

Constructions of Identity and Social Status: Krios in Freetown from 1885 to 1920

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Introduction

The construction of Freetown, Sierra Leone as a city for freed peoples and white British colonizers reveals a unique history of identity, particularly as Krio peoples negotiated their place of privilege between white colonizers and natives of Sierra Leone. From 1885 to 1915, British colonial authorities in Freetown attempted to manipulate ethnic divides between Krios and non-Creoles in order to strengthen colonial rule in a city where Krios already enjoyed greater economic opportunities due to their access to common British religion, language, and education. However, I contend that colonial authorities' implementation of this strategy lacked consistency and effectiveness because the concept of Krio-ness was a construct and the result of the diaspora of displaced peoples. Krio identity was fluid and not restricted to one ethnic group. Rather, "Krio-ness" came to define a mobile social class within Freetown that transcended colonially imposed ethnic distinctions. In this essay, I will assess the contributions of religion, education, economy, and housing to the construction of Krio identity and social status at the turn of the 20th century. I will then introduce the fluid reality of the Krio identity and argue that the actualization of Krio privilege was more complex than the original assessments of some British colonial authorities.

The Origins of Krio Identity: Religion, Education, and Economy

Freetown, Sierra Leone was created, in part, to provide a British imperial home for freed slaves. From 1808 to 1862, the British Empire advocated an abolitionist policy that led the British Royal Navy to begin liberating slave ships in the Atlantic.¹ During this period, 99,000

¹ Richard Anderson, "The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration, and 'Liberation' at Freetown, 1808-1863," *African Economic History* 41, (2013): 101.

freed peoples arrived in Freetown.² Some of these individuals were then forcefully relocated to Gambia and the West Indies or enlisted in the imperial army, but others remained in Sierra Leone and worked in agriculture and the urban economy.³ These freed peoples, or “liberated Africans,” who settled in Freetown became known as Creoles or Krios.⁴ As British colonialism intensified in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Creole population gained recognition and power under British authority.⁵ The formation of a British protectorate in Freetown and the surrounding area in 1896 intensified British rule.⁶ A newspaper account of the Krio situation in Freetown in 1909 explains:

"[A] large number of Creoles and Europeans who are now doing business or holding Government appointments in the Protectorate thereby earning sufficient incomes for the comfortable maintenance of themselves and their families and at the same time carry to the aborigines of the Hinterland not only the material things of trade but also the spiritual things of Education and Religion."⁷

Thus, there was a general perception that freed peoples in Freetown had an advantage over non-Creoles in their access to European education and trade opportunities.⁸ This hinterland trade created a new social class within Sierra Leonean society because Krio traders served as intermediaries between the British Freetown and the people of the hinterland. Although these cir-

² Ibid, 101.

³ Ibid, 122-123.

⁴ P.E.H. Hair, “The Freetown Contribution,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 5, No. 4 (December, 1967): 127.

⁵ Ibid, 128.

⁶ Christopher Fyfe, “1787-1887-1987: Reflections on a Sierra Leone Bicentenary,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 57, No. 4 (1987): 416.

⁷ *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, “The Development of Sierra Leone,” Oct. 30, 1909. From *Nineteenth Century Collections Online* (accessed March 30, 2018). <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/6DvQL8>.

⁸ Hair, “Freetown,” 128.

cumstances suggest a clear division of power, the realization of Krio identity was more complex and requires a closer examination of religion, education, and economy.

Colonial authorities first used religious education to provide greater opportunities to Creolized peoples. At the turn of the 20th century, Freetown topped every city in sub-Saharan Africa in school enrollment.⁹ However, this educational advantage was restricted to the city and did not breach the hinterland—home to most of Sierra Leone’s non-Creole population.¹⁰ Krio people primarily practiced Christianity, and the Temne and the Mende (peoples native to the hinterland) purposefully excluded Christian missionaries from their territories—further isolating the urban Krio population of Freetown.¹¹ Although some scholars argue that the majority of the Krio were Christian, there were also Muslim and polytheist Krios.¹² British colonial authorities may have welcomed Christian missionaries, but it is notable that other religions like Islam occupied space in the religious composition of Freetown as well.¹³ Therefore, it is unlikely that religion was the sole uniting factor in Krio identity, nor that a uniform Christian identity necessarily advantaged Krio people.

Although Christianity was not a universal aspect of Krio identity, Christian missionary education did afford certain advantages to its Krio practitioners. Beginning in the 1850s, the Krio Diaspora across West Africa increasingly contributed to the growth of a capitalist trade

⁹ Ewout H.P. Frankema, “The origins of formal education in sub-Saharan Africa: was British rule more benign?,” *European Review of Economic History* 16, No. 4 (November 2012): 345.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 345.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 345, 347.

¹² Fyfe, “1787-1887-1987,” 413.

¹³ *Ibid*, 413.

economy.¹⁴ Krio traders across the West African coast relied on Freetown for education and trade opportunities. Highly connected Krio-Christian missions provided Creolized peoples with access to English-language education at mission schools, which allowed educated Krios to participate fully in a trade economy—forming alliances with British administrators to facilitate trade.¹⁵ Indeed, in Freetown itself there was a clear educational divide between Krios and non-Krios. Krios, especially Krio women, benefited from higher literacy rates compared to their Temne and Mende peers.¹⁶ Thus, due to mission schools and the nature of the Krio Diaspora, there was a significant contingency within the Krio population that enjoyed access to Western education and literacy. These skills coincided with the economic dynamics of Freetown, ultimately providing Krio peoples with increased economic mobility within Sierra Leonean society.

The Krio community itself did not occupy one distinct socio-economic class. Rather, Krio people participated in multiple levels of the Freetown economic system, and this mobility gave them a distinct advantage over non-Creoles.¹⁷ Although the nature of British colonial society generally favored Krio people, there were moments in the 1885-1995 period in which British colonial authorities denied Krios access to government and economic opportunities, sometimes preventing Krios from obtaining bank credit.¹⁸ Despite these attempts, Krio people in Freetown generally benefited from the structure of the colonial economy, especially at the turn of the cen-

¹⁴ Martin Lynn, "Technology, Trade and 'A Race of Native Capitalists': The Krio Diaspora of West Africa and the Steamship, 1852-95," *The Journal of African History* 33, No. 3 (1992): 426.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 427.

¹⁶ Joseph J. Bangura, "Gender and Ethnic Relations in Sierra Leone: Temne Women in Colonial Freetown," *History in Africa* 39, (2012): 272.

¹⁷ Fyfe, "1787-1887-1987," 413.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 416.

ture. More upper-class Krios maintained professions in medicine, law, education, religious organizations, and the civil sphere.¹⁹ The Krios' tendency to enter white-collar professions reflects the British authorities' desire to empower the Creoles of Freetown to become an economically preeminent majority class.

Navigating Urban Spaces: Krios and non-Krios

The inclusion of women within the Freetonian economic structure reveals the nuances of this Krio advantage. Krio women occupied positions of power within the local economy, trading useful items in the hinterland and contributing largely to Freetown's trading center: The Market.²⁰ Many Krio women owned stalls in The Market and determined the supply of goods within that economy.²¹ Although Krio women generally benefited from greater control in this economy, Temne women also maintained access to the urban market.²² They too participated in commercial activities, often capitalizing on social interactions with non-Krios to enhance profit in places like the Market.²³ A photograph from the 1870s reflects the pre-eminence of women in these Market interactions.²⁴ In the photograph, women seem to control both the stalls and the negotiations, and they work to form relationships with specific consumers—the majority of whom

¹⁹ James Steel Thayer, "A Dissenting View of Creole Culture in Sierra Leone," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 31, No. 121/122 (1991): 217.

²⁰ Bangura, "Temne," 269.

²¹ *Ibid*, 269.

²² *Ibid*, 272.

²³ *Ibid*, 272.

²⁴ Dionysius Leomy, photographer. "[Market scene,]" Albumen print photograph. Freetown: Sierra Leone Museum collection, c1870-1880. From Vera Viditz-Ward, "Photography in Sierra Leone, 1850-1918," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 57, No. 4 (1987): plate 3. See Appendix A.

appear to be men.²⁵ In this scenario, Temne women used their non-Krio status to form relationships with customers who functioned outside of the upper-middle class Krio society in Freetown.²⁶ The complexities of such socio-economic dynamics suggest that Krio power structures were fluid, benefiting English-speaking peoples with access to British colonial trade. However, this imposed stratification also created space in society for the less privileged—like the urban Temne women of Freetown and their customers—to unite and build underground economic structures, undermining aspects of British control. Ultimately, however, these interactions reflect a degree of social stratification evident in the economic relations between Krio and non-Krio communities.

Socioeconomic and educational divisions often emerged in the urban development of Freetown, and they were increasingly intertwined with the construction of Krio identity in this city space. Throughout the turn of the 20th century, rural areas tended to remain occupied by non-Creolized peoples from the hinterland, like the Temne and Mende.²⁷ The economic status of Krio traders as intermediaries between imperial Freetown and its surrounding rural areas afforded them a certain monopoly on hinterland trade, but it also allowed Krio people to interact with non-Krios living in rural areas.²⁸ Krio people lost their economic autonomy in this rural trade economy because they did not have the same cultural fluency in these more isolated communities.²⁹ Because Krio traders lived in Freetown, they depended on their relationships and interac-

²⁵ Leomy, “Market,” plate 3.

²⁶ Bangura, “Temne,” 272.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 276.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 276.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 279.

tions with non-Krio rural traders to sustain working relationships in the hinterland.³⁰ Thus, there were two intermediaries: Krio and non-Krio. Such nuanced relationships suggest that the social dynamics of colonial Freetown and Sierra Leone did not fall into a clear hierarchy. Rather, Krios and non-Krios participated in an exchange of privilege depending on their working environment.

Housing patterns in urban Freetown further reflect this complex power dynamic that often times favored Krio people over non-Krios. A 1901 newspaper article about a neighborhood in Freetown, *The Grassfields*, reflects British efforts to form an ethnic hierarchy supported by a purposeful distribution of resources. The author criticizes citizens who could trace their origins to Sierra Leone itself, describing them as “emigrants from the Hinterland of the Colony, who have honoured the West End with their abiding presence on the other—to be noisy and boisterous all through the hours of the night.”³¹ The author favors the Krio residents of Freetown, calling them “peaceful, industrious, and law-abiding, members of the community” and saying that Krio citizens of the Grasslands should be provided with “more than ordinary consideration from the Government—Colonial and Municipal.”³² The author explains that these citizens live in squalid conditions, specifically advocating for better roads and drainage systems to prevent disease during rainy seasons.³³ This writer’s bias suggests that British colonial authorities attempted to manipulate and emphasize ethnic differences to build a caste-like system in Freetown. Had British colonial authorities succeeded in fomenting such division, it would have allowed them to

³⁰ Ibid, 279.

³¹ *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, “The West End of Freetown,” June 3, 1901. From *Nineteenth Century Collections Online* (accessed March 2, 2018). <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyural/64bjK4>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

maintain control in Freetown and perpetuate the colonial imperial model. As Freetown developed during the first quarter of the twentieth century, Krio villages formed on the periphery of the city.³⁴ This mountainous area contains five villages where Krio people tended to settle, allowing them access to the city and providing an intermediary to the hinterland.³⁵ Such separatist housing emphasizes the dichotomy that formed in Freetown among three social groups: white colonizers, Krios, and non-Krios.

Fluidity Within Krio Identities

Here I will make a distinction among fluctuating definitions of Creole identity in Sierra Leone. Although many scholars have focused on the privileges afforded to upper and middle-class urban Krios, there were lower-class, rural Krios.³⁶ The term “Creole” has been used to describe a variety of social and ethnic classes in Sierra Leone over the years.³⁷ The term “Creole” did not appear in official government documents until 1908.³⁸ Before the term emerged, government documents used terms like “Sierra Leonean” or “educated natives.”³⁹ When the term took hold, it was not used to refer to the actual relocated, liberated Africans of the first half of the 19th century.⁴⁰ As Skinner and Harroll-Bond define it, the term was used to describe “individuals born

³⁴ Thayer, “Dissenting,” 218.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 218.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 218.

³⁷ David Skinner and Barbara E. Harrell-Bond, “Misunderstandings Arising from the Use of the Term ‘Creole’ in the Literature on Sierra Leone,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 47, 3 (1977): 305.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 308.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 307.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 308.

in the colony, regardless of their ethnic origins, social status, or religious affiliation.”⁴¹ Thus, the term “Krio” does not effectively describe one, homogenous group of people. In fact, as urban interactions intensified over the decades, intermarriage between Krios and non-Krios blurred the ethnic distinctions of the early nineteenth century. Fyfe writes, “From the earliest days migrants into Freetown had been taken into Krio households to work... Marriage over the generations brought them together. The offspring had a choice of identity—to be a Krio or (as it might be) to be a Temne, Limba, or Mende.”⁴² Rather, I hypothesize that the malleable use of the term created a space in society for socio-economic fluidity and, ironically, allowed individuals to transcend the restrictive ethnic barriers it sought to impose.

“Krio” does not simply refer to individuals whose ethnic histories could be traced to liberated Africans. Krio has been used to describe members of a higher economic class, citizens of Freetown, and subjects of the Sierra Leone colony.⁴³ The Krio ethnic distinction was a construct that functioned as an intermediary in changing power dynamics in Freetown. Perhaps most accurately, “Creoleness” described urban individuals who possessed the education, economic, and housing tendencies of black upper-middle class Freetonian society. British colonizers increasingly associated the term “Creole” with their definition of “civilized,” or an individual whose mannerisms more closely mimicked the behaviors of British society.⁴⁴ Similarly, other scholars have

⁴¹ Ibid, 308.

⁴² Lord Hailey, *Native Administration in the British Territories, III*, (HMSO: London, 1951): 285. From Fyfe, “1787-1887-1987,” 418.

⁴³ Skinner and Harrell-Bond, “Misunderstandings,” 307-308.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 308-314.

declared that the term “Krio” more accurately describes a “westernized African.”⁴⁵ Similarly, evidence from Western education suggests that the educated middle class came to define the African urban elite in Sierra Leone.⁴⁶ This class was often associated with the Krios, but the Krio identity was malleable and one could achieve a degree of “Creoleness” through education. As Corby writes, “The developing system of Western education produced a new elite—those Africans who by virtue of their education held occupations that enabled them to accumulate power and prestige in the changing society of the colonial period.”⁴⁷ The relative fluidity of this identity—often times based more in one’s educational background than ethnicity—allowed individuals to climb the socio-economic hierarchy of colonial society and change their own identities in urban societies throughout the turn of the 20th century. Individuals likely could have used their “Krio” or upper-class identities in certain situations (i.e. interactions with colonial authorities, employment opportunities) to advance themselves, but they also likely would have shed such an identity in other interactions with non-upper-class, non-British individuals to appease both sides of the power structure in Freetown. British colonial authorities thus failed in their attempt to dichotomize ethnic identity and repress colonial subjects.

The fluidity of this Krio identity created more space in Sierra Leonean culture to redefine urban class structures and gender roles. In Freetown itself, the initial British acceptance of the legitimacy of Krio and Liberated African peoples diminished some of the harsh racial rhetoric that would increase after WWI. In Sierra Leone, Krio-identifying women found themselves in a

⁴⁵ Lynn, “Technology,” 423.

⁴⁶ Richard A. Corby, “Educating Africans for Inferiority under British Rule: Bo School in Sierra Leone,” *Comparative Education Review* 34, No. 3 (August 1990): 319.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 319.

position of relative autonomy within the economy.⁴⁸ Influences from Yoruba culture early on in the Liberated African community infiltrated many aspects of society in Freetown.⁴⁹ Yoruba women tended to retain more autonomy in their ability to trade and travel throughout the hinterland, which allowed them heightened access to the colonial economy.⁵⁰ Yoruba marriages tended to promote economic independence and easy access to divorce, which helped Yoruba women succeed in the trade economy.⁵¹ Because Yoruba cultural values became an aspect of the Liberated African (and later Krio) identity, this new perception of gender roles in the economy became an aspect of the developed Krio culture.⁵² Krio Women participated in the colonial trade economy, becoming indispensable in the kola trade at the end of the 19th century.⁵³ I infer that women who could access a Krio identity might also be able to incorporate some of this economic independence into their lifestyles, allowing them further autonomy in their livelihoods and status in society. This distinction in the status of women supports the idea that Krio identity emerged on its own as many cultural traditions melded in Sierra Leone's capitol. The influence of Yoruba culture suggests that Krio women may have been afforded more autonomy in their social hierarchy than British women and other western colonizers. This key distinction bolsters the idea that Krio identity was not one ethnicity, but an emergent identity that blended local traditions with western concepts of trade and education.

⁴⁸ E. Frances White, "Creole Women Traders in the Nineteenth Century," *The International Journey of African Historical Studies* 14, 4 (1981): 627.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 627.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 627.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 627.

⁵² *Ibid*, 634.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 634.

Nineteenth and twentieth century documentation of life in Freetown emphasizes this concept of ethnic fluidity. A photograph of the Baker family taken in Freetown in 1918 depicts a large family posing in European-style dress in a formal studio setting.⁵⁴ In the photograph, an older man and woman sit on a bench surrounded by younger adults and children.⁵⁵ The older man holds a baby. No one smiles, and everyone is sitting up straight and looking at the camera.⁵⁶ The family appears to be upper-class, and this photograph was taken at a Freetown studio owned by a man named W.S. Johnson.⁵⁷ Johnson was a photographer who traveled along the Western Coast. He advertised his arrival in the *Sierra Leone Times*, hoping to attract wealthy customers who would be willing to pay for a high-quality photograph.⁵⁸ Viditz-Ward believes that Johnson was likely a Creole photographer who eventually settled and established a studio in Freetown.⁵⁹ The photograph of the Baker family, therefore, reflects a greater interest in the implications of physical depictions of self that came to define one's wealth and status.⁶⁰ The individuals in this photograph mimicked European dress, and the studio background similarly reflects European influence.⁶¹ This photograph alludes to a broader trend in identity that sought to replicate European styles to appear well-educated and wealthy. Later in the twentieth century, these definitions

⁵⁴ W.S. Johnson, photographer. "[The Baker family,]" Photograph. Freetown: W.S. Johnson Studio, c1918. From Vera Viditz-Ward, "Photography in Sierra Leone, 1850-1918," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 57, No. 4 (1987): plate 10. See Appendix B.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, plate 10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, plate 10.

⁵⁷ Viditz-Ward, "Photography,"

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 514.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 514.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 514.

⁶¹ Johnson, plate 10.

of class and identity began to shift as art concentrated more heavily on village scenes, mosques, and locally made materials.⁶² Thus, Krios likely embraced this emphasis on appearance and depictions to navigate both British and Sierra Leonean identities—depending on the context of one’s social interactions. Creole photographers like Johnson elevated their own status and highlighted their “Krio” identity by mimicking these European photographic styles.⁶³ Thus, depictions of self would likely have allowed individuals to adapt to the Krio identity and fit a mold of upper-middle class citizenry while simultaneously permitting Krios to shed such an identity for interactions in hinterland communities.

Often conceptions of Krio identity in West African countries—including Sierra Leone—focus largely on western influences in the formation of Creole cultures in ports and other prominent cities. However, the societal tendencies of local communities also greatly influenced the emergence of Creolized communities during the latter half of the 20th century. In Liberia, for example, resettled American Liberians expressed frustrations with the limitations of their rights by other communities within Sierra Leone.⁶⁴ Americo-Liberians wrote of oppression as early as 1847, stating that communities in the hinterland barred them by law and public sentiment from fully participating in the function of Liberian society.⁶⁵ Such evidence suggests that Krio people may have encountered greater animosity in their interactions with non-Creole Liberians than with British colonizers. Krio identity was both a privilege and a burden, depending on the cir-

⁶² Viditz-Ward, “Photography,” 516.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 516.

⁶⁴ William E. Allen, “Liberia and the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century: Convergence and Effects,” *History in Africa* 37 (2010): 19.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 20.

cumstances of one's interactions. Additionally, evidence from Creolized communities in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria suggests that Krio peoples often latched onto traditions from their former cultures. Afro-Brazilians in Nigeria tended to practice Iberian Catholicism, and Americo-Liberians tended to wear traditional American clothes (like the Sierra Leoneans in the photograph).⁶⁶ These behaviors may have stoked feelings of societal stratification and cultural difference already present in converging urban centers across the West Coast of Africa. Evidence from Creole communities in these colonial settlements contributes to the idea that Krio identity in Sierra Leone was not necessarily evidence of a privileged, upper class. Rather, such an identity could both benefit and hinder one's own social status depending on the context of the interaction.

British Influence and the Decline of Krio Status

Concepts of race drove British colonial theory, particularly after World War I. Although previous British colonial practices favored "westernized" Africans, the turn of the century and migration influxes changed the place of the educated Krio class within Sierra Leonean society. British concepts about race—beginning as early as 1887 but intensifying in the first half of the twentieth century—favored European, white people. Fyfe writes, "It [the final stages of colonial partition] was to be followed in British West Africa by the introduction of racial rule. In the coming years the aspiring Krios, and their black counterparts everywhere, were to be pushed out of the senior official posts they had held and were replaced by whites."⁶⁷ As Syrian and Lebanese traders moved through the West African coast, British colonizers favored them over Krios in

⁶⁶ Ibid, 20.

⁶⁷ Fyfe, "1787-1887-1987," 414.

their allocation of economic and employment opportunities.⁶⁸ The mobility of Krio people within Sierra Leonean society may have been a result of access to urban economic opportunity, but the reality of colonial racism did not escape Freetown.⁶⁹ After World War I, British colonial authorities allocated a “war bonus” to salaried officials.⁷⁰ As increasing numbers of Syrian migrants moved to Sierra Leone in the earlier half of the 20th century, British colonial officials began giving Syrians more privileged government jobs, and many became salaried government officials. As a result of increased food prices, particularly the price of rice, black Sierra Leoneans rioted.⁷¹ This anti-Syrian riot of 1919 reflects the changes that had taken place in the society of Freetown since the 1880s.⁷² In a 1905 editorial responding to an article titled “Syrians in Freetown,” an individual states:

I am now calling attention to their [Syrians'] methods of displacing the creole retail traders... These Syrian traders in French Guinea, Sierra Leone, and other centres in West Africa, as descendants of ancient Syria, having in them the principle and traditions of their historic past, and the fire of tribulation, anguish, and ruin, which the ages of time have worked upon their nation, have made them a people of united action, and knowing the effect and value of unity they are following a system by which despite all appearances, they are holding their own everywhere; and in Freetown, to-day, they are gradually, persistently, and systematically superseding the creole native retail traders... I am afraid before long the Syrians will control the retail trade in this city with all the advantages to be derived from such a position.⁷³

The author harbors fears about the domination of one ethnicity by another and the encroachment of Syrian peoples in Sierra Leonean society. The author’s ethnic identity is not apparent in the source, however, the writer’s perspective suggests that he was likely a

⁶⁸ Thayer, “Dissenting,” 218.

⁶⁹ Fyfe, “1787-1887-1987,” 416.

⁷⁰ Ibrahim Abdullah, “Rethinking the Freetown Crowd: The Moral Economy of the 1919 Strikes and Riot in Sierra Leone,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 28, 2 (1994): 199.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 203.

⁷² Fyfe, “1787-1887-1987,” 416.

⁷³ Traders’ Friend, “The Syrians,” *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, July 29, 1905, From *Nineteenth Century Collections Online* (accessed March 20, 2018): 5. <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/64bjK4>.

British observer or, perhaps, a Krio person. Although he expresses economic woes, he seems preoccupied with the history of the Syrian people and his fear of displacement. The reality of his reflection is that he casts no blame on British colonizers for affording greater positions of privilege to Syrians in society, evidenced by discrepancies in government-waged labor.⁷⁴ Regardless, these riots and strikes reflect the changes that took place in the position of Krios within Sierra Leonean society during the turn of the twentieth century, ultimately stripping Krios of the privileges that were originally afforded to freed slaves.

Conclusion

Krio identity is malleable. Throughout the history of Freetown, Krios have occupied positions of power and disempowerment reflective of the socio-economic strata of the larger Sierra Leonean society. The position of the Krios is unique, however, because it became a bargaining tool in colonial power negotiations. The irony of such manipulations was that Sierra Leoneans were ultimately able to move among ethnic groups through avenues like religion and education to gain the privileges afforded to Krio peoples before the intensification of British rule. The turn of the twentieth century represents a challenging time in the formation of Krio identity because the previous power dynamics of the state were increasingly challenged by new ideas about race and control. Importantly, the broader theme of this narrative evidences constructions of race and identity that became increasingly important during the colonial era and still affect our societies today. As I

⁷⁴ Abdullah, "Rethinking," 199.

stated previously, Krios were not one, homogenous ethnic group. However, attempts to categorize Krios as one people suggest that British colonizers, following the behaviors of white supremacy, manipulated racial constructs to gain and maintain power over an oppressed people for almost two centuries. Sierra Leoneans empowered themselves despite this construct, undermining concepts of racial rigidity to negotiate imposed western power structures in order to advance themselves and their families. This fluid circumstance provided Krio peoples with a transitive identity, one which they might have employed in interactions within colonial class structures, but shed for negotiations with individuals native to the Sierra Leonean hinterland. Therefore, constructs of Krio ethnicity became a tool through which people could navigate a complex, stratified colonial society and contribute to the urban narrative of Freetonian life—influencing both British and Sierra Leonean communities.

There is a tendency, particularly in the discussion of colonial narratives and identity, to focus on the role of the colonizer and its implications in modern society. It is important that the formation of Krio identity in Sierra Leone provides some autonomy to Krio people themselves. Krios worked within local and colonial frameworks to create a sub-culture and identity unique to themselves and their circumstances. When discussing events in modern Sierra Leone, one must remember that the lasting dynamics of Creolization affect politics and social life, not just British colonialism.

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APPENDIX A:
MARKET SCENE



APPENDIX B:
THE BAKER FAMILY

