

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Bedfordshire		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 34		
Title of case study: Media and Human Rights in Africa		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Jon Silverman	Prof. Media & Criminal Justice 0.4fte	2010 – to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This research has fostered greater understanding of media influence (both in-country and diasporic), post-conflict justice and democratic engagement in states where ethno-regional identity is a driver of political division. JS's research and expertise on Liberian media and civil society (3.2 & 3.6) led to his appointment as the only British observer on a US-led monitoring mission for the 2017 Liberian presidential run-off. He was invited to take part in the inaugural Frontiers of Development symposium in Kigali, in 2018, organised by the four UK national academies. He was asked by Scotland Yard to act as an expert witness in the Old Bailey trial of the former wife of the Liberian president, Charles Taylor.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Since 2010, JS has pursued a strategy of collaboration – sometimes interdisciplinary – with academics and civil society representatives in sub-Saharan Africa, with the aim of developing a loose research 'network' focused on post-conflict studies. This work is within the spirit of Goal 16 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (sdgs.un.org/goals). As a former journalist, JS has sought to analyse the media-politics nexus in states with fragile democracies. He has instigated partnerships in Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Kenya to examine *inter alia* media practices and varying concepts of justice and equity. In West Africa, where he has worked most extensively, he has examined the influence of ethno-regionalism on politics. While in East Africa, the thread which links the partnerships is the relationship between international justice (the International Criminal Court), regional courts, African media and civil society.

The journal article, 'The International Criminal Court and Africa: A fractious relationship assessed' (3.3) and an earlier draft, published under the title 'The Justice Conundrum' in response to an invitation from the online *Harvard International Law Journal* blog (2018) broke new ground, being the first qualitative research about the ICC, based on 30 interviews in Uganda and Kenya with informed observers/participants in the Kenyatta/Ruto prosecution.

The West Africa research was funded by a grant of £25,000 from the British Academy under the International Partnership Programme. The East Africa research by a BA grant of £10,000 under the International Partnership & Mobility Scheme. These awards were an acknowledgement that Silverman's research is situated within the framework of the Nairobi Report, 2009 (5.10) and the Working with Africa report, 2011

Responding to changes in media usage and influences on society, the most recent research, funded by a £15,000 QR/GCRF (Global Challenges Research Fund) grant, examines the use of WhatsApp in public discourse in Sierra Leone. Social media, facilitated by the ubiquity of

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mobile phone ownership, is having a significant de-stabilizing impact on societies with shallow democratic roots. Working with second-year Mass Communications students at the University of Sierra Leone, which has educated many of the country's leaders and opinion formers, the intention is to understand the flow of discourse in an ethnically/politically divided WhatsApp group and identify potential grounds for consensuality. (3.1).

This project is a continuation of research on media and civil society engagement which underpinned an article in the *Journal of African Media Studies* (3.6), examining the media's role in legitimizing post conflict governance in both Sierra Leone and Liberia following the civil wars of the 1990s. His analysis of media coverage of a key war crimes trial formed the basis of an article in *African Journalism Studies* (3.5). This latter article picks up the theme of ethno-regional division in Sierra Leone and posits that newspaper reportage was framed from the perspective of particular ethnic communities.

Media globalization has made the African diaspora's influence on civil society engagement in politics in the country of origin an equally important area of research. JS's study of the relationship between diaspora media, identity and conflict in West Africa was the product of qualitative research into perceptions of identity amongst diaspora journalists from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia (3.4). It led to an invitation to write the preface to *Media, Diaspora and Conflict* (2017) Ed. Ogunyemi, O. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. As a result, JS was invited to become a board member of the *Diaspora Journalism Group*, based at the University of Lincoln.

The post-conflict research collaborations have led to the signing of an MoU between the University of Uyo (Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria) and the University of Bedfordshire (October 2016) and an inter-disciplinary partnership with the Department of Philosophy at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda and the Centre for Human Rights, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

(3.1) Silverman, J.(2021) 'WhatsApp in Sierra Leone: Burning Bridges or Building Them ?' in *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review*. Article accepted, publication date tbc. Indiana University Press www.iupress.org

(3.2) Silverman, J. (2020) Sections on the media of Sierra Leone and Liberia in the inaugural *Sage International Encyclopedia of Mass Media and Society*. DOI: 10.41359781483375519

(3.3) Rukooko,A., and Silverman, J. (2019) 'The International Criminal Court and Africa : A fractious relationship assessed' in *African Human Rights Law Journal* Vol 19(1), pp.85-105. DOI:10.17159/1996-2096/2019/v19n1a5, ISSN 1609-073X

(3.4) Silverman, J. (2018) 'Mediating identity: The West African diaspora, conflict and communication' *Crossings : Journal of Migration & Culture* Vol 9(1), pp.91-106. DOI:10.1386/cjmc.9.1.91_1, ISSN 2040-4344.

(3.5) Binneh-Kamara, A., and Silverman, J. (2016) Newspaper coverage of a Sierra Leone war crimes trial: 'A continuation of conflict by other means' *African Journalism Studies* Vol 37(2),pp.56-77.DOI:10.1080/23743670.2016.1173571. ISSN 2374-3670.

(3.6) Cole, B., and Silverman, J.(2013) 'The media's reporting of war crimes trials and its impact on post-conflict democracy in Sierra Leone and Liberia ' *Journal of African Media Studies*, Vol 5 (1), pp.53-67. DOI:10.1386/jams.5.1.3_1 ISSN 2040-199X

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

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Silverman's research derives from the belief that independent media (free from government control), in all forms, is one of the strands which can lend civil society a resilience in the face of severe political shocks, up to and including civil conflict. Achieving this robustness and pointing out where media is the problem rather than the solution, is the ultimate goal of his work. As the only Professor of Media & Criminal Justice at a UK academic institution, his work is often inter-disciplinary and intended to have an impact beyond the communications field and, in some cases, beyond the academy.

Empowering civil society

As a result of publications cited above and his connection with the ngo, Liberia Media for Democratic Initiatives (whose founder/executive director, John O.Kollie, he mentored when covering the war crimes trial of the former Liberian leader, Charles Taylor, in The Hague) JS was invited by the Washington-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) to join its December 2017 election observation mission to Liberia. The mission was headed by the former president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan; the former president of Kosovo; and the former foreign minister of Ghana. The NDI guide (2019) to the importance of citizen observation election missions is a distillation of the research published by academics – including JS - and activists who advocate a greater role for civil society in countries in the developing world (Source 1).

On his return from Liberia, Silverman was interviewed by i-News about the implications of George Weah's victory in the election (5.2). And he wrote about it (6.2.18) for the widely-read African consultancy website run by the former BBC Africa Bureau Chief, Peter Burdin (5.3). He was asked by the Principal of Brasenose College, Oxford, John Bowers QC, to provide a briefing on Sierra Leone ahead of a visit to the college by the President, Julius Maada Bio, in June 2019.

Law & Justice

In October 2018, as a result of a recommendation from the Centre for African Studies at Cambridge University, JS was asked by the Metropolitan Police War Crimes Team to act as an expert witness in the trial on torture charges of the former wife of the Liberian president, Charles Taylor. "We are trying to identify an expert.....to potentially set the scene for the jury" (5.4).

As a result of the articles for the *Journal of African Media Studies* and *African Journalism Studies* (cited above) JS was invited to become a member of AFPREA the African regional branch of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), after attending a conference in Abuja, Nigeria, in April 2015. He then joined the organising committee for the biennial conference of IPRA, which was held for the first time in half a century in sub-Saharan Africa - Sierra Leone- in Nov/Dec 2016 (5.5). This was seen as a huge vote of confidence in a country still struggling to recover from the disruption caused by the civil conflict of the 1990s and the more recent Ebola outbreak*.

His record of inter-disciplinary research into strategies – whether media-led or otherwise – focusing on peace-building in post-conflict settings led in February 2018 to an invitation to participate in the inaugural *Frontiers of Development* symposium in Kigali, Rwanda, organised by the four UK national academies. This was the first of a series of symposia designed to foster cross-disciplinary international partnerships. As a result, he was asked to be a peer reviewer by the British Academy (2019) for applications under the *Heritage, Dignity and Violence* Scheme, which funds research into 'sustainable peace and the prevention of violence, broadly understood' (from the BA website).

*Due to JS's work on media reporting of war crimes trials [see REF 2014), the Registrar of the Special Court for Sierra Leone was invited to give the keynote address.

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JS's work in Sierra Leone since 2010, with academics and others, has led to strong associations with society and facilitated knowledge exchange – eg. both the current Freedom of Information Commissioner, Dr. Ibrahim Seaga Shaw, and past chair of the Independent Media Commission, Mrs Bernadette Cole, have been close collaborators.

Human Rights

Silverman's research into independent media in conflict and post-conflict environments has led to an association with the Centre for the Freedom of the Media (CFOM), based at the University of Sheffield and he was an invited panellist at a special session during the university's International Journalism Week in 2019, a contribution to UNESCO's campaign to end impunity for crimes against journalists (IDEI) info@ifj.fund (5.6)

The research into media and its role in heavily divided societies led to membership of the UK government-supported charity, *Remembering Srebrenica*, and to an invitation to visit Bosnia in September 2017. JS chaired the launch of the charity's 2018 strategy at the House of Lords (6.2.18), attended by the Minister of Faith, Lord Bourne, Opposition spokespeople and parliamentarians. He also chaired the national Srebrenica Memorial Day ceremony at the Guildhall, attended by the Prime Minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the UK Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire, the shadow Foreign Secretary, and 400 invited guests.

These connections, deriving from recognition of the significance of his academic work, paved the way for a university partnership and MOU with the Srebrenica Memorial Centre which has multi-source funding for a series of projects to use the lessons of the 1995 genocide as a launchpad for addressing ethnic hatred in Bosnia. 'Your willingness to partner with our institution in such a short time delights us and we are keen to collaborate on a specific project as soon as an opportunity arises' (5.7).

As an indicator of impact/professional standing, JS was invited by the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies (2015) to deliver a module on transitional justice as part of its Professional Certificate in Conflict Resolution, attended by practitioners from a dozen countries. His writing on war crimes justice in relation to the Holocaust led to an invitation to speak at a major international conference, *Liberation75*, (www.liberation75.org) planned for June 2020 in Toronto but deferred because of the pandemic until May 2021. In November 2018, he compered a landmark event, organised by the Association of Jewish Refugees, at Speaker's House, Westminster, in which MPs and peers re-'enacted' portions of the 1938 Commons debate which led to the *kindertransport* initiative (5.8).

His authoritative work on war crimes and justice has led to a book contract from Oxford University Press to examine the UK's record in addressing the many judicial legacies of the Second World War and Holocaust. Manuscript to be delivered in October 2023. 'We've discussed the book project extensively internally and there is a great deal of excitement around the idea'. (5.9).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 <https://raiseavoice.net>

5.2 <https://inews.co.uk/news/world/king-george-liberians-ask-ex-football-star-swapped-pitch-presidency-can-deliver-122729>

5.3 <https://peterburdinafrica.co.uk/news/football-legend-george-weah-scores-top-job-in-liberia/>

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5.4 Corroborating statement from Det. Sgt. Gary Titherly, of the Metropolitan Police War Crimes Unit available on request [held by institution]

5.5 The work of IPRA was praised by the then UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, in a report published in August 2016, for “organizing academic and civil society conferences and training workshops” (p.20, para 59). Report available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/124/

5.6 (<http://www.cfom.org.uk/2019/11/27/cfom-panel-on-seen-and-unseen-barriers-to-media-freedom-on-14-november-during-international-journalism-week-2019/>)

5.7 Corroborating statement from Zlatan Hajlovac, project manager of Truth, Dialogue, Future available on request [held by institution]

5.8 <https://ajr.org.uk/latest-news/the-kindertransport-debate-from-1938/>

5.9 Please email Katie Bishop, Senior Assistant Commissioning Editor, OUP Katie.Bishop@oup.com for corroboration

5.10 <http://www.britac.ac.uk/reports/nairobi/index.cfm>