Complicating Culture for Development: Negotiating 'Dysfunctional Heritage' in Sierra Leone

Paul Basu and Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp

At least since the publication of *Our Creative Diversity*, the report of the UN World Commission on Culture and Development, in 1996, discourses concerning 'the power of culture for development' have formed part of that circulating concatenation of ideas, terms and images that characterizes what we might regard as the 'ideoscape' of international development (cf. Appadurai 1990: 9-10). Alongside such buzzwords as 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction' (Cornwall and Brock 2005), there has been a programmatic diffusion of ideas that link the realms of 'culture' and 'development'. Thus 'culture' is said to be 'a fundamental component of sustainable development', 'a powerful global economic engine', 'a vehicle for social cohesion and stability', and 'a repository of knowledge, meanings and values that permeate all aspects of our lives' (UNESCO 2010: 2-6).

As Hajer (1995) has argued in the context of environmental politics, such discourses do not simply reflect or describe phenomena, they are also generative of the phenomena they describe. It is through the production and reproduction of discourses that meaning is given to particular physical and social realities. Discourses frame certain problems, and, since discourses also form the context in which phenomena are understood, they also determine the solutions to the problems they define. Discourses become 'institutionalized', manifesting themselves in policy statements, in organizational practices and in dominant ways of reasoning. Discourses

operationalize particular 'regimes of truth' while invalidating others (Milliken 1999). These observations are certainly true of discourses of development (Grillo and Stirrat 1997), including discourses of 'culture for development'. However, as Appadurai cautions, the straightforward reproduction of such ideologies is complicated by the fundamental disjunctures between economic, cultural and political domains, which characterize the global economy (1990: 6). This complexity has dimensions that are both semantic, insofar as 'words (or their lexical equivalents) require careful translation from context to context in their global movements', and pragmatic, since there are many different ways in which these discourses translate into 'public politics' (ibid.: 10).

In this chapter, we are interested in exploring the institutionalization of global discourses of culture for development in contemporary Sierra Leone, but we are also concerned with investigating the disjunctures which stop these discourses becoming fully incorporated into Sierra Leone's public politics. This challenges abstract models of unimpeded global flows, and, as Tsing has argued, instead draws attention to 'the productive friction of global connections': 'the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference' (2005: 3-4). As Tsing points out, 'friction is not a synonym for resistance' (ibid.: 6). The power imbalances remain. Friction, rather, 'refuses the lie that global power operates as a well-oiled machine' (ibid.). The encounter, then, between global discourses of culture for development and public politics in Sierra Leone is, among other things, an arena of inconsistencies, of words that are not necessarily intended to translate into actions, and of strategic alignments and deployments. While 'culture' does not straightforwardly translate into 'development' in Sierra

Leone, we suggest that the vocabulary of culture for development nevertheless has potency in itself. It has an incantatory power.

Cultural plurality and universal ethics

That there has been a process of 'discourse institutionalization' (Hajer 1993: 46) around culture and development in Sierra Leone is apparent in the rhetoric employed by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs and, for example, in the language and framing of a new *National Cultural Policy and Action Plan* currently awaiting ratification in Sierra Leone's parliament. In the formal pronouncements of government representatives and in these policy documents we find an incessant repetition of vocabularies and phrases drawn directly or indirectly from the reports and conventions of UNESCO and other international bodies. The theme of the 2013 Annual National Cultural Festival organised by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs was, for example, typically 'on message', echoing the very title of the World Commission on Culture and Development report (WCCD 1996): 'Celebrating Our Cultural Diversity' (Figure 1). Also evident, however, are those frictions and disjunctures that prevent concepts of culture for development from translating straightforwardly into the local Sierra Leonean context. Whereas the international discourse of culture for development redefines culture, and its value, in terms of its positive contribution to human and economic development, and despite an alignment of official policy with this position, there is an apparent failure to operationalize this in practice. For every attempt to commodify some aspect of Sierra Leone's cultural heritage, or repurpose it for developmental goals, there is an equal demonstration of the recalcitrance of long-held cultural values and their ability to frustrate the intentions of state or international agencies.

Figure 1: 'Celebrating Our Cultural Diversity'. Promotional banner for the

Annual National Cultural Festival, Freetown, April 2013.

Indeed, the Sierra Leonean case points to a wider contradiction in the *Our Creative Diversity*

report, which has remained unresolved and largely unreflected upon in the subsequent

proliferation of culture for development discourse. Thus, while the diversity of traditional social

practices, local knowledges and distinctive cultural forms are all celebrated and promoted as

being 'crucial to development', little guidance is available concerning how to reconcile this

commitment to 'cultural pluralism' with an over-riding 'global ethics', the need for which was a

central argument of the report (WCCD 1996: 33-51; UNESCO 2010: 3). What of those cultural

practices and forms which do not necessarily function to support social cohesion, stability or

international conventions relating to human rights? Here, then, we consider how such

'dysfunctional' cultural heritage disrupts the discourse of culture for development in Sierra

Leone, and how this makes visible the frictions that attend local attempts to reinvent 'tradition' to accord with what Eriksen describes as 'UNESCO's ideology of culture' (2001: 127).

This chapter is part of a bigger project that seeks to explore the intersections of 'culture', 'heritage' and 'development' in Sierra Leone (e.g. Basu 2008, 2013, 2014; Zetterstrom-Sharp 2013), but it may also be read as a particular instantiation of Eriksen's more general critique of the *Our Creative Diversity* report (Eriksen 2001). As Eriksen argues, while the report 'is sensitive almost to the point of hypochondria regarding the concept of culture' (ibid.: 130), ultimately culture is conceptualized in the report 'as something that can easily be pluralized, which belongs to a particular group of people, associated with their heritage or "roots"' (ibid.: 131). A problem here is that the insistence on a people's 'right' to a particular culture or tradition is contradicted by an even greater insistence on the upholding of a shared culture of universal human rights. *Our Creative Diversity* thus promotes a relativistic view of culture and a universalist view of ethics, ignoring the fact that cultural self-determination may conflict with global ethics. Rather than debating the strengths and weaknesses of 'the right to culture' *versus* 'rights above culture', the internal tension between these two positions is left implicit in the report, with the result that this policy-orientated document is in fact highly ambiguous and, as Eriksen argues, 'offers little by way of actual policy recommendations' (ibid.: 129). One consequence of this we have observed in Sierra Leone is that 'the mystifying and ideologically charged culture concept' (ibid.: 142) used in the report acquires legitimacy and power as part of this international discourse, and thus becomes incorporated into national policy as a demonstration of the nation's fluency in a shared, global modernity. At the same time, the internal contradictions of the discourse are inherited and must be negotiated (or ignored) when

they inevitably surface in contexts where local 'cultural' institutions and practices (which may, at once, have ritual, political and aesthetic as well as social dimensions) interface with the 'cultural apparatus' of the state (Hannerz 1992: 62).

A 'culture for development' policy for Sierra Leone?

In Sierra Leone, much of the state's cultural apparatus is nominally controlled by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, which is subdivided into a Directorate of Tourism and a Directorate of Cultural Affairs. For over a decade the Directorate of Cultural Affairs has been attempting to formulate and have ratified a new national cultural policy for Sierra Leone. The promotion of such cultural policies has been a significant strand in the work of UNESCO since 1970, when an intergovernmental conference was organised on the topic in Venice. This conference was followed by a series of regional meetings addressing cultural policies in Europe (Helsinki 1972), Asia (Yogyakarta 1973), Africa (Accra 1975), Latin America and the Caribbean (Bogotá 1978), and the Arab States (Baghdad 1981). A World Conference on Cultural Policies then took place in Mexico City in 1982 and, following the publication of *Our Creative Diversity*, an Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development was held in Stockholm in 1998. As Isar discusses in his contribution to this volume, these meetings played an instrumental role in the evolution of the culture for development discourse.

Alongside these meetings, a resolution was adopted at the fifteenth session of the General Conference of UNESCO 'to carry out methical studies of the institutional, administrative and financial problems of cultural action with a view to facilitating the elaboration of cultural

policies' (UNESCO 1969: 47). In the report of the Conference, it is noted that 'several delegates referred to the growing need in their countries for a clarification of aims and objectives as well as functions and guidelines of their national cultural development programmes' and that UNESCO 'is in a unique position to assemble, compare, analyse and act upon the great diversity of cultural policies that exist in the world today' (ibid.: 239). A result of this was the commissioning of studies of national cultural policies by local experts, which were published in a UNESCO monograph series through the 1970s. As part of this programme, the Mende historian Arthur Abraham, then a Lecturer at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, conducted a study that would be published as *Cultural Policy in Sierra Leone* in 1978 (Abraham 1978a).

Given that there was no formal cultural policy in place in Sierra Leone at the time, and the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs had only recently been established, Abraham's report focuses on Sierra Leone's historical and cultural background, its socio-cultural organization, the existing organization and financing of the cultural sector, and the future needs and priorities of the sector. As an academic historian, Abraham is conscious of the problematic nature of defining the culture concept. For the purposes of his report he adopts a broad interpretation, viewing

> culture as the sum total of the nation's life, its spirit and aspirations, its heritage, its traditions and the institutions derived from its history, all modified by external influences without being altered beyond recognition, and at the same time preserved in so far as is consistent with modern conditions of living and development (Abraham 1978a: 10).

From a theoretical perspective, Abraham asserts that culture represents 'an integrative process …
capable of adaptation within the society's cultural frame of reference' (ibid.: 11). At the same
time, however, he remarks on the 'abysmally low' level of cultural awareness among Sierra
Leoneans (ibid.: 12). Many Sierra Leoneans, Abraham argues, 'see themselves beyond the
sphere of "traditional culture" (even though it might be their heritage) because our colonizers
have often referred to it as "primitive", "backward", or "uncivilized"' (ibid.: 11). Thus
generations have been enthralled to Euro-American cultural values, while, for many, Sierra
Leonean 'culture … means nothing more than the National Dance Troupe' (ibid.).

As a response to the high degree of alienation that Abraham observes, and the persistence of
colonial values, institutions and structures he documents, the thrust of Abraham's argument in
Cultural Policy in Sierra Leone is to promote 'cultural education' as a means of decolonizing
Sierra Leonean history and achieving 'cultural liberation' (ibid.: 12-13). This, he argues, needs to
occur in the context of 'national development' and requires 'a centrally directed policy' capable
of preserving 'indigenous traditions' and enabling 'the evolution of a national culture that adapts
modern science and technology to maximize the functioning of inherited indigenous institutions'
(ibid.: 12). It is significant that Abraham insists that external factors must adapt to support
indigenous institutions, whereas, to date, the opposite trajectory would seem to dominate in
practice, with indigenous institutions having to adapt to accommodate external forces. As we
will go on to explore, however, this is by no means unambiguous, and indeed we find that
'culture' itself provides a politicized arena for the negotiation and contestation of 'local(ized)'
and 'global(ized)' values.

While the current draft of the new national cultural policy document lays claim to Abraham's study on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, describing it as the first cultural policy prepared by the Ministry (MoTCA 2011: 8), Abraham's evaluation of the sector and his recommendations seem to have had little impact in Sierra Leone. Whereas Abraham argued for an expansive role for the Ministry so that it might provide greater leadership in the cultural sector, it has remained peripheral and under-resourced when compared with other ministries of the Sierra Leonean government. According to the current Director of Cultural Affairs, this is soon to change since tourism development has been identified as a priority by President Koroma as part of the 'Agenda for Prosperity' manifesto with which he successfully campaigned for re-election in 2012. Abraham's call for a programme of 'cultural education' has, however, fallen on deaf ears. Indeed, in the years of Sierra Leone's deepening economic and political crises during the 1980s and 1990s, many of those – including historians such as Arthur Abraham and Cecil Magbaily Fyle – who might have led such a project departed for greener academic pastures overseas.

The drafting of the current, as yet unratified, cultural policy document has been a convoluted process, dating back to the early 1990s. A key figure behind the inception and development of the document has been Julius Spencer, a well-known dramatist, radio producer and newspaper editor, who was Minister of Information and Broadcasting between 1998 and 2001. Spencer was also centrally positioned in an Interim National Council for Arts and Culture, which would be formally reconstituted to coordinate the implementation of the cultural policy once ratified by Parliament (MoTCA 2011: 60). While there are many unresolved issues raised by the draft policy, our intention here is not to assess the practicalities of its recommendations, but rather to

illustrate how it reproduces the rhetoric, and the fundamental contradictions, of the culture for development discourse, and, in so doing, fails to engage with Abraham's more radical proposition that 'cultural liberation' must be central to post-colonial national development. Indeed, contrary to the underlying principles of culture for development, the very reproduction of this discourse points to a continued culture of dependency.

In this respect it is worth noting that the development of the policy document was itself supported by UNESCO, which funded the participation of an international cultural policy consultant, Burama Sagnia. A graduate of the University of Leicester's Museum Studies programme, Sagnia was the Founding Executive Director of the Gambian National Council for Arts and Culture between 1990 and 1995, and subsequently served as an expert advisor for the internationally-funded Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa. UNESCO also funded a number of workshops, which sought to draw together a wider range of stakeholders in Sierra Leone's cultural sector so that they might input into the policy drafting process. The draft policy was scheduled to be put before the Sierra Leonean parliament for ratification in 2007, but failed to pass through the necessary process before the presidential elections of that year, the result of which saw a significant shift of power and a consequent loss of continuity in government departments. Despite numerous attempts by the current Directorate of Cultural Affairs to reignite interest in the policy, at the time of writing it has still not been formally adopted. Even so, current practice in the Ministry is certainly consistent with its ideological position.

Echoing the goals of the 'Agenda for Change' that President Koroma pursued during his first term in office (2007-12),[1] the draft cultural policy explicitly refers to the need for 'attitudinal

change' and seeks 'to provide leadership and drive in national development'; 'to establish national identity, strengthen cultural understanding and inculcate national consciousness'; and 'to incorporate essential elements of our culture into national development frameworks and processes' (MoTCA 2011: 11). While 'contributing to the alleviation of persistent poverty' and 'improving the quality of life of Sierra Leoneans' are key objectives of the cultural policy (ibid.), there is also a concern to ensure these goals are not achieved through 'development models imposed from outside' (ibid.: 27). In a section of the document explicitly addressing 'Culture and Development Policies', the 'widespread disenchantment' with exogenous development models such as the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s and 1990s is noted, and an alternative model based on 'traditional culture and values' is instead recommended (ibid.). 'When development builds from traditional institutions', the policy argues, 'it exacts lower social costs and imposes less human suffering and cultural destruction than when it copies outside models' (ibid.).

Consistent with the culture for development paradigm of the *Our Creative Diversity* report, the policy therefore argues that 'culture should … be a central component of Sierra Leone's development strategies' (MoTCA 2011: 27). A 'culture-sensitive process of development', it is claimed, 'will be able to draw on the large reserves of creativity and traditional knowledge and skills that are found throughout Sierra Leone' (ibid.: 27-28).

Three core spheres of cultural heritage are identified as contributing to this culture-sensitive process: 'traditional knowledge', 'religion, traditional beliefs and value systems', and 'traditional cultural institutions'. Traditional knowledge, for example, is considered especially important in

the face of increasing 'Westernizing influences'. While acknowledging that Sierra Leone is part of the 'global village' and 'cannot therefore escape the impact of these foreign cultural elements', the document stresses the importance of 'uphold[ing] and maintain[ing] the good in our cultures and to guard against negative influences of other cultures' (ibid.: 10). According to the draft policy, traditional knowledge has the advantage of drawing on 'locally available and time-tested knowledge, methods, skills and resources' (ibid.: 40). It is 'easily accessible and affordable', and, if 'properly developed and utilized, … could contribute to the enhancement of agricultural productivity, better environmental and natural resources management, realization of the objectives of "Health for All" and "Education for All" initiatives, and contribute to peace and security' (ibid.). At the same time, it is noted that aspects of traditional knowledge are disappearing and facing extinction, and that 'urgent efforts' are required to reverse this decline (ibid.).

Alongside traditional knowledge, the draft policy states that 'traditional cultural institutions', including 'chiefdoms, secret societies and social organizations', have an important role to play in Sierra Leone's future (ibid.: 42). The policy explains that such entities 'predate the western-derived institutions introduced by colonial rule' (ibid.: 24). The chiefdom authorities, in particular – including paramount chiefs, tribal headmen, secret society heads, sections chiefs, etc. – are said to be 'custodians of tradition and cultural values', and it is to them that individuals and communities look 'for guidance, inspiration and assurance of identity, image, continuity, education and development' (ibid.). It is argued that 'in areas where the authority of these cultural institutions have [*sic*] been disregarded and weakened, social conflicts and disharmony results' (ibid.).

Throughout the draft *National Cultural Policy and Action Plan* many such claims are made for Sierra Leone's cultural heritage, its traditional knowledge, values and institutions. According to the policy document, Sierra Leone's future seems to lie in its past and in the reanimation of a traditional social order that was 'rendered weak by the forces of colonialism and modernization' (ibid.). Paradoxically, of course, rather than representing a counter-hegemonic alternative to western models, the mobilization of local cultural heritage to serve development goals also reproduces the thoroughly Western 'culture for development' discourse promoted by UNESCO. Also reproduced is a lack of clarity regarding just how this discourse will translate into action and succeed in contributing to the development ambitions noted above.

But there are other contradictions apparent in this rhetoric too. Traditional chiefs, for example, may be 'custodians of culture' (ibid.: 42), but they are also custodians of power, and the draft policy makes no mention of the contested nature of chieftaincy in Sierra Leone (Fanthorpe 2005; Jackson 2007; Lange 2009). Nor is there any discussion of the widely held view that the abuse of chiefly power – and the consequent alienation of youth – was one of the causes of Sierra Leone's civil war (Richards 2005; Peters 2011). If taken seriously as a policy statement, the document actually takes a highly controversial position in this respect. While arguing for the revitalization and strengthening of traditional cultural institutions such as chieftainship and secret societies, the rationale for doing so is that these institutions might participate more effectively in 'the preservation and promotion of culture' (ibid.). Their capacity to participate in the 'power of culture for development', however, seems to require a shift away from their more direct articulation of power in local and national politics.

With regard to chieftaincy, the draft cultural policy appears to be in line with that other international discourse-producing mechanism, Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which, in its report, recommended the 'restoration of the Chiefs to their symbolic and traditional roles', while noting the importance of 'decoupling' chieftaincy from 'party politics' (TRC 2004: 159). This is, in turn, consistent with the donor-driven agenda for governance reform pursued under Kabbah's presidency, culminating in the 2004 Local Government Act, which sought to by-pass the established gerontocracy and install elected local governments as the legitimate seats of decentralized power (Fanthorpe 2005; Jackson 2007). This points to a wider trend in the culture for development discourse: 'culture' must be depoliticized in order to function as a tool for development; traditional institutions and practices must be rendered compliant.

Dysfunctional cultural practices

Drawing heavily on international discourses of culture for development, Sierra Leone's draft cultural policy champions the contribution of cultural heritage to broader national development goals. In addition to the promotion of creative industries and cultural tourism, which are described as 'remarkable economic engines of urban and regional development' (MoTCA 2011: 38), culture is presented as a tool to make development more 'locally appropriate' and effective. The draft policy paints a positive image of a potentially vibrant cultural sector, which would flourish if only it had the financial and governmental backing it deserves. Disrupting this narrative, however, are a number of expressions of concern regarding particular elements of

14

Sierra Leone's culture and heritage that do not fit so easily within culture for development discourse.

In an introductory section of the draft policy, the primary 'mission of the policy' is stated as being 'to promote non-harmful practices and cultural diversity' (ibid.: 9). Employing these further buzzwords of international humanitarianism and development, one might expect the concepts of 'harmful' and 'non-harmful' practices to be defined and the implications for the policy discussed. In fact, the matter is dealt with only briefly. In the 'situation analysis' part of the document, a short section addresses 'culture and disadvantaged groups'. Here it is explained that 'certain entrenched cultural values, attitudes, norms and practices also disadvantage and disempower women as they relate to female circumcision, widow inheritance, domestic violence and lack of control over productive resources' (ibid.: 27). Later, in the section on 'traditional knowledge', the draft policy explains that 'some aspects of traditional knowledge are dysfunctional, yet people stick to them at their own risk' (ibid.: 40). While in the section on 'religion, traditional beliefs and value systems' the document states:

> There are certain cultural practices and institutions drawing from our traditional religious beliefs and value systems which are today at variance with the notion of fundamental human rights as it affects women, children and other vulnerable groups of the society, and these require continuous re-appraisal. (ibid.: 41)

In each case there is an allusion to the tension between cultural diversity and universal ethics discussed above in relation to the *Our Creative Diversity* report. Indeed, as we have argued,

Sierra Leone's draft cultural policy has emerged in an environment directly influenced and shaped by UNESCO's culture for development discourse, which while recognizing the 'pitfalls of ethnocentrism and Western bias' also warns against the dangers of 'unprincipled forms of cultural relativism' (WCCD 1996: 131). In *Our Creative Diversity* the main arena in which 'cultural rights' and 'human rights' are considered at variance is in the sphere of 'gender rights', and in this respect the recommendations of the WCCD report are unequivocal. The emphasis here is on strengthening the provision for collecting and publicizing information concerning violence against women 'so as to create pressure on nations for change' (ibid.: 277). As with the draft Sierra Leonean cultural policy, however, relatively little space is devoted to these complex issues, and such matters are not allowed to complicate positive messages concerning the power of culture for development. Ironically, in this framing of what is and what is not ethically acceptable we see a reassertion of an earlier paradigm in the relationship between culture and development – one which the culture for development movement supposedly rejects – in which culture is seen as an impediment to modernization, something that must be overcome in order for development to take place.

We turn now to examine three contexts in which this contradiction between Sierra Leonean cultural phenomena and discourses of international development becomes apparent: urban masquerade traditions, the annual lantern parade, and female initiation rites. Our interest is in how conflict between 'local' practice and 'global' discourse is negotiated. As with the case of chieftaincy, while it is easy to promote 'good' cultural heritage and exclude 'bad' cultural heritage in the discursive realms of policy rhetoric, this does not take into consideration the complexities on the ground. If the adoption of culture for development discourse requires that

'culture' must adapt to comply with a new global ethics, it is clear in Sierra Leone that 'culture' is not so compliant. Resistance is rarely expressed explicitly, however. Indeed, lip service will often be paid to the policy rhetoric (particularly if compliance provides access to resources), while underlying practices remain unchanged. On occasion, however, recalcitrance takes a more explicit form.

Masquerades at the Ministry

Some of the most visible manifestations of Sierra Leone's traditional cultural institutions are the colourful masquerades associated with the country's various ethnic groups and their so-called 'secret societies'. These are popular both among Sierra Leoneans and overseas visitors, and images of these 'masked devils' often appear in tourism brochures and murals. Much has been written about masquerade traditions in Sierra Leone and their relationship with initiation societies (e.g. Siegmann and Perani 1976; Jedrej 1986; Nunley 1987; Hart 1988; Phillips 1995). As Fanthorpe argues, the 'primary purpose' of these societies 'is to canalize and control powers of the spirit world' (2007: 1). Masquerade figures are particular embodiments of this spirit world, and their cooperation is required in various society rituals, including initiation. For non-initiates, such 'devils' are especially dangerous and laying eyes on them is often proscribed. Alongside their role in traditional society rituals, however, some masquerades have become increasingly visible in public, performing at cultural festivals and parades where they can be seen by all.

Traditional masquerade practices underwent a further transformation in 1964 with the founding of Sierra Leone's National Dance Troupe. This brought together some of the best traditional

dancers and masked performers from Sierra Leone's various ethno-linguistic groups to live and perform together at a 'cultural village' near Freetown. Divorced from their powerful ritual roles, the 'spirits' went through a process of national patrimonialization and became 'cultural ambassadors' for Sierra Leone in state pageantry and at international festivals, winning great acclaim, for instance, at the New York World's Fair of 1964 and the Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar in 1965.

While the National Dance Troupe's repertoire is drawn mainly from Sierra Leone's 'indigenous' culture, Freetown's Krio population has its own masquerade traditions. The Krio are comprised of the descendants of a number of waves of ex-slaves and 'liberated Africans' who were settled in the Sierra Leone colony in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Many of the so-called 'recaptives', who were rescued from slave ships by the British Navy after the abolition of the slave trade, were of Yoruba origin and introduced versions their own cultural institutions to Sierra Leone when they were settled there. Through the 20th century, participation in urban masquerade societies became increasingly popular among working-class Freetown youth, and also increasingly politicized. These Ode-lay societies, which have their roots in Yoruba Hunting, Gelede and Egungun traditions, continue to have a prominent place in Freetown's cultural landscape. Each Easter Monday, for example, crowds line the streets, straining to catch a glimpse of the spectacular 'devils' that process amid high-spirited drumming and raucous chanting with their society members through the town. Participants often drink gin or rum, and smoke cannabis openly; fights frequently break out between rival groups, sometimes leading to bodily injury and even death (Nunley 1987: 197). As Nunley has discussed, 'the groups enjoy their reputations for

roughness', and the violence is part of the 'fierce aesthetic' of these masquerade performances (ibid.: 202).

In April 2011, Sierra Leone celebrated 50 years of independence and a large number of diasporic Sierra Leoneans returned to visit relatives and participate in the festivities. Rather than dwell on the doubtful achievements of those 50 years, which were all too often blemished by political upheaval, economic mismanagement, and ultimately civil war, this was an opportunity to present Sierra Leone in a new, positive light – a policy reflected in the official slogan, '50 Years Forward: Celebrating a New Sierra Leone'. Alas, the 'old' Sierra Leone reared its head and the official celebrations were compromised by a controversy in which senior members of the organizing committee were accused of misappropriating funds and were investigated by the Anti-Corruption Commission. Undeterred, the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs was determined to demonstrate that it embodied the spirit of 'attitudinal change' promoted by President Koroma, and sought to uphold the principles of its draft cultural policy – 'upholding and maintaining the good in [Sierra Leonean] culture and guarding against the negative' (MoTCA 2011: 10). Given their prominence in Freetown festivities and popularity among locals and visitors, it was inevitable that the 50th anniversary celebrations would include a special Easter Monday masquerade procession. The challenge, however, for the Ministry was how to reconcile an event that is characterized by violence and rivalry with its commitment to promoting 'non-harmful cultural practices' that contribute to 'cultural understanding, mutual benefits, respect, shared values and peaceful co-existence' (ibid.: 52).

The Ministry knew that it would be unwise to interfere with the regular masquerade procession through the centre of Freetown, and so its strategy was to create an alternative, 'non-violent' masquerade procession that would take place on the same day, but which would process in the opposite direction, out of central Freetown through the more affluent Western suburbs to Lumley Beach. In an interview preceding the event, the Director of Cultural Affairs explained that it was important to bring the masquerades 'into the 21st century' and to make the event 'more disciplined' by excluding those Ode-lay and Hunting societies that 'did not know how to be serious'. Being 'serious' on this occasion meant that the society members should dance, but not fight. Fighting, according to the Director, was 'unprofessional'. As well as inviting only 'serious' Ode-lay and Hunting societies, the Director also 'chartered' a number of dance troupes to perform their own versions of the Ode-lay and Hunting masquerades. Written into their contracts was an agreement limiting the amount of alcohol consumed and 'allowing photography' (normally societies prohibit the taking of photographs and intimidate those who do so into paying fines). In addition to agreeing such 'peaceful terms and conditions', the Ministry sponsored its own masquerade, which has subsequently performed at the Annual Cultural Festival inaugurated in 2012. Here, then, was an attempt to render a potentially 'harmful' cultural institution 'unharmful', aligning 'culture' with 'development'.

On the morning of Easter Monday 2011, the various cultural groups that had agreed to abide by the Ministry's terms and participate in the alternative masquerade procession began to congregate at the Ministry compound on King Harman Road in the West End of Freetown. Soon the Ministry's forecourt was packed with invited performers and dignitaries, including a number of paramount chiefs, dance troupes, cultural associations, *Sampa* dancers associated with the

female Sande society, and a host of different musicians. Attendants who were not dressed in traditional costumes wore white, while employees of the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, including staff of Sierra Leone's National Museum, wore specially printed T-shirts and caps with the official 50th anniversary logo. As the morning progressed, the orderly group in the forecourt expanded and awaited instructions to begin the procession to Lumley Beach. This order was, however, disrupted at around noon by the arrival of an uninvited *Matoma* masquerade associated with the powerful male Gbangbani society of Sierra Leone's Limba ethnic group.

Little has been written about the *Matoma*, although it shares some characteristics of the *Gbaŋgbaŋ*, the spirit from which the men's society takes its name (Finnegan 1965: 113; Shaw 1997: 871). Kokeh Bangura of the National Dance Troupe describes the *Matoma* as a 'witch hunter' or diviner spirit, which uses its powers to identify, entrap and destroy malignant forces. Wielding its cutlass and magical cowtail whisk, and masked in red cloth with its features picked out in white cowries and crowned with a plume of dark feathers, the *Matoma* is a frightening presence. To witches, Bangura explains, its appearance is as 'lightning and thunder'. Accompanied by the rhythmic pounding of the large *kele* or slit drum, its dance enacts its search for evil-doers. A shake of its cowtail whisk – a supernatural weapon – is enough to kill the miscreant. *Matoma* masquerades rarely participate in the Easter Monday processions, but they are occasionally encountered on the streets of Freetown, sometimes bringing busy streets to a standstill. At times they have been associated with the Limba and Temne dominated All People's Congress (APC) party, the colours of which are also red (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Matoma masquerade figure performing at the

National Agricultural Trade Fair, Makeni, March 2011.

The arrival of the *Matoma* and its attendants caused some consternation among those gathered in

the Ministry compound. Women and children were ushered inside. Four men attended the

Matoma. They wore coarsely woven gowns dyed dark red-brown, resembling protective *ronko*

gowns worn by members of the Gbangbani society. One carried a wooden replica gun. A

member of staff at the Ministry claimed that this was a 'witch gun' and explained that, if

provoked, 'they will show you the witch gun and you will die within half a month'. Shaw

describes a different form of witch gun (*aŋ-piŋkar a-serɔŋ*) constructed out of 'a piece of papaya

stalk…, a grain of sand (or other tiny potential missile), and an explosive powder to activate it'

(1997: 859). A witch, it is said, can transform these objects into a lethal weapon that can shoot victims from considerable distances (ibid.).

Staff members at the Ministry were annoyed that these uninvited guests should sabotage its '21st century masquerade', but they felt unable to take action for fear that the *Matoma* would become angry and dangerous if asked to leave. But neither could the event proceed, for they were afraid that the *Matoma* would follow the procession to the beach and cause further disruption to their plans for a 'non-harmful', family-friendly celebration of cultural heritage. Finally, at around 2pm, the *Matoma* departed the Ministry compound and the procession began. Whether the Ministry staff were correct in assuming that the *Matoma* intended to disrupt the procession is not clear. While its presence was undoubtedly troubling to those gathered, as Bangura explains, the *Matoma* 'hunts only bad people'. It could be argued that the *Matoma* was summoned by its attendants to offer spiritual protection to the event.

Even though it was delayed by several hours, in the end the alternative masquerade was considered a great success. The invited performers processed peacefully along the planned route without any of the usual fighting or theft, and the police did not need to attend. When the party arrived at the beach, a platform had been constructed, and speeches were delivered by the Director and Assistant Director of Cultural Affairs, while soft drinks were distributed to the participants. The day ended with a beach party with a DJ playing Afropop music, and imported beers served, indicative of the relative affluence of the revellers. While the Ministry succeeded in inventing a new, sanitized cultural event, it could be argued that the 'power' of culture lay

elsewhere: with the disruptive presence of the *Matoma* and with the 'real' Easter Monday masquerade procession, which, of course, continued regardless.

The 'non-political' lantern parade

Another key fixture in Sierra Leone's cultural calendar is Freetown's annual lantern parade. Despite its reputation, the event has a relatively short history. According to Nunley, the parade was introduced to Freetown during the 1930s by a trader who witnessed a similar parade while on business in Bathurst (now Banjul) in The Gambia (1985: 45). In Freetown the lantern festival became associated with Lailatul Qadr, the night before the 27th day of Ramadan, when Muslims celebrate the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad. In its early days the parade involved modest hand-held structures, however, through the 1940s and 1950s, with increasing public interest and patronage, the lanterns developed into the larger and more elaborate floats, carried on bamboo frames or on the backs of lorries, that one sees in the parades today.

Freetown's lantern parade has always been a highly competitive event, particularly since many of the groups that construct lanterns also participate in the masquerade processions discussed above (ibid.). Society rivalries thus spill over into this event, which also has a reputation for unruliness and violence. In the 1950s, in an attempt to reduce the violence and introduce more order into the event, the Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA) took control of the lanterns. The YMMA formally organized the parade as a competition, and prizes were awarded to lanterns in different iconographical categories (ibid.). The YMMA also raised funds for the festival, which was distributed to the entrants, ushering in a new era in the parades. The

increasing publicity garnered by the festival resulted in rising political interest and, in the 1960s, the two main political parties, the APC and Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), both sponsored lantern groups, which proudly displayed their party symbols. This resulted in spates of politically motivated violence and, in 1967, a ban on wearing party colours was introduced (ibid.: 46). In 1968, however, this was reversed when judging of the competition passed from the YMMA to representatives of Siaka Stevens' newly elected APC government. As Nunley has argued, the rise of the APC was itself facilitated through its patronage of both lantern clubs and masquerade societies. This association with political patronage continued into the 1970s, and these cultural institutions were used by the APC as vehicles to mobilize youth and help usher in the era of the single-party state in Sierra Leone (ibid.; Nunley 1987: 203-215). By the 1980s commercial patronage gradually began displacing mosque associations, masquerade societies and political parties as the primary sponsors of lantern floats. The violence, however, remained, and this led the YMMA and Muslim clerics to question to credibility of the festival as a Muslim event.

In her work on Freetown's lanterns in the 1990s, Oram (2007) notes that the YMMA was still in charge of the event in 1993, after which it was discontinued due to the turbulence of the civil war. It was reinstated in 1997 with the return of a democratically elected SLPP government under President Kabbah, but when Kabbah was temporarily ousted that year by yet another military coup, it was again abandoned. In 2004, a decision was made to revive the parade, which was then on the point of collapse, and an organisation called the Heritage Foundation was established to 'secularise the event and broaden its appeal'. Part of this process involved shifting the date of the parade to the eve of Sierra Leone's Independence Day (the night of 26-27 April), such that it *de facto* became a national cultural festival. Since then the parade has gradually

regained its popularity. In 2008 the Foundation became officially linked with the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs as well as Freetown City Council, and the Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs officiated at the prize-giving ceremony. At the time of its reinvention as a secular event, the significance of the parade as a tourist attraction was stressed. President Koroma has also personally taken an interest in the event and has regularly attended since 2008.

The lanterns themselves are often of ingenious design. They are made from a wire or bamboo frames, covered in layers of thin paper or fabric, and are lit up, these days, by light bulbs powered by portable generators. The floats often have moving parts and depict a range of scenes, sometimes drawing on the parade's Islamic heritage, other times reflecting contemporary issues. Recently, each year's parade has been given a different theme, which is reflected in the designs of the floats. The procession starts late in the evening and follows a route from Freetown's East End along Kissy Road and Siaka Stevens Street, and past the Law Courts and Cotton Tree at the very centre of Freetown. As they process, the floats are accompanied by boisterous and high-spirited crowds associated with each lantern club. As the evening goes on, the crowds in central Freetown swell and throng the streets, contributing to the riotous character of the night-long party.

Leading up to the 2010 parade, the Senior Cultural Officer from the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs organized a series of meetings with cultural groups in Freetown, including members of the Lantern Union, a collective of representatives from the main lantern-making groups. At the time the Union was considering a boycott of the event, claiming that they were still waiting for the prizes awarded in 2009. The Cultural Officer was keen to 'get them back on

board' through assurances that the Ministry would support them in 2010. The Officer also used the meetings to encourage groups to campaign for the ratification of the new cultural policy during the parade. At one meeting, speaking of both the policy and the parade, he argued that 'these things are non-political – they are not APC or SLPP – they are about our culture! We have changed our mindset with these things and we are no longer fighting with each other, we are fighting for Mama Salone!' After the meeting the Officer explained that one of the key changes to the 'new' lantern parade was the focus on 'communicating positive messages'. Despite his earlier comment that the parade was now 'non-political', however, the most recent 'positive messages' link directly to the development orientated policies that were central to Koroma's first term in office. Although identified with Koroma, these policies are derived from Sierra Leone's Second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and have effectively been negotiated with the World Bank/IMF as a condition of on-going international donor support (see footnote 1). Thus the 2008 parade theme echoed the APC's 'Attitudinal Change' slogan, in 2010 the theme was 'Free Healthcare for a Better Salone', and unsurprisingly the 2011 parade was dedicated to the '50 Years Forward' anniversary theme. In 2012, in anticipation of the presidential and parliamentary elections that year, the theme was 'Violence Free Election 2012'. In 2013, the parade became part of the wider Annual National Cultural Festival, which, as previously noted, had an overarching theme of 'Celebrating Our Cultural Diversity'. Such themes are reflected in many of the floats: effigies of doctors attending pregnant women, for instance, in 2010; orderly queues of voters at a polling station in 2012.

While the nature of the politics represented at Freetown's lantern parade has changed, the messages that the floats communicate are, of course, still highly political. Indeed, the articulation

of 'development speak' has been central to the political discourse of Koroma's presidency. Though many Sierra Leoneans question whether this alignment of party politics and international development politics has resulted in a significant social or economic transformation, many others acknowledge that *'e de try-o* – 'he is trying'. Indeed the image of Koroma as the engineer of a new, modern, 'developed' Sierra Leone was eloquently expressed in a float that featured in the 2012 lantern parade, which portrayed the President as a foreman overseeing the rehabilitation of Sierra Leone's road infrastructure (Figure 3). Challenging such utopian images of political and economic progress, however, is the continued unruliness of the parade itself. Despite being hailed by the Ministry as a successful demonstration of the 'intermixing of culture and development', for critics the parade can hardly be celebrated as 'a vehicle for social cohesion and stability' (UNESCO 2010: 6). Under the headline 'Lantern Night: Parade or Pandemonium in Sierra Leone', a press report on the 2013 parade describes the event as being 'characterized by boozing, diamba smoking, fighting, looting and other forms of lawless activities that rendered the entire occasion unpleasant'. The article goes on to state that 'certain ill-motivated and criminally-minded citizens blemished this year's parade … Freetown was plunged into total chaos' (Lebbie 2013).

The lantern parades and Easter Monday masquerades are key events in Freetown's cultural calendar and prominent examples of what the Director of Cultural Affairs describes as Sierra Leone's 'unique, warm, vibrant and rich cultural heritage'. At the same time, both cases reveal a tension that exists between the international discourse of culture for development invoked by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs and the nature of these cultural institutions themselves. On the one

Figure 3: Lantern Parade float. President Koroma portrayed as the foreman overseeing the development of Sierra Leone's road infrastructure, Freetown, April 2012.

hand we can see how the Ministry leads attempts to reinvent cultural phenomena such that they accord with the 'ethically functional' model of culture manifest in the *Our Creative Diversity* report or Sierra Leone's own draft cultural policy. Dangerous, boisterous and politically-charged events must therefore be sanitized and secularized, de-politicized and commoditized. On the other hand, it is evident that such efforts, which make visible the seeming power of global discursive flows, encounter local 'frictions' (Tsing 2005), which frustrate the translation of discourse into practice, disrupt globalizing processes, and complicate simple models of power disparities.

'Traditional harmful practices'

We turn now to a final case example in which the incompatibilities between 'traditional cultural practices' and 'global ethics' are even more pronounced. This is an element of Sierra Leonean

'cultural heritage' that has been specifically targeted by international human rights agencies: the issue of female genital cutting (FGC) or female genital mutilation (FGM). As in many African countries, both male and female circumcision are widely practiced as part of 'traditional' coming of age rites in Sierra Leone, including initiation into the widely-spread male Poro society and female Sande or Bondo societies. While the practice of FGC has been widely condemned by the international community, it remains an important part of attaining adulthood – even personhood – for many. A recent poll conducted by Amnesty International (2009) estimated that 94% of women in Sierra Leone have been initiated, confirming the continued centrality of these institutions for the majority of women. There is an extensive literature debating the ethical complexities of FGC (e.g. Brennan 1989; Gruenbaum 2000; James 1994; Prazak & Coffman; Shell-Duncan & Hernlund 2000; Slack 1988), which engages with the broader problem of reconciling (cultural) relativism and (ethical) universalism. Our objective here is not to rehearse these arguments again, but rather to examine how these issues are negotiated locally.

Ironically, the Sande and Bondo 'secret societies' are some of the most well-known and visible aspects of Sierra Leone's cultural heritage. The wooden helmet masks of the societies' main masquerade dancer, the *ndoli jowei* or *a-nowo*, are highly collectable and have found their way into countless museum collections throughout the world. Indeed, so ubiquitous are these so-called 'sowei masks' that they form a veritable Sierra Leonean 'object diaspora' and have become iconic of the region – a sowei mask, for example, appeared on one of the first series of postage stamps issued by the newly independent Sierra Leone in 1961. The masks, and the initiation societies with which they are associated, have been the subject of numerous exhibitions and monographs, most recently the *Sowei Mask: Spirit of Sierra Leone* display at the British

Museum (2013), *Bundu: Sowei Headpieces of the Sande Society of West Africa* at

Queensborough Community College Art Gallery in New York (2012), and *The Art of Women's*

Masquerades in Sierra Leone at the Fowler Museum, University of California, Los Angeles

(2008). Although the context of the masquerade in the societies' initiation rituals is made clear,

the issue of FGC is rarely addressed explicitly in such exhibitions and the emphasis is usually

aesthetic or historical. At the same time, as one of the few female masquerades actually

performed by women in Africa, and as an embodiment of feminine beauty, the gendered politics

of the sowei mask along with the Sande and Bondo societies have been a particular focus of

feminist scholarship (e.g. MacCormack 1979; Boone 1990; Phillips 1995).

MacCormack (1979), for example, challenges common interpretations of FGC being associated

with male control over female sexuality (e.g. Harrell-Bond 1975: 26-28) by arguing that the

practice is part of a wider cosmology shared by both men and women, both of whom must first

undergo circumcision as part of initiation into their respective associations. The ordeal is central

not only to local conceptions of sexuality, but also personhood. It is only through initiation that a

child is transformed into a fully social being. Children are regarded to some degree as

androgynous and the removal of residues of 'femaleness' (the foreskin) and 'maleness' (the

clitoris) is essential to the rite of passage from which they emerge as socialized male and female

adults (Boone 1990: 65). MacCormack argues that the pain initiates experience during excision

is a metaphor for the pain they will later experience during childbirth, and this shared experience

serves to create strong bonds between women in society (1979: 36-37).

Such attempts at providing an emic understanding of the practice beyond the violent narratives of 'mutilation' have had little impact upon human rights interventions in this area. The most recent report of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on Sierra Leone, for example, unequivocally condemns the practice as a violation of human rights. The first paragraph of the executive summary draws attention to the failure of the Sierra Leonean Government to provide a legal framework to protect the rights of women and children by eradicating 'customs and traditions [that] perpetuate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation' (2011: 1). Amnesty International takes a similarly hard line, noting that 'female genital mutilation/cutting … represent serious breaches of sexual and reproductive freedoms, and are fundamentally and inherently inconsistent with the right to health' (2009: 46). During a meeting in 2010, a researcher for Amnesty International repeatedly referred to the senior women (*soweisia*) who undertake the excision procedure as 'cracks who kill people'. The anger which she felt towards FGC and its practitioners permitted no debate: the researcher could not accept that, for many women, *soweisia* are highly respected and play an important and responsible role in society – rather they must necessarily be unhinged or misguided.

Anti-FGC campaigns are also the focus of numerous international aid agencies working in Sierra Leone. Plan International is one such example. This is a UK-based children's rights charity, which operates globally through child sponsorship programmes that set up links between donors and individual children, schools or communities. Plan Sierra Leone (Plan-SL) has several regional offices, which are run by Sierra Leonean staff. In 2010, we visited one of Plan-SL's regional offices, were shown around a number of schools sponsored by the organisation, and met a number of the employees, including Lansana Sesay, the Regional Support Manager.[2]

In addition to ensuring that children have access to 'the basics', including food, water and education, Sesay explained that Plan-SL's priority in the region was 'to improve the position of children within the community'. He noted that this was particularly important for girls in contexts where 'local culture prevents them from going to school and creates misunderstandings about the best approaches to health'. This was both associated with the low standing of girls within the household and their role in assisting with housekeeping, but also their removal from school for initiation, sometimes closely followed by early marriage. Sesay explained that *soweisia* were central to this problem due to 'the big position and weight they hold in society'. Apart from its broader impact on girls' education, Plan-SL's key concern with the Bondo society is the practice of FGC, referred to within the organisation by the more brutal terminology of female genital mutilation (Walley 1997). Plan International's 'Say No to Traditional Harmful Practices' campaign (Stormorken et al 2007), which is informed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN-ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child, lobbies for the termination of all traditional harmful practices, and particularly those affecting girls and young women, through national legislation. In Sierra Leone, Plan-SL's approach has been to intervene more indirectly through educational programmes focusing on HIV/AIDS prevention, maternal health, and gender awareness. This approach differs from the targeted Anti-FGC campaigns run by Plan elsewhere, and those pursued by other human rights organisations working in Sierra Leone, such as Amnesty International, which lobbies for the criminalization of the practice.

According to Plan-SL's 'Say No to Traditional Harmful Practices' project plan, this approach has been adopted in Sierra Leone to take into consideration the ambivalent positioning of the

main political parties concerning the practice. FGC is considered so widespread in Sierra Leone that neither the APC nor SLPP has been prepared to enforce a ban. As a social studies teacher with whom we discussed the issue explained, 'if one party bans it, the other will say they are trying to destroy Sierra Leonean culture'. In 2006, following a petition coordinated by Amnesty International, a Child Rights Bill was drafted by Sierra Leone's Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Children's Affairs with the assistance of experts hired by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Bill included clauses prohibiting the 'cruel, inhuman or degrading' treatment of children, which was applicable to FGC. However, following parliamentary debate, the so-called 'FGM clause' was removed from the final draft that passed into law in 2007. At the time, a senior MP told reporters that there was a 'general consensus' in parliament not to outlaw FGM (Fanthorpe 2007: 22). Subsequent proposals to enforce a minimum age of 18 for girls undergoing the procedure are rumoured to have been in the pipeline since the APC returned to power in 2008, but these were apparently not ratified for fear of losing rural votes in the 2012 elections.

Besides the lack of government will, Plan-SL also highlights the connections between initiation societies and local community leaders (see also Fanthorpe 2007). There is a concern that if Plan pursued a more aggressive campaign against FGC, the relationship between the organisation and the local communities it works with would be damaged, with serious impacts upon other aspects of its programme. In more informal discussions with regional staff at Plan-SL, it was explained that one of the less direct methods the organisation takes is to 'demystify' the supposedly secret knowledge acquired by girls as they undergo initiation into Bondo. As one of the programme leaders told us, 'there used to be secrets, but we have revealed all the secrets to the press. They

have no secrets now, these women [*soweisia*] are no longer important'. This informant was referring to publications of the World Health Organisation, which provide details of the different kinds of FGC practiced, the implements used, and the associated health implications (WHO 2012). He also explained that other kinds of 'secret knowledge' that were once learnt in the process of initiation – 'things like looking after your husband, preparing food, and dancing' – were now being taught in school, removing the need for the societies.

While this informant displayed a somewhat limited understanding of the 'traditional knowledge … beliefs and value systems' associated with the Bondo society (see, for example, Jedrej 1976; Boone 1990; Phillips 1995), a story was told by another Plan-SL staff member – we'll call him Sawyer – that demonstrates that such esoteric knowledge retains its potency. When Sawyer was younger and still living in a rural district, he took a walk with his friend Joseph and Joseph's wife to visit a relative in the next village. Sawyer explained that Joseph's wife was 'always grumbling about one thing or another', and this was the case as they made their journey along a narrow bush path, enclosed by forest on either side. After a while they came to a stream, which they had to cross by balancing on a series of rocks that went from one side to the other. Joseph's wife was not happy, complaining that her skirt would get wet. Joseph passed first, followed by his wife, and then Sawyer. Joseph's wife suddenly stopped and, as Sawyer recalled, 'I swear to you, I swear to God – as a Christian – she saw an egg!'. Neither Sawyer nor Joseph could see the egg themselves. Joseph's wife reached down to pick it up, but, concerned that she had lost her mind and would drown, both Joseph and Sawyer tried to restrain her. She struggled, pointing into the water and began to shout, 'There's an egg, let me take the egg!'. She became very strong –

'like a warrior' – and, breaking free, she leapt into the water. Finally they dragged her out,

kicking and screaming, and, with the help of passers-by, all three returned to their village.

When they arrived home, a group of women ran towards them shouting and waiving their fists in

the air. They were angry because Joseph's wife had been about to 'pull a Bondo mask from the

water'.3 The women returned with Joseph's wife to the stream. When they later came back to the

village, Sawyer remembers that 'she was somehow removed from herself'. He explained that

'she would come, drunk. They would feed her gin. Unable to stand or walk she would start to

cook'. Her cooking became renowned. Nobody understood how she was able to produce such

delicious food, particularly since she would often 'lie down on the ground and direct other

women'.

After telling his story, Sawyer reflected that this 'was a real *sowei*, not a fake like these money-

hungry women'. Referring to Plan-SL's 'demystification campaign', he concluded 'you cannot

demystify a real *sowei*, her power is too strong'. A distinction is thus made between the 'fake'

and 'real' *soweisia*. For Sawyer, the real *sowei* is exempt from Plan-SL's campaign against FGC,

and represents something more profound, authentic and genuinely powerful than those who are

portrayed as charlatans, motivated by their greed for the fees they receive in return for carrying

out the excisions.

Sawyer's acknowledgement of, and respect for, the esoteric powers of genuine *soweisia* would

seem to be inconsistent with his professional work for an international development organisation

and its 'Say No to Harmful Traditional Practices' campaign. Yet the 'friction' between holding

both 'traditional beliefs' and participating in a programme that seeks to demystify, and ultimately outlaw them is mitigated by a sleight of hand which identifies some elements as 'real' and some as 'fake'. The real, it seems, is aligned with traditional *knowledges* and *beliefs*, which, because they are *merely* 'beliefs', pose no threat to the value systems of culture for development and can therefore be celebrated as part of the world's rich creative diversity. The fake elements, on the other hand, are identified with those *practices* – the efficacy of which cannot be contested – that fall foul of a global ethics. The exclusion of such practices can be tolerated since it is said they have already become inauthentic – no longer 'traditional' – because they are now motivated by greed. Thus it was possible for one of the Cultural Officers at the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs to lament the loss of 'our cultural secrets and knowledge' by placing the blame, not with international development agencies and human rights campaigners, but with the society elders themselves: the *soweisia* who 'do it only for the money, they [cut] one hundred girls at a time, and then quickly another hundred'. Needless to say, the logic of separating out good and bad (acceptable/unacceptable; functional/dysfunctional; real/fake) elements of cultural phenomena is itself a consequence of that 'ideology of culture' that Eriksen has critiqued. It is important to note, however, that this ideology has an efficacy of its own, as is evident in its manifestation in public politics such as we have been describing in Sierra Leone.

Conclusion

One of the central critiques of the international development industry is that it leads to the creation of 'aid dependency' in recipient societies. This is not only a matter of economic dependency, but also ideological dependency. With its 'buzzwords and fuzzwords' (Cornwall

2007), the 'ideoscape' of international development is a significant discursive medium of globalization, which contributes to the perpetuation of power inequalities between what are constituted as 'developed' and 'developing' states. One response to this critique has been the 'cultural turn' in development practice, which has promoted the innovation of more 'culturally sensitive' approaches to intervention, a widening in our understanding of 'development' to recognize the value of culture to human well-being, and the idea that culture itself can be a vehicle *for* development. As it has become codified in UN-sponsored reports, institutionalized in policy statements, and operationalized in organisational practice, this alternative approach has, however, also become part of the development ideoscape. Rather than representing an alternative approach, 'culture for development' has become another power-inflected, globally-circulating discourse, which often fails to translate into meaningful practice as it meets with the disjunctures and frictions that exist between different geopolitical contexts.

We have sought to illustrate here how the discourse of culture for development has been institutionalized and has entered public politics in Sierra Leone, shaping the policy environment of the formal culture and heritage sector, and informing the everyday vocabularies that government employees use to discuss cultural affairs. We have found that the unresolved (and unresolvable?) tension between cultural difference and universal ethics inherent in this discourse is reproduced in these local policies. These tensions become apparent when discourses about culture meet with 'cultural' phenomena themselves: thus traditional institutions, such as chieftaincy, can only be valorized if their power is removed; the spirit of urban masquerades can only be embraced if their aesthetics of violence is censured; the politics of the lantern festival can only be tolerated if it aligns with the politics of donor governments and international

development agencies; traditional practices must be rendered 'harmless' or else be condemned. In the case examples we have explored, it is clear that the 'creative diversity' of culture must be narrowly conceived if is to accord with the ethical universalism of culture for development, and that culture must indeed be 'creatively' reconstituted and repurposed if it is to function according to the terms of the discourse. This is a far cry from Abraham's ideas of 'cultural liberation' (1978a: 10).

And yet, of course, Sierra Leone's traditional institutions persist beyond the state's cultural apparatus. As Tsing's (2005) metaphor suggests, it is at the points of contact between – in this case – international discourses of culture for development and recalcitrant cultural phenomena themselves that 'friction' becomes apparent. Judging from the Sierra Leonean context, the contribution of culture to development, as conceptualized in reports such as *Our Creative Diversity*, is far from clear. However, we should be cautious of dismissing this discourse too hastily. For, while it fails to fulfil the outcomes anticipated in its advocates' pamphlets and reports, it has a performative power of its own, not least in transforming those who enunciate it – Ministry officials, NGO workers, etc. – into enlightened cosmopolitans who share this international language and ideology, and who perhaps know better than to worry whether it makes sense or not.

References

Abraham, A. 1978a. *Cultural Policy in Sierra Leone*. Paris: UNESCO.

Abraham, A. 1978b. *Mende Government and Politics Under Colonial Rule*. Freetown: Sierra

    Leone University Press.

Amnesty International. 2009. *Out of Reach: The Cost of Maternal Healthcare in Sierra Leone*.

    London: Amnesty International Publications. Retrieved from

    http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR51/005/2009/en/9ed4ed6f-557f-4256-989f-

    485733f9addf/afr510052009eng.pdf [5 October 2012]

Appadurai, A. 1990. 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy', *Public Culture* 2(2):

    1-24.

Basu, P. 2008. 'Confronting the Past? Negotiating a Heritage of Conflict in Sierra Leone',

    Journal of Material Culture 13(2): 153-167.

Basu, P. 2013. 'Recasting the National Narrative: Postcolonial Pastiche and the New Sierra

    Leone Peace and Cultural Monument', *African Arts* 46(3): 10-25.

Basu, P. 2014. 'Reanimating Cultural Heritage: Digital Curatorship, Knowledge Networks and

    Social Transformation in Sierra Leone', in Coombes, A.E. and Phillips, R.B. (eds)

    Museum Transformations: Art, Culture, History. Oxford: Wiley.

Boone, S.A. 1990. *Radiance from the Waters: Ideals of Feminine Beauty in Mende Art*. New

    Haven: Yale University Press.

Brennan, K. 1989. 'The Influence of Cultural Relativism on International Human Rights Law:

    Female Circumcision as a Case Study', *Law and Inequality* 8: 367-398.

British Council, 2012. 'The Power of Culture to Change Lives' brochure. Retrieved from

    http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/documents/The Power of Culture.pdf [30

    July 2013]

Cornwall, A. 2007. 'Buzzwords and Fuzzwords: Deconstructing Development Discourse', *Development in Practice* 17(4-5): 471-484.

Cornwall, A. and Brock, K. 2005. 'What do Buzzwords do for Development Policy? A critical look at 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction'. *Third World Quartlerly* 26(7): 1043-1060.

Eriksen, T.H. 2001. 'Between Universalism and Relativism: A Critique of the UNESCO Concept of Culture', in Cowan, J.K., Dembour, M.-B., Wilson, R.A. (eds) *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fanthorpe, R. 2005. On the Limits of Liberal Peace: Chiefs and Democratic Decentralization in Post-War Sierra Leone. *African Affairs* 105/418: 27-49.

Fanthorpe, R. 2007. 'Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation', Writenet Report commissioned by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Retrieved from www.refworld.org/docid/46cee3152.html [8 July 2013]

Finnegan, R. 1965. *Survey of the Limba People of Sierra Leone*. London: H.M. Stationery Office.

Fraser, A. 2005. 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: Now Who Calls the Shots?' *Review of African Political Economy* 104/5: 317-340.

Gruenbaum, E. 2000. *The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological Perspective*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Grillo, R.D. and Stirrat, R.L. 1997. *Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspectives*. Oxford: Berg.

Hajer, M.A. 1993. 'Discourse Coalitions and the Institutionalization of Practice: The Case of Acid Rain in Britain', in Fisher, F. and Forester, J. (eds) *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hajer, M.A. 1995, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hannerz, U. 1992. *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Harrell-Bond, B.E. 1975. *Modern Marriage in Sierra Leone: A Study of the Professional Group*. New York: Mounton.

Hart, W.A. 1988. Limba Funeral Masks, *African Arts* 22(1): 60-67 +99.

Jackson, P. 2007. 'Reshuffling an Old Deck of Cards: The Politics of Local Government Reform in Sierra Leone', *African Affairs* 106(422): 95-111.

James, S. 1994. 'Reconciling International Human Rights and Cultural Relativism: The Case of Female Circumcision', *Bioethics* 8(1): 1-26.

Jedrej, M.C. 1976. 'Medicine, Fetish and Secret Society in a West African Culture', *Africa* 46(3): 247-257.

Jedrej, M.C. 1986. 'Dan and Mende Masks: A Structural Comparison', *Africa* 56(1): 71-80.

Lamb, V. and Lamb, A. 1984. *Sierra Leone Weaving*. Hertingfordbury: Roxford Books.

Lange, M. 2009. *Lineages of Despotism and Development: British Colonialism and State Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lebbie, J.M. 2013. 'Lantern Night: Parade or Pandemonium in Sierra Leone', May 1, Sierra Express Media. Retrieved from www.sierraexpressmedia.com/archives/56379 [30 July 2013]

MacCormack, C.P. 1979. 'Sande: The Public Face of a Secret Society', in B. Jules-Rosette (ed.)
  The New Religions of Africa. Norwood: Ablex Publishing.

Milliken, J. 1999. 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research
  and Methods', *European Journal of International Relations* 5(2): 225-254

MoTCA (Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs), 2011. 'National Cultural Policy and Action
  Plan for Sierra Leone', Unpublished version submitted to cabinet in September 2011.
  Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Government of Sierra Leone.

Nunley, J.W. 1985. 'The Lantern Festival in Sierra Leone', *African Arts* 18(2): 45-49+97+102-
  103.

Nunley, J.W. 1987. *Moving with the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa*.
  Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Oram, J. 2007. 'Freetown "Lantans": Tradition, Art and Performance in Sierra Leone, 1895-
  1997'. Unpublished PhD Thesis. SOAS, University of London.

Ottenberg, S. 2007. 'Decorated Hu Ronko Shirts from Northern Sierra Leone', *African Arts*
  40(4): 14-31.

Peters, K. 2011. *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University
  Press.

Phillips, R.B. 1995. *Representing Woman: Sande Masquerades of the Mende of Sierra Leone*.
  Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Prazak, M. and Coffman, J. 2007. 'Anthropological Perspectives on Female Genital Cutting:
  Embodying Tradition, Violence, and Social Resilience', *Africa Today* 53(4): v-xi.

Richards, P. 2005. 'To Fight or to Farm: Agrarian Dimensions of the Mano River Conflicts
  (Liberia and Sierra Leone)', *African Affairs* 104(417): 571-590.

Shaw, R. 1997. 'The Production of Witchcraft/Witchcraft as Production: Memory, Modernity, and the Slave Trade in Sierra Leone', *American Ethnologist* 24(4): 856-876.

Shell-Duncan, B. and Hernlund, Y. (eds) *Female 'Circumcision' in Africa: Culture, Controversy, and Change*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Siegmann, W. and Perani, J. 1976. 'Men's Masquerades of Sierra Leone and Liberia', *African Arts* 9(3): 42-47 +92.

Slack, A. 1988. 'Female Circumcision: A Critical Appraisal', *Human Rights Quarterly* 10: 437-486.

Stormorken, L.S., Vincent, K., Vervik, A. and Santiseban, R. 2007. *No More Excuses!: Ending all Traditional Harmful Practices against Girls and Young Women*. Plan-Norge, Plan International. Retrieved from http://www.plan.fi/File/1e3f1736-1ce2-4ac2-824f-172803cc8088/No+more+excuses+%28Plan+2007%29.pdf [8 October 2012]

TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), 2004. *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, volume 2*. Freetown: Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Tsing, A.L. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

UNESCO, 1969, *Records of the Fifteenth Session of the General Conference: Resolutions*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO, 2010. 'The Power of Culture for Development' brochure. Paris: UNESCO.

UNHRC, 2011. 'Assistance to Sierra Leone in the Field of Human Rights – Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights', 22 February 2011. Retrieved from http://daccess-dds-

ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G11/110/76/PDF/G1111076.pdf?OpenElement [8 October 2012]

Walley, C.J. 1997. 'Searching for "Voices": Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations', *Cultural Anthropology* 12(3): 405-438.

WCCD (World Commission on Culture and Development), 1996. *Our Creative Diversity: Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, Second revised edition.* Paris: UNESCO.

WHO (World Health Organization). 2012. *Female Genital Mutilation*. Fact Sheet No.241. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/ [8 October 2012].

Zetterstrom-Sharp, J.T. 2013. 'Encounters of Culture, Heritage and Development: Exploring Global Connection in Sierra Leone'. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University College London.

---

[1]   Although presented as Koroma's personal manifesto, the 'Agenda for Change' was a codification of Sierra Leone's Second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP-II). PRSPs are mechanisms for coordinating multi-donor support through the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Intended as a departure from previous 'top-down' approaches of the World Bank, the strategies emerge from discussion between both 'domestic stakeholders' and 'international development partners', with 'ownership' identified with the beneficiary country. It has been argued, however, that PRSPs enable international financial institutions 'to secure ever more intimate supervision of African political communities' and that they may therefore be better understood as a 'technology of "social control"' (Fraser 2005: 317).

[2]   Names and other details have been changed in order to protect informants' anonymity.

[3]   The spirits of the Bondo or Sande society, of which the masks are manifestations, are often said to reveal themselves to those gifted with the ability to see them under water. A distinction is sometimes made between 'genuine' masks that are discovered in this way and mere representations of these masks, which might be carved by a craftsman. There are parallels here with the notion of the 'real' and 'fake' *soweisia* discussed above.