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Memory Frictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone

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Abstract 1

This paper concerns the frictions of engagement when transitional justice mechanisms are implemented in local contexts. My focus is the practice of

truth-telling as part of a global paradigm of redemptive memory. I first trace the genealogy of this paradigm, examining how it came to appear 'natural' and 'universal.' Second, I explore struggles over memory that ensued when Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) assertively promoted this paradigm in a region in which alternative memory techniques reflected popular priorities in an unstable context of 'no peace, no war.' These struggles were rooted not only in the contested content of memories, but also in a perceived incommensurability between contrasting memory projects believed to have divergent implications for processes of reconstruction. Finally, I examine the significance of reparations both for local practices of post-war memory and for the local effectiveness of the TRC.

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