



Palimpsest Memoryscapes: Materializing and Mediating War and Peace in Sierra Leone

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The anthropology of West Africa has recently benefited from two particularly nuanced Sierra Leonean ethnographies, both of which are concerned with the relationships among local memory practices, an often violent past, and landscapes in which material and immaterial traces of that past may be encountered (Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002). Working among Mende-speakers in the southeast of the country, Mariane Ferme explains that she is interested in exploring the modalities through which ‘material objects, language, and social relations become sites where a sometimes violent historical memory is sedimented and critically reappropriated’ (2001:5). In Sierra Leone, Ferme notes, ‘collective memory and landscape are replete with evidence of military, political, and social advancement followed by reversals, and of crises turning into moments of opportunity’ (ibid.:225). Relics of the colonial state and its modernizing project have thus been allowed to decay and be swallowed up by vegetation: paved roads have reverted to dirt tracks, commercial signs have rusted away, and buildings have fallen into ruin as such sites have been purposefully neglected by postcolonial authorities (ibid.:23). The forest environment, in contrast, although illegible to the uninitiated, continues to be a resonant and living memoryscape for those able to discern its secrets. A cluster of kola trees in second-growth forest or the appropriate undulations in the forest floor thus tell of a settlement abandoned by the living but perhaps not by memory, nor by the ancestral spirits. In this way, suggests Ferme, trees and other features of the ‘natural’ landscape ‘can be read as ruins . . . as much as decaying, destroyed buildings’ (ibid.:25).

Researching with Temne-speakers further north, Rosalind Shaw's concern is with the apparent absence of 'discursive memories' of slavery in the region – a curious silence given the huge significance of both the Atlantic and the domestic slave trade in Sierra Leonean history (2002). Following Bourdieu (1990) and Connerton (1989), Shaw thus searches for evidence of this ostensibly missing past in embodied, 'practical' memory and in ritual. She concludes that although 'the slave trade is forgotten as history', it is remembered 'as spirits, as a menacing landscape, as images in divination, as marriage, as witchcraft, and as postcolonial politicians' (2002:9). In contrast to early accounts of the Temne living securely under the protection of town-dwelling spirits, Shaw's informants warn of a landscape inhabited by roaming, predatory spirits who lurk along bush paths, ready to seize unlucky and unprotected victims (*ibid.*:55–56). Shaw's argument is that the Temne landscape has been metamorphosed into a sinister memoryscape, which 'condenses historical experiences of raiding and warfare, siege and ambush, death and capture, down the centuries and beyond recorded number' (*ibid.*:56).

Both ethnographies display a sensitivity to local 'regimes of memory' (Radstone and Hodgkin 2003) in which the 'realm of truth' is rarely manifest on the surface of verbal or facial expressions, or on the surface of the visible landscape, but rather remains implicit, waiting to be divined, often literally, in 'the underneath of things' (Ferne 2001:7; Shaw 2001:2). In a West African context that does not necessarily share Western 'ideals of transparency' (Ferne 2001:6), the past and the ambiguity of its material traces participate in a broader culture of dissimulation in which being adept in the 'arts of interpretation' confers power and prestige (*ibid.*:26–27). Here, then, stories of the past are both elusive and allusive, displaying a 'chronological heterogeneity' that challenges straightforward 'presentist' interpretations of the 'politics of the past in the present' (Shaw 2002:15; cf Halbwachs 1992) and, resisting any singular, definitive telling, provides the skilled narrator with an array of possibilities for the shaping of meaning (Ferne 2001:26).

Concerned primarily with rural contexts, these ethnographies present a mnemonic world that seems radically 'other' to the monuments, memorials, and museums associated with Western and urban modernity. Indeed, by stressing the alterity of Sierra Leonean memory practices, one can easily forget that, no matter how desperately underresourced, Sierra Leone also has its Monuments and Relics Commission, its National Museum, National Archive, and, in the aftermath of civil war, other modern 'technologies of memory', such as a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a war crimes tribunal (the Special Court for Sierra Leone). On the one hand, such institutions are, of course, indicative of a colonial historical legacy – part of its modernizing project – and

their neglect may therefore be as purposeful as that meted out on those other relics of the colonial state discussed by Ferme (*ibid.*:23). On the other hand, such technologies of memory are also locally appropriated and incorporated into a more profoundly ‘creolized’ (and ‘creolizing’) culture, contributing to what Paul Richards describes as a ‘heritage of cultural compromise forged over many centuries of social and economic flux’ (1996:69–70).

It is not only Sierra Leone’s Creole (locally, *Krio*) communities whose identity has been defined by this long history of flux: ‘Everyone’, suggests Richards, ‘has complex cultural origins’ here, and ‘to be firmly flagged as having “age-old” roots simply makes for difficulties when it is time to adjust to new neighbours, or move on’ (1996:69). Consequently, in Sierra Leone,

there are many articulate ideas in local cultures about the importance of forgetting the past, the danger of over defining the present . . . and the positive virtues of political compromise, religious syncretism, and hybridization of material culture. (*ibid.*:70)

For Richards, it is *this* cultural heritage that provides Sierra Leone with the greatest hope for the sustenance of a lasting peace.

Whilst it is tempting to employ an image of conflicting regimes of memory in Sierra Leone, drawing imaginary battle lines between ‘indigenous’ and ‘colonizing’ forms, it is this process of creolization – *mnemonic* creolization – that I am interested in exploring in this chapter. Thus, rather than characterizing and contrasting these regimes along such lines as social forgetting versus social remembering, immaterial versus material traces, unreflected upon everyday practices versus self-consciously iconic *lieux de mémoire* (memory versus history, tradition versus modernity, incorporation versus inscription – the list goes on), my interest is with how different mnemonic worlds articulate with and mediate one another. Such an approach recognizes that, as with linguistic creolization, mnemonic creolization is a process ‘invoked by endogenous as well as exogenous factors’ (*ibid.*:74).

And yet, the metaphor of creolization is not wholly satisfactory either insofar as it suggests that there is a *synthesis* of diverse influences, whereas it is perhaps more appropriate to think of these regimes of memory as coexistent, overlapping, and intersecting, whereby one form may sometimes obscure another but without completely erasing it. A more suitable metaphor might therefore be that of the palimpsest, in which the ‘memory’ of prior memory practices is retained and can even dominate. In this conceptualization, Pierre Nora’s *milieus de mémoire* are not supplanted by *lieux de mémoire* with the ingress

of modernity (1989:7); rather, as Ferme argues of the Mende memoryscape, 'new elements map onto older forces grounded in regional history and culture, and do so on the same terrain, so that modernity reinforces their magic and potentiality' (2001:5). In this respect 'memory' and 'history' are coincident: They share the same space.

Drawing on Jan Vansina's conception of 'palimpsest tradition' (1974:320), Shaw herself uses the phrase 'palimpsest memories' to describe how practical and discursive memories from different periods become intermeshed, such that one period is remembered through the lens of another (for example, so that experiences of the recent conflict are layered with memories of the Atlantic slave trade) (2002:15). In subsequent work, however, Shaw appears to resort to a more oppositional framework, arguing, for instance, that the effectiveness of Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was compromised because it valorized a particular kind of Western memory practice that was 'at odds' with local practices predicated on 'social forgetting' (2005:2–3). This argument seems to essentialize both Sierra Leonean and Western memory practices, prioritizing the authenticity of local practices and consequently valorizing another particularly Western sensibility, this time concerned with purity and moral order.

In what follows, then, my intention is to explore the 'impure' mix of convergences, intersections, and interactions of different regimes of memory in Sierra Leone, and to do so by considering a number of sites associated with its recent conflict and ongoing peace process. As Young notes of Holocaust remembrance, so also are the 'sites of memory' of Sierra Leone's conflict 'many and diverse', and in this far-from-exhaustive discussion I am concerned with, among other things, species of trees, banknotes, and *noms de guerre*, as well as more obviously recognizable mnemonic forms such as murals, memorials, and gravesites (cf Young 1993:viii)¹.

Under the Cotton Tree

The interface between Sierra Leone's mnemonic worlds is manifest materially and spatially at the very centre of Freetown in the juxtaposition of the National Museum of Sierra Leone and one of the city's most famous landmarks, the 'Cotton Tree'. Established in 1957, the museum is housed in a low building – the former Cotton Tree Station – which is literally sheltered under the enormous boughs of the tree (indeed, the postal address of the National Museum is 'Cotton Tree, Freetown')². Freetown's Cotton Tree and the National Museum bookend a recent gazetteer of Sierra Leonean heritage sites compiled under the supervision of the Krio historian Akintola Wyse and

funded by the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation (Wyse 2002). In this booklet, Freetown's 'majestic Cotton Tree' is described as standing,

like a colossus, in the middle of the city keeping watch, and 'protecting', the capital, as it has done for over two hundred years. Its gnarled and spiky trunks, sturdy bole and massive shady branches also give it the look of a sentinel, 'standing in the centre of the oldest part of Freetown, surrounded by, yet dominating the principal buildings of Church, Law, and Government'. (ibid.:10)

According to legend (and there are many such legends), Freetown's Cotton Tree is said to have sheltered the first freed slaves who were sent to settle in the Sierra Leone Colony in 1787. Other stories state that, earlier, a slave market was held in the shade of the tree, and others still, that the tree was planted by freed slaves who had brought the seed with them from the Caribbean where the species is also found. Predating and dominating the structures of nation and state, Freetown's Cotton Tree is thus an important site of memory of Sierra Leone's slave heritage (a foundational narrative for Sierra Leone's Krio population). The tree both acts as a witness to the violent uprooting of people from their homeland in the image of the slave market and provides a symbol of sanctuary and protection for the freed slaves on their 'return' to Africa. Furthermore, in the story of the cotton tree being planted by exslaves, the tree itself shares in their experience and provides a literal motif for the rerooting of the slave diaspora in African soil.

Indeed, as JoAnn D'Alisera has recently observed, Freetown's Cotton Tree also features prominently as a resonant symbol of homeland and 'icon of longing' for a more recent Sierra Leonean diaspora in the United States, its photographic representation serving as a 'mediator' for a set of negotiations that emerge at the intersections of past and present, here and there, and individual and communal memory that, in part, define the diasporic experience (D'Alisera 2002). The iconic nature of the tree is similarly evident in the work of visual artists at home in Sierra Leone, not least in their responses to the conflict. Simeon Benedict Sesay's painting, *Handiwork of Child Combatants* (2000), for example, depicts the January 1999 rebel invasion of Freetown. At the bottom right of Sesay's composite image, the rebels can be seen entering the city, leaving a trail of carnage in their wake; at the top right of the picture, those citizens fortunate enough to escape are shown making their way to a refugee camp. Meanwhile, depicted on the left half of the painting, Freetown's Cotton Tree stands as a lone witness, towering above streets emptied save for dogs and vultures picking over the corpses of victims, while the Law Courts



Figure 10.1 *Handiwork of Child Combatants*, Simeon Benedict Sesay, 2000

Building (the ‘Gran Kot’) and the National Museum have been abandoned. Confronted by this image, one thinks of the words penned in 1947 by the British colonial administrator and ethnographer, E. F. Sayers:

How many human joys and human sorrows has our Freetown Cotton Tree not seen, and how many tragedies and comedies must have been enacted within the sight of it and within its sight? . . . Freetown’s Cotton Tree stands today for a sense of continuity in our corporate life, a symbolic link between our past and our future. (Sayers 1961:133–34)³

Colossal though Freetown’s famous specimen may be, the cotton tree has much deeper roots in the Sierra Leonean memoryscape. Some of the earliest European accounts of Sierra Leone mention the special place of cotton trees in local cosmologies; as well as boundary markers, they are described as being regarded as ‘idols’, as ‘symbols of power and might’, and as sacred places under whose shade ceremonies are held and carved wooden statues set up (Alvares 1990:2, Chapter 1:7, Chapter 10:2, Chapter 12:2). Indeed, the silk cotton or kapok tree (*ceiba pentandra*) is a significant species throughout West Africa. Highly venerated, these trees frequently form the centre of village social life (Gottlieb 1992). Cotton trees were often planted to mark the establishment of new settlements and are associated with, and sometimes named after, founding ancestors (Fairhead and Leach 1996:89). The kapok tree is ‘the beginning

of all things in the village’, one of Gottlieb’s Beng informants explains to her; another adds that the tree itself is ‘the head of the village’ (1992:19). Referencing the earlier ethnographic work of E. F. Sayers in northeast Sierra Leone, Michael Jackson cites a standard Koranko lament sung at the funerals of high-ranking elders, which explicitly links the greatness of the cotton tree with the greatness of the deceased:

This year oh, a gold cotton tree has fallen, oh sorrow, a great cotton tree has fallen this year oh.

A great cotton tree – that reached to heaven – has fallen. Where shall we find support and shade again?

Lie down, lie down Mara [name of a ruling clan], the war chief has gone. (Jackson 1989:70; see also Sayers 1925:22)

As many commentators have described, fences of living cotton trees were also planted as part of the sometime elaborate fortifications erected around towns and villages at times of war in Sierra Leone (Alldridge 1901: 56; Malcolm 1939). Although these ‘war fences’ were prohibited by the British colonial government after 1896, remnants nevertheless survive, and the sight of the much-matured rings of cotton trees rising above second-growth forest often indicates the location of long-deserted settlements: ruinlike ‘inscriptions’, suggests Ferme, telling ‘of violent encounters or at least of abandonment of a once-inhabited site’ (2001:25; see also DeCorse 1980:51).

The Cotton Tree, the Dove and the Le10,000 Note

Given the place of the cotton tree in both urban and rural mnemonic consciousness, and therefore its capacity to act as a unifying symbol, one is likely not surprised that it has been incorporated into Sierra Leone’s national iconography. The Freetown tree appeared, for instance, on the first issue of Sierra Leone’s own banknotes in 1964, only later to be joined and subsequently replaced by the head of the head of state. Banknotes are, of course, not only carriers of monetary value, they are also a particularly interesting medium for the expression of what Michael Billig (1995) terms ‘banal nationalism’: those unnoticed, everyday ‘flaggings’ of national identity and heritage. Unlike flags or anthems, however, banknotes have the peculiar characteristic of needing to be redesigned relatively frequently in order to counter the efforts of counterfeiters. As Jacques Hymans has recently observed, this fact ‘forces states every decade or two to confront anew the question of how to portray the nation and its values’ (Hymans 2005:317).



Figure 10.2 Obverse and reverse of the 2004 Bank of Sierra Leone 10,000 Leone note

In 2004, two years after Sierra Leone's civil conflict had officially ended, the Bank of Sierra Leone introduced a new 10,000 Leone note. According to a speech made by J. D. Rogers, the Governor of the Bank, at the launch of the note, the theme of its design – 'National cohesion leading to peace and prosperity' (the words are printed on the note's obverse) – was proposed by President Kabbah himself (Rogers 2004). In addition to this inscription, the obverse of the banknote also features the Sierra Leonean national flag and a white dove with an olive branch in its beak flying over the territory of Sierra Leone as represented in the form of a map. After a fifteen-year absence from Sierra Leonean banknote designs, an image of the cotton tree returns to feature prominently on the reverse side of the bill, although it is interesting to note that it is no longer specifically identifiable as *Freetown's* Cotton Tree. In the background design of the reverse, framing the representation of the tree, is Sierra Leone's national coat of arms and the repeating motif of the dove with olive branch.

The values promoted in the iconography of this banknote seem unequivocal. For a bankrupt, so-called failed state emerging from over a decade of civil war and engaged in various transitional justice mechanisms, there is a clearly articulated aspiration to see the spirit of peace as a reunifying force reigning over the nation – a desire to see the dove of peace come to roost, as it were, in the nation's cotton tree. But it is also interesting to observe how this aspiration is expressed on the banknote through the juxtaposition of the autochthonous symbol of the cotton tree – an emblem literally rooted in the soil of Sierra Leone – alongside a symbol of Judaeo-Christian origins, the olive-branch-bearing white dove, which was adopted as a symbol of the International Peace Congress held in Paris in 1949. Indeed, the inherently Eurocentric internationalism of this symbol of peace would seem to speak to a critique of truth and reconciliation commissions, pursued in a Sierra Leonean context by Shaw (2005), which challenges their universalist assumptions about trauma and recovery, their anthropomorphizations of the nation-state, and their foundations in Western psychotherapeutic practice (Hamber and Wilson 2002). As previously noted, Shaw's argument is framed through opposing a Western, globalizing concept of memory, which valorizes the 'social remembering' of traumatic events, with an indigenous Sierra Leonean memory culture 'based on the *social forgetting* of violence' (2005:3; italics in original)⁴. Thus, although an explicit objective of Sierra Leone's TRC was to create 'an impartial historical record' of the conflict, Shaw maintains that its implicit mandate was 'to bring about an ideological or cultural transformation by turning a population who, for the most part, sought to forget, into truth-telling, nation-building subjects' (ibid.:8).

Although the report of the TRC may indeed be read as an exercise in nation-building myth-making, one doubts that this image of a dominant regime of memory effectively colonizing subaltern minds is born out in practice. Despite much rhetoric, there is little evidence to suggest that the TRC has effected anything like this kind of 'ideological or cultural transformation' in Sierra Leone's population. On the contrary, the activities of the TRC seem often to have been met with suspicion and indifference, and one suspects that ultimately the TRC will have little direct influence on whether peace will hold in Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, the '*Learn from Yesterday for a Better Tomorrow*' slogans of the TRC are graffitied onto the palimpsest of Sierra Leone's contemporary memoryscape, entering the consciousness of Sierra Leoneans through district hearings (Kelsall 2005) and popular radio programmes (Rashid 2006), as well as through the materializing practices that are the concern of this chapter. But in 'over-writing', such exogenous influences do not necessarily erase underlying practices so much as add another layer to their complexity –

a process of incorporation that is apparent in the juxtaposition of the dove and the cotton tree on the Le10,000 note. The point is that just as the conflict localized in Sierra Leone throughout the 1990s had a 'global range of symbolic and dramaturgical references' (Richards 1996:xvii), so Sierra Leone's peace process is also bound up in the 'media flows and cultural hybridizations that make up globalized modernity' (ibid.).

In the Name of Bai Bureh

Such global flows and hybridizations are evident, for example, in the *noms de guerre* assumed by fighters on all sides of Sierra Leone's conflict: the names of Hollywood heroes such as 'Superman', 'Rambo', 'Terminator', and 'Rocky', for instance, whose exceptional qualities are transferred, by association, to the bearer. But even pseudonyms taken from indigenous Sierra Leonean heroes have more complex global genealogies. Take 'Colonel Bai Bureh', for example: This was the *nom de guerre* adopted by, among others, Abubakar Jalloh, a commander of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the main rebel force during the conflict.

Bai Bureh of Kasseh (c. 1840–1908), Jalloh's namesake and another of the sites of memory I want to consider here, was a famous Temne warrior and leader who, in 1898, led an uprising against the British colonial power in what has become known as the 'Hut Tax War' (see Abraham 1974; Denzer 1971). Employing guerrilla tactics against British troops inexperienced in bush warfare, Bai Bureh succeeded in evading capture for many months and was said to have supernatural powers, to be bulletproof and to have the ability to become invisible or stay under water for long periods (Kabba 1988:42)⁵. Although a cultural memory of Bai Bureh no doubt survives locally (see Shaw 2002:64–66, for example), it is interesting to observe how this Temne chief enters into the Sierra Leonean national iconography, not least through the agency of two American Peace Corps volunteers.

A life-sized representation of Bai Bureh is displayed in the National Museum of Sierra Leone. On an official tourism website, a caption explains that the statue 'is dressed in the . . . guerrilla leader's own clothes and holds the cutlass with which he fought in the Hut Tax War of 1898' (www.visitsierraleone.org/thingstodo.asp, accessed 20 July 2006). Significantly, however, it was an American secondary-school history teacher and Peace Corps volunteer named Gary Schulze who, as acting curator of the museum in 1962, argued that the story of Bai Bureh and the Hut Tax War ought to be included in the museum's displays (Gary Schulze pers. comm.). The earlier absence of what has become a key historical narrative celebrating Sierra Leone's resistance to

colonial oppression is itself telling insofar as the museum hitherto presented a more 'Kriocentric' view of Sierra Leonean national heritage, and the Hut Tax War and subsequent Mende uprising of 1898 are ambiguous episodes in this heritage, not least because the majority of the victims of these insurrections were in fact Krios (Fyfe 1962:571–74; Hargreaves 1956:71).

Under Schulze's temporary management, however, the story was duly incorporated into the museum's exhibitions, and, indeed, it was Schulze who commissioned a Freetown-based sculptor to make the statue of Bai Bureh that would form the centrepiece of the display. Since there was no record of Bai Bureh's appearance other than a single drawing, made in profile, by a Lt H. E. Green of the 1st West Africa Regiment after he was captured, it was left to the sculptor's imagination to fashion the face; and although the *ronko* gown and cutlass were authentic to the region and period, they were merely samples taken from the museum's collections and did not belong to Bai Bureh himself as is popularly claimed (Gary Schulze pers. comm.). Indeed, whereas Green's drawing shows Bai Bureh wearing the conical white hat typical of West African Muslim elders of the late nineteenth century, Schulze dressed the museum statue in a red tricorn, which is associated with Mande hunters but, significantly, not with the Temne. Despite the improvised nature of the statue, Schulze explains that, in the months following the statue's installation, thousands of people visited the museum to see Bai Bureh, and, in subsequent years, photographs of the figure began to appear in Sierra Leonean history books (for example, Alie 1990:140). The statue has subsequently been paraded at agricultural shows and other events throughout the country and has come to define Bai Bureh's image in the popular imagination (Gary Schulze pers. comm.).

It was, however, another Peace Corps volunteer, the anthropologist Joseph Opala, who enshrined Bai Bureh, alongside other historical figures, such as Sengbe Pieh, the leader of the 1839 Amistad slave revolt, in what amounts to a national hagiography: a volume entitled *Sierra Leone Heroes* (Kabba 1988). As a Peace Corps volunteer, Opala was attached to the National Museum between 1974 and 1978; staying on in Sierra Leone, he later became a lecturer at Fourah Bay College in Freetown. In 1986, conscious of the absence of patri-otic imagery in the country, Opala wrote a series of articles for the Freetown-based *Daily Mail* newspaper on what he termed Sierra Leone's 'neglected heroes' (Opala 1994:201). Around the same time he urged the contemporary Momoh government to produce a book on these historical figures, which he hoped would be distributed freely to schools throughout the country. In 1987, the book was given the go ahead, and Opala was appointed to the editorial board. Opala notes that, when compiling and commissioning illustrations for the

book, he was ‘keenly aware’ that he was involved in the creation of ‘patriotic icons’ and ‘took pains to place the heroes in memorable poses’ (ibid.). *Sierra Leone Heroes* – the first edition of which features a relatively militant representation of Bai Bureh on its cover – was not distributed freely to schools, but sold commercially. Although sales were good, Opala explains that it was his use of it as a textbook for a course he taught on Art, Anthropology, and National Consciousness at Fourah Bay College that led to it being adopted by an increasingly politicized student body as a source book of emblems for Sierra Leonean cultural nationalism (ibid.). Indeed, the significance of Opala’s role in promoting a more nationalistic mnemonic consciousness in Sierra Leone is evident when he describes how he would assign ‘students the task of memorializing a hero in a painting, sculpture, song, poem, or play’ (ibid.; see also Christensen 2005)⁶.

Amid an escalating rebel war, the corrupt Momoh regime was deposed in a military coup in 1992, and it was the fabricated face and apparel of the museum statue of Bai Bureh that displaced Momoh’s on the Le1,000 banknote introduced by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) government in 1993⁷. More recently, this same visage has been brought to life in the Sierra Leonean/Nigerian coproduction of a video film entitled *Bai Bureh Goes to War*. As the late Abu Noah, the writer and executive producer of the film, was keen to stress to me, although ostensibly about an historical leader and war, the film has much relevance for contemporary African politics: ‘Today’s leaders need to tap into the fountain of unsullied leadership qualities of our forebears’, he explained.

Contemporary world events buttress the foregoing . . . As we strive to make the African Union a viable one, the story of Bai Bureh couldn’t have been more timely. It challenges both leadership and followership in the modern African society. The quality of leadership enjoyed by Africans before the advent of the colonial masters must be revisited. (Noah 2004)

Mediated by American ideas of patriotic iconography, the imagination of a Krio sculptor, the political ambitions of the NPRC regime, and idealizations of precolonial African polities – such is the nature of the making of an ‘indigenous’ Sierra Leonean hero (a malleable site of memory and ancestor capable of being claimed by all sides in a civil war)⁸.

War Memorials and Peace Monuments

Unlike previous regimes, the NPRC was conscious of the power of patriotic monuments and street art, and, in 1992 and 1993, statues and murals depicting

Bai Bureh and Sengbe Pieh were erected and painted alongside those celebrating the heroic officers of the 1992 coup. In his 1994 article describing this popular movement and his own involvement in it through the *Sierra Leone Heroes* book, Opala notes that images of Captain Valentine Strasser and other leaders of the NPRC were intentionally associated with depictions of these historical figures, thereby incorporating them into an evolving national pantheon (1994:205). There are still a few decaying examples of the murals to be seen in Freetown – for instance, those on Howe Street depicting Captain Prince Ben-Hirsh and Lieutenant Samuel S. Sandy, two NPRC ‘martyrs’ who were killed during the coup. Lieutenant Sandy is shown dressed in camouflage jacket and beret under the inscription ‘Even the Dead Lead Us Through’, suggesting that, like Bai Bureh before him, he was claimed by the NPRC as an ‘ancestor’ not a figure of the past, but one who has gone on ahead and in whose footsteps others will follow – an active presence in contemporary events (Last 2000:380).

The initial popularity of the NPRC was largely due to its resolve to put an end to the rebel war that had been plaguing the country. One way in which this militancy was materialized and made visible was in the installation of street side statues celebrating the new government’s victories against rebel forces. One such statue was erected in 1994 to commemorate a skirmish in the town of Bo, in the Southern Province of Sierra Leone, at a road junction that became



Figure 10.3 Remains of the ‘Soldier Kill Rebel’ monument erected by the NPRC in 1994 in Bo (photograph: Paul Basu)

known as ‘Soja Kill Rebel Corner’. The toppled remains of the statue survive, partially hidden behind advertising placards and under a tangle of tree branches that have been thrown over it. Although the statue now lies in a number of pieces, one can see that it graphically depicted a government soldier about to bayonet a cornered rebel. An inscription on its plinth reads:

This monument . . . symbolizes the improved rebel war in Sierra Leone. It is dedicated to all our loyal and gallant soldiers of the NPRC Government.

It was not until 2002, six years after the NPRC was toppled from power, that the conflict was officially declared over and the process of reconstruction was begun in earnest. During the district hearings of the ensuing Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Commission staged what it termed ‘traditional reconciliation ceremonies’ at sites where massacres or other atrocities had taken place. These ceremonies included the performance of cleansing rituals and pouring of libations, as well as prayers and religious ceremonies. According to the report of the TRC, such activities were regarded as being particularly important for local communities ‘because they serve as recognition of the suffering of victims as well as the collective memory of the past’ (TRC 2004a, vol. 3b:475).

Such events were sometimes marked by the erection of memorials, thus leaving material traces of the peace process throughout the country in an *attempt* to counter the more abundant traces of the conflict. In Bo, for instance, on the closing day of the local TRC hearings, a ceremony was held at Soja Kill Rebel Corner in which the intersection was itself renamed ‘Peace Junction’ and a memorial sign board erected to signal the fact. Although this might seem like a classic enunciative act, which brings about the reality it announces and thus transforms the commemoration of war into a celebration of peace, the reality on the ground is, of course, that the junction is still remembered by its more vivid *nom de guerre*.

This attempt to overwrite conflict and leave an itinerary of peace monuments rather than war memorials in its wake was repeated by the TRC in other towns throughout Sierra Leone. Perhaps the most significant example is the renaming, in August 2003, of Freetown’s Congo Cross Bridge as ‘Peace Bridge’. This bridge marked the extent of the rebel incursion into Freetown in January 1999 and was the site of particularly fierce fighting. The bridge was renamed as part of a larger event marking the end of the TRC hearings, a National Reconciliation Procession, in which representatives of all the major factions marched together across the bridge on their way to the National

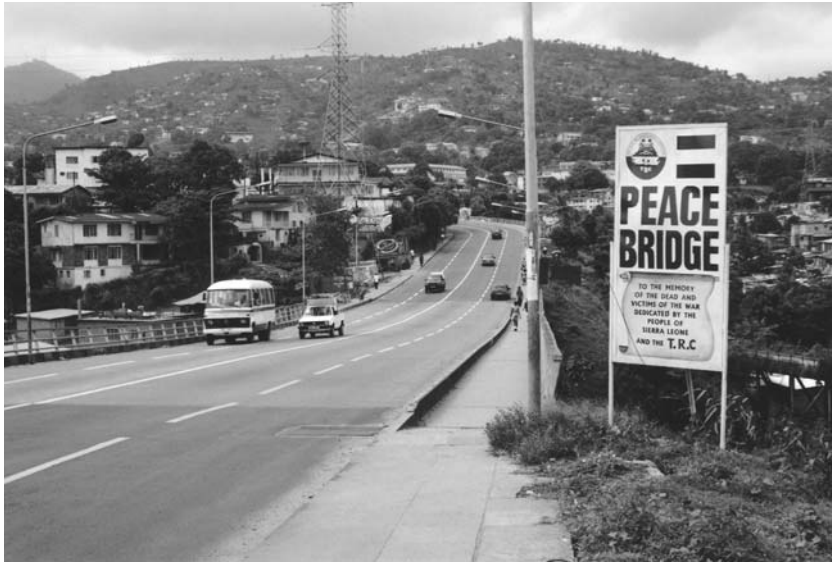


Figure 10.4 Signboard advertising the 2003 renaming of Freetown's Congo Cross Bridge as 'Peace Bridge' (photograph: Paul Basu)

Stadium, where speeches and formal apologies were delivered. A special 'child-friendly' version of the TRC report draws out some of the symbolic resonance intended in the act of renaming: 'The Peace Bridge reminds the people of Sierra Leone that the war was overcome. And it gives hope that peace will become the bridge to the future' (TRC 2004b:31).

With the support of President Kabbah, a National War Memorial Committee was established in 2002, and a competition was held to elicit designs for memorials in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, and Makeni. Despite an announcement in February 2006 that the President had also called for the erection of a commemorative monument in Bomaru, the town on the Sierra Leone/Liberia border where 'the first shots which started the long and protracted senseless war were fired' (www.statehouse-sl.org/archives/feb-2006.html, accessed 10 August 2006), to the best of my knowledge, none of these has yet been constructed, owing to lack of resources. These government initiatives were encouraged by the TRC, and a section of one of the appendices to its report is devoted to the issue of 'Memorials and Transitional Justice'. This section of the report was compiled along with a series of recommendations for the establishment of 'successful memorials' in Sierra Leone by Artemis Christodoulou, a graduate student from Yale University who was serving as an intern at the TRC at the time. Christodoulou stresses the need to integrate

'traditional and cultural methods of memorialization' into any proposal and provides some suggestions made by various Sierra Leonean 'stakeholders' with whom she consulted.

In the context of my earlier discussion regarding the cotton tree as a complex site of memory in Sierra Leone, it is interesting to note a suggestion for a memorial proposed by a group of excombatants, which involved leaving imprints of their hands in a cement wall encircling the Freetown tree. This was intended to signify 'a tacit agreement with themselves, with other perpetrators, and with the nation and the world that they will never use these hands again to pick up a weapon and strike a fellow human being' (TRC 2004a, app. 4, pt. 1:7). Given that the amputation of civilians' hands was one of the 'signature tactics' of the Sierra Leone conflict, this proposal had especial resonance, and, despite misgivings, some amputee groups were evidently supportive of the idea. Christodolou recommended that a forum be established so that perpetrators and victims could meet together to discuss the proposed memorial, suggesting that this would 'serve as a powerful space for healing and reconciliation' (*ibid.*).

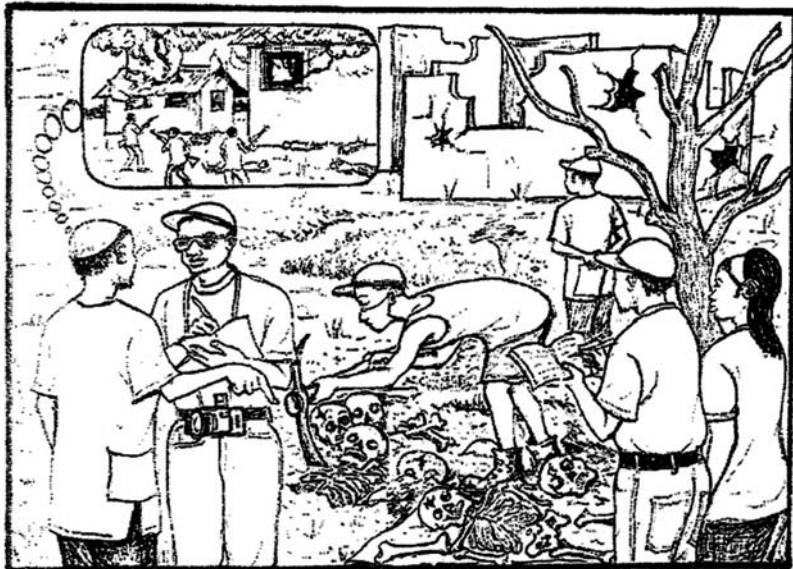
No matter how well-meaning such interventions, the report of the TRC significantly fails to properly identify what form local 'methods of memorialization' might take or how such methods might be integrated with models imported from elsewhere. More fundamentally, as Shaw (2005) argues, the TRC does not consider the possibility that commemoration might be an inappropriate tool for reconciliation in the first place. It is not that war memorials are unknown in Sierra Leone, of course, but their connotative associations are ambiguous, to say the least. A prominent example is the memorial that lists the names of the Sierra Leoneans who were killed fighting for the British in the First and Second World Wars. Located in front of the old Secretariat Building in Freetown, the one time hub of colonial government in Sierra Leone, this colonial relic, one suspects, brings to mind an altogether different, postcolonial narrative from that it was intended to commemorate. Indeed, the old Secretariat Building was attacked during the May 1997 coup staged by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), and, although it is now being renovated, its gutted shell stood for several years as yet another kind of monument of warfare.

If the war memorial or peace monument remains a peripheral (and, in the case of the TRC's commemorative sign boards, an ephemeral) artefact in the Sierra Leonean memoryscape, there is one final category of site that I should like to consider at which 'indigenous' and 'non-indigenous' regimes of memory intersect more complexly: the site, that is, of mass graves associated with Sierra Leone's conflict.

Concerning the Dead in Mass Graves

The mass grave occupies a particular place in the Western imagination as an emblem of atrocity. As well as having associations with appalling violence and the dangerous, polluting power of dead bodies (Hallam, Hockey, and Howarth 1999), mass graves, it is argued, inspire fear because they also involve the burial of social memory and identity (Ferrandiz 2006; Sanford 2003). Not only are mass graves often intentionally hidden and left unmarked by perpetrators – at once amplifying terror through secrecy, concealing evidence, and denying survivors a body to mourn – but in their carelessly cast jumbles of corpses is entailed an effacement of individual identity, which is especially unsettling for societies used to commemorative practices that preserve an individual's identity to the grave (for instance, the indexical relationship between an inscribed headstone and the identity of the body below it).

As part of a wider interdisciplinary fascination with cultural trauma, violence, and memory, an increasing number of anthropologists have begun exploring



Investigators find evidence about what actually happened during the conflict.

Figure 10.5 Illustration from *Wetin Na Di Speshal Kot: The Special Court Made Simple*, a booklet produced by the Special Court's Outreach Section in 2002 and distributed to Sierra Leonean schoolchildren; note the depiction of the mass grave – its association with memory, with evidence, and with the investigation of 'what actually happened during the conflict'.

the social and political significance of mass burials. In contexts ranging from Argentina (Crossland 2002; Robben 2000) and Guatemala (Sanford 2003) to Spain (Ferrandiz 2006), Cyprus (Sant Cassia 2005), and Eastern Europe (Verdery 1999), researchers have been considering the implications of exhuming both bodies and memories when such sites undergo forensic excavation as part of truth commissions or other investigations. As Crossland (2002) observes of the excavation of mass graves outside Buenos Aires, the physical uncovering of bodies at these sites constitutes a reappearance of the 'disappeared', which again makes visible the 'crimes of the juntas' and revivifies memories of state violence and oppression. Anthropologists have also explored the politics of preserving mass gravesites and their transformation into memorials of genocide (Cook 2005; Hughes 2005; Jarvis 2002; Williams 2004). Hughes, for example, contrasts the memorial activities of the Cambodian state at Choeung Ek with local-level memorial practices elsewhere in Cambodia; she observes how the memorialization of gravesites reflects contestations between multiple actors, meanings, and values, 'including Cambodian party-politics, Khmer Buddhist beliefs about death, and local and internationalised discourses of justice, education, and memory' (Hughes 2005:286). With advances in DNA identification techniques, the forensic examination of mass graves has now become a standard part of the toolkit of transitional justice mechanisms and human rights interventions across the world.

In 2001, human rights officers of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone began receiving information from local NGOs regarding discoveries of graves and other sites of atrocities related to Sierra Leone's conflict. The following year the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) was funded by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to conduct a preliminary survey of these sites and to advise the TRC and other organisations regarding future investigations. In the course of a month, members of the EAAF team visited fifty-five sites located in five districts in the east and centre of the country. With permission from local authorities and chiefs, interviews with witnesses were conducted and the sites inspected, planned, and recorded. Although no exhumations were carried out, the EAAF made recommendations for the preservation of the sites so that evidence would remain intact should excavation be deemed of interest to the TRC or judicial inquiry (EAAF 2002). Details of the EAAF's activities and its discoveries of mass graves were reported widely in the Freetown press.

Following the EAAF's preliminary survey, the TRC embarked on its own programme of investigations of mass graves, extending its remit to include other sites 'that have a story to tell' – for example, 'mass killing sites, execution sites, torture sites, and amputation sites' (TRC 2004a, app. 4, pt. 2:1–2).

TRC investigators were sent into the field with the following objectives:

- a. to identify as many 'mass graves' and 'other sites' as possible in all districts,
- b. to photograph the identified sites,
- c. to identify the number of victims,
- d. to reveal the identity of the victims,
- e. to identify the types of [human rights] violations committed at the site,
- f. to identify the perpetrators,
- g. to identify and locate the tools and instruments used in committing the violations,
- h. to identify the persons and institutions responsible for the management of the sites,
- i. to determine the current uses of the sites (if any),
- j. to advise the local community on the protection, preservation and security of the site. (ibid.:2)

It is clear from its report that the TRC encountered a number of difficulties in relation to these tasks, not least the lack of time and financial resources to properly conduct the research, which meant that coverage was rather patchy and the districts of Kambia, Western Area and Port Loko were not included at all. A more complex difficulty, which had far wider implications for the success of the TRC, is described in the TRC report as 'some confusion on the part of the local populace between the TRC and the Special Court' (ibid.). The problem of simultaneously conducting a truth commission, which promoted amnesty, and a war crimes tribunal, which sought to prosecute perpetrators of the more serious human rights violations, is discussed at some length in the TRC report itself (TRC 2004a, vol. 3b:363–430). One result was that potential informants were reluctant to participate in TRC investigations because they were afraid that they would be called as witnesses or prosecuted by the Special Court: thus, detailed information relating to mass burials, even if known, was often not forthcoming.

Despite these limitations, the TRC compiled a database of some 99 mass gravesites, the majority containing fewer than 20 bodies, but a significant number reputedly containing in excess of 100 bodies each (two sites in Bonthe District were reported to contain 450 and 600 bodies, respectively). A table in an appendix of the TRC report provides details of the location of each of these sites, together with the number and the identity of victims (where known), the alleged cause of death (usually gunshot wounds), the date of the killings, date of burial, and the alleged perpetrators [usually RUF and AFRC, but instances

of killings by the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and Kamajor Civil Defence Force are also recorded]. Graves were often dug hurriedly and without ceremony after an attack on a village; in other cases, bodies were not buried until a number of years after the killings took place (for instance when a village that had been abandoned after an attack was later resettled). As the report states: 'Behind every mass grave there is a tragic story' (TRC 2004a, app. 4, pt. 2:1). An example of one such story, gathered by TRC investigators working in Pujehun District, follows:

At Bumpoh Pejeh chiefdom two mass graves were discovered. As the burial took place three years following the killings in 1996, the remains could not be identified. According to eyewitnesses, Bumpoh Pejeh was the only chiefdom in the Pujehun district that had a heavy presence of SLA soldiers. As a result, many people from other areas came to this town for security. The RUF attacked the chiefdom causing heavy casualties and resulting in the dispersal of the population. When displaced persons returned after three years they discovered that many of the original inhabitants were missing. When the residents of the chiefdom returned the entire village had become overgrown. It was during the time when the bushes were being cleared ('under-brushing') that many of the remains were discovered. Most of the remains were collected from the township and some others were retrieved from the nearby bush. The first set of remains that was discovered was buried in a hole near a cotton tree at the southern end of the township. When the first site was full, the people dumped the remains at a second mass gravesite between the roots of the cotton tree. (TRC 2004a, app. 4, pt. 2:19)

In contrast to the ephemeral efforts of the TRC to displace the memory of war through the erection of peace monuments, this account – typical of similar descriptions recorded throughout the country – provides a vivid and disturbing illustration of how the landscape of Sierra Leone continues to be transformed into a memoryscape of conflict, and not necessarily through intentionally commemorative practices⁹.

At the time of its investigations, the TRC found that, in most cases, the mass gravesites it visited were in a state of neglect, and their future preservation was in danger. The TRC recommended that, because they 'serve as powerful reminders of the abuses of the past and the need to ensure that they never occur again', steps must be taken to preserve and mark the most significant sites in all districts (ibid.:21). Whereas the TRC proposed the erection of 'shrines and monuments' over the graves, consultation with local people

demonstrated that there was a preference for more “community oriented” ways of remembering and commemorating the dead’ (ibid.:20) – for instance, the erection of hospitals, schools, and other community facilities that have a more immediate use value in the present and that ‘remember’ in another sense insofar as they call to mind a quality of life lost in the years of conflict. This preference calls to mind a debate that took place in Britain in the aftermath of the First World War between those who favoured commemorating the dead with schemes that served some utility for the living and those who felt ‘a noble piece of sculpture’ was a more fitting tribute (King 1998:86–105). In the Sierra Leonean context, the divergence between these approaches underlines the TRC’s concern that the gravesites must remain *visible* reminders of past abuses and reveals its blindness to the fact that many of these sites were already ‘marked’ (or not) in locally meaningful ways – it is surely no coincidence, for example, that the mass graves in Bumpah Pejeh chiefdom were located under a cotton tree¹⁰.

If the mass grave is a particularly terrifying spectre that haunts the Western (and international humanitarian) imagination, the question arises as to what other layers of meanings accrue at these sites. How, for instance, are they perceived according to local cosmologies in which different attitudes toward the dead may prevail? This is not the place to detail the mortuary customs of the various ethnolinguistic populations of Sierra Leone; however, as in other regions in West Africa, it is clear that the circumstances in which a person dies, as well as the person’s status, affect the ceremonies performed, the location and nature of the burial, and the fate of the person’s ‘spirit’ in the afterlife. Some sense of the sensibilities around death may be discerned in an excerpt from a poem by Josaya Bangali entitled ‘Elegy: For the Dead in Mass Graves’:

*Ancestors of new death
Take this message
To ancestors of old death
Among whom was Sengbe Pieh
Not forgetting Mama Yoko and Bai Bureh.
Tell them that the children of Nyagua
Have opened each others’ stomachs
And fought over their entrails.
They’ve been laid to rest
On top of each other.
No side-bands are worn
To pronounce them dead
And the ceremonies of the spirit-house
Cannot be looked after.*

Although Bangali writes in English, he is a Mende-speaker, born in Tikonko Chiefdom, south of Bo. He was educated at Christ the King College, Bo, and at Njala University, where he studied Literature and Linguistics. The imagery Bangali uses in his ‘Elegy’ combines a nationalistic sensibility with more traditional motifs in a manner that, as I have been arguing, is quite characteristic. Bangali explained to me that he wrote the poem as a response to the hopeless situation that Sierra Leoneans had, he thought, brought upon themselves because they no longer heeded the wisdom of their cultural heritage and traditions (a heritage mediated through the very processes I have been describing).

The following interpretation is based on Bangali’s own comments. In the poem, Bangali contrasts those who have been killed fighting in Sierra Leone’s recent civil conflict – the ‘ancestors of new death’ – with legendary figures from Sierra Leone’s past who fought against slavery and oppression (Sengbe Pieh, Bai Bureh, Madam Yoko, Nyagua – the ‘ancestors of old death’). Whereas Bangali argues that the ancestors of new death will soon be forgotten, he claims that the ancestors of old death ‘are immortal and cannot be extinguished from memory’ and that ‘their deeds are worth emulating’ (pers. comm.). The recent dead are thus told to carry a message to these ancestral heroes of old, that Sierra Leoneans – the ‘children of Nyagua’ – instead of uniting against common foes, are fighting one another in a most hideous manner. Those killed in the conflict are dumped into mass graves, their corpses piled on top of one another. Bangali explains that ‘among the Mendes, the blood relatives of the deceased wear white side-bands to differentiate themselves from ordinary sympathizers; and it is by wearing side-bands that outsiders know that the wearer has lost a dear one’ (pers. comm.). According to the poem (and, indeed, corroborated by the TRC investigations), the dead in the mass graves go unmourned, and the appropriate funeral ceremonies – the ‘ceremonies of the spirit-house’ – are not observed.

According to traditional Mende belief, this last point is of particular significance, for it is through the *tenjamfi* ceremony, performed three days after the death of a woman, or four days after that of a man, that the dead are enabled to ‘cross over the water’ and properly join the community of the ancestors (Gittins 1987:57). If the *tenjamfi* ceremony is not performed, then the dead person is destined to remain a liminal earth-bound spirit, or *ndTubla*, ‘not properly integrated either with the living or with the ancestors’ (ibid.:61, fn.33). Such spirits are thought to linger around their place of burial and are regarded as being discontented, capricious, and sometimes ‘a threat to the living’ (ibid.:57).

Rebirthing the Nation?

The sites of memory, which have been the concern of this essay, are also sites of mediation. Not only are they the material mediators through which coexistent regimes of memory are brought into relation with one another, and through which multiple meanings of war and peace in Sierra Leone are shaped, but – as Sayers remarked of Freetown’s Cotton Tree – they are also sites that mediate between the past and the future. The master trope articulated in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is, of course, that of ‘rebirth’. By seeking to create ‘an impartial historical record’ of Sierra Leone’s conflict (TRC 2004a, vol. 1:10), the TRC hopes that the ‘lessons of the past’ can be learned, and out of the crisis of civil war can be born a new, peaceful, and just nation-state. Such an ambition is expressed in the many essays, poems, and paintings submitted by ‘men and women of all ages, backgrounds, religions, and regions’ in response to the TRC’s invitation to Sierra Leoneans to contribute to the shaping of a ‘National Vision’ for the future of the country (TRC 2004a, vol. 3b: ,503). Examples of these submissions were reproduced in the final chapter of the report of the TRC, and they were also made into an exhibition that was displayed at Sierra Leone’s National Museum between December 2003 and June 2004. Alongside images of reconciliation and hope painted in the colours of Sierra Leone’s flag or superimposed on the cutout shape of the national territory, a contribution from Bishop Joseph Humper, the chairman of the TRC, articulates this trope of rebirth most explicitly. Under the title of ‘A Sierra Leonean Renaissance’, Humper’s message states that he envisions ‘a revived Sierra Leone, born out of the ashes of a reckless and senseless civil conflict, [which] shall become active and committed to the establishment of genuine peace’.

Humper’s words resonate with a broader vision of African Renaissance, associated in its most recent formulation with the pronouncements of Thabo Mbeki (Ajulu 2001). However, rebirth is not the only trope discernable in the palimpsest of Sierra Leone’s memoryscape. If the desire of local communities to commemorate the victims of civil war with schools and hospitals, rather than with monuments and mausolea, suggests a future-orientated attitude that serves the living and not the dead, it is as well to remember the lingering discontent that haunts Sierra Leone’s mass graves. Indeed, barely concealed beneath the optimistic rhetoric of the TRC is a more pessimistic observation: that many of the characteristics identified as antecedents to the conflict continue to persist in Sierra Leone, and, hence, there is considerable doubt as to whether the ‘lessons of the past’ will in fact be learned (TRC 2004a, vol. 3a:149). Thus, rather than prematurely celebrating the rebirth of a nation,

we might heed the still-potent underlying layers of Sierra Leone's palimpsest memoryscape and, with some justification, fear that which is undead and which cannot yet be properly laid to rest (cf De Boeck 1998).

The authors of Sierra Leone's TRC report are not, of course, alone in seeking to construct a myth of the past that serves the perceived imperatives and aspirations of the present – which is, in part, my point: that there are multiple entities, each differently positioned in the social, cultural, and political landscape, each committed to a particular engagement with the past in the light of present needs, hopes, and future-oriented agendas. What is interesting to observe in this familiar, 'presentist' interpretation, is the way in which the same historical 'motifs' are, more or less strategically, reappropriated by differently positioned entities to serve very different ends (see my discussion of Bai Bureh, for instance). The past, no less than the present, thus becomes a contested ground. What this interpretation fails to capture, however, is the sense that it is not only the *use* of the past in the present that is contested but also the very nature of 'pastness' and its 'presence'.

Too often this contest is characterized as an opposition between competing regimes of memory, such that traditional mnemonic practices are regarded as being suppressed by modern historicizing ones, and local conceptualizations as being displaced by globalizing hegemonies. As this exploratory chapter has sought to argue in a Sierra Leonean context, the relationship between these regimes is more complex. Rather than reductive dichotomies, we need a more nuanced understanding of the 'synchronic heterogeneity' of diachronic processes in a given context (Cole 2001:289). Whereas the mnemonic practices of any one individual or social body might entail a synthesis of some of the diverse influences c-existent at a particular time and place, at a more general level these heterogeneous elements do not necessarily cohere into a new creolized form. Rather, the memoryscape is continually 'overwritten', resulting in an accretion of forms. But, unlike an ideal type of stratified archaeological contexts, whereby successive strata overlay one another neatly, this accretion occurs in an uneven manner and, to pursue the archaeological metaphor, is constantly being excavated and reburied, mixing up the layers, exposing unexpected juxtapositions, and generating unanticipated interactions. Such is the medium of the palimpsest memoryscape.

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Notes

1. No attempt is made to provide a history of Sierra Leone's conflict. For recent analyses, see Abdullah (2004) and Keen (2005).
2. A fuller history of Sierra Leone's National Museum and cultural heritage legislation is currently in preparation. In the present context, however, it is worth noting that the establishment of the Museum should be seen in the context of a broader movement across colonial British West Africa. In 1944, having visited the region as a member of the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa, Julian Huxley sent a detailed memorandum to the Colonial Office arguing that there was an urgent need to establish museums in each of Britain's four West African colonies. This memorandum was supported in a 1946 report commissioned by the Colonial Office and prepared by Hermann Braunholtz, then Keeper of Oriental Antiquities and Ethnography at the British Museum. Given the straitened conditions in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the colonial governments did not, however, consider this a high priority, and the recommendations were slow to be taken up. In Sierra Leone, it was not until 1954 that Governor Robert de Zouche Hall, who had a personal enthusiasm for cultural heritage matters, pushed for the creation of a museum under the management of the newly reconstituted Sierra Leone Society. M. C. F. Easmon, a retired Krio medical doctor and chairman of the Sierra Leone Monuments and Relics Commission, was appointed as its first curator.
3. In relation to his use of the possessive pronoun, 'our Freetown Cotton Tree', it is interesting to note that Sayers was regarded by his peers in the colonial service as somewhat having 'gone native' (John Hargreaves pers. comm.). A Temne and Koranko speaker, Sayers was a frequent contributor to *Sierra Leone Studies* in the 1920s and 1930s on ethnographic topics, and he also served on the Monuments and Relics Commission from its inception, in 1947, until his death in 1954.
4. Shaw makes a distinction between 'social' and 'individual' forgetting, arguing that, although people still have personal memories of violence, it is the voicing of this memory in public that is avoided, since this is viewed as encouraging its return (2005:9).
5. In the context of the more recent conflict, Bai Bureh's supernatural powers resonate with those associated with the 'hunter-warrior' *kamajors* of the Civil Defence Force, who, through "contractual" associations with specific bush spirits were believed to be able to make themselves 'invisible and impermeable to bullets' (Ferme 2001:27; Leach 2000:588).
6. Opala's involvement in Sierra Leonean cultural heritage issues continues in his support of a campaign to have the 'slave fort' of Bunce Island in the Sierra Leone River designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (see http://freetown.usembassy.gov/bunce_island_preservation.html, accessed 21 July 2006).

7. In addition to Bai Bureh, other historical Sierra Leonean ‘heroes’ to be represented on the new issue of Sierra Leonean banknotes during the NPRC rule included Sengbe Pieh (Le5,000) and Kai Londo (Le500). Each represent a different ethnic/language group within Sierra Leone (respectively, Temne, Mende, and Kissi); it was not until 2002 that a Krio national hero was added, with a portrait of Isaac T. A. Wallace appearing on a new Le 2,000 note. All of these figures feature in the *Sierra Leone Heroes* book.
8. As well as being Abubakar Jalloh’s *nom de guerre*, Bai Bureh lends his name to the ‘Bai Bureh Star’ (a medal awarded by the government ‘for military gallantry of the highest degree’), the ‘Bai Bureh Warriors’ (Port Loko’s main football team), and the ‘indigenous political ideology’ of ‘Burehism’ promoted by the People’s Democratic League, which draws its principles from the ‘teachings, preachings, ideas, beliefs, and practices’ of the nineteenth-century chief. Citing an unpublished article by Joseph Opala, Christensen notes that, during Siaka Stevens’ presidency, a group of actors were jailed for staging a play about Bai Bureh on the grounds of ‘inciting rebellion’ (2005:17, fn.10).
9. This account also resonates strikingly with Thomas Alldridge’s late nineteenth-century descriptions of the devastated Sierra Leonean landscape in the aftermath of what he refers to as ‘a long and serious tribal war’, attesting to the palimpsest-like accretions of violent associations in place:

We had not gone far into the Krim country before, as I went along, I saw many white objects on the ground which at first I hardly noticed, but which upon inspection I found to be bleached skulls.

In the line of destruction extending over many miles, not a town was to be seen, the sites that they had occupied being then overgrown wildernesses; banana plants and kola trees alone testifying to the fact that here, not long since, had been human habitations. (Alldridge 1901:166)

The ‘tribal war’ to which Alldridge refers was actually provoked by the expansion of colonial trade in the region (see Caulker 1981).

10. See David Bunn’s fascinating discussion of the politics of the changing visibility of Xhosa graves and the ‘evolution of an intricate reciprocity between British monumentality and Xhosa grave practices’ in the Colonial Eastern Cape (Bunn 2002).

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