call for extraordinary measures to tackle them' (National Youth Commission, 2012:viii). The report identifies a range of failures of educational provision as contributory factors to the youth crisis including lack of investment in technical and vocational education, mismatches between secondary and higher education curricula and labour market needs, and low rates of access to and completion of secondary and higher education. It concludes that 'the robust economic growth performance after the civil war was not matched with corresponding increases in remunerative employment opportunities for the country's able-bodied population, worse still for the youth' (National Youth Commission, 2012: 10). Analysis of SL's economic trajectory in the post-conflict period links this failure to create viable employment opportunities for youth to the misplaced attempts by the international community to tie aid and debt relief to the government's implementation of processes of economic liberalisation with insufficient regard to local structural challenges (Cubitt, 2011, 2012). Reduction of the role of government in the economy and expansion of the private sector were promoted as 'reforms, which would bring development, growth and jobs' (Cubitt, 2011: 6). However, Cubitt explains how pervasive contextual factors including lack of financial transparency, inability of the country to attract foreign investment, weak infrastructure, reduced public sector employment and the continuation of patrimonial practices, all undermined the capacity of such expectations to translate into job creation. 'Given the post-conflict political and cultural context and the many challenges of the post-war environment', Cubitt argues, 'liberalisation was not doable even if it was desirable' (Cubitt, 2011: 12). The continuing precaritisation of young people in Sierra Leone suggests that they have become victims not only of conflict but also of the counter-productive insistence by the international community that SL's post-conflict economic trajectory should follow the liberalising priorities of peacebuilding interventions.

At a more conceptual level, the assumptions within which youth agency is understood within the security/development logic that underpins liberal peacebuilding have proven to be similarly counter-productive. These issues are explored in a recent study of the provision of vocational education and employment opportunities in SL supported by the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture, UNPBA (Enria, 2012). This highlights the 'stark discrepancies between the exigencies and constraints faced by international organisations and the lives and perspectives of young people on the streets of Freetown' (Enria, 2012: 44). Enria notes how the UNPA's rationale for programming framed the 'youth employment question' within the statebuilding aims of liberal peacebuilding that conjoined 'security and socio-economic development' (Enria, 2012: 43). Within this strategy, youth employment and related education and training was represented by policymakers as a vehicle for the pacification of a constituency which presented a threat to the state's stability, thereby strengthening the Sierra Leonean government and contributing to post-conflict statebuilding (Enria, 2012: 48). Indeed the PBA 'cast itself as technical supporter of the Sierra Leonean state' (Enria, 2012: 50). However, Enria points out that the consequent stereotyping of unemployed youth as a security risk in the PBA's policy

directives - in line with the securitisation of unemployment - bypassed the precise context and conflict- specific attention to the 'channels through which through which unemployment leads to violence' (Enria, 2012; 49). That the resulting Youth Enterprise Development Project offered Sierra Leonean youth the opportunity of participation in a generic micro-finance scheme commonplace in non-conflict scenarios reflected this decontextualized approach.

In stark contrast to the reductive positioning of SL youth as security threats needing work, Enria's interviews with long term unemployed youth in Western Freetown indicate how their economic predicament was inseparable from a highly negative attitude to the post-conflict state based on their 'experiences of marginalisation from formal state structures and exploitation from informal relations with state officials' (Enria, 2012: 50). For instance, respondents frequently pointed to their exclusion from clientelist networks and their lack of 'connections' as well as their criminalisation by figures of authority to explain their unemployment. Their disillusion with the state was further compounded by experiences of being mobilised by politicians for political violence at election times.

Highlighting the disjunction between the perspectives of young Sierra Leoneans and their positioning within UN PBA employment interventions, Enria's analysis draws attention to two key weaknesses of the conceptual parameters of liberal peacebuilding. Firstly, when youth unemployment is understood as a security risk the complexity of their economic plight and its interconnections with a larger sense of alienation from authority and social exclusion are bypassed. The simplistic linking of unemployment and violence results in an impoverished understanding of youth agency detached from the particular cultural political economy contexts in which it is shaped and constrained within SL's post-war, but nevertheless conflict-affected environment. Within this logic, the instrumentalisation of youth employment and related educational interventions as a component of statebuilding has resulted in a miscrecognition of the complexity and context-specific nature of their needs. Secondly the analysis draws attention to the limitations of the privileging of formal state structures within the reconstruction priorities of liberal peacebuilding. Such an approach may marginalise grassroots engagement with constituencies such as youth with conflicted relations to state authority, making it difficult to retrieve the 'youth voice' so essential to effective policies and programming on their behalf (Lopes Cardozo et al, 2015: 62). Analysis of interventions to support another key conflict affected constituency, ex-combatants - in particular the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes under the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDR) - reveal a similar pattern of misrecognition of context-specific needs and conflict dynamics combined with massive under-investment in requisite financial and human resources. The UN Secretary General warned in 2002 that the programme was short of funds thus undermining its potential benefits to participants with the result that 'many would return to fighting either in SL or in neighbouring Liberia' (quoted in Hanlon, 2005: 466). Critiques of the

failure to properly invest in DDR processes (Porter, 2003, quoted in Hanlon, 2005: 466) draw attention to the incoherence of 'donors parsimony towards peacebuilding activities.. in view of the high sum invested in UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in SL)' highlighting precisely that privileging of investment in security over attention to local need which has been a recurring theme of this paper. Indeed, the disconnection of the programme's content from the dynamics of rural conflict experienced by the majority of ex-combatants is underlined by an ethnographic study of their perspective and experiences (Peters, 2011). The programme's orientation to urban employment through its short-term provision of vocational skills training and start-up packages bypassed attention to 'the more general rural crisis for young people in SL'. (Peters, 2011: 16). In failing to offer agricultural options as attractive as its urban-related work options the programme missed an opportunity to contribute to the wellbeing and livelihoods of the vast majority of its participants. Peters concludes that 'the most kind hearted conclusion one can draw from this is that those designing and implementing the project knew rather too little about the realities of rural SL and the rural young people who fought the war' (Peters, 2011: 202). In pointing out how the programme's priorities were collusive with the interests of an urban elite, including politicians, with links to global corporate mining projects and little concern to promote agricultural development, this study also confirms the limitations of state-centric interventions which are liable to elite capture at the expense of meaningful dialogue with the perspectives and contexts of local constituencies including youth (Novelli et al, 2014: 59).

CONCLUSIONS

Reflecting on more than a decade of 'peace' in SL, our analysis suggests that the international community has contributed to the restoration to power of the old order – albeit in a slightly more democratic form – and sidestepped the need for more widespread social transformation. This reflects a narrow conceptualization of peacebuilding that appears dominant within international policy debates on post-conflict intervention, which reduces the term to a mode of stabilization and avoids notions of transformation. As a result of the prioritization of security, democracy and markets, education appears as a marginal component in the overall picture of reconstruction, which is lamentable, as education appears to be at the heart of both the core problems of Sierra Leonean society and one of its potential solutions.

While our critique of the peacebuilding model deployed in SL raised the importance of education, our penultimate section highlighted that this is by no means a plea either for a restoration of the old education system, nor for the adoption of a generic 'global education menu'. The historical analysis demonstrates how British colonialism produced a highly elitist and geographically uneven education system, which was reproduced by post-colonial national elites. The examples of post-conflict programming offered, similarly highlighted the way international agencies reproduce global technical

models of education practice and reform and are subject to the broader disciplinary practices of macro-economic reforms, both of which fail to address local realities of social exclusion and inequality and therefore miss the potential for education to contribute to processes of sustainable and socially just peacebuilding. In the cases of teachers, gender inequity and youth constituencies this review has brought together compelling evidence of the prolonged misrecognition and neglect of the context-specific needs and experiences of key stakeholders within interventions and approaches informed by the priorities – conceptual and processual - of liberal peacebuilding.

In essence we are pointing towards a two-way disjuncture. On the one hand the global peacebuilding model is highly un-social, top-down, overly securitised, fails to address the underlying causes of conflict and sees education as a marginal concern. On the other hand post-conflict education programming and planning, has drawn from a global education menu that is insensitive to conflict, generic and technical, and as a result tends to reproduce and by default work in tandem with the broader stabilisation agenda, by avoiding a focus on conflict drivers and conflict resolvers.

Education has the potential to play a much greater role in peacebuilding in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, but it requires that the current model of peacebuilding is challenged and modified for a more sustainable model that emphasizes the long-term transformations necessary for sustainable peacebuilding and balances security concerns with investments in mechanisms that can address underlying structural inequalities that underpin conflicts, and work towards a more socially just education system and society . Central in achieving this is to ground education programming in context and conflict sensitive analysis that is firmly rooted in dialogue and participation with local and national stakeholders with the aim of retrieving, valorising and reclaiming the agency of these actors to produce more grounded and transformatory solutions. This links closely to what Richmond has called a 'post-liberal peacebuilding' agenda (Richmond, 2012).

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