

EDUCATION AS A SITE OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN SIERRA LEONE

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This article investigates the example of a state-funded secondary school in colonial Sierra Leone to get at the nature of political struggles over education and over knowledge, power, and identity more broadly. Bo School was formed as a school for indigenous chiefs' sons and intended to create a more "modern" chieftancy to aid in British indirect rule. However, the participants remade the school to suit their own strategic goals. The essay problematizes a simplistic notion of school as a manipulable machine for the skill and knowledge transfer and rather situates the institution historically and politically in everyday practice. Connections are made to the ongoing civil war in the region.

Este artigo analisa o caso de uma escola secundária pública em Serra Leoa colonial, perspectivando-a no âmbito das lutas políticas relativas à educação e ao conhecimento, ao poder e à identidade nos seus sentidos amplos. A "Bo School" foi instituída como uma escola para filhos de chefes indígenas, com a intenção de criar chefias mais "modernas" e cooperativas com o domínio indirecto britânico. Entretanto, os participantes reformularam a escola para atender aos seus próprios objetivos estratégicos. Este ensaio problematiza a noção simplista de escola como um aparelho manipulável de transferência de habilidades e de conhecimento, situando assim a instituição histórica e politicamente no âmbito das práticas quotidianas. Fazem-se ainda ligações com o presente de guerra civil da região.

Education is often proposed in development discourse as a sort of citizen-molding machine, an investment in human capital, the solution to a host of problems. This use of education as panacea is not new: current development discourse on education has clear continuations from colonial discourse before it. In order to understand education as a political and cultural phenomenon in the post-colonial context, it must be understood in historical context. To understand that historical context means taking apart the naturalized dichotomies which colonialism produced and which were productive of it.

Educational projects, such as Bo School in Sierra Leone, can be read as microcosms of conflict over political futures. Why are they political? First, because the creation and distribution of knowledge -- Foucault would say power/knowledge regimes -- are always political. Second, education was an important

part of the colonial strategy of nation building and is an important part of the same political project now. As discussed in the work of the Comaroffs and others, education is a powerful place to see the simultaneous and interrelated disciplining effects and the potential for creative resistance that come out of the colonial encounter. Education is a terrain for political revision in that it is the site for struggles over how knowledge and power are to be embodied. Education is an especially interesting site to study because education is supposed to have a transformative effect on participants, to develop them, to modernize them. Historians agree that education was a fundamental element in African social change, and possessed certain features not associated with other factors of social change. Africans could gain education with much less effort than that involved in the attainment of large scale commerce, industry and capital. Once attained, education invariably altered an African's way of life and social position.

Sierra Leoneans used education strategically. By this I mean that their responses to education were not predictable according to a set of rules projected backwards, rather their responses were inventive and improvisational (Bourdieu 1977). The prevailing ideology of education is so mechanistic and outcome-oriented that it mainly fails to see how education is used by, created by, inhabited by the people in and of the educational system. Although education was important in the struggle for independence, when I say participants used education strategically that is not to say only that they used the skills and knowledge they learned in school to resist colonialism. In fact, many went on to use their western education in the service of the colonial project as functionaries, clerks, teachers, etc. I mean that they used the status of an educated person. If we think of education as leading to new subject positions, and of those subject positions as created not by individuals but by entire communities and struggles over pre-existing identities in relation to one another, we get to the idea of "the cultural production of the educated person" (Levinson, et al 1996). In fact part of what is struggled over in this field is the relative status of certain knowledges, practices, and identities.

HISTORY OF EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE IN SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone lies on the West Coast of Africa, between Guinea and Liberia, in the tropical rain forest zone. It has an area of 27,925 sq. miles and a population of approx. 3.5 million in 1995. Sierra Leone has had a fairly standard development trajectory for British

West Africa: aid dependent, primarily agricultural, with a huge disparity between rich and poor. Yet, the history is somewhat different from the rest of British West Africa in that the colony of Sierra Leone started off as a home for returned people of African descent from London, for returned slaves from Nova Scotia and Jamaica and, during the first half of the nineteenth century, Africans whom seamen of the British Navy rescued from ships illegally engaged in the transatlantic slave trade landed at the settlement at Freetown. The descendants of all these people eventually became the Sierra Leonean Krios, who developed their own language, also Krio, and a distinct society, which was greatly influenced by western culture yet was basically West African. The strong missionary influence in Freetown was successful in creating what might superficially be called 'Black Englishmen' but in fact represented a group with a strong cultural identity of its own. They were given a predominantly Christian/literary education to fulfill the demand for clerks and missionary agents throughout British West Africa. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) Grammar School curriculum in 1845, for example, included English grammar and composition, Greek, Latin, Mathematics, Geography, the Bible, English History, Astronomy, and Music. In the mid-1800's the percentage of Freetown children enrolled in primary school exceeded that in some European countries at the time (Harding 1968: 144). This trend in education was to successfully supply the whole of the British West African coast with well-educated Krio clerks from Sierra Leone. The Krio became a highly visible group who, due to their educational and trade accomplishments, served as middlemen for British colonialism. Also, they had the greatest degree of self-governance

of any group in West Africa. Because they embodied the ideals of modernization to such a great extent, they were able to use their missionary educations to press Britain for more rights than other Africans.

As part of the "scramble for Africa" among the major European powers of the day, Great Britain pressed further into the interior and undertook treaty making and other negotiations that would lead to control of what would become Sierra Leone. The British government declared a "protectorate" over all of Sierra Leone in 1896. Later, the necessity for promoting development conducive to British and Krio interests led to a decision to impose a system of taxation upon the people of the "protectorate."

The colonial government had two different policies for the two different regions of what is today Sierra Leone. For the Krio, in the colony of Freetown and along the peninsula, this meant a certain degree of autonomy as long as they continued to be good "Black Englishmen," while for the protectorate people up country, indirect rule: a system whereby the British became the pinnacle of a pyramid of existing or created chiefs and other administrators.

Different and sometimes contradictory education policies regarding the balance between academic and vocational education provision and attitudes towards the "educated African" came from Britain over the years of colonial rule. These different viewpoints came from the different groups who made up the British "side". For example, administrators wanted educated clerks to run the colony and keep Europeans away from the "White Man's Grave" of West Africa. Missionaries had many

reasons for wanting Africans who had an academic training: the provision of more ministers, as an abolitionist proof of the contention that Africans were part of the family of man, albeit as little brothers.¹ However, missionaries also had reason to want their flock trained in a more vocational vein to build the modern and civilized buildings, homes and farms that were called for in a transformation of the habits of the "natives" towards making them better Christians (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: Chapter 4). The European traders were afraid of the power of the creolized middlemen of an earlier mercantilist era of imperialism that perhaps took too literally the enlightenment promise of knowledge and meritocracy. The merchants, and their allies in the colonial administration and British government, were against education for the Creole elite — disgusted by their mimicry — and for an appropriate education for the rural up-country Africans, an education which would render them easy to rule, easy to trade with, and easy to bring into the labor force.

In the end, the British policy of governing Sierra Leone according to two categories of peoples, the "colony" and the "protectorate," came to be quite influential. Thus a greater hierarchical structure developed throughout Sierra Leone following the administrative demarcation of Sierra Leone into a colony and a protectorate. A whole set of dichotomies that contrasted the colony and the protectorate came to have great power: Krio / "up-country", urban / rural, educated / uneducated, modern / traditional, etc. This dichotomy, exploited by the British, still has powerful impacts today.

¹ See Hall (1992) on abolitionist discourse among missionaries to Jamaica.

With time, the British started to fear that the Krio had perhaps too much power. The Krios' position as middlemen gave them the power to interpret protectorate conditions to Britain to suit their political and economic advantage. Also, some Krio traders were gaining great economic power through trade with the interior, intensifying mercantile rivalries especially with the onset of the 'Great Depression' of the 1870s. Finally, there were alliances with indigenous leaders that left Britain out of the picture and increased Krios political power.

However, rather than a direct response to the Krio, much of the shift in attitude can be attributed to increasing racism in England in the late 1800s. While physical anthropologists proclaimed the inferiority of black peoples, and Darwin's work was used to bolster the proposition that superior races were marked by their material superiority, the "noble savage" stereotype was replaced by the popular image of an ape like black man in top hat and a dark suit.

Krio awareness of the unfavorable attitudes toward Africans was heightened by events both at home and abroad. One clear indication that the wind had shifted in Britain was in the abuse heaped upon educated Africans in the writings of European travelers and ex-colonial servants. Richard Burton's books, *Wanderings in West Africa* and *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, G. A. L. Banbury's *Sierra Leone, or the White Man's Grave*, A. B. Ellis' *West African Sketches*, and A. F. Mockler-Ferryman's *British West Africa* all had one thing in common – derogation of Krio and their scorn for African capabilities. Hyam concludes that it was mainly the rising tide of Social Darwinist thinking on race which mainly

accounted for the decline of the Krios: "Revulsion – the word is scarcely too strong – against the educated classes was something which took place throughout the empire in the late 19th century." (Hyam 1976: 288). The educated African now became the "curse of the West Coast" and the ideal type became the "good African" who would be loyal, hard-working, trustworthy and content to remain within the traditional world, a complete contrast to what the Krio had become in European eyes.²

The distaste became colonial policy. In 1873 Colonial Secretary Kimberly wrote a directive which Hyam claims was to become the received wisdom of the administration: "Except in quite subordinate posts we cannot safely employ natives ... I would have nothing to do with the 'educated' natives as a body. I would treat with the hereditary chiefs only, and endeavor as far as possible to govern through them." (Hyam 1976: 288). This official break with the Krio coincided with growing discrimination in the private sector. The missions became more intolerant of the black clergy, and European firms employed whites in position where equally qualified blacks could have been found at a fraction of the cost of bringing out expatriates. The British did not turn away entirely from African organic intellectuals, but tried to redefine their role as lying within 'traditional societies',³ especially through education.

² For a detailed view of European disdain for Western-educated Africans by the end of the nineteenth century in Freetown, see Fyfe 1962, pp. 614-20.

³ See Clarence-Smith 1994 and Comaroff and Comaroff 1997 on the uses of social anthropology to study and, in some senses, make "traditional" society.

BO SCHOOL — EDUCATION FOR INFERIORITY

The town of Bo was the largest in the protectorate, situated in the heart of Mende country, far from Freetown. It was a hub on the newly constructed rail line, with several buildings left over from the building of the railroad which could be used. It seemed a perfect site for a school which could train the sons of chiefs without the danger of them becoming overeducated. The means of creating the 'good African' was to be through practical education, with a strong element of public school 'character building'. Bo school, opened in 1906, was to represent a new philosophy, being designed to protect future chiefs from what were seen to be alien cultural influences, in distinction from the Krio who had been spoiled by their unsuitable missionary education.

Especially in the aftermath of the Hut Tax Wars, the Governor of Sierra Leone from 1904 to 1911, Sir Leslie Probyn, was eager to educate future chiefs who would effectively mesh themselves into the British Administration's policies at the local (chiefdom) level. He aimed to produce leaders of the protectorate people who would be able to promote better agricultural methods, but not educated enough to encourage or lead opposition against the colonial government (Corby 1990: 320). Africans often commented that Western schools were alien institutions whose main product was impudent children. The 1910 colonial report for Sierra Leone maintained that "it is an almost universal complaint made by chiefs and others concerned with the welfare of the people, that education, as now carried on, raises in the pupils contempt for farm labor." (Corby 1990: 321). Therefore, the colonial government was also interested in an education which would

channel students back to their chiefdoms. The education at Bo School was to be exclusive to the sons of chiefs, practical, designed neither to lead to government employment nor to alienate pupils from their home environment. The school was to be modeled on the life of a native village, with no interference in religious beliefs⁴ or indigenous customs⁵ but an attempt would be made to inculcate a sound moral code and to strengthen tribal patriotism.

Much of the inspiration for schools such as the Bo School came from the pattern of American Negro education, exemplified by Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute which lay emphasis on practical rather than academic education (Walton 1985: 190). This model proved very popular in the Colonial Office and amongst many of the Governors and Directors of Education in Africa because it provided a well-trying precedent for the attempts which were being made to provide an education that, it was hoped, would develop the African "along his own lines." This led to a tendency for the "new look in colonial education," in spite of the sincerity and idealism which often lay behind it, to consign

⁴ Walton notes that interestingly Islam seemed to fit in better with the idea of the "good African" than Christianity. An official report commented in 1912-13 that "the advance and spreading of Islam still remains a salient feature of many Protectorate tribes; and in districts where that influence is strong a high degree of sobriety and amenability to good order prevails." (Quoted by E. C. Anderson, 'Early Muslim Schools and British policy in West Africa', in *West African Journal of Education*, XIV, 3 Oct. 1970, 177-79, p. 177.)

⁵ In Reverend James Proudfoot's prospectus for the school (cited in Fyfe 1964: 304-307) it is made clear that "(t)here would be no interference with religious beliefs or African customs excepting of course, any custom that is repugnant to humanity." No examples were specified.

the African to a separate, and inferior, path of development to that of the European.⁶

There was an interesting contradiction in the British discourse. They clearly saw the Africans, Krio and up-country alike, as inferior; yet, they had a functionalists sort of respect for the pure African society. One might wonder why they proposed education for chiefs at all, when it had backfired in the case of the Krio. It stems from the contradiction of seeing African society as functional, yet inferior and in need of science and other western modernizations. Their own contradictory ideologies and their need to create British subjects out of African objects led them to the creation of the Bo School. It was also centrally an ideology of education as a machine which could take certain inputs and reliably create certain outputs. They envisioned leagues of educated chiefs serving as agents of modernization, building roads, improving farming techniques, loyal to the obviously superior British system, yet still purely African. Bo School, therefore, was very much a European interpretation of the nature of African society. A sifting process went on retaining what were seen as the good parts of various African cultures, discarding others and adding European values, such as 'team spirit', borrowed from the English public school system. This 'mix and match' view of culture is characteristic of colonial ideology.

From the beginning, the Krio saw the fundamental contradictions and the inevitable

⁶ It is perhaps no surprise to note, as Phillip Foster has pointed out, that the recommendations of the Phelps-Stokes Committee and the Colonial Advisory Committee were to have much in common with the South African Bantu Education Act of 1953, which provided one of the bedrocks for the elaboration of the system of apartheid in that country. (Foster, 1965: 165)

outcome of the government's scheme to educate Protectorate boys. The British were ignoring the missionaries and the Krios' years of experience of educating protectorate boys at missionary schools, such as the Prince of Wales school in Freetown. Abayomi Cole, a Krio, prophesied in the Weekly News soon after the announcement of the new school that "the Europeans who preferred the pliant obedience of unsophisticated natives to the pretensions of educated Creoles would soon find themselves rearing a class of educated natives whose pretensions they would dislike quite as much." (quoted in Fyfe 1962: 616.)

The school was meant to be exclusively for the sons of chiefs. However, in the early years of the school, chiefs who were suspicious of the British motives after the Hut Tax War were unlikely to send their favored son and legitimate heir to the school. These heirs would be required to undergo the full rites of passage in order to hold traditional office. Instead chiefs were likely to send junior sons of less favored wives or sons of servants to placate the District Commissioner who had to fulfill his quota of recruits or perhaps saw an opportunity to train a future clerk (Walton 1985: 177, Corby 1990: 324). This was perhaps the first site of resistance to the aims of the school. As the benefits of western education became more apparent, those who had already gained access to the 'modern' world were anxious to send their children to Bo School and this could usually be arranged by their chief 'nominating' the boy, for a small consideration. Thus, among the pupils in the 20s and 30s were a good number of sons of court messengers, traders, provincial administration clerks, and teachers (Walton 1985: 178).

Daily practice at the school was an odd mix of African "traditional" life and that at a British public school. Students lived on the compound in one of the "towns": London, Berlin, Paris, and Liverpool. Each town contained a number of circular African-styled houses usually with six boys in a house. Although there was no official effort to organize the students along ethnic lines, they tended to do so on their own (Corby 1990: 326). They didn't wear school uniforms. Rather, they were required to wear "traditional" country-cloth gowns and caps. They ate the rice and oil diet of West Africa, out of communal plates, prepared in a central cookhouse. School hours were from 7:00 to 10:00 A.M. and from 4:00 to 5:00 P.M. with the rest of the day given to sports, study, and work in the garden. The curriculum in the early stages consisted of the usual subjects taught in an English school – reading, writing, arithmetic, science, history, and geography – but farming, carpentry, bridge building, road making, and surveying were the principle emphases (Fyfe 1964: 304). The school was organized on the basis of prefects and monitors, much like a British public school (Corby 1990: 324).

STRUGGLES FOR THE SCHOOL

Thus, by the 20s and even earlier in the case of Bo School, a clear divergence of interest could be noted between the aims of the colonial government in providing education the aspirations of those Africans who were receiving it. Educational historian John Anderson has summed up the deadlock in these terms,

...as the Europeans gradually learned to interpret the needs of African society and to refine their own

educational ideas to meet these needs, the Africans were rapidly learning to reject the European interpretation of their situation and to press for those features of European educational practice which appeared most closely related to European power and prestige (Anderson 1970: 6-7).

Many missionaries and colonial officials believed the schools and their academic curriculum created a distaste for manual labor and agriculture. Their students desired clerical and white-collar jobs. The remedy, these Europeans believe, was to emphasize agriculture and vocational subjects in the schools. Europeans, however, failed to see the major factor that determined African goals. What was crucial to the Africans was not the curriculum of the classroom but the opportunities available in the colonial economy and social structure. According to Corby, Africans demanded an academic education because they correctly perceived that the financial and fringe benefits of clerical and lower administrative jobs were the most lucrative in the colonial economy (Corby 1990: 332). Of course, it was not just the economic situation driving African demands for academic education. There was a concomitant creation of the powerful identity of the educated person in the protectorate and the beginning of an economy of symbolic capital, reflecting that already existing among the Krio.

In the late 20s British colonial authorities attempted to block the efforts of Africans and sympathetic British education officials to transform Bo School to a primarily academic curriculum. By keeping academic content to a minimum, the authorities could more readily use Bo School as a conduit between themselves and the masses to dispense colonial policies. The struggle to reject what Africans deemed an

inferior education and achieve educational parity with the British resolved into a confrontation between British attempts to expand vocational education in the vernacular and African efforts to upgrade the curriculum and physical facilities. Many parents viewed vocational training and vernacular education as obstacles that hindered the legitimate aspirations of their sons in obtaining clerical and administrative positions (Sumner 1963: 221).

The effort to convert Bo School to an academically oriented institution reached its culmination in the 30s and focused on the attempt to transform the school into a secondary institution, to improve educational facilities, particularly in the sciences, and to inaugurate the teaching of European languages, principally Latin, Greek, and French. The Africans perception that such a curriculum was necessary to insure high marks for their sons on the civil service entrance examination and to enable them to enroll at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, and in universities in Britain was the motive behind these goals. In the 1920s, Principal de Lisle did not favor the teaching of Greek and Latin, proposing instead that the Cambridge syndicate offer less difficult examinations for West Africans than it administered for British students. West Africans everywhere strenuously opposed such moves, demanding the same standards as the metropole itself.

The prep classes at the school were eliminated in 1930, and in 1936, of the 90 students enrolled, 43 were in the upper three levels. (Corby 1990: 335). The chiefs and alumni demanded that the curriculum institute the Junior Cambridge level. The Bo School Old

Boys' Association (OBBA), at its 1934 and 1935 meetings, petitioned the department of education to inaugurate such a course. The chiefs said they would send their sons to Freetown schools if necessary to obtain the education they desired, but they preferred to send them to Bo School.

It was ironic that Bo School pupils proved to be much better equipped to become clerks in the colonial administration and trading companies rather than returning to traditional sector as was originally intended. Due mainly to the efforts of Sierra Leoneans, Bo School eventually became an academic institution of high standards in spite of numerous reports and memoranda from official agencies that had unanimously recommended vocational education. Africans played an important role in the shaping of their education system.

Although Bo School was meant to supply educated chiefs, by 1939 only 10% of pupils had succeeded their chieftancies (Walton 1985: 182). It was these Bo School ex-pupils, representing the majority of the first "up-country" educated elite, who provided the nucleus of the early non-traditional political leadership in the Protectorate. They were very well placed to fulfill this role with their close links with the traditional authorities, sound general education, experience of government service and trans-tribal friendships. Though Britain had wanted them to be satisfied with a traditional power in the context of indirect rule, they pressed for another kind of power. After World War II, the "upper classes" of the protectorate, many of them Bo School Old Boys, stimulated the formation of a Protectorate Assembly for more voice in governance of the protectorate. In this way, they did provide a bulwark against Krio

dominance, but again in a way unexpected by the Colonial administration.

Additionally, Bo School created a trans-tribal, anti-Krio identity for the first time. This forging of a protectorate identity would be very important in the struggles for power after independence and became the basis for an explicitly nationalist identity which unified Colony and Protectorate into a nation called Sierra Leone for the first time. The colonial government's aim of securing a continuity of ruling elites in the Protectorate was largely achieved, though not in the way they had expected. They had expected that education at the Bo School would produce better colonial subjects, not the beginnings of an independence movement.

What is particularly interesting about the example of the Bo School is how subjects were changed in relation to each other. New identities were made in practice and gained salience for the first time as a result of people living and working in this institution. Of course, some of this was intended by the creators of the Bo School who wanted to create local administrators who would think of their responsibility to govern and the very meaning of their governance in terms of the British empire and in terms of enlightenment ideals of the state and the subjects of the state.

These new anti-Krio, protectorate identities played a part in the protectorate's seizure of political power before and after independence. It also led to development of a strong social, political and economic network among students of the Bo School, a literal Old Boys Network. In this way, African trans-tribal lines of power were formed through British colonial

institutions. Trans-tribal lines of power existed before, but new lines of power were formed via new identities. Whereas previously power was distributed via kinship and marriage arrangements or through the trans-tribal secret societies, this was a kind of African power translated through, and partially created by, British cultural forms.

CONCLUSIONS

The Bo School in Sierra Leone offers an historical example that sheds some light on education as a site of political struggle. The school was intended to create certain futures for people and the nation of Sierra Leone through the medium of education and yet this intervention had unintended effects. The story is not simply one of the conquest of a global discourse or the power of education to form colonial subjects. Participants on all sides remade education for their own strategic purposes. I want to understand colonialism not just as something imposed by Europeans on hapless Africans but as an arena in which Africans participated strategically through resistance, reform, alliance, and even through taking up the tools of the colonialists and making them their own. On the other hand we don't want to lose sight of the extreme power imbalances both in terms of physical, political and symbolic violence.

The people making policy, first the colonial and then the post independence state, were not successful in controlling educational outcomes. The principle contradiction here is the chasm between the stated goals of education, in terms of skill and knowledge transfer, and the actual

outcomes in terms of identities and subject positions. Education is not a historically-neutral machine to be plugged in wherever development is needed. Not only are the form and content of education historically specific, but also how education is situated within the field of power, and how education is experienced in the day to day practice of the participants.

Another lesson is that one can not predict what schools will do. In this example, the outcome desired by the colonial government was a certain type of person: a rural, domesticated person. But this is part of a mechanistic understanding of what schools do: that one sticks a blank, malleable person in one end, and tinkers with the machine to produce the kind of person to come out the other end: missionaries want Christians, colonialists want good clerks or docile chiefs, etc. While education is clearly a powerful transformative experience, it is quite difficult to control or even predict its outcomes when embedded in a field of countervailing power relations. If a vocational school is situated in a field in which academic credentials are valued, that fact can not be separated from the practice in that school. i.e. participants can not be taken out of their contexts and webs of power relations and unproblematically be transformed by schooling in a predictable way.

Part of the lesson is that those who implement educational schemes -- whether British colonialists or local elites -- do it with certain ends in mind, but the people who are the targets of the schemes always interpret and make use of them in the ways that seem most strategic to them. Struggles over schools are not just struggles over knowledge, but over

how knowledge will be created and distributed and over the creation of new subject positions. In this case, what people are gaining is not skills or knowledge necessarily, but a certain symbolic capital⁷ which, because of Sierra Leone's unique history of education, is highly valued.

Bringing the analysis into the present, we see that struggles over education in Sierra Leone and similar struggles in other "developing" countries are political struggles.⁸ If we examine the original aims of Bo School, and the subsequent uses and modifications of the curriculum and experience by the students, we see some clear parallels to more current attempts at implementing "appropriate" education. Echoes of the colonial era debates and struggles about the need for practical/vocational or academic/Western education ring on in today's development discourse. The arguments on both sides remain very similar.

We have seen how the Bo School played a vital part in the creation of national identity among the protectorate elite. Today, it is similarly the educated elite who take part in debates about the nation and the future of the nation as a nation. Education is a terrain for political revision in that it is the site for struggles over how knowledge and power are to be embodied.

Present day Sierra Leone is war-torn and close to anarchy. Yet I believe that it still makes sense to talk about education policy in a

⁷See Pierre Bourdieu, (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, for more on strategy and symbolic capital.

⁸ For more on education as a political struggle see Lave (in press) on "Getting to be British in Porto".

country where most institutions are no longer functioning at all and there is widespread violence and hunger. Richards' argument that the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels are disaffected intellectuals shows that the contradictions within the field of education have had huge impacts on Sierra Leone society (Richards 1996). He claims that RUF rebels have attacked Universities and colleges merely to destroy school records. Based on this and other evidence, the civil war can be seen partly as a response to the hollowness of the claims of education as a strategy for social mobility in post-colonial Sierra Leone. Further, many have argued that the only way to reintegrate the anarchic rebels and "sobels"⁹ is to increase their faith in the state. This requires nation building and ... education. Whether we agree with this argument or not, it is important to recognize the echoes of the same discourse that has pervaded political debate in Sierra Leone for at least two centuries about the use of education to create a certain type of subject in the Sierra Leonean context.

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⁹ "Sobel" is a term for soldier-rebels, soldiers who turned to looting and other violent activity during the civil war mainly in response to poor treatment and lack of supplies and pay from the army. The term has gained wide acceptance to describe the sense of confusion about the goals and alliances of wandering bands of armed men.

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