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Only Looking Forward: The Absence of War History in Sierra Leone

Introduction¹

Sierra Leone is a small West African country, population 5.7 million, bordering Liberia, Guinea, and a stretch of Atlantic coast. From 1991 to 2002, it was consumed by a civil war notorious for its brutality, with widespread sexual violence, recruitment of child soldiers, and amputation used as a fear tactic.² Nearly half the total population – approximately 2.6 million people – was internally displaced; upwards of 70,000 people were killed; and substantial infrastructure was destroyed.³ Some of the driving factors of conflict in Sierra Leone included power struggles over access to diamond revenues, societal frustration over unequal access to insufficient resources such as education, water, sanitation, and electricity, and the disenfranchisement of youth.⁴ These factors were exacerbated by rebel groups crossing the border from Liberia's neighboring civil war. Though some progress has been made, none of these conflict factors has yet been resolved, and these same issues still shape social and political life.⁵ While the Lomé Peace Accords were signed in 1999 and a large United Nations (UN) mission

1 My thanks to Susan Shepler, Joseph Dumbuya, Joshua Dankoff, and Justine Davis for comments on earlier drafts, as well as colleagues at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research, where this study was first presented. I am also grateful for feedback from fellow participants at the 2014 Georg Arnhold International Summer School on Education for Sustainable Peace at the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, particularly Elizabeth Oglesby. Brief excerpts of this chapter originally appeared in Gellman, "Teaching Silence in the Schoolroom." All errors remain my own.

2 Rakita, *Forgotten Children of War*, 12–17; Jalloh, "Introduction", 5.

3 Gberie, "War and Peace in Sierra Leone," 2; Jalloh, "Introduction," 5; Kaldor and Vincent, "Human Security," 4.

4 Keen, "Greedy Elites," 67–70; Maconachie and Binns, "Beyond the Resource Curse?," 104–5; Gberie "War and Peace in Sierra Leone," 2; Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Witness to Truth*, 5–17.

5 Clark, "Assessing the Special Court's Contribution," 747–48. Clark's work looks specifically at the role of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in addressing the injustices from the conflict and those that are still potential drivers of conflict today.

presence ushered in a transition to relative calm in 2002, physically, socially, and psychologically, Sierra Leone is a country in recovery, and the 2014–15 Ebola crisis only extended this process.

In Sierra Leone, the idea that “everyone knows what happened during the war, so why talk about it?” has embedded the culture of silence throughout institutions and society.⁶ In reality, the older generation who survived the war opts for knowing silence, while the younger generation joins in the silence without knowing their national history beyond what can be gleaned from family and community lore. Since the war’s end, capacity building and infrastructure projects have addressed some of Sierra Leone’s needs, but the Ebola outbreak, as well as ongoing inequality and insufficient resources, continue to keep the underlying drivers of conflict near the societal surface. In the midst of these problems, I argue that the culture of silence about the Sierra Leonean civil war traps citizens in a discourse of forgetting. In this discourse, the societal momentum to “look forward” advances without including an understanding of why the war occurred in the first place, and what future role it may play in the country. This chapter is based on a year of political ethnographic work (2013–14) in Freetown, Sierra Leone, during which I conducted 25 formal interviews with education sector employees, analyzed school materials, and talked informally to Sierra Leoneans and expatriates involved in the education sector about the quality and content of education.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I assess the relationship between citizen formation and processes of remembering and forgetting theoretically, looking to Charles Tilly’s notion of effective citizenship as an important part of the social contract between citizens and states. Second, I consider institutional means of remembering the violent past in Sierra Leone in both formal and informal education sectors. Third, I consider the obstacles to employees of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) teaching about the civil war in primary and secondary school classrooms, and discuss why formal sector education is so important in crafting national-level identity and discourse. I conclude by arguing that violence is more likely to reoccur within cultures of silence, and thus reassert the necessity of developing tools to discuss and learn from past violence.

6 Gellman, “Teaching Silence in the Schoolroom,” 149.

Remembering, Forgetting, and Citizen Formation

People remember when they have been wronged. Many people remember the ways previous generations of their families or communities have been wronged, but only some people talk about it.⁷ Cultures of silence pervade citizen behavior by determining what becomes part of the public discourse and what is relegated, by either state institutions or other dominant community voices, to be forgotten. Paulo Freire's work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* describes how humans can self-actualize not through silence but only by naming things as they are; in other words, opening up dialogue.⁸ In Freire's culture of silence concept, silence is something that oppresses people by keeping them voiceless, while dialogue entails a transformation of the world by naming it, creating it, and thinking critically about it.⁹ Being voiceless or empowered as a social actor has real consequences for how people perform citizenship, especially in fragile, post-conflict democratization contexts like Sierra Leone.

In brief, citizenship signifies the status of a person with duties, rights, and privileges that are connected to a specific, state-governed territory. Tilly's contractual definition of citizenship is stated as follows:

Citizenship designates a set of mutually enforceable claims relating categories of persons to agents of governments. . . . Citizenship has the character of a contract: variable in range, never completely specified, always depending on unstated assumptions about context, modified by practice, constrained by collective memory, yet ineluctably involving rights and obligations sufficiently defined that either party is likely to express indignation and corrective action when the other fails to meet expectations built into the relationship.¹⁰

Tilly's framing of citizenship captures its contingent nature. Because the contract remains unspecified, people can perform their role as citizens hoping that their participation in the state will improve their lives. Contingency is particularly salient in democratization and post-conflict contexts, where the social contract is not well defined or has been shattered by war. In these fragile moments, institutions are not yet fixed in their rules and norms, nor are the expectations of citizens entrenched. Yet in Sierra Leone, the notion of contingent, dynamic citizenship does not culturally resonate. Legal, status, rather than a social contract between people and those that govern them, is the way citizenship is operationalized in Sierra Leone. Culturally, people do not have high or even moderate expectations that the state will address their needs, and therefore

7 Gellman, *Democratization and Memories*, forthcoming 2017.

8 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.

9 Ibid., 88–92.

10 Tilly, "Conclusion," 253.

political mobilization targeting national-level actors and institutions remains low. In such states, rights and duties can be ambiguous,¹¹ and even before the war there was only a tenuous connection between citizens and the state. Family and community networks were much more salient for meeting needs than a set of institutions that were often quite removed from daily life.

Tilly's definition above highlights the ability of the social contract to be "modified by practice," something that again shows the potential for change to occur in citizens' discourse with the state about their rights and duties. Tilly includes collective memory as a tool to constrain the social contract, showing how socially and institutionally constructed norms lead to expectations, which in turn reinforce the norms. In Sierra Leone, this plays out through the culture of silence that is perpetuated through traumatic memory. When combined with cultural and structural norms of political behavior, this culture of silence results in citizens not questioning the omission of the violent past in citizen-forming spaces like the formal education sector.

Bound up with Tilly's notion of citizenship is the understanding that for a regime to be considered democratic, it must include relatively broad and equal public political participation, constituent consultation, and rights protection.¹² Although voter turnout in the 2012 elections was 87.3 percent and heralded by the Carter Center as a "benchmark in democratic consolidation,"¹³ elections alone do not foster an engaged civil society, and non-electoral mobilization is low in Sierra Leone. Passive citizenship, or what I would call "voting-only citizenship," is distinct from what Tilly labels "effective citizenship," something that obliges both the state and the polity to address "political effects of inequalities in routine social life."¹⁴ Though these inequalities might be addressed in alternative spaces for citizenship performance in Sierra Leone, such as through secret societies or tribes, there is a dominant sense of resignation to the status quo in Sierra Leone because of fear of violence reigniting, because organized groups like the secret societies do not want government interference, and because tribe-based advocacy runs the risk of being labeled "tribalist."¹⁵ Ethnic groups that might otherwise be interested in organizing for cultural rights along ethnic lines are reluctant to do so because of concern about being associated with ethnically divided political

11 Addison and Murshed, "From Conflict to Reconstruction," 3, 11; Azam and Mesnard, "Civil War and the Social Contract," 2, 17.

12 Tilly, "Conclusion," 256.

13 Carter Center, "Observing Sierra Leone's November 2012 National Elections," 2.

14 Tilly, "Conclusion," 256.

15 Lamin Kargbo (program manager, Institute of Sierra Leonean Languages) and Rev. Frederick Jones (Krio literacy and scripture engagement coordinator, Institute of Sierra Leonean Languages), group interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, February 19, 2014.

parties or tribal militancy from the war era.¹⁶ Instead of practicing Tilly's "effective citizenship," people participate passively – voting rather than visibly petitioning or protesting. In interviews, civil society leaders generally characterized Sierra Leonean political engagement as low. Though there may be secret or subaltern petitioning or protesting taking place, such discourses are not particularly open to outside researchers. My own inability to access potential subaltern political discourses is an admitted limitation of this study. This limitation also points to the need for Sierra Leonean scholars and others who are more closely embedded in Sierra Leonean communities to document the range of political behaviors that do constitute enactments of the social contract, particularly those that are less visible or recognizable as such.

Democracy for Tilly is not something that can be proclaimed separately from effective citizenship, yet Sierra Leone is attempting democratization without enough attention to how citizens are formed in the first place in venues like formal-sector education. Memory about the war, and the teaching of national history, has in many ways been divorced from contemporary citizenship practices, with a few notable exceptions. Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) created a means to institutionalize memories of the war by gathering stories from people affected by it. Yet even during the TRC, created by the Lomé Peace Accord in 1999 and sanctioned by domestic law in 2000, the institutionalization of memory was inhibited by several factors.

First, the tension between "truth-telling" as a healing process versus the TRC documentation as a neutral and national narrative of what transpired remains unresolved.¹⁷ Second, because of simultaneous operations by the TRC and Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCSL), there was confusion among the potential population of testifiers about how their stories would be used.¹⁸ Though amnesty was a condition of the creation of the TRC and there was generally a "firewall" of information-sharing between the TRC and the SCSL,¹⁹ misunderstandings about the purpose of the two institutions among Sierra Leoneans were rampant, and the two institutions were to some degree in competition with each other for both funding and testimonies.²⁰ Third and relatedly, because the TRC, as part of its formation in the Lomé Peace Accords, granted blanket amnesty to all combatants, many survivors who wanted punitive justice through the SCSL rather than truth alone chose to tell their stories as SCSL witnesses rather than to the TRC.²¹

16 Ibid.

17 Basu, "Confronting the Past?," 237–39.

18 Carter, "International Judicial Trials," 729.

19 This was true with the exception of the case of Chief Hinga Norman. See Bangura, "International Criminal Justice," 704–5.

20 Ibid., 728–30.

21 Bangura, "International Criminal Justice," 705–6.

Finally, a voluntary truth-telling mechanism had limited appeal to a traumatized population that had yet to see real assurances that the conflict would not re-erupt, as many of the same actors remained in positions of power. This critique is not meant to overlook the significance of the TRC, which did offer an important though limited means of memory performance. In the end, the SCSL prosecuted nine war criminals and the TRC documented human rights violations around the country. Yet these official procedures did not make a great impact on the daily reality of Sierra Leoneans commensurate with the amount of resources consumed.²² This was true in spite of significant outreach efforts by the SCSL, including radio programming, community town hall meetings, video screenings of court proceedings in rural areas, and text message information distribution.²³ Though there was some effort of behalf of both the SCSL and the TRC to create school materials – including Krio-language pamphlets and books – that would relate these two processes to schoolchildren,²⁴ language and distribution barriers, in addition to poor integration into the overall curriculum and teacher training on how to use the materials, diminished their potential impact. In sum, neither the SCSL nor the TRC served as a sufficient memory mechanism for Sierra Leoneans or successfully integrated material about their work into schools.

The Sierra Leone Peace Museum, situated on the former grounds of the SCSL, opened its doors for the first time in 2013 with the mandate to serve as a memorial to civil war victims as well as to provide an intellectual space where visitors can learn about the causes of the war and potential solutions for lasting peace.²⁵ Though funding freezes in the midst of the Ebola crisis have paused further curation and development of the exhibits, the Museum is poised to serve as a significant institution for both war memorialization and promoting a culture of peace in the future.²⁶ Civil society organizations have also worked to address the culture of silence about the war in meaningful ways in relation to the SCSL and the TRC. Fambul Tok, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that focuses on community-driven reconciliation at the grassroots level, has led important initiatives throughout the country, engaging people at the village level to support them as they reintegrate perpetrators of civil war crimes into their communities.²⁷ Since 2012, Fambul Tok has also worked directly on the issue of cultures of silence in schools through the creation of school-based peace clubs in 2012. By 2014 there were thirty such peace clubs in schools across six districts, but momentum for

22 Ford, “How Special is the Special Court’s Outreach Section?,” 525.

23 Ibid., 505–26; Special Court for Sierra Leone, “Outreach and Public Affairs.”

24 Paulson, “(Re)Creating Education in Postconflict Contexts,” 24.

25 Joseph Dumbuya (director, Sierra Leone Peace Museum), interview with author, Sierra Leone, January 22, 2014; Sierra Leone Peace Museum, “Background.”

26 See Gellman, “Teaching Silence in the Schoolroom,” 153–55.

27 Fambul Tok, “Our History”; Terry, *Fambul Tok*.

this program, as with many programs, was severely jeopardized by the 2014 Ebola outbreak.²⁸ During the outbreak, resources and energy were reapportioned wholesale across the gamut of organizations working in Sierra Leone to contain the disease. Thus, now that Ebola is contained, these organizations are able to return to their original missions in the post-conflict reconstruction and development fields.

I have written elsewhere about the importance of the culture of silence versus dialogue in post-conflict contexts,²⁹ and reiterate here that all players at all levels are needed to overcome the challenges civil war represents to individuals, communities, and states. Though the Sierra Leone Peace Museum and Fambul Tok represent significant institutions in promoting peace, my concern continues to be centered in the need to mainstream these discourses into the formal education sector. The following section turns to the role of formal-sector education as a key site of remembering and forgetting for Sierra Leonean schoolchildren.

MEST and Citizen Formation

The culture of silence about past violence and contemporary well-being in Sierra Leone is reinforced socially but also institutionalized through the state, particularly through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), which uses class curricula, teacher capacitation, and textbooks to further the agenda of moving forward by forgetting the past. Sierra Leone's development has been significantly donor driven, and education sector reform is part of this process.³⁰ Despite ongoing efforts by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations (IOs) to supplement the low capacity and lack of resources that plague MEST, major obstacles remain for formal sector students to become well-informed citizens grounded in their national history.

Official MEST curricula do not explicitly teach the violent past to schoolchildren. Textbooks do not include narratives about the war, nor about post-conflict reconstruction processes.³¹ As of this writing, teachers receive no training on how to teach the war or its implications for young Sierra Leoneans. The director of the Textbook Taskforce at MEST stressed to me that some text-

28 Jon Lunn (member of Fambul Tok's International Advisory Group), personal communication with the author, received May 29, 2015.

29 See Gellman, "Teaching Silence in the Schoolroom."

30 Solomon, "Reconstruction Survey: Sierra Leone," 22.

31 Horacio Modupeh Nelson-Williams (executive secretary, Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, January 27, 2014; Anonymous B (international organization employee), personal communication with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, February 18, 2014.

books do include information about the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), for example, following the government's 2008 launch of the Emerging Issues initiative, which tries to address underlying problems in the country. However, he conceded that the last real update to syllabi and curricula was in 2003 and that it is time for revisions.³² Though it is not uncommon for textbooks to be the last sites of memory to be updated in post-conflict processes, they constitute a critical ingredient in intergenerational knowledge deserving of attention. While some Ministry officials state that they plan to include the war in history and civics curricula in the future,³³ the war officially ended in 2002, and an entire generation of schoolchildren has gone through school without these officially sanctioned spaces for remembering, storytelling, and processing their national history.

A common defense brought up regarding the work of MEST is that the list of improvements needed in the formal education sector is so enormous that peace education is simply not the first priority; it will have to wait its turn behind a host of other issues.³⁴ While it is true that Sierra Leone's formal education system faces major challenges,³⁵ other post-conflict countries such as Cambodia and South Africa have used schools as sites of peace education. The following paragraphs highlight numerous structural problems that would need to be addressed in order for Sierra Leonean schools to similarly serve as memory sites with peace-promoting intentions. Some of these problems include: affordability, corruption, teacher quality, and teaching resources, which are each addressed in turn below.

Formal education in Sierra Leone remains a luxury many cannot afford. Although primary school students theoretically incur no official attendance fees, ongoing costs include uniforms, which are worn in all public schools, notebooks and other classroom supplies, as well as informal fees paid to teachers.³⁶ In fact, corruption is endemic in Sierra Leone's formal education sector and is extensively interwoven into daily life for teachers, students, families, government

32 Edward Pessima (director, Textbook Taskforce, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, February 27, 2014.

33 Mohamed Sillah Sesay (director, Inspectorate Directorate, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, February 26, 2014; Horacio Modupeh Nelson-Williams (executive secretary, Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, January 27, 2014.

34 Anonymous B (international organization employee), personal communication with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, February 18, 2014; Mohamed Sillah Sesay (director, Inspectorate Directorate, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, February 26, 2014.

35 Harding and Mansaray, "Teacher Motivation," 10; GTZ et al., "Enhancing Transparency," 11, 20.

36 Anonymous C (international organization employee), personal communication with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, January 27, 2014.

officials, and the donors trying to address the problems.³⁷ Notoriously underpaid, many public school teachers augment their low salaries by teaching some of the standard curriculum in special tutorials for students who can pay for meetings after official school hours.³⁸ These tutorials often make the difference between passing or failing major benchmark exams. While the tutorial practice incurs outrage, it is also done as a survival tactic by teachers, who, because their salaries are so often paid late, are commonly denied housing by landlords worried that they will never receive their rent.³⁹ The negative stigma around public school teachers because of their low salaries is further embedded socially in the fact that parents often discourage or forbid their children to marry teachers.⁴⁰ In a survey of male and female teachers in ten schools, both urban and rural, 100 percent of teachers reported that they sometimes go to work hungry.⁴¹ With average annual secondary school fees around US\$20 per child, in addition to the cost of uniforms, notebooks, exams, and many other corrupt fees, the accessibility of formal-sector education is a major challenge for average Sierra Leoneans.⁴²

Teacher training and protocol remains a particularly central challenge in reforming formal education in Sierra Leone. Often students who fail college entrance exams choose to do a teacher training program as a last resort to salvage their career options,⁴³ while others may be strong students but lack university scholarship and so turn to teacher training as a way to get more education. The ubiquitous cycle of poorly educated students becoming poorly prepared teachers who then leave the next generation of students ill-prepared is one that must be addressed when discussing formal-sector education challenges.

Educational curricula are also a problem. In part, modifications to curricula are bogged down by highly centralized mechanisms for curricular approval and harmonization. For primary and secondary school curricula, public schools may only teach MEST-approved curricula and syllabi, though in practice many teachers do what they want, are rarely monitored, and frequently do not have a

37 GTZ et al., "Enhancing Transparency," 29.

38 Ibid., 111.

39 Mohamed Sillah Sesay (director, Inspectorate Directorate, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, February 26, 2014; Harding and Mansaray, "Teacher Motivation," 7–8.

40 Ibid., 7.

41 Ibid., 9.

42 Other informal and corrupt charges include students having to pay for: class-required pamphlets, lunch for the teacher, chalk and other school materials used by the teacher, grades, school projects via donation envelopes, anniversary celebrations, fees to avoid punishment, and gifts – including birthday gifts – to teachers. Anonymous A (civil society leader), personal communication with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, May 3, 2014.

43 Mohamed Sillah Sesay (director, Inspectorate Directorate, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, February 26, 2014.

copy of the official curriculum.⁴⁴ In turn, the colleges that train teachers may only teach curricula approved by the National Center for Technical and Vocational Awards (NCTVA), which awards all degrees in Sierra Leone.⁴⁵

Teacher training programs, and in fact all degree programs at the college and university level, are required to harmonize their programs with all other colleges and universities offering the same degree.⁴⁶ This means that Milton Margai College of Education and Technology in Freetown, which began as a teacher training college and now offers a range of degrees including a peace and conflict studies diploma, cannot independently decide to create, for example, a teacher training certificate that specializes in peace and conflict studies. Rather, the college would first have to convoke a workshop bringing together all tertiary institutions that offer teacher training degrees, reach consensus on a curriculum and syllabus modification, and then submit it to NCTVA for approval.⁴⁷

This lengthy centralized process of education reform at the tertiary level deters innovation in the formal education sector and supports a culture of the status quo regarding the content that teachers themselves are learning and what they will therefore be implementing when they gain employment in primary and secondary school classrooms. At the same time, without central curriculum control, many teachers would, and do, commonly teach from the same notes they accumulated in their teaching training days, which have long since fallen out of date. NCTVA's centralized policies try to correct for misuse and abuse, for example by collecting final exams from individual professors and having them regraded by examiners at other institutions, with the student's final grade an average of the two. This aims to address rampant grade buying,⁴⁸ whereby students bribe their professors to inflate their grades. In this light, the centralized role played by NCTVA is actually helpful in ensuring that degrees awarded represent real merit and not corruption in academia.⁴⁹

44 Emilia Kamara (regional focal person, Human Rights Committee; chairperson, Mombali District Human Rights Committee; acting national coordinator, Women's Forum on Human Rights and Development, Sierra Leone), interview with the author, Makeni, Sierra Leone, January 24, 2014.

45 This highly centralized control of degrees is to some extent meant to diminish corruption by adding oversight to how diplomas are awarded. But in fact, fake diplomas, inside information about exams, and other types of credential fraud are a major problem in Sierra Leone despite (as well as within) NCTVA. See GTZ et al., "Enhancing Transparency," 29.

46 Focus group (anonymous focus group with Registrar's Office employees), Freetown, Sierra Leone, March 24, 2014.

47 Ibid.

48 Elizabeth Taylor Morgan (dean of education, Milton Margai College of Education and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, March 24, 2014.

49 However, stories of deep-seated academic corruption are rampant in Sierra Leone, including the practice of female students being pressured or forced to have sex with teachers for better grades or the chance to rewrite an exam; thus, NCTVA grading has not solved the problem.

The formation of teachers also is of pressing concern. As most new graduates prefer to stay in the urban centers where they do their teacher training, the resulting dearth of trained and qualified teachers in rural areas often results in teachers instructing in the same materials that they themselves failed a few years earlier.⁵⁰ This scenario does not result in high-quality education, thus trapping rural students in cycles of limited education. Though distance-learning teacher training programs have been developed to address rural capacity, the quality of teachers charged with their own classrooms is highly variable. A 2005 survey shows that nearly 50 percent of teachers are increasingly demotivated in their jobs,⁵¹ representing an overall trend of dissatisfaction among those who have daily contact with young Sierra Leoneans.

Ineffective school administration also has a direct relationship to teacher professionalization, as effective administrators are able to keep teachers on task in spite of the aforementioned challenges, ensuring that teachers cover their classes and do not hire themselves out to private schools for additional income at the expense of their primary obligations.⁵² It is not only weak teacher motivation that poses problems for the education sector, but also the national government's failure to prioritize the education sector itself, which filters down in what MEST is mandated to do. Curricula, syllabi, and textbooks can be changed, but without political will, any real change will be hard to institutionalize.

In sum, Sierra Leone's formal education sector faces a host of obstacles in educating the next generation of citizens. Even as the culture of silence about the war in schools is recognized as a problem by some actors in the education field, especially at the tertiary level,⁵³ this issue must wait its turn behind a range of other challenges. At the micro-level, dire conditions surround the teaching profession, from late and minimal pay to the resulting social stigma that casts those charged with forming young citizens as undesirables. More broadly, schools are seen by Sierra Leoneans as centers for skills acquisition rather than primary sites of citizen formation.⁵⁴ Yet alternative sites of citizen formation,

Anonymous A (civil society leader), personal communication with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, May 3, 2014.

50 Focus group (anonymous focus group with Registrar's Office employees), Freetown, Sierra Leone, March 24, 2014.

51 Harding and Mansaray, "Teacher Motivation," 9.

52 One way this phenomenon is visible is that teachers will complain about the challenges at their public schools, including lack of income, but will then hire themselves out to private schools for less pay because the administration is more competent. Anonymous A (civil society leader), personal communication with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, May 3, 2014.

53 Abu Kamara (lecturer and head of unit, Peace and Conflict Studies, Milton Margai College of Education and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, March 23, 2014.

54 Susan Shepler, personal communication with author, June 22, 2014.

such as the family, village, or tribe, are too loosely connected to the state to actually foster an identity that may enact nationally relevant political behavior.

Why Formal-Sector Education Matters in Sierra Leone

In the introduction to her edited volume *Teaching the Violent Past*, Elizabeth Cole posits that new approaches to teaching the violent past are particularly important in post-conflict settings because things like revised textbooks and curricula can create narratives for people and communities that change their previously embedded conflict dynamics.⁵⁵ History education is well positioned to rehumanize the Other, meaning a person or group of people previously cast in the role of enemy or stranger, and rebuild social trust through shared or multiple perspectives.⁵⁶

In addition to rebuilding trust at the community and state level, which is fundamental for the social contract to operate at both levels, history education after violence is also charged with creating a “usable past.”⁵⁷ The notion of the usable past as a vehicle of collective memory, something that can allow young people to craft their identities as proud continuations of what came before them, stands in contrast to the importance of a more critical approach to history, where violence is analyzed even when it undoes the master narrative of the state.⁵⁸ Those who advocate “forgetting” past violence as a necessary part of democratization may subscribe to the school of thought that rehashing the past through detailed analysis in the schoolroom does not help people heal. On the other end of the spectrum, subscribing to a single state-sanctioned narrative about the past may similarly require the repression of memory rather than providing a way to heal with it.

In this chapter I do not argue for either approach but rather put forth the idea that moving from a culture of silence to a culture of dialogue will require a middle way, where the violent past is taught not as a list of horrors but as a usable past that can inspire students to engage in the opportunities and challenges of their communities and state in ways that contribute to peaceful coexistence. At the same time, the real challenges faced by MEST in developing and implementing new history education curricula should not be underestimated, nor should these structural challenges operate as a mechanism that automatically defaults Sierra

⁵⁵ Cole, “Introduction,” 20.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 20–21.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 18–19.

Leone to a state-sanctioned narrative of silence without discussion of its implications.

Conclusion: Addressing the Culture of Silence

In order to address the culture of silence, national history education could be integrated into formal-sector education, where it would reach a significant portion of schoolchildren, and could continue to be developed in the informal education sectors through spaces like the Sierra Leone Peace Museum and Fambul Tok. In Sierra Leone, the drivers of the civil war are still ominously present: Poverty, disenfranchisement, and unequal access to insufficient resources pervade people's daily existence. There is currently grave concern over the violent behavior of secondary school students, particularly at sporting events, where, since the war, police are regularly summoned to intervene in fights.⁵⁹ Seen in this perspective, education is only one of many sectors that need improvement. Beyond schools, many civil society meeting places such as churches, mosques, and markets, as well as professional and community-level organizations, can play a role in promoting cultures of peace.

At the same time, MEST, as a central instrument of the state agenda, has the opportunity to break the culture of silence around war in a wide-reaching way, along with spreading concrete peacebuilding skills like non-violent communication and anger management. If the next generation of children does not learn about the impact of conflict when it gets out of control, there is less incentive for them to control their own tempers – whether on the football pitch, in the classroom, or on the street. As the underlying causes of the war continue, a pragmatic way to contain conflict is to teach people to better manage themselves and their emotions, as well as to teach the real consequences of violence through national history education. MEST will need to overcome substantial obstacles to take on such a task, and in the meantime, civil society and internationally supported organizations can move ahead with their own related agendas.

If students are not educated about their country's past and not taught skills to transform their own conflictual relationships, it is unrealistic to think they will avoid the conflict patterns of their predecessors. Without knowing their history, it may be difficult for young people to be effective citizens in Tilly's sense, holding governments accountable to their demands and renegotiating the social contract. Teaching accurate national history will not be a panacea for these problems, but

59 Abu Kamara (lecturer and head of unit, Peace and Conflict Studies, Milton Margai College of Education and Technology), interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, March 23, 2014.

as young people learn about the effects of conflict in the past, they may be more willing to participate in peacefully holding the government accountable to a new and democratic social contract, and applying this contract through community-level engagement as well.

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