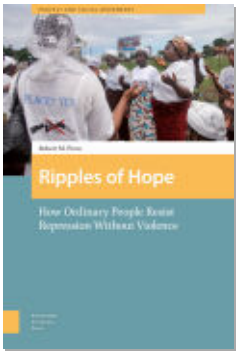
2. Students Shake the Pillars of Power



Part one
Sierra Leone

Figure 2 A street scene in central Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2008

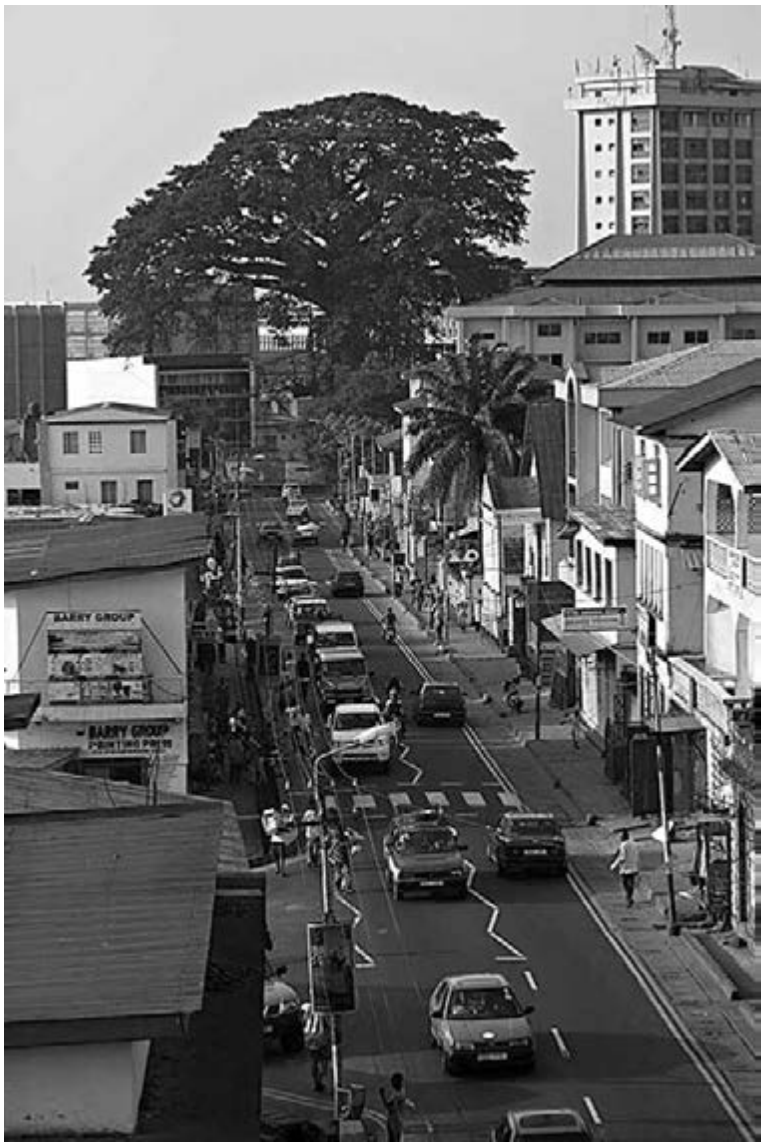


Photo by Betty Press

2 Students Shake the Pillars of Power

Sierra Leone, January 1977. Here in this coastal West African nation that is linked to the popular hymn "Amazing Grace,"[1] was home of the captive who led the successful rebellion on the ship *Amistad*, and is the country whose civil war was portrayed in the film *Blood Diamonds*, restless students at Fourah Bay College readied themselves to carry on a long tradition of resistance to repressive rule.

Meanwhile, Siaka Stevens – a president feared for his harsh way of dealing with detractors, including political executions and torture – prepared for his convocation speech as college chancellor. But during his address, students took him by surprise. Waving banners and placards, booing, and shouting "No more one-party," "Free and fair elections," and "Accountability – this is what we want," they launched a protest that built on a history of resistance in Sierra Leone. It never quite developed into a full social movement forging connections with other constituencies in the country, but it contributed significantly to the creation of a culture of resistance in Sierra Leone that would fully blossom in the 1990s against two military regimes. This in turn laid a foundation for the social movements that emerged in the 1990s. And for a brief period, the 1977 demonstrations (which went nationwide among students) shook the pillars of power of the Stevens regime. The resistance momentum continued later that year in a different form: an opposition newspaper, *The Tablet*, involving some Fourah Bay College faculty and activist students. It extended further with more student protests in the 1980s, though on a smaller scale. In the mid to late 1980s, some student activists and others chose an alternate route for resistance by taking training in Libya on how to launch a revolution.

Founded during British colonial rule in 1827, Fourah Bay College, part of the University of Sierra Leone, was once called the "Athens of West Africa" for its proud tradition of learning. It sits atop Mount Aureol, looking out

1 Former slave trader John Newton wrote the poem in 1772 that later became the hymn "Amazing Grace." At one point as a young man he was held practically as a slave himself on a Sierra Leone coastal island by a slave trader he had angered, fed during his captivity by the owner's slaves. Years later as a minister, he "used his pulpit in London as one means of raising British consciousness of the immorality of the slave trade. Newton was one of the leading abolitionist thinkers and activists to support the founders of the Sierra Leone Company, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, John Clarkson and Henry Thornton, who sought to establish a free settlement for ex-slaves in Sierra Leone" (Sapoznik 2012, 5, 11).

like a sentinel over Freetown, the capital city with its maze of narrow streets overflowing with people. In many ways the city hasn't changed much from that pivotal moment in 1977. Looking down today from the campus where the president and his entourage took their seats in the small, open-air convocation site, the eye is drawn to a sea of rusted, corrugated iron-roofed homes stretching upward one, two, four, five stories like trees competing for sunlight, of which there is plenty. At street level, between modern, taller office buildings, history continues unruffled by time: barbers ply their trade in tiny kiosks while teenage girls, balancing stacks of charcoal-filled baskets on their heads, seek customers; two-story wooden homes hark back in style to the early days when freed slaves rescued by the British (after the British ended their slave trade) gathered upon their arrival beneath the giant cotton tree in the center of town. The tree lives on today, home to bevies of bats that fly off at dusk and return by dawn.

Despite the bustle and the energy of the people in 1977, all was not well. "The worsening economic situation in the country due to high level corruption, nepotism, over-centralization of the state machinery, clientelism and patronage, the oil shocks of the 1970s, and others, had adversely affected all sections of society" (Alie 2006, 85). Many people were struggling to make a living, hoping and praying for children who didn't die at birth, and facing an ever-weakening economy under the leadership of a president who used a combination of cunning and repression to silence critics. Most people lived in the crowded slums of the capital and in the few major outlying cities. Rural villagers shared the deprivations.

The previous colonial power had gradually spread its control outside of Freetown, forming a protectorate of the rest of the area that is Sierra Leone today. The British wanted to keep the French colonizers at a distance and not end up with an English city-colony surrounded by French-speaking Africans. The British used "indirect" rule, getting locals to do the administrative work for their colony. But that meant they had to start creating schools. They gradually started some, in Freetown and later up-country, but with limited curriculum – just enough learning to do the clerical and other administrative tasks. Fourah Bay College was an exception, but bright young students, including college graduates, had only limited prospects with the British in control. Gradually, with much help from missionaries establishing schools throughout the country, and with formation of some colleges, this began to change.

Roots of Resistance

President Stevens probably should not have been so surprised at what happened at Fourah Bay College in 1977. The history of resistance in Sierra Leone is a long one. In 1839, for example, when fifty-three Africans from Sierra Leone were abducted by Portuguese slave traders, sold to Spanish planters, and chained on board the Cuban schooner, *Amistad* bound for Cuba, they rebelled.

They had no way of knowing that their freedom would be successfully defended in the US Supreme Court in 1841 by former President John Quincy Adams. The court ruled in their favor and they returned to Sierra Leone. By all accounts the man who led the slave rebellion on the *Amistad* was Sengbe Pieh, whose name was incorrectly written by the Spanish as Cinque. In court, after the *Amistad* had been seized by the US Navy, he described himself as the son of a chief. He was an imposing figure.[2] Virtually everyone who met him agreed he carried himself like a natural leader, with a charismatic magnetism, a forceful intensity. Somehow, even in chains in an American prison, he managed to hold center stage and to fix himself in the American imagination at the time.

When the British finally declared their claim in 1896 over all of Sierra Leone, establishing a "protectorate" for the area outside of Freetown, they followed up in 1898 with a tax on every home. Resistance quickly spilled over into what became known as the Hut Tax War of 1898. Though the resistance was widespread, the British focused on apprehending Bai Bureh in the Port Loko district.[3] The British were unable to apprehend him but punished other dissidents "mercilessly"; some chiefs were imprisoned, "huts and farms of defaulters set on fire, and payment exacted at gunpoint. The terror of the colonial state was unleashed with a vengeance" (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999, 42-3). Soon the Mende in the south joined their northern Temne counterparts. Later, after Bai

2 A sketch of Cinquez (an alternative spelling), was probably done by James (or Isaac) Sheffield around 1839 while he awaited trial in New Haven, Connecticut. The original is now in the US Library of Congress and available online at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003690782/. (This is listed in the References section under the name Sheffield.)

3 "Bai Bureh was, the resilient general and military strategist who led the Temne in the war against the British in 1898 … Intimations that Bai Bureh was responsible for the Hut Tax War of 1898, which grew out of his resistance to British aggression, are un-founded," according to historian Arthur Abraham (1974, 9, 106). Abraham cites Bai Bureh's account that he was drawn into the conflict in response to the killing of some people by the British.

Bureh surrendered in late 1898 he was first imprisoned then sent into exile, returning in 1905.

The Hut Tax War may have marked the end of that kind of armed resistance (until the civil war began in 1991), but the Creoles[4] and others continued to press for political rights, including through newspapers critical of the British administration. Labor organizations were also especially active. Examples of this twentieth-century resistance included: strikes by railway and other skilled workers between 1906 and 1914 to win higher wages; riots in 1919 over depression conditions and late payment of WW I war bonuses; and a strike in 1926 by railway workers over "deplorable work conditions," supported by strikes by the Krio elite. When colonial officials offered a series of constitutional proposals in 1947, the Krio elite (now "replete in lawyers") mounted a campaign to reject them (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999, 46-7; 60). In this way Sierra Leoneans provided models of resistance for what occurred in the early years of independence. But under the regime of Siaka Stevens and his All People's Congress, the resistance was nearly silenced by a combination of force and co-optation. "Stevens systematically destroyed all forms of political and civil opposition" (Alie 2006, 97). Stevens and his party managed to capture most of the energy of civil society that might otherwise have developed into social movements (Rashid 2013). The resistance was evident again from time to time in specific protests, including the 1977 student demonstrations; it began to emerge more fully in the 1980s after Stevens stepped down, coming to full fruition in the 1990s. "The case of Sierra Leone demonstrates at least that the root cause of the problem lay in the systematic ruin of state institutions by a succession of corrupt and inept dictatorships, indulged by external donors and a network of *pirate* businessmen. As economic and institutional decay set in, the regimes lost all legitimacy in the eyes of the people they claimed to govern" (Chege 2002, 159).

4 Creole (often called Krio, though originally Krio applied only to their language) are a mix of people of various origins including: former slaves recruited by the British from Nova Scotia and Jamaica, liberated slaves recaptured by the British from slavers off the coast of West Africa and released in Sierra Leone, and some freed slaves from the UK. "By the 1860s, wealth and some education had produced in the ranks of the recaptives and settlers the beginnings of a Krio elite, owners of property and aspirants to a lifestyle that was the envy of their poorer kinsmen … If the Krio were themselves divided along class and cultural lines, the alienation of some of their dominant families from the indigenous populate was even more pronounced" (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999, 26-7, 32-3).

Rebirth of Resistance

Most social movement literature describes what induces a person to join a movement, how a movement does or does not advance, and sometimes what makes a movement decline. Seldom is there an explanation of how a movement actually starts or is attempted. It is not an easy research question to examine, but one can get a reasonable idea by locating past participants and leaders and interviewing them. In 1977, students at Fourah Bay College were about to attempt to start a social/resistance movement, though it was unlikely they were actually conscious that they were doing so or had thought out the full consequences. At that time, Stevens, a former labor leader and suspicious politician, was in control with a regime based on nepotism, paternalism, and fear. He had survived coups and assassination attempts, and he had learned to manipulate, co-opt, threaten, and punish those who might pose a challenge. But the economy was slipping, and radicalism was growing among college students. In addition, Stevens had made a relatively minor mistake with the Fourah Bay College students, and it was about to trigger a protest that would shake the regime. The question in 1977 became whether he would survive what began as an unprecedented act of resistance to him at the convocation and grew into a nationwide resistance.

"Opportunity?"

Social movement theories as applied in the democratic West by McAdam and other scholars typically emphasize the importance of political "opportunities" that help a movement to advance. Generally these are considered to be something in the structure of the society, something beyond the control of the activists. Lack of opportunity is also considered critical: the greater the repression, the less chance for a social movement to advance. In Sierra Leone, there was little in the way of apparent opportunity for restless students in 1977. Instead they faced a repressive regime that would resort to force when it felt force was necessary. They also faced a regime skilled in the use of co-optation to limit the scope of any emerging challenge. Referring to McAdam's updated and synthesized, "highly consensual" list of opportunities (1996, 27): the political system was closed and stable; there were no obvious fissures among political elites or elite allies of the students (something that soon would become even clearer). Using McAdam's earlier suggested list of "opportunities" (McAdam 1982, 176), the country was not at

war; Sierra Leone was not industrializing; the Cold War was underway but with no realignments affecting Sierra Leone at the time; and there were no widespread demographic changes, a vague concept given the difficulty of determining when such changes might provide an opportune moment for action. Political freedom was limited. There was chronic unemployment, however, and the economy appeared to be worsening.

Beresford Davies was a new student at Fourah Bay College in 1977. Life had been "much better" in the early 1970s, though "not for everybody in Sierra Leone," he recalled. "People were having a good time. Nobody was rushing to go out of the country." For relatively little money, he would go to the market and fill up a small basket. "I'd buy milk, I'd buy tea, I'd buy sugar, coffee, salami sausage, butter – *any kind of thing* I would require." But by 1977, the economy was in decline. That potential "opportunity" for action was easily offset by the repressive nature of the Stevens regime. Stevens' nepotism and paternalistic style of government showed no signs of changing. "Stevens would say the elections are 'free and *fair*.' Students would say they are 'free and *fear*,'" Davies recalled, laughing. To help keep order, Stevens used the SSD (Special Security Division) an agency opponents referred to as Siaka Stevens' Dogs. "Torture was an instrument [of the state …]. By '77, you know people had gotten to the point where they are giving up to an extent … Because they [opponents, including students who had demonstrated unsuccessfully in 1968] tried all that they could to change [the policies] of the central government, but Siaka Stevens had sewn up the system … Nobody was ready to challenge him because challenging him would be trouble: you'd either get killed or you'd be forced to run away …"[5]

Phase I: Student Resistance

Sierra Leonean historian and Fourah Bay faculty member Joe A.D. Alie noted (2006, 85) that students were particularly hard-hit by the combination of bad politics and bad economy at the time. "Poor educational facilities, inadequate and inappropriate curricula, programmes, and lack of employment opportunities for young people over the years contributed to their marginalization and turned them into a rebellious group. The students,

5 Davies, in an interview with the author, December 3, 2009, on the campus of Milton Margi College of Education and Technology, near Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview, Davies, a former Fulbright Fellow with a PhD in social science from Clements University in the US, was a faculty member at Milton Margi College.

particularly those in the University, became very radical and anti-system." Against this backdrop, facing a repressive regime and with little in the way of a clear "opportunity" on their side, students at Fourah Bay College were about to shake things up in 1977, creating their own opportunity.

Students were already focused on the growing opposition to apartheid in South Africa and had in their midst some students from southern Africa, including Zimbabwe and Namibia. When Kenneth Kaunda, president of a "frontline" state of Zambia, was scheduled to visit Sierra Leone that year for the first time, students planned to welcome him. They had received permission from the college officials and were on their way to the ferry that would bring Kaunda across the bay from the international airport when the government intervened. It was Jan. 20, 1977, the day Jimmy Carter was being inaugurated president of the United States. The students suddenly heard an announcement that the Sierra Leone government had called off the student welcome of Kaunda, apparently fearing it might be misinterpreted as an anti-American gesture on the US inauguration day. But the students rejected this reasoning and greeted Kaunda anyway. On their return, they took a break at Victoria Park in downtown Freetown. Police dispersed them with teargas. After dinner that night at their campus some of the students in the "Gardeners," one of the student social/political groups, gathered behind a hostel for a secret discussion. One of the students was Hindolo Trye, president of the Student Union at Fourah Bay, and president of the Gardeners.

> So it was at that gathering we started to think: let's begin to look at the whole country. If these people [the government] can think about America – the effect of our demonstration on America – let them begin to look at the effect of a demonstration in Sierra Leone pertaining to what was happening. Because at that time we had a de facto one-party system of government. And there was a lot of corruption. Things were not right.[6]

President Stevens was scheduled to address the annual convocation on campus January 29, just a few days later. "We said that will be the best time for us to organize such a demonstration so we can outline some of our own shortfalls to our own leaders. So we started planning from the 20th."[7] Pulling off a surprise protest against the president would not be

6 Hindolo Trye in an interview with the author, December 12, 2008, in his office as minister of tourism, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

7 Trye interview.

easy, especially in a repressive state. Elected student leaders often had wide popular support, but they had to proceed with cunning to avoid detection by pro-government students who would tip off the police. So elected leaders tried to keep planned demonstrations secret until the last minute then suddenly take a vote. Whoever voted against the plan would be identified as pro-government. In their preparations to challenge the president, student leaders contacted someone off campus to write up instructions for the protest so that the handwriting could not be traced to any student. The Gardeners would lead the demonstration and begin at a signal from Trye.

> I would give a sign. I would pretend as if I'm fixing my gown. I would stand up and sit down fixing my gown. And that's the time everybody would come out with their placards. And then they'll be singing: "This is what we want." So it was shocking to everybody because nobody expected that.[8]

At Trye's signal, the twenty or so students who had been invited into the reserved seating section of the convocation and some among the hundreds of students standing around the edges pulled out their signs hidden in their clothing and began booing and calling out. "He [the president] was flabbergasted. I don't think he had ever experienced anything like it before."[9] Davies, one of the students, recalled:

> He was in the middle of delivery of his address to the convocation when the students unfolded banners condemning the government. Right there, there was complete uproar. They [Stevens and his entourage] were not able to continue with that convocation, they had to move to town, for safety.[10]

The Power of Small Groups

It was a nonviolent protest. There would soon be violence by students in response to attacks by government thugs and the SSD, and as the protests spread, there were student attacks on some government property. But for now they were exercising what today is known as nonviolent resistance or nonviolent "conflict." Either term signals a deliberate response to repression,

8 Trye interview.

9 Gordon interview. Gordon, who died in 2011, was a longtime independent journalist and a former faculty member at Fourah Bay College.

10 Davies interview.

either through acts of commission or omission, doing something or refusing to do something. One of the prominent proponents of nonviolent resistance, Gene Sharp, notes (2005, 36): "[P]eople have immense power potential. It is ultimately their attitudes, behavior, cooperation, and obedience that supply the sources of power to all rulers and hierarchical systems, even oppressors and tyrants." Sharp also stresses that victory is not easily won and requires the activists to consolidate their gains and be ready to respond to countermoves by the opposing power. Would the students of Sierra Leone be able to build on their momentary success and help bring a shift of political power in their country? (Twenty years later, Sierra Leoneans would refuse to cooperate with a military junta, depriving it of the legitimacy and power it so desperately sought and helping attract international intervention that brought the regime down.)

For the moment, students had more power than the president. Looking back years later, some Sierra Leone professionals argued that the demonstrations were a movement and that it had the potential to topple the government had labor joined forces with the students. Others disagree. "We could have brought the government down if we had had the experience; I certainly think so. There was a window of opportunity. It [the resistance] was a *very fierce* period of uprising … against a one-party system.[11] The resistance was "very, very close" to ending the Stevens regime, said another observer. "The Labour Congress could have tilted the balance if they had sided [with the students]. They may have been able to tilt the balance in favor of true democracy.[12] Gberie (2005, 44) doubts this claim. He writes: "The student-inspired protests … were a failure … [and] led to the consolidation of Stevens' hold on power … But they also exposed the weaknesses of the state and *the potential for small groups of dissidents* to shake it to its foundations" [emphasis added].

For the moment, students were refusing to be obedient to an oppressive president. What might have been just a one-time protest, not a "movement," quickly shifted from a Fourah Bay campus protest to a national campaign to bring about real political change. Many students were still celebrating the audacious challenge at Fourah Bay to the president when supporters of the government countered with violence that triggered what became a countrywide protest. It is not clear that the campus protest would have spread nationally without the response from the regime.

11 Gordon interview; emphasis in original.

12 Davies interview.

Regime Repression Stimulates more Resistance

Early prominent social movement studies such as McAdam's (1982) argued that without opportunities there was not much chance for a movement to progress. Some later studies recognized that the counter-resistance to a movement, including repression, could actually stimulate more resistance (e.g., Goldstone and Tilly 2001). Beyond an undefined point, however, repression is likely to stop a nonviolent resistance movement, as it did in Syria where a peaceful movement starting in 2011 was soon almost entirely shut down by the government's massive use of force against civilians. In Sierra Leone, the first countermeasures to the students' peaceful protest came the Monday after the weekend demonstration on campus. Members of the youth wing of the president's party, All People's Congress (APC), commonly considered by students to be thugs, attacked the campus with support from members of the Internal Security Unit. They destroyed property and assaulted some students and members of the staff.[13] This repressive response to a peaceful protest added to the frustration and determination of students, both in the college and in secondary schools.

Student leaders at Fourah Bay had been in contact with student leaders in Freetown's secondary schools, including some who would later surface as activists in the 1980s (Rashid 2004, 77). Although no advance plans had been made for them to join or support the Fourah Bay demonstration, secondary students soon became involved due to an unforeseen chain of events. Amidst word that the government was planning to close Fourah Bay College after the demonstration, secondary school students vowed to boycott their own classes. The protest message was then quickly "framed," as the social movement literature describes a rallying focus, as "*No College: No School*." This slogan helped spread the resistance nationally from Fourah Bay to across the nation as secondary students, who saw their future linked to the University, joined in (Rashid 2013). Fourah Bay student president Hindolo Trye was taken into police custody.[14] In an interview, Trye recalled what happened next amidst word that the government would close Fourah Bay College:

13 Trye interview; Alie (2006, 86). Rashid (2004, 75) notes: "Students were brutalized and extensive damage wrought on campus property. Armed units of the Cuban-trained paramilitary Internal Security Units … personally controlled by Stevens, followed on the train of the thugs, allegedly to control the situation. They joined in the operation and arrested a number of lecturers and student leaders."

14 In the interview with the author, Trye said he turned himself in because the police were looking for him.

> I remember the Inspector General of police … His son was also a member of the Gardeners and a student at Fourah Bay College at the time. So we were used to him; he was used to us because we used to go for weekends in the house with his son and so on and so forth … He said a lot of your friends want to come and see you: what should I do? I said "allow them to come and see me three by three." That was a mistake they made. So when they came in it was "Plan Two:" Bring in the school children. The IG came to see me at about 11 or 12; by 2 or 3, the whole streets of Freetown were littered with protesting students; these students and college [students] combined [shouting] "No College, No School" from the east, the west, the north, and the south of Freetown. So after that from Freetown it [the demonstration] extended to the provinces. By then we had incorporated all the other colleges: Njala [University], Makeni Teachers College; Freetown; Bo Teachers College; Bo Normal Teachers College – all of them [supported] "No College, No School" So there was massive protest in Bo, Kenema, Kono; everywhere in the country.[15]

"Plan Two," involving secondary school children, had not been prepared in advance, even by Trye's acknowledgement. Rather, it was a quick response to circumstances, a choice of tactics in the resistance. It was a major strategic initiative that transformed the resistance from a one-time campus event into a national protest. (It is worth noting here that this book argues for updated and broader conceptualizations of what social movements are, especially in repressive settings; one that includes individual and small group resistance with less automatic focus on "opportunities" and more appreciation for the initiatives of activists.)

Abdul Dimoh Kposowa, a high school student at the time who participated in the demonstrations in Freetown, recalled the sequence of events. University students would come down from their campus late at night and talk to secondary school student leaders. When the clashes broke out after the Fourah Bay demonstration, "police used live bullets." In response, some government property was destroyed by students as they went on strike around the country, according to various accounts. Students threw petrol bombs at government vehicles, buses, and police. "When police blocked [us] … we started pelting stones at them and 'missiles' (Molotov cocktails). They burned down a dozen or six police vehicles."[16] Olu Gordon, who graduated

15 Trye interview.

16 Abdul Dimoh Kposowa, interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, December 1, 2008.

from Fourah Bay in 1979 and lectured there in the 1980s, saw a girl killed near a police station and said two other children might have been shot by police as students rampaged through the streets of Freetown. According to Gordon, the spread of the resistance nationally came about in part when students from the then-closed Fourah Bay College returned to their homes in various parts of the country and "agitated" secondary school students into joining the protests. Interestingly, he noted, students were particularly active even in the city of Makeni, part of the APC's northern power base of the president: "There was a lot of discontent, even in the north."[17] Gibril Foday-Musa was a secondary school student at the time in the southern city of Bo, Sierra Leone's second main city after Freetown. "We led a demonstration against APC …We wanted an end to [single party] rule."[18]

Resistance Impact

In the wake of the nationwide student protests, the government took a two-pronged approach to regaining control. "All educational institutions in the country were closed for several weeks and the Stevens administration, through the use of brute force, restored law and order" countrywide (Alie 2006, 86). At the same time, Stevens personally began to negotiate with student leaders over their main demand to have a multiparty election. President Stevens had temporarily locked up the Fourah Bay College student president Hindolo Trye in a waterfront cell at Government Wharf. Beads of water drifted into the cell from the splashing waves, Trye recalled.[19] When released, he and other student leaders further "framed" the continuing protest as a national movement by calling for a meeting of the student presidents of other colleges and universities in Sierra Leone. Together they drafted a set of resolutions which they released February 8, 1977, at which point the resistance "became a more coherent political challenge" (Rashid 2004, 76). "Every day, for hours. [Stevens] was chairing all these meetings. It was Stevens, some members of his government, and the students." The daily student leaders' negotiations with the president and members of his cabinet brought crowds of students and others around State House. When the student leaders emerged after a day's session, they would walk to nearby

17 Gordon interview.

18 Gibril Foday-Musa, in an interview with the author, January 31, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

19 Trye interview.

Victoria Park, surrounded by supporters and there announce the results of the day's negotiations.[20]

In the end, Stevens agreed to student demands for "free and fair" multi-party parliamentary elections and an end to the one-party system, "clearly a concession made to the students' leadership" (Gberie 2005, 44). But Stevens had no intention of seeing his ruling party, the APC, lose the May 6, 1977 elections. "Amid widespread violence, harassment, killing, and destruction of rural settlements [by government forces], only a mere 15 opposition SLPP [Sierra Leone People's Party] candidates squeaked through to Parliament" (Rashid 2004, 76). But even that was too much for Stevens. On May 22, 1978, his party introduced a bill which passed and converted the country back to a one-party system, defended by Stevens as a necessary measure to avoid the country splitting into "tribal factions" (Alie 2006, 87). Part of the new law required SLPP members of Parliament to switch to the APC or lose their seat. All but one of the fifteen, Mana Kpaka of Pujehun, switched. For former student leaders such as Trye, the election they had worked so hard to achieve was a major disappointment. What really hurt was that some of the Fourah Bay College lecturers that Stevens suspected of having supported the students' protest accepted uncontested seats from the ruling APC. Trye said in the interview that he was *"extremely disappointed"* in the way the election was manipulated after "all the sacrifices; all the school children that were killed in protesting." Trye extrapolated:

> Some [SLPP winners who agreed to switch parties instead of resigning] were made Ministers and given an official vehicle. Those who were not made Ministers were given an official vehicle … All three students who went in under SLPP were made Junior cabinet Ministers. [Emmanuel] Grant was made Minister of something. All of our friends who were making all that noise were then part and parcel of the system.[21]

Emmanuel Grant's short-lived opposition victory and later political career is an example of the mercurial nature of Sierra Leone politics and an example of why the student-initiated protest of 1977 failed to bring lasting political change. Grant, a former student at Fourah Bay and a school teacher at the time of the 1977 demonstration, was one of the fifteen who won a seat in Parliament on the SLPP ticket. He was a popular candidate among those tired of the Stevens regime. As part of the government's intimidation of

20 Trye interview; emphasis in original.

21 Trye interview.

opposition candidates police fired guns at the polling station and even tried to seize the ballot boxes. But Grant's supporters "fought with the police, seized some guns from them. Somehow we were able to get those boxes into the counting station and were able to guard them. That's why I say it [his election] was a miracle." But the next year Grant agreed to switch to APC rather than resigning when the one-party law passed. He was rewarded with the post of deputy minister of finance. (He ran again in 1982 and was reelected; Stevens appointed him minister of education from 1982-86.) Grant explained his decision to switch parties rather than resign:

> The SLPP group was of the opinion that democracy will never return to this country again and they felt if we [SLPP-elected MPs] were there, we'd be able to secure their interests. Selfishness of human beings; that was the point. Nobody wants to lose. But I would have thought the best thing we could have done was to have quit Parliament and go into a private life. But that didn't happen. They instructed us to stay. So all of us, including our leader, stayed.[22]

Civil Society Fails to Support Protesting Students

The student-led resistance of 1977 expanded more rapidly than its leaders had anticipated. The nationwide student uprising that spread from the Fourah Bay campus and the temporary detention of the student president followed by his release to negotiate with the head of state alongside other student leaders was impressive. But there was no planning on how to consolidate those gains other than to leverage an election and hope for a credible opposition in Parliament. There were formidable obstacles to further success, not just the emasculation of opposition victories in Parliament despite popular support. "It was the students who made a name, but there were a lot of people underneath who supported the students, or else you wouldn't have gotten anywhere. It was a mass movement."[23] But participants in mass movements can grow weary or be drawn back to routines by their normal interests (Tarrow 1998, chap. 9).

Although the student protests went on around the country for several weeks, the promise of elections – and upcoming national student exams – took the steam out of the resistance. Unfortunately for the students,

22 Emmanuel Grant, in an interview with the author, December 12, 2008, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

23 Grant interview.

their unorganized mass support had not been enough. Key civil society organizations that might have tilted the balance of power away from the government and offered strategic and political leverage and experience that might have led to a different outcome had stood on the sidelines. Labor was the main holdout. Accounts differ on the reasons, but the most widely cited explanation is that they had been co-opted by Stevens, an acknowledged master at the art. "Political activism by the labour movement was silenced through co-optation of labor leaders during the 1977 student crisis, and then crushed in the wake of the 1981 labor unrest" (Kandeh 2004b, 177). Stevens had come up through the labor ranks himself; he and his party had "deep networks in the labor movement." Stevens also warned the professional class by radio that their businesses were likely targets if the protests "spiraled out of control" (Rashid 2013).

Tejan Kassim, a labor movement official then, confirmed that labor did not support the student uprising. But, he countered, this was due in part to lack of unity among the students. He cited support for the government among the Limba, an ethnic group Stevens used to help break a labor strike in 1981. Kassim added that when police started shooting at the students in 1977, the Labour Congress issued a statement against that.[24] Trye, looking back on his perspective as the Fourah Bay student president at the time of the demonstrations, argued that it was not just labor that failed to support the students. "The doctors, the professionals are not [consistent in resistance efforts]. The labor union – they've always been bought over. Personal interests. You know Siaka knew them. Stevens played on the vulnerability of the human being. So they were vulnerable – to material things."[25]

Women, who had been active politically in the 1940s and 1950s, retreated into social organizations in the 1970s due to the extreme violence against critics by the Stevens regime, according to Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, a prominent human rights attorney.[26] (Women's organizations would reemerge in the 1990s in a major push for peace and a civilian government to replace a military junta.) In 1981, when the labor movement finally did stage a strike in the face of worsening economic conditions, it was the students who failed to turn out to support them. Though labor leader Kassim noted that students stayed home

24 Tejan Kassim,in an interview with the author, April 17, 2009, Freetown, Sierra Leone. Kassim was general secretary of the Artisans, Public Works, and Services Employees Union at the time of the interview, a post he had been elected to in 1972.

25 Trye interview. Gberie (2013) notes: "Trade unions, professional organizations, are not normally expected to follow students."

26 Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, in an interview with the author, February 2, 2009. At the time, she was deputy chair of Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, a government agency.

from classes, this was more likely because the teachers on strike were not in their classrooms. Some Sierra Leonean former activists speculated that either students were still resentful for lack of labor's support for the 1977 student demonstrations, or they had lost some of their former steam for resistance. But by the mid-1980s, students at Fourah Bay College had reenergized under the leadership of their student president, Alie Kabba, whose story is related below.

As in Kenya and Liberia, the bar association often was not active as an organization to defend human rights, leaving human rights attorneys to act individually in defending political dissidents or making other legal challenges to the regime. This was another example of individual activism that becomes part of an attempted social movement as seen in the broader definition of a movement used in this book. In the 1970s the Sierra Leone Bar was sidelined by co-optation by Stevens. "[It] had been in the forefront of leading demonstrations against Stevens. Lawyers are on record here of having downed their tools on a number of occasions and having led marches up to state house to meet Stevens and make demands … in the 70s." But then the Bar was compromised by appointment of its president or other senior members to government posts, says attorney Abdul Tejan-Cole. "So as a result of that it ended up making the bar association a little more impotent. The bar ended up condoning what was going on [regarding repression of human rights]." When Tejan-Cole became president of the Bar Association, he issued an apology for the association's failure to act as an organization. Some individual attorneys were active in defending human rights, but their impact was minimized by failure of the Bar Association to support them.[27]

Teachers also stayed on the sidelines in 1977. So did most leaders of the clergy, Christian and Moslem who "had always been on the conservative side, and allied to ruling governments"[28]. In Kenya, a handful of clergy spoke out boldly against the repression of President Daniel arap Moi in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Liberia, Catholic Archbishop Rev. Father Michael Kpakala Francis was one of the most courageous vocal critics of both Samuel Doe and Charles Taylor. In Sierra Leone, few clergy spoke out against Stevens; the rest were either afraid to do so or supported him.

> At that point in time the whole country was an one-party state. If you said anything here, people were arrested for what they called "careless talk." More often than not, they [clergy] would resort to Romans chapter

27 Abdul Tejan-Cole, in an interview with the author, February 24, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

28 Ismail Rashid, in an email to the author, December 15, 2013.

> 13 which speaks about … render to Caesar the things that are Caesar … But to come up at that particular point in time, as it were, to say: "Mr. President. We totally condemn what you are doing" – it did not happen in the strict sense of the word. [29]

Phase II: Political Shape Shift: A "War" of Words

The narrow courtyard leading into Stop Press café is unremarkable and easy to overlook from the busy downtown street lined with angle-parked cars along a sidewalk overflowing with people, some of them working or studying at an adjacent university building. Young men hawking CDs or other items know the café well and approach clients seated in the small outdoor section in front of the indoor kitchen, sometimes venturing to the upstairs dining room, an unpretentious space with plain tables and a basic but tasty menu of rice, meats, and vegetables.

If you don't know the faces, it looks like any other café, though the spirited talk hints at something more. Stop Press is more than it first appears: it is not just a place to eat; it is an unofficial political gathering spot, mostly for supporters of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). The SLPP is a former archrival of Siaka Stevens' All People's Congress (APC), a rivalry that continues today with a new cast of politicians. At midday, history and the present mingle. Young attorneys in suits, other young professionals – men and women – and professors, settle in at tables in the cramped outdoor section. Look closer and on most days, if you know the faces, you can spot political activists, journalists, former student protest leaders and others from the turbulent Siaka Stevens era, survivors of those repressive years. One day, according to one of the regulars, President Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC party dropped in, perhaps for the food, but more likely as a friendly gesture to SLPP stalwarts. The café is run and owned by Pios Foray, who graduated in the turbulent year of 1977 from Fourah Bay College. He

29 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph C. Humper, Retired Bishop Emeritus of the United Methodist Church, of which Stevens was a member, in an interview with the author, April 20, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Humper served as president of the Inter-Religious Council of Churches and as chairman of the post-civil war Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone. In spite of the possible consequences, he added, "to some extent, the late S.M. Renner spoke out; the late Dr. M.N.C.O. Scott of the Anglican Church spoke out," as well as Bishop Michael Kelly of Bo; and the late T.K. Davies of the Pentecostal church from 1971-78. He did not specify when they criticized the government. Some clergy were more direct in their criticism of the military junta that seized power in 1992, he added.

and three other activists in December that year launched *The Tablet*, an opposition newspaper that became the extension of the resistance started with the student protests earlier in the year.[30]

One might ask: how can a newspaper be the focus of a resistance? The usual, Western-based definitions of social movements are hard-pressed to answer the question. The typical focus is on organizations that assemble people for protests, though many social movement scholars do recognize the concept of process, not just organizations. The more flexible conceptualization of social movements offered in this book takes a less narcissistic or self-observing approach to movements than usual, focusing less on the mechanics of a movement and more on the purpose and the way the targeted authorities view the various kinds of resistance a movement can encompass. Under this approach it makes good sense to focus on *The Tablet.* It had the same purpose as the demonstrations – to bring about fundamental political change in Sierra Leone through public challenges to the authorities, in this case through risky institutional channels. The regime was not very friendly to critical journalism.[31]

The Tablet was inextricably linked to the student protests and resistance at Fourah Bay.

"Radical student leaders became radical journalists with the launching of the *Tablet* newspaper" (Rashid 2004, 77). *The Tablet* was tightly linked to Fourah Bay College and a clear extension of the social movement the students attempted to start. "For the population it [*The Tablet*] was a continuation of the student strike. They knew that."[32] Both Pios Foray and Frank Kposowa, two of the four founders of *The Tablet,* graduated from Fourah Bay in 1977, the year of the student-led national protest movement. Foray considered Fourah Bay faculty member Cleo Hanciles, a supporter of the student protests, as his mentor, along with a journalist from the 1960s, I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson.[33] Hindolo Trye, student president in 1977, later wrote for

30 The other three founders of *The Tablet*, according to Pios Foray and his brother John Foray were: Charlie Kallon, Lamine Warrity, and Frank Kposowa. Olu Gordon and I.B. Kargbo became key contributors. (Kposowa names Hindolo Trye, former Student Union president at Fourah Bay in 1977 as a founder.)

31 Rashid (2013) notes that the APC's own newspaper, *We Yone*, had been a powerful tool against SLPP in the 1960s and 1970s.

32 Trye interview.

33 It is interesting how each generation of activists took models from the previous one. Abdul Dimoh Kposowa, for example, who led a 1977 demonstration at his secondary school considered as his role models Pios Foray, Hindolo Trye, I.B. Kargbo, and his relative Frank Kposowa. "They were guys I admired. They were eloquent speakers." In an interview with the author, December 1, 2008 in Freetown, he recalled a phrase they often used: "The Struggle will continue."

the newspaper. So did *Tablet* contributor Olu Gordon who was expelled from Fourah Bay along with faculty colleagues Hanciles and Jimmy Kandeh in 1985 along with forty-one students after another major student demonstration. "[A]ll three were deemed friendly with students" (Rashid 2004, 81). "With the start of *The Tablet*, "the student opposition just took another direction."[34] It was more than an opposition newspaper in an era when there was no opposition press. It was the voice of the resistance, of dissent at the time. Like the *Nairobi Law Monthly* in Kenya in the late 1980s and early 1990s, *The Tablet* became a kind of rallying point for the intellectual class. Some of the professors, the lecturers at Fourah Bay College, contributed to the newspaper.'[35] Their aim was the same: bring about a political opening of a fossilized, nepotistic system that was blocking economic progress and denying human rights. *The Tablet* lasted until 1981 when the government dynamited its press in downtown Freetown.

While one can still find copies of *The Tablet* in a monitored reading room in the library at Fourah Bay College, the best place to start tracking down its founders and key contributors is at Stop Press café. Most days founder Pios Foray is sitting, often with friends, at his usual table with his back to the kitchen, facing the rest of the patio from where he can keep an eye on business. My interview with him took place at this post. He continued to greet people as they arrived or left.

"We were radical, young idealists. We grew out of a liberal background. We thought we were the national conscience. I used the system to beat the system."[36] Foray said they found two printers, John Love and Ina McCarthy, who were willing to ignore government warnings against *The Tablet*. The paper tried to establish itself as a reasoned voice of the opposition, though from time to time their critical articles landed the staff in detention or forced them to hide. At one point he was ordered to appear at Parliament and faced charges of contempt for an article the newspaper had published which offended an appointed member of Parliament, Major-General Joseph Momoh, who was also the head of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces and later to be named president by Stevens. "There was a *huge state of tension* in town. We had a large number of followers. We went with those

34 Davies interview.

35 I.B. Kargbo, in an interview with the author, April 21, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview, Kargbo, who wrote for *The Tablet*, was minister of information and communication in the APC government of President Ernest Bai Koroma.

36 Pios Foray, in an interview with the author, February 2, 2009, at Stop Press café in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

to Parliament."[37] Foray successfully defended himself and was given "a hero's applause" by supporters. He and Hindolo Trye later fled into exile in the United States "as a result of the APC's repressive tactics" (Rashid 2004, p 88, n. 12).

Could they have been even a stronger voice for change? Independent journalist Paul Kamara, winner of the Train Foundation (New York) Civil Courage award for "steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk," thinks so. "The SLPP (the main opposition party to Stevens APC) decided to transform themselves into the printing press of *The Tablet* newspaper." Kamara contends *The Tablet* was co-opted to some extent by allowing a close and wealthy ally of President Stevens to furnish them with a printing press and vehicles, a "compromise of principles" of independent journalism. "Then when the newspaper opposed [the regime], the system came for them." The press was blown up, no doubt at government orders, in 1981, according to Kamara.[38] Foray acknowledged that things "went haywire" after the press was provided in 1979 by a backer of the president, Jamil Sahid Mohammed, who was also an entrepreneur. He did not explain further.

The Cost of Resisting Repression with Words

As a foreign correspondent in Africa, I encountered many courageous people who stood up for freedom in one way or another, often through their profession, especially lawyers and journalists. Their work was much more dangerous than mine. Periodically over a five-year period, I covered the civil wars in Somalia, Sudan, and part of Rwanda, among other stories. But we foreign journalists would fly back to our base in Nairobi, Kenya, leaving the danger behind. Once while in Khartoum, capital of Sudan, in the Arab-controlled north, a local paper published a recent story I had written based on my visit to a rebel-held town in the south of the country. I was not harassed by the government, though later I learned state security agents were questioning my activities. In one rebel-occupied town in southern Sudan I was briefly held under "arrest" by a local commander for having interviewed the unhappy local chief who resented the takeover of his area by southern rebels from a larger ethnic group. My wife, photographer Betty

37 Kargbo interview.

38 Paul Kamara, in an interview with the author, April 17, 2009, on the flat roof of his *For Di People* newspaper office in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Kamara established *For di People* as an independent newspaper in the early 1980s and maintained a strong critical approach toward all regimes for several decades. Kamara was still its editor when I interviewed him in 2009.

Press, and I were arrested by the military at gunpoint and held (unharmed) for two days in Uganda for visiting a rebel-held area. Yet our escape routes from danger as journalists were usually as close as the nearest international airport. Local journalists in Africa, however, who persistently exposed wrong doing by repressive regimes, were never that safe. For them the exit door sometimes led to detention, or worse.

In Sierra Leone, Kenya, and Liberia, I met and interviewed numerous journalists who had been mistreated by their government or forced to flee their homeland. In Sierra Leone, "[t]hroughout the 1970s the media was constantly harassed sometimes by over enthusiastic APC supporters. In addition, there were draconian press laws which hampered the work of journalists" (Alie 2006, 97). If President Siaka Steven could not co-opt someone he considered a risk to his power, he could be violent. By the time *The Tablet* was launched in late 1977, Stevens had already engineered the pseudo-legal executions of a number of his political foes. Interviewing surviving activists from that time it is easy to overlook what some of them risked to be a part of the nonviolent resistance to the Stevens regime. Two journalists for *The Tablet* illustrate the cost some activist journalists paid.

Refusing to Flee

Frank Kposowa, a co-founder and editor of *The Tablet,* met me in the members lounge in Parliament, a place he once covered as a journalist some three decades before being elected as a member of Parliament. The building sits atop a small hill in the midst of sprawling office buildings in downtown Freetown. It was here that members had voted the will of Stevens, wiping out temporary opposition gains by the SLPP in the elections students had helped force with their demonstrations in 1977, returning the country to one-party rule. It was here that hand-picked leaders of various organizations were seated as members in Stevens' efforts to co-opt any potential bases of power against him: the military, the bar association, labor. Bring them in; make them feel needed; give them prestige: take away their critical voices.

As we huddled together at a table on the side of the members lounge, Kposowa would suddenly stop talking when someone walked by in earshot, at one point for a long time. Was this a carryover from his heady days as an opposition journalist before he was elected to Parliament? He pointed to his still-visible facial scars that came from torture following one of his many arrests for his work with *The Tablet*. During those years under Stevens, "everybody was afraid. This was the time when you make your will before speaking" he says, laughing. "You could be in detention for one month, after

which you advise yourself not to talk again. Then he [Stevens] would give you a job," a typical Stevens response to potential challengers to his power.

> At that time we were really very radical. We had no respect for ethics. I'm being honest. We went raw. To make an impact on somebody's life style, you have to speak in the language he understands. We didn't have guns. We carried on the [struggle on the] front page of our paper: "The use of words is a choice of arms."[39]

His arrest and torture came as a result of an article which apparently touched a nerve with Stevens. Kposowa criticized the president's plans to host an annual summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1980. The summit preparations would involve considerable expenses at a time when the country's economy was already bad. On another occasion he was detained for an article he had written critical of the government as part of his "Ears to the Ground" column. "He was beaten up very seriously. He was admitted to hospital," I.B. Kargbo, another writer for *The Tablet* at the time, recalled in a separate interview.

Why did Kposowa persist? "We were young and radical. Wherever we went we were hailed; people were giving us money. They called our name" he said. This seemed a rather vain reason for risking his life. But while acknowledging that the fame and money were certainly attractive, later in the interview he offered a deeper insight on his opposing repression. When a brutal rebel group naming itself the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) seized power in 1997, Kposowa was president of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ). The AFRC was practically at war with independent journalists. He considered fleeing the country.

> Sometimes I get very emotional. And it was the morality of it all. Here I was: elected by a professional association to provide leadership and I was afraid. Here were journalists, my own people, fanning flames of civil disobedience … to oust perpetrators of human misery. I had an opportunity to leave this country. I did take that decision one time. But half way, I burst into tears. I said: this could be interpreted as deep betrayal [of my profession]. And these boys are holding out … For me to turn my back on them – it was one of the few moments when I was actually emasculated. I said I cannot [leave]; I turned back: I must be with them.

39 Frank Kposowa, in an interview with the author, April 15, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

> And because of that, once civilian rule was restored and my term had ended, they [fellow journalists] voted me [president of SLAJ] again.[40]

Independent Journalist Escapes Arrest by Jumping out a Window; Press Dynamited

I.B. Kargbo. In my interview with him, Minister Kargbo spoke distinctly and slowly as if carefully measuring his words, perhaps a habit developed as the official spokesman for the government, perhaps to recall with detail his political resistance some thirty years earlier. During the interview he put off numerous attempts by others to reach him by cell phone. It was something that happened often in such interviews. Former activists seemed very keen on telling their story. I often got the distinct impression that no one had previously asked them to recount it in any detail. In Kenya, for example, Paul Muite, a leading human rights attorney generously agreed to one, then a second lengthy interview, later saying it was the first time he had ever reflected on his activism in any great detail. He asked for a copy of the transcript which I provided.

At one point early in the interview Kargbo closed his eyes and recalled the "near absence of people to agitate for political and human rights" in the late 1970s and 1980s under Siaka Stevens. He analyzed both the 1977 student demonstrations and the 1981 labor strike, calling both of them "unsustainable." He argued that neither the students" nor the labor unions had a sustainable project. The old guard in the labor movement did not support the students in 1977, he said, because they still saw President Stevens as a "comrade." Stevens had come up through the labor movement. Then students didn't support labor's strike in 1981 because the student union had "lost its teeth" and its Maoist and other radical "ideology" by then.

> [The students] didn't provide any positive results. So some people did not want to take the risk of associating themselves with a non-sustainable movement. The military was clearly against it – the student uprising. The military was firmly behind Siaka Stevens. The police were firmly behind Siaka Stevens. They [the students] did not have a structured system that can keep their programs and policies intact on a sustainable basis. And this is why you have these gaps there. And the workers, too; it's the same

40 Kposowa interview.

> thing. This was not helped either by the fact that later the government decided to recruit some of these people into government.[41]

(Perhaps it should not be surprising, but it is interesting how numerous anti-regime activists in Kenya, Sierra Leone and Liberia, ended up in high government posts. In Sierra Leone when I interviewed her, Zainab Bangura, who helped lead a women's movement for peace and democracy in the mid-1990s, she was minister of foreign affairs. Trye was minister of tourism; and another former key *Tablet* contributor, Kargbo was minister of information and communication, both in an APC government, the same party they had opposed in their activist days.)

By 1979 *The Tablet,* Kargbo continued, "became a full blown organ for promoting human rights issues. People relied on it to come up with alternative views on state governance." While officially tolerated by the Stevens regime, sometimes just reading it could be a problem in some parts of the country. Marian Samu, for example, was arrested in Bo in 1981 because she had a copy of *The Tablet*. She was detained for two weeks for possession of "subversive" documents. Undeterred, the arrest spurred her interest in journalism – and politics. She began helping gather information for the newspaper. In 1991 she was vice president of the student union at Njala University and participated in a demonstration on the main road near Njala campus in 1991.[42] When I told Kargbo I had read some copies of *The Tablet* and found them surprisingly unremarkable, uncritical, and rather bland, he responded:

> The one-party state at the time did not provide much room for [an] effective opposition. And at the same time, we did not want to appear to be an anti-state instrument. So there was this neat balance that was most sincerely to insure that the people were informed properly and also insure that the government was put on its toes to promote at least some aspects of good governance; and the newspaper also exposed … any irregularities in the running of the state.

This attempt at a middle ground was precarious. While Kargbo said President Stevens at times called on *The Tablet* for advice, even soliciting names of people for a new government whom he then appointed, articles critical of the government got writers into trouble. At one point the newspaper

41 Kargbo interview.

42 Marian Samu, in an interview with the author, January 23, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone

published an article critical of the wife of a minister. The article was based on what the editors and a reporter thought was solid information, but it turned out to have been false. "Somebody set us up," Kargbo said. On another occasion, the paper's support of the 1981 labor strike was the breaking point in its tenuous relations with the government.

> I wrote an article: "The Lessons of August 13 [1981]" on all the weaknesses of the government, the disappointments, the un-adherence to the promise made [to labor] by the President. And of course that also contributed to the intensification of the uprising. The workers became even bolder than before until Siaka Stevens declared a state of emergency. The same night, the police invaded my premises. I jumped out of the window. I could not [get] access to my car. I was lucky: I saw a very brave taxi driver, all by himself. Everybody else was at home. I flagged him down and he gave me a lift to the center of town. I actually did go to the newspaper to see the level [to which] it had been vandalized.

Kargbo was found and arrested the next day. He was detained for forty days along with most of the key labor union leaders. Pios Foray and Trye fled into exile; Frank Kposowa stayed in Sierra Leone but fled to Makeni. That same week, *The Tablet's* presses in downtown Freetown were blown up. It is widely assumed the government was responsible.

The second phase of the resistance started by students at Fourah Bay College had ended. A third phase had already begun. Students continued demonstrations throughout the 1980s and to a lesser extent into the 1990s at which time two other social movements emerged to challenge two military juntas that deprived people of both their human rights and their longing for a democracy that might also improve economic conditions and provide a life for people.

Kargbo illustrates how some who engage in nonviolent resistance in one forum (as a student leader) can continue to resist in another (*The Tablet* newspaper); and, in this case, how some survive to later join governments after a repressive regime has been replaced.

Phase III: Radical Activism: From Seeking Regime Reform to Regime Change

The period of 1980-92 saw several major political changes with students continuing the resistance begun in 1977 through organized protests using a variety of tactics, both violent and nonviolent. Others turned to a more

radical option: taking training in Libya on how to start a revolution. In 1980, Stevens generated more antagonism by hosting the expensive summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at a time when the economy was deteriorating. "This activity was perhaps the most important single factor that precipitated the rapid collapse of the economy" (Alie 2006, 107). Students organized a campus strike in protest of the conference but it was ignored by the government.[43] As noted previously, in 1981 labor organized a national strike; teachers also struck. The strike was quickly put down through a variety of tactics by Stevens, but it represented a growing public resentment to the way Stevens was governing the nation. It was also a sharp contrast to labor's docile failure in 1977 to support the nationwide student strike. In the 1982 elections, an opponent of the government was killed in the Pujehun District near the Liberian border. In response, some residents organized a "campaign of defiance known as Ndogboyosoi ("bush devil"). The APC responded brutally, and thousands of peasant families were uprooted from their homes" (Keen 2005, 18).

Stevens, previously seen as the master of the game of control, appeared to be unable to prevent eruptions of resistance from various segments of society, especially from students. Unlike hierarchical organizations such as the Labour Congress or the Bar Association, or even the military, where he could wield his co-optation wand, awarding leaders with seats in Parliament, Stevens was unable to control students. Despite government supporters among the students, and despite the threats and use of violence to quell demonstrations, Stevens, and later President Momoh, never managed to fully quell students' social push for change. In 1984 there was a major student demonstration in Freetown in reaction to the ambiguity by Stevens about whether he would like to be a president for life. "Over 2,000 college students and urban youth took to the streets carrying placards which condemned the president's apparent plans for life presidency. The demonstrators stormed City Hall in Freetown and disrupted the ongoing APC summit" (Rashid 2004, 80). While some of the student organizers of demonstrations had larger goals than campus reform and wanted to see Stevens gone, they were not able to mount the kind of national protest that university and secondary school students had carried out in 1977. They made one last major attempt, under new student leadership and amidst a growing radicalization of students at Fourah Bay College. Olu Gordon, who graduated from Fourah Bay in the 1979 and was a lecturer there in the

43 *The Tablet*, February 20, 1980, cited in Rashid (2004, 78).

1980s, compared the intellectual atmosphere among students in 1977 to that of the mid-1980s.

> They were very radical [in the mid-1980s]. There was a high degree of socialist influence which was lacking in our time. We [in the 1970s] were familiar with Mao and Marx and what have you, but [there was] no considered ideological direction. But by '85 that had changed [with] a lot of student groups – you had the socialists on campus; Green Book [of Libya's Gaddafi]; you had the Pan-Africanist groups; you had [North Korea's] Kim IL Sung study groups. You had a lot of ideological groups on campus.[44]

At a time when the regime appears to have been convinced that ethnic and political divisions among students at Fourah Bay College – no doubt encouraged by the regime – prevented student unity, students rendered the government a surprise. Alie Kabba was elected student president – unopposed – in 1985. Considered a radical, Kabba had already started taking training in Libya on how to start a revolution. His election was an indication of the united determination of the students to seek bold leadership to oppose a corrupt, failing regime. In an interview, Kabba reflected on his thinking at the time.

> '85 was the crystallization of forces working for change. I felt anytime we could affect deep change. The one party dictatorship looked very vulnerable at the time. The economy was going downhill. We thought that was the time for us to go for it. I was pointing the finger at the President. We needed an end [to Stevens]. We must organize to transform – basically regime change.[45]

The "frame" for his message was *not regime reform but regime change*. Kabba points out that where the 1977 demonstrations were initially planned, the spread to secondary schools was not, a point that even then-president of the student union Hindolo Trye makes. By contrast, according to Kabba, a lot of planning went into the 1985 demonstrations. Communications had previously been established with student leaders at other campuses around the country, in particular at Njala University near Bo, and at Kenema. Kabba and others then made contact with secondary school student leaders, building

44 Gordon interview.

45 Alie Kabba, in a telephone interview from Chicago with the author, October 11, 2012.

on their involvement in 1977. Kabba's team did not make contact with the labor unions; something he acknowledges was a mistake. "We planned mass civil disobedience: go straight to the State House and launch the first in a series of mass protests, not just in Freetown [but nationwide]."

But the nationwide demonstration never happened. Before it could occur, the Stevens regime responded to what they perceived as a growing militancy on campus and possible links to Libya under Kabba's leadership. State Security Division personnel "raided the campus brutalizing and forcibly removing students staying on campus. The incident led to a citywide demonstration." The University student leadership, including Kabba, was declared ineligible to re-register. After a subsequent protest demonstration on campus, which included burning a Mercedes Benz belonging to the vice-principal, Cyril Foray, protests continued in the city where students were joined by local youth (Rashid 2004, 81). "It became more than a student action [and] lasted about a week. Siaka Stevens flew to the military barracks from Freetown. Some thought the military would take advantage [of the unrest and stage a coup] … We had 1,000s [demonstrating]. We took over the city."[46]

Gordon recalled the protest. "They [the protestors] shut down the town. The minute the students came downtown the police tried to stop them. There was tear gas all over the place. And if you are walking around you could get shot."[47] The University later expelled Kabba and three lecturers: Gordon, Jimmy Kandeh, and Cleo Hanciles. Student demonstrations continued into the 1990s. In 1985, Stevens stepped down, orchestrating his replacement by his loyal head of the army Major-General Joseph Saidu Momoh. According to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report (2002):

> Momoh, attempted to decelerate the economic and political decline through the promulgation of an economic state of emergency and a multiparty constitution. These measures were, however, managed in a dictatorial and abusive fashion, which rendered them "too little, too late" to salvage the situation. Against this backdrop, Sierra Leoneans became increasingly disgruntled and aggrieved with the malaise in governance and their inability to do anything to alleviate it. Many citizens, particularly the poor, marginalised youths of the provinces, became open to

46 Kabba interview.
47 Gordon interview.

> radical means of effecting change: they would readily answer the call to arms when the so-called revolution began to enter the country in 1991.

Students generally gave Momoh a two-year "honeymoon," but by 1987 resumed their protests and demands for multiparty government with a major demonstration. There was an effort to keep the protests nonviolent. "We had organized a 'police' force to keep it nonviolent." But students reacted to violence against them from the government. "By the time Momoh came to power we knew how to make firebombs. When police fired tear gas, students threw teargas back."[48] In a meeting in 1990 with President Momoh, the Vice Chancellor of Fourah Bay College Cyril Foray, and others, Abdulai Wai, student president at Njala University, delivered a letter from students calling for a constitutional change for multiparty elections. Momoh argued for continuing a one-party system. "He [Momoh] called us all kinds of names. He was furious. After his rage, Foray raised his hand and supported multiparty. The moment CP spoke, everything was calm. The following week, Momoh formed a national commission to study switching to a multiparty system of elections."[49] The following year, however, the APC Secretary General announced there would be a one-party election in 1991; that multiparty would be put off for five years.[50] Students at Njala University staged a demonstration in favor of multiparty democracy. Students at Fourah Bay College held their own protest for multiparty elections, as Hindowa Momoh recalls:

> We marched down the hill. But we could not even get there. The police arrived at the bridge [on the way downtown from Fourah Bay College]. We call that bridge "Solidarity Bridge." We had stones; and they had guns. We had eight [white] students [from Kalamazoo, Michigan]. We used them as shields. [He said the American students had agreed to that.] We were tear-gassed; there were wounded students.[51]

48 Kalilu Totangi, in an interview with the author, February 11, 2009, at Stop Press café in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Totangi was President of the Student Union at Njala University, 1993-94.
49 Abdulai Wai, in an interview with the author, January 21, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Rashid (2013) adds that this led to a "nationwide consultation process which led to the writing of the 1991 [multiparty] constitution. Ironically, the war started in the middle of this process."
50 Wai interview.
51 Hindowa Momoh, in an interview with the author, January 23, 2009, in Freetown Sierra Leone. Momoh, a lecturer in public administration at the time of the interview, was president of the National Union of Sierra Leone Students, 1993-94.

In 1991, shortly after the start of the civil war, Momoh finally agreed to multiparty elections. By then, the "winds of change," a popular phrase in many countries in the early 1990s, were blowing across sub-Saharan Africa in favor of democracy and human rights. A post-Cold War West was finally showing genuine interest in both. In some African countries, especially Kenya, where Smith Hempstone was the US ambassador, the US was pushing for change. Some former student leaders in Sierra Leone credited student pressure plus domestic pressure for forcing Momoh's hand. "In my opinion, domestic [pressure for multiparty] was more important [than international pressure]. Anarchy prevailed."[52]

Training for Revolution

When a regime uses enough repression, it may be able to halt open nonviolent resistance, but it runs the risk of driving it underground. To some extent that is what happened in Sierra Leone. The failure of key segments of the still-weak civil society to support the student protest of 1977; the 1981 dynamiting of *The Tablet* printing press and retaliation against its writers and editors; and the repressive crackdown on student activism at Fourah Bay in the mid-1980s, left student activists with a choice: keep trying various nonviolent resistance tactics, or turn to violent means of wresting change from an intransigent regime. Those opting for continuing nonviolent resistance, extending the 1977 resistance further, had engaged in a series of student-led demonstrations. But having seen the failure of the student movement to win lasting political change, some students and others began exploring alternatives, including revolutionary training in Libya and war. It is beyond the scope of this book to examine in any detail either of these paths. The war, especially, has been well-documented and analyzed by others (e.g., Richards 1996; Abdullah 2004; Kandeh 2004a, b; Gberie 2005; Keen 2005). Of note is the argument of Bolten (2009, 350) on the motives of student activists at this time.

> I argue … that regime change was the goal only insofar as the regime in power attempted to limit, dictate, co-opt or crush the intelligentsia; and students with democratic political ideologies could not thrive under these circumstances. In essence, students acted because, in order to benefit from their education, they needed a government that valued the

52 Momoh interview.

intelligentsia, rather than one of rigid nepotistic structures to which an educated class served only as a threat.

Although this study does not include an analysis of the war, it does examine in subsequent chapters the nonviolent resistance by civilians, mostly in Freetown, to two military juntas that seized power during the war: one in 1992, the second (which included a coalition with the rebels) in 1997. For the moment, because it shows the kind of fallout that may occur after a mostly nonviolent resistance fails to achieve its primary goals, it is worth looking briefly at the ventures of two Fourah Bay activist students' involvement with the Libya training. Several other Sierra Leoneans, led by Foday Sankoh with encouragement and cooperation from Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor, launched a civil war in 1991 which officially ended in January 2002.

Gibril Foday-Musa. We sat on the balcony of a modern apartment that my wife and I had rented with a distant view of the ocean, in the Hill Station section of Freetown. It is a neighborhood of mostly colonial-era wooden homes on high posts built to catch the breeze and minimize attacks by mosquitoes in this rain-drenched coastal country. Gibril Foday-Musa, wearing a T-shirt, cutoff jeans, and a hat inscribed "Che Guevara," seemed dressed to suit his accounts of how some students became radicals in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But his hat offered no clue to his nickname: "Gaddafi." In 1989, after revolutionary training in Libya, he had brazenly crossed back into Sierra Leone at an official border post wearing a track suit with thousands of dollars hidden in his clothing. He was on a daring mission: hire recruits to help start an armed overthrow of the government.

There was a direct link from the student demonstrations at Fourah Bay and the audacious plans of that young man. In 1977, when university students sparked the nationwide protests that challenged the one-party state, Gibril was in secondary school in Bo, where he joined in the protest which had spread there. Four years later he arrived as a student at Fourah Bay with his still-developing spirit of rebellion. With the limited student political gains of 1977 in mind, he began reading radical literature by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso. Sankara's charisma and revolutionary rhetoric inspired a generation or more of idealistic African youth.[53] At Fourah Bay his yearning for freedom

53 After only four years in power, Sankara was gunned down in 1987 by troops loyal to his supposed friend, Blaise Compaoré who succeeded him as president, bringing an end to Sankara's revolutionary government.

from the repressive Stevens rule was further kindled by faculty members such as Gordon, Hanciles, and Kandeh, who were eventually fired for being independent thinkers at a time when the regime wouldn't tolerate dissent.

> In 1981 I came to the University and at the University we witnessed a whole lot of problems with the government of Siaka Stevens. We started advocating not only for freedom of the press, we started advocating for a regime change … That was also the period of the Cold War. The University was a fertile ground for the international community. The Americans were coming. The North Koreans were coming. The South Koreans were coming. The Libyans were also there. Even the Russians were there, recruiting sets of students.[54]

Gibril began studying *The Green Book* of Gaddafi, a pursuit that earned him the nickname, "Gaddafi." He accepted a Libyan offer to visit. On one of what would become numerous trips to Libya, he was part of a group of about thirty to thirty-five people, including perhaps ten university students. Gibril began regular travel to Libya. At one point he took military training in the Libyan desert. Commenting on this training, he expounded,

> It was serious military training. Six months commando training … We wanted a revolution – we wanted to fight. Because after the demonstration [in 1977 at Fourah Bay College] when they [the government] shattered us, we decided to say: "No: the next time we demonstrate we need to get our own guns.[55]

At that time, Libya was supporting revolutionary fever in various parts of the world, including Burkina Faso, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The US considered Gaddafi a terrorist. When it came his turn to host the annual summit meeting of the OAU in Tripoli, the US lobbied nations against attending. Stevens decided not to attend, "persuaded, no doubt by bribery rather than principle, to boycott the summit." After that, Gaddafi "spared no opportunity to embarrass and undermine the Sierra Leone government" (Gberie 2005, 49). Gibril began recruiting for the future revolution, slipping back into Sierra Leone and meeting in small groups with people who had been spotted in other venues as being critical of the government. It was a courageous endeavor in the police state of the time. "Yes, it was dangerous, but exciting, too. It

54 Gibril Foday-Musa, in an interview with the author, January 31, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

55 Foday-Musa interview.

was really exciting," he recalled. Among the would-be revolutionaries from Sierra Leone, some of whom had taken training in Libya, there was "a lot of in-fighting, a lot of suspicion" that spilled into the open in Ghana, a departure point for many of the trips to Libya. "People were developing bad blood because they thought Alie [Kabba] was becoming the darling of the Libyans. Alie was more charismatic than all of us. He was likeable, intelligent. I had trust in him." The split was mostly between the ideological and the military wings of the group, which had not yet chosen a name.[56]

One of the people in the meetings in Ghana was Foday Sankoh, son of a peasant farmer, who had a primary school education. He was a former, low-ranking member of the Sierra Leone Army and had been imprisoned 1971-78 on charges of involvement in an attempted military coup. "Sankoh *had nothing to do* with the Fourah Bay College student movement," Gibril stressed. After most of the other radicals had given up on plans for an armed revolution, however, Sankoh forged ahead, launching a civil war in 1991. "We wanted an intellectual revolution. Foday Sankoh was not [an intellectual]. We had a problem with [that] – a serious problem. And the Libyans were really not happy with the situation because they wanted us to launch immediately. They wanted us to fight immediately … We had a radical split with Sankoh himself over timing of the war." Sankoh wanted to start the war sooner than the others.

In the end, Gibril and his colleagues, except the few who went with Sankoh to launch the war, dispersed. While in Ghana Gibril completed his journalism training and returned to Sierra Leone in 1990. When the military seized power in 1992, he saw a chance at last to share his revolutionary ideas. It seemed the right moment and he was hopeful as he presented a junta contact with a twenty-page paper and was told it would be given to junta leader Valentine Strasser. He later saw signs they had adopted some of his key ideas but without attribution. "Without credit, without credit." He softly repeated the phrase a third time, "Without credit. I never would have wanted much – [very softly] credit." At this moment, on the ground, two stories below the balcony, a chicken's clucking was louder than his voice. After that, he added softly, his revolutionary spirit "went away." Today he lives in Freetown.[57]

Gibril Foday-Musa illustrates that sometimes fine line between nonviolent resistance and violent resistance. In his case, he prepared for a violent response to the repression in his country, but ultimately he backed away from that and later became a part of civil society again.

56 Foday-Musa interview.

57 Foday-Musa interview.

Alie Kabba. His name kept popping up in my interviews. Alie Kabba. Where was he, I asked, as I made my way around Freetown talking to men and women who had stood up to repressive regimes and lived to tell their story? Oh, he's in the US, one person said. Maybe Chicago. His name was mentioned when there was talk of the aftermath of the 1977 demonstrations; he was part of the next wave of idealists/radicals. There was never an exact term for student leaders who simply wanted an end to a seemingly endless one-man, one-party rule based on corruption, intimidation, and cronyism that would almost certainly block their own future employment – unless they joined the sticky web of collusion with the regime that had co-opted so many before them. Some professors from the college and a number of students, including Kabba, who was elected student president at Fourah Bay in 1984, found in Gaddafi's *Green Book* inspiration for the kind of change that was not taking place at home. Kabba explained the attraction.[58]

> We weren't interested in the loaves – we wanted to change the bakery; to get rid of Stevens. [Gaddafi had a] very, very appealing message of power to the people: organizing people to be their own champion. It was everything contrary to the one-party dictatorship. We had no space for civil society [at home]. Getting this popular message of grassroots [politics] – was refreshing. "Power to the masses." I was searching for ideas, not ideology. I was trying to come up with an idea that was Sierra Leonean. In the process I came up with "WeismGaddaf," an attempt on my part to create a philosophy – interconnectedness among people – one that sought to basically assert that my interest is intimately connected, and together we could strive with something uplifting … African communalism.[59]

Kabba was exposed to revolutionary doctrines and training in Libya. As president of the student union at Fourah Bay College he attempted to implement some of the concepts from Gaddafi's *Green Book.* This led to an armed and violent occupation of the campus by government's State Security Division in 1985, which in turn prompted a citywide demonstration by students and others. He went underground for a few weeks after the police detained his fellow student leaders. After police began looking for them

58 Kabba interview.

59 This is very close to the widely-quoted African proverb: "I am because we are; we are because I am," which is "attributed to South Africa. It speaks to the interconnectedness and responsibility that we have for each other. It embodies the concept of *Ubuntu*, the African idea of living harmoniously in community" (Betty Press 2011, 1).

and raided their homes, Kabba and several other student leaders, including Ismail Rashid boldly showed up at police headquarters. This took police by surprise. A deputy inspector arrived shortly with a detention order for Kabba signed by President Stevens in red ink.[60]

Kabba was held for several weeks then defended by a lawyer pro bono, the late Claude Campbell. At a time when the bar association was lying low, individual lawyers like Campbell and others stepped up to defend people the government wanted to silence. Upon his release he stayed in Freetown for a while but grew ever more suspicious of how far the government would go to silence himself. When he and some of his friends were mysteriously "invited" to meet with President Stevens at a military barracks some distance from Freetown, Kabba opted out. He was wise to do so. Armed security forces stopped his friends' vehicle on a lonely stretch of road and asked "Where is Alie Kabba." Shortly thereafter, his lawyer told him: "These people really want to kill you." He soon left the country out of concern for his personal safety.

After his trips to Ghana and Libya, however, Alie grew disillusioned with the idea of being able to organize a revolution in Sierra Leone. He and his co-conspirators had neither the forces, equipment, nor the funds to carry it out. He later thought of another option: "Build a broad-based coalition through civil protest – passive resistance, I still believe in it … tap into the energy of the masses … as a popular uprising." But with this plan, too, he realized "we didn't have the capacity … There was a danger of spontaneity that would not make systemic change." After completing his education in Ghana and later in Nigeria, he immigrated to the US.

His fire has not died out. "My past caught up with me. I thought I would not be interested in activism [anymore], but I started working for state of Illinois. That's when I discovered nonviolence. I'm not a Marxist anymore; I never really was." At the time of the interview Kabba was the executive director of the United African Organization, a Chicago-based coalition of African community-based organizations that promote social and economic justice, civic participation, and empowerment of African immigrants and refugees in Illinois. He is married and has two sons and two daughters.

Alie Kabba illustrates the dilemma a repressive ruler faces regarding popular nonviolent resistance: ignore it and it may undermine the regime's power; repress its leaders and they may turn to violence and even attempt a revolution.

60 Kabba interview. The others who had gone to the station voluntarily were not in student government and were not detained (Rashid 2013).

Implications of an Informal Resistance

In a repressive setting, open resistance led by small groups and individual activists is possible in the absence of more formally organized structures. During times when formal opposition organizations are considered too dangerous, small groups and individuals, operating more fluidly and informally, can mount a resistance movement when participants are impassioned enough by their cause to risk violent reprisals by the state. Identifying such movements requires a more flexible concept of resistance than much of the social movement literature presents. This kind of resistance can take place without apparent structural opportunities and with minimal material resources. Demonstrations, however, even large ones, are unlikely to achieve lasting reforms without well-organized plans on how to keep the pressure on a regime after the main demonstrations end, or how to replace the regime. Without effective alliances with other key sectors of society, an uprising – even a major one that seems to threaten the pillars of power of a repressive regime – is likely to fail. One generation's activism, however, can be a model for greater activism in the future, regardless of the success achieved, sometimes leading to a culture of resistance, as happened in Sierra Leone.

The resistance never fully developed into a social movement because of the repression and co-optation skills of the Stevens regime, and for lack of follow-through planning. But it had many of the hallmarks of a social movement, especially using the broader concept of a social movement developed in this book. In Sierra Leone, most of the political "opportunities" cited in much of the social movement literature were not present during the late 1970s and '80s. There was widespread unemployment; and the economy was worsening by 1977 when students at Fourah Bay College staged a major demonstration against the regime of Siaka Stevens. But this potential advantage was more than offset by the regime's record of repression. Instead, a small group of students created their own opportunity, seizing on a scheduled presidential visit to their campus to surprise him with placards and shouted demands for political reform. The protest quickly grew into a nationwide protest that spread to secondary schools and other colleges across the country.

Though it started peacefully, as police and government thugs attacked demonstrators, some students responded with Molotov cocktails and stones and damaged public property. The demonstrations temporarily crippled normal life in the country. The resistance took place before there was much in the way of an activist civil society. Repression and co-opting by the regime

had rendered key potential civil society players generally ineffective or unwilling to join the resistance. Students, one of the few organized bodies of potential activists, were somewhat divided along ethnic lines between supporters and opponents of the regime. Student organizers of the uprising had little time to forge a supporting alliance with labor, other professional groups, or women's organizations, an alliance some observers said might have toppled the regime. President Stevens did agree to student demands for a multiparty election to Parliament, but a year after the election he reneged and won passage of a law to change back to a one-party system.

This up and down momentum echoes Tarrow's theory of social movement cycles (1998). He describes a rise and fall phenomenon; in Sierra Leone, there were several in this period. After the peak of activism during the student demonstrations, the level of resistance changed – along with its shape. The focus of a second stage begun in late 1977 was several individuals who formed a small, independent newspaper, *The Tablet*. The co-founders and key writers were mostly former student leaders and activist faculty members from Fourah Bay College. It became the voice of the movement until its presses were dynamited by the regime. The energy of the resistance revived in the mid-1980s with more student-led demonstrations and a separate strike by the labor movement. Again, failure to forge effective alliances among key sectors of the emerging civil society weakened the collective clout of the movement. There appear to be several explanations for the failure of students in 1985 under radical student leadership to achieve a major nationwide impact: (1) failure of students to establish close relations with the labor movement, including teachers; (2) the continuing use by the state of repressive and preemptive violent tactics against student protesters; (3) a realization among student leaders that it was useless to try to wrest the concession of multiparty elections from Stevens, something students achieved temporarily in 1977, because he was just as likely to renege on the results as he had then; (4) a continuing deterioration of the economy which, instead of providing an "opportunity" for expanded resistance, created a feeling of helplessness that changes could come peacefully; (5) lack of other apparent exogenous "opportunities" of the kind generally regarded as helpful for a movement, such as splits in the ranks of the military.

But a culture of resistance was growing in the 1980s that came to fruition in the 1990s when civil society effectively opposed two military juntas. In terms of social movement activism, the students had left a mark. The repression by the regime had not stopped the resistance, including the government-backed attack by thugs on the Fourah Bay campus in 1977 and elsewhere around the country. Despite efforts to intimidate and brutalize

supporters of opposition candidates in the "multiparty" elections of 1977, many people had turned out to register their dissatisfaction at the polls. Students alone could not overcome a long record of co-optation of key elements of the emerging civil society organizations and some of its leaders. But the students had shown that even a repressive regime has weaknesses. As Gberie (2005, 44) noted above, students also showed "the potential for small groups of dissidents to shake [a repressive regime] to its foundations." These lessons would be acted on in the 1990s. The activism in the 1970s and 1980s left another important legacy, as one Sierra Leonean historian noted (Rashid 2004, 77):

> The 1977 student intrusion into politics had limited gains. If anything, it served to revive a government under crisis but also *opened up the possibility of sustained and organized opposition outside formal structures* (emphasis added).

Figure 3 Secondary school students and instructor at a human rights workshop in Port Loko, Sierra Leone, 2009

Photo by Betty Press