

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Enclosed are clippings of the latest local and international press on the Special Court and related issues obtained by the Press and Public Affairs Office as of:

Monday, July 04, 2005

The press clips are produced Monday to Friday.
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ISSUES

BY ABDUL KUYATEH

The Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) remains a contentious institution. In international circles and among Sierra Leoneans at home and in the Diaspora, the debate continues to linger as to whether the SCSL has been a success story in its mission of bringing to book the figure heads of the civil conflict between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels and successive governments, characterized by the systematic and massive violations of the laws of war and human right. This in very simple terms means making people physically accountable for orchestrating, supporting and ordering or even taking part in the shooting and killing of innocent Sierra Leoneans, amputation of arms and limbs, dissecting pregnant women, butchering children and putting whole towns and villages on fire.

The ten years brutal war in Sierra Leone left thousands dead and many more maimed, raped or rendered homeless, offences committed by all the factions in the war- RUF, Kamajor, the army and the ECOMOG interventionists.

The idea of the Special Court, no matter how necessary, logical and essential for the sake of justice and reconciliation, has apparently not been quite successful without ups and downs.

From the perspective of the international community, the SCSL has been the most successful of the four international criminal courts so far experimented, the other being the tribunals for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, for Rwanda in Arusha, and for the Nazis in Nuremberg.

Established by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone by way of resolution 1345 of the Security Council on 14th August 2000, the SCSL was the first of its kind to be established on the basis of an agreement between the UN and one of its member states, Sierra Leone - i.e., on the request of the security council and the government of Sierra Leone.

By resolution 1315, the Security Council requested the Secretary General to negotiate an agreement with the Government of Sierra Leone to create an independent Special Court.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone: A bumpy path to success

In that resolution, the Council reaffirmed that for "persons who commit or authorize serious violations of international conventions on war and human rights" the international community will exert every effort to "bring them to justice in accordance with international standards of justice, fairness and due process of the law."

Furthermore, the Security Council recognized that in the event that "a credible system of justice and accountability is established to try the very serious crimes committed, then there would be an end to impunity, which would contribute to the restoration and maintenance of peace."

On the contrary however, many people in Sierra Leone have perceived the Court as a punitive measure (potential source of conflict) which gravely undermines and contradicts the spirit and objective of the reconciliation process, mandated by the Lome Peace Agreement signed between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Forces on July 7th 1999, which called for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Sub-articles i and ii of Article XXVI of the Lome Accord states thus:

"A Truth and Reconciliation Commission shall be established to address impunity break the cycle of violence, provide a forum for both the victims and perpetrators of human right violations, facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation" (sub-article i)

Sub-article ii states:

"In the spirit of national reconciliation, the Commission shall deal with the question of

human rights violations since the beginning of the Sierra Leonean conflict in 1991."

Thus critics argue the role of the SCSL in post-war Sierra Leone collides with that of the Lome Peace Agreement, describing the duplication as unnecessary and wasteful.

In addition to the timeliness of the SCSL, vis-à-vis the establishment of the TRC, also because it has become the subject of criticism, a human rights activist stated that the simultaneous functioning of the two institutions seriously dented the

reconciliation, the GOSL shall ensure that no official or judicial action is taken against any members of the RUF/SL, ex-AFRC or CDF in respect of anything done by them in pursuit of their objectives as members of those organizations since March 1991 up to the time of the signing of the present document. In addition legislative and other measures necessary to guarantee immunity to former combatants, exiles and other persons currently outside the country for reasons related to the armed conflict

peaceful demonstrators in May 2000 by RUF combatants at the residence of their late leader, Foday Sankoh who died in custody.

The next in the row of hurdles that the SCSL was doomed to jump was the question of the courts constitutionality, as raised by fugitive Charles Taylor's lawyer, late Terrence Terry.

Terry's outburst on this issue nearly caused many Sierra Leoneans to disown the Court on the basis of its illegality.

Again, the unsavory development was countered by explaining the circumstances surrounding the special arrangement between the GOSL and the United Nations Security Council that led to the creation of the Court, as an experiment in international criminal justice. "Established on the basis of an agreement between the GOSL and the UN..."

Against the background of the above obstacles for the SCSL is a ray of light at the end of the tunnel. A former Kamajor militia wholeheartedly endorsed the creation of the Special Court.

Shari, now a baker residing in the westend of Freetown, lend credence to the apprehension by the SCSL of particularly Chief Sam Hinge Norman, former deputy minister of defense and national coordinator of the pro-government militia, the Kamajors.

According to him, the Kamajors indeed violated the rules of war in 1998, when he, witnessed the brutal murder of his uncle by Kamajors, citing the names of commanders BJL and Musa Clinisa.

"Even though the Kamajors had an official mission to salvage civilians, they also committed atrocities against the people they were meant to protect," Sahr disclosed.

"Against the background of the above obstacles for the SCSL is a ray of light at the end of the tunnel. A former Kamajor militia wholeheartedly endorsed the creation of the Special Court"

prospects for true reconciliation in post-war Sierra Leone.

"In as much as there was a need for the Special Court, the process of reconciliation should have been allowed to take precedence," stated John Caulker of the Forum of Conscience who argues that compensation for the victims of heinous crimes must be the basis for justice.

Another criticism leveled against the Special Court is in relation to Article IX (Pardon and Amnesty) Sub-article iii of the Lome Accord, which states:

"To consolidate the peace and promote the course of national

shall be adopted, ensuring the full exercises of their civil and political rights, with a view to their reintegration within a framework of full legality."

Clearly critics note the creation of the Special Court was in contravention of this provision.

On the other hand proponents of the Special Court initiative have maintained that the court's mandate conversed only those crimes committed after the signing of the Lome Accord, such as the circumstances that led to the abduction of 500 UN peacekeepers and the horrible daylight shooting to death of

Sahr opined however that the SCSL would be appreciated more if absconded indictees (Charles Taylor and Johnny Paul) could be brought to justice.

This opinion was also shared by Dalton Venn, a builder, according to whom, the SCSL represents an effective check to the crimes committed by the warring factions.

Responding to the hue and cry of ex-Kamajor combatants against the indictment of Chief Sam Hinga, Norman, Venn said that the indictment of Norman went a long way to establish the neutrality of the Court.

Meanwhile, the success of the SCSL in comparison with previous international courts has been described as unprecedented, to the extent that the Court has been recognized as a model in international justice, attracting the attention of international judges and prosecutors, as disclosed by Alison Cooper, of the Special Court press and public affairs office.

She made the revelation while speaking to fourth year students of the Mass Communications Department at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone on the invitation of Fulbright Fellow, Merely Rubine, to deliver a lecture on court reporting.

Not too long following her disclosure, were calls by the international community for Nigeria's president, Oluksengun Obasanjo to hand over Charles Taylor to the SCSL, where he stands indicted for 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

One was the unanimous resolution passed by the US Congress on May 4, 2005, authored by US Rep. Ed Royce. The bipartisan resolution 127 called on Nigeria to turnover the former Liberian president, Charles Taylor to the Special Court.

Earlier the EU parliament passed a similar resolution.

Indeed, the success of the SCSL will largely depend on, as stated by David Crane, chief prosecutor at the Special Court, "unless and until Charles Taylor is brought to justice there will be no peace...."

This view is widely shared by many Sierra Leoneans who believe that the essence and legacy of the Special Court can only be appreciated if the job is finished by the netting of Taylor and AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma, who escaped arrest by the court and fled into thin air.

Recent talks between Nigeria's Obasanjo and US President George Bush brought vistas of hope to the world that Taylor will soon land in the Trial Chamber of the SCSL.



Concord Times. Monday July 4th, 2005.

For Hinga Norman's indictment...

Kamajor exposes SLPP over Special Court

From last edition

Credit Cocorioko

The agreement was what he called "a contract between the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone";

The government of the United States played no role in establishing the court;

He has never said that if elected president of Sierra Leone, he will dissolve the court - only that he will "renegotiate the special court agreement." Over the past few weeks, however, we

have uncovered several instances contradicting Leigh's statements in his letter to me in which he asked me to in effect, withdraw my previous statements indicating that

he was a Johnny-Come-Lately to the special court debate or that he and others were playing both sides of the Hinga Norman debacle.

TO BE CONTINUED

**UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 2 July 2005**

[The media summaries and press clips do not necessarily represent the views of UNMIL.]

International Clips on Liberia

The Daily Telegraph - 2 July 2005

Bloody past is catching up with Liberian despot

By David Blair in Calabar

AFTER impoverishing his country, killing thousands and stealing a fortune, Africa's most notorious fallen tyrant is facing a rising clamour for him to face justice. Charles Taylor, the deposed president of Liberia, benefits from asylum in Nigeria despite being the subject of an Interpol arrest warrant and an indictment on 17 counts of war crimes. A life steeped in bloodshed has not prevented Taylor from enjoying Nigeria's official hospitality and a grace-and-favour residence in a government lodge in the city of Calabar. Yet his immunity may be about to end. Yesterday, 300 human rights groups, including Amnesty International, urged Nigeria to surrender Taylor for a war crimes trial. Kolawole Olaniyan, the director of Amnesty's Africa programme, said this would "not only bring justice to the countless victims of Charles Taylor and their families" but combat the "disastrous cycle of impunity in West Africa". Nigeria's government prizes its reputation.

**UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 01 July 2005**

[The media summaries and press clips do not necessarily represent the views of UNMIL.]

International Clips on Liberia

07/01/2005 13:49:45

**Restructured armed forces the "fulcrum" of new Liberia:
defense minister**

MONROVIA, July 1 (AFP) - Restructured armed forces would be the "fulcrum" of a new post-war Liberia, packed with the brightest minds and devoted to defending the sovereignty of the West African nation, Defense Minister Daniel Chea told AFP Friday.

"We only want the best, those people with the desire to put Liberia first, because the army will be the fulcrum of the new Liberia," Chea said in an interview, one day after the country began dismantling its bloated armed forces ahead of a US-funded restructuring of a smaller army.

06/30/2005 20:54:51

**Liberia: Taylor Still Looms Large As Election Countdown
Begins**

Nearly two years later as Liberia prepares for presidential and parliamentary elections and a return to democracy, the former warlord, Charles Taylor, still looms large in the nation's psyche and diplomats and international researchers say he continues to pull political strings from abroad.

**Côte d'Ivoire: UN threatens sanctions after finding 62
military vehicles at port**

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

ABIDJAN, 30 Jun 2005 (IRIN) - UN officials monitoring an arms embargo against Cote d'Ivoire said on Thursday that they had found 62 military vehicles at Abidjan port, the first potential violation of the restrictions that were slapped on the divided West African nation seven months ago.

"It's the first concrete course we've found and there will be consequences", Pierre Schori, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in Cote d'Ivoire, said at a weekly media briefing.

Local Media – Newspapers

Trial of Taylor Associate Begins Today

(The News and The Analyst)

- The Dutch businessman accused of greasing the war machinery of former President Charles Taylor, Gus Kouwenhoven, will appear in court in his native Holland today to answer to charges of war and economic crimes, according to a local rights group, Green Advocates.

Civil Society Supports Global Campaign for Taylor’s Extradition

(The News and New Democrat)

- At a press conference in Monrovia yesterday, a group of Liberian civil society organizations voiced support for a global campaign to have Nigeria extradite former Liberian President Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone where he faces charges on 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Complete versions of the UNMIL International Press Clips, UNMIL Daily Liberian Radio Summary and UNMIL Liberian Newspapers Summary are posted each day on the UNMIL Bulletin Board. If you are unable to access the UNMIL Bulletin Board and would like further information on the content of the summaries, please contact Ms. Kadiatu Konteh at kontehk@un.org.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Justice Denied

Human Rights and Aid for Africa

By Sonya Maldar, Nigeria Researcher for Human Rights Watch, published in *World Today*

As the G8 leaders meet in Gleneagles, Scotland, all eyes are on Prime Minister Tony Blair as he canvasses support for increased aid and debt relief. The prime minister has called this a 'real moment of opportunity' to promote democracy and growth throughout Africa.

In Nigeria, one of Britain's key allies on the continent, the Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn said in May, 'What happens in Nigeria is crucial for the future of Africa as a whole.' He went on to announce backing for President Olusegun Obasanjo's quest for debt relief. Nigeria owes almost \$36 billion to the Paris Club of creditor nations and Britain's support will be crucial in persuading others to agree to end payments. Benn cites the strides Obasanjo has made in tackling corruption, improving transparency and accountability, and implementing 'impressive and much needed economic reforms.' He pledged to triple the aid programme from \$64 million in 2003 to \$182 million in 2007.

In some respects, the progress is real. And yet, the British government makes no mention of serious human rights abuses that persist in Nigeria, six years after the end of military rule. Thousands have died in communal conflict, the 2003 elections were characterised by fraud, ballot-rigging and violence, and law enforcement agents, most notably the Nigerian police, regularly torture and kill.

Britain is spending \$55 million on a five year, Security, Justice and Growth Programme, a major component of which is collaboration with the police. A flagship community policing programme in the southeastern state of Enugu is scheduled to expand to five other states later this year. Through intensive skills development and leadership training of local officers, it aims to bring major attitudinal change and improvements to police community relations.

It sounds impressive. However, on a recent visit to Enugu State there was little evidence of improvement in police behaviour. Earlier this year, I interviewed fifty victims of alleged police torture from eight states, including Enugu. The forms of brutality they described were shocking and reminiscent of abuse in the military era.

A twenty-three-year old man told me how police in Enugu tied his hands and legs and suspended him from a ceiling fan hook. For four hours he was beaten, had broom bristles inserted into his penis and tear gas powder rubbed in his eyes.

Other victims have described beatings with cable wire, iron bars, wooden planks, pressure from concrete blocks on the arms and back while suspended, the rape of female detainees, the use of pliers or electric shocks on the penis, shooting in the foot or leg, stoning, death threats, and the denial of food and water.

Many have died as a result of their injuries. Others are summarily executed. In the northern city of Kano,

four men, held for periods of up to 23 months, told me they witnessed the death of at least twenty people during their detention. A police officer acknowledged to me, 'There are many cases at the police headquarters where the police intentionally shoot people. They are shooting roughly one person per week.'

The majority of the victims I spoke to were ordinary criminal suspects, arrested for alleged crimes, ranging from petty theft to armed robbery. Many were detained either because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, or on the basis of unverified tip-offs. Again and again, the police failed to inform suspects of the reasons for their arrest, or produce evidence against them.

The primary function of torture was to extract a confession. Victims described how they were forced to write or sign a statement, often without knowing what it said because they could not read, or because officers withheld the document from them.

Torture is perpetrated by and with the knowledge of senior officers, some of whom are known by the nickname OC (Officer in Charge) Torture. It is carried out in local and state police stations, often in interrogation rooms which appear to be especially equipped for the purpose.

In February last year, a 22 year old student from Enugu was arrested by officers who told him he looked like an armed robber who had just stolen a motorbike. Despite protesting his innocence, he was taken to the Enugu State police command and brutally beaten with a metal rod while suspended by his hands from the ceiling. When he refused to admit to stealing the motorbike – no evidence was produced, nor was a complainant named – he was taken to a senior officer. Holding a gun to his head, the officer said that unless he admitted the crime he would be shot. He then ordered his juniors to beat him then and there. The student was forced to sign a statement admitting the crime.

I met the man in prison where he was awaiting trial on charges of armed robbery, a capital offence in Nigeria. He said, 'When I think about what happens it pains me so much. Why did this happen? How did I end up here? Now I just don't know what to do.'

The use of torture has become an acceptable method of interrogation and perpetrators are protected by a culture of impunity. Decades of military rule has entrenched violent and brutal policing practices. Many victims do not even think to question their treatment. When asked if they would complain to the police the typical response was, 'I don't have power so I can't do anything to challenge the police,' or 'who am I to complain, I have no power.'

Those who do try to complain face intimidation or harassment. Two school girls from Enugu told me how they were gang-raped by three police officers in September 2004. They were aged 17 and 18 at the time. With the support of a local human rights organisation, they complained to police authorities. Shortly afterwards they received repeated phone calls from the Enugu State police spokesman and the principal accused who said, 'If you don't drop the case, I will deal with you and show you I am a man.'

In the rare instances that cases are brought before a court, obstruction from the police and connivance with members of the judiciary ensure the perpetrators are seldom held accountable. As far as Human Rights Watch has been able to establish, no police officer alleged to have committed torture has been successfully prosecuted.

Senior officers deny the undeniable. The head of the police in Kano State boasts that he has never received a

complaint of torture or ill-treatment. He told me: 'I've never found that torture has been used to extract confessions. It never happens here.'

Since 1999 national efforts to reform the police have failed to introduce accountability or bring about a reduction in abuse. In January, Sunday Ehindero, the new head of the force, announced an ambitious programme of reform, promising to improve intelligence and investigative capacity, expand community policing, and change the philosophy and attitudes.

Theoretically, the reform programme could bear fruit. But success will depend on political backing from Obasanjo. There is little sign of that. Since coming to power in 1999, the president has shown little interest in justice. No one has yet been charged or tried for the massacre of hundreds of people by the Nigerian military in Odi, Bayelsa State, in 1999 and in Benue State, in 2001. Nigeria continues to provide a home for former Liberian president Charles Taylor, despite indictments against him for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Human Rights Watch has repeatedly asked the British government to raise concerns about police abuses with the Nigerian authorities. So far there has been a notable reluctance to do so. Nigeria's importance as a major oil-producing country and its regional influence in Africa have apparently proved more valuable than the need to protect the fundamental rights and freedom of Nigerians.

British assistance in community policing can help bring change, but it must be accompanied by an end to the silence on human rights issues, especially police abuses. There has been no reduction in police torture or killings since the end of military rule.

As London prepares to increase development assistance to Nigeria, it is high time that, at the very least, continued funding of police reform should be made conditional on improvement in conduct. If what happens in Nigeria is crucial for the whole of Africa, ministers should publicly denounce torture and call for an end to impunity for abuses. They should listen to the two girls who were gang-raped by policemen in the very state where the community policing programme runs, 'We want the policemen to be punished. We need justice.'

From: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/07/01/nigeri11264.htm>

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Under African skies

Thirty years ago, Aminatta Forna's father was framed and then executed by the Sierra Leone government. Here, she recounts how she made peace with her past - and commemorated his life - by helping replant the family estate.

Sunday July 3, 2005

Observer

It has rained during the night, sheet lightning turned the sky momentarily into day. In the morning, the warm, reddish earth has turned dark. After the muezzin's call to prayers, the village bell sounds and the men and women assemble under a vast silver sky, ready for work. The land has been cleared, the scrub burned and brushed. Stakes mark where the new trees will be planted. The stumps and roots that still stand in the clearing will rot into the earth, providing nutrients for the seedlings. By the end of the rains, my cousin Morlai tells me, the foot-high seedlings will be as tall as me.

I am in my father's village, where he was born and raised. My grandfather, Pa Roke Forna, a regent chief, ran a coffee plantation here. He arrived in the Twenties, bringing wives and retainers. The coffee trees soared, a village began to flourish. But by the Seventies, coffee prices had already begun to slide. Today the plantation, long neglected, has been engulfed by the forest. The only remaining signs of the great avenues are the red berries growing wild. It is a strange, beautiful place.

When he died in 1976, my grandfather was said to be 103 years old, but the truth is that nobody really knew. By my best estimate he was born around 1890, making him in his mid-eighties at the time of his death - still an extraordinary age in a country where medical care scarcely exists. As it was, he survived his own son by more than a year.

Thirty years ago this month - on 19 July 1975 - my father was executed by the Sierra Leone government. I was at home the rainy night he was taken away, alone in the sitting room when two agents from the secret police arrived. I was 10 years old. My father, a medical doctor turned political dissident, had recently been released from three years' detention. 'Tell Mum I'll be back later,' were the last words he said to me as he stepped out into the rain. Almost exactly a year later, he was hanged.

Morlai was in the house, too, the night my father was taken away. I hero-worshipped Morlai. A stylish dresser, he favoured patterned, slim-fit shirts and nylon flares. He made me giggle when he called me 'sistah' in an accent straight out of Shaft, and had me doubled over with his high-kicking, air-punching rendition of Carl Douglas's 'Kung Fu Fighting'. The morning after the arrest it was Morlai who tried to take food to my father in the detention cells. And in the months that followed, during my father's trial, it was to Morlai I turned with the questions nobody else would answer.

In the decades that followed my father's death, we lost touch. I went to university in London at the start of the Eighties and have lived there ever since. During the dark years of the civil war in the Nineties, I heard little news of my family. Later, Morlai wrote in need of help. He had lost everything, seen two homes burned, was nearly shot when he was taken for a rebel. Only the intervention of one of the soldiers in the firing squad - whom Morlai had taught when he worked as a tutor - saved his life.

Then, after 10 years, the war was brought to an end by the Nigerian-led Ecomog (Economic Community of West African States) forces, shored up by UN peacekeepers and a contingent of British troops. ← In 2000, I returned to Sierra Leone to write a memoir of my father and my childhood. Morlai and I were reunited. He agreed to help with the research and for weeks we worked as a team uncovering the past.

The Devil that Danced on the Water was published in 2002. It told of the events leading up to my father's arrest and traced what became of him after the family last saw him. When I was 10, all I had really known was that my father had resigned from the government he once served and set up an opposition party. The party had been banned overnight, its leaders thrown into jail. In the years that followed, free elections became a thing of the past, the population lived under a dictatorship whose power was bolstered by spies and thugs.

After he was taken away, my father was held in solitary confinement, not allowed to wash, shave or change his clothes. When my stepmother finally found a lawyer who dared to defend her husband, he was refused access to his client until the first day of the trial. After two months, the jury, packed with government stooges, took one hour to return a verdict of guilty. Eight men were hanged.

By the time my book was published, the war was over and people were looking for a way to understand the violence that had engulfed our country. In the months that followed, I received hundreds of letters, many from Sierra Leoneans. I'd set out to write my family's story, but ended up writing about how a country loses its way. For decades, the elite had been in denial - over the human-rights abuses, the extraordinary levels of corruption, the growing numbers of disenfranchised youth - even while civil war raged in neighbouring Liberia. My father was the first casualty of a sequence of events that would go on to claim hundreds of thousands of lives.

After his execution, my father's body and those of the other men were taken to Rokupa, a cemetery on the outskirts of town, and dumped in an unmarked pit. Acid was poured over them. Siaka Stevens, by then the country's absolute ruler, had attempted to erase every trace of his enemies. Denying a dictator the chance to create his own version of history was an important part of resurrecting the memories of those men.

Now Morlai and I are together again 30 years after my father's death, with a new project to commemorate the man who always said his own father was the greatest influence on his life. We are replanting our grandfather's plantation.

Out in the fields, the heat of the day is already climbing, even though the sun has barely risen. By midday, the temperature here on the plains, in the heart of the country, will reach upwards of 40C. Each worker collects a seedling and stands behind one of the staked sites. Morlai is in the middle, holding aloft a seedling, shouting directions in Temne.

The excitement is palpable. Children and teachers from the school have come to join in the planting. Building a school was the first project Morlai and I undertook. The village provided all the labour; my husband and I raised the funds; Morlai co-ordinated the work. On another recent visit, I stood in front of the vehicle I had borrowed, staring at the names of children drawn in the dust, and laughed out loud. The year before none of them had known how to write. Never had graffiti looked so beautiful.

Traditionally, the people here are rice farmers. Now most have returned to subsistence farming. Where once they relied on sales of their surpluses to help them through the 'hungry season', today free-market economics have seen an influx of rice from countries who subsidise their farmers, sold at such low prices that the local coarse-grain variety cannot compete.

Now, on top of it all, the rains have come early. The vegetation is a startling multitude of greens. But the beauty of the landscape disguises a bitter truth. The timetable for farming rice here is rigid. The unexpected rains mean the farmers have not had time to clear the land.

Part of our plan is to introduce new, more productive systems of farming to sustain the village in the long term. We'll begin by growing saleable ground crops, such as cassava and groundnuts, between the trees. The villagers don't understand why they can no longer make a profit selling rice or how world trade discriminates against poor farmers like them. Even our new venture is subject to decisions taken thousands of miles away. It would be uneconomic for us to plant coffee again, so we have chosen cashew trees. The crop has been selected for preferential import status under George Bush's African Growth and Opportunity Act. We hope this will be good news for us.

A week before the first day of planting we held a meeting in the village. In my grandfather's days, the plantation relied heavily on indentured labour. We plan to implement a shared-ownership scheme. During the meeting, we also review the schedule: planting 50 acres with 2,000 trees by the end of the rains. Up to 100 acres next year.

I am awed and a little nervous at the scale of the undertaking. Most of what I have learned about growing cashews has come from searching the internet. I am a writer. I live in a terraced house in London. But somehow this is what Africa does to you, the legacy of every one of us born with Africa's blood running in our veins.

And if I am truthful with myself, this is what draws me back. In Europe, the wheels of life are well oiled, we are pampered, so safe we become afraid to take a risk. People here have little to lose.

There was a time I dreaded returning to Sierra Leone. I would meet former colleagues of my father and wonder what they knew, whether they had played a part in his death. Gradually, I began to avoid coming home. Throughout my twenties and early thirties, I barely set foot in the place. Not until I had finished writing the book did my feelings about the country alter.

Back in Freetown, during this trip, my step-mother Yabome (whom I have called Mum since I was a child) shows me the front page of a newspaper. On it is the text of my father's 1970 letter resigning from his post as minister of finance. Following an article I wrote in a British newspaper, somebody in America published the letter in full on the web. Subsequently, two newspapers here have followed suit.

The predictions my father made in that letter have proved to be astonishingly, tragically accurate. He foresaw how Sierra Leone would become a one-party state. Foreshadowing his own death, he accused the president of using violence to silence his critics. He revealed details of Stevens's spending, over which the two men had argued bitterly. In a later letter, written hours before his execution, he talked of the end of the rule of law, the coming anarchy.

In the week that follows my conversation with Mum, two men of my father's generation, one a politician, the other a diplomat, make the same remark: 'Your father signed his own death warrant with that letter.' The comment is stunningly insensitive. I stare at the expression on the face of each speaker. What is it I see there? Not remorse or humility, certainly; rather, a strange satisfaction.

The second man goes on to add that, back in the Seventies, a friend had once kicked him under the table for criticising the government at a dinner. 'Thank goodness,' he laughs. 'I made sure I kept quiet after that.' When he has finished, I do something I have never done before. I tell him what a shame it is that an entire generation did the same, all the good men who did nothing.

A few days later, a visitor arrives at Mum's house, somebody I welcome. Unfa Mansaray stood trial alongside my father, was convicted and sentenced to death. All through the night he listened as each man was led from his cell to the gallows, my father first. ← Unfa waited his turn. Only the next morning did he discover his sentence had been commuted to life.

Today, I can never look at Unfa without wondering what it must be like to believe, truly believe, you are going to die. There is no clue in his countenance, serene and courteous always. Unfa spent 14 years in prison. When he was released, the company where he had worked as a cook had closed, his pension gone.

It was Unfa who led me to one of the men who gave evidence during the trial. By then I had spoken to two former soldiers who admitted they had been paid to bear false witness. I was surprised to find Unfa was still in touch with the third man, Saidu Brima. 'Ah, but I have forgiven him,' he had told me. I met Saidu, and when I heard his story, recounted quietly and without self-pity, of how he had been beaten and tortured, I ended up feeling desperately sorry for him. Later I wrote: 'A poor, uneducated man in a barren country. His destiny did not belong to him.' Mum was so moved she even gave him a job in the house when he was out of work, so for a while we all ended up, surreally, living under one roof.

Unfa tells me Saidu is upcountry, or he too would have come to say hello. I send my regards and ask Unfa about his life since we first met. He tells me how he spent a year cooking for David Crane, chief prosecutor at the Special Court set up with money from the UN to try war criminals. The hearings are ongoing. 'Did he know who you were?' I ask.

'No, madam,' answers Unfa. And we both smile at that - one of the defendants of perhaps the country's most famous treason trial working quietly in the celebrated lawyer's kitchens.

A few days later, driving into town, I think about how, in a way, I envy Unfa and Mum their equanimity. For my stepmother, telling our story has closed a troubled chapter in her life. After my father's death, even old friends avoided her, she had trouble finding an apartment and a job. She remained unbowed through it all, and her strength inspired me. When I gave her a copy of the book, I inscribed it with a quote from Bertolt Brecht: "And is there singing in the darkness? Yes, there is singing in the darkness." To Mum, who sang in the darkness.'

I drive down Pademba Road, past the prison, on my way to visit Donald. Donald is one of only seven paediatricians working in the entire country. His father resigned his government post at the same time as my father. With Donald's uncle, the three men founded the United Democratic Party (UDP). They spent years together in Pademba Road Prison. His uncle, Ibrahim Bash Taqi, an outspoken and likeable journalist, was hanged. Donald's father was released after the executions and Donald remembers him arriving home after being forced to walk all the way, his hair in dreadlocks, wearing the clothes he was arrested in a year before.

We rarely talk about these things any more, though these are the threads that connect us. Life goes on. But this year is different because of the anniversary. Donald is older than me, remembers more of the detail of that time. Our compound being raided by government thugs during the days of the UDP. I was six, too young to realise the gravity of the danger. Donald was 11, he climbed inside a big gramophone and hid until he was discovered by men trying to steal it.

After university, Donald applied to medical school but found his candidacy blocked. Eventually he won a scholarship to China and left the country for 10 years. One day, Donald tells me, he will enter politics himself. He still believes the country can change. 'Otherwise I wouldn't be here,' he says. And I realise the same is true of me. I am here because I believe this country can have a future. All it requires is for enough of us to think the same way.

I remark that many people wonder at our optimism. Sierra Leone is the poorest country in the world, a place where life expectancy is actually dropping. There are constant blackouts in the capital, vast unemployment. 'It is strange in a way,' agrees Donald, 'after all that happened to us. But then we knew what was going to happen in Sierra Leone. Because our fathers prepared us. And we understand why, and how it could be different.'

We share the same anger that the warnings were ignored by people who should have known better. 'Look around at everything that has happened,' Donald speaks quietly and gazes out of the window. 'Everything this country has gone through. And yet they never feel responsible for their silence.'

When I was a child, I was given an autograph book for Christmas. I went around collecting the signatures of everybody in the family. My father wrote something for me: 'Honour and shame from no condition rise. Act well your part and there the honour lies.' I was too young then to understand the meaning of the words.

But that's what it comes down to - the reason I am standing in acres of scrub that have been burned and cleared and are now ready to be planted. It doesn't look too attractive right now, but in three years' time all this will be avenues of cashew trees.

I am following in the footsteps of my father, and of my grandfather who came to this place at the beginning of another century following a diviner's prophecy. The story was told to me by his eldest daughter, who remembers arriving here riding on his shoulders. Her tale so inspired me I turned it into a novel which I have just finished writing.

Now art and life have begun to imitate each other. I can stand where my grandfather and father once stood, look out upon the same view - the river curling around the houses, the meeting house and the well, the men working in the fields. So little has changed, everything is almost exactly as it would have been when they were alive. I can see it all through their eyes, I can dream their dreams.

And for a moment, the obstacles disappear and everything becomes possible.

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