How We See This Place

An Intergenerational Dialogue about Conservation using Photo-Voice around Tiwai Island, Sierra Leone

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Abstract

You can express a different story through art. What happens when you use arts-based inquiry to explore environmental knowledge? How can artistic expression value and construct alternative knowledges that might otherwise be overlooked or silenced? Holistic and justice-oriented trends in environmental education argue for the integration of social identity within ecological issues. This participatory community-based Photo-Voice project takes place in the rural communities around Tiwai Island in Sierra Leone. The project investigates environmental, community and cultural assets to be protected for future generations. The performance pieces that emerge elaborate, nuance, and particularize important features of place for these communities. The study draws attention to the ongoing process of post-war reconstruction within the communities around Tiwai Island. It also raises questions around the role of physical structures in the enactment, negotiation, construction and deconstruction of identity.

Vous pouvez exprimer une histoire différente par l'art. Que se passe-t-il quand on utilise l'enquête art-basée pour explorer la connaissance environnementale? Comment les connaissances alternatives artistiques peuvent valoriser et créer des connaissances alternatives qui auraient autrement été oubliées ou négligées? Les tendances holistiques et justice-orientées dans l'éducation environnementale plaident pour l'intégration de l'identité sociale dans les issues écologiques. Ce projet 'Photo-Voice' à caractère communautaire participatoire tient place dans les communautés rurales autour de 'Tiwai Island' au Sierra Leone. Le projet examine les biens environnementales, communautaires et culturels afin d'être protégés pour les générations à venir. Les poèmes démontrent les nuances, les particularités et le contexte dynamique des aspets d'un endroit important à conserver pour ces communautés. L'étude appelle l'attention sur le processus continu de la reconstruction d'après-guerre au sein des communautés autour de 'Tiwai Island.' Elle soulève également des questions autour du rôle des structures physiques dans l'établissement, la négociation, la construction et le déconstruction de l'identité.

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Introduction: Sweet Sweet Salone

Five years ago, I spent 8 months in Sierra Leone doing environmental education projects with youth. Raw from a recent brutal civil war, the place stole my heart. It captivated and changed me. I could not wait to come/go[1] back.

Hot
Burning surfaces
Skin concrete metal car plastic skin
Hot
Sweat pools in the small of my back
        the crease of my arm
                behind my knees
Khaki cotton quick dry
Khaki cotton wrinkle
Khaki cotton fade
Hot
        Oh, White

Diamond sparkling
Colonial opulence
                violence
Sparkling shatter
        country scatter

Wayt Gyal!
If a de find diamond, a de married yu!

Mangos hang like light bulbs
Green mangos with salt: Bitter but not sweet
The rain wants to come

I'm tired, lately
        Finding forgiveness
        Sometimes I am selfish

JT, A no want money – just one pair trousers

[1] My location within the text is dynamic. At some stages of this research, I was writing in Sierra Leone. I could not wait to 'come' back. At other stages, I was in Canada – I could not wait to 'go' back. My changing location alters where the text itself is placed.

Sugar ants are everywhere, lately, crawling
through my book
on my wicker chair
between ALT + CTRL on my laptop
in the hidden zipper pockets of my bag
in the sweaty crease of my elbow

It doesn't matter how someone treats you
You can always go back
It's not resolved
It's patched up with band aids
Reconciliation takes 100 years, I heard the radio say

Dis na Afrika, with a smile
A joke that isn't funny
Independence Day, 43 years and what have we achieved?
The president's house and car would be the target of my grenade
These jobless hungry corners of Freetown

I'm tired. I'm tired of being dusty. I'm tired of the humid heat. I'm tired of trying. I'm tired of filling my days with usefulness. I'm tired of feeling. I'm tired of my heart. I'm tired of this place. But I've got a passport….
Oh, White

Sink or swim in the filthy water

Delve deeper into the garbage on the beach
Reach into the center of that dark cloud
that is moving over Freetown
Climb every palm tree to find out
what's actually inside the coconut

Invite the ants, maybe they know…
Forget it, they always invade anyways
when they find something they like
Oh, White

Dusty leaves turn shiny from the rain
Garbage heaps turn into compost

Sometimes it's hard here
Always there is beauty

Sweet
Sweet
Salone

You can express a different story through art. I doubt that I could have produced the same expression through straight conversation alone. If you ask me about my first time in Sierra Leone, I probably say: It was great! I learned a lot about myself and my culture from being in another place. I took away much much more than I could ever give. I made new friends. When I learned to speak Krio, I discovered new parts of my personality. I never could have imagined a country with such a traumatic history to have such beautiful beaches, mountains and forests. And you should see the style in Freetown – I came to the 'poorest' country in the world and felt like I needed to dress up! These statements are all valid; they represent important aspects of my experience. But writing a poem through found phrases in my diary allowed me to express my first experiences in Sierra Leone in a *different* way. This first creative endeavor attuned me to the possibilities of arts-based expressions of 'place.' It is a personalized and particularized knowledge. This ability to view place in a different way inspired me to embark on this research story.

I understand 'place' to include culture, community and the surrounding environment. Environmental knowledge is thus more than oxygen produced by the trees, fertilizers that run-off into the sea, and rare mammals that lurk in the jungle. The environment is social space and material practices too. But how do you investigate this? What happens when you use arts-based inquiry to explore environmental knowledge? How can artistic expression value and construct alternative knowledges that might otherwise be overlooked or silenced, through more traditional methods such as quantitative wildlife studies, surveys, questionnaires, or census data? In this study, I set out to explore this exciting possibility. In the chapters that follow, I describe my return to Sierra Leone to engage youth in community conservation and development through arts-based inquiry.

In Chapter 1, I present my epistemological lens which orients the study in the field of environmental education. I review holistic and justice-oriented trends in education that argue for the integration of social identity within ecological issues. Through this analysis, I arrive at the concept of 'place' as a starting point

for environmental inquiry. Place-based education is grounds for interrogating the connections between identity and place.

Chapter 2 is an overview of what has been written about youth and education in Sierra Leone. Here, I examine the post-colonial and post-war contexts of education, locate the study within the culture of rural Sierra Leone, and reflect on the current situation of youth in the country. This literature provides a backdrop to my work with youth participants within the context of education and place.

In Chapter 3, I describe my methods and the research site. I propose using Photo-Voice, a participatory action research method that has participants take pictures and write short photo narratives that describe the pictures they took. I illustrate how the research project was designed and situate the participant communities around the Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Sierra Leone.

Throughout Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I tell the fieldwork story. Chapter 4 is a detailed account of how I approached working with cameras and photographs in the communities. In Chapter 5, I establish the themes of the objects that were photographed, and compare these themes across gender, age, and place. Chapter 6 is my own interpretation of the photo narratives. What emerge are performance pieces that elaborate, nuance, and particularize import features of place for the Tiwai communities.

In Chapter 7, I extend the analysis of the photographs to reveal other trends in the data. Cross-cutting themes emerge from the photo narratives, and an underlying rationale of war further contextualizes the research. By accounting for outlier photographs, I offer a broad framework for a holistic approach to education.

To conclude in Chapter 8, I integrate the fieldwork stories with the background literature. I draw attention to the ongoing process of post-war reconstruction within the communities around Tiwai Island. I present tensions of using Photo-Voice to facilitate an intergenerational dialogue at the community level in rural Sierra Leone. Finally, I question the role of physical structures in the enactment, negotiation, construction and deconstruction of identity.

Chapter 1. Starting with Place

Environmental education is an umbrella term for a range of interdisciplinary concepts, aims and contradictions. As the field evolves into the 21st century, it maintains a dynamic and iterative position bridging various areas of study. In an era of grave concern about the capacity of the earth and ever-increasing disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots,' there is an urgent need to merge social and ecological aims of education. Broadly considered, environmental education is informed by and influences fields such as nature or conservation education, outdoor education, science education, place-based education, eco-feminism, environmental justice, sustainable development, indigenous education, eco-pedagogy and a critical pedagogy of place. While Orr (1994) wrote that "all education is environmental education," educational theory synthesizing social and ecological issues is in its early stages of development (Gruenewald, 2003a). As such, environmental pedagogy is ripe with questions and debate.

Central to this debate are questions about the values that underpin how we think about the environment, and how they are incorporated into the broader aims of education. These complex questions depict the multiple tensions in environmental education literature. What is the environment (Bowers, 2001, 2004; Chinn, 2007; Cole, 2007; DiChiro, 2006; Evans, 2002; Glasson, Frykholm, Mhango, & Phiri, 2006; Li, 2006; Morgan, 1996; Schroder, 2006; Sumner, 2003)? Does nature have intrinsic value? Is it socially constructed? Should the use of the earth's natural resources be managed by people? What role should technology play in resource use/management? How does science tend to exclude culture? What is sustainable development (Banerjee, 2006; Farrell & Papagiannis, 2002; Li, 2006; Shallcross & Robinson, 2007; Sumner, 2003; Varga, Koszo, Mayer, & Sleurs, 2007; Vargas, 2000)? Who benefits from resource use, and who bears the burden of environmental pollution and degradation? Is Western individualism compatible with ecological aims of education (Bowers, 2001, 2004)? What are the roles of individuals, activism and public policy in environmental issues (Clover,

2003; Clover & Hill, 2003; Klawiter, 1999; Kurtz, 2007; Vargas, 2000)? In actuality, these tensions may not represent absolute dichotomies, but an opportunity for dialogue (Shallcross & Robinson, 2007). An understanding of these underlying social and ecological tensions is important when doing critical environmental research.

In this chapter, I explore a holistic approach to place-based education. I begin by presenting the paradigm shift required for a holistic approach. I do this by investigating Systems Theory, Eco-Feminism and Environmental Justice which compatibly merge social and environmental concerns. I was drawn to these theories during the coursework portion of my studies as they resonate with my personal life experiences. Systems Theory has informed my past work with Youth at Risk and organizational change, providing me with tools for working with people. It also appeals to my undergraduate background in engineering, but takes the possibilities of science to a new social understanding. Eco-feminism and environmental justice respond to the feminist environmentalist in me, who had become disenchanted with mainstream environmentalism for its lack of consideration for social justice issues. These epistemologies advocate reconnecting nature with culture by valuing alternative, embodied, spiritual and nonlinear ways of knowing. I then investigate pedagogy of place as a point of departure for exploring *how* these alternative knowledges are connected to the environment. I review different conceptualizations of place and theories on how identity connects with place. I then expose some of the potential problems or limitations of focusing on place, and the tendency within the literature to universalize the experiences of the global north. To end this chapter, I present a collection of participatory projects with youth in the global south that represent promising evidence and momentum for including the voices of youth from developing contexts in environmental inquiry.

Making Connections: Shifting towards a holistic approach

A systems perspective is the theoretical base of an ecological framework for education (Aslop, Dippo, & Zandvliet, 2007; Colucci-Gray, Camino, Barbiero, & Gray, 2006; Farrell & Papagiannis, 2002; Morgan, 1996; Vargas, 2000).

Systems Theory[2] developed from simultaneous discoveries in subatomic physics (systems on micro level) and ecological systems (on the macro level). These discoveries challenged the relevancy of knowing something about part of a system without considering its *relationship* to the whole. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of human development incorporates a systems view to address ecological aspects of identity. As individuals, people sit at the intersection of many different systems. For example, these systems might include a family, a place of worship, a sports team, a neighborhood, or a landscape. Each individual has a contextualized identity with respect to their location within a myriad of systems. An individual's identity and interactions in one system are connected to and may affect that individual's identity and behavior in another. Every community is a unique mix of individuals, and is nested within higher order systems such as culture, history and policy. A community is a network of interconnected systems, or a web of interactions. *Relationships* are central to understanding how communities function.

It is widely accepted amongst culture theorists that culture is a system of complex interactions and associations, where boundaries are fluid (Appadurai, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Y. Cohen, 2000; Nicholson, 1968; Young & Adler, 2001). From a systems perspective, culture and nature constitute a web of interaction; culture is interconnected within greater ecological systems. Addressing ecosystems without a consideration for culture is thus an incomplete understanding of the environment. In order to value this connectedness, there needs to be a shift away from traditional mechanistic Newtonian linear thinking, towards more holistic inter-relational ways of thinking (Plas, 1986). Rather than understand nature and culture as separate, a systems view advocates an inclusive interdisciplinary understanding of the *relationship* between them.

A systems perspective thus challenges Western notions of education. There is a focus in Western education towards neo-liberal values such as accountability, standardized teaching and testing, student competitiveness,

[2] Unless otherwise specified, I base my understanding of Systems Theory on the work of Fritjof Capra (1997).

managerialism, and funding (Arshad-Ayaz, 2007; Brown & Lauder, 2006; Dei & Karumnachery, 2001; Giroux, 2007; Gruenewald, 2003a). This culture of schooling and the aim of education to produce a "rational, self-directing individual" (Bowers, 2001, p. 87) is contradictory to an ecological approach (Aslop et al., 2007; Farrell & Papagiannis, 2002; Shallcross & Robinson, 2007). Ecological education advocates a focus on relationships – how individuals *connect* to their environment and culture. A systems approach is thus the basis for a major paradigm shift which challenges the perspective that individuals act independently from their lived context. This shift presents the potential to enter new spheres of knowledge (Clover & Hill, 2003).

Eco-feminists, Mies and Shiva (1993), refer to the hierarchical dualism between nature and culture. This dualism is an oppressive dichotomy that leads to an understanding of self at the expense of the 'other.' Here, 'other' refers to people who are marginalized based on their gender, age, sex, sexuality, race, culture, or ability, to name a few. Feminist literature recognizes that this need to dominate the 'other' is not unique to the nature-culture divide (DiChiro, 2006). Dualistic thinking is the root of oppression. Goldstein and Selby (2000) write,

> Western society is still heavily influenced by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scientific thinkers who believed that, except for the human mind, everything in the world is a machine that is fully understandable by dividing it into its component parts … This has led to our creating a hierarchy within ourselves (mind/reason above emotions/body) and to our locating ourselves outside and above nature. Such a worldview denies moral status to other life forms and environments … and so, gives us license to exploit. Also by emphasizing separation as a means to understanding, the mechanistic worldview has helped spawn countless false dichotomies including human/animal, reason/emotion, reason/nature, mind/body, male/female, culture/nature, self/other. These dichotomies lie at the root of oppression… (p. 16).

Thus, a comprehensive examination of the (false) nature-culture dichotomy exposes greater ideological issues. The division between nature and culture is rooted in ideological assumptions connected to other forms of Western societal oppressions. Education based on these premises is exclusionary and

socially unjust. An inclusive ecological approach to education is not simply a feature to be added to mainstream education. Pedagogical practices must challenge dominant discourses to radically deconstruct these hierarchical dualisms and re-construct more just systems of education.

Environmental justice extends the notion of environment from natural ecosystem to include where people live, work, and play and challenges the unjust distribution of environmental burdens and benefits along lines of social difference (Banerjee, 2006; Clover, 2003; Clover & Hill, 2003; DiChiro, 2006; Evans, 2002; Kurtz, 2007; Li, 2006; Pena, 2002; Pulido, 2002; Schlosberg, 2007; Vargas, 2000). Di Chiro (2006) applies the feminist concept of intersectionality to environmental justice practice, integrating the environment within identity politics. Intersectionality refers to the inability to separate race, ethnicity, sex, gender, class, sexuality, age, and ability from identity. In order to effectively address one form of discrimination, other forms of discrimination must be included in the discussion as part of the same problem. For example, 'not-in-my-backyard' environmentalism usually benefits the Western, White middle-class, effectively reinforcing lines of gender, racial, class, and ethnic injustices. Environmental issues need to be integrated within everyday life, and consider socio-economic contexts. Thus, identity and social status have an important place within environmental discussions.

Western scientific epistemologies are regarded as legitimate ways of knowing in the prevailing environmental discourse. However, these epistemologies can reinforce hurtful and unfair practices. In order to challenge this view of culture over nature, alternative ways of knowing must be explored. System Theory demonstrates how culture is a human system within a greater interconnected and interdependent ecosystem. There is a complex relationship between culture and environment that must be acknowledged for a more complete understanding. The Feminist deconstruction of dualistic thinking is complimentary to this analysis, problematizing this traditional way of seeing the world. Environmental Justice further highlights how social inequality intersects with the environment. Each of these theories reinforces the need for a paradigm

shift towards a holistic approach to education. In order to put this epistemological shift into practice, I present pedagogy of place. Place-based education offers a point of departure from which to reconnect people with the environment.

Place-Based Education

Place is an interdisciplinary, contested, fluid and elusive term (Cole, 2007). It is perhaps "one of the most theoretically and politically pressing issues facing us today" (Gillian Rose, 1995, p. 88). Dimensions of place are central to place-based education. They are also explored by a vast array of 'place-conscious' traditions, such as phenomenology, human geography, architecture, sociology, critical studies, bioregionalism, and eco-feminism, amongst others (Cameron, 2008; Gruenewald, 2003b; Hutchison, 2004; King, 1995; Massey, 1994, 1995; Gillian Rose, 1995). While a comprehensive review of the diversity and depth of place theory is not feasible within the scope of this review, I address some of the more salient issues raised by these disciplines. These issues include the impact of globalization on concepts of place and boundaries; the relationship between space and place; and how identity and place intersect. I then highlight some biases and possibilities presented within the field of place-based education.

Recent interest in place has emerged as a counter-strategy to globalization's compression of space and time. This 'new localism' is proposed in reaction to the negative social and environmental impacts of an increasingly globalized world (Cameron, 2008; Clover, 2003; DiChiro, 2006; Farrell & Papagiannis, 2002; Giroux, 2007; Nash, 1995; Stromquist, 2002a, 2002b; Sumner, 2003). It is widely felt that a sense of place is being lost or eroded (Aslop et al., 2007; Gruenewald, 2008; Hutchison, 2004; Stevenson, 2008; Thomson, 2006). With the growth of the internet, multi-national corporations, and international economic trade, local places and particularities are being 'flattened' by global homogenizing forces (Stevenson, 2008). There is concern that this sense of 'placelessness' and 'abstract living' is detrimental to cultural diversity, the environment, and human rights in general. While it can be argued that not all local places are engulfed by change (Cameron, 2008), an overall 'place-less' focus on

global trade, environment and communications creates a disconnect between distinct geographies and personal attachments with place (Banerjee, 2006).

However, the complexity of globalization challenges traditional binary notions of 'global' to be understood as place-less and 'local' to pertain only to a particular place (Massey, 1995). With the increased flow of people, goods, and information around the world, interaction with place is certainly changing! Expressions in the English language such as "a sense of place" and "no place like home" have connotations of place as a settled locality, of a familiar place with which one has a sense of belonging (Massey, 1995). However, migration, displacement, tourism, and the international labor market all dislodge notions of geographical places, cultural boundaries and our connections to them (Hutchison, 2004; King, 1995). This change gives more meaning to expressions like "home is where the heart is" or perhaps, "a home away from home." A re-conceptualization of place is in order to address globalization.

Massey (1995) explores this re-conceptualization of place through an analysis of space. Place is traditionally understood as situated and fixed (Gruenewald, 2003a). Massey calls for this coherent, bounded and settled place to be re-conceptualized as "a meeting-place, the location of the intersection of particular bundles of activity spaces, of connections and interrelations, of influences and movements" (p. 59). Social space can be viewed as a complexity of networks. This is similar to a systems view where individuals sit at the intersection of complex human systems, such as family, work, school, and culture. These networks are constantly changing, as is the environment where they are enacted, constructed, negotiated, or deconstructed. Places need to be seen as interdependent with the shifting and contested boundaries of social relations and spaces.

Identity and Place

The relationship between space and place extends this analysis to the relationship between identity and place:

> To be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as

> requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 262).

Human experience is grounded in place. Place is lived, sensed, and experienced. Place is also constructed, (re)produced and shaped. Place is thus an important aspect of identity construction in relation to both self and community (Stevenson, 2008). The common expression "a sense of place" can refer to an individual's emotional connection with place. It can also refer to the meaning and feelings infused within a place through social relationships.

Rose (1995) suggests three possible ways in which emotions about place connect with identity: Identifying with a place; identifying against a place; and not identifying with place. To identify *with* a place, is to imply strong feelings associated with that place. This might mean a sense of belonging. To identify with a place indicates that this place is (or has been) lived, sensed, and experienced, as an embodied phenomenon. This helps explain our emotional and sensual connections to a particular community or landscape (Banerjee, 2006; Gruenewald, 2003b; Hutchison, 2004; Schroder, 2006; Sobel, 1993). These emotional connections influence particular senses of belonging which can also include missing a place, or feeling homesick. Furthermore, identifying with a place might occur on different intersecting geographic scales, for example, the local (community or family), the regional (landscape), the national (nationalist identity), and the global (global citizens).

To identify with a place also means being involved in the construction of that place (Banerjee, 2006; S. Cohen, 2002; Gruenewald, 2003b). Place is created, (re)produced and shaped by culture and the politics of identity. Gruenewald (2003b) suggests the foundations of place to include perceptual, sociological, ideological, political and ecological dimensions. People are place-makers, and places are cultural artifacts (Gruenewald, 2003b). Places are encultured by their inhabitants and become sources of shared history (Banerjee, 2006). Spatial relationships and language in a place shape culture, identity and social

relationships, which in turn influence the continuous shaping of that place. Space also has a hegemonic function which may be manipulated for means of power, control and domination (Gruenewald, 2003b). Spatial control is widely accepted as constitutional in the construction of gender (Massey, 1994). As such, space is not a neutral container to be exploited or inhabited, space is brought into being according to how it is used, surveyed, and invested with symbolic significance (S. Cohen, 2002).

However, as Sara Cohen (2002) writes, the senses and richness of sensuality play important roles in the subjective production of place. It is more complicated than this, sensuality not only produces space but space produces emotion which in turn reproduces the space. Therefore it is a complex and recursive relationship. Place is an emotional interaction where identities can be unsettled and rebuilt (Thomson, 2006). It is felt that these emotional, sensual or experiential aspects of place is often neglected in environmental education (Clover & Hill, 2003; Gillian Rose, 1995). In sum, places can have political, cultural, economic, historic, *and* emotional meanings.

The second way that identity and place might connect, identifying *against* a place, means to identify with a certain place according to what that place is not. This is essentially the emotional process of 'othering' in order to construct a sense of belonging. Othering is an expression of inclusion, exclusion, and construction of boundaries. Included in this might be issues of marginality, exile, refugees, and forced migration. Thus, strong feelings against a place might include a sense of alienation, or confused feelings of belonging.

The final way that identity might relate to place, *not* identifying with a place, implies that a sense of place may be irrelevant to how people identify themselves. This idea is not well established in the environmental literature. In fact, efforts to re-conceptualize place (Massey, 1995; McKenzie, 2008; Stevenson, 2008) work to reinforce that identity and place are indeed connected. This may indicate an underlying bias in place literature that identity is, in some way, *always* connected to place.

To summarize, conceptualizations of place need to be complexified in order to address globalization in a changing world. Place can no longer be viewed simply as a local geographic location. Spatiality plays an important role and helps bring this analysis forward. Aspects of place also include the sensual, the social and the political. The lived and the produced are not necessarily separate but intertwined (S. Cohen, 2002; Gillian Rose, 1995). The same location may be interpreted quite differently through varying senses of place and identity, making our sense of place very personal. Exploring people's personal connections with place is the basis for place-based education.

Place in Education

Place-based education is not a new or isolated approach – it can be connected to "experiential learning, contextual learning, problem-based learning, constructivism, outdoor education, indigenous education, environmental and ecological education, bioregional education, democratic education, multicultural education, community-based education, critical pedagogy itself, as well as other approaches that are concerned with context and the value of learning from and nurturing specific places, communities, or regions" (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 3). By starting with place, it is to suggest that the local community and environment can act as an interpretive framework to understanding how the meanings of place, memory, and history are connected. At the intersection of identity, community, culture, and the environment, place provides a situated understanding of social and environmental issues.

There is a multitude of academic work on place in education. In light of the volume of place-based theory, I focus on a recent highly impassioned debate between David Gruenewald and Chet Bowers around the compatibility of critical pedagogy and ecological education. I explore this debate because it is the most recent work in the field of environmental education around issues of justice. The debate heralds an intriguing collection of essays that analyze, contest, and muddle through this theoretical merging of two significant disciplines. I also focus on this debate because I am keen to explore some of the methodologies suggested for the implementation of a critical pedagogy of place.

In *The Best of Both Worlds*, Gruenewald (2003a) proposes a critical pedagogy of place by merging critical pedagogy with place-based education. While critical pedagogy brings attention to social justice issues, place-based education is grounded in the experience of the local. By melding the two thoughts, Gruenewald suggests decolonization and reinhabitation as objectives for this integrated pedagogy. This joining will in turn challenge dominant knowledges and promote a re-connection with place that will positively direct environmental education. On the other hand, eco-justice pedagogue Bowers (2008), strongly disagrees that critical pedagogy is compatible with ecological thought. In fact, he claims a critical pedagogy of place to be an oxymoron! He questions critical pedagogy's aim of transformative change through critical reflection as universally acceptable, desirable or progressive. He argues reinhabitation to be biased against traditional cultures that already inhabit places, and proposes instead 'thick description' of local intergenerational knowledge in order to interrogate what needs to be conserved and what could be changed.

In order to move past this ecological gridlock, Gruenewald (2008) encourages a shift of perspective. A more complex understanding of place can include popular culture and out-of-school non-traditional learning sites (Stevenson, 2008), as well as virtual places and inter-subjective spaces between the thought and the sensed (McKenzie, 2008). Expanding notions of place creates a more inclusive approach to environmental education. This is effective and appropriate in engaging marginalized groups, for example, for collective youth engagement (Stevenson, 2008). Indeed, place-based education could be seen to radically challenge traditional cultures of schooling (Knapp, 2008). However, place-based education is not without its limitations.

A holistic approach to place-based education attempts to connect or reconnect identity with place. This is in opposition to dominant, linear, rational, scientific knowledges. It seeks to validate and explore knowledges and experiences, which tend to be under-valued, ignored, or discredited in mainstream education. Despite an attempt to be inclusive, the holistic approach threatens to exclude minority cultures that separate mind from body, and culture from nature.

The political nature of the approach is often overlooked or hidden. A more overt acknowledgment of the approach's political stance would help avoid discrediting certain perspectives just for their similarities with traditionally hegemonic thinking.

When place and space are not deconstructed, educators run the risk of falling back into old notions of place as settled and restrictive. Banerjee (2006) cautions that too much focus on the local may have the effect of negating the other. The local is not a utopia. It is "located within the web of oppression, inequality, and power" (p. 6). The parochial, or provincial has a potential to isolate or exclude place (Aslop et al., 2007). Cameron (2008) challenges the 'old localism' as narrow-minded and inward-looking, entrenched in power struggles. However, focusing on the local does not mean negating the importance of the global. Many issues are not confined by national or regional boundaries. When place is re-conceptualized, local place presents a sound starting point for connecting culture with place. From there, notions of global, regions, and boundaries can still be pondered.

Finally, a bulk of the literature on place-based education is limited to school contexts in North America (Bartsch, 2008; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Gruenewald, 2003b; Hutchison, 2004; Knapp, 2008; Sorenson, 2008; Tompkins, 2008), Australia (Cameron, 2008; Dubel & Sobel, 2008), and Israel (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2008). This focus on schools is reflective of a larger trend in educational research, which equates education issues with schooling issues (Gruenewald, 2008). While there has been recent interest in alternative sites of learning, the opportunity for schools to contribute to community and economic development projects is largely overlooked (Tompkins, 2008). What is more, research using place-based frameworks in the global south is limited to teacher education projects in Malawi (Glasson et al., 2006) and Peru (Aslop et al., 2007). There is a paucity of studies on the learning that happens outside of schools and the potential for place-based education through community development processes. The understandings gleaned from an industrialized perspective may not translate to a development context in the global south. It may be that research about place in

these contexts is named differently. However, exploring place-based education strictly from, for, and with the developing world will further the field of environmental and identity education as a whole.

In this chapter, I have described a holistic approach to environmental education that calls for the reconnection of nature and culture. Systems Theory stresses *relationships* between people, communities, culture and the environment as central to a more complexified and inclusive understanding of social and eco-systems. Justice-oriented traditions such as eco-feminism and environmental justice are compatible with a systems view, and add to it an analysis of power. These traditions challenge seeing the world through binaries that reinforce inequitable hierarchies and enable oppression. Education can confront these hierarchies by seeking and validating experiential, spiritual, emotional, and indigenous knowledges. I propose place-based education as a starting point for accessing these alternative knowledges. New concepts of place in this global age actively integrate social, physical and virtual spaces. Place plays a significant role in how identity is enacted, constructed, negotiated, and deconstructed. Place-based education strives to explore these emotional connections to place.

I also describe recent philosophical efforts to merge place-based education with critical pedagogy. However, this merging is not without debate. It is questionable whether the individualistic and transformative goals of critical pedagogy are compatible with indigenous and collective ways of being. Thick description is put forward as a counter-strategy to explore how people who already inhabit place experience and construct that place. What is more, research informing place-based education appears limited to the context of the global north. Applying these methods – using thick description to explore the lived connections between identity and place - in the global south offers a unique and exciting opportunity to expand, refine and inform the interdisciplinary field of place-based education.

Chapter 2. Environmental Education and Youth in Sierra Leone

In this chapter, I contextualize environmental education and youth in Sierra Leone. As environmental education (place-based, holistic, and otherwise) is not well explored in Sierra Leone, the research below presents what has been written about education, about resources and culture, and – in light of the recent civil war - about youth and violence in the country. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of terms such as environment, culture, identity and place, a comprehensive review of all the relevant literature is a difficult task. Almost *all* literature could fall under these terms. To begin, I locate some of the daily challenges of living in Sierra Leone today. I then explore the roots of Sierra Leone's formal education system and its role as a site for youth identity negotiation. I go on to present texts about the civil war and violence from both an academic and popular culture perspective, drawing particular attention to youth involvement in the war. A review of the current state of education in the country exposes efforts to re-build education, peace, and community. Several detailed analyses address rural resource use and landscape, by interpreting and describing how culture interacts with nature. Finally, I explicitly explore Sierra Leonean youth standpoints on their current situation.

A small developing country of 5 million people in West Africa, Sierra Leone has recently emerged from a brutal 11 year civil war. Before the war, Sierra Leone ranked amongst the five poorest countries in the world (United Nations Development Programme, 1990). Now, it is considered *the* poorest country in the world based on the United Nations Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2007)[3]. Life expectancy is barely over 40 years old. Adult literacy averages at 39%. Three quarters of the population live on US$1 per

[3] The Human Development Index (HDI) is a statistical quality of life indicator published by the United Nations Development Programme. Countries around the world are ranked according to their level of development on an annual basis. The index attempts to look beyond the Gross Domestic Product as a measure of development, to include a broader definition of well-being that accounts for factors such income, education, gender and health (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). As with statistics in general, the HDI is not without limitations. However, it does provide a useful tool to comparatively illustrate the disparity between countries around the world.

day. This is compared to Canada, where the average daily wage is over US$100 per day. Only 32% of rural people have access to an improved water source. The infant and maternal mortality rates are the *highest* in the world: One in four children dies before their 5th birthday, and one in eight women dies during childbirth (United Nations Children's Fund, 2007). Of the children that survive, only 40% of primary-aged children attend school and 50% are involved in child labor activities (United Nations Children's Fund, 2007). In other words, although the war is over, life in Sierra Leone is still not easy. And youth are amongst the country's most vulnerable people.

Printed Text

In my review of the literature about environmental education and youth in Sierra Leone, a representational bias became clear to me regarding what views and whose perspectives are represented in printed text. Sierra Leone is traditionally an oral culture. Today, adult literacy averages at 49% among men and is even lower among women at 29% (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2006). The *lingua franca*, Krio, as well as the 20 other ethnic languages used throughout the country (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009) are not commonly written languages. While there are recent efforts to write the Krio, Temne and Mende languages into books and educational curriculum (Koroma, 1999; Lukan & Taki, 1996; Pias & Pias, 1996), most school curriculum is based in English. In order for people to learn how to read and write, they must first learn how to speak English. The dominance of English as a written language marks Sierra Leone's British colonial history. While most of what has been written about Sierra Leone is in English, only a minority of the population speaks English fluently. An even smaller minority reads English. When combined with a post-conflict lack of access to formal education and a scarce supply of printed text in general (The World Bank, 2007), it is very rare that literature is written from a Sierra Leonean perspective. As a result, the majority of the books and articles in this review are not from a Sierra Leonean point of view. Without negating the English language literature produced, it is important to acknowledge that a Sierra Leonean voice is largely absent. And given the language barriers and low literacy rates, Sierra Leoneans

are for the most part unable to critique what is written about them. In an attempt to address this inequality and include a Sierra Leonean voice, I have incorporated into my literature review an analysis of local music and fiction produced by Sierra Leoneans, as well as films and visual texts more accessible to a Sierra Leonean audience.

Education: Yesterday and Today

Sierra Leone's formal education system is closely intertwined within its cultural, political, social and economic history. Films presenting a broader historic perspective of Sierra Leone's relationship with slavery include the documentary film, *The Lion Mountains: A journey through Sierra Leone* (Buckley, 2007), and Spielberg's feature film, *Amistad* (1999). These popular texts expose and explore Sierra Leone's political legacy of violence. Literature about the foundations of education in the country exposes the systematic Western influence associated with Sierra Leone's position as a port on the transatlantic slave trade, as the 'province of freedom' with the abolition of slavery, and as a target of British missionary efforts and colonial rule (Alibrandi & Bull, 2005; Banya, 1993; Paracka, 2003). The formal education system is a result of British philanthropists, missionary, and abolitionists movements. In fact, Fourah Bay College (FBC) is considered West Africa's first institution of higher learning, and influenced Freetown being once known internationally as the 'Athens of West Africa' (Paracka, 2003). An institution that drew academics and students from all over the region, FBC was once a great source of pride for the urban Freetown elite.

However, with a curriculum literally based on Greek and Latin texts, FBC was also considered a colonial institution spreading Western ideology and Christian principles. In the decades prior to the war, the Western education system became a place of urban resistance. Students constantly negotiated Western curriculum and their traditional African values systems (Hinton, 2002; Paracka, 2003). These values systems are the basis for informal systems of learning, or

traditional Sierra Leonean secret societies[4] (Wyse, 1989). Formal education in Sierra Leone has not developed in isolation from, but infused by its political history steeped in Western influence. Formal *and* informal educational institutions continue to provide space for youth to construct, enact, negotiate, and deconstruct their identities.

Two recent studies reveal how Sierra Leone's current system of formal education faces many challenges. The existing 6-3-3-4 formal education system was implemented in the early 1990s, during the war. This system involves six years of primary, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary, and four years of tertiary education. A study conducted by Banya and Elu (1997) presented some of the challenges implementing this 6-3-3-4 system of education during the war. These challenges included funding, training and retention of teachers, curriculum reform, language development, equipment and supplies, and evaluation. Although the war is now over, these issues closely reflect the current educational challenges a decade later. The World Bank's (2007) report, *Education in Sierra Leone*, presents an in-depth statistical analysis. This report addresses indicators such as poverty and well-being, literacy, youth unemployment, government structure, historical context of education, enrollment, completion and transition, learning environments and outcomes, government expenditure and financing, statistical disparities encountered, government and education management within the post-war context and finally policy recommendations. These two reports essentially present systemic challenges to national formal schooling from administrative perspectives. When faced with these enormous structural challenges, environmental education – often viewed as an 'add-on' to curriculum - takes a back seat in education discussions.

On a more local level, studies that integrate learning in a community context highlight economic and structural challenges associated with managing programs in Sierra Leone, as well as the need for a holistic approach to

[4] Many children in Sierra Leone are initiated into societies around puberty, through secret ceremonies in the forest. This initiation acts as a sort of "rite of passage" into adulthood. While I do not intend to explore what is meant to remain secret, secret societies remain a central organizing feature of Sierra Leonean sociality (Ferme, 2001; Richards, 1996).

reconstruction that includes creative self-expression for healing towards inner and outer peace. These include a participatory school-based peace-building initiative (Bretherton, Weston, & Zbar, 2005), rural community development projects (Kamara & Kargbo, 1999), and adult education initiatives (McCaffery, 2005; Skelt, 2003). These case studies present possible solutions to the current challenges in education. Regarding environmental education specifically, several educational films and television documentaries have been produced to promote environmental stewardship in the country (The Environmental Foundation for Africa, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008b). These materials address environmental issues such as collaboration, forest and wildlife conservation, and water shortages. While the distribution of these materials is limited, these materials present an important starting point for environmental education in Sierra Leone.

That War: Diamonds, Child Soldiers and Violence

Sierra Leone's recent and brutal 11-year civil war instigated an explosion of literature, film, and music about the tiny coastal country. While unnoticed from a global perspective for years, the civil war has drawn the world's eye to Sierra Leone once again. Indeed, despite its dynamic history, 'that war' could be said to have put Sierra Leone back on the map. While at times a scapegoat for contested theories of "the coming anarchy" of human civilization (Kaplan, 1994; Richards, 1996), the war time violence is undeniably grim and difficult to grasp. Journalistic-style books and documentary films investigate the gruesome details of war, illicit diamonds, rape, forced amputations, and child soldiers. These include: *How de Body?* (Tuen, 2002), *In the Land of Magic Soldiers* (Bergner, 2003), *Cry Freetown* (Samura, 2005), and *Women See Lot of Things* (Asher, 2006). A majority of academic literature about the war searches for explanations or understanding of its distinctive features epitomized by conflict diamonds and child soldiers.

The riverbeds of Sierra Leone contain diamonds worth an estimated US$400 million annually (Gberie, 2006). These diamonds, a legitimate form of income for Sierra Leone, are mined easily with a shovel and sieve. During the war, diamonds were smuggled from alluvial mines in the Sierra Leonean jungle in

exchange for guns and drugs. This illicit trade fueled 'that war.' As such, many attempts have been made to expose and problematize this lucrative, complex, violent, and highly secretive international diamond trade (Campbell, 2002; Cooper, 2002; Gberie, 2006; Hirsch, 2001; Smillie, 2000; Tidwell & Lerche, 2004). The popular Hollywood feature film *Blood Diamond* (Zwick, 2007) stories the role of mercenaries and multinational corporations involved in the international diamond trade, in the context of the Sierra Leone war. While diamonds – an international symbol of love and luxury – present an alluring hook that draws attention to Sierra Leone, the strength of the people, the rich inter-cultural dynamic, abundance of resources, the natural beauty of the land and the country's potential futures are often left out of these accounts.

The war was fought in large part by child soldiers who were forced into conflict by rebel groups. Children who have engaged in warfare are easily targeted as deviant criminals or passive victims of adult violence. Much literature attempts to counter this tendency by understanding and reconciling this phenomenon of child soldiers. Richards (2005) rejects the urban gang warfare model to understanding child soldier violence, and highlights the rural agrarian origins of the war. He attributes the success of youth recruitment into conflict in Sierra Leone to its parallels with the process of initiation into secret societies (1996). In his widely cited war-time analysis exploring the connections between youth, war and resources, *Fighting for the Rainforest* (1996), Richards argues for an urgent recognition of youth interaction with landscape, in particular forest culture. He calls for a re-assessment of youth political agency during conflict which has previously been mislabeled as youth deviance. In his best-selling autobiography, *A Long Way Gone* (2007), Sierra Leonean youth, Ishmael Beah, shares his own personal heart-wrenching yet hopeful story of his life as a child soldier during the war. He reminds readers that child soldiers are human, with inner strength and feelings of anger, pride, fear, sadness and regret. Recent interviews with ex-girl soldiers work to counter how girls are largely ignored or labeled as silent victims by mainstream dialogue about child soldiers. This work identifies how girls in Sierra Leone employed remarkable resilience and coping

strategies when faced with the atrocities of war (Denov, 2006; Denov & Gervais, 2007; Denov & Maclure, 2006, 2007). After the war, the country was faced with how to effectively relocate and reintegrate thousands of ex-combatant children who were separated and estranged from their families and communities (Wessells, 2005). The literature about child soldiers works to humanize and contextualize youth in the country.

Culture and Nature

Several longer term analyses of life in rural Sierra Leone present more nuanced and reflective pictures of local relationships between nature and culture. These analyses work to interpret and describe Sierra Leonean culture in terms of its natural resources and traditional practices. In her ethnographic study, *The Underneath of Things,* Mariane Ferme (2001) addresses violence in everyday conflicts by incorporating a socio-cultural and historical dimension to understanding this violence. She uses a feminist anthropological approach to disrupt what has traditionally been written about the region and instead adopts a gendered perspective on the role of objects as the bearers of social meaning in Mende culture. She dissects material practices associated with cloth, the kola nut, and palm oil to expose how the production of secrecy is woven into the landscape and practices of the place. She also deconstructs notions of twinship and 'big people' to expose how power can be ambiguously and unpredictably given and taken away from individuals. Essentially, she connects cultural traditions with material objects, relationships and space. Leach's (1994) work on rainforest conservation and resources use amongst Mende people in Sierra Leone reinforces the importance of recognizing how the environment is used differently by men and by women. She uses gender as a lens for dissecting cultural practices around hunting, fishing, farming and forestry. Gender, she attests, is a crucial concern for people-based conservation initiatives. Conservation agendas need to be debated amongst rural communities and conservation planners. Ferme and Leach explore the very connections between culture and the environment, between identity and place, which could provide a basis for a place-based approach to environmental education. Ferme looks to the distant past to understand how the present came to

be. Leach studies how men and women use forest resources differently. They describe a gendered complexity, specific to Mende communities, which underlies the local culture. However, they do not explicitly address the role of youth in planning for the future.

Paul Richards, on the other hand, has written extensively about youth in Sierra Leone. While some of his work focuses on child soldiers, as I have already described, his work is not limited to young combatants. Through several decades of research on agricultural rice production before the war (Richards, 1985, 1992), a war-time analysis of youth recruitment to combat during the war (1996), and post-war agrarian justice (Archibald & Richards, 2002b; Richards, 2005, 2007), he presents an overall longitudinal picture of youth in the country. He depicts a conflicted rural youth identity that can be attributed to the crisis of the patrimonial state, and injustices within how subsistence agriculture is practiced at the village level. The forest is not only a site for farming but also a stage for war, where identities and voices fought and performed the drama of state recession. Discontent amongst rural youth *and* women is expressed regarding leadership and agricultural justice. He calls for the reform of rural rights in order for women and youth to live more equitable lives.

These works provide a rich framework for understanding how nature connects with culture in rural Sierra Leone. They interpret and document the historical and environmental scene that makes up rural culture in Sierra Leone. Richards' efforts contextualize youth within this understanding. However, besides interviews with youth during the war (Richards, 1996) and an action research study about seed distribution (Archibald & Richards, 2002b), the works largely rely on an outsider Western perspective through observation, historical document reviews, and qualitative and quantitative household surveys. Very little participatory work has been done which explicitly asks youth how they see it.

A Youth Perspective

The inclusion, consultation, and participation of youth in research projects in developing countries is a burgeoning field. Research framing youth as knowledge-producers has been conducted with great success in South Africa.

Here, youth have contributed to the development of arts-based methodologies, HIV and AIDS education, and community schooling issues (Mitchell, DeLange, Moletsane, Stuart, & Buthelezi, 2005; Mitchell, Stuart, Moletsane, & Nkwanyana, 2006; Norris, Mbokazi, Rorke, Goba, & Mitchell, 2007). Roger Hart (1997) addresses some of the conceptual issues, processes and design of how to authentically engage children specifically in community development and environmental care. In presenting case studies from South America, India, Kenya, Niger, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines – Hart demonstrates the importance, success, and practical feasibility of genuinely including children in sustainable community development.

In Sierra Leone, a recent participatory study conducted by CARE International – Sierra Leone (2008)[5] opens a dialogue by and with youth. The study presents youth perspectives on the challenges they face in Sierra Leone today. In this study, selected youth were trained to conduct conversational interviews within their social networks. Over 500 youth, between the ages of 18 and 35, were asked to look at the causes of their low social status and ways to move forward and improve their situation[6]. Generally, youth attribute their low status in society to having poor parents which in turn limits their access to financial support to further their education or start a business. The youth also discuss their limited access to connections that would enable them to find jobs, lack of education, and the corruption of top-down resource-distribution. Resources destined for youth programs are often diverted to the pockets of 'big men.' Youths make the following recommendations as necessary to improve their situation:

- Establishment of industries, construction companies, and schools owned or supported by the state;
- Construction of roads;
- Provision of free quality education in order to solve the high drop-out rates;
- Establishment of low-cost housing schemes for youths;

[5] Report cited with permission from CARE International – Sierra Leone.
[6] The youth were interviewed to address the three pillars of CARE's unifying framework: Human Conditions, Social Positions, and Enabling Environment.

- Formation of community youth organizations to serve as intermediaries between youths, the government, NGOs and other development agencies to identify and find solutions to youth problems; and
- Establishment of community centers and recreational facilities for youth (p. 7).

The report further explores deeper causes of low youth status: "Negative discourses; anti-youth patriarchal norms, corruption, and inequitable and unjust relationships between youths and authority figures" (p. 7). As suggested by the title of the study, *Youth in Sierra Leone: The Next Explosion?,* the authors of the report predict that ignoring these deeper factors will "very likely" lead to further violence in the country. This study presents youth as a powerful group of people with the desire and will to contribute to the development of their country; however they are feeling extremely frustrated and powerless about their current marginalized status.

Youth popular culture in Sierra Leone reinforces (or fuels?) the findings of this report. The end of the war in 2001 allowed for the re-opening of music studios and the explosion of Sierra Leone hip-hop music. Influenced by American 'gangsta rap' and MTV, the voice of youth, mixing English, Krio and other tribal languages with synthesized beats, calls attention to pressing issues such as poverty, corruption, pollution, resources, nationalism, education, unemployment, AIDS, and sexual health (Baw Waw Society, 2004; Daddy Saj & Sahr Issa Stress, 2003; Kao Denero, 2004; Shufikz Sojaz, 2004; Sugar Daddy & Sahr Issa Stress, 2004). Almost a decade later, youth are still singing about their struggles with poverty, hunger, and unemployment. Today's lyrics lament a youth who *want* to work, who are tired of being hungry, who want food on the table, who struggle for survival, and who are tired of saying 'Yes Sir!' to government ministers … but who want solutions and change[7]. These lyrics are broadcast over battery-powered radios in village compounds, on tightly-packed public transport and at rural

[7] I tried my best to properly reference these lyrics, which were hit songs at the time of writing. However, by nature of the Sierra Leone music industry, most of the songs had not yet been officially released onto albums. The street vendors who sell bootleg compilations could not even tell me the names of the artists singing. Release dates, studio names and locations, and other important referencing information were literally unavailable. So, I use the lyrics valuing how they represent what is oral and un-documented, to share the popular youth voice in the country – with utmost respect to the artists who produced them.

community dances. They are a form of expression that is very accessible to Sierra Leonean youth. The lyrics and beats resonate with the youth's lived everyday experiences. This expression stands alone in a sea of Western writing about the country. Popular music emerging from Sierra Leone contributes to important youth perspectives about the current situation in the country: Youth are frustrated about their low status, and lack of opportunities to better themselves. Despite a recent in-flux of aid programs to support youth, this crisis of 'youth alienation' is potential threat to security in the country (International Crisis Group, 2008).

In her post-war analysis of communitarian ideals around the reintegration of ex-combatants and displaced people, Stovel (2008) stresses that, despite a reluctance to talking about the war, open space for dialogue is an important step in finding culturally appropriate spaces for reconciliation dialogue. Given their involvement both as soldiers and civilians, this would include creating a space specifically for youth to explore their experiences. Considering the challenges faced by the formal education system in Sierra Leone, the arts provide an accessible forum for youth to voice these concerns.

Education is a thread embedded within the political, economic and historical contexts of Sierra Leone. Formal and informal systems of education - schools and secret societies - have been influenced by slavery and its abolition, colonization and Christian missions. Youth are key participants in these education systems, which provide a space for the negotiation of youth identity. Yet their voices are left out of education discourse. As a possible pre-cursor to war, student uprisings in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s voiced Sierra Leonean youths' disenchantment with their current educational system and the country's failing political economy. The war was then fought by thousands of youth. Post-war efforts concentrate on re-building a floundering formal education system and re-integrating child soldiers into school and community life.

There is powerful possibility for increased youth participation and voice in Sierra Leone. It is difficult to find literature in Sierra Leone that includes youth perspective. Ethnographic and anthropological studies dissect the connection between people, forests and farms illuminating the role of gender in the

construction of social and environmental reality. However, most of what is written about youth and culture is not from a youth perspective, nor is it from a Sierra Leonean perspective. A youth perspective on environmental issues is practically non-existent. Research and popular culture suggest that youth have important things to say, and are striving to have their voices heard. Youth are active agents, constructors, resistors, and contributors to the fabric of Sierra Leone. Youth environmental participation in the country presents an unprecedented and promising project. Indeed, such a project responds to an expressed (and potentially explosive) need to include youth voice in the future of Sierra Leone.

Chapter 3: Method

Current environmental education research explicates the need to re-examine how people connect with their environment. Lived and emotional connections with place represent important alternative ways of knowing and being that are often left out of science-based education. Arts-based inquiry is proven effective to access these knowledges. Thick description is suggested as one way to describe and foster these connections. However, questions remain as to *how* to engage in thick description, and what this intellectual effort really means. In this chapter, I describe a research methodology and design for engaging in thick description through the arts.

To explain my methods, I begin by demonstrating how Photo-Voice – a participatory action-based and arts-informed methodology – is an appropriate vehicle to produce thick descriptions of place. I do this by presenting the basic concepts of action research, arts-based inquiry, thick description, and Photo-Voice itself. I also locate myself as a researcher in post-colonial and post-war Sierra Leone. Reflexivity and ghost-writing are useful techniques to account for my bias. I wrap up by demonstrating how Photo-Voice is an effective tool for the production of youth knowledge in the global south.

I then present the study design. A community-based conservation program in rural Sierra Leone is the selected research site. I illustrate how collaboration was central to the project design and execution, and led to the inclusion of elders in the project. The Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary is located as a conservation and ecotourism hot spot in Sierra Leone. I then situate the participant communities around the island in rural Mende culture. Finally, concepts of ecotourism are integrated within a positive approach to working with people to devise the Photo-Voice prompt.

Methodology

Action Research

Action research is a popular methodology for conducting critical environmental education research (Aslop et al., 2007; Chinn, 2007; Colucci-Gray et al., 2006; DiChiro, 2006; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Glasson et al., 2006; Gruenewald, 2003b; Shallcross & Robinson, 2007; Sumner, 2003; Thomson, 2006). Combinations of place-based action research methods have been used for adult education (Clover, 2003; Sumner, 2003) as well as teacher education and professional development (Aslop et al., 2007; Chinn, 2007; Dubel & Sobel, 2008; Glasson et al., 2006; Schroder, 2006; Shallcross & Robinson, 2007; Varga et al., 2007). A participatory process, action research combines theory and practice for social change. It engages participants throughout the research process and fosters any number of vocational and/or inter-personal skills (Hutzel, 2007; Schafft & Greenwood, 2003). Action research confronts dominant discourses and challenges mainstream ways of knowing – it incorporates local knowledge and ownership in identifying and solving problems. Thus, action research effectively disrupts the dominant paradigm that has been problematized within an ecological approach to education. Furthermore, the goal of action research is not only to contribute to scholarly work, but for the research process to directly benefit research participants and/or their communities (Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998).

Arts-based Inquiry

A holistic approach to place-based education calls for exploring emotional connections between identity and place. This means accessing alternative, spiritual, nonlinear, embodied, and emotional ways of knowing (Barrett, 2007; Stevenson, 2008). It is widely accepted that arts-based inquiry can provide this means (Butler-Kisber, 2008; Butler-Kisber & Borgerson, 1997). By working visually, poetically, or through performance, amongst others, new inclusive spaces are created for the exploration and production of knowledge. As demonstrated in the introduction, my own experience using poetry as a method of inquiry facilitated a level of emotional expression that I doubt I could have achieved or produced through an interview, a survey, or traditional academic text.

A growing interest in the arts for environmental research is reflective of the explosion of arts-based inquiry in qualitative research in general. In fact, various forms of poetry, narrative, dance, music, sculpture, and painting are increasingly being explored as inclusive tools to express an embodied connection with place within environmental and place-based literature. In an inner city community project in Cincinnati, an art education program engaged youth in reclaiming and greening a neighborhood playground through the development of murals (Hutzel, 2007). In an art class in New York City, students used drawing, painting and collage to explore the layers of shared history, significance of place, and connection to community (Graham, 2008). In a Nottingham school, arts-based work in school helped disadvantaged youth increase their voice and agency in public spaces (Griffiths, Berry, Holt, Naylor, & Weekes, 2006). In the north-east of England, a mosaic methodology incorporating photography, poetry, film, and map-making was employed to explore children's views on involvement in landscape decisions (Roe, 2007). Poetry and personal narratives are used to compliment the linearity of environmental academic writing (Adamson, Evans, & Stein, 2002; Barrett, 2007). In a Navajo community school in Arizona, drama was used to increase student's emotional learning of the history of a place (Sorenson, 2008). Australian students were asked to physically spend time in a place within 30 minutes of their homes and journaling, drawing, and painting in order to deepen their experiential and conceptual connections with that place (Cameron, 2008). These methods are relatively new to environmental education research, and have not yet been used in the context of international development. However, these past projects and their successes in Europe and North America strongly influenced and inspired me to explore an arts-based approach to my research in Sierra Leone.

Photo-Voice

Photo-Voice is an action-oriented visual methodology whereby people take pictures that represent their own lives. Community issues and assets are identified by research participants themselves, through the analysis, interpretation, and display of their photos. This process can then inform community planning and

policy development (Wang, 1999). Photo-Voice is exploding as a research methodology to engage the perspectives of marginalized people, and has proven highly effective in a developing context. To name a few of these studies, Photo-Voice has been used with rural women in China (Wang, 1999; Wang et al., 1998) and Guatemala (Lykes, 2001), and village radio-listeners in one of India's poorest states (Singhal, Harter, Chitnis, & Sharma, 2007). It is also a popular methodology working to address taboo subjects such as HIV, AIDS and schooling issues with youth in South Africa (Mitchell et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2006; Moletsane et al., 2007). With the exception of Roe's (2007) study engaging children's views in landscape decision-making in England, Photo-Voice does not, however, appear to be a widely used methodology in the field of environmental education research.

While a vast and quickly growing field, emerging insight in the use of photographs in research includes: The technical and aesthetic aspects of learning photography (Mitchell et al., 2005; G. Rose, 2001); interpretive techniques of working with photographs (Mitchell & Allnutt, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2005; Prosser & Burke, 2008; G. Rose, 2001); ethical concerns about the informed consent process and ownership of the photographs (Harper, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2005; Pink, 2001); how to best archive and display forms of visual documentation (Mitchell et al., 2005); issues of participation (Mitchell et al., 2006; Wang et al., 1998); visual methods for identity work (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006) and the healing aspects of taking photographs and telling of stories in a post-war context (Lykes, 2001). Photo-Voice has the potential for creating a democratic space and may be used as an intervention to blend research with education and taking action (Mitchell et al., 2005).

Thick Description

An additional methodological recommendation for addressing a critical pedagogy of place are Geertz's 'thick descriptions' (Bowers, 2008; Greenwood, formerly Gruenewald, 2008; Stevenson, 2008). Geertz (2000c) defines 'thick description' as an intellectual effort in describing the meaningful structures within a culture, such as the subtle nuanced differences between an involuntary wink and

a conspiratory wink. Thick description is particular, complex in its specificity, and circumstantial. A highly interpretive process, thick description indulges in the "delicacies of distinction" and attempts to expose the layers of meaning within culture.

Although not yet employed by those engaged in critical pedagogy of place, I have several reservations about thick description as a method. Geertz (2000c) focuses on the role of the ethnographer in reading and inscribing 'other' cultures. How might a number of action research participants change the process and outcomes? Geertz (2000a; 2000b) maintains a binary view of culture as separate from nature. Does thick description rely on 'self' describing something that is 'other'? Stevenson (2008) questions the intellectual nature of 'thick description,' and asks for further clarification on the development of a theoretical framework for the process. He also questions the compatibility between thick description and the instability of intergenerational knowledge.

Thick description produced through Photo-Voice activities is promising for participatory explorations of the connection between identity and place. Stevenson (2008) maintains that the method can be seen as an important pedagogical tool for engaging with the history of a place. McKenzie (2008) agrees that the method has the potential to integrate conceptual and embodied experiences. That is to say, when shaped by photographic means, thick description has the potential to bridge the gap between the thought, the sensed *and* the visual, offering rich insight into the lived experience of the participant.

In order to acknowledge the problematized lack of accountability for researcher bias, I employ the use of *ghostwriting* in the writing of thick description texts (Rhodes, 2000). When used implicitly, the ghostwriting technique has been criticized for its lack of accountability for authorship (Langdon-Neuner, 2008). However, when used explicitly in the writing of research, the ghostwriting metaphor positions the researcher in the production of textual representations of the research participants and incorporates researcher reflexivity. While Rhodes (2000) specifically uses ghostwriting in the context of

interview texts – I explore the technique to produce thick descriptions that represent the participants' narrative texts attached to the photographs.

Researcher Reflexivity

I question my role as a White woman in post-colonial Sierra Leone. How much do I contribute to the culture of colonial (research and international development) mentality? Do I 'other' research participants? How is my gender as a woman perceived and received? What are the short- and long-term impacts of my actions and words? Do the research participants resent me speaking on their behalf? What are the participants' expectations of and from me? Do I collude with "structures of domination when [my] white, middle-class translation of [my] respondents' words is given more authority than their own narratives?" (Maguire, 2005, Section 6.0). While I do not have answers to my questions, I hope that they guide my process of critical reflection (regarding but not limited to culture, power, representation, and reciprocity) to better inform my work. I hope that I am "willing to work collaboratively for change rather than as independent agents" (Eder & Fingerson, 2002, p. 187).

Throughout my time in Sierra Leone, I use Memoing as a methodological tool to maintain a reflexive perspective on my role, position, and bias in the research. I work to integrate salient segments of my personal reflections through this text to locate myself as a young White woman both researching in and personally experiencing (for a second time) post-war and post-colonial Sierra Leone. Through this reflexivity, I hope to explicate my biases, and the lens through which I make decisions, interpret events, and evaluate interactions.

Study Design

In this section, I establish how the research study design emerged through collaboration with a Sierra Leonean environmental organization. I describe the selected research site - a community conservation and ecotourism initiative in rural Sierra Leone. I locate and contextualize the research communities around the Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary, and describe the process of how elders came to

be included in the study. Finally, I present my rationale for the Photo-Voice prompt which investigates the conservation of place.

In Collaboration

The research study was designed in collaboration with the Environmental Foundation for Africa (EFA), a local non-governmental organization that has been doing environmental work in Sierra Leone since 1992 (The Environmental Foundation for Africa, 2008a). EFA uses a variety of innovative approaches to environmental education and awareness-raising, such as urban murals, youth clubs, and developing national and regional networks for environmental dialogue and learning. On a previous project in Sierra Leone, I co-constructed environmental education programs with EFA. Based on a positive working relationship, we had kept in touch with mutual hopes of further collaboration. I approached EFA in the initial stages of the Photo-Voice design, in order to best integrate the research within EFA's programming and philosophy.

Research can act as an intervention for social change (Denzin, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2005). Based on the connections between society and the environment, I suggest that research also offers the opportunity to act as an intervention for environmental change. As such, I designed the research project critically to not only meet my own theoretical and academic objectives, but in a way that could work alongside EFA's existing initiatives. I planned the study over a 6-month period. This involved several conceptual email and Skype conversations with the executive director; plenary sessions at EFA's headquarter office in Freetown; feedback from leading local environmentalists with experience in participatory approaches to environmental education; and meetings with EFA field staff that has over 25 years of experience doing community work in rural Sierra Leone. This planning was based on the idea that sound collaborative project design incorporates local knowledge and experience, and increases local ownership in the process. It also increases the likelihood that results will actually be integrated within planning and decision-making to incite sustainable change where it is most needed.

In addition to the collaborative design of the project, it is equally important to recognize the reciprocal nature of the relationship. In the short time-frame of a Master's level study, collaboration with EFA was essential to the success of the research project. Through my collaboration with EFA, I was able to gain access to the research site through local channels, efficiently and quickly. EFA staff provided invaluable support helping me navigate sensitive community dynamics; organizing food, accommodation, and transportation logistics; and accessing translators. Furthermore, the Photo-Voice project gained credibility being attached to an established organization with a long-term relationship with the research site. While the relationship between EFA and some of the communities is delicate (to be discussed further), it is doubtful that a short-term research project by a foreign researcher independent of any local recognized structure, in the context of rural Sierra Leone would have been possible at all. EFA's proficient experience in the field made the research possible.

Including Elders

Based on my past experiences working with youth in the country, and the current situation of youth in Sierra Leone that I described in Chapter 2, I originally intended to design a project aimed specifically at engaging youth in environmental issues and community development through Photo-Voice. However, after collaborative consultation with EFA staff and associated researchers, it was decided that in the rural community context - elders should also be invited to participate in the project. It was felt that elder participation would support project legitimacy, whereas not including the elders might be insulting and result in ostracizing the participating youth. When deciding which photographs to take, it was presumed that the youth might consult with their elders. Therefore elder participation might as well be built into the research plan. Also, the project addressed significant community issues, and was worthy of support wider than a conversation amongst youth alone.

At first, I was resistant to the idea of including the elders. I felt frustrated that some of the feedback I was getting implied that youth could not handle such a big important job on their own. I attributed my frustrations to the top-down

structure of society (CARE International, 2008) which tends of exclude the voices of women and youth from decision-making forums (Archibald & Richards, 2002b; Richards, 2007). However, by questioning my resistance, I realize my personal bias in wanting to hear only from youth. When I reflect on my experiences working with youth in schools in Canada – my role incorporated youth advocacy and listening to youth where they are. Listening to youth is second-nature to how I operate, but even in Canada this was challenging. Not all the school staff would agree that we needed to listen to youth, in particular the ones with disruptive behavior that I was working with. Through my reflection, I realized that hierarchical knowledge and not trusting the voice of youth is not only an element of being in Sierra Leone, but of my own country as well. My bias is ingrained within my experience and mode of operation – I tend to forget sometimes that not everybody wants, or is ready, to hear from youth. This helped me accept the idea of including the elders. It is actually 'including youth' (and women) that makes this project effective at challenging dominant knowledge.

This initial reluctance to design a project with community youth alone might indeed reflect the documented low status of youth in Sierra Leone (CARE International, 2008). However, I felt that following local guidance to include elders in the project design was essential to foster local ownership and incorporate local perspectives and community structures, as well as to the success and credibility of the research. This is in line with other research that purports an intergenerational dialogue about the places people inhabit is central to place-based education (Bowers, 2008; Stevenson, 2008). Furthermore, while it is customary for youth to listen to their elders, including the elders was a way to ensure that the youth had the attention of the elders too. Inviting both youth and elders (men and women) from each community to participate in the study allowed the research to not only engage youth in community and environmental issues, but also initiates essential and enriching dialogues across both gender and generations, about place.

The Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary Program

The selected program is Sierra Leone's first and only community conservation program, the Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary. The sanctuary was

established as Sierra Leone's first legally protected area by the government in 1987 (Oates, 1999). At 12 square kilometers, Tiwai Island (meaning Big Island in the local Mende language) is one of Sierra Leone's largest inland islands. It is located on the muddy Moa River in the south of the country. Bordering on the Gola Forest Reserves, and close to the border with Liberia, Tiwai Island is an exceptional eco-system constituting some of the last significant patches of rainforest in Sierra Leone. The island is home to 700 plant species; 135 bird species, including 8 different types of hornbills and the white-breasted Guinea fowl; 11 species of primates including the black and white, red, and olive Colobus monkeys as well as the Diana monkey – making it the second highest and most diverse concentration of primates in the world; and the rare pygmy hippopotamus which is only found in 4 countries in the world (The Environmental Foundation for Africa, 2008a). With this rich and unique biodiversity, Tiwai Island is gaining a reputation as an attractive location for local and international researchers and tourists. A number of research studies have been published about the wildlife on the island and its ecotourism potential (The Environmental Foundation for Africa, 2008a). While research and ecotourism activities were suspended during the country's decade-long civil war, EFA has been working hard to re-build the research station and visitor's center infrastructure and services. Nine years after the war, Sierra Leone's tourism industry is picking up again and Tiwai is steadily receiving more researchers and visitors every year (The Environmental Foundation for Africa, 2008a).

The Tiwai Island project is based on the founding principle of community-based conservation. According to Berkes (2004), community-based conservation integrates three conceptual shifts in development thinking: Toward a systems view, toward the inclusion of humans in the ecosystem, and toward participatory approaches to ecosystem management. This means conservation by, for and with the local community (Fisher, Maginnis, Jackson, Barrow, & Jeanrenaud, 2005). The Tiwai project is run by the Tiwai Island Administrative Committee (TIAC) - a partnership representing environmental NGOs, local government, universities, as well as land-owners, chiefs and elders from the 8 communities surrounding the

island. EFA plays a management role on the island, and reports to TIAC regularly – at annual meetings, as well as on an 'as-needed' basis. The program is an integrated approach to nature conservation that includes local stakeholders in management decisions *and* contributes to the development and well-being of the communities around the island. This philosophy is consistent with my epistemological stance towards a systems perspective, and the reconnection of nature and culture. It is also compatible with a participatory methodology.

We decided to conduct the Photo-Voice in the communities around the island. While ecotourism is a growing industry in post-war Sierra Leone, it is a slow process. The Tiwai program is not yet self-supported through visitor fees. Thus EFA is focusing a large amount of energy, resources and funding to (re)establish, maintain and develop the initiative. Furthermore, the communities have high expectations regarding benefits for development - there is a sensitive relationship between the communities and the Tiwai program in general. We felt that the Photo-Voice provided a positive opportunity to engage community members in the program in a constructive way. While including all 8 communities extended beyond the scope of this project, we felt that we could not conduct a project in one community, without including them all. As such, the Photo-Voice took on a slightly larger dimension than was planned. However my desire to make the research beneficial for EFA programs meant that this was the most appropriate course of action. Once a loose framework was designed for the Photo-Voice project, I presented the study at the annual TIAC meeting for approval, which conveniently took place on Tiwai Island during my second week in Sierra Leone.

Locating the Communities

There are 8 rural communities participating in Tiwai's community conservation program. Three of the more remote communities are located on the south-eastern side of the island in the Koya Chiefdom of the Kenema District. These communities include Segbema, Mapuma and Ngiema. The 5 communities along the north-western side of the island in the Barrie Chiefdom of the Pujehun District are Kambama, Jene, Sahun, Niahun, and Boma. The communities, located

in Figure 1[8], survive mostly on subsistence agriculture, which is supplemented by seasonal diamond-mining activities around the Moa River.

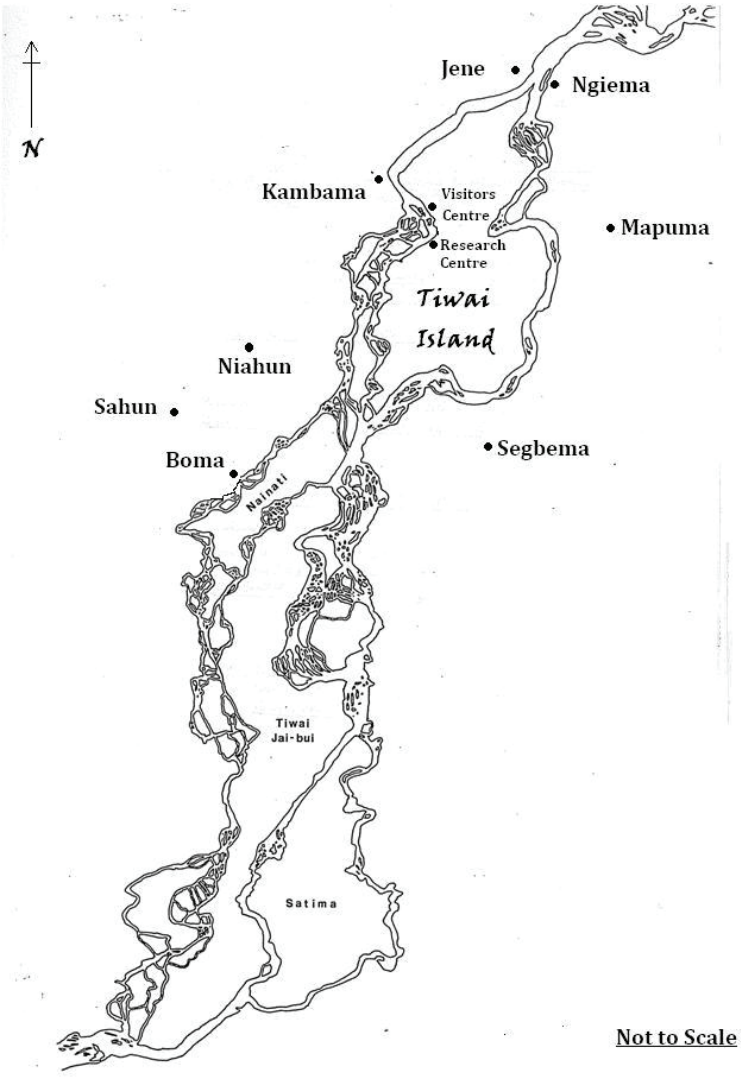

Figure 1: Map of Tiwai Island and surrounding communities

In the Southern Province of Sierra Leone, Tiwai Island is located in a predominantly Mende-speaking area. While I do not want to 'describe' a culture that is not my own, I feel it is important to locate some of the central characteristics of Mende history and sociality. Accounting for approximately 30%

[8] According to EFA, it is very difficult to find detailed maps of rural Sierra Leone that locate the Tiwai communities because most are not situated along the road network. This map was compiled by EFA in 2009 to orient visitors to the island. The location of the communities on this map is approximate.

of the population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009), the Mende tribe is traditionally a hunter/warrior culture. During colonial times the British Protectorate in Freetown met fierce resistance from Mende warriors in the southern part of the country (Ferme, 2001). More recently, Mende hunters - the Kamajors - gained recognition throughout Sierra Leone as the fearless bullet-proof warriors who used their hunting skills and black magic as warfare to navigate dense rainforest and make themselves invisible or shape-shift into various animals or personalities to deceive enemies (Ferme, 2001). Mende culture is also traditionally associated with the keeping of domestic slaves (Ferme, 2001; Richards, 1996). Slave labor was entwined with the dynamics of polygamous marriage arrangements, foreign hunters looking for land to culture, and captured warriors; it was a central organizing feature of Mende society. It is estimated that up until 200 years ago, approximately 50% of the people in Mendeland were considered slaves. In the more remote areas of the Pujehun District (such as along the north-western shores of Tiwai), up to 50% of the people were slaves through to the 1920s, until domestic slavery was outlawed in Sierra Leone in 1928 (Richards, 1996). Tiwai Island itself was historically a slave settlement, where slaves were made to farm the land. The large groves of bamboo on the island are said to be physical reminders of these settlements – long abandoned and overgrown dwellings inscribed into the landscape as visible reminders of the past (Ferme, 2001). Polygamous marriage, close relationships with the forest, and the patron/dependent labor relationships are still central organizing features of village life in rural Sierra Leone.

The relationship between the communities and EFA is highly political. EFA's management role in the project places the organization in the difficult position of coordinating amongst various community leaders and personalities and managing the project finances. In the context of abject poverty, it is difficult to meet the needs and wants of everyone in every community. Even before the war, the process of working with 8 communities was not without challenges (Oates, 1999). With its rich fertile soil and alluvial diamonds, its location on the Moa River along the boundary of two districts, and its complicated local history,

ownership of the island is a sensitive issue. Oates (1999) emphasizes the need to plan for vulnerability and political instability within conservation initiatives, such as the Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary.

Photo-Voice Prompt

Ecotourism is a burgeoning field based on contested and malleable concepts that is experiencing differences in practice and theory (Ross & Wall, 1999). According to the widely cited definitions of the World Conservation Union and The International Ecotourism Society, ecotourism includes initiatives towards both *conservation* and *local development* (Meletis & Campbell, 2007; Ross & Wall, 1999). Meletis and Campbell (2007) call for a re-conceptualization of ecotourism in order to challenge its 'non-consumptive' label, to better achieve its goals of conserving nature and culture.

I do not intend to define or evaluate ecotourism in theory or in practice. For the purpose of this study, I adopt the understanding that ecotourism does not only purport to conserve nature, invite tourists to visit a place in an ecologically sound manner and contribute to local socio-economic development. Ecotourism also works to conserve culture. But what is it that local people *want* to conserve? This idea of cultural conservation is also consistent with the suggestion within the debate I presented in Chapter 1 around how to merge social and ecological issues (Bowers, 2008; Greenwood, 2008): To engage in 'thick description' of local knowledge in order to interrogate what communities want to conserve. Photo-Voice provides the opportunity to engage communities in a critical dialogue about conservation of place.

According to Wang (1999), Photo-Voice is an effective tool for conducting community needs assessments, asset-mapping, and evaluation. In the construction of the prompt, it was important to me to undertake an asset-based approach, which allows people to focus on positive aspects of their lives. This decision was influenced by the principles of Appreciative Inquiry as well as my personal experiences working with troubled youth in Canada. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a tool that integrates action research, organizational learning and organizational change (Calabrese, Hummel, & Martin, 2007). It is a world-view

that shifts from a problem-based paradigm to a focus on positive experiences. AI is a constructive form of inquiry, where asking provocative questions creates the momentum for change. A researcher may thus facilitate a renewed consideration of potential avenues or outcomes for change. AI is also congruous with a systems perspective – it recognizes that individuals play a role and interact in the future of the whole (Neville, 2008).

Through my work with youth in Canada, I experienced the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. I learned that it is sometimes easy to focus on the problems – what is not working, what we do not have, what we need. This sole focus on the negative can, at times (in particular in times of crisis), produce a downward spiral. An important part of moving forward, and of learning is a shift of perspective – what is working, what we have, what we can build on. In one of the poorest countries in the world with well-documented problems and need, I therefore resisted a problem-based approach of asking what people wanted to change, or what people need. While problem-identification is an essential and healthy process for communities, due to the limited scope of the research, I wanted to explore in particular how an 'appreciative' spin on place would be visualized, and how this might facilitate positive change. A dialogue about what communities are proud of can be an empowering process for the communities themselves, as well as important local perspectives to help inform outside agencies and donors how to build on what is positive, and what is working.

When I integrated the tenants of ecotourism, Appreciative Inquiry, and my own personal experiences using a positive approach to working with people, the following prompt emerged: *What do you have in this place (your environment, your community, or your culture) that you feel is important to protect or conserve for future generations?* In asking this question, it is not to suggest that place is static, unchanging, or shared by all in the same capacity. I recognize that place is a dynamic blend of individual, culture, community, history, power, emotion, time, and environment. Asking participants what is important to conserve inherently recognizes that place is changing, and that there is a role for voice and agency in the future of that place.

Fieldwork Story Structure

The following Table No. 1 summarizes the fieldwork phases and activities for conducting the research, which I explore in further detail in the following chapters:

Table No. 1: Fieldwork Schedule

Dates	Research Phase	Activities
November 22, 2008	Tiwai Island Administrative Committee (TIAC) Annual Meeting	The Photo-Voice project was presented at the TIAC meeting for approval and critique by key members of the Tiwai Island community conservation program.
November 24 – December 4, 2008	Community Tour 1	Public community meetings were held in each of the seven communities to present the research project, provide space for community questions, and recruit participants.
January 19 – January 30, 2009	Community Tour 2	Photography workshops were conducted with 4 participants from each community.
February 5, 2009	Photo Interpretation Day	The participants from each community came to the Visitor's Center on Tiwai Island to interpret, analyse, and present their photographs.
February 19 – February 28, 2009	Community Tour 3	A slideshow was conducted in each community, the participants presented the research back to their families and communities.

In this chapter, I have justified the Photo-Voice methodology as a promising vehicle to contribute to environmental education. Grounded in principles of participatory action and local ownership, action research is a popular methodology for conducting environmental education research from a justice perspective. Arts-based methods offer the possibility to explore emotional, spiritual or alternative knowledges regarding how people connect with their environment – the very types of knowledges missing from a scientific approach to environmental education. Photo-Voice is effective for working with youth in an international development context. It provides a visual process through which youth can engage in the production of thick descriptions of place. The use of thick

description in a participatory study is promising, despite reservations about how to best approach the task. By implicitly using ghostwriting and researcher reflexivity – I account for my personal bias in the interpretation of the data.

In this chapter, I have also described how the research was designed in collaboration with EFA, to integrate within and benefit their programs. Upon recommendations from local staff, the project engages both youth *and* elders in an intergenerational dialogue about place. The Tiwai Island community conservation program promotes forest and wildlife conservation and ecotourism on the island, as well as development of the local communities around the island. Based on the tenants of community conservation and ecotourism to conserve both nature *and* culture as well as a positive approach to working with people, the research design prompts participants to identify the assets of place (community, culture and environment) they feel are important to conserve for future generations. Using arts-based inquiry with youth and elders living in the communities around Tiwai Island is a unique integrated approach to conservation, development, and environmental education. The fieldwork that proceeds is a story worth sharing. In the following chapters, I describe the process of working with the communities, I document the participatory and comparative stages of photograph analysis, and I present an artistic analysis of the photo narratives. The fieldwork stories contextualize the final photographs and narratives as part of a larger process and dynamic.

Chapter 4. Fieldwork Story 1: With the Communities

When I first set out to plan this research project, I wondered – how do you do this anyways? While I risk including more detail than necessary, I feel it is important to be transparent in *how* the research was conducted, in addition to the emerging results. In asking, 'What happens when you use arts-based inquiry for environmental education research in rural Sierra Leone?' - The process is just as important as the product. In the next three chapters of fieldwork stories, I highlight the importance and particularities of this process.

In this chapter, I document the field portion of the study and some salient reflections arising from 3 community tours and a workshop on Tiwai Island. On the first trip to the villages, we hosted public meetings, obtained community consent, and recruited participants for the Photo-Voice research. The second tour was to conduct photography workshops and take photographs. At the workshop on Tiwai Island, we facilitated the participants through photo documentation and interpretation. And on the third, final tour, we concluded the project with a slideshow and dance, so participants could celebrate their work with their families and communities.

Reflecting on my experiences working with the communities, I then present some overarching questions around working through a translator and recruiting youth. I also underscore the role of community tensions as a backdrop to the project. These reflections help to identify the biases of the project, and frame issues that arise later through the photographs and narratives produced. Finally, the composition of this chapter allowed me to formally work through my memos, journals, and observations in order to integrate my researcher reflexivity during the field work.

Tour 1: The Physicality of Place, Levels of Consent and Women's Participation

The first community tour was an initial visit prior to the research for me to get a feel for the community dynamics and context, to gain the communities' permission to participate in the project (i.e. access to the research sites), and to

begin the process of recruiting participants. Based on my experiences, this tour highlighted my own researcher embodiment of place, the importance of working through different levels of consent (project, community, and individual), and finally access to women's voices in a village context.

Place - Embodied

The first challenges I faced as a foreigner around Tiwai Island, were not related to the research project in an intellectual way. I was confronted with the sheer physicality of meeting my basic needs (food, water, sleep and shelter, health, and travel). Some communities are accessible only by foot or by boat, which meant trekking gear through the jungle, shimmying across slippery rickety bamboo bridges, literally taking my shoes off to wade through murky puddles and shallow streams, and balancing my body in narrow hand-made dug-out canoes to cross the river. Other communities are accessible by motor-bike, which entails a different kind of physicality – an immediate heart-thumping element of danger on washed-out gravel roads and bush paths. I ate meals of okra, fish and country rice 2 or 3 times a day, but food was not always available when I was hungry. It was a good day when someone would hand me a bundle of bananas or a coconut. Trousers that were tight-fitting when I began the tours needed a belt by the end. There were no shops to buy any supplies or items – we relied entirely on the contents of our backpacks, and the harvests from the village farms. I slept in a tent that we carried with us, on the dirt floor or concrete verandahs of the village chief or imam's home. I spent many hours in the middle of the night attempting to drive skinks (lizards) out of my tent. Only two of the communities have improved drinking water sources – so most of the time I drank river water that had been boiled (luckily we had thought to pack iodine, and luckily I did not get too ill). I squatted over pit latrines. I swatted mosquitoes and black flies and itched their persistent bites – with a nagging worry about malaria and river blindness that can result from these bites. I bathed in the Moa River, or after nightfall with a bucket of water in the darkness behind a mud and thatch home.

Research is often touted as an intellectual project, requiring rigorous reflexivity. I do not negate this essential aspect of the research process. However,

in rural Sierra Leone - the daily aspects of meeting my basic needs were, quite literally, embodied within the research. I found my physical connection with place at times beautiful, like bathing in the moonlight under a banana tree or watching the morning mist over farm fields. Other times it was demanding - feeling tired and sun burnt and thirsty and hungry, knowing that there were still 2 more hours in our trek to the next village. It is almost ironic that my interest in how identity relates to place is a seemingly intellectual and theoretical project. My experiences in the communities have drawn attention to the *physicality* required to do participatory work at the village level in Sierra Leone. Is this physicality just because I am a stranger, and not used to eating country rice 3 times a day? Or does the physicality also represent a local connection or perception of place? During more difficult moments of the tour, I wondered how many fellow researchers would be willing to come and do this work. Even my Sierra Leonean colleagues, who were born and raised in the communities, found the tours challenging. What is it, I wonder, that drives me to do this work? The time and effort I devoted to staying healthy so that I could *do* the intellectual work, was an essential component of the tour. I do not suggest that the physical aspects are not connected to the emotional aspects of being a researcher. However, my experiences suggest that research embodies intellectual, emotional, *and* physical work.

Levels of Consent

In a community-based program, the process of informed consent is not simply a conversation with individual participants. There are multiple levels and layers of people who must be included to some degree in the consent process. Consulting, informing, and asking permission from the appropriate stakeholders in a *timely* manner was a crucial aspect of gaining consent. In fact, my experiences suggest that the individual consent of the participants (often central to ethics committee concerns) was the very last step in a series of important forums.

Even before visiting Tiwai Island, the design itself was a process of gaining access to the research site and consent to conduct the research within EFA's project. To work through EFA designing a project that fit within their

mandate, that was sensitive to their political situation in the communities, and that would benefit the long-term goals of the project and the organization. This involved several conversations with the program director, the Tiwai Island program manager, a volunteer ecotourism consultant who had been working in the communities for a year, the island staff, and finally a presentation at the annual meeting of the project administrative committee, TIAC, for support. I did not want to make decisions or assumptions at one level of the project, without consent and consultation of the next.

At the community level, the timing and nature of our first tour was opportune as there was some friction and frustration after the annual TIAC meeting. The Photo-Voice project, along with a project to establish working groups for increased community involvement in TIAC, both presented positive participatory interventions. In fact, each tour was conducted to coincide with the working group meetings designed to engage community people within TIAC decision-making. We were – for the most part – well received by the communities. One community refused to allow us to host a meeting in their community, and therefore did not participate in the research; this community opted out of the community conservation program altogether[9]. The other 7 communities expressed interest in the project and allowed us to host public meetings.

While these community visits initially seemed long and physically challenging, it was clear that they were essential in laying the appropriate foundations for gaining community support. It was vital to give adequate time and warning to communities, to make myself physically available to be able talk to people directly in their own space. We held the public meetings according to community schedules: Meetings were often held between 6 and 8 am - after morning prayers, before everyone went off to their farms for the day. Otherwise, we held the meetings at dusk, after evening prayer. The meetings gave community

[9] As I was leaving Tiwai Island at the end of 4 months of field work, this last community was beginning to negotiate its way back into the Tiwai Island program, demonstrating the tumultuous and dynamic membership in the community conservation program.

people a chance to reflect on the use of cameras, prior to the introduction of cameras, in a place where cameras are rare. Another researcher in the area chose to just go to the communities without a preliminary introduction and mission statement, and was denied the opportunity to interview community members upon first visit. It is not only 'appropriate' to follow local protocol, but essential to gaining community consent.

I found participant recruitment and informed consent of the community to be parallel, almost inseparable processes. Participants could not be recruited without the consent of the communities, and as the communities gave their support and consent, discussions immediately ensued as to which community members would be the most appropriate for the job. Community members engaged with the project ideas; their inquiries indicated a critical understanding of the research intentions. Can I photograph my family? Can I take pictures of things that are important to me, or does it have to be important to the whole community? Can I photograph my cocoa farm or my palm oil plantation? What will happen to the pictures? Is this project long or short-term? What is the benefit for us, and for you? Are we getting any money? Can I keep the camera? I enjoyed the questions, which seemed to indicate a genuine engagement in the process of informed consent. In some communities, a lively discussion even began about the topic itself (this was one of the moments when I felt extremely frustrated at not being able to understand Mende!). In other communities, there was considerable debate about which community members would be selected to participate.

What is more, I found the questions asked by community members helpful to inform my own thinking in the research process and planning. For example, I remembered the importance of breaking things down and the many ways in which my cultural way of thinking is different. It was helpful for me to see and feel and live the realities of the community environments where people will be taking pictures beforehand. It also gave me time to work with and get to know the community liaison officers, who also act as translators … and the issues that working *through* someone raises. The extra time and effort that went into this first community tour was crucial groundwork in understanding the physical

requirements for me, in gaining community consent, and building relationships with key players in the project.

Recruitment and Women's Participation

We invited 4 participants from each community (one elder man, one elder woman, one young man, and one young woman) to participate in the project. In total, 28 participants were recruited with the consent of the villages. From what I am told, participant selection was consensus-based upon the following criteria: Hard-working, physically capable for the foot travel to Tiwai Island, and willingness to participate. Based on EFA's previous experience hosting community workshops, women's participation was ensured by specifically requesting it as part of the recruitment process. Unfortunately, women were often absent from the public community meetings that we hosted. Despite our energetic encouragement that they are welcome to attend – women were often few and far between at these meetings. I was told that women are not used to attending community meetings – they do not feel it is their duty, are not interested, or are busy cooking, cleaning and looking after their children. From what I could gather, meetings seem to happen in men's spaces where women may not feel comfortable (such as the verandah where the men's hammocks are located, or the community meeting place that is far from women's cooking stools). These are, of course, outside observations mixed with answers to my queries about why women were not attending the meetings. Furthermore, most of the women participants also needed public consent from their husbands in order to sign up for the Photo-Voice. I found out after the fact that some women who were interested were actually not given permission by their husbands. From my Western 'independent woman' perspective, I was extremely frustrated that interested participants could not participate *because* their husbands did not agree. In the context of working in rural Sierra Leone, however, it was crucial to follow local protocol so as not to put women at risk.

The process of gaining access to the communities, collective consent, and recruiting participants was very important groundwork for the Photo-Voice. This tour provided a strong foundation for the project. I cannot underline enough the

utter importance this process played in the success of the research. Based on conflicts we experienced later on - I feel as though just appealing to the individual consent of participants would have been almost immaterial. Failing to genuinely approach the informed consent of the organization, the communities, and the family members of participants would have potentially disrupted or jeopardized the Photo-Voice project, as well as the greater Tiwai project, putting participants, Tiwai staff, and myself at risk. Furthermore, the experience enabled me to effectively design the next phase of the field work within the village context.

Tour 2: Photographs, Photographs, Photographs!

The second tour was to gain individual consent and conduct photography workshops. Here, I share some techniques I developed to specifically respond to the particular communities. I describe my rationale for developing a pictorial form to facilitate the process of informed consent. I use photographs of myself and my family in Canada to introduce basic photography skills and concepts. I allocate pictures for the participants' personal benefit. And finally, I explain how we managed the excitement generated by the cameras in the villages, through the very use of the cameras themselves. Each technique involves a different use of photographs in the projects' design and execution.

Visual Consent Forms

Individual consent of the participants was addressed during the photography workshops using a combination of oral and visual methods. While audio-recorded oral consent is a logical method of gaining consent amongst people who do not read, I felt uncomfortable documenting consent without giving participants a copy accessible to them. There is no electricity in any of the villages. While some people have access to battery-powered cassette radios, most audio-recording is done digitally and therefore difficult to convert back to cassette format, especially in Sierra Leone. I felt that giving participants a copy of a digital recording that they did not have the appropriate equipment or infrastructure to access was unfair. It was important for me to produce a consent document that both the participants and I could understand, keep a copy, and refer back to during

the research. I therefore created a visual form (presented in Appendix I) that uses photographs to depict the various stages and elements of consent. Using photographs in the consent form emulates the image-based methodology and provides a starting point for looking at the messages that can be produced through photographs.

In general, the form was effective in providing a visual guide to the consent conversation. The EFA staff in Freetown agreed to 'model' for the photographs in the form. However, there were certain factors I did not think about. First of all, I wanted to limit the form to one A4 size sheet of paper. As there is limited access to printed material in most of rural Sierra Leone, I did not want to overwhelm participants with reams of paper. Due to the complexity and requirements of the consent process, there were 10 photographs on the form. When combined with limited access to good photocopy quality, the reduced size of the photograph meant that the photographs were not that clear – I often had to describe what was in each photograph for the participants to visualize the content. Secondly, as instructed by the ethics committee, participants were asked to 'opt-in' to being audio-taped and photographed. I had designed the form so that participants could tick a box, not realizing that most participants were not familiar holding a pen and did not know what a tick mark was. The translators were excellent in facilitating this unfamiliar process of holding a pen, and gave participants the options to opt-in with a tick, check, line, or 'x.'

The form was effective at visually guiding and documenting the consent process. It acted as the official documentation to mark participation in the project. Each participant brought the form with them to the workshop on Tiwai. However, despite this novel approach, questions still remain regarding how to gain genuine informed consent. Participants' asked me questions during the follow-up interviews: What happens next? Is there a job for me now? Why did you come here? Can I keep my pictures, or are you taking them away with you? One person even forgot about the visual form altogether. Most of these questions had already been addressed earlier in the project indicating a gap in their understanding of the consent process, and the importance of continually working to ensure participants

are informed about the research. These questions do not necessarily indicate a failure of the visual consent form, however perhaps reflect a larger debate about how to effectively gain informed consent, particularly in the cultural context of the global south (Dawson & Kass, 2005; Fitzgerald, Marotte, Verdier, Johnson, & Pape, 2002; Hill, Tawiah-Agyemang, Odei-Danso, & Kirkwood, 2008; Molyneux, Peshu, & Marsh, 2004; Molyneux, Wassenaar, Peshu, & Marsh, 2005).

Sharing Photographs

In order to address the role of images in telling a story – I told a story about my father and then showed a photograph of my father to emphasize how a photograph can compliment voice. I described the wrinkles on his face, the way his hair is a little bit long, parted to the side, and starting to turn white, and the gap between his two front teeth. Participants actively engaged with the story, and were then delighted when I produced a photograph of my father at the end. It was a simple exercise that permitted participants to reflect on the detail you can show in a picture. Furthermore, community members often greeted me by asking how my family is doing. I felt as though choosing to share a personal family member helped to personalize my interactions with the participants.

As most of the participants had never taken a photograph before, or even held a camera - a key component of this workshop was practicing different 'styles' of photography. Here, I used 8 different pictures of the same thing – me in front of a lake in Canada – to demonstrate techniques such as close-ups, landscapes, portraits, centering and off-centering the photograph subject, subject personality (confident and bold, or shy and withdrawn), and action shots. These 8 photographs provided an invaluable visual tool for critical photo analysis. We compared, dissected, and practiced these 'styles' before answering the photo-voice prompt. Working digitally meant that participants could take unlimited practice photographs that could be viewed instantly. This element of the project would have been lost had we used traditional film cameras. The practice sessions were fun, and helped the participants have the skills and confidence to produce

photographs that they were proud of. By the time participants completed the practice session, the actual taking of the 4 pictures was a relatively quick process.

According to participant feedback, this was by far the most popular activity in the project. In Krio, to 'bluff' is to show off or act with confidence. Several participants referred to the photographing as 'bluff work,' they felt confident showcasing their new photographer skills in their communities. "I'm a photographer!" "What you taught us made us happy, proud." "I never knew how before, and now I know." Thus, adding to the joy factor of Photo-Voice activities (Mitchell et al., 2006) is a feel good factor that fosters participant pride.

Personal Picture

Many of the community people lack the opportunity to take photographs to document their lives. While the Photo-Voice aims to address this, there were some concerns from Tiwai staff, community feedback and advice from a volunteer working in the area that participants might use the opportunity to take photographs of themselves or their families, instead of focusing on the prompt. Although this may have simply been an indication of what is important in peoples' lives, we decided that in addition to the 4 allotted photographs for the Photo-Voice, each participant could take one personal picture that they could choose for themselves. Most participants chose a portrait of themselves or a family picture.

Snap Me!

Once the cameras were brought out, a challenge was not an aversion to the cameras, as predicted by my ethical review committee. On the contrary – too *many* people wanted to have their photo taken. This excitement around the cameras actually risked becoming a distraction to the research process, as the participants, my colleagues, and I were surrounded and summoned by 'Snap Me!' requests. After a rather hectic experience in the first community, we decided that while the Photo-Voice was taking place a volunteer would respond to these requests and photograph community people. These photos were then presented at the final slideshow. This effectively provided the opportunity for everyone in the

village to have their photos taken, so the research participants could conduct their work without feeling pressured to be town photographer for the day.

Figure 2: Snap Me! A photographer is surrounded by on-lookers wanting to be part of the project

Photo Interpretation Day on Tiwai Island

The participants own analysis of their work was conducted during a one-day interpretation workshop on Tiwai Island. Twenty seven (27) of the twenty-eight (28) participants were present for the workshop; only one young man was ill and unable to attend. One elder woman walked for 2 hours on a swollen foot. The participants from the farthest community walked over 3 hours in the early morning hours to arrive at the island by 9 am. Conscious of keeping to a strict schedule for the participants who had another long walk home at the end of the day, we jumped right into the participatory work without too much 'talk talk.' After breakfast and a brief introduction, the process of working with the photographs began.

Group Work

For the workshop, we divided the participants into four working groups according to their age and gender. The groups thus consisted of the elder men, the elder women, the young men, and the young women. This division based on age and gender was based on the hypothesis that different genders and age-groups in rural Sierra Leone might represent different perspectives (Archibald & Richards, 2002a; Leach, 1994; Richards, 2007) on what needs to be conserved. It was also

an opportunity for participants to work amongst potentially similar experiences, and to hopefully decrease hierarchies based on gender and age.

Each group was facilitated by a staff member from the Tiwai Island visitor's center. The facilitators were selected based on their ability to read and write in English, and played a key role in the project development. Prior to the workshop, each facilitator was trained in the Photo-Voice methodology and basic researcher and interview skills[10]. I conducted a small-scale pilot Photo-Voice project with the facilitators themselves. This was helpful for them to reflect on and practice researcher skills; gain personal experience with the methodology; better guide the process of translation; and appreciate the multiple 'types' of knowledge that Photo-Voice can engage. Furthermore, a test run of the methodology was helpful for me, as it was the first time I was facilitating the methodology myself. From the project design through to this training, the facilitators helped build a workshop for participants that best reflects the local context.

In the working groups, the participants explained why they took their photographs. During these explanations, the facilitators simultaneously translated and transcribed the participants' stories from Mende into English. This process was lengthy, and took roughly 3 hours. Consequently, it was a quiet and reserved task – quite the opposite of the lively debate and discussion that I had anticipated. Due to the number of participants (27), the volume of

Figure 3: Transcribing photo narratives

[10] Researcher skills such as: Listen more, talk less; following up; avoiding leading questions; using open-ended questions; exploring silences; and resisting interrupting (Seidman, 1991).

photographs (104), and the short time available (one day), this seemed to be the most efficient and precise way for participants to share and document their work. If the equipment had been available, digitally recording the process would have been preferable. This may have perhaps livened up the conservation, and brought more debate and dialogue, which could have been translated and transcribed later.

However, I observed a positive impact of having scribes document participants' photo descriptions. The average literacy[11] rate in Sierra Leone is 39%. During the process of informed consent, I observed that less than 10% of the participants signed their name on the consent form: Two of the young men wrote their name in English and one of the young men wrote his name in Arabic. The 25 other participants signed the consent form with a thumb-print, which is customary in local tradition. During the workshop, none of the participants chose to write their own photo descriptions, suggesting a literacy rate around Tiwai much lower than 10%[12]. While digitally recording the process may have allowed for a more lively conversation, the physical process of being a witness to the 'scribing' of their voices was taken very seriously. As demonstrated later on in the research, this official documentation was an important aspect of the project, in this context where voices are rarely documented in written form.

Participatory Data Analysis

After the participants explained their individual photographs, they worked to identify common themes or ideas across the photographs. This constitutes a preliminary coarse-grained analysis of the constant comparison method to data analysis (Butler-Kisber, in press), designed as an accessible interpretation activity that promotes inclusive participation. Participants used some or all of their photographs to represent the common themes and differences on a poster (Mitchell et al., 2005), which was presented to the group as a whole at the end of the day. Incidentally, a majority of the participants did not know what a poster

[11] Defined as being able to read or write in any language by the 2004 Population Census (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2006).

[12] Most participants explained that their children who attend school must leave the communities in order to do this. This leaves rural communities largely illiterate and bigger towns or cities with a disproportionately higher population of literate people.

Figure 4: Presentation of photo themes

was, or how to make one. This was a minor design oversight that the facilitators worked through with their groups. The final presentations generated the energy that might have been missing from the translation/transcription phase of the day: I was asked to audio-record each presentation, and there were enthusiastic rounds of applause after each one. I will further discuss the categories and results of this exercise later in the next chapter.

In the context of "workshop fatigue" in post-war Sierra Leone(Skelt, 2003), I was uncertain how the participants would perceive the day's activities. Would it be seen as a day to do something *for* the White visitor? Would the day seem like a pointless waste of valuable farming hours? Would the participants feel like they came away with new ideas? According to participant feedback, there were physical benefits from the day: For being invited to attend a 'workshop' on the island; for the comfort of sitting under a nice big Barray[13] in comfortable chairs; for eating bread and drinking tea (treats that are not part of daily village routine); and for the small 'soap' money participants were given as compensation for their expenses to attend. Some appreciated learning new things from fellow participants, and enjoyed coming together with other community members to see each other's photographs, and share ideas and knowledge. One man said, "I took the picture, I am the only person who knows why I took it. But now more than one person knows why I took it. You too know why I took these pictures." Another participant captured the critical reflection aspect of the methodology, "Photo-Voice is a great activity because you think twice." Several participants were excited about the possibility that their photographs would be shown to wider audiences both in and out of Sierra Leone, so that the whole world can know

[13] The Barray is a local court house. It can be rectangular or hexagonal in shape, and is constructed with half-walls. It is a space used for hosting visitors, community meetings and legal proceedings.

about them. One participant was even appreciative of the rainforest on Tiwai, recognizing that if the forest (or community conservation program) was not there, I probably would not have come to do the workshop. Overall, there were no direct complaints making me wonder if "workshop fatigue" is more applicable to urban areas where most NGOs are based.

Young Men

The dynamics of the young men, in particular, drew (even commanded) my attention. This working group had a very difficult time creating a poster. They were the last group to complete the task, and there was visible tension within the group during the activity – some youth left the group, some sat quietly and looked away without contributing, and some stood up and raised their voices. This tension may be partially attributed to a novice facilitator who was also unclear what was expected from the poster activity. It may also reflect community dissent about the Tiwai program and the wide age range of this particular group (and therefore underlying hierarchies based on the varying social status), both of which I will address later on. In reality, the tension was probably a consequence of the combination of the factors. However, it was clear that the young men could not agree, or even bring themselves together to disagree to complete the task at hand.

At one point, when several of the male youth were standing up around the table in heated debate, I felt it necessary to intervene to de-escalate the situation, (re)focus on the task at hand, and facilitate the completion of the poster. I was careful not to over-step the role of the facilitator who was, by this point, standing back and looking at a bit of a loss and not wanting to draw attention to the escalating situation. My choice of intervention was to ask how things were going, and use the fact that I could not understand Mende as an entry point to intervene lightly to move through the tension. While this intervention changed the course of what male youth produced (I literally took a pen, and asked the men what they would like written on their poster as a way to shift the attention) – I felt it necessary to do so. The resulting poster contained a sparse 5 photographs, and therefore a very short final presentation. When faced with the opportunity to voice

what is important to them, the young men had a very difficult time coming together to be heard.

At this point, I am unsure what this means but the dynamic brought young men onto my radar. The incident insinuates a more complex understanding of how to effectively and productively engage the voice of young men in Sierra Leone. However, it is interesting to point out that while I perceive the dynamics of the young men to be troubling, the youth who presented the sparse poster chose this activity as the aspect of Photo-Voice that he enjoyed the most. This suggests that *despite* the tension that I observed, perhaps encouraging and facilitating more young men in more participatory and cooperative activities is more productive than I can know.

Tour 3: Final Slideshow and Interviews

The final slideshow was a collaborative presentation of the Photo-Voice research and other initiatives associated with the Tiwai program. By combining these activities, we made efficient use of Tiwai staff time and logistics were easier to combine into a celebratory event. The slideshow was a great success – well worth its expense and challenging logistics (the wildlife researcher had a generator and voltage regulator, I carefully carried a projector from Freetown on public transportation on my lap, and we hired people to help us tote the heavy gear through the jungle). We observed almost full community participation in most of the communities, and had some fun along the way. Having images up on a big screen was an attractive event for communities. The Photo-Voice participants themselves presented their work, which generated rounds of applause. Some cited this as their favorite part of the Photo-Voice as it provided an avenue to prolong a relatively short-spanned activity with lasting evidence. Furthermore, it was an effective visual forum to engage *all* community members in the sharing of information and ideas. This is a helpful discovery for future EFA community projects.

During our final tour, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 of the 27 participants to follow-up on their narrative descriptions, provide space for one-on-one conversation, and get feedback about the Photo-Voice process.

Four participants were not in their villages during the time of our tour, and one had double-booked himself the morning of the interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded. In addition to the specific questions I asked regarding their photograph work, I asked participants to formally introduce themselves. This gave the participants the opportunity to identify themselves, and how they see themselves in their own milieu. I also asked what they liked about the places they live and what made their community different from others. Based on the delicate relationship between EFA and the communities, I also re-visited their consent on how their photographs would be used.

The Interpretive Role of the Male Facilitator/Translator

The fieldwork story highlights the interpretive role of the translators and facilitators throughout the research. The translators and facilitators are active interpretive agents in the research. While I speak Sierra Leone's *lingua franca*, Krio, most of the participants speak only Mende. We therefore communicated through translators, which added an extra layer of interpretation to the project. I realized that sometimes my explanations were supplemented through the process of translation. Although I cannot speak Mende – if I listen closely, I can often understand what 'topics' are being discussed from the insertion of English words. In my explanation of the project framework, I became aware that the translator was adding his own perspective about conservation on top of the project rationale that I had explained. During the interviews, the translators often added their own explanations or neglected to translate my questions altogether, simply answering *for* participants (in particular for the women). At times, when the interviewee asked a question, the translators would not translate to me but answer it directly. Sometimes I was even left out of the conversation and had to ask the interviewee and the translator what they were talking about! I repeatedly had to ask translators for the participants' own points of view. I do not imply that the translators intentionally changed meanings; their voices and agency were natural aspects in the translation process. Layers of conversations were woven through the interviews – between the participant and I, between the translator and I, and between the translator and the participant.

During the photo interpretation process, the facilitators acted as additional lens through which the participants' voices were transcribed. By design, the four facilitators for the Photo-Voice workshop were staff members from the Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary. The staff on the island, selected by the communities, is all men - reflecting local patriarchal hierarchies. Given the short-term nature of the project, finding a woman with the appropriate skills and interest to act as facilitator was virtually impossible[14]. It also felt important to work within existing organizational structures so as to build on current projects, and contribute to building the capacity of local staff. The translators for most of the interviews were also men. Furthermore, the facilitators were selected based on their ability to speak and write in English. This presents a particular 'literate' or 'educated' male lens through which the participants' work was interpreted, translated and presented.

On the one hand, I felt slightly panicky that I could not understand every word being spoken, that I was not 'in control' of the project, that the translators might be explaining the project differently than I intended. But on the other hand, I think it is brilliant that the translators and facilitators adopted an interpretive role and translated the project in their own words, terms and cultural references. They took ownership of the process which, despite my translation concerns, means I was successful achieving an increased level of participation. While this is ideal in a community-based and capacity-building context, I need to account for their bias. This raises questions as to the impact of their bias. In asking an elder man to translate a young woman's story, what is the dynamic between them? How does the young woman choose to answer? How is the man going to translate for, and represent the woman? How much does he answer for her, when I ask for further clarification? Despite this male focus, women's agency to express their own views was clearly noted.

[14] One woman would have been a suitable facilitator; however was a prominent and vocal opponent to EFA. She was continuously rallying community members against EFA's involvement in the management of the island.

Women were not helpless or passive in the interpretive process. In the taking of photographs, I observed that the women participants were often accompanied and directed by men (husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons) as they worked with the cameras. Some of the men even physically took the cameras from the women's hands to take photographs. My reaction in the field was to encourage women to come to us for help if they needed it, and to discourage 'helpers' as much as possible. The phenomenon of 'male helpers' made me question the accessibility and independence of women's voices. However, during the follow-up interviews, I asked participants how they decided to take their photographs: I asked if they were directed, if they consulted with others, or if it was a personal decision. All the women, except one, stated that they decided for themselves. Perhaps the women were proud to have their husbands with them, perhaps the women were nervous to use the cameras and felt more confident with a helper that they know well, perhaps doing something 'alone' just seems like strange thing to do in the community, perhaps my Western sense of 'the individual' as being 'independent' does not fit within this village context. Ultimately, I recognize women's agency, and take the final photographs to represent the women's own voices. In a separate example of how women exercised their own agency to determine how her voice was being translated or represented, one young woman actually got up and left our interview to find another translator that she thought would do a better job at translating her stories.

Overall, I identify the educated male interpretive lens through which the fieldwork was conducted and my personal challenges in negotiating this power dynamic. I tried to find a balance of working within local structures of authority, while at the same time challenging dominant hierarchies without discrediting the project completely. I hope that the very participation of women (and youth) in the project in some way challenged local structures of power and authority, while at the same time providing a productive democratic space for dialogue.

Community Dissent

The town of Kambama is the main crossing point to access the visitor's center on Tiwai Island. As we arrived back in Kambama on the last day of our last

tour, we were greeted by a series of signboards entering the village. Written with white chalk on a background painted black were the slogans: “We want justice!”, “EFA must go!” and “No visitors alloud!” With environmental justice as the very motivation for the research, my heart sank when I saw the signboards accusing the ‘project’ of injustice. What do they mean by justice? Was I complicit with injustice? Was I considered a visitor, who was now no longer welcome on the island? Who was EFA? Was it the staff in Freetown, the community liaison officers, the volunteers on the island, the international volunteers? Did the community view me as part of the EFA that *must go*? I thought the Tiwai program *was* using a justice framework to conduct conservation. From my observations of the structure of the project, it was as participatory and democratic as possible, with real concrete benefits for the communities. I realize there are different versions, understandings, and perspectives of what justice means. The communities had assured me that expectations from the ‘project’ were high. I questioned my role as a researcher, working in collaboration with EFA in the communities.

There is a long and complicated history between the communities, the island and the Tiwai conservation initiative (Oates, 1999), as well as several years of recent management history between EFA and the communities. Furthermore, reconciliation after 11 years of civil war is an on-going process. Essentially, the signs did not appear out of nowhere; we had been receiving news of both public and secret community meetings through the island staff. What ensued after the signboards was a series of meetings with the Paramount Chief and police that involved one arrest and several police statements. The signs were taken down and community members were encouraged to follow appropriate legal channels of protest. As I was not directly implicated, invited to community meetings, or confronted with the conflict – I have no firsthand experience, only hearsay. As such, I do not feel it is my place to evaluate. But I do wish to draw attention to the delicate context of community relations within which the Photo-Voice took place.

I question, though, why the conflict was not overtly voiced by the participants through the Photo-Voice (aside from the underlying tension through

the young men's group on Tiwai), or even ever directly to me over my four months coming and going from the communities. The only time I physically experienced dissent was the signboards. However, the conflict was a large stress for the island staff living in Kambama. The conflict was thus an underlying conversation and context through which the Photo-Voice fieldwork was planned and executed. Does the absence of conflict or dissent in the Photo-Voice indicate a bias in the research, that participants were not really speaking their minds? Or do community members agree what they want for their community, but perhaps not on how to go about getting it (i.e. who and how the island should be managed). Was I complicit with injustice by failing to address the community's plaints? Any community work needs to recognize and address conflict. However, based on my status as a short-term foreign outsider conducting a relatively small project, with a limited ability to communicate in the local language, and little experience facilitating the resolution of community conflicts, I felt I was not the right person to intervene. I would not have turned someone away who wanted to voice their opinion to me. But I did not personally initiate dialogue or resolution to the conflict. I referred, deferred and relied on local staff and structures of authority in this matter. This is in particular in the context of fragile national security, where "the country's social fabric is stronger than had been thought, but a loss of faith in the post-war development process could still be catastrophic" (International Crisis Group, 2008, p. i).

From Youth to Elder

Recruiting youth between the ages of 18 and 25 years old was a difficult task that we were not entirely successful at achieving. In fact, by the end of the study it was clear that at most of the youth participants were over 25. At least 4 of the participants were in their 30s and 40s. The purpose of this study was not to explore how age is defined in rural Sierra Leone, but to engage youth in community development and education. However, this phenomenon of 'over-aged' youth raises some questions, which I introduce below, about what it means to work with youth in rural Sierra Leone.

Is age quantified or qualified in varying terms, and therefore an ambiguous concept? It is common knowledge that some villagers are not sure of their age, or count their age in crop rotations as opposed to calendar years. I noticed some participants expressed age in relation to other temporal markers, such as the times of initiation into societies, marriage, childbirth, and the recent war. Perhaps the status of youth might be more related to number of children born to that individual, level of education, amount of land planted for harvest, or size of dwelling? My personal definition of youth for this study (as number of calendar years old) might simply be a Western perspective on age, and not be appropriate or relevant criteria. What is more, while I did not specifically ask the age of the elders, one 'elder' told me he was 30 years old, and another was in his early 40s. This suggests a fluidity to categorizing people in calendar years.

Is it difficult to access youth (between the ages of 18 to 25) only in certain communities? The youth in their 30s and 40s were actually participants from 2 particular communities. This suggests an emphasis on the politics of place. Interestingly, these 2 communities are visibly the most developed in terms of infrastructure – with many more concrete buildings and zinc roofs than the other communities. Perhaps just a coincidence or perhaps an indication of a more powerful group of elders and leaders in those communities … to both influence youth participation *and* source development money, amongst other things.

Is there a potential conflict (or contradiction) in how 'youth' are defined in rural areas? Although not part of the study, some 18 and 19 year old male youth in one of communities explained to me that they are still considered 'children,' and that they do not have any knowledge yet. This has been repeated to me several times during my time in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, there is no middle category between being a youth, and being an elder. I asked several participants what the criteria was for 'becoming an elder;' most cited the age of 50. One participant explained, "You go directly from being a youth, to being an elder." This suggests an age bracket of people (between 35 and 50 years old) who are well into their adult lives – are parents, grandparents, have built their own homes, farm and own their own land – but are still considered youth.

Is it reflective of the novelty or popularity of Photo-Voice? In rural Sierra Leone, Photo-Voice is exciting. Learning how to use a camera and taking pictures is special. Cameras generate a lot of interest, in a place where cameras are not common. Many people want to participate, whether to be photographed, to use the camera, to have a copy of the photograph, or to own a camera. Does the shifting of age reflect interest and support of the Photo-Voice activities, inadvertently excluding youth between the ages of 18 and 25 in the process?

Or is this a result of a flawed project design? Did I establish the youth age range too small? Should I have included a middle category for the 'older' youth in the communities? Should it have been wider? I was conscious to target younger youth as I was concerned that if a broader age range (say, 18-35) would attract only 30 year olds. And maybe all this fuss over exact age is just a product of my Western upbringing which focuses on numbers.

How did the politics of place influence participant recruitment? One very outspoken woman volunteered as a youth participant. The whole community agreed and consented that she was indeed under the age of 25, and could represent the voice of young women in the village. However, this woman was well-known to be in her 40s based on her previous involvement in projects on the island prior to the war. When a colleague challenged her age and stressed the importance of age because of the different *types* of knowledges associated with youth and with elders, the woman sort of laughed and (with permission from women more senior to her in the meeting) openly moved herself to the elders category. Again, the community just agreed and consented. In the end, this woman opted out of the study completely in order to participate in a separate initiative, which required a longer term commitment but yielded more influence and power. The politics of individual places cannot be discounted when examining why younger participants were difficult to recruit.

Finally, I recognize my position as an outsider, and the power of the communities to conduct the Photo-Voice according to their needs and structures. During recruitment, one youth who to me looked to be in his 40s, looked me straight in the eye and said he was 21. I could not help but directly challenge this

statement which, based on my experience living and working in Sierra Leone, seemed unrealistic. However, the man insisted he was 21 and the community liaison officer did not further intervene. So I let it go, recognizing that dwelling on this man's age which I could not prove might be insulting or inappropriate. I later asked the facilitator what he really thought about the man's age. After a long smiling silence he said, "Well, some people don't know how old they are. And some people have old faces, even though they are young." I later found out that this particular participant was indeed 43 years old. Both the liaison officer and the participant had effectively used the ambiguous nature of age, for what Ferme (2001) calls the strategic management of identity.

Ultimately, I cannot know why some of the participants were in their 30s and 40s because I did not directly address the issue with the participants or their communities. On the one hand, it simply means the lens through which the project was conducted is somewhat older than intended. On the other hand, many programs are working to address the low status of youth by conducting youth employment and empowerment activities. But I ask - who is being served? Is it 18 year olds, or 45 year olds? And does it matter? I question what the label 'youth' implies, and what it means to engage youth in Sierra Leone, in particular in a village context.

In this chapter, I have described my experiences working with the participant communities. In the first tour, the physical challenges I faced meeting my basic needs highlight my own researcher embodiment of place. While these challenges led me to question the benefit of an initial visit, the tour underlined the importance of addressing multiple levels of consent, in particular regarding women's participation. I found that the consent of the actual participants recruited was the very last stage in the process of informed consent. The second tour portrays the workshop process and shares helpful techniques, such as the use of visual consent forms to gain individual consent, and an extra photographer as an important strategy to include the greater community in the excitement around cameras. On the interpretation day on Tiwai Island, the participants worked in groups to transcribe their photo narratives and conduct participatory data analysis.

The challenging dynamic of the young men pre-empts questions of what it means to engage youth in rural Sierra Leone. The final tour and interviews celebrate the work, and present participant feedback about the project. The fieldwork reveals lessons, techniques, and the important process of working with communities. Translators and facilitators were central to local ownership of the project, and present an educated, gendered bias in the interpretation and presentation of participant voices. A conflict in one of the communities underlies the project, and questions remain about what it means to work with 'youth' in Sierra Leone.

Chapter 5. Fieldwork Stories 2: Surface Objects

After three visits to the participant communities and a day of participatory photo interpretation on Tiwai Island, I returned to Freetown with 108 photographs and narratives stored in my laptop. What did people take pictures of? Did the youth and elders have different things to say? What about men and women? In this chapter, I work to answer these questions. By integrating the participants' analyses of their work with my own systematic analysis, I produce the major themes of the photographs. I also assess how these themes are prioritized differently amongst participants. Through this fieldwork story, I provide the groundwork and inspiration for an artistic presentation of the data in Chapter 6 that follows.

The photo interpretation workshop was designed whereby participants worked in groups based on age and gender to identify the photograph themes[15]. These themes were then reassembled for the final community slideshows. Inherent to this design was the act of comparing and re-comparing the photographs. The constant comparison method seemed a natural process to continue the analysis. I begin this chapter by explaining how the constant comparison method of data analysis is useful for participatory research, and the contrasting and comparing of photographs. I present the coarse- and fine-grained stages of the method as a rough guide to analyzing the photograph surface objects. Here, I use the term surface objects to refer to the visual images depicted[16]. I address the narrative texts that accompany each photograph later in Chapter 6. I create rules of inclusion for the surface object themes, and visually chart the frequency of photographs taken for each theme by gender, age group, and place. Examples from this analysis demonstrate the importance of a holistic approach to education.

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[15] Throughout this chapter, I use the term 'theme' to refer to the themes emerging from the photographs. I use the term 'category' to refer to the age and gender categories of the participants.

[16] Some of the photographs depict people. I do not intend to call the photographed people 'objects' but for simplicity and consistency throughout the data analysis, I use 'object' to refer to the visual. The object of the photograph is what you see, which be a partial representation the photographer's intention.

The Photographs: Surface Objects

Constant Comparison Data Analysis

In this participatory action-based research study, I wanted to let results and theory emerge through the analysis of the photographs and narratives. To analyze the photographs, I use the constant comparison method of data analysis based on grounded theory. Grounded theory does not test a hypothesis, but lets theory emerge from the data (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007). In other words, theory is built not tested. Constant comparison involves the coding of data and the constant development, expansion and reduction of themes (Charmaz, 1998; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). The method allows for both systematic and creative process within data analysis, and for multiple meanings to emerge (Charmaz, 1998). It is an effective tool for social justice research (Charmaz, 2005) and the analysis of similarities and differences amongst photographs (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008).

Coarse-grained Analysis: The Themes

Coarse-grained analysis refers to the inductive coding of data and comparing of meaning across themes, exploring relationships across themes, and refining the themes by integrating or expanding them (Butler-Kisber, in press). This stage of analysis was participatory, conducted by each group at the photo interpretation workshop in Tiwai Island. Here, the participants intuitively worked with the visual - the surface objects of the photographs. The participants identified themes based on the object in the photograph, rather than the subject of the narrative. For example, a photograph depicting a toilet with an accompanying narrative drawing attention to hygiene and health was categorized as Toilet, rather than Hygiene and Health. Each group worked with over 30 photographs, so it made more sense to work with the visual than trying to remember the narratives attached to each one. The themes listed in Table No. 2 below reflect the participants' interpretation of their own work.

Table No. 2: Participant Data Analysis

Elder Men	**Elder Women**	**Young Men**	**Young Women**
Community	Development	Toilet	Tiwai Island
Education	Education	Pump	Rice
Agriculture	Agriculture	Barray	Agriculture
		Bush work/Forest	Toilets
		School	Education
			Barray
			Mosque
			Bush
			Road
			Water/River
			Chickens
			House

In these groups, the participants explored the relationships across photograph themes. However, this portion of the process was not recorded or translated from Mende. I considered this be an educational component of the activity, which took place organically at the grassroots level. The ownership of this process thus stayed at the level of facilitator and participants, as opposed to being 'overseen by' or 'produced for' me. At various stages in the fieldwork, I continued this approach of not translating conversations and presentations – to keep the flow and ownership of the process at the local level. Briefly, from these coarse themes, it might be suggested that the elders' analysis seems more broad and general, while the youth's analysis seems more detailed and specific. However as I discussed in the previous chapter, it is not clear how much each facilitator also influenced the analytic process.

Between the interpretation day and the community slideshows, I began but had not yet completed the fine-grained analysis below. To organize the photographs for the slideshows, I first translated the final presentations from the interpretation day, to best identify the salient themes from the day. I then expanded and reduced the work of the participants into the following themes: Food and Agriculture, Health and Family, The House, The Mosque, The Barray, Transportation, Toilets, Education, and Water. This merging of themes was iterative. I recognize that my approach to the coarse and fine-grained stages of

analysis was not a distinct two-phase process, but a flexible and reflexive 'conglomerate' grade of analysis.

Fine-grained Analysis: Rules of Inclusion

The fine-grained stage of analysis involves reassembling the data into provisional themes and writing rules of inclusion, naming the themes, and examining how the rules of inclusion stand alone or relate to each other (Butler-Kisber, in press). Using the above themes as a rough framework, I began fine-tuning my analysis by methodically coding each photograph. I named the surface object of each photograph, based on the participants' own description of what they had photographed. For example, the surface object might be a coconut tree, a bed, or a mosque. I then assigned each surface object to one of the designated themes. For example, the coconut tree represents Food and Agriculture; a bed represents the House; and the mosque represents Religion. During this process, I adjusted and re-adjusted the themes for consistency. Finally, I wrote rules of inclusion for each theme, as presented in the following Table No. 3.

The next stage in the constant comparison process is to explore how rules of inclusion stand alone or relate to each other (Butler-Kisber, in press). However, I wait to examine this more comprehensively later in conjunction with my analysis of the photo narratives in Chapters 6 and 7. First, I return to the comparison of themes to present a visual analysis of the distribution of photograph objects across age, gender and community.

Table No. 3: Rules of Inclusion

Food and Agriculture	Photographs of plants that are harvested, tools used for harvest, or methods and tools for post-harvest production. This also includes photographs related to livestock[17].
Education	Photographs of places, clothing, or instruments (such as blackboards and books) used for conducting education. Education also includes photographs of teachers and students.
Religion	Photographs of mosques, the imam, or instruments specific to the tradition of Islam, with the exception of books and blackboards which are categorized as education.
The Barray	Photographs of the community meeting place (the Barray) and community leaders (the Chief).
Toilets	Photographs of toilet facilities.
Family / Birth	Photographs of family members, and places or tools used in the delivery process.
Transportation	Photographs of vehicles or pathways.
Water	Photographs of bodies or sources of water.
The House	Photographs of the exteriors of homes, items within the home, or devices to protect the home.
Forests	Photographs identified to be forest or bush, including Tiwai Island. This is not to be confused with photographs of plants that were identified in reference to food or agricultural activities.

Visualizing Results

While constantly comparing the objects in the photograph was helpful in identifying the major themes of the project, I felt the analysis was inadequate to understanding the big picture. How does the frequency of photographs compare across gender and age and place? I thus compiled tables and graphs to visually represent the numbers of photographs per theme and per demographic category. The graphs are not meant to represent a comprehensive statistical analysis of the photographs. They are a simple tool which makes the frequency of photographs

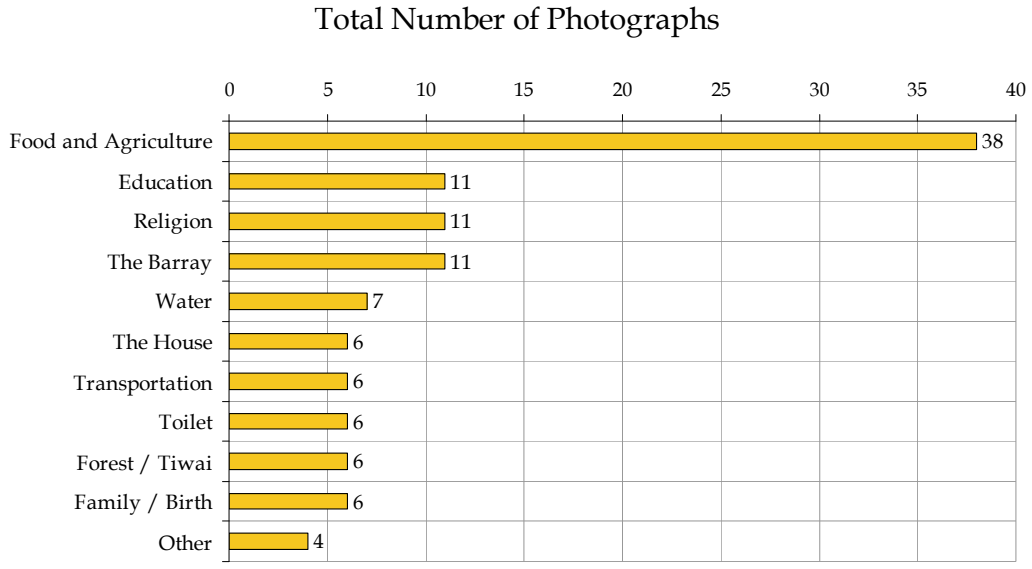
[17] Despite a documented recognition that men and women are involved and responsible for different stages in agricultural production, harvest, and processing (Leach, 1994), I chose *not* to divide the food and agriculture category. I felt that, within the scope of this study, working with data from 27 participants and 10 themes was already pushing the limits of what I could accomplish in the timeframe of the study. I therefore recognize the potential for a further nuanced reading of the photographs, regarding gender, labor, and resource use within the category of Food and Agriculture.

visually accessible. They offer one perspective to explore how the themes relate to each other.

Total Photographs

As depicted in Figure 5 below, a quantified analysis of all the photographs reveals Food and Agriculture to be the most important aspects of place to be conserved, accounting for 38 out of 112 photographs. The second most important features of place include Education, Religion and the Barray, with 11 photographs each. The remaining themes of Water, the House, Transportation, Toilets, Forest, and Family/Birth were each represented by 6 or 7 photographs. The 'Other' theme accounts for 4 outlier photographs, which I will address later in Chapter 7.

Figure 5:



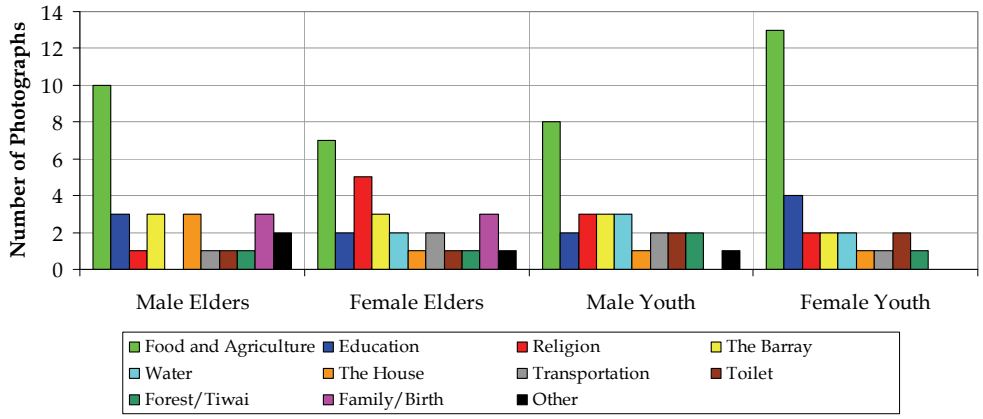
One Word: By Gender and Age

Once I quantified the importance of each theme, I was interested to see how the themes varied across age and gender. Do women and men in the communities around Tiwai Island have different priorities for community conservation? Is there an intergenerational divide in views for the future? By virtue of being women *and* youth, I would argue that young women in rural Sierra Leone are amongst the country's most marginalized voices. In particular, I was interested in this most vulnerable demographic. In order to get a visual

representation of these differences, I plotted the numbers of photographs per theme in Figure 6. Based in my theoretical stance inspired by environmental justice, I expected that age and gender would be significant factors.

Figure 6

Photograph Themes - By Age and Gender



Despite my assumption that results would vary, this visual representation revealed more uniformity across age and gender than I had expected. Most thematic areas, such as Education, The Barray, The House, Transportation, the Toilet and the Forest had a variance of only 1 or 2 photographs across age and gender. There are some exceptions and notable observations, such as:

- A higher importance of Religion identified by elder women, who took 5 photographs of Religion, compared to the other groups which took 3 photographs or less;
- A focus on Family/Birth for the elders, whereas none of the youth identified family members or the birth process as important to conserve;
- An absence of Water and a greater emphasis on the House for elder men, reflecting their role as builder and inheritor of the house, as opposed to the fetching of water which is a role more commonly designated to (and therefore photographed by) women and youth;
- More emphasis on Toilets by youth – youth took twice as many photographs of toilets as their elders, perhaps indicative of exposure to 'aid' projects from a younger age?

- Young women are particularly interested in Food and Agriculture and Education.

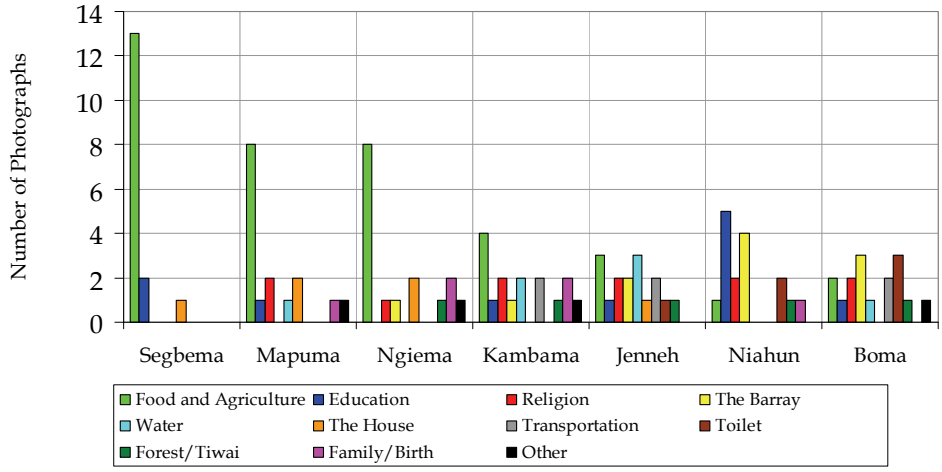
The uniformity across gender and age may reflect the conflicted age of youth, and the male lens that I described in Chapter 5. The uniformity might also suggest a sort of 'surface' collective identity of what it means to live in a place with a certain hierarchical structure. One of the participants described the community effort to construct a Barray as 'One Word,' or a communal effort. Leach (1994) describes men's and women's roles around resource use amongst Mende people in the Gola forest as inseparable and interdependent. Thus, while perhaps women fish collectively by wading in the river and men fish individually from boats, both men and women fish in the same river. While men may clear the plantation, plant the seeds, and manage the income, and women may be more involved in harvesting and processing and the use of the fruit for medicinal value, both men and women are both involved in and benefit from the culture of coconuts. Thus it would make sense that most people living in a place would agree that the river and the coconut tree are important aspects of their lives, despite potential difference or inequalities in use, decision-making, ownership, or income benefits from those resources. With this collective use of space and resources, perhaps it is not feasible or realistic in an open participatory village-based process to expect entirely separate points of view.

By Place

Next, I repeated the categorization of surface object according to the community or place where individual participants were living. Figure 7 depicts these results. This visual representation indicates that *place* is as much a determining factor as age or gender in how communities establish priorities for conservation and development. This surprised me, given the close geographic proximity and similar livelihoods of the towns. However as I demonstrate below, each community has its own particular dynamic resulting from a multitude of factors that influence its assets.

Figure 7:

Photograph Themes - By Place



In the town of Segbema – 13 of the 16 photographs were Food and Agriculture objects. This is compared to 2 photographs related to Education, and 1 photograph relating to the protection of the house. This overwhelming importance on Food and Agriculture reflects Segbema's location as the most remote and isolated of the 7 participant communities.

Comparatively in Niahun, the 9 photographs relating to Education and the community Barray far surpass the 1 photograph of Food and Agriculture. This might reflect the leadership qualities of Niahun's Chief who is known to be a strong, fair and well-liked leader. It may also reflect Niahun's dedication to education: In the absence of government or NGO funding for a school, the community is operating a small independent school in a temporary thatch hut with volunteer teachers.

Finally, the village of Kambama is known as the most difficult and conflicted community in relation to development issues. This heterogeneity might be reflected in the diversity of photographs that lend equal weight to a variety of issues affecting the community. Competing values, combined with an elderly Chief and a couple of strong and well-voiced community members leads to frequent discontent within this particular community. Despite the best of intentions, change is a slow and often a conflicted process. For example, this

community has an unfinished concrete school building, despite the generous quantities of cement donated for the completion of the school.

The importance of place can even be proven from one side of the island to the other. In the Koya Chiefdom, *none* of the communities identified transportation with their photographs. Contrarily, all the communities in the Barrie Chiefdom except Niahun identified transportation as important. With a theoretical grounding in place-based education, it is ironic that I am surprised at the importance of place emerging from the graphs. I suspect that my focus on issues of justice around youth and women's voices over-shadowed my consideration for place. Visually charting the frequency of the photographs helped me to expose this bias.

Beginning with participatory analysis during the interpretation day on Tiwai Island and reinforced through the constant comparison method, the photographs reveal 10 themes. Food and Agriculture, Education, The Barray, Religion, Water, Transportation, The House, Family/Birth, Forests, and Toilets are important assets of place to protect for future generations. A visual comparison of these themes across age and gender delineates some distinctions between what men and women, elder and youth identify in their photographs. However, I observed more uniformity than anticipated based on my literature review about the experiences of women and youth in the country. By comparing these themes across communities, the research suggests that contextualizing place is *just* as important as age and gender when identifying community priorities for conservation and development. Thus, the surface objects provide a foundation to identify trends emerging from the data. The graphs further illuminate these trends. When integrated with the accompanying photo narratives, the themes also provide inspiration for exploring and expressing the particularities of the alternative knowledges produced by the people living around Tiwai Island.

Chapter 6. Fieldwork Stories 3: Thick Description, Performed

In this chapter, I incorporate the photo narratives with the fieldwork stories to produce thick descriptions for each of the 10 themes. To begin, I compile the salient aspects of each photo narrative. I then describe the process of ghost-writing thick description, and how a series of performance texts emerge. Finally, I combine the written poetry with selected photographs into poster format. By approaching thick description through the arts, I challenge dominant forms of data presentation, explicate my own creative expression, and make the large volume of data accessible (beyond the written thesis text) in a way that maintains the expressiveness of the participants' voices. The 10 posters are presented at the end of this chapter.

Coding the Narratives

Working within the 10 themes described in the previous chapter (Food and Agriculture, Education, Religion, the Barray, Transportation, Water, Forests, the House, Toilets, and Family/Birth), I began the process of thick description by analyzing each photo narrative for its content. For each photo I generated a list of content descriptors that identify the topics discussed within the participants' narratives. I selected descriptors based on words or concepts that seem significant to the participant's justification and explanation of their work. For example:

Photo #1 is a student in uniform. The reason of snapping this photo is because I love education. I need a school in my community as every school day, the children walk miles and miles to school. We therefore need help to have a school structure as we have more school-goers. I and my Boma community stand for education, therefore please help.

-Fatmata Sesay, young woman, Boma

Content Descriptors:
Student, Uniform, Education, Need, School, Community, Children walk miles (Transportation), Inadequate infrastructure, Help

From here, I compiled a list of descriptors for each of the 10 themes. The descriptor lists are comprehensive and detailed, containing up to 100 descriptors per theme. In the example above, the descriptors fall under the surface theme of Education. While the photo depicts a boy in school uniform, the narrative also alludes to the need for better transportation and infrastructure. When you photograph your plantation, you might also be talking about family inheritance. When you photograph the mosque, you might also be talking about forgiveness. When you photograph the Barray, you might also be talking about a history of war. When you photograph a motorcycle, you might also be talking about emergencies and the opportunity to travel. When you photograph toilets, you might also be talking about hospitality. When you photograph the Moa River, you might also be talking about community health and diamonds. When you photograph your family, you might also be talking about your plantation. The interconnectedness of culture and the environment emerge through this analysis of the photo narratives.

Thick Description: Performance Poems

The descriptor lists then provided material to begin thick description for each theme, using the ghost-writing technique. This process was both iterative and creative, and what emerged were performance pieces that represent the photo narratives. While it was not in my original plan to write 'performative' poems, my knowledge of how poetry can be used to represent research (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Yallop, 2005), my creative judgment and willingness to be explicit in my representation of the participants' work, and finally my natural tendency to memo my own emotions and experiences through prose compelled me to explore this method of analysis.

I began writing a first draft of the performance texts using the content descriptors only. I tried to recall the photo narratives without referring to them. I worked intuitively through memory to (re)produce a sense of cadence and tone similar to the way the photo narratives were written down. When initially compiling the descriptor lists, I had naturally re-organized the descriptors into

loose sub-themes, without actually naming them. For example, for Food and Agriculture, I had naturally 'chunked' all the different plant types such as rice, coffee, cacao, coconut, and banana, in one area of the page. I organized farming techniques, such as mixed crops, the cutlass, manual work, and improved variety seeds, in another. I recognized the impermanence and fluidity of these categories - I did the chunking in pencil and was often erasing and re-writing as I worked with the descriptors. I used these loose sub-themes as the basis for paragraphs or stanzas of the thick descriptions, again using the space of the page to separate them as ideas or points. By centering, right- or left-aligning the stanzas, I attempted to show the range of ideas and concerns addressed by the participants. While I did not include each and every content descriptor in the performance pieces, I attempted to include a representative cross-section of topics raised by the participants.

After completing the first draft, I then referred back to each of the original narratives in order to edit and particularize the poems. I changed expressions I had used that did not best represent the voice of the participants. For example, for Food and Agriculture, I had repeated 'I've got…' several times. I changed this to 'I have' which was more likely to be found in the actual photo narratives. I inserted direct quotes as much as possible. Phrases such as "Learning is better than silver and gold," a popular expression used by several different participants when referring to education, and one young woman's description of her house, "My mother who gave birth to me used to dwell here," were helpful to give the prose a thicker and more illustrative texture. I found other quotes useful as the basis for summary statements: "All living things on Earth depend on the forest" explained one woman; "Toilets are important for our town" said another. Writing the poems allowed me to weed through the linguistic formalities of the photo narratives, and focus more clearly on the different ways that participants connect with place. By eliminating formal explanatory phrases, such as "The reason why I took this picture is…" and broad introductory or summary statements, such as "Reason being that it brings a lot of benefits," and "So this is a very important part of our community," I attempt to highlight the prominent content and ideas.

Participants often had many different ways of explaining a similar phenomenon. I listed these within the poetry to portray a sense of repetition, and the range of the experiences expressed about that phenomenon. For example, many participants described the implications of prayer and worship in their lives. I listed these descriptions as thoroughly as possible, such as "You say praise and thanks to God, You ask God for mercy, You fulfill promises, You please God" etc. Finally, I re-organized the stanzas to show-case the direct quotes, and attempted to present any contradictions or tensions from the photo narratives through formatting.

At this stage, I walked away from the poetry for several weeks in order to review, take notes and transcribe the follow-up interview recordings. Through this process, I was drawn to several rich descriptive segments that emerged through the interviews. These 'nuggets' expressed emotions, distinctions, and particularities of being in or experiencing a place - and were voiced in a repetitive poetic style that appealed to my own creative expression. The interview content renewed my inspiration, prompting me to revisit each performative text to continue working with them and 'thicken' the descriptions I had written. During this time away from the poetry, I also read Denzin's (2000) work on how an aesthetic of performance-based text can merge critical race theory with qualitative inquiry. He draws attention to how the ethnographic, the artistic, the epistemological, the aesthetic, and the political are entwined. This article discusses the political nature of the performances, and highlights the potential of the poems to articulate a "politics of hope." Therefore, the poems are an attempt by me to balance the needs and challenges alongside the positivity and hope expressed by the participants during the Photo-Voice activities.

When I re-worked the poems with elaborations from the interviews, my attention was drawn to the different and sometimes conflicting opinions of the participants. For example, when referring to diamonds – one young man described how he mines in the river. Another young man explained how he has to leave his home town when he wants to mine. An elder woman described people from outside coming to mine and then taking the diamonds away. The process of compiling all these different experiences into the poems helped illuminate the

contrast and heterogeneity amongst participants. The poems thus work to validate these different knowledges, by weaving them together into a single performance.

Using a combination of narrative, found poetry and my own creative initiative I create performance pieces to thickly describe what the people living around Tiwai Island want to protect. Photo-Voice, an artistic process in itself, acts as a basis for my own artistic expression. Including the participants' individual narratives, as well as oral texts from their poster presentations during participatory data analysis and individual interview data through the artistic process strengthens my data analysis. The poems bring voices together, reflective of the 'collective' village context. Individual voices overlap and merge through the process of interpretation and translation. This demonstrates the possibility for thick description to be done through participatory and artistic means.

Poetry Posters

Given that this was a Photo-Voice project, I wanted to incorporate the images into the performance pieces. I created a poster to (re)present each theme. The photos represent a visual aspect of description. A selection of photographs around each performance text thus integrates this critical visual aspect of Photo-Voice into the findings. The posters provide a synopsis of the essence behind each theme without losing the first person voice *or* the visual impact of the photos. My intervention - collating, re-arranging and re-presenting the photographs and narratives - allows for the audience to 'get a feel' for the sheer number of photographs produced throughout the project. When looking at the posters, the audience 'experiences' and interprets the art. There are multiple ways to read the work, and multiple valid conclusions. The posters make the texture of the research accessible without having to look at all 108 photos and read each description. This is useful for EFA, as well as other aid agencies who are often overloaded with reports and emails and do not have time to keep up with current research. In a sense, they are visual abstracts of the research's salient themes that maintain the personalized voices of the participants. To me, by thinning out extraneous phrases, the richness of statements becomes more powerful and intensifies the

participants' descriptions and emotional engagement with place. When the performance pieces are read *with* the photographs – they provide a thick perspective on the prominent environmental, cultural, and emotional aspects of places in rural Sierra Leone. With the posters, I am further develop the process of thick description by using participatory artistic, poetic, *and* visual interpretation in their production.

For the purpose of sharing this information in a variety of formats, I thought to summarize each poster and theme in a short paragraph[18]. However, this seemed to defeat the purpose of the posters. I was relying on the standard, rational, linear knowledge that I am trying to challenge by using an arts-based approach. By summarizing what participants were saying about each theme, I was translating local, indigenous, spiritual, non-linear emotional knowledge into 'NGO speak.' While perhaps informative, the paragraphs I wrote felt empty and bland compared to the poems. Presenting the main ideas narrowed the content, losing important qualifiers, such as one young man's referral to his childhood as "the time I didn't wear trousers" and an elder's strategic planting of a local tree to protect his home from the "shocks and destruction of thunder and lightning." These rich distinctions help to particularize and contextualize participant knowledge by drawing attention to *how* people describe their own lives. Writing summaries flattens the data; participants' voices would be lost in my translation of their work. By trying to succinctly recap the thickly descriptive performances, I was reinforcing the idea that rational linear knowledge is the best way to present knowledge. The purpose of thick description is to engage in the delicacies of distinction and expose layers of meaning within culture (Geertz, 2000c). The summaries erased distinction and skimmed over depths.

In leaving the performative texts as is and not including summaries, I question their impact. How are performance-based texts perceived and received

[18] For example: **Education,** sending children to school, is important for its financial benefits. Despite the lack of schools in most communities, for which the participants ask for help, education is viewed as a strategy to improve the financial situation of the family and community. Educated children can make money by traveling overseas or working as a teacher and therefore take care of their parents and elders.

by different audiences? How will NGOs and government ministries (some of the intended audiences of the work) interpret performance pieces? Do I risk isolating and stereotyping rural people? Will the poetry be helpful in guiding programming and policy decisions? How would the participants want me to represent their work[19]? Disseminating research in an arts-based format is relatively new strategy within development work. By abandoning the report format I worry how the research will be interpreted. Based on the problematized disconnect between Freetown elite and rural populations in Sierra Leone (Richards, 1996), I strive to maintain the rural voice. I am accountable to the Tiwai communities, EFA, and the sensitive relationship between them. I want the research to make a difference. I am confident that the art speaks for itself. However, I question how the message will be received by other people.

In this chapter, I have integrated participatory, constant comparison and artistic methods of data analysis to produce thick descriptions for each of the 10 photograph themes. The performance pieces use poetic and visual representation to extend what it means to engage in thick description of place. The delicate distinctions expressed through the poetry allow for particularized nonlinear, alternative, spiritual, and embodied expression which would not emerge if translated to report format. The pieces illustrate the multiple ways people value, connect with, and feel about the places where they are. Finally, my use of performance-based data presentation is also an attempt to challenge audiences to think and understand beyond dominant, rational, scientific, and linear ways of thinking and actively engage in interpreting the research.

[19] Unfortunately, a final member check was not possible within the scope of this study due to time, money, and logistical limitations of returning to the remote communities.

I am a Farmer

This is my rice farm

This is my oil palm plantation

This is my

Coffee Coconut Cocoa Cacao

Banana Orange Kola nut

Broad bean

Groundnut

Chicken coup

My farm is in the bush

Slash

Burn

I have seeds, short variety plants, and a successful yield

I have my cutlass, my axe and my hoe

I have long term benefits

My family benefits, and my community benefits

I can leave something for my children

I have food, and this is how I prepare it:

I dry it on a mat in the sun

I pound it in my mortar and pestle

I cook it, I grind it, I eat it

I share it - especially with visitors

Food is life

Rice is *my* life

An empty bag does not stand on its own.

I have cash crops

I sell the fruits and get cash

I have profit, I have income,

I can pay my children's school fees,

I can travel

I care for my plants, morning, afternoon and evening

I use them as medicine, for heartburn and malaria

I use them to make things, like clothes, brooms and bedding

I use them as offerings

Animals benefit from my farm too

You are supposed to brush every year, but when the war came...

Now I also have photographs of things that are important to me,

that I can show to my children

Learning is Better than Silver and Gold

If you don't agree to learn, you are furniture

Education is money
If you have enough money,
you will do what is good
Education brings profit

Education is key to the world
Education helps you know
your rights and wrongs
Education can enlighten you

There are
Two kinds of book learning:
English and Arabic

Book learning made *you* know this place

It is good for parents to send their children to school
My family didn't put me in school
I only know bush work

When I give birth to a child, I want him or her to be educated
Your children can go overseas,
And make friends in other countries
Your children can bring home benefits
Children in uniforms are really nice-looking, I love them

Our school is the landmark of our community
Our children walk miles and miles to school
We don't have a school
Our school is a temporary shelter
We need help for education in our community

This is a teacher in our community
She prepares our future leaders

One good turn deserves another

Me and my community stand for education

A Special Place, A Godly Place

There are two ways to worship God: Christianity and Islam
I am a Muslim
This is a Muslim-dominated area
I hold the Muslim prayer with 2 hands

This is our chief imam
This board represents our Muslim culture and tradition, which we don't want to loose
This is our mosque, our place of worship, the entrance to god's house
It is a special place, it is a godly place

But it is old
It is not in good condition
It is falling down
Please help us fix it

I would like my children to follow
the same way of worship in this place.

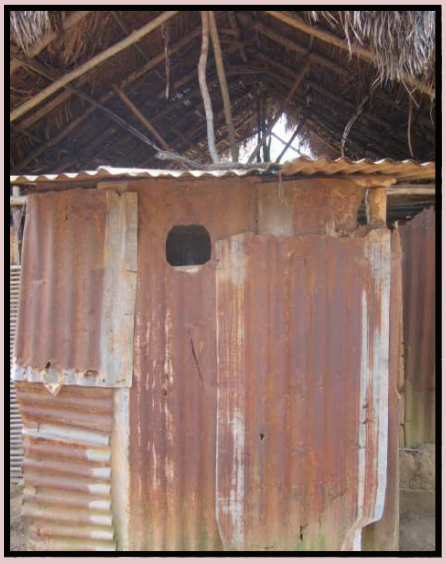
Through prayer and worship:

You say praise and thanks to God
You ask God for mercy
You fulfill promises
You please God
You beg to God for blessings if you are in trouble
You become closer to the Almighty Allah

You learn how God created Heaven and Earth
You are protected from danger
You know good from bad
You are saved from the next world
You can ask for help
You are with God at all times

Praying is like a reward after a whole day's work

If in the future, I pass away to God's kingdom,
if my children beg God for forgiveness for me inside this mosque,
God may grant it



God creates us
God is everywhere
I love God

My House is my Shelter

It is my space to prepare for the day
I want to sleep in a *decent* house
Without a house, you live like animals in the forest

Locally woven bamboo thatch protects us
from rain and sun
And keeps the place cool for relaxation

A *pambai* plant protects
me and my family from the
shocks and destruction
of thunder and lightning

My bed is a place in my house where I
Sleep
Relax
Keep time
and
Talk about important family matters with my wife

My father built this house
It is his house, but he died
Now I live here with my husband
But I won't say he doesn't own it
(My mother, who gave birth to me, used to dwell here)
It is property for my children
They will be proud of the house their father built

As a visitor, we will not allow you to sleep outside
You will sleep in the house

(With this picture)
I can show my house to
my children yet unborn

Toilets are Good for our Town

When a visitor comes – even you - the toilet is the second place (after accommodation) that you show them

As you reach somewhere – even you - you ask:

Show me the toilet

If a toilet isn't there, you strain

If you don't have a toilet, you go to the bush

You cannot host a workshop, if you do not have a toilet

Without toilets, you will get sick

The flies sit on people's food

We used to use the bush

Now we dig pit latrines

It is more hygienic

Toilets reduce illness

If you put charcoal, you can avoid bacteria

We have a really really deep one

It is not yet completed

This one is safe, without flies

I don't have the upper hand to buy cement, nails, and zinc

Ours is broken and we need help to fix it

Sometimes, you dig until you meet water

Sometimes, you dig until you meet rock

Sometimes, we are afraid of the deep deep places

Our Meeting Place

Our Barray
is a meeting place
in the shade
where we sit
and meet
and discuss
important community matters

And recite prayer

Together, as youth and elders,
we discuss the welfare of our community,
development and the future.

And,
When visitors come, this is where we bring them.

But,
Our barray is not presentable:
It is not in good condition
There aren't enough seats for everyone
We are not finished building it yet
It is small
We need a zinc roof
We need help to make it better

This Family

This is my
mother
father
uncle
children
grandchildren

This family was created
by God

This is the oldest,
This is my beloved
This the last remaining
member of my family

My family farms
My family owns the (is)land
My family provides food, clothing, and education for me

This delivery house is
a place
where our wives give birth

This delivery kit
represents all women
It was given to me by the hospital
for community healthcare

I can show my children
that I worked as a nurse
in my community

I hope that one day I will have
a child to love
Anybody who grows up
prays to God to get children

We in Africa, we like children

I advise you to educate yours

The Forest is not a Farm

All living things on Earth depend on the forest

We love the forest

It protects us from the sun
It provides food, clean air and water
It boasts species that cannot be found elsewhere

When there is forest and
there is water underneath
The water is *cold* to drink! It makes your heart *cold*.

Students come and do their dissertations
on the forest and its inhabitants

Tourists and Researchers
(People we have not seen before
People from different countries)
visit
Tiwai Island
and bring benefit to us all

It should help our community
It should be profitable for future generations

That forest, we want it
We want it today
We want it tomorrow
Because that's where we come from

I want the island to be conserved
for my children

We need Mobility

Business
is important
Only animals are naked
A lady from Vaama brings these wares

For selling, for travel, for holiday, for cash and education

If there was a closer market, we could sell
But we can't go far, we get tired
If we go to the big towns, we can sell rice for Le 500 per cup.
But cars don't reach here

Before the war, there was a road here

River transport
Fast and easy outboard engine
Olden days dug-out canoe,
In case of engine problems
In case of *any* problem
If someone is hit by sickness

We need help for mobility and medical care

A good road would be a legacy from Tiwai
We are trying hard to get a Honda motorbike

Opportunity

We Drink from this Water

Pump water is pure, purer than swamp water. Pure water is good to drink
I hope that one day our water will come from an improved water system
We take great care of our pump, because we get clean water as a whole community

We drink from this water, we get sick from this water
The water is rough, it makes people sick
The water I drink is dirty, I don't like that
The tap we had broke, we are only managing
Water here is not good, for real

We have a big river, the Moa River, the river that surrounds the island
Laundry Cooking Bathing Swimming Washing Drinking Refreshment
Food Fish Snails Animals

The pygmy hippo:
People come to study it
Where ever we lay a farm, it eats the grass

After our clothes are dirty, we wash them freely
When you feel like bathing, you wash freely
We don't need to use a bucket to get water
People come here, when their own water dries up

I don't buy fish – I get them from the water
I pick the poison, I grind it, I wrap it inside a bag, for the smell
I go to the river, near the rocks, and I look to see better fish
I put all the bags in my net, I shake it and it runs down
The fish float up and I catch them
I don't buy fish – I get them from the water

The river provides diamonds, for our men
I bank around the place where I want to mine
I make it with dirt - a lot of dirt!
Then I remove the water, and dig for diamonds
People come and dig, they dive under the water
They find them, they hide them, then they go
We don't know how to dive
We don't have the machine to bail the water
When I want to do diamond work,
I leave, I go, I can't do it here
Because this is my home town

I used to fetch water from the well
when I was small
The time I didn't wear trousers

Chapter 7. Throughout, From the Margins, and Underneath the Photographs

At this point, the fieldwork stories culminate with thick artistic description of place. However, I recognize that the path of this story is somewhat linear. The poetry pieces in the previous chapter are constructed out of the 10 themes identified through the surface analysis of the photographs. But what else is happening in the data? How do these themes stand alone and relate to each other? In this next chapter, I return to the constant comparison of these themes. I push my analysis throughout, from the margins, and underneath the photographs, photo narratives, and interview conversations to explore what else the data can tell us.

I begin by identifying some cross-cutting themes throughout the photo narrative and interview texts. I then account for the photographs that do not fit succinctly into the 10 major themes. This exploration of the margins suggests an alternative analysis that addresses the role of instruments, consumption, community spaces and people in the conservation of place. Finally I tease out salient threads of war and belonging that emerged from the interviews. Knowing these stories, the images become more nuanced and complexified.

Cross –Cutting Themes

Hospitality, Health and Income

In my analysis of the photo narratives, Hospitality, Health and Income emerged as cross-cutting themes throughout the data. A culture of Hospitality is expressed through the participants' concern for having the appropriate spaces and facilities to accommodate visitors. The Barray is the first place you bring a visitor to sit when they arrive in your community. The house is where you invite guests to sleep. The toilet is the second most important place, after accommodation, to show visitors. Inadequate facilities affect the ability to be a good host. Participants also draw attention to Health issues such as cholera and malaria, the medicinal value of crops and forests, access to clean drinking water, good quality toilets, and the lack of transportation and money for medical emergencies as well as mental health through relaxation and prayer. Finally, the ability to make money

determines the value of an activity, resource, or object in a place. Food and Agriculture and Education activities are strategies for finding income. Transportation is a resource that facilitates these strategies – through better road networks and access to vehicles, children can go to school, and produce can be sold in markets. These additional themes underlie why Food and Agriculture, Education, Religion, the Barray, Water, Toilets, Family, Transportation, the House, and Forests are important to conserve for future generations.

Documentation, Memory and Advice

Photo-Voice is a visual forum and tool to document, remember and share advice about life in the communities around Tiwai Island. Eight participants explicitly documented their lives, for the sake of having a record. One nurse said, "[This] is a memory for my children to know what job I was doing for my community." One young man explained, "This was the well we were using." A youth photographed a traditional pot used for keeping drinking water cool: "The main reason why I snapped this pot [is] for the children coming after us. We take this [for] granted that this pot was used by our late parents". One elder was proud of his palm plantation, "I took this photo to show that anyone who grows such a plantation would be known by the entire family including the children." When describing a photograph of her house, one young woman said, "My children yet unborn can see it, the type of covering." In describing local food processing techniques with a mortar and pestle, one youth said "I want children yet unborn to know that there is a carved wood called mortar which substitute machines for pounding things." Another youth's reason for photographing a cocoa plant was: "I want my children to see it." One young woman described the importance of how the mosque in her community was built: "I can in future, show out this design to my child or children yet unborn as the mosque culturally built." What is more, three elders specifically gave advice about farming, raising a family, and cleanliness. This demonstrates how some of the participants inherently used the communicative possibility of visual methods to share and document their knowledge in a way that they felt would benefit future generations.

The photographs themselves are important documents for inter-generational memory. Future generations can know and see aspects of their parents' and grandparents' lives. Each participant kept copies of their 5 photos and they reflected on what it would mean to have these documents. "At the end of the day, when I pass away – my children will see the pictures and know that their father was a photographer. But if I didn't do [the Photo-Voice], the day I die there would be no photo," explained one elder. "The photos are in my heart," he said. "(The photograph) shows something that you won't forget, forever." For some, the photographs represented their favorite aspect of the project. They were hung up in homes as mementos of their work and conserved in their own right for future generations. Thus, the photograph has multiple functions: It is material proof of both lifestyle *and* participation in the Photo-Voice activities. The photograph acts as a reminder of the Photo-Voice 'event' as well as a prompt for continual reflection. While Mitchell (2005) addresses the importance of documentation and digitally archiving photographs from a researcher perspective, the participants highlight the value of the physical photograph in keeping a visual record of their own lives in a way that is accessible to them.

Please Help, Expectations and 'Project' Responsibility

Despite a Photo-Voice prompt designed to avoid focusing on problems and need, the problems that people face in the communities around Tiwai Island emerged anyways. At first, I interpreted the requests for assistance to reflect a possible dependence on or expectation of outside assistance. Being a White person in Sierra Leone identifies me as someone from abroad with access to money. People ask me for help on a daily basis. Reliance on donor funding is indeed a challenge in the country (International Crisis Group, 2008). In order to further explore this phenomenon, I charted the demographics of who asked for help through the Photo-Voice.

Women were much more likely to ask for assistance through their photos. Twelve of the elder women's photographs and 13 of the young women's photographs asked for some form of assistance. This is compared to only 6 requests from the younger men and no requests for help from the elder men

(although 1 elder man did request for help during the follow-up interviews). The Photo-Voice was thus a *particularly* accessible forum for women to voice their needs. In the follow-up interviews, women explicitly discussed the opportunity Photo-Voice afforded them. One elder woman stated that her *main* purpose of joining the research was to ask for assistance. One young woman articulated a tension she felt between representing her own life, and asking for the things her community needs: "What I want to say, is I am an agriculturist. That's what my husband and I do… we work in that swamp. Every morning, that is where we go. That's my first answer, for myself. But for the pictures, the first thing I want to say is please help us." This suggests that women (and to a lesser extent, young men) negotiated the topic of conservation and used Photo-Voice to strategically document their community concerns.

When I compared requests for help by place, the results varied drastically across Chiefdoms. Participants from the Barrie Chiefdom were much more likely to ask for assistance than those in the Koya Chiefdom. There were between 5 and 9 requests per Barrie community compared to only 1 or 2 requests per Koya community. Tiwai staff members report the dynamics of the Barrie Chiefdom communities to be more conflicted than those of the Koya Chiefdom. If this is the case, it suggests that women and youth in conflicted communities are more likely to ask for help than those living in more stable places.

Voicing individual requests (for example, to pay their children's school fees or put a better roof on their home or to pay for a sick uncle who is in hospital) was not observed during the research. The participants *all* asked for help for the community, in most cases to be able to help it's self. By building a school, the community children can be educated so that they can bring money home. If a road is constructed, the farmers can get better prices for their produce, or travel to the hospital quicker in case of an emergency. If the Barray is bigger, more people can be accommodated for important community dialogue about development. If toilets are constructed, the community will feel more hospitable when visitors pass through. If a water pump is installed, cleaner water reduces chance of illness.

If the mosque is upgraded, the community people will feel more proud of a major pillar in their lives. These requests for help were community-minded.

Some participants seemed unclear how development projects could help their community. Participants referred to 'the project' as the Tiwai Island community conservation program, however, sometimes 'the project' referred specifically to my Photo-Voice research, and sometimes to aid in general. 'The project' brings outside assistance, which people want. "We want people to come from abroad to help us, to tell us what to do with Tiwai. That will benefit us so we can survive," said one elder. Participants often asked me to build a road or a school. I needed to explain that this was something I was unable to do and went beyond the scope of my ability and my project. One woman stated "high expectations" of outsiders to help local development. On the other hand, one man expressed a simultaneous sense of vulnerability and acceptance that 'projects' come and go, and that not all projects meet the needs of all the community members: "You came with a program for us. Good [projects] exist, and sometimes it's a bad one that we don't want. But all is good. Sometimes the one that is there, I don't want. But another person wants it. Sometimes the one I want, the other person doesn't want." The Photo-Voice participants expressed dependence and a want for outside projects but also were concerned how these multiple projects would actually benefit the communities.

This focus on 'project' assistance prompted me to ask participants whom *they* saw as responsible for community development. Most agreed that it was a combination of EFA, local government, and the community people themselves. However there was not very much confidence in the local government. When referring to the responsibility of the chief and local government for community development, one woman said, "But they don't do it. I don't know why." One participant recognized the chief is responsible, but appealed to me for help "because you are different from us, so we call to you for help so you can talk to people on Tiwai. So they can come with a school for us." Participants feel that the community people are ready and willing, but lack some of the skills and resources

to complete the job on their own. One young man described his frustrating and failed attempts to rebuild toilets:

> I dug another toilet, behind the house. But 3 months ago, it got ruined. I don't have the upper hand to buy cement, to buy nails, or zinc (roofing). That's why we use thatch. The thatch we use, when rain comes…. Every day rain falls on it, it spoils it. Unless I make another one … That spoils us. We dig them but we don't … If we dig 2, 3, or 5 holes – they all spoil.

Some participants feel as though development will happen if God wills it. "But for the mosque, we want it to have windows... It's up to God. If God says we should get glass, we will get glass," said one young woman. Views of who is responsible for community development ranges from God to 'the project' to the Chief, but above all, many feel development is not happening fast enough.

My analysis of the cross-cutting themes in the data reveals Hospitality, Health, Income, Documentation, Memory, and Advice to be important aspects of place that compliment the 10 major themes. Requests for help through the Photo-Voice suggest the opportunity that this type of research offers women and youth, in particular, to voice their concerns for their communities. There are various different understandings of what the 'project' is and who is responsible for community development. This suggests a need to clarify community expectations of outside initiatives versus the limitations and deliverable mandates of these same initiatives.

Narratives of War

Throughout the Photo-Voice activities, only one participant made reference to Sierra Leone's recent civil war. He photographed a concrete structure used to dry rice and explained that it was made before the war. Other than this one instance, it might seem as if war had not happened. However, prompting participants to talk more about their personal experiences in the places where they live, work, and play in the follow-up interviews elicited significant narratives of war. These experiences of war affect the communities deeply. It influenced how they arrived where they are today and further influences what they feel is important for future generations. Destruction experienced during the war – at

times over and over again - was a central explanation for the current state of the villages. There is a repetition of how the war/rebels came, destroyed the place, and how the people are working on but have not yet finished rebuilding their communities. There is a perception that the shadows of yesterday are taller and better built than the structures of today. While I interpret glimmers of hope and collective efforts to rebuild, I also get a sense of frustration and discouragement over what can seem at times an insurmountable task. What people have is not enough, it is just making do. Infrastructure is not what it used to be and therefore not yet ready to be conserved. It needs to be fixed, constructed or re-constructed first. Thus, the stories of war apparent in the interviews add an historical understanding to what is behind and underneath the photographs. In an attempt to integrate this historical significance of the war to the communities around Tiwai Island, I present thick narratives of war as a performance piece, *When the War Came*.

When the War Came

During the time when war hadn't come yet, the place was *small*
I didn't have any money, but I had enough to eat.
I lived an average life

During the old time, when my grandfather laid farms on Tiwai and cut lots of rice
There used to be so many houses
So so so many zinc houses, pan-bodi houses, concrete houses
There was a road here, before the war came
My mother told me so

When the war came, everything was destroyed
The rebels came here
They came and destroyed us
They set fire to everything
They burned the whole house
They burned *all* the fine houses
Everything was ruined

When the war came, I lived here
The rebels came and removed us
We returned and began to build
Then the soldiers came and burned the place
We returned and began to build, again
Then the soldiers came
Then the rebels came
and burned the place, again
down to toilets

When the war came, the rebels came here
They came and shot guns
They came and killed us
They killed a lot of people!
They killed one of my children
Even my small brother,
this is where they killed him

When the war came, we all scattered from here
All the family
All the children
Scattered the place
All
When we went to the island, they followed us
When we came out of there, they followed us
Anywhere we went, they followed us
That's how we lived

When the war came, nobody could do their brushing so everything went bad
You are supposed to brush every year
Those who survived are working hard to brush again
But even now, we can't get a good harvest

When the war came, they said I should join as a Kamajor
We cleared the place, before our families came home
We sent word and people came back

Only now, we have started to settle

Now, everybody is building
When we came back here
We made a thatch house
We would like our houses to be like during the 60s or 70s
Last year, we gave our house a zinc roof

We work together
We do things in common
We build someone's house today
Tomorrow we build someone else's house
The day after, we build the next house
We do things in common
If we don't put hands together, it won't change
Its chain work that we do

But we haven't finished fixing everything
If you have family out,
They send money
They send money so you can build
Here, nobody lives out
In London, in America
over there
That's why here is not fine

Before the time the war came, we did cultural activities
During the dry season,
we danced, we danced
with the devil

Now, it's different - all the old people died
Now, we have to build for ourselves - before a person's father built for them
Now, everybody is worried - You stand hard

Before was quality
We have gone backwards
The first (town) was better than now
Now is totally different
That's the only history I have

Outliers – Broader Themes

Outliers, data that do not fit with the general trends seen during analysis, can offer valuable insight. In the case of this research, outliers are the photographs that did not fit succinctly within any of the 10 themes: The Clay Pot, the Kpatoi Tree, Cleaning the Community, and the Wash Yard. In a sense, these photos are 'at the margins' of the data and at first I could not understand their importance. But a closer read of these outlier photographs and their narratives allowed me to re-think my 10 surface themes and suggest a counter analysis of the data. This counter analysis is more general and breaks the data into only four themes: Community Spaces, Instruments, Consumables and People.

The Wash Yard

Figure 8: The Wash Yard

This is the photo of a wash yard. The reason of taking this photo is because it is very important in our society. You keep yourself clean in the wash yard. You hide your face from people.

- Jenneh Kallon, elder woman, Ngiema

The wash yard is a small open-air space, half-enclosed by vegetation planted around its U-shaped perimeter. Communities usually have several wash yards, located around the edges of the village. The wash yard provides a space for women to urinate and (if they do not wash at the water's edge) wash in semi-privacy. When I first came to Sierra Leone, it took me a while to understand there are different spaces designated for different bodily functions. One space, the wash yard, is designated for urinating and another, the latrine, is designated for 'going to the toilet.' It took me about a month to realize this difference, and when I did I was immediately embarrassed about all the times I

had asked for a 'toilet' when what I probably needed was a 'wash yard.' Because of my confusion, I was known as the White girl with the weak runny belly.

Now that I know what a wash yard is, it would seem to make sense to include it the Toilets category. However, the elder woman who photographed the wash yard behind her house described the purpose of the space for keeping clean, and for hiding yourself as well as for bodily functions. Following her description, the wash yard did not seem to fit within the Toilets category. This distinction led me to ponder the possibility of places within place. Indeed, within one community place there exist numerous other designated places. These are depicted through the photographs such as: Places of worship (mosques), places of learning (schools), places to get water (rivers or wells), places to relax or sleep (houses), and places important for hosting visitors (toilets and Barrays). These places represent spaces within the community with multiple functions. I summarize this idea of places within place as Community Spaces.

The Clay Pot, the Kpatoi Tree, and Cleaning the Community

My analysis of the outliers continued when I turned my attention to one young man's photograph of a Clay Pot, a vessel for storing drinking water and keeping it cool. He called it the "African fridge." I almost categorized the Clay Pot under the Water theme, as it is a source of water for drinking. However in his description the participant did not emphasis the *water*, per se, but the historic, cultural and aesthetic aspects of

Figure 4: The Clay Pot

This is a pot. It is a clay pot. The importance of this pot is known as Africa fridge. When you put water in this pot it becomes cold to drink. So it is one of the important fridges in our village. The main reason why I snapped this pot for the children coming after us we take this as granted that this pot was used by our late parents. It is historic and interesting.

- Lansana Koroma, young man, Mapuma

traditional cooling methods: “This pot was used by our late parents. It is historic and interesting.” The Clay Pot could therefore be considered a vessel or a tool that enables an age-old process still used by communities. In other words, the pot is an Instrument through which you accomplish something. When I applied this theme across the rest of the data, it is consistent with the photographs that depict material objects (such as the cutlass, axe, hoe, drying mat, mortar/pestle, books, and blackboards) and processes (praying, farming, cooking, cleaning). This also accounts for the 2 other outlier photographs: The Kpatoi Tree and Cleaning the Community. The Kpatoi Tree can be understood as an instrument used in ritual and ceremonial processes, and Cleaning the Community can be seen as a process through which the community enjoys a healthy life.

Figure 5: The Kpatoi Tree

This is the photo of a tree in Kambama, Kpatoi. I took this photo to indicate that the Kpatoi is the heart of Kambama. Under this tree, we assemble and make sacrifices to God.

-Abdulahi Koroma, elder man, Kambama

Figure 6: Cleaning the Community

This is the photo of cleaners in Boma village. I chose this photo to show that cleaning our environment is important. Cleanliness can lead to a healthy life. If you are dirty, you may die before your time. This is a message for everybody.

-Foday Kallon, elder man, Boma

Alternative Framework

My analysis of the outlier photographs exposes alternate themes of Community Spaces and Instruments. A return to the complete data set indicates these themes can account for many of the photographs, but not all. Photographs of food, income, water, medicine, and consumption require a different theme. For these, I propose Consumables as they represent items consumed on a regular basis. Revisiting my initial coding of surface objects and themes, I re-assigned each photograph to these 3 broader themes: Community Spaces, Instruments, and Consumables. At this point, I realized that I needed to add a fourth category for People. The People category includes images of teachers, students, chiefs, imams, nurses, and family members.

Exploring the marginal photographs thus introduces an alternative - more general - framework through which to consider how identity might relate to place. The original, ten place-specific themes characterized by the surface objects in the photographs are helpful for planners, conservationists, development organizations, and policy-makers in Sierra Leone to better understand the rural context from which they are derived. However, it is unclear how transferable these themes would be outside of the rural Sierra Leone context. How might the results of this research apply to different places? Where do the themes intersect with current identity theories? This framework is preliminary and experimental; further investigation is certainly required to develop, refine, or evaluate its applicability. People, Community Spaces, Instruments, and Consumption may offer a different way to discuss the structural determinants of place and identity in environmental education. I hypothesize that this framework might be applicable outside the Sierra Leone context and could be replicable in 'other places' where environmental education is working to re-connect culture and nature.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that by extending my analysis throughout, from the margins, and underneath the photographs and narratives, layers of meaning are revealed, enriching my interpretation of the data. Exploring the cross-cutting themes between the photographs and their narratives illustrates additional features of place worth preserving: Hospitality, Health and ways of finding Income. It also demonstrates how the Photo-Voice was used as a forum

for women and youth to ask for assistance, for elders to extend advice, and for participants to document life, as it is today, for future generations. Trends emerging through the final interviews expose narratives of war underneath the photographs that – when presented as a performance piece – elaborate on the historical context of the area and its emotional interaction with place. This further nuances and contextualizes how identity is expressed in the research communities. And finally, a close read of outlier photographs suggests broader themes through which the data may be interpreted: Community Spaces, Instruments, Consumables, and People. While characteristics of place such as Food and Agriculture, the Barray and Toilets may be specific to these research sites in particular, the alternative framework offers an introductory perspective through which identity might relate to place both within Sierra Leone and abroad.

Chapter 8. Discussion & Conclusion

The Photo-Voice project gathered men and women, youth and elders from 7 of the communities around the Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary in an inter-generational and inter-community discussion about the conservation of place. Through this participatory, arts-based method the participants explored new forms of visual expression. For most, it was the first time they had ever held a camera or taken a photograph. Identified through this study are ten characteristics of culture, community and environment that are important to protect for future generations. Thick description of the 10 themes was explored through poetry to emphasize particular ways that the participants connect with place. In this chapter, I combine the literature, the fieldwork stories, the interview narratives, the art, and my own researcher reflexivity to ask two questions: First, I interrogate the role of physical structures in a place, as they relate to the negotiation and (re)construction of identity. Second, I question where Photo-Voice fits within the space between the collective and the individual, and how it can challenge a dominant paradigm while at the same time work within it.

The Physicality of Institutions

Eight years after Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war, the communities around Tiwai Island are still in the process of rebuilding. Houses, toilets, roads, mosques, and the Barray have not been rebuilt yet, are not what they used to be, or are too small to accommodate growing communities. The types of infrastructure that communities identify as 'development,' such as schools, medical clinics and improved water sources are almost non-existent. These types of improvements are central to community visions for the future. While hardly documented through the photographs, the follow-up interviews highlight the war as the underlying cause for the current condition of the villages. What does it mean when there is no designated physical space for these institutions? Or when a whole community feels as though the physical structures housing community institutions are derelict versions of yesterday? How does culture change when the physical environment (in the form of structures) is destroyed or re-shaped?

In a sense, the war was an event that 'came' but has not yet left. In the follow-up interviews, I noticed a common use of the phrase 'coming of war' as a temporal marker related to change in the community. With this 'coming of the war,' was the coming of the rebels, and the destruction and scattering of the communities. References to time and place were distinguished as the time before war came, the time war came, and after the war came. War always refers to the coming of the event. The participants rarely used expressions such as 'the end of the war,' or 'when the war left.' Is this just semantics or is this linguistic tendency the subtle reminder of an ever-present war? The destruction has not yet been repaired. How participants 'see this place' is a war-affected version of what it used to be. The struggle to acquire the resources to re-build to their former capacity, to repair the physical damage that resulted from the war, is still a daily experience for the communities around Tiwai Island.

Some of the infrastructure needing repair or reconstruction in rural Sierra Leone houses significant community institutions. Mosques, Barrays and schools represent institutions that include religion, law, and education. If space is an important consideration for understanding culture and identity, the physicality of these institutions contributes to the judicial, democratic, aesthetic, financial, and spiritual construction of community. The lack of walls, roofs and seating in the communities around Tiwai Island leads me to question the role of the 'physical' structure of an institution. I suggest that physical structures can provide a literal frame through which institutions - and therefore culture and identity - are constructed, enacted, and negotiated.

Sociality can also be constructed in other ways (Ferme, 2001). Institutions such as organized labor (tracing a legacy of slavery), polygamous marriage, and secret societies remain central to the function and organization of rural communities (Ferme, 2001; Richards, 2005). Furthermore, it is important to explore the function of interstitial spaces between the thought and the sensed (McKenzie, 2008). However, this Photo-Voice research draws attention to the material structures through which community institutions are enacted and the ability of a community to repair and develop within the spaces of these structures.

These symbolic buildings are part of the physical reality through which constructed social reality is shaped and can play an important role in the enactment, construction, negotiation, and deconstruction of identity.

Physical structures alone cannot provide the space for identity negotiation. The construction of these structures is inherently political and tied to the social relationships. In Kambama, a school remains half-finished because of a controversy between the school committee and EFA. In Mapuma, a protected water well was not constructed properly and because of its far distance from adult supervision was later ruined by children. A Barray recently constructed in Ngiema is now in disrepair and is unsafe to be used. Erecting structures alone will not solve the problems of Sierra Leone. Quick-fix, band-aid development schemes (Installing wells! Building schools! Putting a new roof on the Barray!) do not necessarily address underlying social issues. However, I suggest the construction of buildings and infrastructure provides an opportunity to facilitate community-based dialogue about what the institutions that will occupy these places mean. This is consistent with CARE International (2008) findings that identify ways to combat youth stigmatization through the construction of road networks, community youth organizations, community centers, recreational facilities, housing, and schools. Along with development of infrastructure is the need to explore how these resources will be used and maintained by the community institutions.

Institutions and the complex relationships within them must also be regarded with caution. Richards (2005) cites institutional abuses deeply rooted in an era of domestic slavery as the 'agrarian roots' of the recent war. I am personally drawn away from institutional projects mired in bureaucracy towards grassroots advocacy initiatives that recognize important conversations happening in streets, parks, fields, and kitchens. Given my Western experiences in dingy classrooms, stale corporate board rooms, and the loss of individuality one can experience within them, I see beauty and potential in hosting open community meetings under a mango tree or on the verandah of a house. However, my resistance to institutional conformity may simply be a result of my own privilege

of having been able to experience such organization – both their benefits and their challenges. The Photo-Voice project forces me to critique my concept of institutional conformity to suggest institutional possibility. In the context of rural Sierra Leone, infrastructure may provide important space for resistance, negotiation, and alternative social organization.

A lack of physical space marked for community organization makes it harder to negotiate change in an equitable manner. When there is no Barray, community meetings often happen on the Chief's verandah, or in other spaces occupied by men's hammocks. This effectively reduces the space available leaving what little space there is prioritized for leaders and elders, and limits women's attendance within men's spaces. When there is no school, there is no space designated for youth advancement. Would the existence of effective physical structures enable women and youth to challenge hierarchies in a locally appropriate way? Physical spaces appropriate for *every* member of the community – regardless of sex and age - may provide women and youth with more opportunity to voice their concerns and participate in development projects.

What about Young Women?

My theoretical lens draws on eco-feminism. I intentionally approached the categorization of the photograph data according to participant age and gender to specifically isolate the voices of young women. I genuinely *tried* to be conscious of young women. But I wonder if I was naive in thinking that I could so easily incorporate a gendered lens outside of my Western context. In my analysis, my concern for the young men overshadows the discussion of the young women. What does it mean that the young men commanded my attention, enough to name a whole section about them in the fieldwork stories? Why did I not include a similar section on young women? What does this mean about young women? By drawing attention to young men, was I ignoring young women? Did I 'collude with the structures of domination' that I tried so hard to be aware of? In a community-based project, I was accountable to and needed to include multiple participants from each of the 7 Tiwai communities. The resulting research overwhelmed and overloaded me with data. I had to make decisions about what to

include and what to leave out of the research findings. I am left wondering if drawing attention to women's participation and the fact that women as a whole exercised agency in making requests for help through the Photo-Voice is enough. My decision to discuss the young men's experiences over the young women's does not meant that young women did not play an active role in the project. There is the young woman who left in the middle of our interview to seek out a different translator to ensure that her voice was heard. There was the woman who prioritized her community's needs for better infrastructure over her personal needs as a farmer. And I wonder about the 19 year old participant who was expecting her fourth child. As a young woman myself, but without children and traveling around the country independently, perhaps I identify more with the young men my age then the young women. It is almost as if I could have written my thesis only about young women. But I had other issues that also need to be addressed. The result was the young women were pushed to the margins. My difficulties including the experiences of young women in the research findings, I think, point to larger challenges of mainstreaming gender within and throughout community-based work.

Whose Voice?

According to the Photo-Voice findings, the participants are generally in agreement about the state of their communities and their goals for the future. While different priorities for conservation and development were voiced, there was very little debate across these differences. Food and Agriculture, Education, Religion, The Barray, The House, Transportation, Family, Forests, and Toilets *are* important to the potential of rural Sierra Leone. However, background research and the fieldwork stories lead me to question this high level of agreement. Long-term rural research illuminates tension between youth and elders in the country (Richards, 1996, 2005, 2007). Youth are frustrated about their low status in the country (Care International, 2008). The fieldwork stories for this study reveal significant difficulties in recruiting a *younger* youth voice in the village context. The stiff dynamic between the young men during the photo interpretation day was apparent. There was on-going dissent in the communities underlying the field

research process. The interpretive role of the male translators and facilitators had an inevitable impact on the process of gathering data and the data itself. And women, in particular, expressed a need for assistance more than men. Given these subtle and not-so-subtle suggestions of tension and inequality, why was there not more debate amongst the participants?

An intergenerational dialogue perhaps facilitates a different process, dynamic and response from participants than, say, the peer-to-peer interviews conducted with youth by CARE International (2008). In a peer-to-peer setting, there is a different sense of comfort and maybe less opportunity to critique local structures of power. I know that I speak very differently with my grandmother than I do with my peers. I voice my concerns differently and some issues I avoid altogether. In an intergenerational project, how much are women and youth free to fully express themselves in front of their husbands, fathers, and elders? Conversely, how much did elders feel they needed to maintain the impression of unity in front of their communities? Or, did community members not want to expose their discontent to a White visitor associated with the hope of resources for change? Is this reflective of the tensions in the debate between Gruenewald and Bowers, which question the compatibility of individualized critical reflection and localized place-based work? Keeping in mind these questions, I wish to contextualize the Photo-Voice findings and the potential limitations within this intergenerational study.

Another interpretation of the apparent lack of debate amongst participants is simply a lack of controversy surrounding the research question. Collective appreciation of place may not necessarily be a controversial or highly debated topic for the communities surrounding Tiwai Island. It seems as though most community members, while photographing different things, agree *what* should be protected and developed. Perhaps more conflict might have emerged if we had asked what is the best *way* to protect this place? It may be that collective agreement is valued more than an individual's need to voice their opinion - as is suggested by the relatively communal lifestyle lead by the villagers. On the other hand, it was clear through the fieldwork that conflicts exist within and across the

communities. For example, the management of the island is a very contentious issue! Secret meetings were held and sign boards openly expressed discontent with EFA. It is possible that more tensions might have emerged if the research had investigated *who* and *how* conservation and development should be managed.

However, a lack of conflict does not negate the data. A positive outlook that emphasizes community assets was one goal of the research. The stories that participants chose to visualize and produce through the Photo-Voice are their own. Including the elders and focusing on the positive aspects of place produced a particular picture of cohesive community conservation. A large body of work already reveals the conflicted experiences of Sierra Leone and its communities. The positive approach of this study was integrated into the research question and subsequent methodology. Thus, the participatory visual research allows for a more hopeful perspective about the future of the country to be expressed.

Conclusion

I began this research story by asking: What happens when you use arts-based inquiry to explore environmental knowledge about place? How can artistic expression expose or produce alternative knowledges? To answer these questions, I developed an intergenerational Photo-Voice project that worked collaboratively with rural youth, elders and a community conservation project around the Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Sierra Leone.

I found Photo-Voice an effective tool to engage the marginalized voices of women and youth in environmental planning and community development. My priority was to get youth involved. However, accessing youth between the ages of 18 and 25 proved difficult in this rural context. At the same time, the Photo-Voice provided an apt forum for women's strategic requests for help for their communities. Photo-Voice is an accessible visual tool for inclusive engagement, increased participation and agency in community and environmental issues. Given the success of this tool, it could be used to help mainstream gender and youth participation within environmental programming and community development.

By categorizing, charting, and comparing photographs, 10 themes emerged as important for the future of the communities around Tiwai Island:

Food and Agriculture, Education, Religion, the Barray, Transportation, Water, Family, Toilets, Forests, and the House. The varying priorities across age, gender and place demonstrate the importance of adopting an inclusive approach to community knowledge that allows for these differences to be considered. In the fieldwork stories, I demonstrate how Photo-Voice provides a participatory entry point to approach arts-based thick description. Visual and poetic performance texts particularize and contextualize the photographs and narratives. Performance-based posters challenge dominant, rational, linear knowledges and make the data more accessible to a wider audience. An analysis of the outlier photographs offers an alternative framework for a holistic approach to education that includes People, Community Spaces, Instruments, and Consumption within place-based educational approaches. This alternative framework might be more applicable outside the Sierra Leonean context.

It is clear that communities are still feeling the effects of the war. People struggle to find resources to re-build their homes, mosques and barrays. Developing infrastructure such as schools, improved water sources, and road networks still seem feats unattainable without the help of outsiders. The current state of villages brings with it a sadness of how the place used to be. Given this context of very little or inadequate infrastructure, I question the role of physical structures in the construction, negotiation and enactment of identity. Reflecting on the community dynamics that occurred during the project, I identify some potential limitations to the research design and the difficulties of incorporating a gendered perspective into community-based work. However, the intention of the study was to elicit participant expressions of 'how we see this place' and facilitated community appreciation of the positive aspects of the future of Sierra Leone.

Appendix I: Visual Consent Form

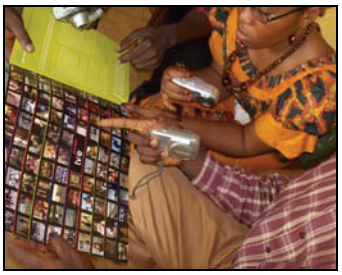
Photo-Voice Project – How We See This Place
Sierra Leone, January 2009

I understand who is involved in this research project, and where the workshops will take place

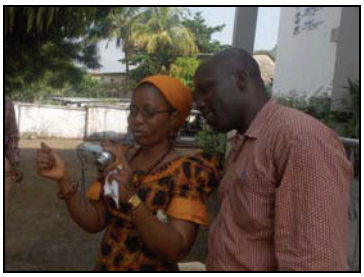
I understand the purpose of the research.

I understand that I will be asked to participate in 2 workshops and potentially 1 interview.

I understand what I will be asked to take pictures in my community.



I understand that I will be asked to discuss the photographs that I took.



I understand the risks and benefits of being involved in this project.

I understand that if my voice is recorded, the cassette tape will be kept private and confidential, and that my photo may be taken.

I agree to be audio-taped ☐
I agree to be photographed ☐

I understand that my role in this study is voluntary. I can refuse to answer any questions, and I am free to stop participating in this study at any time.

I feel informed about the research and have had a chance to ask questions. I understand that I may ask questions at any time during the project.

In signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project.

Date:_____

Staff member:_____

Participant:_____

Category:_____

Village: _____

Signed:
Primary Researcher:

Tiwai Island staff member:

Participant:

Jennifer Thompson, McGill University (Canada)
Tel: 076 699 563
In collaboration with the Environmental Foundation for Africa
PMB 34, 1 Beach Road, Lakka, Freetown Peninsula, Sierra Leone

Appendix II: Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

McGill

Research Ethics Board Office
McGill University
1555 Peel Street, 11th floor
Montreal, QC H3A 3L8

Tel: (514) 398-6831
Fax: (514) 398-4644
Ethics website: www.mcgill.ca/researchoffice/compliance/human/

Research Ethics Board II
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 104-0908

Project Title: How we see this place: Engaging Sierra Leonean youth in community development project through art

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Thompson

Department: Integrated Studies in Education

Status: Master's student

Supervisor: Prof. Claudia Mitchell

Funding agency and title: N/A

This project was reviewed on October 9, 2008 by

Expedited Review ✓
Full Review ____

Mark Baldwin, Ph.D.
Chair, REB II

Approval Period: October 24, 2008 **to** October 23, 2009

This project was reviewed and approved in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Subjects and with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans.

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* All research involving human subjects requires review on an annual basis. A Request for Renewal form should be submitted at least one month before the above expiry date.
* When a project has been completed or terminated a Final Report form must be submitted.
* Should any modification or other unanticipated development occur before the next required review, the REB must be informed and any modification can't be initiated until approval is received.

Appendix III: Epilogue

October, 2009

Six months after the fieldwork, questions of the impact of the research and its actual long-term benefit for the people living around Tiwai Island are still on my mind. A project such as this one will inspire a range of reactions. As with my previous experience in Sierra Leone and my work with Youth at Risk in inner city schools in Montreal, it is sometimes difficult to 'know' or 'measure' the multiple impacts of an initiative.

Photo-Voice can have multiple outcomes and impacts. If Photo-Voice is to encourage critical reflection and dialogue (Wang et al., 1998), one participant confirmed its success during the follow-up interviews, "It is a great activity because you think twice." Another participant explained how the Photo-Voice benefited her understanding and interest in dialogue, "We took different pictures in our own environments, and others took their own pictures in their own environments, and we all came together and we shared ideas from different communities … I grew interest in that area – sharing ideas." If the point is to bring marginalized voices to the attention of community planners and policy-makers (Wang, 1999), the photographs were exhibited to politicians and NGO workers in Freetown. Upon viewing the photographs, one government official was shocked at the condition of the photographed toilets. She gathered a crowd in the hallway of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to encourage her civil service co-workers to 'do something' about the state of Sierra Leone's villages. In another instance, an environmental NGO director was initially disappointed that very few participants photographed forests and natural wildlife. However, the photographs influenced his decision-making leading him to allocate new funds towards the reconstruction of a mosque, better responding to the community needs depicted in the images. These examples demonstrate some of the benefits of the study for the research participants, and possibly other rural communities in the country.

On the other hand, the benefits of the project were not always clear to the participants or audiences of the photographs. For example, one participant asked me, "Who is learning, here... me or you?" Another question, by one viewer of the public exhibitions was, "What is the point of all this, why are these photographs important?" Despite considerable care taken to gain genuine informed consent, did the research make "false promises" (Mitchell et al., 2006) to the participants hoping for assistance to rebuild and develop their communities? During the follow-up interviews, one woman asked, "How do we use or get benefits from the photographs? So I took all the pictures, what kind of benefits are you going to bring?" Another youth said, "[We want] income to come for us, for the people in Niahun. So that's one thing I am asking from the program, so I can put my children in school." In the context of such extreme poverty (United Nations Development Programme, 2007, 2008; United Nations Children's Fund, 2007), the pedagogical benefits of the research might seem subtle compared to the immediate and tangible needs of the communities. It might be unrealistic to think that a 6-month project might significantly benefit or change the lives of the people living around Tiwai Island. Photo-Voice itself does not necessarily guarantee practical benefits towards the day-to-day life of the participants. Change takes time, and the long-term impacts are not always apparent at the completion of a

project, or even 6 months later. For this reason, the project was integrated as much as possible within the Tiwai Island community conservation project, a long-term initiative to promote conservation and development in the participating communities. The Photo-Voice project helped develop local photography skills and promoted 'coming together and sharing' across communities, age and gender. The community liaison representatives gained experience with cameras, facilitation and qualitative research. What is more, the research process not only engaged the participants in a new process, but also the NGO workers who are involved in promoting eco-tourism on the island. These workers' decisions have a direct affect on the Tiwai communities. The project cameras were donated to EFA for the staff on the island and in Freetown to document their work and include photographs in donor reports. Some benefits to infrastructure and long-term outcomes from humanitarian funding or policy change might only be realized in several years time.

As a researcher, I assume a responsibility to continue to exhibit the photographs and share the participants' work with a wider audience. One community Chief urged me to "show the pictures to the whole world, so they too will know..."

Exhibitions/Outreach to date:

Concord Times (Freetown)
Newspaper Article, Kevin Hill (Journalists for Human Rights), March 12, 2009

All Africa.com
On-line article, Kevin Hill (Journalists for Human Rights), March 12, 2009

Environmental Foundation for Africa - Head Office
Photograph Exhibition, Freetown, Sierra Leone, April 29 – May 1, 2009

Research into Use
Presentation, Youyi Building, Freetown, Sierra Leone, May 5, 2009

Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
Photograph Exhibition, Youyi Building, Freetown, Sierra Leone, May 5 – 8, 2009

Cotton Tree News (103 FM and 107.3 FM)
Radio Interview, Radio Mount Aureol, Fondation Hirondelle – Media for Peace and Dignity, May 4, 2009

Cotton Tree News Studio
Photograph Exhibition, Fourah Bay College, Mass Communications Building, May 11 – 22, 2009

Feminist Visual Methodologies for Social Action Workshop
Photograph Exhibition, Thomson House, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, September 25, 2009

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