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David O'Kane

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Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, PO Box 110351,
06017 Halle/Saale, Phone: +49 (0)345 2927-0, Fax: +49 (0)345 2927-402,
http://www.eth.mpg.de, e-mail: workingpaper@eth.mpg.de

Language, Nationhood, and Systems: insights from language policy at the University of Makeni, Sierra Leone[1]

David O'Kane[2]

Abstract

This paper examines language and national identity in Sierra Leone using Eric Kaufmann's (2017) model of the rise of nationalism, which rests on four 'pillars' derived from complexity and systems theory: 'tipping points', feedback loops, distributed knowledge, and emergence. The 'emergence' here is that of nations and nation-states, which often involve some form of linguistic nationalism. In this form of nationalism, a language or languages are nominated as the keystone of national identity or the indispensable medium of communication in the systems that make up the nation-state apparatus and the civil society that accompanies it. The relationship between language and nationalism has been a difficult one in many African countries since independence. One such case is Sierra Leone, where ethnic languages, a *lingua franca*, and English all coexist within what one writer has called a 'language ecology'. The evolution of that ecology is driven not only by national-level policy, but also by the independent policy decisions of civil society organisations such as the University of Makeni, Sierra Leone's first private university. A consideration of the roots of the language policy of that university suggests that Kaufmann's model of nationalism's emergence has merit, but that it should be supplemented by attention to the exogenous factors that drive the crises through which his four 'pillars' have their combined effect.

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[2] David O'Kane, Associate, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology; Honorary Fellow, University of Durham; okane@eth.mpg.de.

Since its foundation in 1787, Sierra Leone has been an ethnically and linguistically plural society, one in which the languages of the country's various ethnic groups coexist in a "language ecology" (Childs 2015) or a 'linguistic ecology', a concept which uses the metaphor of ecology to describe the relationships between languages, the communities which speak them, and their environment (Urciuoli 1995: 526). In such ecologies, perceptions of languages are shaped by "specific relations and institutions in specific places and times" (ibid.). In the case of Sierra Leone, indigenous languages must coexist with English, the language of the country's former coloniser, and Krio, the eponymous language of the Krio ethnic group, whose tongue has become the country's *lingua franca*. These languages are not perceived in the same way by all citizens. As in other countries in Africa – and beyond – in Sierra Leone the connection between language and identity is a complex and important one that poses vital theoretical questions: how language and identity become connected, how national identities arise, and how and why nation-states choose to deal with the existence of linguistic diversity within their borders. Linguistic diversity is often seen as threatening the national homogeneity which these states claim to represent and defend. In other cases, it is a *fait accompli* which complicates the project of nation-building precisely because it cannot be wished away or repressed. This working paper contributes to debates arising from such questions by examining language policy at Sierra Leone's University of Makeni and by proposing the use of insights and models drawn from contemporary complex systems theory to understand this case and others like it. The university has grown up in the context of the country's national reconstruction, a context in which new state systems were built up using the legacies of the past. The attitudes to language that are embedded in the policy and practice of its campus are part of the story of the role of language in national reconstruction: they therefore have a relevance beyond the campus itself.

The everyday functioning of the contemporary nation-state relies on complex systems of various kinds – systems of administration, communication, law enforcement, *et cetera.* Nationalist movements claim to embody or represent nations as a whole, as do the nation-states they create or inherit: the maintenance of those states requires the successful maintenance of those complex systems, regardless of whether the nation is defined in exclusionary or inclusionary terms, and whether the population designated as comprising the nation is ethnically or linguistically homogeneous or heterogeneous. Individuals participating in a system experience stresses of various kinds, and this drives them towards particular definitions of nationhood and a particular place of language in that definition. J. Philip O'Kane has defined a system as "an object consisting of many parts that stand, act or function together" (2015: 164), while Homer-Dixon et al. view the system as "a set of causally connected entities that can be considered as a whole and has sufficiently strong homeostatic mechanisms to persist as an identifiable whole over an extended period of time" (Homer-Dixon et al. 2015, unpaginated). The concept of dynamic systems or complex systems has emerged in recent decades in both the natural and social sciences: in public health it has been used to understand the complex relationships between disease-causing agents and human populations that are themselves highly complex internally, while in other fields it has been used to understand the social causes and consequences of global climate change (Amagoh 2016; Anyanwu 2020; Luke and Stamatakis 2012). In social anthropology, the concept of systems has been traditionally associated with kinship: for Radcliffe-Brown, the totality of kinship and affinity in a given society formed a "complex unity, an organised whole", the elements of which were, moreover, united in "a complex interdependence" (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 53). Since Radcliffe-Brown's time, anthropological debates have continued to grapple with the nature and outcomes of the interdependencies between

the various elements of complex and interdependent unities. The medical anthropology of emerging infectious diseases, for example, must consider the ways in which environmental systems and social systems interact with each other. If environmental systems experience pressure from social systems, this will lead to the creation of conditions that allow diseases to cross into human populations and to reach epidemic or even pandemic proportions (Bausch and Schwarz 2014). The speed and destructive power demonstrated by such disease outbreaks (such as the Ebola virus outbreak in Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries in 2014) exemplifies the most important quality of systems: their dynamic nature. The dynamic aspect of systems arises not only from the fact that stocks of resources flow through them, but also from the fact that the flow is shaped and determined by the nature of the system itself, through that system's negative and positive feedback loops. The concept of feedback is, as Walby (2007: 464) puts it, "central to the idea of a system": systems are formed by the connections between their constituent elements, but their dynamics are produced by the effects those elements exert on each other, and the consequences of those effects. Feedback implies the existence of a causal relationship between the elements of a system, such that each individual element of a system will affect the element following it, until the point is reached that the final element affects the first (ibid.). The patterns visible within a system are emergent properties of feedback effects. In this working paper, I contend that the rise of nationalism and national identities is just such an emergent property, and that this is true also of language when it becomes part of post-conflict reconstructions of nationhood.

As such, my argument follows the lines sketched out by Eric Kaufmann in a 2017 article in the journal *Nations and Nationalism*, in which he proposes a complex systems approach to the emergence of 'nationalism from below', as distinct from 'top-down' nationalist projects engaged in by elites (2017). For Kaufmann, the constructivist-perennialist divide in the study of nationalism should be accompanied by a cross-cutting verticalist-horizontalist perspective that considers the roles of elites versus the masses. He argues that a focus on vertical processes in which ideas diffuse through hierarchies from the elites to ordinary people does not describe the creation of national identity in many cases. By contrast, the horizontalist perspective on nationalism focusses on decentralised relationships within and between groups, or, in other words, on what those outside elite circles are doing when the process of nation-building is underway. Kaufmann holds that proper understanding of that process requires the application of insights from complexity theory, and that these insights should be organized around four pillars – distributed knowledge, 'tipping points', feedback loops, and emergence. I argue, in this working paper, that the emergence of new relationships between language and nationhood can also be usefully analysed from the perspectives of dynamic systems theory and by using the concept of feedback loops, but only if the concept of stress is assigned a prominent position in the analysis, and if feedback effects are seen as occurring where individuals are exposed to significant and systemic stresses. For some writers, stress is best defined as "a powerful emotional force that can divert behaviour from the urgings of reason" (Simon 1987: 62). For others, however, it is simply "a force that, if unopposed, will move a system away from its current state" (Homer-Dixon et al. 2015, unpaginated). Stress is key to the politicisation of language, which occurs in response to the experience of stress by individuals and the wider, group-level systems to which they belong. The experience of the threat or reality of language loss, for example, has been classified as a form of "language grief" (Bostock 1997) – and grief of any kind is a reaction to stress.

"Language grief" and its associated forms of stress can lead to political militancy in defence of the threatened language, which has been an integral component of nationalist political movements in

modern history, both in Africa and elsewhere. This working paper, however, deals with stress and systems as a more mundane aspect of the emergence of nationalism and nation-states and their re-emergence in periods of post-conflict reconstruction. The everyday stresses of participation in the systems that are essential to the modern nation-state also have an effect on individuals, the feedback mechanisms that individuals are embedded in, and the character of the social phenomena produced by these systems, be they administrative, judicial, financial, or educational. In the next section, I detail the context in which those institutions were created and the politics of language that defined that context. Subsequent sections of this paper will deal with the ways in which language played a role in the creation and consolidation of the University of Makeni, and how language affects the ways persons involved in the university conceive of the university's role in national development and reconstruction. A discussion section elaborates the implications of this case for theories of nationalism, as well as how a dynamic-systems perspective might aid in revising those theories. A concluding section sketches the argument and presents a suggestion for future research, both in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, on the themes dealt with here.

Language and Cultural Politics in Sierra Leone

The population of Sierra Leone is ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous as a result of the pre-colonial movement of diverse ethnic groups into the territory, the consequences of colonial rule from 1787 onwards, and the course of cultural politics in the country since independence in 1961. The creation of a colony for liberated slaves at Freetown, today the capital of Sierra Leone, led to the emergence of a new ethnic group, the Krio, and their eponymous language. This language would go on to become Sierra Leone's *lingua franca* – in spite of the fact that the Krio would never constitute more than a small fraction of the total population. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the country became integrated, in the classic dependent and peripheral colonial pattern, into international networks of commodity exchange, relying on timber and later minerals for much of its meagre export earnings. While these relations are not within the scope of the present paper, they are relevant to the theme of systems and their dynamism. While most countries became integrated into international economic networks in the nineteenth century and after, the countries of the Upper Guinea Coast experienced a particular kind of dependent and peripheralising integration, one that had major consequences for the subsequent development of identities in the region (Højbjerg et al. 2012). As Banya notes, "Sierra Leone's economy was developed and restructured to serve British imperial industrial and commercial interests" (Banya 1993: 164). This had major implications for the country's subsequent development, both economically and socially, as can be seen in the education system, where the early development of university education was accompanied by persistent problems of access for the majority of the population: and it was also significant for the relationship between language and nationhood.

The existence of a local *lingua franca* that was distinct from the colonial language (English) has been a major factor in Sierra Leone's post-colonial politics, even though English remains the country's language of politics, business, and higher education. It is still seen, for example, as the language of "advancement" (McLean 2020: 13). Since independence, Sierra Leonean politics have involved the retention, construction, and (after the end of the civil war) reconstruction of the various systems – administrative, fiscal, educational, commercial, legal, *et cetera* – that are vital to the sustained existence of a modern nation-state. A functioning fiscal system, for example, not only

provides a country with a viable financial base for administration and the provision of public goods, but also, it has been argued, assists in the democratisation of states (Baskaran and Bigsten 2013). The present phase of language and nationhood in Sierra Leone has taken place within the context of these systems, which have been shaped by their own longer history.

In Sierra Leone, these systems were built up over the course of the gradual expansion of the territory under colonial rule in the nineteenth century. By the 1890s, that territory had expanded into the interior, and after the attempted imposition of a hut tax in 1898 it was secured by military conquest and the suppression of an indigenous revolt.

The integration of this diverse political and economic space took place in uneven and distorted ways: Eliphas G. Mukonoweshuro, a Zimbabwean researcher, notes that the northern province was excluded from the development of transport infrastructure, thus depriving of it the incentives to economic participation enjoyed by the southern province (1993: 26). As a result of British policy the southern Mende ethnic group became the group most strongly represented within the colony's nascent *petit bourgeoisie* (ibid.: 65). The Mende would become one of the groups involved in the agitation for national independence which began in the 1930s and culminated with the creation of the Republic of Sierra Leone in 1961. Nearly sixty years later, politics in Sierra Leone remains dominated by the rivalry between two ethno-regional parties, the northern, Temne-based All People's Congress and the southern Sierra Leone People's Party, which takes its base of support from the Mende ethnic group (Rashid 2013). The problems of Sierra Leonean society and politics cannot be reduced to the rivalry between these two groups, however, nor to ethnic heterogeneity alone. During the colonial period the Krio had, like the rest of Sierra Leonean society, been excluded from any major role in the colonial administration, and faced racialised discrimination from the colonial authorities, but still sought to move into the legal and other professions (Kandeh 1992: 87). At the same time, they began to perceive threats to their social position from the wider population of the protectorate (ibid.: 87–88). Their social position represented an intersection of ethnicity and class, and would continue do so after Sierra Leonean independence in 1961. Social class remained a complicating factor in the country's politics, sometimes forcing itself onto the political agenda in cases such as a controversy over the pricing of rice, the national staple (Allen 1968). An important implication of the rice-pricing controversy is that the politics of Sierra Leone have always been, and continue to be, complicated by struggles between rival elites and between elites and subalterns over available resources[3] – resources that flow through the systems of the nation-state (Rashid 2013: 27).

These factors had major implications for the country's politics of language. After independence in 1961, language swiftly emerged as a concern in the new state's politics, as a result of both independence itself and the political centrality of ethnicity which independence brought with it. Much of the state's post-independence language policy had the goal of "forestalling the consequences of ethnic/group consciousness" (Francis and Kamanda 2001: 237). While the official position was to retain English, the colonial language, as the language of administration (ibid.: 236), official recognition of language was important for the status of both Sierra Leonean languages and the ethnic groups who spoke them. This led to, for example, the political mobilisation of the Limba ethnic group in a search for "respectability", which they believed could be won via an enhanced status for the Limba language (ibid.: 237). By the 1990s, four of Sierra Leone's sixteen languages had been

[3] The consequences of this strife in post-independence Sierra Leone included the rise of single-party rule, chronic economic crisis, and mass political alienation, especially among Sierra Leone's young people. The multiple crises of the 1980s came to a head in 1991, when the Revolutionary United Front crossed the border from Liberia and the civil war began. The violence it wrought would not end for eleven years, and would leave behind it a devastated country.

elevated to national language status – Krio, Limba, Mende, and Temne (Francis and Kamanda 2001: 229).

This politicisation of language created a space in which Krio, as a *lingua franca*, could be pressed into service in politically difficult situations. Writing at the end of the civil war, C. Magbaily Fyle noted that

> "Heads of State in Sierra Leone regularly make policy statements during tours to open public shows, health centres, bridges or other such facilities. Ninety per cent of such speeches are made in Krio which is perhaps seen as having less regional bias than any other language." (Fyle 2002: 47)

This does not mean, however, that members of the Krio ethnic group have always been held in such esteem by the rest of the population. Likewise, in spite of the current use of Krio as a *lingua franca*, the proposal of Oyètadé and Luke (2008) that it be declared the official national language does not seem to have been widely supported. The politics of language in Sierra Leone have long been contested, even under single-party rule. In the run-up to Sierra Leonean independence in 1961, there was quite a degree of apprehension among members of the Krio ethnic group concerning their place (if any) in the future politics of their country, and even fears that they might be pushed out by those who had not acquired what they considered to be "western values" (Fyle 2002: 50). While Krio had been somewhat frowned upon, its usage in the business world and 'non-official' communication seems to have at least partially raised its status (Sengova 1987: 524). In spite of these advances, however, it still seems to be the case that Krio is considered inferior to English as a route into professional success and the middle classes (Gellman 2020: 141).

In the 1990s Sierra Leone experienced civil war and societal collapse (Gberie 2005). A decade of civil war meant both the deaths of many thousands of its citizens and the ruination of the country's nation-state systems of governance. After peace was finally restored in 2002, these systems of governance, as well as a wider sense of collective nationhood, needed to be restored (Sesay et al. 2009). The return of political normalcy brought back the politics of language, but in a new context – one in which the constituent ethnic groups of the nation were severely marked by the experience of war. In the earliest stages of reconstruction, some observers noted the persistence of "youth alienation, state corruption and limited reconciliation", which they saw as signalling a bleak future for the country (Baker and Roy 2004: 57). At the time, some even feared that the various forms of structural injustice and exclusion which had triggered the civil war in the first place were being reinstated, threatening a resumption of hostilities (Hanlon 2005). In short, post-war Sierra Leone appeared to be a case of a post-conflict society characterised by "suspicion, resentment and revenge in institutional rebuilding" (Højbjerg, Knörr, and Murphy 2016: 4). This was not a situation conducive to the reconstruction of a sense of nationhood that would enable social peace and legitimise the post-civil war order, and it also presented challenges connected with language as a political factor.

Even as ethnicity played a role in politics at both the local and the national levels, there was still a need for appeals that transcended the ethnic in the name of the nation. Language was one element of these appeals: the electoral success of Tejan Ahmed Kabba of the southern (and Mende-based) Sierra Leone People's Party in 2002 has been attributed at least in part to his command of the nation's five major languages (Kandeh 2003: 211). Kabba also opened up the systems of patronage to at least a few members of the northern, Temne-based elites (ibid.: 212–213). Patronage, however, was not the

only system which he and his successor, Johnny Paul Koroma of the All People's Congress Party (northern-based, and mainly Temne), needed to recreate, if Sierra Leone was to avoid a return to the problems of the past. The reconstruction of the educational system was only one of several tasks facing the people of Sierra Leone in the wake of the civil war. The most major of these tasks was the reconstruction of systems of governance, administration, justice, education, and economic life. To rebuild Sierra Leonean society was to rebuild these nation-state systems. The combination of the various systems that make up a modern nation-state are the practical expression of what Jonathan Hearn has called "the systematic relationship between the intensive and extensive powers of the modern state, the integrating effects of mass culture and the productive power unleashed by modern capitalism" (Hearn 2006: 108). In Sierra Leone the process of building that systematic relationship has historically always taken place in a difficult and highly uneven manner. Mukonoweshuro (1993) makes this clear in his account of the ways in which the emergence of trading sectors in colonial Sierra Leone followed the very uneven pattern of infrastructure. The period after 2002, however, offered the chance of a new beginning, one in which the systems that enable a sense of nationhood would be placed on a new footing, one that meant changes for the role of language in the definition of Sierra Leonean nationhood.

The implications of this for language, and for the role of language as a marker of group identity, may be illustrated by the post-war status of Krio among the ethnic group which originally developed the language. As both the language of the Krio ethnic group and the national *lingua franca*, its position had always been somewhat ambiguous, at least when compared to the other three national languages. Prior to the civil war, it had been perceived as a legacy of the colonial era rather than as a symbol of Sierra Leone's "post-colonial nationhood" (Knörr 2011: 207). With the coming of peace to the country, members of the Krio ethnic group began to re-evaluate the "creole dimension" of their ethnic identity (ibid.: 206). Before the war, the Krio language had been perceived as a 'colonial remnant'; after the war, the language was subject to novel efforts to 'Africanise' it and emphasise its connection to Yoruba heritage (Knörr 2011: 214; King 2016: 61).This new cultural re-evaluation of Krio identity was not only relevant to the Krio themselves: it was also part of a wider cultural turn in Sierra Leonean national identity, in which the reconstruction of the state and of society involved a post-crisis rebirth of 'cultural nationalism'. This involved, for example, a re-evaluation of Sierra Leone's "neglected heroes" (Basu 2016: 242) via the creation of new sites of national commemoration and remembrance in which efforts were made to present Sierra Leonean nationhood in new forms (Basu 2013). Those efforts took place in parallel with the work to rebuild the systems of governance and communication and education on which the restored nation-state would rely for its existence and consolidation. This is done within a legal apparatus created by the Sierra Leonean parliament in the early years of the post-civil war era and the relevant financial regulations which derive from it. In that post-civil war period,[4] the parliament also created the Tertiary Education

[4] This was a period of innovation in governance in Sierra Leone. A series of pilot programmes for local property taxation to fund local government and its services were initiated in three major urban centres – Makeni, Bo, and Kenema – and these schemes appear to have achieved results (Jibao and Prichard 2016: 1760). The reform of local government financing was part of a wider drive for the decentralisation of the state administration in Sierra Leone, an option chosen in response to perceptions that the single-party state's aggressive centralisation of power had been one of the main factors that had fostered the conditions for civil war. The decentralisation effort included restoring chiefs to their pre-war positions of power at a local level (something about which many observers were apprehensive: see Hanlon 2005) and creating new local governments. This implied a number of innovations, such as that of making rural villages "nodes of 'development' in their own right", rather than leaving them as mere passive cogs in a centralised state machine (Bolten 2008: 83).

Commission, as a body charged with oversight of higher education systems in Sierra Leone, including the country's first private university.

Civil Society, Language and Post-conflict Reconstruction in Sierra Leone: the case of the University of Makeni

From the 1990s onwards, a wave of creation of private institutions of higher education spread across Africa (Varghese 2006: 30). Due to the civil war, Sierra Leone was a relatively late participant in this wave, and the creation of a private tertiary education sector took a form directly related to the needs of post-civil war reconstruction in the country after 2002. In the northern city of Makeni, which had suffered badly under the occupation of the rebel Revolutionary United Front, members of the local Roman Catholic community developed a project for creating what would be the first tertiary education institution of any kind in Sierra Leone's northern region: the University of Makeni, or UNIMAK. The original plan for the university's creation included a department of peace studies that would form the 'flagship' department of the whole institution. This was later changed to a department of development studies, which remains the UNIMAK flagship department today. This change of focus reflects the contribution the university was intended to make to its community and to the country. Reconstruction after the civil war involved the reconstruction of civil society, while the university's creation required the formation of internal governance systems and the connection of the new institution to the systems of the reborn Sierra Leonean nation-state, and, beyond that, to international networks (often associated with the global Roman Catholic Church) to which the university could appeal for aid and resources.

In Sierra Leone, both public and private tertiary education institutions must perform careful 'balancing acts' as they negotiate their position within Sierra Leone's post-civil war politics (O'Kane 2018: 218). A few years after the civil war, the then-government set up a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), a new oversight body charged with scrutinising the inner workings of the country's tertiary educational institutions for purposes of quality assurance (Jackson 2015: 16). The relationship between the TEC and UNIMAK seemed to be an ambiguous one, and the relationship between the university leaders and the government in general appeared to be stressful. The choices made about the internal organisation of a tertiary education institution have to take into account the wider, external context of the re-emerging civil society in which the institution is embedded. The choice of language is one element of this context, at least for UNIMAK. Since the university sector (both public and private) in general plays a role in the reconstruction of nationhood, a university's language policy has implications beyond the education sector. The university may either choose a particular 'mainstream' language as a medium of instruction, and thus help to enhance and sustain that language's status, or it may adopt indigenous languages and help revalorise them. Either of these paths may involve specific ways of defining nationhood in relation to language. In multilingual societies, the use of this or that language may open up political contestation over access to both material resources and more intangible resources deemed necessary for the maintaining the esteem of social groups whose members may identify with the group rather than with the nation, or indeed may identify with it in opposition to the nation. Any state or civil society institution which seeks to contribute to the post-conflict reconstruction of its society needs to be sensitive to this particular aspect of the language question. Universities, as institutions that guide the intellectual history of their societies, are especially affected by this position.

The goal in other words, is not just to train new members of a professional middle class, but to create new cohorts of people who can 'think Sierra Leone', endowed with a national consciousness that will assist national reconstruction, and to inculcate in them a certain set of values – those of a society that is open, democratic, and as free as possible from corruption (O'Kane 2016, 2018). In the past, in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, members of this social layer have been the bearers of new or revised forms of nationalism, and their definitions of nationhood have often depended on the content of the intellectual traditions to which they have been exposed in their educations. The intellectual content – both official and unofficial – to which they are exposed to at UNIMAK will affect their views of how Sierra Leonean nationhood should be defined.

This includes the forms of intellectual content which relate to language and nationhood. While UNIMAK has never explicitly made the promotion of a specific language a part of its overall set of goals, the university aims to have a positive and powerful external effect on Sierra Leonean society. In parallel with this, the university has developed its own internal language policies. The effect these may have on the relationship between language and nationhood in Sierra Leone are not yet readily discernible: my research, however, suggests that on the university campus and in university policy a particular *modus vivendi* has emerged between English and Krio, with implications for the status of each language.

Language on the UNIMAK Campus: Krio as weakness?

The nature of that mode of coexistence between English and Krio was visible in several places on the UNIMAK campus during my fieldwork there, in the everyday life of the development studies department, the strategic plan of the university, and, later, in the remarks of one of the university's key people involved in the teaching of languages.

Official English and Unofficial Krio

Unofficially, it is not unusual to hear the Krio language being spoken on the twin campuses of UNIMAK.[5] During my research I would often participate in and observe the social setting of the office where the development studies department was headquartered. This small room, equipped with three desks, a fan, and various files and books on its shelves, was the site through which a shifting population of staff, students and others passed. It occupied a strategic position at the centre of the campus, and was where I spent time with the head of the department, Mr. Usina Patrick Kamara, and the deputy head, Dr. Susan Cutter. Dr. Cutter was an English nurse who had worked in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and who was, in addition to her connections at UNIMAK, also active in nursing education. Her interactions with students seeking changes to their grades were one of the many points where, as a participant observer, I was privileged to see how the social dynamics of the university occurred or were 'played out'. On one occasion I observed a student who attempted to revise her mark, talking first in English to Dr. Cutter and then in Krio to Mr. Kamara – not knowing, as we did, that Dr. Cutter spoke fluent Krio as well. Mystified that her attempt to raise her grade had been undermined by the Krio talk to which Dr. Cutter was privy, this student told Mr. Kamara (later, at another site) that "Dr. Sue must be a witch". This case, I think, sums up at least some of the ambiguous existence of Krio on the UNIMAK campus. Officially, the working

[5] The university maintains its main campus in Makeni city, along the Azzolini highway, and a satellite campus at the village of Yonni, just outside Makeni.

language of the university was English, and Krio was certainly not to be used as a medium of instruction. Yet the language still turned up on the campus, occasionally, and this was by no means a trivial thing. Officially, despite its status as the *lingua franca* of Sierra Leone, it is banned from use in the classroom at UNIMAK, where the medium of instruction is English. The use of the old colonial language is mandated in the strategic plan of the university, a document drafted as part of the efforts to consolidate the position of the school and to ensure that it would survive and test, and it is here that Krio is explicitly mentioned for the first time.

Krio in UNIMAK's Strategic Plan

As an educational institution, UNIMAK has to maintain an internal bureaucracy which produces and archives records and documents of various kinds, collating distributed knowledge that exists within the university's community and the systems which make it up. Documents have been described as "situationally embedded creations of their producers" (Wolff 2004: 285) and, as such, they allow for inferences about the social situations and institutions in which they are created and the social role of the ideas that are mobilised in those situational and institutional context (Jorgensen and Philips 2002: 6–7; Fairclough 2003: 32). UNIMAK's Strategic Plan for 2010–2015 was one such situationally embedded document. As one senior member of the university community put it to me:

> "(…) the Strategic Paper is actually a vision that we have up to 2015, for what, for what we want the University of Makeni to look like. And in that Strategic Paper we are having our goals and our main goal is actually, an education of a civilization of love. By this we mean, we want to educate people, all those coming in here, so that they can also be educators. (…) Because our belief is that when you empower intellectually somebody, it is the best empowerment that can bring about the real development." (Interview with Father Leonard Bangura, 15.10.2011)

One mode of mobilisation chosen for the production of this vision was the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, which "aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of an organization, and the opportunities and threats in the environment", with the goal of refining and identifying strategies that can best allow the organisation to achieve its goals and secure its ongoing existence (Dyson 2004: 632). As part of the process of drawing up its strategic plan for the 2010–2015, the University of Makeni held SWOT meetings with faculty as part of a "methodology intended to engage with a wide range of stakeholders".[6] When faculty were asked what weaknesses they perceived in the university, one thing they cited was the occasional use of Krio in the classrooms (on the UNIMAK campus, these would have been audible from outside). The use of the language in the classroom was, they said, inconsistent with what students had been told at their induction into the student body, and was cited as a weakness alongside such issues as "inadequate materials in the education department", "poor communication and information flows" and the problem of "weak lecturer to lecturer relationships" (University of Makeni, 2011).

The juxtaposition of the *lingua franca* with these other weaknesses implies that it is seen as an issue in terms of the dynamic systems of the university as an institution. The occasion on which they were cited is an example of a feedback loop at work – literally so, in fact. In seeking to guide its direction into the 2010s, the university had to mobilise its flows of information through mechanisms

[6] These were contrasted with strengths that included "good staff and enough coordination, good student-lecturer relationships", and opportunities that included the expansion of programmes and international partnerships. Threats, meanwhile, included high tuition fees, the 'brain drain', and problems of staff and student recruitment (University of Makeni 2011: 28).

that would help strengthen its equilibrium and Krio is seen, in this discourse, as an impediment to the flow of a key resource – information – within both the university's administrative systems and its key pedagogical relationships.

English, the Coloniser's Language?

One explanation for the resistance to the use of Krio on the UNIMAK campus would see its rejection, in the name of a preference for English, as a survival of older colonial attitudes that elevated European languages at the expense of African tongues. The English language has been viewed ambivalently in Sierra Leone: for some people at least the language was not regarded as a 'foreign language', even though it was a 'learned language' only accessible to one-tenth of the population (Conteh-Morgan 1997: 54). A more recent viewpoint, however, is that English could not function as a nation-building or national language in Sierra Leone because it had been introduced by colonisers and lacked roots in pre-colonial history (Turay 2019: 5). Such contrasting attitudes form part of what Arjun Appadurai terms an 'ideoscape', a complex of "ideas, terms and images" in which ideological contention occurs (1990: 299). Ideoscapes are often associated with the complexes of organisational forms such as the wave of private tertiary education institutions in Africa which UNIMAK joined at its inception. The appearance of these institutions in the continent has been associated with the economic turmoil of the structural adjustment period and after, which produced new incentives to acquire skills and qualifications among affected populations, but it has a longer historical context. In the early 1990s Ali A. Mazrui argued that African universities were affected by structural and organisational dependency that perpetuated the intellectual dependency of Africa on its former colonial powers, and these forms of dependency would contribute to continuing economic dependency (Mazrui 1992). This is by no means an unjust critique, but it does not fit the reality of language policy at UNIMAK, where the goal is the building of local capacity through the accumulation of networked links within Sierra Leone and beyond the country, and where the university's activities are part of a wider evangelising mission of the local Roman Catholic diocese. That church has for decades been making assiduous efforts to adapt itself to the local cultures[7] in which it seeks to win converts and establish itself as an institution; the Catholic cadre at UNIMAK, whether lay or religious, did not see their faith as requiring them to be culturally or psychologically dependent on any European model.

Nor can any such dependence be detected in the remarks of Albert Tarawali, a key member of the university staff who is concerned with the teaching of English, French, Temne, Limba, and Krio.[8] His first remarks on Krio stressed the importance of speaking this language for full participation in Sierra Leonean society. If people know you speak Krio, "then they know you've been to Freetown". In other words, they know that you are a cosmopolitan person, familiar with the nation's capital, the centre of its economic and political life. What about the question of it being a "weakness" in the classroom? He answered this by arguing that because it was a "lingua franca" outside the classroom, speaking it in the classroom might undermine the use of English. It was used in the classroom, however, whenever it might become necessary to provide further explanations of key concepts and certain key issues. Regarding how the use of Krio or English related to questions arising out of the

[7] This adaptation is known as 'enculturation' in the Church, and is defined as the adaptation of the church's universal message to local cultural concepts and conditions.

[8] These are not compulsory for students, but they are important to the university's mission, and to its drive to forge connections within Sierra Leone and beyond. The university also provides courses in English proficiency for police officers, for example (University of Makeni 2016).

colonial past and today's decolonising controversies, Dr. Tarawali told me that he did not think that "speaking English or Krio reduces anything from our Africanness or Africanity (…). If we are going to beat you, we should beat you in your language".

This is the language of a confident individual in a confident institution, one who sees no contradiction between the speaking of an indigenous language and the speaking of a language imported in the historical context of colonialism. What is implied in this is that a researcher eager to know what role language has played, or is playing, in the post-conflict reconstruction of Sierra Leonean nationhood should begin by looking at how the memory of past events, either in colonial times or in the post-colonial era, has shaped the ways in which people in Sierra Leone deal with language and reconstruction today. The experience of those eras will inform, directly or indirectly, the ways in which people respond to the stresses of reconstruction. To assist in understanding this point, the final section of this paper turns to the methodological implications of a focus on crisis as the key factor in catalysing the emergence of a sense of nationhood (or its re-emergence) in a given population. This will need to be preceded, however, by a discussion of the links between crisis, language, and the emergence of nationhood in both Sierra Leone and the rest of the world.

The Role of Language in Constructing and Reconstructing Nations

For a very long time, the study of nationalism has been dominated by a constructivist paradigm which insists on the novel and recent origins of modern nationalism. The competing schools within this paradigm share a common perspective that sees modern nationalism as a product of forces unleashed by modernity – the rise of industrial capitalist economies, the production of nation-states and national-level education systems, *et cetera* (Hearn 2006). The historical facts support this perspective: the putatively homogeneous French nation that we know today, for example, is the product of assiduous efforts by the French state to inculcate a national identity among communities who, though they lived within French borders, retained languages and local identities that were different from what we know as 'French' today (Weber 1976). This does not mean, however, that the modern French nation-state was created *ex nihilo*: the nation-building project in France had to draw on particular resources to achieve its goal, resources that were available because of the political history and social evolution of that country before its revolution. The rise of French as a national language and the language of the nation-state goes back to 1539, when the French king issued the ordinance of Villiers-Cotterêts, which made French the language of law and the judiciary, as part of a wider attempt by the French monarchy to strengthen its power over its enemies – enemies who were numerous in an age of religious wars and stubborn local ethnic diversity (ibid.: 70). If the hand of the past is evident even in the most modern of modern nationalisms, this explains the persistence of 'perennialist' or even 'primordialist' theories of nationalism, which oppose the constructivist paradigm by insisting on the relevance of national roots extending back into historical time (Armstrong 1982). In the following section I argue that a case like that of Sierra Leone in general and the University of Makeni in particular offers an opportunity to look towards a new way of understanding the emergence of modern nationalism and the role of language, one that can combine the best insights of the constructivist paradigm and its tenacious antagonist.

Each of the two conventional paradigms for the understanding of modern nationalism has their own implicit interpretation of the role of language in nation-building (regardless of whether or not that nation-building occurs after a civil conflict). In different ways, both approaches regard language

as a historical resource which can be drawn on in the political projects which nationalism entails. The division of scholarly labour between the opposed camps within nationalism can be transcended, I believe, by rethinking the language's role in nationalism and nation-building as seeing that role as an emergent property of the systems on which modern nationalisms (including linguistic nationalisms) and modern nation-states depend. Insights from both constructivist and perennialist approaches could thus be combined, and the division between those two perspectives be transcended.

The systems on which modern nation-states depend for their creation and existence are networks of related entities through which flow stocks of various kinds, and which are related to each other in ways that produce feedback loops of a negative or positive nature. Negative feedback mechanisms tend to preserve the equilibrium of systems (ensuring the maintenance of political stability and legitimacy in the case of the nation-state), while positive feedback mechanisms enhance forces that tend to disrupt and degrade systemic equilibria. The forms of modern state administration and economic connection that, according to the constructivist theory, play a central role in nationalism were systems that brought together very diverse sets of social entities (individuals, households, enterprises, civil society organisations, *et cetera*) which were then united in ways that produced very strong feedback effects, of both positive and negative kinds.

As noted above Kaufmann's application of (2017),[9] complexity theory to the study of nationalism rests on the four pillars of distributed knowledge, 'tipping points', feedback loops, and emergence. These are themes that have already been presented, explicitly or implicitly, in this working paper. 'Tipping points', the points where changes of degree in a system suddenly produce changes in observable patterns that are not just changes in degree but also in kind, are implied in the concept of emergence. Often, these are small changes that have unexpectedly large effects: the case Kaufmann cites as an example is a linguistic one, the rise of the Estonian language as a route to assimilation in the post-Soviet state (Kaufmann 2017: 8). A large change emerged from a small effect, as ordinary citizens found that it made sense to switch their linguistic allegiances (ibid.). Such changes involved the mobilisation of "distributed knowledge", the accumulated "reflections and interactions of individuals in relation to each other and the whole" (ibid.: 10). Kaufmann argues by analogy with the appearance of market outcomes in individualistic market economies: no individual participant in such markets has full access to the total set of knowledge in and of such a market; rather, that knowledge is distributed among the set of market participants. The consultation exercises the University of Makeni engaged in when designing its strategic plan for the near future represent another mode of mobilising distributed knowledge. Such consultations, whether undertaken within public or private entities active in Sierra Leonean society, will drive the emergence of a complex whole from below. That emergence will be driven by the operation of feedback loops in the internal systems of those entities and in their relationships with each other.

The University of Makeni is one of those entities, and all four of Kaufmann's 'pillars' can be identified within its language policy. As a nascent institution emerging within a peripheral region of a former British colony, the university relied for its existence on the organisation of multiple, heterogeneous elements, organisation that allowed feedback loops to operate. A governing council, for example, was created to provide internal oversight of the university's activities, while external oversight is performed by Sierra Leone's Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), a body formed after the civil war to oversee the whole of the tertiary education sector in the country, and with which

[9] I am grateful to Mariana Kriel for bringing Kaufmann's work to my attention.

the university has had an ambiguous relationship from the beginning. The operation of those feedback loops involved interactions between the individual members of the university community, interactions which allowed for the accumulation of distributed knowledge, and the formation of programmes of action based on that knowledge. Tipping points, points of decision in which the state and condition of the institution would change, followed from these. Policy decisions, such as those involving choices for languages on the campus, were among those decisions.

The necessity of maintaining the position of the new university led to the (partially ineffective) ban on the use of Krio on the campus. Despite the re-evaluation of Krio's status as a language, especially among the ethnic group where the language emerged, it was still more politically advisable to adhere to perceived standards which held English, the former colonial language, in higher prestige. This was also made necessary by the goal of participating in international academic networks and sending out postgraduate students and staff members to external training courses. The language policy of the university arose out of the bringing together of the university's members in an organised pattern that brought into play the key pillars of complexity noted by Kaufmann.

The historical and contemporary contexts in which Sierra Leonean nationhood emerged were complex – and this complexity continues today. The interaction of Sierra Leone's citizens in and through a set of overlapping complex systems (systems that include, but are not limited to, education, law and justice, economics, the media, and health care) is what has produced any sense of nationhood its population may share, and it has shaped the role that language has played in the reconstruction of nationhood since the end of the civil war. However, in addition to the factors identified by Kaufmann – tipping points, distributed knowledge, feedback loops, and emergence – there are two other vital factors that must be integrated into any analysis of nationhood and language in Sierra Leone, or in any other country with a comparable history: those concepts are stress and crisis.

Stress is implicitly present in the process of constructing nationhood. While more research would be required to understand the role of stress as a psychological and emotional factor in the lives of individuals, on a collective level it can be understood as a force whose presence can be inferred when systems are redirected away from pre-existing states and forced to reorient themselves towards new sets of systemic rules and ideas. Such new orientations include ideas about the proper role of language in defining national identity, and the identification of a particular language as a symbol of national identity. The memory of the civil war is a key factor driving the production of such a curriculum, as is the memory of colonialism, and its persistent reality is also present in Albert Tarawali's declaration that "if we are going to beat you, we will beat you in your own language".

The presence of stress in the data can be inferred from the explicit presence of crisis as a theme in the recent history of Sierra Leone, which includes civil war and the Ebola virus epidemic. It is a theme, in fact, that can be traced back to the pre-independence history of Sierra Leone and was present also at a very early point in the country's independence. Crisis, the memory of crisis, and the need to avoid crisis in the near and medium-term future, was a driving factor in the establishment of the University of Makeni and its subsequent policies, such as the original intention to develop a department of peace studies (although this ultimately became the department of development studies, the goal of promoting peace remained, and remains). Crisis can be defined as the set of consequences that result from what Maital and Bornstein refer to as the "counterintuitive and nonlinear effects" of

dynamic systems (Maital and Bornstein 2003: 277; see also Ghosh 2017: 168).[10] It should also be seen as the result of destabilising and disequilibriating factors resulting from either exogenous shocks (and the stresses they bring), or from the endogenous effects of feedback loops and tipping points.

Although born out of ancient Greek conceptualisations of the world, the concept of crisis in its contemporary form is very much a product of modernity: the original Greek elements of the concept, uniting decision with conflict, was transferred to early Christian theologies that united individual consciences with eschatological cosmology, and from there to a world of rationalised decision-making where crisis "indicates that point in time in which a decision is due but has not yet been rendered" (Koselleck and Richter 2006: 361). The centrality of decision in crisis allows the crisis concept to be usefully distinguished from "disaster, decline and conflict" (Beck and Knecht 2016: 56). This is because periods of crisis involve events of "ordering and reordering" and efforts at "improvisations and creative manoeuvres" (Beck and Knecht 2016: 56, 59; see also Vigh 2008, on crisis as an endemic, not episodic, condition) – and these are all acts that require agents to decide, to choose between courses of action.

Crisis has also been part of the story of the connection between language and nationhood in Sierra Leone. There, the reconstruction of nationhood – i.e., the re-emergence of a pervasive, popular sense of belonging to a national community whose members share certain basic criteria of nationality – necessarily also involved language, and involved it in ways that occurred in the context of crisis. Like many other African states, Sierra Leone was united as a territory under colonial rule, a form of unity which did not help to fully unite the population of the country under one single sense of 'nationhood'. A sense of Sierra Leonean nationhood does exist, and there are key actors in the society who assiduously seek to promote that sense of nationhood: while researching at the University of Makeni, for example, I once saw a senior member of the university staff admonish a group of students that they should "think Sierra Leone", as part of a public debate and lecture on politics that was held as the elections of 2012 (O'Kane 2018).

This admonition, along with that debate and lecture, was part of the university's effort to help ensure that those elections would be peaceful, and to help build up a new cadre of middle-class professionals who would be imbued with a certain set of values, including, for example, those entailing a rejection of corruption in public life (O'Kane 2018). This was a case of 'thinking Sierra Leone' because it required a vision of a national interest above and beyond the local, ethnic, or ethnoreligious. That the university should emphasise this as a part of its mission is unsurprising, given the circumstances in which it was born: a law department, for example, strives to develop a new generation of legal professionals who can fill the gaps left by damage to the country's legal system by the civil war. The actions of the University of Makeni in rebuilding Sierra Leonean nationhood in this way, then, are an example of 'nationalism from below', in contrast to the kinds of 'nationalism from above' which many modernist theories of nationalism would see as the appropriate central focus of any explanation of the emergence of nationhood. In the case studied here, Kaufmann's four pillars of a complexity theory of nationalism are present. I would argue, however, that stress and crisis are the two factors which drive the dynamism of the systems in which those four pillars operate, at least in Sierra Leone's case (and in other cases as well). For Kaufmann, the benefit of complexity theory is that it "enables historians and social scientists to make better sense of their

[10] I cite Maital and Bornstein (2003) here their definition of crisis and its relation to system is particularly cogent and apposite, and not because of any particular affinity between the case that their paper discusses (child-rearing on Israeli kibbutzim) and the case of language at UNIMAK.

data, scrutinising empirical cases for evidence of emergence, feedback loops, tipping points and distributed information". These were all present in the policy decisions that the University of Makeni made about language, and they were also all present in the various episodes in which policy shaped the language ecology of Sierra Leone and the ultimate relationship between language and Sierra Leonean nationhood. Distributed knowledge was present in the ways in which the University of Makeni carried out an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats it was likely to encounter: this shaped the attitudes to the presence of Krio on the university campus. The assessment exercise in which the university sought the views of its staff in order to refine its policies and strategies was an example of a feedback loop at work. If tipping points emerged out of the endogenous effects of feedback in the systems of the university, what made them significant was the effects of crisis upon Sierra Leonean society and the ways in which successive crises imposed their particular stresses on individuals and organisations in that society. Specifically, those tipping points, and their contribution to the emergence of a connection between language and nationhood, were the result of the experience of crisis on those who had formed the university community and the stresses they experienced after that formation.

Conclusion

The establishment and definition of nationhood is central to the study of nationalism as a whole: as noted above, the major paradigm within that area of study has been a constructivist one, which sees nationalism as the product of modern societies – but the perennialist perspective, which sees nationalisms as rooted in the pre-modern past remains stubbornly persistent. National identities may be constructed, but this implies the question of what materials they are constructed out of. Languages play a role in this process as the symbols of national identity (this is what occurred in the Irish case, as will be briefly explored below); but in more ethnically and linguistically plural societies (such as Sierra Leone) this equation cannot be made easily.

This working paper was written as a contribution to the understanding of the role of language in the reconstruction of nationhood, in the context of a post-conflict situation. It does not claim to be a definitive answer to that problem, either in relation to that question as a whole, or in the specific case of Sierra Leone. What it has helped to establish, I believe, is some insight on the nature of the language ecology in that country, and the ways in which one particular institution has adopted policies that will impact on that ecology. The ecological metaphor, in relation to linguistically plural societies, implies that the languages in such societies are united in a relationship to each other formed by access to resources. Those languages threatened with extinction are those which cannot retain speakers due to their inability to allow those speakers full access to opportunities in society, the economy and the state. Turning briefly to an example from Europe, this was the major reason for the decline of the Irish language from the eighteenth century onward and its replacement by English (by the end of the nineteenth century, the numbers speaking the Irish language were rapidly declining, and it was "in retreat even its western redoubts" [Garvin 1987: 79]). The population, however, ultimately provided the basis of support for a nationalist movement, which (after initial disinterest) elevated the Irish language to a key definitional part of Irish national identity and Irish nationhood (Zenker 2013, 2014: 69).

The Irish case took place in the context of a 'language ecology' that was much less complex than that of Sierra Leone, where, several major ethnic groups maintain their own languages and have

strong linguistic communities that can guarantee their existence into the future. The country also has a *lingua franca* originally developed by an ethnic group which has been shaped by the country's long links with an old colonial power, the United Kingdom; and the language of that colonial power, English, remains the language of education, government, and business. This has implications for the ways in which Sierra Leonean nationhood is defined: there can be no designation of one particular language as *the* national language, for this would risk alienating substantial sections of the population, with obvious implications for political stability and the legitimacy of the nation-state itself (Turay 2019: 6).

In early sections of this paper, I reviewed some of the history of linguistic politics in Sierra Leone during and after the immediate post-colonial period that followed Sierra Leonean independence in 1961. The evolution was connected both to the importance of language as a marker of identity, and to language's other role in the construction and reconstruction of nationhood: as a tool of communication, including within the systems of administration, economic life, education, *et cetera* that are indispensable to the emergence of the contemporary nation-state. The role of such systems was raised by Kaufmann in his 2017 paper as providing a means of understanding the processes by which nationalisms and nationhoods emerge. In his paper, Kaufmann understands the emergence of nationhood and national identities as an example of how "complex social phenomena may emerge from seemingly uncoordinated individual acts" (2017: 6). The lack of coordination between those acts, he implies, is only an apparent one: the acts individuals make, their decisions within institutions such as universities and their language policies, are coordinated by the structures of the systems in which they exist. For Kaufmann, the constructivist-perennialist divide in the study of nationalism is complemented by a cross-cutting verticalist-horizontalist dimension in which elites and masses are ranged against each other. Many nationalist theorists, or theorists of nationalism, focus on the role of elite political leaders in the dissemination of (for example) linguistic nationalism. In the example of Ireland sketched above, scholars have noted the importance of the elite in promoting the revival of the Irish language (Hutchinson 1987: 251); however, the country also saw popular nationalism emerge in the popular masses through the appearance of the Gaelic Athletics Association, a civil society organization devoted to sporting activities seen as culturally consistent with national identity (Garnham 2004).

For Kaufmann, these are examples of how small events can have large effects, rendering simple linear assumptions of historical patterns inoperative. Theories of complex systems thus provide a means of understanding the appearance of nationalisms, national identities, senses of nationhood, and their attendant connections with languages, as the outcomes of individual choices which are aggregated within systems and channelled towards particular outcomes as the result of the feedback loops into which they are drawn and the tipping points towards which they are directed.

As an institution, the University of Makeni is one example of such a system, which in turn is embedded within the wider set of systems that form the post-civil war Sierra Leonean nation-state. The individuals who form that university's community participate in the formation of policy in the university, including in its language policy. The outcome of that policy includes a mandate for the use of English in the classroom, in a context where the university's own internal 'language ecology' contained both the elite language and the *lingua franca*, and where the university was connected to a local linguistic community that contained some of Sierra Leone's other national languages.

In other publications (O'Kane 2018) I have described how the University of Makeni is seeking to contribute to the creation of a new Sierra Leonean middle class which will have the skills and values

necessary to contribute to the development of the nation. Combined with the efforts of the university to make its campus as free as possible from political factionalism (O'Kane 2018: 217), this means a definition of nationhood that is tolerant and pluralist. This leads to a reproduction, in university policy, of a linguistic pluralism that ascribes a particular role to the language of the colonial power that drew heterogeneous communities into what is now the territory of the independent Sierra Leonean state. Within that pluralism, there is still a clear division of labour and varying perceived status among the national languages. That division of labour is not an accident, but it cannot be ascribed to the persistence of colonial era ideology, nor is it a simple matter of pragmatism alone. It is the outcome of a set of processes that are consistent with the model laid out by Kaufmann, but with this additional relevant factor, that of crisis.

The connection between language and policy at UNIMAK is connected to crisis in Sierra Leone's recent history, and this suggests that the connection between language and nationhood in Sierra Leone is also an outgrowth of crisis, defined as a major event that leaves lasting legacies of stress on individuals and the groups they form. These crises include disease epidemics, civil wars, protracted economic crises, and other, similar events, in a historical continuity that goes back to the Atlantic slave trade. They have not just been the product of internal structural contradictions, but are also the outcomes of exogenous shocks. It is trivially obvious that crisis and suffering changes people: what is important is that we understand the particular changes act on the choices of individuals and groups. In the region of the Upper Guinea Coast, the experience of suffering through protracted crisis in Guinea and Guinea-Bissau has shaped people's individual lives and senses of self in distinctive ways that contributed to nation-building 'from below' in the context of ethnically heterogeneous societies with weak nation-states (Kohl and Schroven 2014: 2; see also McGovern 2017: 21). As an institution, the University of Makeni is neither part of a 'top-down' elite set, nor is it simply the expression of nation-building 'from below'. It is an institution that bridges the elite and the popular through its networked connections to the state and to the communities in its region where the popular masses lives. The courses chosen by those who build the university's language policy may yet have consequences for future definitions of the relationship between language and nationhood in Sierra Leone. Those choices are made in a context where the memories of the stresses imposed by recent and historical crisis are present. Future research on that relationship will have to examine, I believe, not only the systems through which the relationship is defined, but also the pressures and stresses on the individuals whose actions drive and power those systems forward.

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