

The Temne of Sierra Leone

Much of the research and study of the formation of Sierra Leone focuses almost exclusively on the role of the so-called Creoles, or descendants of ex-slaves from Europe, North America, Jamaica, and Africa living in the colony. In this book, Joseph J. Bangura cuts through this typical narrative surrounding the making of the British colony, and instead offers a fresh look at the role of the often overlooked indigenous Temne-speakers. Bangura explores the socioeconomic formation, establishment, and evolution of Freetown, from the perspective of different Temne-speaking groups, including market women, religious figures, and community leaders and the complex relationships developed in the process. Examining key issues, such as the politics of belonging, African agency, and the creation of national identities, Bangura offers an account of Sierra Leone that sheds new light on the social history of the colony.

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The Temne of Sierra Leone

*African Agency in the Making
of a British Colony*

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This book is dedicated
To Jesus Christ, The Son of Almighty God
Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life
Jesus is my Refuge and my Fortress
“My Flesh and my Heart faileth: but God is the
strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

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Preface

Writing a book on the role of indigenous ethnic communities, especially the preponderant Temne community in the social formation of Britain's oldest colony in West Africa - the Sierra Leone Colony - is an arduous but enthralling task. My curiosity to venture into this intellectual enterprise heightened in graduate school where part of my research focused on the identity of scions of settler groups broadly referred to as Creoles, or "Krio" (an imagined and ahistorical appellative used by instrumentalists to describe the same group). The thrust of the research wrestled with the polemics of Creole identity and the peculiarities and discontinuities inherent in the behavioral pattern of the group. Thus it quickly became perceptible that in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, Creole identity was multidimensional, circumstantial, mutable and to some extent contingent on happenstance. This means the Creoles did not establish a fixed community nor did they develop a symmetrical cultural tradition before the mid-twentieth. In spite of this, Sierra Leone historiography equates the history of the Sierra Leone Colony with the history of the Creoles. Put another way, the extant historical literature insinuates that the history of the Creoles and the history of the Sierra Leone Colony also referred to as colonial Freetown are homologous.

In light of the above and with adrenalized vigor, I decided to expand my research to explore indigenous agency in the socio-economic formation, establishment and evolution of colonial Freetown in the context of Britain's oldest colony in West Africa, the Sierra Leone Colony from the perspective of one of Sierra Leone's most important- but almost completely ignored - indigenous group, Temne-speakers. My focus on the ascendant Temne community and its unique role in the colony's social formation was influenced by the fact that such a project is within the confines of my bailiwick. In addition, the historical sources indicate that Temne-speakers constituted the largest indigenous ethnic community in colonial Freetown in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. As a matter of fact, the importance of their numerical strength means that the Creoles did not occupy the Sierra Leone Colony in isolation. Simply put,

the historical documents clearly indicate that the Creoles had company because they shared the colonial space with non-western educated and ordinary Temne, Limba, Mandingo, Mende, Fula, Loko and Sherbro-speaking men, women, boys and girls who actively participated in the affairs of the colony. On account of this, the book offers a new perspective on the social history of this British demesne which served as an experiment in social engineering in the mid-eighteenth century. This new focus is informed by and situated within multiple contextual and theoretical frames - microhistory, urban, intellectual and social history. Microhistory broadly stresses among others, the significance of studying small units, individuals, and peripheral communities in society and writing their history in the established literature. In employing microhistorical tools, I discuss the historical patterns, features and activities of Temne-speakers and their role in the history of the colony.

Corollary to this, I utilized elements of the relatively new genre of African Urban history in showing that the founding and establishment of one of Britain's oldest colonies in sub-Saharan Africa was a complex historical process shaped by an unlike crop of intriguing agents, actors and actresses whose actions were driven by kaleidoscopic interests. I also examine the complex relationship which developed between the colony's periurban and non-urban communities of Funkia/Goderich, Adonkia, Rokel, York, Gloucester, Leicester, Waterloo and cosmopolitan Freetown including the interrelationships between the various ethnic communities. Added to this, by the end of the nineteenth century, the colony's urban character made it prone to class struggles and tension, conflicts over cultural and political hegemony and clashes over control of public spaces such as necropolis and entrepôts. Put differently, as the colony became increasingly citified, major ethnic groups, especially the Creoles and Temne, imagined, shaped and "invented" their identities for demographic and hegemonic advantages – a trend that continues to inform and shape the political and social activities of this historic city. In short, one of the book's principal aims is to unpack the complex history of this colonial domain.

Akin to the above, I also deploy the tools of intellectual history to redress the marginal attention given to the agency of non-western educated, lowly educated and rural Temne elites in the history of the colony. This approach is timely given that the Temne population in the colony approximately matched that of the Creoles between the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. As a result, I analyze the activities of Temne-speaking market women traders who contributed substantially to the development of the colony's informal economy; cultural elites who helped shape the colony's popular culture, Islamic religious entrepreneurs

such as Imams and sheiks who contributed to the entrenchment of Islamic principles and teachings in a Christian dominated colony, ethnic chauvinists such as gatekeepers of Temne identity, community and opinion leaders such as “tribal” chiefs, provincial migrants, and grassroots agents. The past activities of these key figures and players receive scant attention in the dominant literature. All in all, in the context of the new African social history agenda, the book shows that Britain’s relationship with the colony transcended the colonizer and colonized binary surfeit in African historiography.

In succinct terms, the book combines textual, archival and empirical research to broadly explore the motives and behavioral pattern of ordinary Temne and non-Temne men and women in colonial Freetown as recollected and recounted in the accounts of participant observers. Additionally, the book examines a variety of themes like identity formation, constitutionalism, micro-entrepreneurship and grassroots activism as it relates to Temne market women and girls. In seeking to contextualize and historicize the big picture, I use key historical periods to advance the case that the established literature downplays the contributions of the Temne in the success of the British colonial project in Sierra Leone and arguably in British West Africa since Britain briefly administered the colonies of Lagos (Nigeria), the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Bathurst (Gambia) from its base in Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century. Closely related to this, I discuss the patterns, particularities, peculiarities and continuities of Temneness or “being” Temne and its way of life. As a matter of fact, Temneness became influential among Temne-speakers and non Temne-speakers in the colony as gatekeepers of Temne identity gave it enough flackery to win over young men and women from other ethnic communities.

Against the backdrop of these assumptions, I seek to make a critical contribution to Sierra Leone historiography and scholarship on African history including colonial studies in general. The motif of the book shows that the history of the Sierra Leone Colony cannot be reduced to home-spun rendition. Expressed another way, the book indicates that understanding the agency of non-Creole Africans such as Temne-speakers in the historical development of the colony enhances a copious and an indubitable understanding of the phenomenal history of this quintessential British colony. Moreover, the book maintains that a triangle of interaction existed in the colony: British colonizers, colonized Africans and junior partners of the colonial administration - the Creoles. Clearly, the historical data signifies that illiterate men and women, and the lowly educated class who demonstrated competence in retail commerce and local governance and religious impresarios among others, implicitly shaped

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colonial policy and direction. Their activities and actions make the composite history of this colonial sphere of influence a compelling object of analysis. I hope the book has done justice to this towering objective, especially as the *au courant* literature pays insufficient attention to this significant aspect of the colony's history.

Overall, then, it is my hope that the historical dialectic inherent in this book has shed some light on the complexity of the colony's history. In other words, I hope the book has shown that a multiethnic effort contributed to the social formation of the Sierra Leone Colony since the British Crown took control of it from the territory's erstwhile directors – officials of the Sierra Leone Company. Equally important is my hope that this book will help curious readers historicize and contextualize Sierra Leone's current state of political, economic and social imbroglio. Finally, regardless of the varied intellectual repartee this book may elicit, I am fully conscious of its imperfections for which I squarely accept full responsibility.

Joseph J. Bangura
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 27, 2016

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List of Abbreviations

CRBP	Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor
NSMDA	Nova Scotian Maroon and Descendants Association
NCSL	National Council of Sierra Leone
UPP	United Peoples Party
SLPP	Sierra Leone Peoples Party
UK	United Kingdom
TTA	Temne Tribal Authority
SLWN	Sierra Leone Weekly News
SLT	Sierra Leone Times
CSO	Colonial Secretary’s Office
TIC	Temne Islamic Committee
EEPG	East End Political Group
AWU	Artisan Workers Union
SPP	Sesay’s Private Papers
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union
TPU	Temne Progressive Union
EBIM	Elections Before Independence Movement
APC	All Peoples Congress
MRC	Muslim Reformation Council
SLMC	Sierra Leone Muslim Congress
SLMPA	Sierra Leone Muslim Pilgrims Association
SLMRS	Sierra Leone Muslim Reformation Society
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLWM	Sierra Leone Women’s Movement
TTR	Temne Tribal Ruler