1 Introduction: Rethinking History and Freetown Historiography

The West African territory of Sierra Leone became Britain's first colony in West Africa, in the eighteenth century. A majority of the indigenous ethnic communities of this territory lived in the interior, while a few occupied the coast. British philanthropists in 1787 and later the British government in 1808 largely restricted their relationship with Sierra Leone to the coastal area where it later established a colony for freed slaves and their descendants.

Before the British took control of this coastal territory, two prominent ethnic groups initially occupied it – Sherbro- and Bullom-speakers. John Crooks states that in the fifteenth century, the Temne invaded the coastal territory and dislodged the Bullom- and Sherbro-speakers. The invading Temne lived in the hinterland of Sierra Leone from where they made frequent forays on the coastal territory and eventually took control of it in the mid-fifteenth century.

Sierra Leone, like many other states in the Upper Guinea Coast, served as a bastion for the Atlantic slave trade whereby millions of slaves faced capture and forced transfer across the Atlantic to the Americas and Europe. However, in the eighteenth century, a gamut of agents including intellectuals, clergy, poets, economists, and freed slaves worked fervently to end the trade in slaves. Consequently, in 1807, the British government made the following declaration abolishing the slave trade in its Empire:

Be it therefore enacted … that from and after the 1st day of May 1807, the African Slave Trade, all the manner of dealing and trading in the purchase, sale, barter or transfer of slaves, or of persons intended to be sold, transferred, used or dealt with as slaves, practiced or carried on in, at, to or from any part of the coast or countries of Africa, shall be … utterly abolished, prohibited and declared unlawful.[1]

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[1] Cited in Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 172.

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The above declaration by the British government undermined the Atlantic slave trade in the British Empire. Kenneth Morgan, among others, states that Britain abolished the slave trade in its Empire on the basis of "humanity, justice and social policy."[2] Other scholars challenge Morgan's perspective; they contend that Britain abolished the trade for controvertible reasons. Stefan Goodwin argues that the abolition of the slave trade should not be viewed from a "moralistic perspective" as Morgan and others contend. He states: "Neither the British nor any other European nation was factoring the abolition of slave trading into its national policy purely on humanitarian or moral ground. Rather they gradually began to place constraints on slave trading where it was not at variance with their larger motivational interests."[3] Goodwin's assertion ignores the complementary efforts made by British philanthropists in illuminating the ills of the slave trade and slavery. He derided policy outcomes derived from the efforts of abolitionists as "half-hearted abolitionist policies."[4] Sean Sitwell raises similar observations: he highlights the gap between the "altruistic" and "paternalistic" rhetoric of Europeans with their colonial interests in ending the slave trade. He states that "Europeans relied on slavery to help make the colonial conquest possible."[5] This observation contradicts one of the major reasons adduced by European colonialists for colonizing Africa – the abolition of the slave trade and its substitution with legitimate commerce. Europeans indeed fostered legitimate commerce and played a role in promoting significant agricultural activities in Africa. In spite of this, Sitwell states that European colonizers relied on slavery to facilitate "annexation and administration of African colonies."[6] It became evident that the British, Germans, French, Belgians, and Portuguese relied on African soldiers, African slaves, and former African slaves to conquer territories and undertake laborious tasks for the various colonial projects. He points out that some slaves "were bought on the open market or from masters by Europeans and then made into slaves."[7] In short, Sitwell, Anne Phillips, and others argue that slavery became part of the fabric of colonialism as the practice persisted well into the colonial period. However, though European colonizers encouraged and in some instances delayed abolition of the slave trade for practical and

[2] Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire*, p. 170.
[3] Stefan Goodwin, *Africa's Legacy of Urbanization: Unfolding Saga of a Continent* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), p. 127.
[4] Stefan Goodwin, *Africa's Legacy of Urbanization*, p. 127.
[5] Sean Sitwell, *Slavery and Slaving in African History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 180.
[6] Sitwell, *Slavery and Slaving*, p. 180.
[7] Sitwell, *Slavery and Slaving*, p. 181.

economic reasons, they allowed African slaves to challenge their status in colonial courts, and many of them won such cases.[8]

Nonetheless, in 1807, Britain abolished the slave trade for a variety of reasons. The process partly happened through the flinty determination of a group of Anglican evangelicals, the Clapham Sect, who convinced the protagonists of the trade to abolish it. Tightly bound by a set of core moral beliefs, the Clapham Sect mounted a vociferous campaign to abolish the slave trade. Supported by American Quakers, the abolitionists quickly created the society "for the abolition of the Slave Trade."[9] In 1772, in a landmark ruling by a British judge, Lord Mansfield, the abolitionists landed an unexpected victory that helped end the slave trade and its accompanying vice of slavery in England. The judge's ruling essentially declared that English culture did not permit the practice of slavery. The ruling had far-reaching consequences. Though restrictive in its reach, the legal decision enabled slaves to escape from bondage in England and beyond. Though unparalleled, the reverberations of the Mansfield ruling likely influenced American slaves, particularly those who fought alongside British forces in the American War of Independence. After the war, fearful of the repercussion of their betrayal of their American masters, the slaves requested their freedom from Britain. In other words, the Mansfield ruling resulted in an exodus of slaves to England to gain freedom. The influx of slaves in London resulted in a raft of social problems: destitution, large-scale unemployment, and famine, among other social ills. Concerned by their plight, a Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor (CRBP), consisting of William Wilberforce (Member of Parliament), Henry Thornton, Thomas Clarkson, and Granville Sharp, embarked on a mission to find a suitable home in Africa for the freed slaves.[10] In its search, the committee envisioned a "free community based on Christian principles" for the poverty-stricken slaves.[11]

Eventually, in the mid-eighteenth century, the CRBP founded a settlement in Sierra Leone for the resettlement of the ex-slaves. This came about when members of the committee studied a positive report on Sierra Leone submitted by Dr. Henry Smeathman in 1783: "[T]he woods and plains produce spontaneously great quantities of the most pleasant fruits and spices."[12] The report stressed the rich agricultural

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[8] Sitwell, *Slavery and Slaving*, p. 193.
[9] Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire*, p. 155.
[10] Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire*, p. 158.
[11] Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire*, p. 158.
[12] Roy Lewis, *Sierra Leone: A Modern Portrait* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1954), p. 25. The British government sanctioned the publication of this monograph, and it contained the autograph of Prime Minister Churchill.

qualities of the soil: "[I]t is not necessary to turn up the earth more than from the depth of 2 or 3 inches with a slight hoe in order to cultivate any kind of grain."[13] The report meshed with the vision of the CRBP that wanted a settlement where the ex-slaves would live independently and uphold democratic and Victorian principles. Consequently, two members of the CRBP, Wilberforce and Thornton, traveled to Sierra Leone to acquire a piece of land occupied by the Temne. On arrival in 1787, the CRBP representatives signed a lease agreement with the Temne regent of the territory, King Tham (erroneously represented as King Tom in the literature). The first batch of former slaves arrived in the new settlement, designed "for the sole benefit of the free community of settlers, their heirs and successors," soon after the lease was signed.[14] Disagreement over the terms of the lease led to another round of negotiations for a final status agreement with the local chiefs. In 1788, King Naimbana, a Temne regent of Koya, signed an obscure land deal with British philanthropists; this deal resulted in the permanent ceding of the land to Britain. Before signing the agreement, Naimbana showed his cosmopolitan character when he critiqued the Atlantic slave trade in an apothegmatic statement: "[M]any of us African rulers are not happy about the slave trade going on in our country. It brings to our country and people a lot of destruction and unhappiness. But we have found out that we cannot stop it on our own unless the white people cooperate with us."[15] The land granted by Naimbana to representatives of the CRBP became a mainstay and a refulgent scheme for the resettlement of thousands of ex-slaves. The resettlement of these freed slaves is the subject of numerous scholarly discourses; its examination here will be brief.

Between 1787 and 1864, the CRBP and the British government repatriated four sets of freed slaves to the new settlement: the Black Poor, Nova Scotians, the Maroons, and Recaptives or Liberated Africans.[16] The Sierra Leone settlement as it came to be known carried different designations – Granville Town, Sierra Leone Colony, and/or colonial Freetown; Sierra Leone Colony and colonial Freetown will be used interchangeably in this study. Founders of the new settlement wanted it "to be a beacon on the coast of savage Africa: a light to lighten the Gentiles still

[13] Lewis, *Sierra Leone*, p. 25.
[14] Colonial Secretary's Office, *Treaty between the Governor of Sierra Leone and King Tom* (London: 1801) and J. J. Crooks, *A History of the Colony of Sierra Leone: Western Africa*. (London: Browne and Nolan, Ltd., 1903), p. 30; *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, April 16, 1890; Colonial Secretary's Office and *Sierra Leone Weekly News* are abbreviated as CSO and *SLWN*, respectively.
[15] Adeleye Ijagbemi, *Naimbana of Sierra Leone* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 28.
[16] *SLWN*, January–April 1892; see also *SLWN*, June 15, 1895.

sunk in superstition."[17] The original financiers of the resettlement project administered it through the Sierra Leone Company until the British government declared it a Crown Colony, or a British overseas territory, in 1808.[18]

In the mid-nineteenth century, the colony became a hodgepodge of descendants of freed slaves from which a "hybrid" group variously described as Creole and/or Krio emerged. The group is the most intensely studied in the history of the Sierra Leone Colony; its history dominates Sierra Leone historiography. The extant historiography equates the historical and social activities of the Creoles with the history of the Sierra Leone Colony. Elites, culture brokers, the popular media, local intellectuals, ethnonationalists, and colonial authorities described members of the group as Creoles. Members of the group, however, used multiple identities stimulated by sociopolitical and economic factors to describe themselves. By equating the history of those recorded as Creoles with the history of the Sierra Leone Colony, the dominant literature constrains our understanding of the contributions of various groups in the social formation of this British overseas demesne. The historical literature thus oversimplifies the complex history of Britain's oldest and arguably most important colony in West Africa in the nineteenth century.

This study offers a different interpretation of the dynamics that shaped the history of the Sierra Leone Colony – one that breaks significantly with a long tradition of historical writing about Sierra Leone. To fully appreciate the historical trajectory of the colony, it will be useful to outline the dominant texts and interpretations of the historiography over the past half-century, for these studies, both in their methodologies and interpretation, have established a narrow, Western-centric model of colonial power dynamics in the Sierra Leone Colony. The study limns the significant contributions of disparate indigenous groups in the colony's history, particularly the preponderant indigenous ethnic group described as Temne. It departs from the approach of African historians who seek to interpret aspects of Africa's past in terms of a "transcendent tension" between colonizers and colonized. It also challenges the use of Western education as a marker of success and civilization in the colony. The study seeks to underscore the role played by non-Western-educated elites, marketers, and local intellectuals in the social formation and success of this British colonial project. The study shows the complex history of the colony, which cannot be reduced to simplistic renditions.

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[17] Lewis, *Sierra Leone*, p. 32.
[18] Crooks, *History of the Colony*, pp. 107–109.

As leasers of the land that accommodated the Sierra Leone Colony, Temne-speakers, though lacking Western education in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, developed institutions that rivalled the Creole-dominated British institutions. The study discusses the historical patterns, features, and activities of Temne-speakers such as market women, Islamic feminists, religious entrepreneurs, gatekeepers of Temne identity, community and opinion leaders, "tribal" chiefs, provincial migrants, and grassroots activists. It delineates the colony's relationship with the peninsula towns and peri-urban and nonurban communities – Funkia, Adonkia, Regent, Rokel, York, Gloucester and Waterloo – including the interaction, mobilization, and mutation of ethnic identities. The study is one of the first book-length projects to problematize and challenge the use of the term "Creole." Was Creole identity fixed or consistent? A careful analysis of the historical evidence indicates that colony residents with settler lineage referred to as Creoles in the historiography did not carry a fixed or consistent identity.

The study also explores the meaning and process of "becoming" and "being" Temne. What did "being Temne" mean? What role did Temne institutions play in the making of this British colony and why and how did these institutions become influential in the post–World War II period? Did Temne identity makers facilitate the making or construction of this British colonial project? This volume is one of the first book-length projects to probe and address these questions. It argues that identity formation in the colony, especially among the Temnes and Creoles, became rife with instrumental undercurrents, because the identities shifted from time to time for material advantage. Despite this, disparate groups contributed significantly to the growth of the colony's economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; many served as cooks, domestics, hawkers, peasants, gardeners, marketers, janitors, and court bearers. The historiography pays inadequate attention to these significant contributions.

The following section outlines the major scholarly motivations, failures, and weaknesses of works on the history of the colony.

Deconstructing Sierra Leone Historiography: Trends and Praxis in History

A careful examination of Sierra Leone historiography reveals that the interpretation of the history of the colony has been ethnocentric in character. To fully appreciate this trend, it is useful to survey and deconstruct the historiography by examining the motivations and weaknesses of the major texts.

Many of the major works surveyed in this study have influenced and shaped our understanding of the history, growth, and socioeconomic development of the colony. Some of the works of scholars reviewed here, particularly Christopher Fyfe, Arthur Porter, Leo Spitzer, Akintola Wyse, Abner Cohen, Gibril Cole, and David Harris, equate the history of this British colony with the history of one of the multifarious groups that occupied the colony since the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The images that emerge from many of the works of these scholars suggest that the history of the colony is best understood by understanding the history of descendants of ex-slaves described as Creoles. James Thayer summarizes this point ingeniously:

The repatriated Africans [Creoles] who were settled in Sierra Leone are one of the most intensely studied and well documented people on the continent of Africa, certainly in sub-Saharan Africa. Except for large ethnic groups like the Yoruba or the Asante it is hard to find a single ethnic group on which so much scholarly effort, mostly of an historical nature, has been expended.[19]

The quotation shows that the works of Fyfe, Porter, Spitzer, and others privilege the historical activities of those described as Creoles over non-settler groups in the colony. Some of these scholars used the history of the Creoles to show that Africans possessed enough capacity to thoroughly assimilate and exhibit Western civilization. Fyfe reinforces this point when he states that Creoles served as torchbearers of Western civilization "in Sierra Leone and West Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."[20] In concluding his seminal work, *History of Sierra Leone*, Fyfe states that the Creoles

Were … indispensable, the unrecognized vehicle by which not only British rule but [also] trade, education and Christianity were conveyed to West Africa. In the churches and schools which must have closed without their ministrations, in mercantile counting-houses and government offices, dependent on their subordinate toil, these gentle pioneers bringing a European culture Europeans resented their possessing, could well look round them to see in whatever good Britain brought West Africa in the nineteenth century a plant which could never have taken root without their slighted labour.[21]

He argues that other ethnic groups in the colony looked to the Creoles as a social reference and followed their example: "[W]hatever they feel

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[19] James Steel Thayer, "A Dissenting View of Creole Culture in Sierra Leone." *Cahiers D'Études Africaines* 31, no. 121/122 (1991): p. 251.
[20] *SLWN*, Freetown, April 9, 1951.
[21] Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 619–620.

about the Krios personally they followed their social lead."[22] He posits that given their inculcation of Western values, the Creoles influenced the identity and mode of life of indigenous non-Creole groups: "[T]he off-spring [of non-Creoles] had a choice of identity – to be Krio or (as might be) to be Temne, Limba or Mende. But whatever their choice, their upbringing was still within Krio culture."[23] This suggests that autochthonous groups like Temne-, Mende-, Sherbro-, and Loko-speakers in the colony had to "behave like Krios to be accepted as civilized."[24] Fyfe regarded Christianity, education and attendance at balls as hallmarks of civilized behavior.[25] For Fyfe, the Creoles did not limit their civilizing mission to the Sierra Leone Colony; they undertook similar enterprises and provided educational and religious training to non-Creole groups in the hinterland as well.[26] Though Fyfe's works on the colony stresses Creole agency, his works also cover non-Creole groups in the colony and in the interior. He states that in 1895, the colonial administration allowed Temne-, Mende-, Mandingo-, and Kru-speakers the opportunity of electing a headman to coordinate their affairs in the colony. Subsequently, the government legitimized tribal rule in a series of Ordinances passed in 1905.[27]

Arthur Porter shares many of Fyfe's views on the role of the Creoles in the historical and social formation of the colony. He avers that Western education, dominated by the Creoles, became a "royal road" to success in the colony: "Education was thus, in Freetown, one of the important mechanisms providing for social mobility. It was and still is the royal road to success and positions of power and prestige."[28] The assimilation of Western civilization by Creoles made them the "desired reference group in Sierra Leone."[29] Porter asserts that in the post–World War II period, non-Creoles gradually acquired Western education in sufficient numbers to challenge the dominance of the Creoles in all spheres of life, especially after the introduction of drastic constitutional reforms between 1922 and

[22] Christopher Fyfe, "1787–1887–1987, Reflections on A Bicentenary" in Murray Last and Paul Richards, *Sierra Leone, 1787–1987 Two Centuries of Intellectual Life* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 148. The term "Krio" is used interchangeably here with the term "Creole."

[23] Fyfe, "Reflections," p. 148.

[24] Fyfe, "Reflections," pp. 148–149.

[25] Fyfe, *A History*, pp. 403–415.

[26] Christopher Fyfe, "European and Creole Influence in the Interior of Sierra Leone before 1896." *Sierra Leone Studies* 6 (1956): pp. 113–115.

[27] Fyfe, *A History*, p. 495.

[28] Arthur Porter, *Creoledom*: *A Study of the Development of Freetown Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 92.

[29] Porter, *Creoledom*, p. 63.

1948.[30] The constitutional reforms expanded the political landscape; in other words, they created the space for non-Creole communities like the Temne-, Mende-, Limba-, Loko-, Kru-, Fula-, and Mandingo-speakers to participate unequivocally in colony politics.[31]

Leo Spitzer's work on the colony also addresses Creole agency, images, and self-aggrandizement. In his foremost work, Spitzer states: "[T]he [Creole] group was numerically small. But it included the most literate and vocal members … of society, men with direct access to the Sierra Leone press and other vehicles of communication. Occupying the top rung of the social hierarchy, they set fashions, shaped opinions and exerted an influence far exceeding their numerical strength."[32] He opines that Creole cultural arrogance affected their relationship with non-Creoles, especially in "expression of Creole ideas about themselves, their British mentors and colonial masters and other Africans."[33] He observes that the Creoles saw themselves "as special, different from or even superior to Africans who had not experienced prolonged cultural contact with Europeans."[34] In buttressing this perspective, John Peterson affirms that "the history of Sierra Leone is a history of an acculturative process which produced a Westernized African … the Creole chapter of this process is the first phase of this broader history." Like Fyfe, Peterson trumpets and privileges Creole cultural superiority over the culture of non-Creole groups.

Additionally, Abner Cohen's major work explores the spread of cultural ideas by descendants of settler groups he describes as Creole. Cohen states that before 1947, Christianity, balls, and membership in freemasonry became important markers of status and prestige. These markers of prestige made Creoles a secure elite in the colony and Sierra Leone as a whole until the eve of independence.[35]

Akin to the above, Akintola Wyse shares and touts similar views in his numerous works, though with a conspicuous slant. Wyse constructed the term "Krio" to describe people in the Sierra Leone Colony described as Creoles by Fyfe and others in the historical literature. He uses the term to distinguish Sierra Leone Creoles from other groups with

[30] Porter, *Creoledom*, p. 28.

[31] Porter, *Creoledom*, pp. 68–72.

[32] Leo Spitzer, "The Sierra Leone Creoles, 1870–1900" in Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Africa and the West: Intellectual Responses to European Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), p. 108.

[33] Spitzer, *Creoles of Sierra Leone*, p. 3.

[34] Spitzer, *Creoles of Sierra Leone*, p. 218.

[35] Abner Cohen. *The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1981), p. 138.

similar designations in the Americas and Europe. He asserts that those he referred to as Krio "possessed a superior culture civilisation to that of the interior peoples and that they were so many distances removed from their unfortunate brethren."[36] Wyse contends that descendants of freed slaves he describes as Krio were culturally superior to non-Creole ethnic groups living in the colony because members of these groups were not exposed to Western values and education. The phrase "interior peoples" refers to indigenous residents born in the Sierra Leone Colony. He states that "the detractors of the Krio" continually assaulted their society:

> But it was at this period [the nineteenth century] when the accomplishments of the Krio sparkled with brilliance, the successful among them displaying all the attributes of a bourgeois society with its social circuit and pretensions, vocal press and reading public and being called "the Athens of West Africa," that the detractors of the Krio began to make continual assaults on their society.[37]

The above is a rehash of the views expressed by Fyfe and others on the aristocratic culture of Creoles. Gibril Cole magnifies some of Wyse's views in his recent monograph.[38] Cole describes descendants of settler groups as Krio and, tracing the etymology of the word to nineteenth-century Yoruba society in Nigeria, claims that the compellation Krio is a derivative of a Yoruba expression.[39] Like Wyse, he maintains that the Krio also comprised some kindreds of ethnic communities from the hinterland. He exalts the role and contributions of the Oku and Aku in the history of the colony. In brief, the undercurrent of Cole's work equates the history of the colony with the histories of those he describes as Krio and Muslim Krio. Analogously, David Harris' recent work also impressively examines the political history of Sierra Leone from the colonial period to contemporary times. Harris' key argument aligns with the views of Wyse and Cole on the use of the constructed term Krio as a horizontal identity to describe descendants of former slaves in the colony. In all, like others, Harris accepts the Krio claim of cultural superiority and arrogance, and gives a detailed account of the factors that led to their loss of political influence in the Sierra Leone Colony before and after independence. Though Wyse and Cole rationalize the decline of the Krio, Harris situates

[36] Akintola Wyse, *H. C. Bankole-Bright and Politics in Colonial Sierra Leone, 1919–1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 28.

[37] Akintola Wyse, "Perspective and West African Historiography." In McGrath, Simon et al. eds. *Rethinking African History.* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1997), p. 205.

[38] Wyse, *The Krio of Sierra Leone* : An Interpretive History. (Freetown: Hurst and International African Institute, 1989), pp. 20–29.

[39] See Gibril Cole, *The Krio of West Africa: Islam, Creolization, and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013).