



Testimony

Found Poems from the Special Court for Sierra Leone

by Shanee Stepakoff
Foreword by Ernest D. Cole

DESCRIPTION

IBPA Benjamin Franklin Award™ gold winner, poetry category

Sierra Leone's devastating civil war barely caught the attention of Western media, but it raged on for over a decade, bringing misery to millions of people in West Africa from 1991 to 2002. The atrocities committed in this war and the accounts of its survivors were duly recorded by international organizations, but they run the risk of being consigned to dusty historical archives.

Derived from public testimonies at a UN-backed war crimes tribunal in Freetown, this remarkable poetry collection aims to breathe new life into the records of Sierra Leone's civil war, delicately extracting heartbreaking human stories from the morass of legal jargon. By rendering selected trial transcripts in poetic form, Shanee Stepakoff finds a novel way to communicate not only the suffering of Sierra Leone's people, but also their courage, dignity, and resilience. Her use of innovative literary techniques helps to ensure that the voices of survivors are not forgotten, but rather heard across the world.

This volume also includes an introduction that explores how the genre of "found poetry" can serve as a uniquely powerful means through which writers may bear witness to atrocity. This book's unforgettable excavation and shaping of survivor testimonies opens new possibilities for speaking about the unspeakable.

Paperback

9781684483105, \$22.95

Hardback

9781684483112, \$15.89

eBook

9781684483129, \$22.95

PDF

9781684483143, \$22.95

Date: June 2021

Pages: 184



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SHANEE STEPAKOFF is a psychologist and human rights advocate whose research on the traumatic aftermath of war has appeared in such journals as *Peace and Conflict* and *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*. She holds an MFA from The New School and is completing a PhD in English at the University of Rhode Island.

ERNEST D. COLE is John Dirk Werkman Professor of English at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. His research focuses primarily on post-apartheid South Africa, but he is also interested in body and trauma studies, especially the ways in which bodily injury shapes identity. He is the author of several

books, including *Space and Trauma in the Writings of Aminatta Forna* and *Theorizing the Disfigured Body: Mutilation, Amputation, and Disability Culture in Post Conflict Sierra Leone*.

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