The Influence of Modernity and Modern Warfare on the Koh Mende Society of Sierra Leone

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Abbreviations:

M	Mother
F	Father
D	Daughter
S	Son
Ch	Child
B	Brother
Z	Sister
y	Younger
e	Elder
Sb	Siblings

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support. Thanks also to my other brother Sam and other members of my family, especially my cousin Tamba Momoh who allowed me to stay at his house in Ngiema and took care of me during the fieldwork.

This study is dedicated to the memory of Belinda, Michaela and my dear parents

Introduction

Background and choice of topic

This study investigates the impact of modernity and modern warfare on the social and religious representations of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde[1] in Eastern Sierra Leone (map 1) with special reference to Ngiema village (map 2). What prompted me to study this subject was the all too devastating eleven-year civil war in Sierra Leone and its consequences on the social representations of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde (map 3). This conflict served largely as a background impetus to the research carried out among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde at Ngiema in the Luawa chiefdom[2] from March to September 2006. Additional research was done for three months in 2007.

The Sierra Leone Civil War drew the attention of many within the international community. Especially between 1998 and 2000, Sierra Leone dominated the news headlines in much of the western media, which made constant references to the alleged brutality of the rebels and those involved in the fighting. On January 6, 1999 – when the rebels launched a final assault on the capital, Freetown – a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reporter claimed that Sierra Leone had fallen into a state of mindless anarchy, barbarism and savagery.[3] Upon a close social anthropological analysis, however, it soon becomes evident that the conflict in Sierra Leone was more than just "barbaric" and "savage".

One of the early descriptions of the civil war implied that Sierra Leone, like many African States, had fallen back to primitive superstitious beliefs in warfare (Kaplan 1994, 2001). Accordingly, its primitive and brutal conflicts could leave no room for a rational explanation when compared with the more modern western type of warfare and inter-group

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1   See chapter 1 on the origins of this society.
2   People in the Luawa chiefdom sometimes say Ngiema-Luawa, when they want to specify and differentiate their village from other villages that have the same name in other parts of Sierra Leone. Hence, I employ both forms in this study.
3   Meanwhile former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was busy urging his cabinet at that time to approve a mandate of sending British soldiers to Sierra Leone "in order to put an end to this savagery in Sierra Leone" (cf. 'Freetown – the most dangerous place on Earth', a BBC radio and television program broadcasted end of January 1999).

conflict.[4] Unfortunately, such a line of interpretation has surfaced in certain academic circles as the "New Barbarism Thesis."[5] It is academically weak and scientifically naïve to dismiss lethal conflicts in Sierra Leone and elsewhere on the African continent as sheer brutality, rooted in the presumably wicked and savage African Nature. On the contrary, lethal conflicts in Africa as a whole must be interpreted in their proper historical and cultural contexts (cf. Abdullah 2004; Schmidt & Schröder 2001; Kastfelt 2005). I shall argue these propositions in the course of this study.

Undertaking such a research was by no means an easy project. Being hesitant about it, I finally saw the necessity of facing such a challenge after a series of discussions with Prof. Dr. Jos Platenkamp. The reluctance was not academically motivated, but rather had to do with personal reasons, such as the fear of being re-confronted with my own suffering and the loss of some family members during the conflict. Taking into account the atrocities caused by the civil conflict, the process of reconciliation, and healing all the wounds most Sierra Leoneans had suffered was bound to be arduous.

Being a Kɔɔ-Mɛnde myself, and like many other Sierra Leoneans, I have been affected by the war and have stories to tell, but this would not be the right forum to do so. I will concentrate instead on understanding and interpreting the processes that are involved in such a conflict from a social anthropological perspective. This requires reflection – in historical retrospect – on the cultural and inter-cultural relations that were involved in various interventions, impacts and influences. Hence, it is evident that modernity and its products have indeed played a tremendous role in the civil conflict. From this perspective, the present study demonstrates the extent to which the influence of modernity and modern warfare is contributing to changes in the social behaviour and ritual actions of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, especially in Ngiema village.

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4   Such ideas have been criticised by social anthropologists like Kastfelt (2005).
5   See Richards (1996) who also levies a justifiable criticism of such an interpretation in his analysis of the war in Sierra Leone. For further discussions on the subject of "New Barbarism", see Kastfelt (2005).

One of the phrases I suggested when discussing this study with Prof. Dr. Platenkamp was that of *homo brutalis*. Admittedly, taking into account the increasing acts of violence[6] in the world, I was tempted to apply this phrase as an integral part of the research. Inasmuch as humankind as genus could be defined in social anthropological circles as a cultural animal, nonetheless experience shows that it could also be argued that he be defined in terms of his violent nature and brutality. I was quite aware of the constraints surrounding such a proposition; nevertheless, it is also certain that violence or violent conflict is a phenomenon present in most societies.

During these discussions, I quickly recognised that the terminus *homo brutalis* would not be helpful. This is because culture varies from society to society, and every society has its own understanding of violence, which can be legitimised, ritualised or even be detested according to the specific cultural context. It would be therefore fallacious to speak of the violent nature of humankind in general, since violence can only be a culturally specific reality *sui generis*. It is against this background of lethal conflict in a culturally specific context that I intend to undertake this study. Many ethologists and ethologically minded scientists, however, tend to overlook this fact. Scholars like Lorenz (1966; 1998), Morris (1968), Storr (1968) and Konner (1984) put much emphasis on the aggressive nature of humankind, which could pave the way for an evolutionist perspective in studying conflicts.

Furthermore, this study suggests that contrary to dismissing the Sierra Leone conflict as irrational, barbaric and savage, the war should be seen and interpreted from different perspectives, considering both internal and external factors such as social, economic and political. These factors, which intrinsically relate to the cultural and social values of those involved, have both historical and contemporary dimensions. Apart from the destruction of life and property, the civil war has affected not only the

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6   While most conflicts may end up in violent acts, it is also known that not all conflicts are violent or take on violent actions. These two concepts are mostly difficult to differentiate from each other. Due to such difficulties, I prefer to employ both terms as synonyms.

social representations of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, but other societies in Sierra Leone as well. To support such a claim, I examine the impact of modernity and modern warfare on the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde in Ngiema village.

The research question and its concepts

The research focused mainly on the question as to how the impact of modernity and modern warfare has changed and is still changing the social structure of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society in the Eastern part of Sierra Leone, particularly in Ngiema-Luawa. The following pages highlight the concepts that are employed in addressing this question. Hence the theoretical background of the research conducted informs the research question, which has been formulated in terms of more specific concepts. The application of such concepts is necessary for analysing the social reality of Ngiema village and of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde at large.

The research question can only be properly defined if it expresses – in systematic terms – the conditions, which must be fulfilled so that the different concepts that are part of the question can be applied and related to the research as a whole. Such conditions are explored by simply posing the question: What do these concepts actually refer to? It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at what the concept of modernity as an integral relational term of the study means.

In order to understand the theoretical background of the present inquiry, it is necessary to take into account the theoretical complexity of modernity in all its forms. Such an approach to modernity presupposes a reasonable attention to the interpretation of some of its different and elaborate theories (cf. Habermas 1985, Foucault 2007b, 2008). Most proponents construct various theories of modernity, even though its basic structure remains similar in many respects. Only some of these theoretical exponents that are considered to most appropriately apply to the object of this study have been selected to support my arguments about the quiddity of modernity itself. Some of these chosen theories, however, only remain implicit in this study, or act solely as background information.

The phenomenon of modernity[7] as a theoretical construct has always proven to be an interdisciplinary object of enquiry (cf. Früchtl, 1998) due to its polysemantic and multi referential nature. That is to say, it is largely through interdisciplinarity that an inquiry of this kind could become a fruitful scientific discourse. Many scholars therefore who engage in such an intellectual discourse may come from disciplines like philosophy, sociology, political science and other related sciences.[8] Nonetheless, this interdisciplinary character of modernity generates much dispute among its proponents (cf. Habermas 1985, 2006, 2008; Welsch 2008). A major reason for such controversies lies in the fact that modernity *sui generis* is a highly ambiguous phenomenon, thus making it problematic, since such an ambiguity is recurrent and cannot be completely transcended (cf. Bauman 2003, 2005, 2007; Früchtl 1998; Habermas 1985; Track 1999).

Modernity is prone to emphasise the Individual as an *a priori* category, to such an extent that it is indisputably recognised by various scholars to be the backbone of its ideology, identified as *Individualism* (cf. Dumont 1986). The phenomenon of modernity is therefore not only highly ideological in its diverse connotations but also largely historical (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Dumont 1986). This certainly has something to do with the developmental history of European culture, where the various discourses on the provenance and nature of modernity have come into being. According to Habermas (1985), much emphasis has been on the aspect of self-assurance (*Selbstvergewisserung*) in various discourses on modernity, which clarifies its principle as subjectivity, in the sense of individuality. In analysing the historical dynamics of the

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7   In elaborating the aesthetic meaning of modernity, Habermas argues that though the substantive *modernitas* as well as its adjective opposite pair *antiqui/moderni* already had a chronological linguistic meaning in late antiquity, nonetheless this term became part of a linguistic substantive only as late as the 19th century in the European languages, but solely in the realm of fine Arts. This explains why words like *Moderne, Modernität* and *Modernité* carry an aesthetic meaning up to this day, influencing especially the different realms of fine Arts (Habermas, 1985: 17-18). For further discussions on the aestheticism of modernity, see Foucault (2007a).

8   Even theologians who engage in research on the ecumenical relevance of inter-religious dialogue are becoming more and more involved in various theoretical discussions on modernity (cf. Brosseder and Ignestam, 1999).

latter, Habermas (1985: 16) argues that there are three crucial events responsible for the enforcement of the principle of individuality or subjectivity which can be summarised as follows. Firstly, the Reformation that stressed the individual right to judge what is good for him or her and to criticise or to reject what is not. Secondly, the Enlightenment, which sees the birth of *res cogitans* as the thinking or reflecting subject. Finally, the French Revolution brought an increasing consciousness of individual freedom as well as free judgment and choice in political and social life.

Since the 1970s, theoretical discourses on the problems of modernity have attracted many social scientists. These debates have reached their pinnacle in the guise of so-called post modernity (cf. Früchtl 2001; Grasskamp 1998; Jauß 1989; Lyotard 2005) an even more confusing notion than the much-disputed concept of modernity itself, which informs us more about the true nature of modernity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993). Another form of modernity that has emerged in diverse academic communities is the much-debated globalisation, which asserts key concepts for exploring the proper subject matter of modernity (cf. Eriksen 2007; Mooney & Evans 2007). In order to avoid a quagmire, need arises to focus on cultural modernity in contrast to the concepts of aesthetic modernity and what Grasskamp (1998) may call epochal modernity.[9] The following paragraphs attempt to give further indications of the concept of cultural modernity, demonstrating its relevance to this study.

Louis Dumont initiated a theoretical discourse on the question of modernity in social anthropology. By identifying and analysing the cultural ideology of modernity (cf. Dumont, 1986), his propositions on individualism are relevant contributions to the general discourse on the perennial problems of modernity. Certainly in the course of its early history, social anthropology has strongly maintained that modernity as an intellectual or theoretical enquiry can be of no immediate concern to its subject matter. Classical social anthropologists such as Malinowski were more interested in studying societies that have not yet been modernised in

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9   See Habermas (1985), Lyotard (2005) and Welsch (2008) for more discourse on these two concepts.

the sense of being developed to the state of western modernity (cf. Malinowski, 1953). Today, however, the centre of gravity is gradually changing, and social anthropologists are now adjusting to the ever-increasing challenges they face in their discipline. It is evident that societies, which social anthropologists investigate, are undergoing a process of rapid social changes. Such cultural dynamisms are derived not only from the globalisation processes set in motion by modernity, but also due to local cultural developments.

Contemporary social anthropologists have therefore been developing many methods in order to meet these demands. In addition to the classical village-based social anthropological research, a significant number of anthropologists are now taking more and more interest in social groups and communities living in cities. These are thought to be fertile grounds for the processes of developing modernity (cf. Antweiler 2000, 2003). Such developments are evident in the work of urban anthropologists, some of whom, according to Antweiler, undertake the so-called "*cool* ethnographic" studies in the metropolis and big urban centres, which is actually doing ethnographic research in bars, peep shops and other nightclub milieu.[10] Some of these anthropologists are increasingly investigating societies whose way of life is becoming more and more engulfed by the various processes of globalisation, since traditional values may now run the risk of being constantly replaced, at least superficially, by modern ones. These social anthropologists also try to discover and study the many changes occurring in such societies mainly due to the processes of modernisation (cf. Burawoy *et al* 2000; Gmelch and Zenner 2002; Hetzel 2001; Inda and Rosaldo 2007; Lindner 2004, 2007).[11] Social anthropology, conceived in this sense, would give an *apropos* contribution to the development of a theory that may not only serve an interdisciplinary purpose, but can also be of greater relevance within the confines of the discipline itself. The latter can engage more and more in theoretical discussions on the problematic of modernity, thus accounting

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10 See Antweiler (2003: 368ff).
11 For details on social anthropology and modernity and related themes see (Eriksen 2001; Fergusson 1999; Lofland 1998; Low 1997, 1999; Sanjek 2000).

for any intellectual discourse on the recurrent problems surrounding many globalisation theories.

Contemporary social theory as developed by the Critical Theory of Culture (*Kritische Theorie der Kultur*) of the Frankfurt school has played a crucial role in discourses relating to modernity (cf. Brunkhorst, 2001). Its fundamental premises are of great significance for the theoretical background of the present study. Critical Theory is a practical philosophy, which concentrates on social changes that take place within a society with an ever-increasing self-determination and assertion of the individual.[12] It mainly predicates the Individual, Culture and Science in its theoretical explications, but in a rather critical way (Honneth, 2006). Apart from having its basis in the philosophy of Karl Marx (cf. Bevc, 2005), some authors also argue that such a social theory has its proper roots in Horkheimer's *Traditional and Critical Theory* (Schweppenhäuser *et al.*, 2004).

The main founders of the Frankfurt school of thought, namely Horkheimer and Adorno perceive a direct link between capitalism and fascism, with the latter identified as the crisis of capitalism (cf. Hetzel, 2001). In their main opus, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) Horkheimer and Adorno identify and criticise the Enlightenment principally as mass beguilement. They regard it to be a particular turning point in the history of modernity, where a "culture of replacement" has come into being. Instrumental reason replaces mythical conceivability and beliefs; science and technology the awe-inspiring relationship of humans to the cosmological world. Such a pragmatic logic of replacement spurred by the Enlightenment has a number of implications, the most obvious being the idea of ultimate freedom. Modern technology, generated by *homo rationalis*, has ultimately revealed parts of natural phenomena hitherto regarded as divine mystery. Rational man may now give scientific explanations of how the universe came into being, and considers himself,

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12 In my opinion, these are the two main foundations upon which the Critical Theory is based. For further suggestions, see Gmünder (1985), Jay (1981) and Wiggershaus (1988).

in many respects, no longer subject to fears and limitations imposed by natural forces around him.

Another implication of equal importance is the aspect of a Culture Industry, which mainly has a utilitarian and profit making purpose. In its efforts to replace traditional culture (*Kulturindustrie*), Culture Industry generates different effects of the replacement of values in the sense that it renders relationship between people to be more business-like and less personal. In short, the general commercialisation of culture and its values analysed in terms of its mass production. Consumption, in this sense, becomes the Ultimate Good as the culture industry mainly aims at economic success, requiring all necessary means to pursue this end (cf. Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947.).

At present, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School continues to critically analyse and evaluate modernity and modern western cultural theories but in a less radical way than the founding generation. Today under the leading figure of Jürgen Habermas, its proponents prefer the name Culture Theory (*Kultur Theorie*) or sometimes the New Critical Theory (*Neue Kritische Theorie*) instead.[13] They, nevertheless, continue to see the contemporary form of western culture as a particular offspring of modernity and its ideology. Hence for most of its theoreticians, modernity is not a sacrosanct theoretical enquiry, but must be analysed rather critically (cf. Giddens 2008; Track 1999). One reason for such a critical analysis is the recurrent problems modernity generates or poses for cultures affected by its processes. The theoretical and philosophical presuppositions of the Frankfurt school, focusing mainly on culture and the critical analyses of social theories, have attracted some Anglo-American pragmatic thinkers like Richard Rorty, Richard Sennett, Charles Taylor and John Dewey. Although it is not central for this study to dive into the history of the *Kritische Theorie der Kultur,* it is nevertheless helpful to mention briefly a selected few of its main premises, and the contributions offered by some of its most important precursors and prominent thinkers.

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13 See Habermas (2001).

One of the most important precursors is the German philosopher-sociologist, Georg Simmel. His major opus, *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900), which analyses a phenomenology of modern monetary economy, is Simmel's main contribution to the theory of modernity (Lichtblau, 1997). Money and commercial goods are quintessential dynamics of modernity *per excellence* that forms and influences all realms of culture, including values and life-styles. The objectification of goods and economic value in the form of money always leads to differentiation between subjects and objects, as well as to their estrangement (Simmel, [1900] 2006). In view of these simmelian observations, one could argue that the relationship of human beings to the natural world is being constantly replaced by the cultural objectification of scientific methods (Frisby, 1984). Simmel laments the loss of relationship between social and cosmos domains in the modern world thereby identifying the special conflict character of modernity. He also follows Baudelaire's analysis of modernity in defining its main features and basic principles as temporary fluctuations (transientness), contingency and the tendency to vanish very quickly, because something new has overpowered or replaced it (*op. cit.*).[14]

Besides Georg Simmel, Max Weber,[15] another important forerunner of the Frankfurt School (Lichtblau, 1997), was also a critic of modernity. This is evident especially in his sociological perspective depicting the basic structure and spirit of modernity as leading to the disenchantment of mythical belief systems (Weber, 1922). Weber saw the skeletal structure of modernity mainly in fragmentation, plurality, decentralisation and the separation of subject from object, spurred by the rational nature of its modern economic and monetary exchange forms *(op. cit.)*.

Some contemporary Anglo-American social scientists or cultural theorists are also actively involved in general debates surrounding critical discourses on modernity. Rorty also views modernity and the modern western culture as responsible for the dichotomisation of different spheres

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[14]   This, however, can be understood as referring to the realm of fine Arts
[15]   Scaff (1991) and other scholars trace discourses on modernity in Weber's sociological thought.

in the modern world, which inevitably leads to the alienation between subject and object (Rorty 1989, 1991, 2001), as well as the disconnection between the subjective inner experience of the self and the objective material world out there (Sennett 1983, 1990). In this perspect, modernity does not unite, but consistently differentiate various domains of life.

The consequences of such "subjectivity" could be summarised as follows: First, a specific type of individualism grants each and everyone the right to self-expression of ideas and opinions, even to the point of becoming (extremely) self-assertive. Secondly, subjectivity in this sense stands for and leads to an autonomy of personal action. Characteristic of the modern world is to give every individual the right to be responsible for his or her deeds and independently judge them as right or wrong. This individual autonomy, however, leads to the weakening of social forces that bind groups of people or communities together. Thirdly, because each individual has the right to utter criticism, whatever he or she judges as right should be respected, and in most circumstances be granted. Subjectivity in this sense is self-actualisation (individuality and individual), self-determination (autonomy and self-determining moral consciousness) and self-awareness (the thinking self as *cogito ergo sum*). Finally, the principle of subjectivity as an essential feature of modernity concretizes itself in the formation and shaping of modern culture. Such a premise can be readily understood in the idea that *res cogitans* can free humanity from the fetters of nature through the help of modern scientific methods. It can also be manifested in the fact that myth and cosmos are no longer regarded as models for explaining the universe. The breakdown of religious values in the occidental worldview leads mainly to the secularisation of its culture, and new orders created by modernity are put in motion instead (Habermas, 1985). Drawing upon these various theoretical understandings of modernity, I shall employ their concepts in my model of modernity by referring to the following: 'individualisation', 'fragmentation', 'rationalisation', 'detraditionalization', 'globalisation', 'capitalism' and the 'monetization' of economic systems. The meanings of these concepts will be clarified when applied in their respective contexts, especially in chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11. In expounding the theoretical meaning of this model I have also employed the notion 'pre-

modern', which corresponds to the distinction made by people in Ngiema village between 'the past' and 'the present' in understanding their own history and society. This is what I have called the indigenous ideal models.

Present-day Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society is the outcome of long and complex historical processes, in which in the course of centuries the initially holistic, socio-cosmological parameters of its social order have been deeply affected by various external influences. These range from exchanges with foreign Muslim traders, the devastating European slave trade, the British colonial expansion, Islamic and Christian missionary activities, to the post-war presence of NGO ideologies and religious fundamentalists of various denominations.

To analyse the transformations, which these processes have generated, I employ an ideal-typical model based on a conceptual contrast between 'pre-modern' social systems, on the one hand, and 'modern' social systems on the other. As already explained, this model is informed by various social science theories in order not to reduce "complex continuities and contradictions to the aesthetic of nice oppositions" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993: xii). The descriptions pertaining to the socio-cosmic structure of the village based on recollections of elderly informants, furnish an ideal indigenous model of social order and communal solidarity, as it is believed to have existed before subsequent foreign interventions began to erode it.

I do believe that social institutions of the present cannot be adequately understood without some reference to 'the past'. Therefore in trying to discover how the Ngiema people make sense of their own past prior to the interventions, I have employed concepts like 'pre-modern' and 'pre-colonial' as indicators. I am quite aware, that like 'modernity', the concept 'pre-modern' is highly problematic, especially with regards to the difficulty of situating it in a precise historical period. In view of such limitations, I am not primarily concerned with an accurate historical definition of the pre-modern period, but rather with the time when the village community was practicing its ancestral traditions before major influences of modernity resulting from colonialism and post colonialism. In the wake of minor influences with other groups and early pre-colonial

Islamic influences, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde (had) largely continued to perform their religious rituals as well as keeping their political and social institutions in place.

To comprehend such institutions, a closer and more profound reflection on the methodological status of the data about 'the past' gathered among elderly informants became necessary. Such reflections, however, generated further problems as it is not always evident to what historical period the ideal models of socio-cosmological order usually refer. Some pre-modern institutions are still having effects on the present which informants present as a model Secondly, in analysing the social order of Ngiema village, two intertwined concepts of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society were salient, viz: images of 'the past' as provided by informants and the highly complex empirical data about the present social order. To understand how 'this past' is reflected into the later and to rigorously assess the information provided, additional field research is required.

Most recent studies in Sierra Leone have investigated the Mɛnde and the civil war as such, hence leading to unwanted generalisations based on the assumption that State is identical with Society. Many authors – up until now – have analysed the war in Sierra Leone as such, and almost the entire literature on the subject investigate the war in Sierra Leone in general terms, as if the country were a homogenous society.[16] In contrast to such views, social anthropology insists on studying each society as a whole, in order to understand their culturally specific representations. Hence, I have adhered to this approach of cultural specificity, which requires a look at the state of social anthropological research on the Mɛnde of Sierra Leone.

The state of social anthropological research

An important component of the overall research question is to analyse the divergence between State and Society, thus enabling this study to render a description of a local society. Most scholars generally assume that there are common characteristics among all societies of the Sierra Leonean

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[16] See (Richards *et al*., 1997; Richards 1995, 2005).

state, especially in relation to the civil conflict that lasted for more than a decade. What they virtually overlook in their analyses are the existing differences between these various societies. Contrary to such propositions, this study aims at presenting a rather culturally specific approach. Therefore, it focuses on investigating the impact of modernity and modern warfare on the social structure of a particular kind of society in Sierra Leone – the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. In doing so, the difference between Society and State becomes more visible.

During fieldwork, I realised that the various problems caused by the civil war was much more complex as hitherto assumed. It implies that broader issues had to be taken into consideration. For instance, the necessity to address the aspect of change in the face of all the rapid changes, which Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, especially in Ngiema village, was undergoing mainly due to the war and the various interventions that came as consequence. It also became apparent that the phenomenon of modernity, in most of its forms, has had an influence not only on post-the war, but also on the pre-war village community. Therefore, to address such vital issues would give a deeper understanding of the conflict in Sierra Leone as a process as well, rather than merely concentrating on analysing its causes. Thus, an analysis of the influence of modernity is an indispensable tool in understanding how most cultural representations of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde as a society have been changing over time. Changes are characteristic of any society; but it is precisely with such ongoing changes within the framework of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social structure, exemplified by Ngiema-Luawa, that I am mainly concerned. A holistic enquiry into the structure and cultural uniqueness of this society can be much helpful to such a study, rather than making sweeping generalisations about the Mɛnde or Sierra Leone as a whole.

The need to stress cultural specificity arises because recent research in Sierra Leone has shown how various Mɛnde-speaking groups have experienced the civil war in different ways compared to other societies, especially in relation to cultural practices. For example, "the rebels allowed Temne and Limba societies in the north to continue the

performance of their initiation rituals, while all cultural and religious practices of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde were prohibited."[17] In addition, we have three different types of Mɛnde-speaking groups living in Sierra Leone, with some considerable differences in cultural practices and linguistic behaviour.[18] These groups are the Kpaa-Mɛnde mainly living in the Southern Province, the Sewa-Mɛnde also inhabiting the south along the Sewa river, and the Kɔɔ- Mɛnde [19] mostly living in the Eastern Province as far as the Liberian and Guinean borders with Sierra Leone. The Sewa-Mɛnde and the Kpaa-Mɛnde in the south, for example, have quite different cultural experiences of the decade-long civil conflict than the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde in the east. Central to this differentiation is the fact that the Kpaa-Mɛnde themselves are more inclined to draw lines of cultural variations from the other Mɛnde-speaking groups, especially the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, rather than otherwise, because of "the *Wunde* society [which many authors refer to as a secret society] being their pride and index of the superior power which they claim" (Gittins, 1987: 24).

Social anthropologists giving ethnographic descriptions of the Mɛnde have mostly failed to consider the differences regarding ritual and cultural practices between the various Mɛnde-speaking groups of Sierra Leone. Therefore, it is vital not only to illustrate how the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde differ from the other groups, but also to point out some of the similarities between them in any ethnographic study, since most scholars have taken ritual differences between these groups for granted. In other words, such

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[17] Again all verbatim information from informants remains without indication of source.

[18] See Gittins (1987: 24-25). He, however, fails to include a third type of Mɛnde-speaking population, namely the Sewa-Mɛnde. There is a fourth group, the Wanjama-Mɛnde which has been virtually incorporated into the Sewa-Mɛnde, since the rivers *Wanje* and *Sewe* both running in the south of Sierra Leone meet at a place very close to where these two societies live. Probably for such reasons, most authors distinguish only these three groups leaving out the Wanjama-Mɛnde. The Wanjama-Mɛnde see themselves as a distinct group even though they share a lot in common with the Sewa-Mɛnde. However, I shall be considering only the three groups in terms of dialect and cultural practices. Jedrej (1974), to my knowledge, serves as a second exception for writing about the Land and Spirits of the Sewa-Mɛnde.

[19] Abraham (2003), however, classifies the various Mɛnde-speaking groups mainly in terms of four major dialects, virtually not considering differences in ritual practices: "the 'Koh' (Upper) or Eastern Mɛnde, the 'Sewama' or Middle Mɛnde, the '*Kpaa*' or Western Mɛnde, and the 'Wanjama' (Gallinas) or Southern Mɛnde" (*op.cit.*: 28).

differentiations have been virtually neglected even in most recent, if not all ethnographic descriptions of the Mɛnde-speaking population in Sierra Leone. Instead, researchers have been focusing their attention implicitly or explicitly on the Kpaa-Mɛnde (cf. Ferme 2001; Gittins 1987; Harris and Sawyerr 1968; Little 1967; Øster 1981; Reeck 1976), from where they generalise about all Mɛnde-speaking societies. Gittins (1987) may serve as an exception to this general tendency as he recognises, at least in principle, the need to differentiate the various Mɛnde-speaking populations.

Despite this general tendency of so-called Mɛnde ethnography, such scholarly works can contribute much to comparative analyses when investigating problems of change in the social representations of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. It is apparent that questions of change can only be meaningful if connected with different interventions resulting from various processes of modernisation brought in especially by colonialism and the eleven-year lethal conflict that devastated much of rural Sierra Leone. Selected ethnographic analyses from various scholars have been useful sources of information, which I have compared with my own field materials on Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social structure, both in colonial and post-colonial times. To appreciate the value of these materials, some of whom I will be mentioning in due course, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at some salient points in their ethnographic analyses. These scholars elaborate fundamental concepts which form the basic feature of Mɛnde social structure.

First, the concept of the House (*mawɛɛ*) as a social unit (cf. Little, 1967: 96), which shows the fundamental practice of "an extended family system in a projection of gross household type, in which a core of agnatic kin is augmented by other cognatic and even affinal kind" (*op. cit.*: 4). They further state how *mawɛɛ* has developed from a simple family structure, which encompasses many other jurisdictions in the Mɛnde social structure. Øster maintains that "originally the family made up the nucleus around which the entire social and economic life [centred], the so-called *mawe* [*mawɛɛ*], plural mawesia [*mawɛɛsia*]" (Øster, 1981: 29).

Secondly, a considerable amount of literature on the Mɛnde has been devoted to analysing so-called traditional warfare, especially during

the colonial era (cf. Little, 1967). Descriptions about traditional military organisation, tactics and the technology of warfare, such as building fortifications around villages – a defensive barrier consisting of strong posts or timbers fixed upright in the ground – all belong to this category of warfare. These, however, vary from author to author, with some important details being sometimes omitted, which I think are necessary to consider, if we are to understand Kɔɔ-Mɛnde traditional warfare today. This is particularly the case when authors fail to differentiate between warfare and its rituals in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times. For instance, it is only when Little mentions the names of famous warriors like Kai Londo in his study on the Mɛnde (*op. cit.*: 30-32) that I was able to situate his ethnographic descriptions within pre-colonial and early colonial forms of warfare. It is therefore necessary to locate and differentiate warfare at various times in the course of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde history, as they differ in intensity and kind.

Thirdly, great importance is attached to the religious and social significance of rice farming and the social meaning of the oil palm (production) in the life of Mɛnde people in general (cf. Harris and Sawyerr 1968; Little 1967). Farming means, especially for pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, the cultivation of rice farms with their proper ritual proceedings. Whether, how and when exactly these farming rituals are performed, and their relations to other aspects of society are not elaborated in the works of most of these scholars. My own analysis of Ngiema village sheds light precisely on religious ceremonies involved in rice farming notwithstanding the fact that these have been changing in the wake of various interventions of modernity.

Fourthly, Little sees a link between systems of authority and the process of socialising individual persons into society. Socialisation is coupled with local kinship groupings, interpreting it as a particular system of political authority that results mainly from a special form of social hierarchy (Little, 1967: 175ff.). The socialisation of individuals mainly takes place through *Poro* and *Sande* initiation rituals, both of which Little and other classical social anthropologists refer to as secret societies. *Poro* is primarily responsible for initiating young boys, while *Sande* initiates

young girls. Details of *Poro* and *Sande* initiation rituals and their significance for Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society are given in chapter 6.

In an age of globalisation, the role of Islam and Christianity in local Kɔɔ-Mɛnde belief systems has become even more influential than in pre-colonial times. An analysis of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde religious practices and rituals in pre-modern times reveals that they were different from Islamic beliefs, but gradually transformed at the advent of Islam. Gittins (1987), Little (1967: 217-253) and Øster (1981) have claimed that the Mɛnde apply "two concepts for the Supreme Being". This study, however, shows that the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde employed one relational concept for the Highest Deity identified as the Sky Deity and the Earth Deity (see chapt. 4), and that such a concept has changed mainly as a result of Islamic influences in the course of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde history (see chapt. 6). The concept of *hei*, which is a principle of embodied spiritual presence, occupying a central focus of analysis in this study (see chapt. 4) and that of *ngafangaa* and *jinangaa*, which refer to ancestral and non-ancestral spirits respectively were pertinent to the pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde religious representations (see chapt. 4). In the next paragraphs, I outline why, in my estimation, the analyses from some of the above-menstioned scholars can be of help for any comparative study on the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde.

In his study *Mɛnde Religion*, Gittins renders a rounded, coherent and integrated picture of Mɛnde religious beliefs and thoughts (Gittins, 1987). Doing social anthropological research in southern Sierra Leone during the 1980s he saw the need to distinguish between the various Mɛnde-speaking groups, though he could not totally transcend the logic of generalisation since he kept on talking about the Mɛnde throughout his study. Gittins briefly analysed the social and religious changes occurring among different Mɛnde-speaking population after gaining Independence from the British. However, in such an age of rapid social and economic changes, he further argues that little can remain of the traditional belief systems, especially in a country that was quickly trying to open up to every possible aspect of modernity and its processes such as communication, western education, Christianity, as well as Islam (*op. cit.*: 38-40). Yet despite these changes, his analyses have shown that most educated Mɛnde contemporaries in Sierra Leone had not completely escaped the traditional

beliefs and customs of their own societies. Nevertheless, most of those who claimed to have a rather modern way of life normally make fun of certain belief systems and cultural patterns of tradition, regarding them as primitive and uncivilised (*op. cit.*: 39). Despite some minor shortcomings in Gittins' ethnographic analysis, his study on Mɛnde religion is one of the most reliable studies that have surfaced in social anthropological circles during the 1980s. This is partly because he sees Mɛnde traditional religion as an integral aspect of everyday life in the village and because he sees a relationship between *Poro, hei*[20] and the ancestral spirits (*op. cit.*: 44, 99-136).

The historian and distinguished scholar Arthur Abraham is the leading authority on the Mɛnde in terms of their political history and social development (Abraham 1978; 2003). Sound historical sources are of utmost importance for this study, and as such, I have compared Abraham's material with that of oral history furnished by informants in Ngiema and other research sites. His data corresponded mostly with the field information received from oral literature that sheds light, for instance, on Mɛnde traditional political authority and way of ruling. Yet what he refers to as traditional can in fact be interpreted as something that was already undergoing a process of change after colonial intervention.

Abraham mainly aims at providing "an African interpretation to the process of change" (1978: v) and thereby contending a "colonial interpretation of African history", in order to support and maintain colonial rule. He further argues that Africans had no choice, but to adjust to changes brought by colonial rule. The by-product of such an adjustment to change was a cultural synthesis which resulted from reacting to the imposition of colonial rule. He further questions the very meaning of the so-called indirect rule, arguing that it was indeed more direct than generally assumed. Abraham then goes on to explain, "how pre-colonial political institutions" had no choice, but to adjust "to the colonial situation" (*ibid*). In his estimation, this process of adjustment was later responsible for much of the political confusion in Mɛndeland up to the

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[20] This is a nonmaterial presence of the Highest Deity. See especially chapt. 4 for details.

present day. Abraham's substantial treatment of the modern political systems emanating from colonial institutional authority is vital for the comparative ethnographic analysis of both pre-colonial political situations and the post-colonial period. Of particular interest to this study is his description of different types of Mɛnde warfare in their history and how the British conquest of the Mɛnde interrupted various processes of traditional polity formation (Abraham, 2003).

A third scholar, whose ethnographic analysis on the Mɛnde is of relevance for the present study is Reeck (1976). He investigates how African traditional religions, American Missionary Christianity and *Maliki* Islam interacted and responded to one another. In this regard, he contextualises and analyses broader social changes deriving from the impact of modernisation processes on rural Sierra Leone. Moreover, because Islam is an infringing religion, especially on rural Sierra Leone, Reeck devoted a whole chapter to the analysis of this topic (*op. cit.*: 77), as well as the general responses of Mɛnde society to Islam. He also addresses the capacity of African societies to adjust to changes brought by the imposition of modernity and colonialism, hence analysing the response to modernisation, mainly political modernisation between 1875 and 1908 (*op. cit.*: 35ff).

In studying the relationship between Islam and Mɛnde traditional religion, as well as the general Mɛnde response to Islam, Reeck distinguishes between two types of Islam. Firstly, he identifies Stranger Islam, which mainly supplied economic services and was instrumental in developing and maintaining trade links between the Mɛnde and the outside world for much of the 19th century. Stranger Islam was the "normative [*Maliki*] Islam characteristic of the small trading community of Fula, Susu [Soso] and Mandingo folk living in Kori Chiefdom" (*op. cit.*: 89). Secondly, Mɛnde Islam, which consists "of technical additions to the traditional Mɛnde repertory of the means for dealing with *halei* [*hei*] for its many adherents" (*op. cit.*: 77) validates further analyses. It somehow indicates, in his view, a distorted customary Mɛnde culture that employs spiritual experts from other societies, like the Mandingo and Soso, who claim to have supernatural means of attaining *hei*. This point is of much significance, for it mainly has to do with the question of how the

concept and practice of *hei* has changed in the face of modernity, and what consequences such a change has for people who still cling to their traditional cultural values. Reeck also argues that Christianity, which was firmly allied with colonialism, had economic, political and cultural goals. As a result, there were a number of hostile reactions to Christian missionaries. It is precisely such tensions and struggles for the conservation of local cultural values that are addressed in the chapters dealing with the interventions of modernity.

It is evident from the preceding paragraphs that these scholars have made copious research on the Mεnde in general, yet a number of important issues need to be addressed. These Mεnde are described in general terms, without taking due considerations of the existing differences between various Mεnde-speaking groups. Failure of addressing such culturally specific differentiations could account for many misrepresentations. There are, for instance, considerable differences between Kpaa and Kɔɔ-Mεnde conceptualisations and practices of *hei*; there are different so-called secret societies and the spirits associated with them. These groups also react differently to the influences of various modernisation processes. However, I am not ruling out the fact that there are also similarities between the various Mεnde-speaking populations, which actually qualify them to be ethnographically comparable.

This study proposes a shift from generalisation to one of cultural specificity in analysing social representations of the Mεnde. It seeks to do so in a case study showing the influence that modernity and modern warfare has on the social structure of the Kɔɔ-Mεnde in Ngiema-Luawa. Such a stance entails not only concentrating on colonial and post-colonial institutions of the Kɔɔ-Mεnde, but also their pre-colonial past and traditional values as well.

Research sites

The choice of Ngiema village was motivated by its relevance to my overall research question. Although Ngiema became my main base, where I did most of the research for the first six months, short-term comparative research in other Kɔɔ-Mεnde villages became necessary as well. Thus, research was done in Combema – a village in Nongowa Chiefdom, about

two miles away from Kenema, which serves as a provincial and district administrative headquarter town in the Eastern Province (maps 6 and 7). Research was also done in villages lying within seven miles away from Ngiema-Luawa itself such as Gbeworbu, Njadehun Mambabu and Dodo Kortuma. I spent at least three days conducting interviews and making the necessary cogent observations in those villages, pending on the available time. In Combema village for example, four days of intensive interviews and simultaneous observations were for the most part helpful. The data acquired from that research was then compared with what I have observed in Ngiema. I did some additional research in Kpaa-Mɛnde villages like Mokpala and Gbomotoke located in Moyamba District, southern Sierra Leone in 2007. These villages are actually Sherbro villages, but they mostly speak Kpaa-Mɛnde instead of Sherbro and have adopted many of their traditions. Such a cross-regional research enabled me to compare the Kpaa-Mɛnde with the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde data. I also did some follow-up research in Ngiema in 2007, to fill in gaps resulting from the first research. This allowed me to make valid social anthropological statements about the cultural representations of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, inasmuch as this was practically and technically possible.

Methodology

The data was acquired mainly through participant observation, as well as from discussions and formal interviews with informants. These interviews were mainly done with a village elder who became my main informant, after recommendations by other village elders and chosen after much scrutiny and comparisons with other recommended candidates. He was selected because, as an elder in the community, he possesses a vast knowledge of the cultural traditions and history of the village and of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde in general. This knowledge makes him a likeable and respected person, with a high moral authority in the village. He is also one of the section chiefs in Ngiema, to whom most young people come for advice. Besides, he was one of the few elders who survived the civil war after spending eleven years with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Ngiema, and therefore giving him an understanding of the war and the rebels in an intimate manner. However, I cross-referenced and cross-checked his information with that of other informants, partly through informal conversations and my own personal observations.

The collection of data on the history of the village induced me to come up with the following questions: What types of traditional structures were present before the civil war and before pre-colonial contacts with Europeans, and how was traditional warfare organised? What were its aims? What types of cultural traditions have been changing so far or have actually changed pertaining to the social representations of this society? The quest to find answers to these and similar questions motivates the investigation into the traditional social values of Ngiema, starting with its founding as a small village community of farmers to the present day. This I have done by relying predominately on oral history and other unwritten accounts in the face of all the complexity it encompasses.

To underpin this complexity, the following paragraphs outline how the present study presents the collected data. I have also included many references to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde language, adopting, where possible, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde spellings according to the manner in which people in Ngiema pronounce these words, making it different from written Mɛnde. The reader must, therefore, expect a certain amount of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde

colloquialism. Since there are some differences between Kɔɔ- and Kpaa-Mɛnde words, a further complexity is added to the general problem of local variations, as some of these constructs become more and more difficult when transcribed into English. Notwithstanding this fact, most authors writing about the Mɛnde have sometimes mainly used Kpaa-Mɛnde words in their work without distinguishing them from the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde ones. Therefore, some problems of differentiation have emerged as I compared Kɔɔ-Mɛnde words with their Kpaa-Mɛnde counterparts in works on the grammar of Mɛnde language in general by some distinguished linguists such as Aginsky (1935), Bayon *et al* (2004), Innes (1969; 2001), Migeod ([1908]2007). The limitations are even more acute owing to my own deficits in knowledge of written Kɔɔ-Mɛnde language, especially regarding transcription and the grammar.

Chapter synopsis

The present study is divided into two main parts. Part one comprises chapters 1 to 5, while part two covers chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. The study begins with an introduction to the theoretical background of the entire study. It not only defines the research question, and clarifies its theoretical model, but also gives an overview of the present socio-cultural reality of Ngiema, emphasizing the physical and social morphologies of the village.

Part one generally presents what I call the pre-modern socio-cosmic order of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. It describes and analyses the origins and settlements of the Mɛnde-speaking population as well as the social values and ritual activities that were present in the history of Ngiema village. This renders information on what cultural values were present prior to the intervention of modernity. It describes pre-modern traditional ritual practices, systems of socio-cosmological representations, traditional political leadership and authority, as well as social and kinship relations. Relying mainly on oral traditions and mythical narrations, chapter 1 begins with a description of the origins of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society before proceeding to the analysis of socio-cosmological structure, which includes the ritual construction of social and cosmological spaces. It also covers the founding of Ngiema, and relates how the founding ancestors

performed a series of rituals imperative for the social life of the village. Such rituals are a necessary component upon which social relationships between founding ancestors and their descendants, as well as between the people themselves were based.

Chapter 2 describes the social structure in relation to types of social relations that were present within pre-modern village community. Chapter 3 examines its economic activities (also social in character) and political leadership. Such economic activities focus mainly on the aspect of exchange and collective ownership of goods and services. Political leadership and authority analyses the idea of seniority embedded in the principle of social order. Leadership described in cosmological terms builds an important component of pre-modern society. The question also arises as to whether it is feasible to strictly separate politics from religion in such a society. This is valid not only for religion, but for other spheres of life as well, since the different domains of social life were so intertwined that it becomes extremely difficult for any social anthropological enquiry to separate them.

The fourth chapter deals with religion, where the social role of the ancestors and the concept of religious leadership remain important aspects. Pre-modern religious representations also describe the nature of relationships that existed between people and cosmos, people and *hei*, as well as between the village community and spirits, developed either directly or through various intermediaries. Of particular importance are conceptions about the order of the cosmos and the Highest Deity. The changing of local concepts about this Deity was mainly due to different cultural and historical interactions or interventions, first by Islam and then by Christianity. The description of such changes in local concepts forms an essential component of the present analysis. Chapter 5 describes cosmological categories and cyclical rituals performed in the village community. In interpreting Kɔɔ-Mɛnde cosmological categories, and how they relate to the cosmos and Highest Deity, I find it accurate to employ the word "Ordering One" instead of Highest Deity. Pre-modern cosmology focuses mainly on the traditional concept of time, while ritual cycle describes and analyses birth and death rituals. These rituals also describe initiations into the *Poro*, and to a certain extent the *Sande*, both

of which are conceived by Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society as ("symbolic") rituals of birth and death. Further explanations of various rituals involved in rice farming give clues about the social and cultural importance of this type of farming. All such rituals are crucial for a holistic understanding of the social and religious institutions of this society, as well as the behaviour of its people in their proper contexts. Viewing Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society in this way, the study also aims at contextualising *Poro* and *Sande* within traditional belief systems, thus explaining the relationship which *Poro* and *Sande* had to *hei*. In doing so, the study explains the nature, origin and scope of *hei*, a concept crucial to Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social and religious life. Hence, the present ethnographic analysis also situates such social institutions within a wider framework of belief and conduct. In this way, their importance and applicability to relevant social issues can disclose knowledge of ideas and practices that constitute a way of viewing reality by the members of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society.

The second part of the study, which describes pre-colonial inter-cultural interactions and the introduction of modernity, is covered in chapter 6 to 11. Especially chapter 6 examines how Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society was never static, but evolved as a dynamic society. This mainly came about through constantly developing and establishing contacts with other groups. Early trade relations with Arabs and Europeans as well as the spread of Islam have played a major role. The chapters in this second part gradually introduce a series of modern interventions at various times or stages in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde history, mainly under the banner of colonialism. They also describe how the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde became gradually engulfed in global affairs, indicating how pre-modern social and cultural values have changed over time through the influx of various external post-colonial interventions. Various problems described in these chapters pay less attention to the analysis of technological modernisation processes. Rather they are more concerned with the type of ideology introduced by modernity and different responses emerging from Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society to the influences of expansive cultural modernisation, originating outside that society.

Chapter 7 describes pre-modern warfare and the changes brought by warfare of the 19th century. The differences between this type of warfare

and its pre-modern counterpart are manifested mainly in their ethical, social and ritual meanings. The eighth chapter which examines colonialism mainly analyses its socio-political, socio-economic and socio-religious modalities. It also examines how new forms of economic activities were gradually put in place, especially with the introduction of monetary and free market economies. Such new forms of economic activities, that culminated in colonialism and the development of Sierra Leone into a nation state, of which Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society were bound to be part, were increasingly characterised by what Max Weber calls economic rationality (Weber, 1922). The effect on traditional economic exchange systems was enormous. Colonialism overall has left a particular legacy on the political culture of various societies (cf. Abraham, 1978), resulting in the gradual development of political and economic individualism among modern political elites.

Chapter 9 analyses post-colonial modernity. It begins with a description of the transformation of politics, power and authority. Sierra Leonean political elites who took over from the British mostly continued the line of succession without a critical reconstructuring. In describing the independence and post-colonial era, chapter 10 mainly analyses the period between independence and civil war by describing the rapid cultural and social changes that were going on among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. The last chapter is concerned with the civil war and its aftermath. It describes mainly the social structure of post-war Ngiema village and the incipient transformations brought about by the civil war. Facts about these changes are primarily gained through narrations from those involved in the conflict, combatants and civilians alike. In my estimation, the various international and local Non-Governmental Organisations, (NGOs), such as "International Rescue Committee" (IRC), "Save the Children" and "Fifty-Fifty", which became active immediately after the war still represent different forms of modern ideology. Of equal relevance are the changing aspects of religious beliefs and practices through new forms of Islamic and Christian belief systems that had gathered momentum after the war. Examples are the Pentecostal evangelical Christian churches and sects, as well as various types of Islam now present in the Luawa chiefdom. The analysis here aims at identifying types of interventions that

lead to the modern ideology of individualism, and showing how this infiltrates into the present cultural and social world of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. It also allows for comparisons with the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde past, in order to see which profound changes have taken place as a result of various interventions of modernity.

The study concludes by arguing that in spite of the various interventions of modernity, some fundamental social representations and ritual practices persist. This is what I call the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde counter discourses to modernity, which also means that the members of this society themselves now take an active part in modern discourses. In doing so, they devise various means to resist interventions they consider a threat to their social and religious values and thereby preserve certain fundamental aspects of these representations. Such a discourse can take the form of both active discussion and collective action. The concluding premises further show that the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, no matter, how 'modern' they appear to be, are not yet ready to compromise cultural and ritual practices considered indispensable to their representations.

Ngiema village

The following paragraphs present a brief description of the socio-cultural situation of Ngiema after the civil war ended in 2002. It serves as a field report that supplies information prior to any in-depth analysis of the problems pertaining to social life in present-day Ngiema in chapter 11. Doing research in this village about three years after the lethal conflict, it became apparent to me that a series of social changes have been taking place there. I could observe that in the midst of such changes, most people in that community put up with their present situation by constantly referring to 'the past' and comparing it with 'the present'. Such comparisons mostly tend to appraise the pre-war situation in moral terms. To give a graphic view of this post-war situation of the village regarding aspects of its cultural, social or religious structures, I outline the following themes.

Ngiema village (map 2) is situated seven miles southwest of Kailahun, between Bandajuma Sinneh and Gbeworbu, and very close to river Keeya (photograph 2) and a village called Sandeya. It is the

headquarter town of Lower Kpombali Section in the Luawa Chiefdom (map 4), which is one of the fourteen chiefdoms in Kailahun district (maps 6 and 7). It has ten sections, lower Kpombali being one of them. The other sections are Luawa Fogoeya, Gbela, Gao, Upper Kpombali, Luawa Yiehun, Luawa Baoma, Mofindor, Mano Sewalu and Mɛnde Buima. Kailahun town doubles as the headquarter town of Luawa chiefdom and Kailahun district, the latter being one of the three districts in the eastern province of Sierra Leone (map 6). The other districts are Kenema and Kono. The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde live in the Kenema and Kailahun districts (map 3). Kailahun district makes up one of the twelve districts (maps 1, 6 and 7) in Sierra Leone. There are about one hundred houses (*pɛlɛisia*), meaning households (photographs 4 and 5) in Ngiema. Apart from these houses in the more physical sense of the word, there used to be another type of House[21], which the inhabitants of this village called *mawɛɛ/mawɛɛsia* (pl.). These Houses were social in character, represented by strong kinship ties; they were of utmost importance for the social organization of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde up to about the late 1980s.

Ngiema village is divided into two main sections and nine sub-sections. The two main sections (photographs 13 and 14) are Keeyama Section, which consists of five subsections: Weima, Kakaibu, Nganyagoihun, Kokolu and Songejeima; and Mbotima Section, which consists of four sub-sections: Kporneibu, Nganyawama I, Nganyawama 2, and Sembehun/Godama. The village has a church (photograph 7) and mosque (photograph 8), a primary school (photographs 9 and 10), a smithy (photograph 11) and a health centre (photograph 12).

The main sections are administered by two democratically elected chiefs, who are also responsible for running the day-to-day affairs but are ultimately accountable to the village chief. They must work with him and his deputy directly, acting as intermediaries between people and the village chief. Each sub-section also has leaders who are responsible for its daily affairs. Another chief, resident in Ngiema, is the section chief of

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21 Hence, I distinguish the House as a category of relations between patrilineal descent groups sharing the same totemic founding ancestor from the house as a physical structure.

Lower Kpombali since Ngiema is the headquarters of this section. All the different chiefs are now elected democratically through popular vote by the ballot box, according to western standards.

The population of Ngiema was estimated at two thousand inhabitants in May 2006. However, this estimate applies only to Ngiema village itself. If we consider the small farming settlements surrounding it such as Kortumahun and Kortihun, which had been traditionally amalgamated to Ngiema since its founding, then the population of Ngiema would have amounted to around two thousand five hundred. However, it is difficult to acquire appropriate figures that convey the exact number of people living in Ngiema. This is partly because most of its inhabitants are constantly travelling back and forth from Liberia, Guinea as well as towns and villages in Kpombali section, including parts of Sierra Leone outside Kailahun district. One reason for such movements can be (petty) trading in palm oil and cash crops like cocoa and coffee.

Ngiema is the shortened form of the original name *Limei Yiema*. Limei is the name of the foundress, while Ngiema refers to the fact that the village is situated on top of a hill. This founding ancestor was a brave woman and this is quite an exception, since it was usually male ancestors who founded Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages (see chapt. 1). The cotton trees, of which only one remains today (photograph 18), have played an important role in making war fences during pre-colonial and colonial times (see chapt. 7).

The four roads (photograph 3) leading to and from the village are located at a strategic point (junction) connecting other parts of Sierra Leone. From there to the Liberian border is about seven miles and to the Guinean border on the North about ten miles. One can follow the main bush path from this junction that leads westwards, crossing the small forest over the Sagbeeja stream which leads to other parts of Sierra Leone's interior, even as far as the capital, Freetown. This unique location of Ngiema created an advantage for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels to make it their base for many years during the civil war. These routes also serve as a convenient link, so that one can go to Liberia via Vaahun or alternatively, via Koindu without passing through Kailahun. "The RUF was constantly using the routes from Kailahun to

Vaahun in Liberia and another road from Pendembu through Nyandehun Mambabu to Buedu and Koindu for all their operations."

The sacred crocodile from river Keeya which the ancestors put into the swamp (photograph 17) around the Kɔ-gbege stream lives there up to this day. "This crocodile was expected to protect the inhabitants of the village from war and other adversity, by giving warning sounds" (see chapt. 1). These sounds also marked important events not only in Ngiema, but also in the whole of Kailahun district. The other stream near the village is the Sagbeeja, which was mainly used – and to certain extent is still used – for ritual purposes.

According to local history and belief, no enemy forces have ever conquered and destroyed Ngiema; even the historical war brought by Mbawulomeh, a Gbandi lieutenant to Ndawa (see chapt. 7) and other warriors in the 19th century could not completely devastate this village. Neither did the insurgency led by the RUF destroy it. In fact, during the civil war Ngiema became known as "Camp Burkina", meaning the stronghold of the RUF. It is, however, certain that most people in Ngiema village do maintain that their experiences of the war have largely contributed to changes in attitudes and moods of individuals in the village community. Young boys fighting as rebels humiliated many people, whom the village had hitherto held in great esteem. With the power of the gun, these boys publicly molested chiefs and disempowered them. Likewise, people who were rich and had possessed much property had their wealth taken away from them by the rebels. An old poverty-stricken man, who used to be very rich in Ngiema village before the war said, "I would rather prefer that the Almighty God take my life, rather than live with such a humiliation."

Through daily conversations I had with people and through my own observations, it is evident that Ngiema village is still undergoing a process of rapid changes. The Ngiema people expressed critical dissatisfaction (with such changes) by constantly comparing the past with the present in moral terms, as well as expressing uncertainty about the future. People like to talk about the good old days, when things were different and life much better. They talk mainly about the "founding ancestors who had the village community at heart," and recall how "children used to obey their

parents and respect their elders and how listening to the narrations of the elderly was vital for acquiring wisdom." These narrations were considered an important means of in-depth learning of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture and understanding its traditions, as well as the world around them. Most people also remember "the days when sacrifices to the ancestors and traditional religious cults were common." A detailed description of how modernity has contributed to such changes is the focus of the analyses in chapters 8 to 11. However, such changes can only be fully understood against the background of the cultural traditions of the village prior to the interventions. The following analyses of the pre-modern socio-cosmic order of the village community serve this purpose.

PART ONE: PRE-MODERN SOCIO-COSMIC ORDER

The pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde was a holistic society, which essentially means that the maintenance and well-being of the social order was more highly valued than the pursuit of individual happiness. The common good of the whole society was superior on the scale of values. In such a holistic representation of society, all aspects of the social order are intertwined, so that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to neatly separate them from one another. Therefore, I have taken the advice from Marcel Mauss into consideration, when he cautioned that social anthropologists should see the various domains of social life in their totality, meaning as a "total social fact" (Mauss [1925] 1983), rather than trying to separate them. The representations shared by the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde indeed examples of such social facts, are the focus of the following chapters.

Chapter 1   Socio-cosmological Structure

Origins and settlements of the Mɛnde

Ethno-linguists divide all spoken languages around what is present-day Sierra Leone into two groups, viz: First, the *Mande-speaking* group in the North, which comprised the Soso, Yalunka, Loko, Mɛnde, Kono, Vai and Koranko. Second, the *West Atlantic* group in the South that consists of the Limba, Temne, Sherbro, Kissi and Krim (cf. Kup, 1961: 23-24). Greenberg (1966) adds the Bullom,[22] the Gola and the Kissi as belonging to a different language group called the *Mel*.

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[22]   They are also known as the Sherbro, even though some kind of linguistic difference exists. Drawing from my own observations in spring 2007, Mɛnde, properly speaking Kpaa-Mɛnde, is now the *lingua franca* in most Sherbro villages around the southern province of Sierra Leone. This is important because the Sherbro and other small groups did not only adopt the Kpaa-Mɛnde language, but also adapted most of their customs and traditions. This process, which Abraham (1978; 2003) calls "Mendenisation" has been successful, partly because the Mɛnde belonged to one of the few African societies that developed new forms of writing in the 19th century (cf. Fagg, 1967). The Mɛnde syllabic script called *Kikakui* was used as symbols to depict sounds. *Kikakui* was still in use around the 1940s by local tailors and carpenters to note down measurements (Fyle,

So to reconstruct any early origins of the Mɛnde as a distinct society can be highly problematic, as there is little or no agreement among historians and other scholars studying various Mɛnde-speaking groups (cf. Abraham 2003; Corby 1983; Hair 1968; Kupp 1961; Little 1954; Thomas 1919). One fundamental indicator is that Mɛnde do not exist as such, but only as Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, Kpaa- Mɛnde and Sewa- Mɛnde or Wanjama-Mɛnde. It is only when such differences are considered that the attempt to develop a general hypothesis on Kɔɔ-Mɛnde origins becomes meaningful. Otherwise, much of the debate surrounding the Mɛnde origin in general remains an issue of much debate and uncertainty among even respected scholars of the Mɛnde like Abraham (cf. 1969, 1975, 1978, 2003) and Gittins (cf. 1977, 1987).It is not surprising, therefore, that most arguments about the general Mɛnde origin are often formulated in propositions of probability.[23]

Early pre-colonial history

Sailors from the Iberian peninsula visiting the coast of West Africa in the 15th century (Fyle, 1981: 7) [24] had called the various societies on the coast of Sierra Leone, with whom they frequently came into contact "the Sapes or Sapi (from the Portuguese *Capijis*)" (Gittins, 1987: 23).[25] The Sapes comprised of the Bullom as their major group (*ibid.*), as well as the Baga, Nalou, Gola, Krim, Temne, and the Kissi,[26] who were further inland

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1981: 70). See also Kormoh (2001) and Simpson (1967) for similar views on "Mendenisation".

[23] See Abraham (2003: 11ff.) for copious examples of such propositions. For details on these debates, see also (Abraham 1969; Butt-Thompson 1926; Corby 1983; Dalby 1966; Dwyer 1963; Fage 1969; Fagg 1967; Fyfe 1962; Gittins 1987: 23ff; Greenberg 1966; Hair 1967, 1968, 1972, 1975; Innes 1969; Kormoh 2001; Kup 1960, 1975; McCulloch 1950; Migeod 1926; Ngaboh-smart 1986; Person 1964; Thomas 1919; Thompson 1857, 1859).

[24] Gittins (1987: 23), basing his sources on Kup (1975: 32) and Rodney (1970: 32 f), estimates the arrival of the Portuguese in about the 16th century.

[25] On the original names of these societies as they were called by the Iberian visitors, see (Fyfe, 1964: 33).

[26] The principal members of this group according to Rodney (1970: 33) were the Bullom and the Temne. Rodney also adds the following societies: Cocoli or Landuma and the Nalu. Nalu is different in orthography from that of Nalou employed by Fyle (1981: 7), which probably belongs to the same ethnic group.
Gittins (1987: 23) and Kup (1961: 123) add the Yalunka, the Susu (properly called Soso). In another place Kup remarked that "Therefore, when the Europeans came, Sierra

Davidson (1981) have argued that the Sapes led well-ordered and disciplined lives, and that they were mainly subsistence agriculturalists, producing crops such as rice, yams and millet (Fyle, 1981). Apart from rearing poultry and fishing in the sea and rivers around them, they were reported to be good hunters and talented in different artistic crafts, such as making mats from animal skins. From earth or clay they fashioned jars, bowls and pots, and made cloth mainly from fibre (*op. cit.*: 8; cf. Person, 1961). These various societies had their own representations of ritual practices and independent political organisation.

The Mane invasion of the Upper Guinea coast, occurring probably between 1545- 1606 (cf. Rodney, 1970: 39), not only dismantled the social and economic setups of the Sapes, but also changed their ethnic situation to a large extent (cf. Abraham 2003; Fyfe 1964; Fyle 1981; Gittins 1987; Kup 1961; McCall 1969, 1972; Person 1964; Rodney 1970, 1975; Thomas 1919). The Mane, according to Fyle, were a group of "Mandinka from the Mande Empire whose leader, a queen named Masarico, was said to have been exiled from Mande. With her followers she travelled south-westwards and was joined by some Mandinka and other groups they had conquered en route and which swelled their numbers" (Fyle, 1981: 14).[27]

Towards the end of the 14th century, the Mane are thought to have been based in Cape Mount area of present day Liberia, which became their most important "empire called Manow" (Kup, 1961: 145). Cape Mount lies within the proximity of eastern Sierra Leone, thus making it possible for them to settle among non-Mande peoples like the Gola and the Kissi (cf. Fyle, 1981: 14ff). This suggests that the Gola and the Kissi already inhabited part of Liberia, and parts of the present day eastern

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Leone was inhabited by the Bagas, Temnes, Susus, Yalunkas, Lokos, Limbas, Bulloms, Krims and Konos; because the Temnes and the Bullons lived along the shore, it was their languages which the Portuguese learnt and recorded for the purposes of trade" (Kup, 1961: 128). Abraham, in quoting other sources like Rodney, maintains that the Sapi were "a loose community sharing a common culture which comprised mainly Mel speakers north of the Sierra Leone river, of whom the largest was the Temne cluster"(Abraham, 2003: 20). For other groups see Horton (1869).

[27] See also (Abraham 2003: 22ff; Rodney 1970: 39ff) on the composition of the Mane invaders.

Kailahun district in Sierra Leone. It was from this area that the Mane sent invading armies – sometimes in regular intervals of 20 years – into the hinterland of Sierra Leone, setting up different kingdoms[28] in Sierra Leone. In doing so, the ferocious Mane fighters further shattered the cultural and political setups of the Sapes. Such a conquest consequently had great repercussions on the ethnic distribution of the Upper Guinea coast in general. However, in trying to conquer the Soso and the Fula, the invaders were pushed back to the coast.

There is no reference to the Mɛnde in various records relating to this invasion, nor have they "been mentioned in the literature before about 1800" (Gittins, 1987: 23). For this reason, most scholars have argued that "their background is unclear" (*ibid*), leading to widespread debates and disagreement. I am not primarily concerned with such academic debates, but rather with ethno historical accounts of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde about their origin as a society. This represents indigenous models, distinct in character and form from any modern historiography.

The indigenous models

To have a clear understanding of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde origins, an analysis of the indigenous views about their own beginnings is necessary. Here I shall outline some ethno-historical views of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde origins and settlement as a society. Two different types of information emerge as models: Firstly, immigrants into Gola territory. Secondly, the gradual migration that led to differentiation into groups.

Immigrants into Gola territory

"Unlike other groups who have stories of origin and migration, the Mɛnde have none as a group" (Abraham, 2003: 2). Indeed, the Mɛnde have none as an overall group. Most Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages prefer speaking first about where their own ancestors came from and who they were. They would then proceed to talk about the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde as a group, arguing "the Mɛnde can only exist as Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, Kpaa-Mɛnde or Sewa-Mɛnde". For

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[28] According to Rodney (1967: 219), the Mane set up four kingdoms.

example, during an interview conducted in Ngiema the origin of the people of Luawa chiefdom was represented as follows:

> *Maada* [epical ancestor, literally "grandfather"] Kanga Gaahun was a Gola, and he came from Liberia. Even *yie* [a founding female ancestor,[29] literally "mother"] Limei was Gola. They were all Gola. Ngiema, and indeed the whole of Luawa chiefdom was Liberia. In fact, most of the ancestors had Gola names – even Gan is a Gola name, but they later told us not to describe one another as strangers, because everybody was Gola. Besides, most names of hills and rivers are in Gola. For example, there is no meaning in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde for the Keeya river, which runs through the heart of Luawa territory or the Kambui hills in Kenema, also in the heart of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde territory. Even river Moa and the Sagbeeja stream all have Gola names.
>
> Again, the whole area used to be called Gola, and the people who roamed about the place were all Gola. This included the whole area from the river Moa, which came from Zimmi Makpei as far as Sacambu, including Njaluahun where Seigbema is, and far beyond, because at that time there were no boundaries and the Temne could come to us and vice versa.

The above interview shows that toponyms in this area clearly support Gola origins. Oral traditions state unequivocally that the present region of Sierra Leone to the east of the Moa river, where most Kɔɔ-Mɛnde live, was originally Gola territory. If we accept the proposition that the areas inhabited by present-day Kɔɔ-Mɛnde had been part of Gola territory, then Gola and Kɔɔ-Mɛnde must have had common ancestors, although these two societies have been categorised as two different societies with distinct languages (cf. Dalby, 1966).

Secondly, there is no mention of the Mane invasion in this model. The Ngiema example seems to correspond with most other West African peoples who have myths narrating that their ancestors came from another homeland in the distant east, or some far-away part of West Africa other than where they live today. Nearly always, these myths must be taken as referring to only very small groups of migrating ancestors. Such movements, as occurred, were made only by a small minority of people, by a few warriors under strong leaders. These groups who, after leaving their homeland, entered into a new territory, merged with the more

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[29] See "The Founding of Limei Yiema".

numerous peoples they found there, and began new traditions and ritual practices.

Migration and differentiation into groups

When asked about any common Mɛnde origin, most people in Ngiema and other areas I visited in the Luawa chiefdom always replied that there is none. They would proceed, however, by giving a scanty oral history relating to traditions of original settlements in groups, and in a particular place, after breaking up from a larger group. In an interview conducted in Ngiema, a group of elders maintained that

> originally, there was only one settlement in the Gola forest. Having settled at a place while hunting game like deer, and making rice farms for some time, some groups started to move away from the original settlement in search of more fertile farming settlements. After staying in these new settlements for a reasonable period, the language and behaviour of the migrating groups became slightly distinct from the original group. For example, a group called the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, took the direction of the east, and settled around the present border to Liberia and Guinea, while another group known as the Kpaa-Mɛnde moved southwards, towards the coast as far as the Sherbro hinterland. The Sewa-Mɛnde settled around the Sewa river located in the south, while the Wanjama-Mɛnde, which broke away from the Sewa-Mɛnde, settled around the Wanje river also located in the south, gradually developed some differences in dialects, [ritual] and cultural behaviour. Another group in Sierra Leone which is today called the *Loko*, moved away from the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde to form their own ethnic group. They speak a different language than all Mɛnde-speaking groups, even though there are many similarities in the vocabulary and construction of sentences. [Probably due to such a differentiation, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde[30] claim that the *Loko* are their kinsmen].

The above account tells us practically very little about any early origins of the Mɛnde as an overall ethnic group. Instead, each Mɛnde-speaking group mostly recalls its own origins as distinct from the other, claiming to "speak the real or right Mɛnde." This can be illustrated by an example Abraham (2003: 28) gives about dialectical differences among the Mɛnde. Recent ethnographic study, however, has shown that not only do these groups have dialectical differences; they have also developed considerable

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[30] The Via and the Kono have similar myths of origins and differentiations into groups. The Kono were part of the Vai, but somewhere along the line the former were said to be waiting for the latter in a particular place, and in this sense, they became *mu-kono* meaning in Vai "those who waited" (cf. Fyle, 1981: 11).

ritual diversity.[31] Popular folklore makes frequent reference to the affinity between the Mɛnde and the Loko (cf. Hirst, 1957). Where a group or individual Loko and Mɛnde meet they always make jokes about each other by insisting that the other group took away the bull's head, thus making a direct reference to the "privileged uncle-nephew relationship" (cf. McCulloch, 1950: 18-21).[32] Though some scholars had argued that ''Mɛnde is a fairly recent word, and probably a European one" (Little, 1967: 71), it is certain from the above models that Kɔɔ-Mɛnde as a social entity had existed before Europeans started mentioning the word "Mɛnde" in their books (cf. Clarke 1843a; Migeod 1926).

Totally at variance with the above indigenous models of historical origins and pre-colonial forms of settlement among different societies living in the Upper Guinea Coast are descriptions from European travellers, missionaries and ethnographers. These accounts from such visitors were mostly related in derogatory terms. For instance, at the beginning of his analysis on religion and medicine, Little (1967) describes the social environment of the Mɛnde before the British arrived. He maintains that:

> In the case of the Mɛnde, this conception governs and determines their reaction and adjustment in almost every aspect of the cultural life, though to a varying extent. It seems to be based on the physical environment in which, presumably, traditional belief mainly developed its roots. This physical environment consisted, until recently, of thick and almost impenetrable bush and forest in which the traveller who strayed from the narrow and foliage enshrouded path might get lost forever. It was a place where wild and dangerous animals, like leopards and snakes, lurked, and where even more dangerous human enemies frequently lay in ambush to attack the unwary. It was a place where the pursuit of game was both difficult and dangerous. Above all, it was a place in which sudden heavy storms and floods added fresh uncertainty to the arduous and unending labour of hewing down and clearing giant trees, scratching the earth with simple, hand-made tools, and finally tearing away the rapid and ever growing weeds from the few grains and vegetables, which the effort had produced. In short, it was an environment in which very many factors and circumstances were of a kind to enhance the inexplicable, the mysterious, and the dreadful. Consciously or unconsciously, the sentiment mind must have been made

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[31]   Gittins (1987) also seems to support this cultural differentiation, something he undertakes by studying the cultural and etymological meanings of the Kɔɔ-and Kpaa Mɛnde.

[32]   See chapt. 2 for explanations on this type of kinship relations.

continuously aware of its inadequacy, and must have realised its inability to cope with, let alone control, its surroundings by material means alone […].

For sociological purposes, the manner in which man 'adapts' himself psychologically is immediately relevant only in so far as it throws light on the nature of the adaptation itself. Basically, the Mɛnde adaptation (and this is probably true of all forms of 'primitive' religion) involves a positive acceptance of the world or 'universe' as it is found (Little, 1967: 216).

One does not need a special gift in hermeneutics to interpret the far-reaching implications of Little's descriptions, which suggest the Mɛnde living in a "culture of silence", like animals totally depending upon nature to survive without any means of scientific or rational explanation of their environment.

Such a description of the physical environment of African societies was common for 19th century western anthropology and for the general western mind, and it is still latently present in modern times. Little's description of the Mɛnde traditional environment was a way to legitimise British penetration of the hinterland under the pretext of civilising the wild and the savage. Contrary to such a derisive view, a detailed description of the social and religious representations of pre-modern socio-cosmic order of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde in the following chapters shows that this society were by no means living in a "culture of silence". Rather the members of this society interpreted their world mainly through the performance of different religious rituals. These chapters show no evidence, therefore, of a total dependency and adjustment to nature in the sense of outright dreadfulness.

Spatial structure

The founding history of Ngiema is an essential part of the construction of its cosmological space, because a place, a village or a settlement community has to exist first before dividing its space into categories. Such a social dimension of the division of space is essential to Durkheim and Mauss's theory of primitive classification (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963), and it enables one to analyse pre-modern social representation of Ngiema village.

Thus, it is convenient to begin with the question of how Ngiema was founded as a village community, before proceeding to the

construction of its spatial structure. The construction of such a spatial structure is usually embedded in a series of ritual ceremonies for the everyday life of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society was mainly a ritualised one, based on kinship relations *a priori*.

The founding of Limei Yiema

The following mythical account is about how Ngiema as a village community came into being.

> There was a renowned warrior by the name of *maada* Kanga Gaahun [epical ancestor], who lived in the small farming settlement of Mbotima. He was the warrior leader of Mbotima. *Maada* Gaahun had two sons and one daughter. He named his daughter Limei. After the three children had grown to maturity, he allocated to each of his sons a separate farming settlement. But *maada* Gaahun gave his daughter in marriage to another famous warrior as a token of friendship. The name of this great warrior is unknown though it is certain that he came from a nearby settlement. *Maada* Gaahun instructed the couple to settle at a forest site not far from Mbotima called Yawaju, which the Ngiema people now call *kpaa-lombuija*.[33] In obedience to *maada* Gaahun's instruction, they built a thatch hut at Yawaju and made it their place of settlement. Besides being a brave warrior, Limei's husband practiced the art of fortune telling, and became a renowned soothsayer (*tɔtɔgbemui*) in the surrounding settlements. As for Limei, she practiced traditional medicine, and became a powerful herbalist, who possessed vast knowledge of many different kinds of medicinal plants and herbs, through which she became famous in the entire region. Limei devoted her skillful knowledge to the treatment of born and unborn children, by protecting them against witches and other evil forces. For this reason, almost all her patients were women, especially pregnant women (*koo-nyahangaa*) and suckling women with newly born babies or infants (*kuimiesia*).
>
> Meanwhile, Limei used to help her husband at daytime on the small rice farm they cultivated on top of a hill very close to their settlement at Yawaju.[34] Since she was working on the farm mostly during the day, the many women from distant farm settlements who came to see her for treatment or to have their babies treated did not usually meet her at Yawaju. Now when these women asked her neighbours about her whereabouts, they were often told – pointing to the place on top of the hill – *iya ngiyei na ma, iya ngiyei ma, taa ngiye na ma* meaning literally, 'she has gone to that hill, she has gone to the hill, she is on that hill.' The women in question would then go to meet her on that *ngiyei-ma*, in order to have their babies treated. When someone asked them on the way, where they were going, the women simply said,

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[33]   This spot is now situated on top of the small hill near Ngiema village, just across the Sagbeeja stream on the main road leading to Baa village, west of Ngiema.

[34]   Located at the present community hall of Ngiema.

'we are going to *ngiyei-ma* to see *yie* Limei'. With the passage of time, this way of answering was shortened by simply saying they were going to Limei Yiema.

   After many years had passed, *maada* Gan asked his son-in-law to consult the oracle known as the *kenyei*, in order to find out whether it would bring fortune and prosperity to their descendants if they made Limei Yiema their permanent place of settlement. This type of fortunetelling [divination] is said to have been powerful in the days of our ancestors. A particular number of white stones or fine sand from river Keeya were thrown onto a mat, to tell the future. By examining the dust or stones, some vital information was gained and given to the community. Meanwhile the *kenyei* predicted that it would be for the good of their descendants if Limei Yiema became their final place of settlement. This assurance made *maada* Gaahun summon all the elders and leading warriors of the surrounding settlements like Kortumahun, Songejeima, Lekpeyama and Kortihun, and relate what the *kenyei* predicted through his son-in-law. He therefore proposed to them that it would be in their own best interest if they all came and settled in Limei Yiema. Subsequently all of them accepted his invitation and agreed to settle at Limei Yiema. Predicting future events in this way made *maada* Gaahun's son-in-law into a famous *kenyemui*, meaning a person who uses dust or fine sand in divination.

This founding myth relates how an elderly female ancestor by the name of Limei founded Ngiema. This is quite remarkable, as it was "male ancestors, mostly brave warriors, who had founded Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages or farming settlements." It is also certain that *maada* Kanga Gaahun invited the other warriors to come and settle at Limei Yiema, thereby opening the possibility of developing it into a village community. When giving accounts of how their village came into being, Ngiema people usually prefer mentioning this particular warrior ancestor as a starting point of reference. The term 'warrior' in pre-modern society carried a different social meaning from that of late 19th and early 20th century (see chapt. 7).

   Prior to the founding of Ngiema as a village community, there were other small farming settlements such as Kortumahun, Kaapitahun, Songejeima, Kortihun, Lekpejama and Weima, each with its own leader. All of them were under the jurisdiction of *maada* Gaahun, who was residing at Mbotima. "The various sections of Ngiema were all named after these settlements amalgamated to Limei Yiema, each headed by its former leader. The term Ngiema has become today the shortened form of Limei Yiema."

The construction of cosmological and social spaces

The founding ancestors were confronted time and again with the question of how to make their new village secure from evil forces or negative cosmological influences that could hamper the common good. "People in those days believed that witchcraft came from far away, usually unknown settlements envious of their well being and success." For this reason, *maada* Gaahun and his subjects were primarily concerned with "how to preserve unity among themselves and future generations of Ngiema." Another consultation with the soothsayer revealed that it was necessary to perform particular spatial rituals that would serve these objectives. Such rituals became known as the protective rituals (*kpakpei*).

The Kpakpei *ritual*

To achieve unity in their relations, protection from malevolent influences as well as other objectives the ancestors had in mind, they unanimously decided to perform the protective rituals.[35] Cosmological forces such as water from the streams, Sagbeeja and Kɔ-gbege, rainwater (*sende-yei*), the sun and the earth interact as important elements. The relationship of the village community to these forces through various ritual activities expresses a continuous interplay of the social and cosmological spheres.

Since *yie* Limei was a powerful herbalist, she was instrumental in the performance of this ritual. At the request of *maada* Gaahun, she provided different types of plants, especially four strips of dichrostachys glomerata (*ndandei*), various leaves and herbs. Other objects included a white cloth (*fɛɛgbei*) divided into four strips, as well as four old clay-pots (*pɔɔvei*) once used for cooking rice, four pints of dark palm oil (*ndaa-wulei*) and four small buckets of rainwater mixed with water taken from the Sagbeeja and Kɔ-gbege streams. The leaves were left to dry in the hot sun for a few days before being used in the ritual. Spells were recited over the objects and leaves, after which they were put into four old mortars filled with water and palm oil. The ancestors dug a hole at each point they

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35 A similar ritual is performed by other Mɛnde-speaking societies in Sierra Leone (cf. Harris and Sawyerr, 1968: 106-108).

had marked in the village for the ritual, allowing their progeny to call them the protective ritual points, to which the number four corresponds. A pint of the oil was put into each clay-pot and a small amount of water from each bucket. The ancestors put one clay-pot containing the objects and leaves into each hole, after planting a small plant known as *hɔɔwei* near each hole. They then tied the white cloth and a strip of the dichrostachys glomerata to the *hɔɔwei* plant they had planted, watering it with half a bucket of water. A second deep hole was dug into which the clay-pot was then buried with the following words:

> We are putting you here to bring prosperity to this village, and to protect us, our children, grandchildren, their grandchildren's children and all future generations and descendants of Limei Yiema from all that is evil; may we always be united in our decisions and act in charity towards one another.

This was done at all the protective ritual points (map 2) in the village. Informants have explained the symbolism of the constituent objects and plants used in the ritual as follows: the clay-pot containing the oil and the water is generally associated with the life of the village community. It represents permanence and stability in the relationship with the ancestors and with one another, reflecting the village slogan: "in Ngiema everybody is kin to everybody". The dichrostachys glomerata, because of its strong and bad odour, is commonly believed to drive out negative cosmological beings such as bad spirits. The *hɔɔwei* plant stands for the permanence and presence of the founding ancestors, while the white cloth represents good spirits whose presence was believed to enhance the general well-being of Ngiema village. In performing these rituals, the ancestors always followed the direction of the sun.

Consequently, the first ritual was performed at a spot very close to where *yie* Limei built her first dwelling hut, in the direction of the rising sun, which is now the village's main square (*ngitiwaiya*). This spot is very

close to where the present mosque stands, east of the village, extending to Kokolu sub-section.[36]

The women elders, who later became powerful *Sande* ancestors proposed a second point since they wanted it to be mostly associated with the *Sande*. The *Sande* was mainly responsible for socialising young girls of the same age group into the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture and preparing them for marriage. Such a process of socialisation took place within the perimeters of a period of seclusion. This proposed ritual point was situated at the light and deep swamp (*yenge-gbeteihun*), north of the village, which is now located near the main road leading to Gbeworbu. The female elders discovered a rock at that place, which they understood to be a manifestation of the Highest Deity (see chapt. 4). It was eventually transformed into the *Sande* stone (*Sande gɔtii*), and given the name *Ma Tulie*, which came to represent the power of the most important *Sande* ancestors and continued to play a vital role in all *Sande* rituals. The space around *Ma Tulie* was also transformed into a place of ancestral veneration, a "place where the *Sande* ancestors were fed through the pouring of libations and a ritual called the red rice (*mba gbɔli*) ritual, usually performed very early in the morning" (see chapt. 5 and 6). This ceremony was to take place a few days before the young girls started the period of seclusion. In accordance with the tradition that developed around this stone, "all village leaders must always give a white fowl, a white cloth and a bushel of cleaned rice to the *Sande* elders shortly before each period of seclusion, as a sign of solidarity from the entire village community."

The primary aim of these initial the *Sande* rituals was to ask *Sande* ancestors for their special protection and to guarantee good health. "The young girls and all those responsible for their training were to be protected by *Ma Tulie* from all negative influences and malevolent forces

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[36] In 2002, a kind of "hegemonic struggle" between some people surfaced in Ngiema, by identifying particular groups as being the direct offspring of *yie* Limei. In the opinion of most people, "such claims only bring conflict and tensions between different families and sections for this was not what our ancestors envisaged for future generations."

during the entire period of seclusion." The *Sande* elders at Ngiema maintain that *Ma Tulie* never abandoned them, but gave her protection, by keeping everyone healthy and making the *Sande* initiation rituals a success. For this reason, the *Sande* elders at that time, who are now *Sande* ancestors in Ngiema, "pledged not to forget *Ma Tulie*. They also promised that their offspring will always remain faithful by bringing offerings, shortly before each initiation was to take place."

Meanwhile the founding ancestors of Ngiema performed a third protective ritual at a point, where the Nganyawama 2 sub-section is presently located, south of the village. The ritual served to keep all Houses in this section connected with other sections, and in this way, they were all to be included in the affairs of the entire village. The last protective ritual was performed at a spot in Godama section, west of the village, where Sembehun/Godama sub-section is now located.

To ensure the protective force behind these rituals, it was necessary to observe a set of rules and taboos that accompanied the fulfilment of their ultimate purpose. Accordingly, "the ancestors implemented a series of protective ritual laws and taboos (*kpakpa jaweisie*) valid not only for descendants of Ngiema, but also for anybody who was to set foot in the village or was to reside there on a temporal or permanent basis." Observance of these laws and taboos is the *condition sine qua non* of the effectiveness of these rituals to work. Such laws stipulate, for instance that "nobody is allowed to take another human being's life by violent means in Ngiema village. Neither is anybody allowed to fight in public and use abusive language of any kind by rudely insulting another person in arguments and disputes."

The explanatory logic behind such taboos is to ensure a good community atmosphere. "Such an anti-social behaviour should never happen in a community, where its members have close kinship ties with one another." However, the ancestors made a provision for reinstating the prevailing social order and relationship to the cosmos, if someone transgressed against the protective ritual laws. They ruled that whenever these laws and taboos were broken, then the person or people involved must perform the remorse and forgiveness ritual (*gɔyei*). It entails inter alia showing remorse, and the readiness to ask for forgiveness, understood

as a kind of expiation. The fine included "giving three pans of cleaned rice and a white fowl, to be prepared and eaten by everybody in the village." In this way, the right order of relationships was to be reinstated. The efficacy of any protective ritual depended very much on keeping the laws and taboos that govern these rituals, which were vital for the regulation of social behaviour sanctioned by the ancestors. "The village community must always, except for the *jemɔɔmoisia* relationship (see chapt. 2), perform the remorse and forgiveness ritual, whenever people go against the rules and break the taboos, otherwise the *kpakpei* will never work."

The cotton trees, streams and river

To continue the spatial construction of their village, the founding ancestors planted four cotton trees at the outskirts of the village. These cotton trees were primarily thought to be part of the territorial protection against intruding enemy warriors. Such a territorial demarcation had both religious and social dimensions (cf. Durkheim and Mauss 1963; Durkheim 1968; Gottowik 2001). Therefore, in order to understand the socio-cosmological structure of Ngiema, the sociological meaning of these cotton trees must also be taken into account. From the moment the cotton trees were planted, "people started offering the red rice sacrifice under these trees on rotational basis."

The "cotton trees originally served as sticks for war fences (*gɔɛɛsia/gɔɛɛwuisia*)," which became particularly sophisticated in the 18th and 19th centuries, in order to protect the village from invading warriors and enemies. These trees were tied in different ways with strong and long ropes. One way was to tie the trees with ropes around the village or in a semi-circle form. This form of stockading known as the *daa* could be found in most other Mɛnde villages (cf. Little, 1967: 33). The war fence (*gɔɛɛ*) was made with thorns to prevent enemy warriors from climbing it and coming into the village. At midnight, it was securely locked, so that no one could go in and out of the village until early next morning, usually at dawn, when it was opened again to enable people go and work on their farms (see chapt. 7).

The streams known respectively as Kɔ-gbege (photograph 15) and Sagbeeja (photograph 16), together with river Keeya (photograph 2) were important for different ritual activities in the village. The two streams and river were thus part of the constant flow of water around various social spaces. Ngiema people also perceived the streams and river as belonging to the cosmological domain, where a continuous flow of periodic rituals gave meaning to their social and religious lives, a point I will examine in chapter 5.

Furthermore, the light and deep swamp (photograph 17) and the Kɔ-gbege stream flowing around it are located south of the village. As part of cosmological powers set in motion by the protective rituals and regular ritual offerings, the Kɔ-gbege had miraculously overflowed its bank, reaching as far as the village. "The miraculous overflow had deterred enemy warriors on many occasions from crossing over into the village and attacking it. For this reason, the ancestors called this stream Kɔ-gbege," from the lexeme kɔ, meaning "war" and *gbe*, "to hinder, to stop". Kɔ-gbege then means to "stop war". Such miracles, which favour the right relationship with the cosmos, can only happen if the protective ritual laws were observed, as prescribed by the ancestors. Of particular importance for the village community, however, was the ritual transformation of the light and deep swamp that extends into the Kɔ-gbege stream (photograph 17) into perpetual dwelling place for the totemic ancestor, called *maada* (literally grandfather). The Sagbeeja played an important ritual role for the entire village in the sense that *Sande* and *Poro* used its waters for various ritual purposes during periods of their initiation rituals, as well as for various purification rituals, such as those performed by the *humoi* elders (see chapt. 4 and 5). The *Poro* sacred grove (*kama*[37] *lɔgboihun*) and the *Sande* sacred house/bush (*Sande wee-la*/*Sande gundei*[38]) as places of seclusion reserved for initiation rituals were situated very close to Sagbeeja. It was also believed that this stream

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[37] Innes (1969: 39) employs *kama* to mean *Poro* bush. However, I rather prefer to add the word *logboihun* to *Kama*, which convenes the meaning of "Poro forest" for it was not just a kind of bush, but a sacred forest.

[38] See Innes (1969: 129), who prefers the term *gundei*, which he translates as bush to that of house.

has a miraculous power of drawing all the descendants of Ngiema back to their roots, which means that once they drink water from this stream, they will never forget their ancestral roots, which is Ngiema. This inner power will always compel them to go back to the village no matter how far away they live, and how long it will take. Hence, Sagbeeja was also being used for drinking purposes until the war broke out in 1991. River Keeya and the bush around it were also used, apart from fishing purposes, to perform other types of ceremonies [rituals].

Of particular importance for all descendants of Ngiema was the social and cosmological space occupied by the smithy (photograph 11). Its physical proximity to the *Poro* sacred grove shows that it essentially belonged to *Poro* territory (cf. Bellman, 1980). For such reasons, the smithy was not only meant to make tools necessary for the work on farms or for the fabrication of war weapons, but was also a place where all protective ritual taboos were to be observed. In this sense, "it also served as a place of refuge for people who felt threatened by witches and negative social forces in the village." Hence, the smithy was a place very much feared by witches, because they would automatically lose their power to do evil there.

The 'Maada Crocodiles'

Oral tradition maintains that the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde living in most parts of the Luawa chiefdom had developed a special relationship with particular species of crocodiles known as '*Maada* (grandfather) Crocodiles'. In pre-colonial Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, territorial boundaries were not clear-cut, or were even virtually unknown, and people were more affinally related than in colonial and post-colonial times. Before colonial boundaries were drawn, Dodo Kortuma[39] and Ngiema, for example, belonged to the same ancestral territory and performed common religious rituals.

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[39] The inhabitants of this village sometimes use the shortened form Dodo to refer to Dodo Kortuma. I adopt this local convention.

The myth of the '*Maada* crocodiles'

In order to investigate the relationship between people and '*Maada* Crocodiles', we shall examine a myth that I recorded from informants in both Dodo Kortuma and Ngiema. It is about how the '*Maada* Crocodiles' saved the ancestors of Dodo Kortuma from invading warriors. Present-day Dodo lies just about ten miles south of Ngiema and borders other villages along river Keeya in the Lower Kpombali section of Luawa Chiefdom. In order to facilitate the analysis, I have divided the verbatim narration of this myth into three constituent parts.

Part one

In those days … after Dodo Kortuma had been founded, there was an old man in that village who used to go out to his rice farm at dawn, in order to tap palm wine from the only good palm tree in that area. One fine day, he noticed that someone had been drinking all his wine from the palm tree each time, before he could get there. To stop this state of affairs, he started going to the farm earlier, but to no avail. This situation puzzled him very much. Weeks passed … and weeks passed …and weeks passed, but without improvement; instead the mysterious person continued to drink all his palm wine. Nevertheless, he did not resort to curses and woes, but rather remained calm and patient. One day, the old man made a quiet plea to the unknown person who had been drinking his wine: 'I am asking this person to please leave some of the wine for me after drinking, so that I too may have some share of it'.

Meanwhile the unknown person, who used to drink the tapper's palm wine, was a *jinei*, (pl.) *jinangaa* [a famous non- ancestral Kɔɔ-Mɛnde spirit],[40] living as a crocodile in the deep waters of river Keeya running near the village of Dodo Kortuma. When the *jinei* came to drink the palm wine one day, he said to himself, 'The person, whose wine I am drinking everyday must be a very good man, with a very good heart, because he had never complained about his stolen wine, neither had he uttered curses on the mysterious thief. Instead, he had always remained calm and patient. For this reason, I shall make myself known to this man, and become friends with him.' Henceforth, the *jinei* started to bring secret gifts of foreign origin, including some foodstuff for the wine tapper, and deposited them under the palm tree, from which the wine was tapped. Among these mysterious gifts were also some English calabashes, where palm wine was usually being kept for long periods in the olden days. The old man understood at once that someone, whom he did not know, but at the same time was eager to know, brought the gifts for him. Yet he did not dare ask anybody in the village.

One day, the *jinei* decided to reveal himself to the palm wine tapper by appearing to him in human form, and to confess that he was the one who had been drinking his

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[40] The term *jinei* is an Arabic derivative resulting from Islamic influences. See chapt. 4 for details on non-ancestral spirits.

palm wine in the past. In order to do this effectively, the *jinei* assumed the form of an old Kɔɔ-Mɛnde man. Accordingly, he came and met the wine tapper, climbing the palm tree. After greeting him, the *jinei* received a very amicable welcome by the man who invited him to be his guest. The two men then sat down and drank one calabash full of palm wine. They drank and had a very good conversation. Afterwards, the palm wine tapper asked his guest whence he was and what his name was. The guest told his host that he wanted to be friends with him, because he had noticed that he was a sincere and honest man with a very good heart.

The guest then disclosed his identity and revealed to his host that he was dwelling as a *jinei* crocodile in the middle of the deep waters of river Keeya near the village. Furthermore, he confessed that he was the one who used to drink his palm wine, but who also brought the gifts of foreign origin, meant to be a token of friendship. By taking these gifts, he had accepted the proposal of friendship from the *jinei*.

Because they had now become friends, the *jinei* disclosed to his friend that just within a very short period of time a large-scale Mɛnde war (Mɛnde-*goi*)[41] was to reach Dodo, which was going to be very serious. Nevertheless, there was no need for him to panic at this news, but he must remain calm and keep it a secret until further notice. The *jinei* also promised to inform his friend about the precise time the war would reach the village, so that all the villagers could get ready for it. Therefore, only the palm wine tapper who became the *jinei's* friend knew about the impending Mɛnde war at that initial stage.

After some time, however, the *jinei* appeared to an old woman one night in a dream, and told her about the war. He also instructed her to inform the village leader about the coming war, so that he could tell everybody in the village to get ready for it and for a possible evacuation of the village at a convenient time, which the *jinei* was to disclose. After the woman had told the village leader about her encounter with the *jinei* in her dream and his instructions, he refused to believe her. At another occasion, the *jinei* appeared to his friend in a dream and instructed him this time to tell the village leader and the people to be prepared for the coming war. The palm wine tapper told the village leader, but he did not believe him either.

Finally, the *jinei* himself appeared to the village leader in a dream, and explained the situation to him that within a few days the Mɛnde war was coming to Dodo, which would have dire consequences for its inhabitants. The village chief became bewildered, and he summoned the village herald and instructed him to make the traditional public announcement by telling the whole village to gather at the main square. After the people had gathered, he then narrated the whole story to them and they were perplexed. However, he apologized to the two people he had refused to believe. Furthermore, the village leader told the people that they should be prepared for the coming war by getting ready for a possible evacuation, because within a few days the *jinei* himself will come to the village to tell the people about what to do next.

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41 See Abraham (2003: 114) on the description of the dynamics and concept of this war in early colonial times.

Part two

Just about two days before the Mɛnde war reached Dodo Kortuma, the *jinei* came to the village assuming the form of an old Kɔɔ-Mɛnde man. He then told them to take all their tools, their children, their property and their livestock down to the river, which was situated a few hundred metres away from the village. Afterwards they were to put all their possessions into the river first, and then everybody should jump one by one, through his instruction and help, into the deep waters of the river, where they were to stay until the warriors had left their village. At those words, there was much confusion, and everybody was perplexed in Dodo. The people then asked him whether they would survive and ever be able to return to their village. The *jinei* told them not to worry about anything, and he assured them that they would be returning to their village, safe and sound, provided they follow the instructions they were to receive.

A day before the enemy invaders reached Dodo Kortuma, the *jinei* came to the village once more to inform the people that in just twenty-four hours the Mɛnde war would reach their village. Therefore, he instructed them to gather under the big *kafei* tree[42] at the bank of the river. Meanwhile, the people with all their possessions, including livestock, had gathered at the river, and were waiting for instructions from the *jinei*. He told them to put their possessions and livestock into the waters first. Afterwards each person was to hold one of the branches of the *kafei* tree, while a big crocodile would surface from the deep river to help that person sink into the river, by standing on its back. After this procedure was successfully completed, the Dodo Kortuma people found themselves living in another town under the deep river. This town was very big and more beautiful than the village they were living in before. After all the people had gathered at the centre of the town under the water, the *jinei* who had become their friend, introduced them to the other *jinangaa* and showed them the town, where all the *jinangaa* live together. The *jinangaa* appeared to be human beings, and their town under the water was more beautiful than all Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages. The *jinangaa* subsequently divided the town into two sections. The guests from Dodo Kortuma were allowed to stay in one section of the town, but the other section belonged strictly to the *jinangaa*.

Part three

At the gathering, the *jinei* community warned their guests to be very careful about how to live in the town belonging to the *jinangaa*, and that the human guests must strictly observe all the rules and moral precepts given to them by their hosts. These laws include the following: They were never to leave their own section and go to the section of the town reserved for the *jinangaa*, because no mortal being of human origin is allowed to be in that part of the town. Neither were they to eat any food from that section, or to fall in love with the women who live there, which would lead to marriage. Anybody who broke these rules, by eating food and getting married to women living in the section of the town where the *jinangaa* live would never return to the village of his origin – namely Dodo Kortuma – but would stay under the water with the *jinangaa* forever.

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[42]   This is a particular tree usually found at the bank of rivers in villages.

However, in spite of this warning, some Kɔɔ-Mɛnde young men, who love women more than their lives, went to the section of the *jinangaa*, ate their food, had relationships with their women and got married. All those young men who acted against these moral precepts stipulated by the *jinangaa* never returned to Dodo, but stayed under the water forever.

Meanwhile when the warriors from the East came to Dodo, they were greatly surprised not to find anybody in the village, because everyone, including animals and property, had been evacuated before their arrival. The warriors were even more bewildered upon learning that not a single animal was found in the village, but only empty houses. They searched in vain for the villagers and their animals, but they cleverly decided to follow the footprints leading to the bank of river Keeya hoping to see the Dodo people. However, after not seeing anybody, they decided to return to the village and wait there instead, thinking that eventually the people would return. The invaders waited for four days and after seeing no one, they finally left.

In the meantime, the *jinei* who had originally befriended the people of Dodo told them to wait until he goes to see whether the warriors were still waiting in the village. Upon his arrival in the village, he was happy to see that the warriors had left. He then went and told the people that the warriors had left and that it was time for them to go back to the village, to the place of their origin. All the *jinangaa* living under the water took leave of their guests and wished them farewell, and it was arranged that their friend accompany their human guests back to the village. However, all those who had eaten food and had taken wives from the other section of the town belonging to the *jinangaa* under the water never returned to Dodo Kortuma, but stayed with the *jinangaa* in their own world forever and their relatives never saw them again.

Those elders who returned from the town under the water were narrating the events they had experienced to their sons and daughters, to their grandsons and granddaughters for these events must be recounted to all generations of Dodo Kortuma. Indeed, in view of this heroic deed of friendship, Dodo Kortuma and its descendants will forever recall and narrate to future generations this great and unique story, and how the *jinangaa*, who are actually crocodiles, rendered them help by saving their ancestors and their village from the invading warriors. The relationship between human beings and these special types of crocodiles is orally documented in the whole of the Kpombali section of Luawa chiefdom. The descendants of Dodo Kortuma are prohibited from killing and eating crocodiles of any type, not only the *Maada* ones, as a sign of solidarity and assurance of the strict observance of such a moral precept.

For the people of Dodo, this myth describes a historical fact, which cannot be contended otherwise. The rules of strict logical inferences or orderly continuity cannot apply to the order of events in such a myth. Mythology in general should be regarded as reflecting the social structure and the relations composing it (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1967: 228).

In part one, the myth relates events, which led to the establishment of a relationship between the old palm wine tapper and *jinei*, which ultimately extended to the village community. The myth leaves no doubt

that such a relationship is based on exchange, that is to say, of autochthonous versus foreign objects. Dynamics of such an exchange, as conceived by the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, may have a number of implications. The palm wine tapper knew that he was accepting gifts that did not own their origin in the social domain. By constantly taking the beautiful objects and foodstuff, he was quite aware of possible dangers involved, since "it was customary in those days for any Kɔɔ-Mɛnde not to take foreign objects from under trees, on riverbanks or by the streamside, and on road paths leading to farms." Such objects were conceived to have come from spirits, and taking them would mean willingness to accept invitation to enter into an exchange relationship with a spirit. This type of relationship could sometimes be very dangerous, as the spirit would want to possess the person, if it were a bad spirit (see chapt. 4). Therefore, the taking of these objects was a conscious and free decision by the old man, because he was fully aware that such objects were intended to be an invitation to enter into a relationship, which he may have also rejected. Nevertheless, knowing that this could be in his favour, the wine tapper confidently accepted this invitation of friendship which extended to the entire village community. Quintessentially, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde knew that such a friendship was destined to be asymmetric, based on a strict moral precept.

Part two deals with separation of the village community from its social domain, which mainly included living with crocodiles under the water. In this way, Dodo Kortuma people lost their social visibility and identity. What they saw under the water were no longer crocodiles, but living spirits who appeared to them as human beings. By temporarily losing their social visibility, the village community were made invisible to enemy warriors.

Part three of the myth postulates absolute separation between spirits and humans. The fact that no affinal exchanges between them were allowed, is an explanation of why spirits and humans cannot exchange on a permanent social basis. The *jinangaa* gave their human friends a clear moral precept, which should be obeyed and followed. However, this moral precept has a dual character – on the one hand, it appears as if it is limited to the time spent under the water, but on the other, it extends far beyond the aquatic experience with the spirits, to that of the village-life.

This defines the relationship between people and spirits, and therefore becoming co-extensive with the entire social structure of Dodo village, and opens a relationship that transcends time and space in this sense. Hence, the progeny of the ancestors of Dodo and those of other villages who had become related through marriage exchange processes are expected to give their due respects to the '*Maada* Crocodiles' at all times by not killing them. Ngiema ancestors offered this special species of crocodiles in sacrifice with the intension of entering into a relationship with them, which became the totemic ancestor known as *Maada*.

The sacrifice of *Maada* as totemic ancestor

Upon completing the cosmological and social construction of their village, the founding ancestors of Ngiema performed another ritual, which defined their relationship with the '*Maada* Crocodiles'. After consultations with the soothsayer, they decided to offer an animal capable of mysteriously changing into someone or something else (*maawovema-hani*). While preparations were underway, an old female ancestor had a dream at night in which a crocodile told her that it was ready to be sacrificed for the good of Ngiema and its future generations. However, the crocodile also demanded that Ngiema and its descendants must be ready to enter into a covenant with it, based on reciprocal respect.

Accordingly, the ancestors took a small specimen from river Keeya and ritually sacrificed it, which included cutting off part of its tail, but not killing it. They then threw the crocodile, which was still alive not into river Keeya, but into the light and deep swamp that extends into the Kɔgbege stream, just along the road leading to Gbeworbu village; ancestors threw the tail back into Keeya. Afterwards the ancestors told the crocodile that from now on it had become a spiritual crocodile, and that the Kɔgbege stream was going to be river Keeya, where it should dwell forever. "Some objects only known to the ancestors were also thrown into the stream, which should enable the crocodile to recognise the stream as river Keeya." This ritual action sealed the covenant. Henceforth, these crocodiles are addressed as 'grandfather' (*Maada*), because the crocodile that was sacrificed now became the totemic ancestor. Successive generations of this crocodile species from river Keeya would never attack

the Ngiema people, since *Maada* was to protect future generations from calamities such as war, provided the descendants of Ngiema never killed the '*Maada* Crocodiles' either. "The Crocodile from river Keeya lives up to this day in the swamp that extended into the Kɔ-gbege [photograph 17], and protects Ngiema from war and other adversities, by giving the people alarming warning sounds." These sounds mark important events in not only Luawa Chiefdom but also in Kailahun district as a whole.

After the ritual sacrifice, the two main sections of the village were then inverted; meaning from that day on, the Mbotima and Keeyama sections exchanged their names. This structural inversion does not only have a religious meaning, but also some far-reaching political consequences for future generations. In the first place, it means that even the ancestors would have to change their dwelling places, as well as their political hierarchical positions on a rotational basis in order to fulfil the tasks of the ritual. Thus, it was sanctioned that "if the village leader or, as it later developed to be, the section chief hails from the Keeyama section, his representative should be from Mbotima, and vice versa."

It has been constantly reported that Ngiema women may step on the '*Maada* Crocodiles' or even deposit their fishing nets on their backs when fishing in river Keeya or Sagbeeja. Whenever these women see a crocodile while fishing, they should simply say 'here is grandfather, grandfather is here' (*Maada gbeelɛ, maada loo mbei*). "When doing so, they should watch out, because if *Maada* becomes tired, he can abruptly slip away, which may result in the women falling into the water and even losing the fish they had hitherto caught." The '*Maada* Crocodiles' harm neither these women, nor the men fishing in these waters. If, on the other hand, a crocodile were killed by any of the descendants of Ngiema, especially in the rivers around Ngiema, then the crocodiles would begin to kill people and even hunt fishermen at night. That is to say, the covenant must not be taken lightly, but has to be deeply respected by both parties.

Chapter 2   Social Relationships

This chapter focuses on the types of social relations that were mainly characteristic and important for the village community. Of particular importance is the relationship with the great ancestors as well as the social relationships that existed between the various sections and Houses, which facilitated the exchange of marriage partners in the village.

Kinship and marriage

Gathering genealogical knowledge of the ancestors was practically impossible, as people in Ngiema do not like describing their relationship with the ancestors in genealogical terms. Thus, any attempt to describe families or members of particular Houses in terms of their origin would be socially incorrect and could sometimes lead to violence.[43] For this reason, constructing genealogies, which originally seemed to be the most fruitful procedure in collecting kin terms, was abandoned in favour of more direct questions about how Ego would call or address consanguineal and affinal relatives. This study, therefore, does not claim to give an exhaustive analysis of the kinship system of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, as this would require a more extensive field research, but nonetheless covers its most general features. The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde distinguish a classificatory set of terms of address and a descriptive set – employing the same lexemes – in which to explicate relationship towards Alter. An outline of the most commonly used kinship terms is given in table 1.[44]

Marriage was fundamental in articulating social relationships among patrilineal Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. The conditions, which made marriage possible, were "friendship", "kindness" and the "good relationships that

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[43]   That may explain why some people rejected the unpublished pamphlet written by Gbassa Fatorma – a native of Ngiema – as inaccurate and misleading, when he attempted to reconstruct the history of the village just after the civil war. Some even accuse him of being biased as "he attempted to link particular families with the great ancestors of Ngiema like *maada* Gan and *yie* Limei, while deliberately leaving other families out." Some elders even told me not to read the pamphlet, because for them "it is not a helpful presentation of the relationship with the great ancestors of the village."

[44]   I have based the theoretical analysis of kinship and marriage on Barnard and Good (1984).

existed between the different Houses and neighbouring village communities." The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde say, "all kinship relationships must necessarily begin with a woman." (*nyahiɟ mia a ndei lɔɔto*). It is because sisters, daughters and granddaughters are given in marriage that kinship relationships connecting the Houses were possible.

Kinterminology

Kin Term	Denotation	Connotation	Generation
maadahunmaada	FFF, MFF	*maadahunmaadei*. Address form shortened as *mamada*	+4
mamahunnmama	FMM, MMM	*mu mamani-woo* as reference.	+4
maada	FF, MF	*maadani* (pl.) reference and address	+2
mama	FM, MM	*mamani* (pl.) reference and address	+2
kɛkɛ	F	*kɛkɛ/kɛkɛni* (pl.) is a classificatory term of address for any elderly male person, but also for Ego's spouse.	+1
nje	M	Any elderly female person is addressed as *yie*. Sometimes *yie* is employed as reference	+1
talohunlalui	Ch Ch Ch	*lalohunlalui/lalohunlaleengaa* (pl.) as reference, but sometimes also as *mamalui/mamaleengaa* (pl.) as reference and address	-4
talui	Ch Ch	But *lalui* also as a term of reference and address, *laleengaa* (pl.)	-2
dui	S	*deengaa* (pl.), *hindolui*, *hindo leengaa* (pl.) as classificatory term of reference. *Lui* as address	-1
dui	D	*deenga* (pl.), *nyahalui*, *nyahaleengaa* (pl.) as classificatory term of reference. *Lui* as address	-1
dee	yB, yZ	Maternal and paternal *Sb* referred to as *dee-hindui/deengaa* (m.) *dee- nyahiɟ /deengaa* (f.)	0
deewei/deweisia (pl.)	eSb	Maternal and paternal eSb referred to as *deewaa/deewaani* (pl.), but addressed as *gɔɔ*	0
kɛkɛ	FeB	Addressed as *kɛkɛ*	+1
kɛkɛ-wulo	FyB	*kɛkɛ-wuloi* as term of address	+1
nje	FeZ	Addressed as *yie*	+1
dɛnɛ, nje-wulo	FyZ	*dɛnɛ* or *yie* as a term of address	+1
kenya	MeB	Also as address. In a polygamous system, if M share the same mother with B, then MB is *kortuma kenyei* to Ego. Addressed as *kenya*	+1
kenya	MyB	Also address as *kenya*.	+1
nje	MeZ	Also addressed as *yie*	+1

Kin Term	Denotation	Connotation	Generation
nje-wulo	MyZ	Addressed as *yie*, but sometimes *yie-wuloi*	+1
jaagbei	MBZS	*jaagbei* as reference and address	0/-1
dui	SbCh	*nya lui/leengaa* (pl.) as reference and address	0/-1
jemɔɔmo	eSbSp	Because of the speical relationship to her, eBW is sometimes addressed as *nyahiɟ* generally expressed in plural as "our wife" (*mu nyahiɟ*). In times of any difficulty, Ego should help her as "his wife". Because of this relationship, she is mostly called *jemɔɔmoi*. All SpySb are *jemɔɔmoisia*, but spoken as *semoisia*	0
yemui	yBW	*njemui* as address	0
deewei	FWBeS, FWBD, FWZS, FWZD FBWZD, FBWZS	Called *dee/deengaa*, but addressed as *gɔɔ*	-1/0
kemaa-lui	FBCh	*kemaalengaa*. Non-gender specific. All MyBD/ MyBS /FeBD/ FeBS belong to this category. Referred to as *dee/deengaa*, but addressed as *gɔɔ/gɔɔ-ni* (pl.), if Alter is older than Ego	-1/0
jemaa-lui	MZCh	*jemaalengaa*. Also non-gender specific. All MyZD/ MyZS/ MeZS/ MeZD belong to this classification. Referred to as *dee/deengaa*, but MeZS and MeZD are addressed as *gɔɔ/gɔɔ-ni* (pl.)	-1/0
nje	SpM	*yie* as classificatory term of address, but also *yemui* is sometimes employed.	
kɛkɛ/mblei	SpF	*kɛkɛ* as a term of address.	+1
mblei	SpB	SPeB is addressed as *demia*	0
yemui	SpeZ /WeZ	Also addressed as *yemui*. Addressed as *gɔɔ*	0
hinii	WZH	*hinii*. General kin term for all SbSp	0
jemɔɔmoi	SpyZ/WyZ	*jemɔɔmoi*. Sometimes addressed as *nyaha-wuloi*, but does not imply any sexual relations. "Among the Kissi and the Kono, a man can have sexual intercourse with the younger sisters of his wife and can even marry them since it is not considered as incest."	0

Table 1: Classificatory terms denoting and connoting types of social relationships among the village community.

The rules of endogamy and exogamy

Ideal model of endogamy

The village as a whole tended to be endogamous that may be classified into two dimensions. Firstly, "one section of the village gave and took wives from other sections without problems," provided those involved were not affected by the rules of incest. Secondly, "there were those who preferred to marry within their own Houses, rather than going to take wives from other sections and Houses."

This village endogamous practice was, and is often expressed in the idiom "to go round the *kpato* tree" (*kpato-wuli mbeembe*). *Kpato-wuli* is a particular type of tree found in bush forests used for farming. According to farming experiences, parts of the trunk of this tree can recuperate even after farmers have cut down the tree; it can only be destroyed by cutting its roots. The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde project this arboreal idea to marriage relationships, in the sense that the practice of wife-giving and wife-taking operating within the same village is a legitimate one. If Ego marries his FBWZD from the same patrilineal House, then those involved were said to be rotating the *kpato* tree, expressed as "they are going around the *kpato* tree" (*kpatui mia te mbeembeema*). Thus, what we have is the idea of "permanent rotation", of giving and taking wives to, and from the different Houses of the village expressing a strong sense of solidarity among the relations of that House in terms of collective action, as well as mutual responsibility.

Category of Exogamy

The following rules apply to the prohibition of incest among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. FBCh, MZCh, SpM, SpF, SbSp, BW, ZH, FWs are all prohibited from having sexual intercourse with one another. These rules generate from the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde concept of incest known as the *simɔngaamei*. The noun *simɔngama* means, "joining the same/putting together". *Simɔngama wua* means "to commit incest". People who commit incest are said to be guilty of putting the family together (*ndei gbɔnga/lɛma*). An important component to this rule is that of your mother's breast milk (*bi njai nyini-yei*). Informants stress the following rules for transgressing through incest

against the social order, punishable by causing dire social calamities on the village community. In a polygamous home, "the spouses of Ego's father, even when younger than Ego are all his mothers, and he is not allowed to take any one of them as his wife, even after the father had passed away." People who have been suckled by the same mother should never have sexual intercourse, because the "village regarded this as a serious *simɔngaamei* [curse], for which the whole village must bear responsibility." It was believed that this curse could be only reverted if particular rituals were performed.

Marriage preferences

The ritual construction of relationships is primarily a construction of *action* and secondarily a matter of *verbalisation*. Of particular importance in the dynamics of Kɔɔ- Mɛnde kinship, was the special relationship between MB and his ZS. The MB/ZS relationship was a cosmological relationship of rights, which was sacred, forbidden, respected and feared. When the MB killed an animal, such as a deer or cow, the ZS "had the right to seize the head part of that animal by tying a rope around its horn. In this case, he was entitled to take the head of that animal without anybody taking it away from him or rebuking him." Such an action of claiming and taking the animal's head became known as the head of an animal killed by MB (*Kenya huaɟ-wui*). The *jaagbei*, and only he, was entitled to this privilege.

Such an exclusive or special right was applied not only to animals, but also to everything MB possessed. Even in serious matters, where, for example, he was involved in organising feasts and important rituals, the ZS had the right to claim one of the objects for the ritual. In such cases, if he insisted on claiming the object, "the MB and those present would not chide or reprimand him, but must plead with him, not to claim this right on that particular occasion." If he, however, insisted then he usually asked for the token of plea (g*umawui*) instead. This could also take the form of non-material compensation, such as receiving his MB's blessing, which was of vital importance for the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social life.

The head of an animal killed by the MB was also projected to the MBD. In this case, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde were more specific about the head of

an animal, which now became the goat-head (*njee-wui*) killed by the MB. If the latter had a daughter, then the ZS was entitled to marry her. The ritual proceedings were very similar to that of an animal killed in the sense that he must first tie a rope around her wrist. In such a case, the MB was obliged to give his daughter to him in marriage provided the latter had fulfilled certain conditions. In the first instance, he should have had no intimate relationship with his MBW, which included holding her hand in public. Secondly, he was entitled to marry his MBD if, and only if, he had never claimed the right to the head of an animal killed by MB before, because "this privilege is only given once in life and it would be unlawful to repeat it at a later stage." This marriage was called "goat-head marriage". What kept the society together was the MBD marriage, since this was a connecting rod between the various Houses in the village. The ideal wife-taker and wife-giver is reproduced by means of the institution of MBD marriage. There was also a possibility of exchanging wives and husbands with other Houses in the village, which only became possible through the *Sande*.

The *Sande* institution sanctioned and facilitated the MBD marriage as well as the whole exchange of daughters in the village. Initiation into the *Sande* was a collective preparation for potential marriage relations. By being secluded for years and having experienced the world of the ancestors, *Sande* initiation rituals collectively transformed young virgin girls into different a different category of human beings. The *Sande* created relationships between individual and spirit ancestors, which became a socio-cosmological identity. The *Sande* initiation prepared the way for becoming a bride, in the sense that young virgins were transformed into a spiritual category that made them into brides, a collective series of wife-giver and wife-taker relationships became possible through the *Sande*

Rituals of betrothal and marriage

A man from a particular House approached a pregnant wife of an ancestral lord (*ndemɔɔ-wai*), and expressed the wish of taking that child in marriage, if it turned out to be a girl. The woman responded by telling him to hope and pray for a safe delivery. A positive answer from the

prospective wife-giver group certainly depended on his social reputation. Everybody in the village made "a joke of his proposal until the woman gave birth to a baby girl." If, however, it turned out to be a boy, he waited until another woman was pregnant in the House. This is a further manisfestation of the village endogamy described in the preceding paragraphs. An important stage in this process was that he must tie a rope from any kind of tree in the forest around the right wrist of the newborn baby girl, saying, "I would like this child to be my future wife." The entire village community celebrated such an exchange, and all those involved formally gave their consent, which means entering into a number of obligations. The obligation of the future wife-giver House included "making sure that their daughter carried the rope around her right wrist until her initiation into the *Sande*."

Subsequently the prospective wife-taker House started giving their potential wife-givers gifts, as well as performing some deeds of kindness (*kpekpeyei*) to the future mother-in-law. Such gifts were normally not of a monetary or material nature, but mainly included helping the potential wife-givers work on their farm and some other tasks. Sometimes this action of gift giving started even earlier, from the time the man made his first proposal to the potential mother-in-law when she was still pregnant. This process continued until the girl reached the age of puberty, which qualified her for initiation into the *Sande*, as required by Kɔɔ- Mɛnde cultural traditions.

Shortly before the initiation rituals began, the potential wife-givers must remind their future wife-takers of this important event. Accordingly, both groups must begin copious preparations, which was normally the making of a special rice farm. The purpose of this was to meet her material needs during the period of seclusion, which lasted a couple of years, as well as the months that followed her re-integration into the village community. The first day of the initiation was marked with great joy and celebration in the village. During this time, the future husband was supposed to render services to his prospective mother-in-law, such as fetching firewood, processing palm oil and helping in her vegetable garden.

Prior to her re-integration into the village community, the wife-givers and wife-takers began preparations for the put kola nuts (*tolei-la*) rituals, which can be translated as the betrothal ceremony. Meanwhile three days of festivities followed the re-incorporation of all the new initiates into the village, who had now become adults and responsible members of their community. They were henceforth allowed to get married and have children. "The House of the prospective wife-taker group formally asked the future wife-giver group if they wanted to enter into conjugal relationship with their House."

The community attached great importance to the aspect of virginity as a prerequisite for initiation into the *Sande*. Virginity (*nyahaloyaa*) was again emphasised during the "engagement ceremony", which took place at the residence of the wife-givers. The latter brought a bowl full of water, some rice, vegetables and four kola nuts, of which two were red and the other two white, to the wife-givers' residence. The bowl of water symbolises the "completeness, meaning virginity" of the future wife. The kola nuts became a sign of "the new life in terms of procreation, which the woman was to bring into the House of her new husband."

Upon completing the put kola nuts ritual, all the elders gathered at the village court in order to give this a ritual legitimacy. It was then ruled that the elders from both groups were to liaison between the couple in times of crisis. At this gathering, the elders leading the ritual then asked the wife-givers, if they had exchanged gifts, meaning if there had been any deeds of kindness between them and the wife-takers in the past. Afterwards, the court elders asked the wife-givers to hang heads (*Ngu-hitε*) on the matter, meaning to think and deliberate on it, and report to them within a few hours.

The wife-takers formally made their intentions known to the elders, by requesting permission to begin another ritual procedure. After this formal permission had been granted, the elders then asked the wife-taker group to come and pick the woman (*awa wu nyahiɲ goi*) as if she was a palatable and beautiful fruit from a tree.[45] Such a statement allowed the

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[45] See Platenkamp (1988) for similar rituals among Tobelo society in Indonesia.

wife-takers to start procuring the necessary objects, as prescribed by this process. The hallmark of these objects of exchange was the long and thin iron bars (*nyɛkɔi*), made by blacksmiths, especially skilled in the art of making cutlasses, and other tools for farming. The wife-takers "must give ten to twenty bars of these long and thin iron bars." Other important objects included kola nuts and a white piece of cloth. "The parents of the bride and groom must give the kola nut, symbolising unity and the hope for a life-long marriage relationship." The wife-givers were to accompany their daughter, carrying the white cloth. Meanwhile she was to wear a horn taken from any livestock in the village on her neck, which was given by the elders of her own House. She must wear it until the day she was ready to take up residence at her husband's home.

Another important part of the ritual was the examination of the marital union and its legal validity by the elders. According to traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde law, all adult members from both groups should accept the marital union, otherwise it was declared invalid. If, however, for any reason, one member expressed his or her objection, then the elders involved in this process must ask the House of that person to plead with the person, until he or she gave approval of the union. After the rituals have been performed, "the bride must spend three days in the groom's residence, after which her parents fetched her in order to stay with them again. This was normally accompanied by a big celebration with a lot of music, dancing and eating, done in honour of the groom and the bridegroom."

There was another system of marriage, which though slightly different, followed similar ritual proceedings to the one already described.[46] "If a young man from another House happened to fall in love with a young girl almost of the same age group, the young man must first try to establish contacts with the mother of the girl." Establishing such a contact also involved "doing some deeds of kindness to the mother of the

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[46] It should be mentioned here that in pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, symbolic actions took precedence over mere verbal pronunciations, when it came to constructing such complex relationships

girl in question, such as by bringing firewood for cooking meals and fetching drinking water." She then understood the motives behind such services, and so kept a close eye on the movement of the young man, by secretly investigating his character. Creating relationships in this way was important for bringing the Houses from different sections into the process of exchanging marriage partners.

After thoroughly examining his character, and ensuring that there was no incest prohibition between her own House and that of the young man, the mother may ask him to be assisting her with some work of any kind. This was the first positive signal from the mother of the girl as she may have had sons old enough to do the same kind of work for her. Meanwhile the young man's parents also noticed that their son had fallen in love, but did not dare ask him, (and) instead they started making some preparations that would eventually lead to the marriage exchange process. After establishing these symbolic gestures and contacts, the mother instructed her daughter to make friendly contact with the young man by visiting him sometimes, signifying that "there were no obstacles on the part of her House." According to most informants, seldom did a daughter refuse her mother's recommendations because "children were expected to obey their parents in all respects, since listening to the advice of parents implied a blessing from God." This basic conviction normally prompted the daughter to follow such recommendations of her mother by visiting the potential wife-takers. Regular visits opened the way for communication between the two groups mainly by exchanging services, to intensify their relationship.

Such a relationship implies that the wife-takers asked the permission of their future wife-givers to allow their daughter to be spending some time with them on their rice farm. In the evening, the young man accompanied his future wife back to her parents. "At this stage, however, there should be nothing intimate between them until after her initiation into the *Sande*, since it was taboo to engage in pre-marital sexual relationship." A transgression was perceived as an abomination to the whole village, with the consequence that "he could no longer marry the woman". The members of the two Houses continued to exchange gifts until her initiation into the *Sande*. Afterwards the ritual proceedings

leading to the marriage followed the same pattern as described in the preceding paragraphs.

Other forms of marriage

The village also observed other practices of marriage such as *amadei*[47] and telegamy. *Amadei* was an extended and higher form of gift-exchange in the form of giving women in marriage to personalities endowed with particular charisma and people of prominence who enjoyed high reputation among the village community. "Men who was to receive the *amadei*, was informed about the necessity of accepting such an offer. Rejecting it was tantamount to losing their social esteem." The *amadei* also included being freed from all legal obligations required for the exchange of gifts between wife-givers and wife-takers, such as the giving of the long and thin iron bars. The exchange of the iron bars became redundant as this type of marriage did not need to be objectified in gifts.

Giving in marriage in such a manner was highly valued since it was a way of circulating certain special gifts in the village community. A man of prominence and of high reputation, endowed with a particular charismatic gift of, say, leadership and the spirit of uniting people, was actually in the position of transmitting these special gifts to the children through the transfer of his semen, which the mother accomplished by breastfeeding. Such a transmission was only possible through marital union. Thus, when people made these gifts they expected his good qualities and gifts to circulate within the village through the extended family. Strangers were also mostly involved in such processes.

Closely related to the concept of *amadei* was that of "marriage from a distance" or "distant marriage". I shall call this practice of giving in marriage at a distance 'telegamy', aimed mainly at forming political and economic alliances in distant territories. "Daughters and sisters were exchanged for the protection of influential people, usually famous warriors living in far territories who were economically and politically strong." Such marriage rituals usually took place during meetings in some

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[47]   This term is probably an Islamic derivative. However, according to informants, the practice of this kind of gift exchange was common even before the advent of Islam.

established centres where different people exchanged goods and services. Sometimes after the girl's initiation into the *Sande*, the marriage ritual immediately took place at the end of her seclusion period at her parent's residence mostly without the husband being present. That is to say, "the marriage of the couple was characterised mainly by distance, and they lived in different localities, only seeing each other occasionally." The types of marriage exchange relationships that I have just described were necessary for the constant reproduction of the village community and for broadening the network of social and political alliances.

Rituals of purifying incestual relations

People who committed incest "needed to be [ritually] cleansed so that the cosmos can expel the curse from them. Such purifications also applied to other transgressions, such as having sexual intercourse in areas outside the social domain."

Ritual cleansing of incest, performed by a special group of elderly women, must always take place at the Sagbeeja stream near the village. These elderly women were usually very important functionaries of the *Sande*, and were believed to possess vast knowledge of traditional herbs, used as remedies for physical and social "malfunctioning". Those to be ritually cleansed of the *simɔngaamei* took off their clothes and stood in the stream facing the rising sun. One of the three women responsible for performing the ritual welcomed them saying,

> You have come here to rid yourselves of the bad things you have committed against the ancestors and against the entire village. Now by virtue of the power invested in us, we cleanse you and the whole community, which you have polluted by your [self-indulgence and concupiscence], because you loved your flesh more than your village.

While reciting this formula, the women then rubbed their skins with leaves from special plants, which were believed to cleanse them from their "moral transgression" and to restore the right social order. The leaves and the water as cosmological entities formed part of an embodied presence of the Highest Deity connecting the cosmological and the social order (see chapt. 4). After lathering soap on their skins, the two were made to go down under the water three times. At the end of the ritual, they

were given new clothes to wear, symbolising their new moral character resulting from the ritual purification. The two people returned to their village community as new and morally clean members. Sometimes this ritual was performed in the absence of people in the village so as, "to avoid embarrassment for the culprits' House, even though everybody knew of the incest and its purification rituals."

This purification ritual was necessary for the whole village community, because failure to perform it resulted mostly in irreversible calamities. One such adversity was flooding of the river and streams around the village that could cost lives, as well as the birth of abnormal babies. Since everybody in Ngiema was in one way or another related, the logic of solidarity based on the idea that "one man's business is everybody's business", took due forms in such cases. Other adverse effects were forest fires and above all the infertility of the land, especially the rice fields, which may result in famine.

The *jemɔɔmoisia* relationship

The relationship between Ego and elder sibling's spouse, known as the *jemɔɔmoisia* was another form of kinship relations of high cultural value (see table 1). These kin types, because they are highly valued, still form part of the longer chain of kinship relations in the extended family system; hence, they are not restricted to pre-modern society. The *jemɔɔhindei* is a special affinal relationship that exists between the *jemɔɔmoisia*, mostly in the form of making jokes.

It is said that, "in an extended family, one needs people who are not afraid to tell particular kins the truth to their faces, but who have the courage to tell them, in case of problems, the real issue at hand." This usually takes the form of cracking jokes, which develops into a joking relationship. Therefore, the *jemɔɔmoi* has the courage to tell Ego openly, what people normally say behind his back. If there is any dispute about certain issues and Ego's wife is unable or does not have the courage to confront him about it, the *jemɔɔmoi* can tell Ego the truth to his face without any consequence whatsoever. Sometimes because of the joking relationship that exists between them, the *jemɔɔmoi* can also calm Ego down if he loses his temper. Hence, the former sometimes acts as

intermediary when there is tension and palaver between the wife-giver and wife-taker groups.

On the other hand, the *jemɔɔmoi* can make palaver with Ego, sometimes using abusive languages, which may even end in a physical fight between the two, without going against the social order of the village, hence remaining unpunished through the normal fines. For the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, "the *jemɔɔmoisia* were dispensed from all protective ritual laws and taboos in this respect. According to tradition, the ancestors had blessed this relationship between Ego and the *jemɔɔmoi* and had given it a high status." Thus, it is believed that "this relationship comes from *Ngɛwɔ* [God/Allah] himself and that no human being can abolish it, not even the imams of Islam."

At the funeral rituals of the elder sister's husband, only the younger female siblings of the widow were to perform the *jemɔɔmoi* mourning rituals (*jemɔ-wɔɛɛ*). The joking relationship between them and elder sister's husband continued even after death (see .chapt. 5). For example, a *jemɔɔmoi* could sometimes "claim that she had killed him, and could even remove the white cloth from the corpse and tell it to get up and go about his normal work." No one dared scold her for doing such a thing. Sometimes the deceased conveyed messages to his wife and children through the *jemɔɔmoisia* in a dream, which they were bound to deliver.

The great ancestors

From my conversations with most people in Ngiema, I realised that the relationship with certain types of ancestors are crucial for the social life of the village. For the village community, the social link or ties with the great ancestors are of utmost importance as they define their identity with the traditions mediated by these ancestors. My interest, therefore, does not lie in finding out who belongs to which ancestral ties, but in defining the social skills needed to organise the structure of the society through socially codified rituals that connect these relations, and in finding out what importance this has for the life of future generations.

The founding ancestors and their first two descending generations are the most important in the history of the village. According to local history, these ancestors were mostly concerned with the social and

cultural development of their descendants. This included the foundation of the sections (*kuwulokuisia*, sig. *kuwulokui*) and House (*mawɛɛ*, pl. *mawɛɛ sia*).

The most important ancestor is the epical ancestor by the name of *maada* Kanga Gaahun of Mbotima section. This ancestor originally came from Kanga Gaahun, located near present day Kortihun, which is still part of Ngiema. "He did a lot for this village, especially in contributing to the formation of the main sections and instructed us to observe all the taboos [required for the various protective rituals]."

Furthermore, Kpao Bondo, the son of *yei* Limei, became a renowned warrior ancestor. His sons's sons's son by the name of Kpao Bondowulo, became mentor for the 19th century Luawa warrior, Kai Londo (see chapt.7), and trained him in the arts of warfare. Kai Londo depended on Kpao Bondowulo and his warriors to defend the entire Luawa, especially the villages now bordering Guinea and Liberia. Kpao Bondowulo also gave the descendants of Ngiema the rule of rotating political leadership between its main sections.

Another brave warrior ancestor was Korku Mbornorbei the Great. He also lived in the farming settlement of Mbotima, before amalgamating it to Ngiema. Korku was very tall with a deep fearful voice. "He possessed [mystic powers], and tradition claims that Korku had a mysterious friend, who may have been a forest trickster (*ndɔgbɔyosui*). This friend gave him beautiful objects of foreign origin like European tobacco leaves, and helped him communicate with people who lived many miles away." It is said that whenever Korku needed food or firewood, he would stand outside his hut at Mbotima and tell those living in Dodo Kortuma over ten miles away to bring some food, firewood and other items for him. The people then heard his voice and immediately brought the items. According to oral tradition, Korku Mbornorbei roofed his hut with European tobacco leaves. "Other ancestors "from the Nganyawama sub-section include *kɛkɛ* (literally "father") Jamna, *maada* Josaih and *kɛkɛ* Koyo. From the Godama sub-section, we have *kɛkɛ* Blama, *kɛkɛ* Ngegba and *kɛkɛ* Jogbo Goda."

Jogbo Goda "was a very strong and tall warrior with a fearful voice." Because of these imposing physical qualities, "he fought his wars

not with conventional weapons, but rather with his commanding voice, by yelling at his opponents. His opponents would then drop their weapons and take to their heels." In this way, he vociferated his prowess. Oral tradition also relates that *kɛkɛ* Jogbo Goda was capable of drinking five to ten buckets of water a day. "He went to one of the streams located near the village known as Sagbeeja and drank the buckets of water from women fetching water for cooking. The women ran away into the forest and related everything in the village." Such acts gave this warrior ancestor great power in the eyes of his opponents, never daring to challenge him in times of war. Founding warriors of pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages are of fundamental importance. Although *yei* Limei was actually the founder of Ngiema village, "people do not regard her as one of the great ancestors as only men were warriors in the olden days."

The formation of *kuwulokuisia* and *mawɛɛsia*

After the founding ancestors had performed the protective rituals, they ultimately aimed at forming various sections (*kuwulokuisia*) and Houses (*mawɛɛsia*). Those who later became village elders subsequently followed this example by extending the sections, and organising the social life of the village community through marriage exchange relationships. This was the main reason behind forming the sections and Houses. Both concepts, which relate closely to each other, are crucial for the social conceptualisation of the village.

Most Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages had their origins in the forests sites (*tombuija*). A man, usually a warrior, cultivated a rice farm on a particular forest site close to his settlement. After some time, he invited – sometimes through violent means – other neighbours to join him in order to extend his settlement and live together.[48] These men numbered ten or more, and their settlements subsequently developed into small villages, which mostly had five or ten round mud houses with palm thatches (*kiki-wɛlɛsia*).

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[48] Little has described similar methods of settlement among the Kpaa-Mɛnde (1967: 27-42).

Following the invitation by *maada* Gan to the other elders, Ngiema gradually developed into a village community. Most farming settlements that joined to form the village, as mentioned, retained their original names to become the sections. For example, the farming settlement called *Songejeima* became a section, and it is still one of the sub-sections called *Songejeima-la*. The ancestors divided Ngiema into two main sections, viz *Mbotima* and *Keeyama*, which remain the major sections of the village to this day. These sections in Limei Yiema at that time had both socio-historical and socio-cosmological relevance in that *Keeyama* was named after river Keeya, clearly showing its importance for the structural morphology of the village. With rapid population growth and territorial developments, nine sub-sections (*kuwusia*) have been added.

The sections and the Houses originally reflected the social aspect of labour on the farm. "The village community worked, lived and acted as one big extended family." Since the work was usually divided into portions (*kuwusia*) "each group of ten strong men working on the farm was allocated one *kuwui* [portion]". Gradually the head of a household in a particular section in the village, together with all the members of that household was allocated a portion during the communal work on the farm. For example, one household was composed of sir (*kinei*) Kpanguma who was the head or ancestral lord of his wives, children and other relations living under his protection in the big house (*pεlε-waibu*). These people living under sir Kpanguma subsequently formed one House (*mawεε*) called Kpanguma-la.

With the passage of time, the Houses started to take concrete forms as social units. The head or father of the House must bear responsibility for that whole House. Its members in turn paid their respect and allegiance to him, mainly by helping him with work on his rice farm, as well as the coffee and cacao plantations. He was also the head of the big house, protected and fed those who were under his authority. The House lord (*ndemoi*) usually had his wives and sons living with him, and if the latter got married, they usually brought their wives to live together in the big house of the big houses (*mawεε wεwaibu*). Such a patri-local form of residence favoured "the building of big houses by the House lord, which were normally round in structure." He, on behalf of all those living under

his authority and protection, was also responsible for giving local dues to a higher authority living in the entire region, known as the ancestral lord (*ndemowai*). Hence, the House was conceived as a complex social unit (cf. Little, 1967) mostly comprising up to fifty, forty-five, or forty persons.

Relationship between *kuwulokuisia* and *mawɛɛsia*

For the village community, the relationship between Houses and sections also indicated the relationship that existed between the ancestors and the strangers.

> The ancestors who founded our village lived in unity and did everything in common, and gave us rules to keep. The most important of these rules concerned the incorporation of strangers into the village community, by allowing them to be initiated into male (*Poro*) and female (*Sande*) communication of initiates. They should be given wives and husbands, and should be allowed to cultivate rice farms.

The relationship between the descendants (*taliisia*) and the strangers (*hotangaa*) was expected to be cordial. At the instruction of the founding ancestors, these two were to enter into lasting kinship relations. Thus, "both strangers and the descendants were supposed to be one family, and even prisoners of war, who became slaves, all belonged to this family because they were our brothers and sisters." For this reason, "the ancestors gave the descendants a strict warning, never to describe the strangers in terms of their backgrounds, but should treat them like their brothers and sisters."[49]

The ancestors formed one big family by sharing obligations such as labour and ritual actions with other villages by exchanging wives and husbands. Sharing their food with one another was also an important indicator of expressing the social harmony between members of a community. "Since the ancestors believed that the House that eats together also stays together, it became a social rule that the *mawɛɛsia* must always have their meals together in one place."

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[49] This provided considerable difficulties to the anthropologist wishing to record genealogies.

Co-operative groups

According to most informants, the "good atmosphere" and "healthy relationship" that existed between the different sections and Houses gradually paved the way for forming various days (*lɔɔ-wai*), which may be translated as traditional co-operative groups. A group was composed of ten people. The Limei days (*Limei lɔɔ-wai*), formed by the young people, later became the basis for many other clubs and associations (see chapt. 11), since they could identify their objectives with *yie* Limei, the foundress of their village.

     Other types of co-operative groups were founded, based on the main objective of co-operation among the members of the village community. An example of such a group is the *togbei lɔɔ-wai*, meaning "*Poro* peer group days." Its female counterpart was called the *mbaa lɔɔ-wai*, meaning the "*Sande* peer group days." The members of these co-operative groups helped one another work on their various rice farms, based on particular days, on which the work was done, hence the name 'days'. These groups also had a particular day of rest, known as the *kunyai*. Nobody was permitted to work on this day, but the group members all stayed in the village, and cooked and ate together. "They did not only eat together, they also visited one another, and shared their joys and pains. When one of them was about to get married, the others supported him in fulfilling the traditional labour exchange relationship to the wife-givers." In this case, the entire *Poro* peer group helped the future wife-givers on their rice farms and plantations. Upon the death of one member, all the other members helped the House of the deceased member in meeting funeral obligations and other rituals, such as fetching firewood for cooking, drinking water and above all helping in the household chores.

     In addition, communal work manifested co-operation between the various Houses and sections when young men and women came together to clean their village and repair the roads to the farms. "The working scenes were usually characterised by great joy mainly expressed through jokes, laughter and singing."

Chapter 3   Economy and Political Leadership

Economic activities and political leadership constituted an important aspect of the social organisation of Ngiema village, for it was mainly centred on exchange relationships based on collective activity. This implies that the question of collective ownership of goods and services was crucial for both the economic and political life of the community. In this chapter I am mainly concerned with types of collective activities that led to economic and political alliances in which joint ownership in relation to land as well as the exchange of goods and services featured prominently.

The collective aspect to farming

The most common traditional subsistence activity was rice farming.[50] Cultivation of cash crops such as cocoa, coffee and cassava were subordinate to it. Working as a community mainly through the various co-operative groups, the village was able to generate its daily livelihood. Hence, rice farming was primarily communal in character.

The different stages of work on the rice farms resulted in enhancing this community spirit. "An individual was virtually unable to cultivate a rice farm, relying on his own strengths, without the help of the larger community." From this perspective, neither the growing of rice nor the distribution of food was an exclusive affair of individual people, but was organised by the House Lord. In this way, the community prevented famine. After harvesting, the rice was given to the big homemakers (*peblaa*), who were exclusively the first wives of the House lord. Each House was supplied according to the consumption rate, corresponding to the needs and number of people living in the big houses. Closely related, and sometimes parallel to rice farming, but always subordinate to it, was the production of palm oil for daily consumption, and for fabricating the

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[50]   A detailed description of the different stages as well as the rituals involved is given in chapter 5.

local soap (*kohdi mbawei*), which is seldom but still manufactured (cf. Little, 1967).

The collection of 'dues' from each House became extremely important in meeting the needs of the entire community. Each House gave about one third of the harvested rice and palm oil to the ancestral lord in charge of the village. However, harvested products given to him were not only for his private use, but some also came in the common storage for the use of everyone in the community during times of scarcity, which may result from a poor harvest. In this sense, the products given by the people were contributions to their own security, over which the ancestral lord was just an administrator. "He did not become wealthy in the sense that he kept everything for himself. On the contrary, he was obliged to give back these products mainly as gifts to Houses who were in need." The giving of gifts was perhaps the most important way of using wealth; the ancestral lord helped to keep it in circulation among his people.

The various activities involved in rice farming and palm oil production in Ngiema were never isolated activities, but were embedded in networks of exchanges. The paragraphs that follow show the extent at which these farming activities became integral parts of the general exchange processes.

Exchange processes and alliance

Of the two fundamental types of exchange conceived by Mauss ([1925] 1983), I am mostly concerned with gift exchange. In exchanging goods and services, the pre-modern society aimed at constructing and maintaining social relationships. The other type of exchange identified by Mauss is commodity exchange, which is more relevant for the second part of this study. A fundamental difference between them is in relation to their purpose. The purpose of gift exchange was to establish and construct social relationships, while the purpose of commodity exchange is to establish economic relations through monetary systems, which can ultimately lead to "economic individualism" (cf. Dumont, 1986). I am quite aware of the theoretical problems and controversies surrounding such a Maussian model. My main concern, however, is with the kind of exchanges that maintained social relations in pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde

society, and how people in Ngiema village developed and practiced their economic activities, and what such systems can tell us about the validity of anthropological models on exchange in general.

The traditional form of exchanging goods and services subsequently led to shared obligations towards different groups, not only in their own community, but in other villages and regions as well. Such obligations, also linked with exchanging women in marriage relationships, resulted in forming political alliances. That is to say, exchanging goods and services in this way became a means of achieving ties and establishing relationships with distant people. Organised forms of exchange activities mainly "took place in established village centres during particular periods on a rotational basis, where goods and services were put on public display during which no work on the farm was done." Such displays and the days on which they occurred came to be known as the *ndɔɔwei* giving rise to extensive co-operation of villages in the vicinity. The *ndɔɔwei* actually had their beginnings in the harvest festivals, when the villages in the region brought parts of their harvest to thank the ancestors and Highest Deity for granting them a rich harvest.

If, for example, it were Ngiema's turn (normally called "Ngiema's day") to host the other villages, they all came to Ngiema and different products, such as foodstuffs and every other harvested product that year were put on display for the purpose of exchanging them. On the first day of such meetings, the atmosphere was one of meeting potential alliance partners, who then became permanent exchange partners. One person gave his product in exchange for another product or some kind of service, which the other party was also ready to render. Sometimes only goods were exchanged for some other goods that were difficult to obtain in one's own village. On other occasions, people only exchanged products, depending on the availability of the goods. The long and thin iron bars did not include such displays as a medium of exchange, but rather it was something that "gradually developed as a system of transaction at a later period in history." The exchange of kola nuts became very important as "it was associated with property rights and people could also use kola to establish long standing diplomatic relationship with rulers. In breaking the kola, strangers normally felt welcomed for it was a sign of hospitality.

Kola was also a means of establishing affinal relations." People involved in exchanging foodstuffs, objects and services were not interested in accumulating or gaining profits for themselves, since they were mainly concerned with establishing and maintaining relationships that led to lasting alliances.

According to informants, the days on which goods and services were put on display gradually took on different forms, which adapted to the needs of different communities involved in the exchange processes. Thus, different exchanges began to evolve: exchange with a view of forming alliance relationships maintained the original process of "exchange without profit." People were able to construct different types of exchanges at different levels, pending on the types of social relationships involved. The exchange of kola nuts, for example, played a crucial role in these processes. When people exchanged kola nuts, those taking part in that process were preparing for a possible exchange of future marriage partners, since kola nuts were important for marriage ceremonies as well as *Sande* and *Poro* rituals. The main idea of collectivity remained the élan vita in traditional forms of economic activity, until the introduction of money economy in modern times.

Collective ownership of land

The communal dimension of pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society also manifested itself in the ownership and administration of land and communal property, which rested upon descent and alliance relations. Since different exchange activities of the village largely aimed at upholding social relations it had generated within and outside the community, the question of land was never an individual affair. Rather, "in the past, land in Ngiema essentially belonged to the ancestors. The elders only shared the lots among people according to their individual needs." Therefore, land to be used by descendants of Ngiema was administered according to existing demands in the village community. No single individual could claim a piece of land as private property after being leased for farming.

However, as Ngiema extended, the distribution and administration of land moved beyond purposes of farming to that of building. For such

practical reasons, the above idea was gradually adjusted and land use eventually developed into leasing land to people from different Houses. Hence, "if anyone was in need, he would simply first ask the elders to give him a place of settlement (*heimei*) and then a place of nourishment (*mɛɛlimei*), which was the usual way of asking for land." Land leasing usually followed without any further problems provided those involved followed the proper procedures for it was the relationship, and not the land in itself that mattered.

Most elderly people in Ngiema maintain that there were no boundaries in early pre-colonial society, an idea, which they formulated in the expression, *ndunya iye ngui hun*, meaning, "the [Kɔɔ-Mɛnde] world was not separated enough", since "there was only one world of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde". For them a quite different understanding of boundaries existed and spatial possession in this respect was of a low value in their frame of reference. "Conflicts regarding land were rare, especially among early generations, and only developed into lethal conflicts at a later period in history due to different circumstances." According to most informants one of the major aims of the founding ancestors of Ngiema as a village community was that their descendants stay together in peace and harmony (*ngo-yiei/ngo-yiahun*). Even today this aspect is always stressed whenever there are tensions and frictions in the village. Such an integrated form of peaceful[51] community life started inculcating new forms, when different wars began breaking out for various reasons. Internal and external friction and tensions of similar kinds subsequently affected the collective aspect of land ownership and its utilisation so that disputes over land began to evolve in the community.

Political leadership and authority

The fundamental question to consider when examining the political life of pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society is, whether it is expedient to separate politics from other spheres of life, such as religion. For this reason, I have included in this paragraph certain questions pertaining to various religious

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[51]   See Howell and Willis (1989) for comparisons of peaceful aspect to social life among similar socio-cosmic societies.

representations of Ngiema village. The different aspects of legitimate leadership, expressed as sovereign political authority, had particular rules, precepts and moral codes (*saweisia*) handed down by the ancestors.

The criteria or qualities necessary for the appointment – not election – of political leaders to have sovereign authority were of utmost importance for the village community. The founding ancestors obviously became the first political leaders. Their leadership and authority was based on religious values shared by the community, which qualified them to follow certain rules and moral codes. There were a whole set of standard judgments or principles for evaluating the qualities of a political leader. The basis of such a political leadership was the principle of seniority,[52] embedded in the social order, guided by religious representations and values. In this regard, political leaders derived their legitimacy and power from socio-religious sanctions that were part of the *Poro* ritual complex (see chapt. 5).

The principle of seniority and moral virtues

Elderly men, and sometimes women who were held in high regard for possessing a good knowledge of the cultural traditions and following moral precepts sanctioned by the ancestors, became political leaders. The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde recognised age as representing wisdom, and one could argue that such a political system was an aspect of gerontocracy. Seniority coupled with ethical behaviour was highly esteemed as an essential attribute of a political as well as a religious leader.

Also related to age were other virtues, such as dedication to work and assiduity. The prospective village leader must prove capable of mastering the techniques involved in making good and big rice farms, and should show diligence in organising the work involved. The political leader, if he were to have any moral authority must represent through word and example, the ethical codes of the society.

In addition to these qualities, generosity was also an important criterion for becoming a political leader. Particularly kindness towards

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[52]   See also Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1964) for a comparative study relating to similar principles of political systems in other African societies.

strangers was judged necessary since the success of his leadership also depended very much on his generosity towards the community. The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde believed that generosity generated attributes such as fame and success. Thus, among all the virtues that were necessary for the person's appointment the most important were those of wisdom and benignity, for "a good leader was one who shared his own meals with the elderly and disabled", especially in times of famine. A bad leader, on the other hand, was one that was greedy and stingy.

Upon the death of a leader, the village community must once again check his leadership qualities, to see whether he fulfilled his duties faithfully. This process was part of the mourning rituals. If these verifications turned out satisfactory, then all the village elders approached his eldest son or his brother, and asked him to "put his feet in his father's or brother's shoes". The elders never took such a step if the deceased political leader turned out to be greedy, and was incapable of leading the community by word and example. If this were the case, they then chose someone from another section of the village. Thus, a political system based on primogeniture or other forms of hereditary succession was not practiced at that time, but gradually developed especially as a result of various interventions, especially during colonial rule (see chapt. 8 and 9).

Putting his feet into his father's or brother's shoes did not only mean to assume political leadership, but also meant "to continue this line of kindness and wisdom". This was done for the practical reason of saving time and all necessary "ritual protocol" that was involved in the process of choosing another leader from a different House. If the son or brother was ready to accept the responsibility of leading the village, which was usually the case, the ritual procedures were taken to this effect. Far from being excluded, women were also involved in the political process, and could become village leaders if judged suitable under certain conditions. Female ancestors, like their male counterparts, became leaders who represented the women in important gatherings for all necessary decisions by the elders.

The cosmological foundation of leadership

In addition to these criteria involved in appointing a political leader, there were other rituals based on cosmological principles. The *Poro* played a crucial role in the selection of leaders. Initiation into various *Poro* communities became a necessary condition for being a political leader. Women leaders must also have been initiated into the *Sande*. It was during meetings conducted in the *Poro* sacred grove that important decisions were made on the choice of suitable candidates.[53]

The *Poro* obliged the community to accept the leadership of anybody it approved, for political leaders derived their legitimacy precisely from this institution. There is however a dual character to this in that the political leader of the village automatically became "the leader of this institution, thus having the authority of executing laws such as ones sanctioning the punishments of deviants." This, however, must be in consultation with a council of elders. Such interplay of religion and politics became evident in the political leader's role as a religious leader, since cosmological powers were bestowed upon his political role, which subsequently made him an ancestor of the *Poro* after his death. The following salient points enumerate the religious aspect of political authority as conceived by the village community.

First, to assume cosmological authority precluded its execution on an individual basis, since authority was defined by laws – a set of moral precepts laid down by *Poro* ancestors. Thus,

> political leaders were not the law-givers, but the most important *Poro* ancestors who continued to play a crucial role. The leader was not there to pursue his personal benefits, but he must uphold the customs and traditions of the village. He was bound to obey the laws of *Poro* given by the ancestors. Any failure to meet these demands may result in punishment by the ancestors. The choice of leaders was never done at random, but was always monitored by the *Poro* elders.

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[53]   Kenneth Little has also attempted to reconstruct pre-colonial political systems of the indigenous Kpaa-Mɛnde government and its relations to the *Poro* (cf. Little, 1966). Of equal importance in this respect, are the findings made by Abraham (1978). For further descriptions on the relation of *Poro* to Politics before the colonial era, see Fyfe (1964).

Secondly, the village community believed that it was the ancestors themselves, who were involved in the process. A prospective leader was expected to have talents like leadership and the ability to reconcile people especially in times of crisis resulting from political and economic ambitions within groups.

The period of seclusion in the sacred grove also served the purpose of detecting talents of leadership and the capacity of bringing people together. The elder in charge of all novices must discover various spiritual gifts and abilities through observation and judgment during this period. Extraordinary leadership qualities such as the ability to organise the other novices in groups, and to be able to settle disputes among them, as well as the ability to communicate with the spiritual world of the ancestors formed important components of such qualities and talents. It was the novice master's duty as well as other elders responsible for their training and socialisation to make them aware of their talents, guide and direct each one to cultivate these talents during the period of seclusion. Those novices judged to have possessed extraordinary leadership qualities were particularly trained to develop them, since they were seen as possible prospective candidates for being the village head, with the principle of seniority still prevailing; "but if they happen to be of the same age, then the person who first entered the sacred grove became the senior candidate. In this way, *Poro* became a channel through which these talents were socially and religiously cultivated.

It would be fatal for the whole community if a despot were chosen as a result of failing to perform proper rituals involving this process. Such a leader could only succeed in bringing mischief upon the village. If the proper rituals were performed, there was virtually no room for choosing a despotic political leader since the village community believed that the ancestors were helpful and stood by the community. If, however, for one reason or another, a leader became despot, then he was stripped of his authority in a special ritual act as sanctioned by the *Poro*.

Ritual selection of leaders

Political leaders, if chosen by performing the proper rituals, received the support of the ancestors, which legitimised their authority in exercising their duties. The appointment of a new political leader usually followed the death of the former one. Before performing the rituals involved, one notified the village community a few weeks in advance. Preparations for such events were usually marked by the "public appearance of a particular mask, which not only aimed at joyful celebrations, but were also a remainder that an important event was about to take place."

At the death of a leader, *Poro* elders convoked a meeting of those involved in the process of choosing the village leader. For such a meeting, which usually took place in the *Poro* sacred grove, one needed a quiet atmosphere to facilitate the performance of the necessary rituals.

> Part of this ritual entailed forming a semi-circle with the candidate standing in the middle. The elder leading this ceremony then asked those present if this was the right man, whom the ancestors had chosen to be leader of Ngiema, in order to transmit Kɔɔ-Mɛnde traditions (*Mɛnde heedii*/*Mɛnde-jaweisia*). All the elders answered with one voice by loudly saying 'yes', which should be repeated four times. The last ceremony was the most crucial one, done at the foot of a special *Poro* shrine in the sacred grove known as the *kamei*. This was the sacred act of swearing an oath to the *Poro* ancestors. The *kamei* was a very powerful sacred object, [embodying] the most important ancestors.

A person exposed to it was automatically establishing a transient contact with the cosmological powers of these ancestors. The latter, for their part, were to help the political leaders in exercising their duties. The elders usually effectuated this by invoking the ancestors through the pouring of libations and other rituals (see chapt. 5).

> With one candidate, it was much easier than with several candidates. In such a case, the elders must openly endorse the most suitable candidate by the standing behind (*lopoma*) procedure. For example, candidate A would head a separate line, candidate B another line, and so forth. All those elders supporting candidate A would stand behind him, and those supporting other candidates would stand behind them in similar ways. At the end the candidate, who had the majority of the elders behind him was chosen to be the village leader. This must always be done after pouring libations to the ancestors because they were actually involved in selecting him.

The expression "to stand behind someone" (*lo numuwoma*) means "to support that person in all matters, no matter what the consequences may be." Hence, this ritual of standing behind the respective candidates expressed what was actually taking place in the daily lives of the village community. Two interesting points could be observed in this system of appointment. Firstly, it was done openly without fear of what the next person would say or do afterwards. There were no secret ballots because the elders believed that the ancestors were involved in the process, and they relied on their support. Secondly, it is said that there were no palavers, fights or violence of any kind, since such behaviour was forbidden in sacred places by the protective ritual laws. At the end of the ritual, the elders thanked the ancestors for directing and protecting them by offering sacrifices and pouring libations.

At the instruction of the elders everybody gathered at the village square to welcome their new leader after being formally introduced to the people. He was then asked to give some token of acceptance, usually an animal – a sheep, goat, or a cow and sometimes all three, pending on the availability – as a sign that he had accepted the responsibility. After slaughtering the animal(s), some of the meat, together with the red rice[54] was sacrificed to the ancestors in gratitude of their help in choosing the new leader. The rest of the meat was prepared with rice and a vegetable sauce to be eaten by the whole community. There was much eating and celebration in the village which lasted a few days.

Legitimacy of the council of elders

The question how a political leader exercised his duties can be illuminated by examining the dynamics of the council of elders as a ruling body that represented all the sections of Ngiema village. In the hierarchical order of political authority, the village leader featured prominently. In his dual function as village leader and head of the *Poro*, he also mediated between the community and the ancestors. However, the *Poro* also acted as a powerful instrument of checks and balances vis-à-vis the political leader in the sense that some other *Poro* elders became the council of elders

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[54]   This type of rice was used for many rituals. See chapters 4 and 5 for details.

based on the principle of complementarity. His authority was only legitimate, if he delegated some responsibility to this council which, in some cases, restricted the authority of the leader and ensured the enforcement of all protective ritual laws.

The council of elders was composed of different sub-leaders representing the various sections of the village, called the section leaders (*kuwuloko mahangaa*). Another group of elders was chosen directly by the village leader himself known as the doubt removers (*kitileeblaa*), who were in fact the jury. They were usually intelligent, eloquent in speech, and possessed a vast knowledge of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde history and social etiquette, as well as the cultural traditions of the village, especially those concerning the rights and obligations of its people. Both the section chiefs and the jury were ultimately accountable to the main political leader of the village.

In cases of conflict between individuals or groups from different Houses, a person could first, but not necessarily, make complaints to any elder in the village without directly going to the section leader. If that person refuses to listen to him, then he must take him to the section leader, who tried to settle the conflict. If the case became very complicated, or one party refused to co-operate fully, the section leader took it to the council of elders for proper investigation. As offences occurred more often with the passage of time, "the elders implemented additional laws for the punishments of those the community regarded as deviants for committing very serious crimes." They were put in the local prison known as the *kpewei-ya/ndambei-ya*, which was usually located at the village leader's residence. Their legs were usually put between stocks tied together with a big rope, closely pressed together, and put under lock and key, so that the prisoners remain without pain, but had no possibility of running away, since the heavy weight of the stocks prevented them from doing so.

From the preceding propositions, we can conclude that traditional political authority had its sources of legitimacy and strengths from the ancestors represented by the *Poro*. This had a number of implications for the sovereignty of political order, which defined the authority of the political leader also as a religious leader. Sovereignty in this sense was not

a state type, and ultimate authority rested on the cosmological order. The reception of sovereignty by the political leader was made through special cosmological relations with the sacred grove. This kind of sovereignty had little or nothing to do with defined and demarcated territorial possession. Rather it is evident in the relationships between the ancestors and the village community.

Chapter 4   Religion

This chapter is devoted to the religious beliefs and practices as informing about the socio-cosmic systems of representations of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society that precludes the belief systems of Islam and Christianity.

The Highest Deity and the concept of hei

The concept of the Highest Deity[55] (among Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society) had a different connotation from the Islamic and Christian notions of *Allah*/God. The Highest Deity was conceived in relationships identified as Sky Deity (*Leeve Njeini*)[56] and Earth Deity (*Maa-ndɔ*)[57], signifying the idea of an all-encompassing order. These terms do not coincide with the Christian and Islamic concepts of God/*Allah*, but reflect indigenous conceptions of the cosmos in relation to the social order. Such a close interrelatedness of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde cosmological and social categories seems to have prevailed before the advent of Islam and Christianity. Prior to an in-depth description and analysis of this relational aspect, an outline of certain attributes of the Highest Deity as understood by the village community is relevant.

The Highest Deity was called Sky Deity, but this was always in its relations to the Earth Deity. This Highest Deity and provider of order, was not contingent, but infinite. Therefore, all finite beings emanate from this Deity encompassing all life and activity, in both the material and non-material sense. "*Leeve* is the creator of the entire cosmos and everything in it, including animals, plants and the spirits, together with human beings."

One attributed wholeness and completeness only to *Leeve Njeini*. "Our ancestors spoke of Him as being entirely different from human

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[55]   There is a general tendency among scholars to translate this concept as *Ngɛwɔ* (Gittins 1987; Harris and Sawyerr 1968; Little 1967; Øster 1981; Rodney 1970).

[56]   The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde sometimes shortened it to become *Leeve*; I also follow such indigenous conventions by employing *Leeve* from time to time without the *Njeini*.

[57]   Gittins (1987: 59) tries to interpret the linguistics and etymological meaning of the word *Maa-ndɔ*. This, in my view, may stand contrary to Kɔɔ-Mɛnde socio-cosmic representations.

beings, and as living in the 'other' cosmos far far far ... away, where human beings cannot yet go, but are destined to be in the future together with the ancestors." *Leeve* as the principle of being was conceived as "ordering one". Thus, the adjective *njeini*, which means, "who arranges things that way", is added to the substantive "*Leeve*", to become "*Leeve Njeini*."[58] For the village community, the word arrangement (*hungbatei*), which can be applied to arranging affairs of daily life in the village, but also of the cosmos, is of crucial importance. Hence, *Leeve* is *mu gbatɛmui*, 'The One who arranges us', 'who arranges everything in its right order in the cosmos'. He made the skies, clouds, stars and the moon. The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde included their social world into the completeness of *Leeve* giving them a whole order of relationships and connections between cosmological phenomena and the social world. That is to say, the social world and the cosmos were inter-connected. Following this explanation, although *Leeve* was order, he did not always interfere in the daily affairs and palavers in the village. "That is why he has intermediaries, who are the ancestors."[59]

Power and omnipresence of *Leeve Njeini* in *hei*

Although *Leeve Njeini* did not directly interfere in the world of human beings, he has bestowed the whole cosmos with a certain presence called *hei*.[60] The *hei* can manifest itself in various ways and on specific occasions in natural phenomena, such as lightning, rocks, mountains, big trees, rivers and waterfalls and in animate as well as inanimate beings. This presence of *Leeve*, pervading the cosmos helped the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde come to terms with the existential challenges of the world. The protective

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[58] *Njeini* can also mean to put down. See Gittins (1987) for similar explanations of the lexeme *Njeini*.

[59] There are practically many different Kɔɔ-Mɛnde myths explaining the reason why *Leeve Njeini* took the decision to retreat from the daily contact with human beings and their everyday affairs, but I do not include them in this study for the sake of brevity.

[60] Different scholars have employed various orthographies for this concept. Gittins (1987:100) prefers to use *halei* "the definite singular form", while other scholars like Little (1967) prefers *hale* as "the indefinite singular form of the word" (Gittins, 1987: 100). However, I would rather prefer to employ the term *hei*, since it corresponds to that employed by the Ngiema people in their spoken language, especially "in relation to *Poro* as the embodiment of *hei*."

rituals and other rituals I have already described in the preceding chapters all constitute the various manifestations of *hei*. One of the fundamental aims of the founding ancestors in performing these rituals as stressed by informants "was to foster good social relationships among the different sections of the village community, as well as to protect their progeny from evil forces of all kinds." *Hei* was instrumental in achieving this end.

There have been much confusion and disputes among scholars concerning the correct interpretation of the concept of *hei* (cf. Gittins, 1987: 44), since most of them have attempted to translate it directly into English and other languages. Such efforts could hardly be helpful, as this notion is highly equivocal, and can only be properly analysed using its related concepts. Gittins (1987) seems to argue in this line and has made some valuable suggestions. Such an approach indicates that a mere literal translation cannot really convey the right meaning of *hei*. Little (1967) and Øster (1981), for example, have claimed that *halei* mainly means "medicine", and is mostly used in the negative form. Recent research among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, however, has shown that *hei* means more than just medicine in the generic sense of the term. In the following paragraphs, I explore the different aspects of meanings relating to this concept.

The origin of *hei* was the cosmos, which manifested the infinite presence of *Leeve Njeini,* for example in particular plants and leaves used for curing different types of physical illnesses. Knowledge of such medicinal herbs originally derived from *Leeve* and was transferred to special people such as religious leaders, mediated mostly through the spirits of the ancestors in dreams. "The shrine in the *Poro* sacred grove was an important location, where the necessary knowledge of *hei* was disclosed." For this reason, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde have referred to the entire *Poro* initiation rituals as *hei* as in: *amu hei wa* ("let us start the rituals of the *Poro* initiation rites"); *hei wagoi teijihun* ("the *Poro* initiation rites are in session in this town"); *ngu wagoi/hagoi heima* ("he or she has already joined/died to the *hei*, meaning had been initiated into the *Poro* or the *Sande*"), and *heiwai wa teihun* ("the most important and powerful *Poro* ancestral mask-spirit has come into the village").

Hei emanating from *Leeve* was not only limited to the *Poro* rituals, it was also given to special elderly women involved in the rituals of the

Sande. These women had particular abilities enabling them to come into contact with the world of the ancestors. They received the necessary knowledge in dreams during the night from the *Sande* ancestral spirits. It is mportant to remember here that the significance of dreams were prominent attributes of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde religious representations. Their indications of spiritual manifestations were mostly realised by reference to dreams, which normally supplied preindications of events to come, motivating the community to undertake particular forms of religious action.

The immediate positive effect of the cure of *hei* is expressed in the concept of *mbawo*, which may be translated as 'cure' or even 'salvation', always understood as ultimately coming from *Leeve*. What precipitated such healings were leaves from particular plants and trees used as forms of *hei*, embodying the omnipresence and omnipotence of *Leeve Njeini*. These forms of *hei* were not only for the purposes of physical healing, but also for moral as well as social restoration and purification, exemplified in cases of incest and for other offences against the cosmological and social order of the village community. The purification rituals in Ngiema usually took the form of cleansing by washing in the Sagbeeja stream, such as those already described, especially in cases of incest. It was only through the power of the *hei* that the social and cosmological order was reinstated. *Hei* also manifested itself in the ritual protection against negative influences from evil spirits and other maleficent cosmological forces. Accordingly, *hei* is the presence of *Leeve* pervading the entire universe, which appears in several modalities.

The relational ideas of *Leeve Njeini* and *Maa-ndɔ*

The relational idea of *Leeve* expressed a duality encompassed by singularity. The singularity of *Leeve* as all encompassing source of the cosmos and as the origin of *hei* pervading the universe at large, at a lower level is differentiated into and encompasses a duality. This duality is conceptualised as the relationship between *Leeve* and *Maa-ndɔ*[61], between

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[61] *Mama*, literally "grandmother" is often shortened as *ma/maa*, especially when referring to deities as in Ma Tulie, *Maa-ndɔ*.

the heavens and the earth, between male and female, between the rain and the soil, as well as between husband and wife. In the latter manifestation as husband and wife, living Kɔɔ-Mɛnde are related as grandchildren.

Even though *Leeve's* wife, *Maa-ndɔ*, was not conjugally living with him in the skies, but on earth, yet the idea of community life was expressed in a particular logic of relational proximity. Thus, *Leeve Njeini* gave constant attendance to the needs of his wife *Maa-ndɔ*, Grandmother Earth, by sending regular rain for its fertility, so that the children living with *Maa-ndɔ* would benefit from her perpetual maternal care. By giving fertility to the fields and making the rice grow, *Maa-ndɔ* transcended the sheer material aspect of her maternal care by contributing to the constant reproduction of the society itself in the recurring rituals of rice farming. For the Ngiema people, "rice represented life", since it sustained their village community.

The social conceptualisation of the projected conjugal relationship between *Leeve* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ* as well as their relationship with the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde explains why marriage became a cultural norm. Conjugal and affinal relations are regarded as the highest social values. The extended family relationships in the social life of the village must be understood within the context of constant reproduction of its community. In this respect, family forms of life also reflect their religious representations, especially their relationship with *Leeve* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ*. Hence, "*Leeve njeini* was never addressed in isolation, but always in relationship with his wife *Maa-ndɔ*, expressed as *Leeve* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ* (*Leeve ta ngi nyahei Maa-ndɔ*)." The village community directed their prayers to the Highest Deity as provider of order and brought offerings to them. Physical entities such as rocks, rivers and big mountains were also sacrificed to, but only as representing the all-pervading presence of *Leeve* with his wife *Maa-ndɔ*.

Sacrifices to *Leeve Njeini* and *Maa-ndɔ*

The duality expressed in singularity emerges at the moment of reproduction of life and in such a context the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde interacted with this Deity in the sacrificial rituals of fecundity.

The places to offer such sacrifices were big mountains, huge rocks, big trees and forests, rivers and the like, which, as indicated, were all expressions of the power and presence of *Leeve Njeini*. Consequently, places associated with these physical phenomena were regarded as sacred places for the yearly ritual offering to *Leeve* and his wife, *Maa-ndɔ*. In most cases, "the *Poro* and *Sande* elders chose these places and gave them names, after receiving the necessary instructions from the spirits of the ancestors in dreams."

An example of such a place of sacrifice was a forest near Ngiema village which became a sacred place for these offerings for the entire community. There was also the big famous place for offering the yearly sacrifice known as the mountain rock (*Mambaa*) in a village called Nyadehun Mambabu, about seven miles from Ngiema. This was the most important of all the sacrifices to *Leeve* and his wife, since other villages in the region also took part in the celebrations. Several weeks before the stipulated time, a group of young men prepared the sacrificial place by cleaning all the shrines at the foot of the *Mambaa*. Homages were paid and supplications addressed directly to *Leeve* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ* by any assembly of village communities before the sacrifices were offered, headed by the prayer leader (*hɛɛmoi*): *Aaaa… Leeve wa bi nyahei Maa-ndɔ aa gbɔ mu ma …..Kɔnɛɛ a[62] mu bawo jihun* ("Please *Leeve* and your wife, *Maa-ndɔ*, Grandmother Earth, help us …. we are asking you to save us from such difficulty and help us come out of this trouble, ... deliver us from this calamity"). People from different villages all contributed in different ways to make the gathering a success.

They were organised in groups according to their villages of origin, and a lot of rice was prepared so that everybody could eat to their satisfaction. Various musical instruments, as well as the different masks of entertainment were present, [so that the social aspect of the offering could not be overseen]. The mountain was then fed, in the sense that some of the cooked rice was placed in the shrine at the foot of the *Mambaa*, and different prayers for various intentions were offered, such as childbearing and the aversion of a natural catastrophe that threatened different

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[62] *aa* indicates plural, hence *aa mu bawo* ('save us', 'let us prosper'). In the singular, it would have been … *Leeve mu bawo* ('*Leeve* save us', 'let us prosper').

village communities. The ceremony lasted the whole day, beginning from sunrise and ending at sunset.

People firmly believed that *Leeve* and his wife granted everything they asked for, such as human fecundity. An elderly female informant graphically described it the following way.

> It was part of the [ritual] that on their way back to their villages, the barren women who had supplicated *Leeve* and his wife for children should carry small sticks on their backs. They should do it in exactly the same way ordinary women carried their young babies on their backs. One stick represented one child, while two sticks stood for twins, one male and one female. By carrying sticks on their backs, the women were behaving like little girls, who imitated their mothers in ordinary life by also carrying small sticks on their backs in anticipation of their future roles as mothers. Anybody who saw those women carrying small sticks on their backs knew at once that they were barren, and would all join in praying for their intentions. Many babies were born that year, after such a communal yearly sacrifice. *Leeve* and *Maa-ndɔ* granted everything our ancestors asked them; and in our own days, when I was still a small girl, everything we asked the ancestors, they granted. That is why we brought those offerings and made sacrifices to them.

The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde by no means believed in two gods as Øster (1981: 40) seems to suggest when investigating the Mɛnde in general. For them, the metaphysical female principle was part of *Leeve Njeini,* and rituals concerning the fertility of the earth ultimately had *Leeve* as their object. Therefore, there is no ethnographic confirmation from research among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, which states that there has ever been an independent link of an Earth-Mother-God. Stressing the communal and relational aspect of the Highest Deity as conceived by this society in cosmological hierarchy, understood as the "Ordering One", *Leeve Njeini* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ* were seen as affinal relationships encompassing the duality of heaven and earth, from which the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde took their contingent emanation or origin

Ancestral sacrifices

The community also offered sacrifices to various ancestors to ensure their mediation. These sacrifices normally took place in the dry season immediately after harvesting the rice. Places for offering ancestral sacrifices were referred to as places of prayer (*hɛɛmeisia*) and places for

feeding the ancestors (*mbondeisia/ndeblaa ngɔmeisia*). A brief description of these places gives a general view of what such rituals entailed and how they were performed.

In Ngiema, the three most important places were the following. Whether or not initiation rituals were in session, elders of the *Sande* and *Poro* offered sacrifices at the sacred shrines of each institution. Though held separately, they nonetheless had common denominators. Firstly, these sacrifices essentially involved a stone (*kɔtii*) known respectively as the *Poro* Stone (*Poro gɔtii*) and the *Sande* Stone (*Sande gɔtii*). Secondly, they were not only stones, but rather special types of stones known as sweat stones (*fordoh gɔtii*), which were believed to be "capable of sweating like a human being." That is to say, a special type of relationship existed between these ancestral sacred objects and the living generations representing the entire Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. Women who were already initiated into the *Sande* gathered before their own stone, and offered the necessary sacrifices. In the same way, the *Poro* men gathered around their own stone and performed the necessary rituals.

There was another ritual performed by the village community that took place at the smithy. It involved the stone used to sharpen cutlasses and knives made by the blacksmith known as the *gaakpa gɔtii*. The community venerated this stone, because it had the power of a special *hei* mediated by the ancestors, which protected the whole community. The elders leading the ritual brought some newly harvested, but dried and roasted rice, which turned into a sort of rice flour called *kpɔhuiŋ* and some cooked rice with a bit of sauce. "The *kpɔhuiŋ* and the cooked rice were put around the *gaakpa gɔtii* in a semi-circular form, and prayers for protecting the village against all kinds of evil spirits and negative [cosmological] forces were offered."

Finally, sacrifices to the ancestors were offered at a spot near the bank of river Keeya very close to the village. This was the red rice (*mba gbɔli*) ritual for the across the river (*tee-jamei*) ritual, meant to remember particular types of ancestors. An elderly informant maintains that

the red rice ritual contained mainly cooked rice and a particular type of soup with plenty of palm oil. The rice and the palm oil soup were mixed, so that the rice became red. It was then put on big leaves and brought to the river. Then some water

in a pot was placed near it, asking the ancestors to wash their hands in order to eat their own portion of the red rice.

Sometimes the red rice was prepared by strangling a fowl. Its inner parts were well cooked and the elders leading the ritual took some of the cooked rice and put it in a separate bowl. Then they took the sauce containing the inner part of the fowl and put it on the rice, mixing it to form a rice porridge-like substance, so that small balls of rice were formed. Each person received the rice on both hands (*peegejaa*). The elders invoked the names of different ancestors, after the pouring of libations. At the end all those present for the ritual ate part of the rice.

Categories of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde spirits

To understand the religious and social representations of pre-modern socio-cosmic order of society, the social anthropologist has to take into account a range of relationships, as conceived by the people themselves. Such relationships resulted from the perennial interplay of the social world and the cosmos, as designed by the Highest Deity, which included the spirits[63], as well as the *hei* that emanates from this deity. It was crucial for the community to maintain a positive and integrated relationship to this socio-cosmological order so that biological reproduction follows from the social and cosmological. Important mediators for social and cosmological domains were mainly the spirits, which facilitated a steady flow of communication between these two spheres. In what follows, I outline various conceptions of these spirits[64] and their relationship to the village community.

The word *ngafei* and its plural *ngafangaa* mean spirit/spirits. The *ngafei* is invisible unless one had a special ability to communicate with them, or as the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde say, unless "the person has two [pairs of]

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[63] Animals were considered as not having spirits – certainly not in the same kind of *ngafangaa* attributed to the order of creation, "although they had an animal soul."

[64] Kenneth Little's simplistic definition of spirit as a generic concept which can be categorised into four main categories (Little, 1967: 218), cannot just be readily refuted on logical and metaphysical grounds, but also cannot help in any way in understanding the relational aspects of these spirits to the cosmological and social orders. See (Gittins, 1987: 75) for reasons why "spirit as a generic concept with four categories is not helpful."

eyes". *Nya mama Yafei*[65] (my grandmother's spirit), for example, can also mean in some cases my grandmother's blessing. Thus, *nya mama jafei lɔ nya woma* (literally: my grandmother's spirit is behind me) means I still have the blessing of my grandmother. However, this concept also represented a social conditional meaning. For instance, "if a person was respectful and kind to his or her grandmother, by helping her in her old age, the grandmother constantly thanked and blessed that person, so that a very strong relationship grew between them."

This cultural belief did not only help create and strengthen kinship bonds within the society, but also had a highly religious implication for life in the village. People mostly admired those who were charismatic because the community believed that "they had the spirits of their deceased parents or grandparents behind them." To the extent that such people became examples of good family relationships, the belief in the power of *ngafangaa* was even more strengthened. To make this rather difficult concept of *ngafangaa* more intelligible, I have categorised[66] them into groups or kinds, according to the degree of social importance people attached to them. A brief examination of the variety of names Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society employed, when referring to the dead in general can be helpful in clarifying these concepts. The village community commonly employed the notion *ndɔublaa*, literally "people under the earth", which generally means all those who had passed away from this earth and are buried, but not formally recognised as ancestors. They also employed the notion *haablaa*, literally meaning "dead people". These notions refer to an undifferentiated collectivity of the deceased, though people never employed these words when referring to the ancestors.[67]

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[65] The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde employ a number of euphemisms in their speech. For example, the word *ngafei* becomes *yafei* when used in a sentence, so that my spirit becomes *nya yafei,* instead of *nya ngafei.*

[66] There has been a rather justifiable criticism of Øster (1981) by Gittins (1987: 53) in this respect, because the former deliberately refused to classify various types of Mɛnde spirits, arguing that there have been widespread disagreements among scholars and the Mɛnde themselves.

[67] For details on the linguistic variants of these words and their different uses for comparative reasons among other Mɛnde-speaking groups see (*op. cit.*: 60-62). Care should be taken, however, to detect the *a priori* influences of his Christian thought, such as the employment of the term ghosts and ascribing these to all Mɛnde-speaking groups.

Ancestral spirits as social spirits

The most important of all categories of spirits are the ancestral spirits, which have divided into: House ancestral spirits, village ancestral spirits, and the original grand progenitors which were considered to be "ancestral spirits for the entire Kɔɔ-Mɛnde-speaking group." In general, the ancestral spirits belong to the category of spirits that Gittins (1987: 53) refers to as social spirits,[68] by virtue of their constant involvements with the affairs of the living and in providing "positive reinforcement of social norms and values" (*ibid*). As social spirits, they were mainly responsible for enhancing the social order of the village, by enforcing the different social values and norms of the community. This responsibility could vary, though, according to the type of ancestor involved in the process.

The ancestral spirits have been transformed into incorporeal beings, which were no longer subject to the limitations of time and space. Yet these spirits will accept earthly food and drink so that they could maintain the social and moral ties with living relatives. Since they were no longer incarnated, ancestral spirits enjoyed an independent existence in the spiritual world, while their earthly relatives were still subject to terrestrial restrictions. These Kɔɔ-Mɛnde ancestors were very powerful for they could administer *hei*; hence they were acting as mediators between the cosmological and social domains.

As ordinary human beings who they once were, the ancestors had "experienced many of the same problems, made the same mistakes [and had been] vulnerable to the same dangers" (*op. cit*.: 57). Having now a different mode of existence, the ancestors could dispense blessing and *hei* to their living relatives. Exactly how and in what way the ancestors existed in their celestial lives were of little interest to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. Important for them was the fact that the ancestors never lost interest in the affairs of their descendants and were capable of giving sympathy and advice as well as administering rebuke. This was only done if the proper

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[68] Some non-ancestral spirits could belong to this classification under special conditions. This is because they could be important in the reinforcement of "social values, simply because they draw attention to the dangers in store for those who pursue their own selfish ends at the expense of the legitimate claims of the community or its individual members" (*op. cit.*: 53).

rituals were performed and the community upheld the traditional moral values and codex.

Gittins (*op. cit.*: 58) maintains that the Highest Deity[69] cannot be approached directly, but only through ancestral intermediaries. This statement may be true for the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde religion under the influence of Christianity and Islam, but certainly not for pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde religion. We have seen how on certain occasions people directly supplicated the help of *Leeve Njeini* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ*, while in other situations they turned to the ancestors as intermediaries for help. A closer look at the types of ancestral spirits would throw much light on our understanding of how the ancestors related to the living and how they assumed their intermediary role.

House ancestral sprits

The House ancestral spirits were usually those who headed the House when they were still alive; they assumed moral responsibility and authority according to the rules of seniority. These were normally addressed as fathers (*kɛkɛni*) or mothers (*yieni*) and grandfathers (*maadani*) or grandmothers (*mamani*).

When a House invoked its *kɛkɛni*, *yieni*, *maadani* and *mamani* ancestors, they included the deceased fathers, mothers, grandfathers and any other elderly relatives within that group. Such ancestors were believed to have the same existential needs, moods and dispositions as when they were alive. In this respect, offerings to the ancestors mainly included food, drink, pleas and flattery to soothe. People virtually expressed the same attitudes of respect towards the *kɛkɛni* and *maadani* ancestors as they would to respected living elders. These close, non-distant House ancestors were more likely to execute sanctions than distant ones, simply because they had a more direct authority over the living. Even when offering sacrifices and performing rituals for particular requests, living House members preferred to maintain a special protocol of directing these

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[69] He often employs the word *Ngɛwɔ* instead of *Leeve* in this respect. As argued earlier, I would refrain from using such a vocabulary at this stage, because it clearly points to the idea of changing conceptions of the understanding of God, which also can be seen as a result of inter-cultural interactions (see chpt. 6).

requests to these ancestors for their approval first, before finding their way to more distant ones.

At the death of a senior House member, the living normally checked against such criteria as to how he exercised his authority before elevating the deceased to the status of a House ancestor. They carefully verified how the parting elder was carrying out his duties and responsibilities and whether he was effective in bringing the groups within the House together by settling disputes and conflicts. Most importantly, whether the moral and religious etiquette peculiar to that House were maintained by performing the proper rituals at the right times, thereby upholding the right order of relationships within the House. These qualities later became necessary for fulfilling the conditions of becoming an ancestor. The living members of the House took such procedures seriously, as it formed part of the religious values of the whole village community. If, however, a House elder became negligent by not sufficiently caring for the moral and social welfare of his House, "then he normally asked the House for forgiveness while on his sickbed, knowing that his life on earth was about to end. In this way the relationship between him and other members of that House was restored" The living members recognised his spirit as a House ancestral spirit by making the usual regular sacrifices in honour of his spirit.

A further aspect highlighting the social dimension of these House ancestors is the part they played in the House ancestral cult. On most occasions, such rituals took place in the compound in which the members of the House lived. A House-head normally mobilised for prayers at a suitable time in order to ask the ancestors for their goodwill and help, especially in times of crisis within the House. It was also his or her responsibility to see to it that there was enough cooked rice available to be placed inside one of the huts in the compound. The ancestors may be addressed individually by name, or collectively as *kɛkɛni*, *yieni*, *maadani* and *mamani*. Sometimes people call on them as House members (*mbondeisia*), before mentioning their personal names. Small shrines made mainly from wood or mud were built in places mostly associated with these ancestors. On other occasions shrines of this kind were also erected on farms.

"Feeding the ancestors" also belonged to the House ancestral cult. Some cooked rice with potato-green or cassava-leaves sauce was kept from dawn to dust in the House shrine, normally located at a special place within the hut. Before giving the food to the ancestors, the eldest male member of the House recited words of veneration and prayers of intercession for a particular intention. If there were no male members present, the eldest female was to lead the ritual prayer. At dusk, after pouring libations, the living House members ate the rice. One believed that the ancestors were to bring good or ill fortune to the House according to the way their House members had treated them while alive. "To appease them, it was necessary to feed them." This whole ritual later came to be called *dahitii*.

Another obligation was to ensure the proper burial and mourning rituals for the deceased relative (see chapt. 5). In addition to the normal ritual proceedings for the deceased a son of the oldest living member of the House was to make libations and offerings of rice at the grave of the recently deceased member of the House. This was to ensure that the reciprocal relationship between the House members continued after the death of a parent or relatives of the House.

Just as an elder of a House has the authority and the duty to maintain order within that House, so a "deceased household elder must continue to exercise his authority through sanctions as well as rewards, especially with regard to upholding House duties." If suffering or misfortune beyond human understanding and explanation had constantly visited House members, then the House itself came together for libations and sacrifices to the House ancestors, asking for their help. Prevalent sickness, infant mortality and other calamities concerning several Houses meant that a larger group was at risk. In such a case several Houses invoked their collective *mbondeisia*. These ancestors were involved in maintainig inter-House relationships, which promoted alliances and the stability between kin-groups affinally related.

Village ancestral spirits

Village ancestors were founders and protectors of the village as well as those who contributed to the cultural developments of the village community. Their progeny usually referred to them as *ndeblaa*, "progenitors" circumscribed as "the fathers, mothers, or big lords who gave birth to many generations of children." The descent group, however, can also be called the *ndeblaa* to give birth, generate (*nde*) or the progeny (*ndehu*). The *ndeblaa* have responsibility towards and authority over the whole village as a community, not over individual Houses. For younger generations, the *ndeblaa* were ancestors beyond living genealogical memory, and they regarded them as socially important for particular heroic deeds in the history of the village. They were more concerned with the social reproduction of the village, hence retaining jurisdiction over social sanctions. *Ndeblaa* ancestors were also more likely to be feared by their progeny for the negative sanctions they might impose. For this reason, the *ndeblaa* were the focus of prayer and sacrifice in times of distress, when the living explicitly addressed them. The various cults conveyed a pattern of relationships between groups of living beings and groups of the dead. Such relationships determined the times as well as places of prayer and sacrifice between the group and its ancestors.

After "at least three to five generations," the *kɛkɛni, yieni, maadani, mamani,* or *mbondeisia* became conflated with the *ndeblaa,* since one of the criteria for distinguishing these two groups of ancestors is the time factor. The *ndeblaa* could be unnamed and distant, while the House ancestors were mostly addressed by their names during particular offerings and sacrifices. They existed thus "in the memory of living descendants, while the *ndeblaa* existed and functioned even though the living had no specific experiential knowledge of them." The village community mostly remembered particular ancestors such as warriors, hunters and fishermen for their deeds and merits.

In times of war, the *ndeblaa* warrior ancestors were remembered in a special way. The living warriors and the entire village community visited their places of worship before embarking on any battle. "One of these places of ancestral veneration was the big rock located near Ngiema.

The female elders also made sure that there was enough food and drink for everybody." At the gathering, the prayer leader stood in front of the rock and recited the following prayer: "Oh *Leeve* and your wife *Maa-ndɔ*, we are about to go to war against those who want to take our property and women away. Help us, give us victory so that all will be well for us, and never allow our opponents to defeat us." He then addressed particular warrior ancestors, who were famous for their fearlessness and victory in many wars, to intercede for them with the following words.

> Oh! you great warriors of the ages and of Ngiema, we have come here today to ask for your help. Give us strength and victory through the special *hei* that once enabled you to defeat your enemies. We have cooked some rice for you in order to feed you, so that you may be pleased with us and to prove that we have not forgotten your heroic victories of the wars you fought to save all your children from the enemy warriors. We shall surely come back again after the war to thank you. Now here is your own share of the rice and palm wine we have prepared and brought.

The warriors removed all leaves and stones from the ground and put some of the rice, and palm wine on a big leaf. After making promises of coming back after battle, the warriors then fixed a particular time for returning to that place of worship.

There are two points of interest in the above description. First, they always came back to give thanks to *Leeve* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ* for protecting them, whether they were victorious or not. In terms of victory, they returned to venerate the warrior ancestors who interceded for and gave them the strength and courage to fight. Second, they always first directed their prayers to *Leeve* and *Maa-ndɔ*. This seems to contradict the claims made by Gittins (1987) and Øster (1981) that the Mɛnde approached Highest Deity only through the mediation of the ancestors. Their intermediary role, however, did not preclude direct communication with *Leeve* or closed the doors of supplicating Him and His wife in times of dire need and trouble. If the practice of not asking or approaching the Highest Deity directly has become more widespread at all, probably in the wake of the introduction of the Islamic and Christian concepts of God. This is a crucial point I shall demonstrate when describing pre-colonial inter-cultural interactions and the introduction of modernity in chapter 6.

The *ndeblaa* ancestors associated with fishing were asked for help whenever catching fish from river Keeya became very difficult. Thus, after not being successful in fishing for a very long time, the elders asked the village community to offer sacrifices at river Keeya by feeding the water (*njei gɔ*), in order to appease the spirits of such ancestors. "At dawn, all the fishermen took cooked rice and some dried fish to Keeya, where the entire village community was waiting. The red rice [ritual] was performed, and libations poured for these ancestors, calling some by name and asking them to help the men and women involved in fishing to be henceforth successful." With this ritual, it was said that "the river and the fish had gone through a ritual of death called the death of the river (*njei wa*) and the death of the fishes (*nyein wa*). Subsequently there was great catch of fish that same month." Apparently, the performance of such a mortuary ritual was a condition for the reproduction of the fish.

The original grand progenitors

The original grand progenitors were generally known as the *ndemowaisia wo*. They were those ancestors from whose stock the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde has generated as a society, and were generally regarded as ancestors far beyond the compass of living memory (cf. Gittins, 1987). People, however, did not remember them for any specific deeds or words that would be of immediate effect and benefit for younger generations. This group of ancestors was more interesting for the living for its emphasis on antiquity and social prestige, rather than for an immediate social experience with them. Even elderly informants could not give me any vivid picture of particular deeds of the *ndemowaisai wo* for Ngiema, but rather a scanty narration of historical traditions that lay beyond their reach. When referring to this group of ancestors, they would stress the antiquity by adding the phrase *wo wo wo ...* meaning "long long ago, a very long time."

The *ndemowaisai wo* were asked for help, when the existence of the whole society was threatened, since these ancestors saved and defended the first, first, people (*halahalablaa*) against attacks, (mainly from wild animals) before the great dispersal of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. Thus, the relationship of the living descendants with these ancestors was far less

intensive than the *ndeblaa* and *kɛkɛni* or *mbondeisia* ancestor types. The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde kept the importance and memory of the *ndemowaisia wo* alive for future generations mainly through mythical narrations.

Ancestral spirits and Socio-religious institutions

The intermediary role of different types of ancestors became socially meaningful through the way they authorised the performance of various rituals expressing Kɔɔ-Mɛnde religious beliefs. I refer to these rituals as socio-religious institutions, whose leaders organise different cults that may vary in social relevance. All of these institutions had special places for offering sacrifices to the ancestors.

The best-known ritual site belonging to the *jabissaah* ritual was the *jabissaah vaahun*, meaning the *jabissaah* forest for curing certain types of diseases. When someone became seriously ill, his or her relatives consulted the village soothsayer, so that he may find out the cosmological causes. After proper investigation, depending upon the gravity of the illness and its social causes, he eventually told them that it was only the *jabissaah* ritual that could cure the sick person. They then went to the *jabissaah* elders, asking them to make necessary ritual preparations by asking the ancestors, – mostly the *ndeblaa* – to give the *hei*. According to most informants, "the elders then told the relatives that the ancestors were only prepared to give the *hei*, if all ritual rules were strictly observed. This was to ensure the effectiveness of the healing process."

Accordingly, the *jabissaah* elders must first go to *jabissaah vaahun* for consultations with the ancestors to make special preparations for the ritual performance. It was part of the ritual preparations that on their way to the forest, the leading elder must take smouldering firewood from any hut used for cooking in the village. He should swing it until their arrival at the *jabissaah vaahun*. No one should ask about this act. "If anyone should ask the leader where he was going and what he was doing with the firewood, he should immediately drop it or throw it away and sit down at the road side." In this case, it was necessary to cancel the trip and return to the village, since the elders of the *jabissaah* understood this as a sign from the ancestors that they were not ready to give the *hei*. It was a further indication that the (afflicted) person was going to succumb, because there

may have been some grave transgressions. If, on the other hand, no one asked him, they continued their mission to the *jabissaah* forest to receive the *hei* from the ancestors, so that they could cure the sick person. These elders upheld the laws and maintained certain relationships with the ancestors, with which the *jabissaah* in general was concerned. An example of such relationships was the annual sacrificial offering, which qualified the *jabissaah* elders to invoke these ancestral spirits at anytime if in need.

Another ritual to be considered is the *njayei*. Its place of ancestral veneration located near the Sabgeeja stream was called w*ulehun*, meaning "the *njayei* forest of cure". When someone lost his mind in the community, "the *njayei* took him to the *wulehun*, where the elders performed these rituals." The effectiveness of this particular healing ritual was evidenced by the patient's normal behaviour such as in tending rice farms and taking care of his wife and children. Thus, the *njayei* ritual became famous for curing mental illness. Like the *jabissaah*, the *njayei* elders were responsible for organising various ritual sacrifices to the ancestors, and for upholding the religious traditions of the village.

With the passage of time, however, the elders of the *njayei* socio-religious institution had developed a more hierarchical form of leadership than was the case with the *jabissaah* elders. There were those elders who had special powers, which they believed to have inherited from their own patrilineal *kεkεni* ancestors to perform the necessary *njayei* rituals. According to its developed tradition, "these ancestral spirits disclosed the whereabouts of the *njayei* to an old man in a dream, who asked him to go to the waterside (*njei-la*) of the Sagbeeja stream near Ngiema, in proximity to the *Poro* sacred grove," where the presence of cosmological *hei* was embodied. For this reason, it was obligatory for the *njayei* elders to go to Sagbeeja periodically to invoke the spirits specifically associated with the *njayei* and to perform the rituals as prescribed by the ancestors. The *hei* they received became known as the *njayei hei*, which enabled them to heal the mentally ill in the village community, provided the right rituals were performed and the rules kept. The healing function of the *njayei* was important for the whole village, because it was not only concerned with the physical healing, but also with the spiritual healing of

the community at large. The people generally believed that the *njayei* was more relevant for restoring strained relationships between the social and the cosmological spheres of the village.

Another ritual of no less importance was the *humoi*. It was responsible for the enhancement of good relationships between the social domain and the cosmos, which the *humoi* elders accomplished by means of purifying the forest and the bush. For example, the village normally submitted persons guilty of having any sexual activity in the bush to the *humoi* elders (*humoblaa*) to perform the necessary ritual purification so that the existing social norm and order was restored. Such purification rituals became necessary for the enhancement of rice production (see chapt. 5).

Non-ancestral spirits

Different life forms in the universe including the non-domesticated ones were dispersed through two differentiating spheres, with each domain being "subject to specific forms of cosmological authority" (Platenkamp, 2007b: 103). However, all socialised and non-socialised manifestations of life were ultimately subject to the Ordering One that orders the social actions identified as *Leeve Njeini* in pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde thought. Relations between the various Houses which comprised patrilineal descent of the ancestors made up the social spaces of the settlements of the village and the land the people cultivated. Outside this social domain, there were areas which encompassed the forests, the skies, the streams and river which belonged to the spirits. Different materialised forms of these spirits, which were variably labelled as *kangafoi, tingui, jinei* and *ndɔgbɔyosui*, inhabited these domains. These spirits, which I term "non-ancestral spirits", did not only exert authority over these spheres, but they also influenced particular persons in the village in a number of ways.

The traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society made a significant distinction between ancestral spirits, that behaved in predictable ways and upheld social and moral values, and other spirits, whose actions were far less predictive. These spirits were, on many occasions, socially disruptive, and their activities and influences were of a very different kind. Thus, they were conceived of "in terms that emphasise the inverted nature, or the

absence altogether, of those attributes that identify the ancestral order of the [Houses] constituting the society" (*ibid.*)

Ngafa nyamui

The first category of non-ancestral spirits (*ngafangaa*) is what the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde referred to as dead people (*haablaa*), people under the earth (*ndɔublaa*) or people in the grave (*Kambɛihublaa*). These three concepts are also general terms for the dead, without carrying implications of being an ancestor. They had little or no social role in the community of the living, in contrast to the ancestors, who continued to exert social and moral influence and authority on the living. These non-ancestral spirits could do harm, but such negative influences were averted by performing the proper rituals.

Such spirits that do harm to people belonged to a category of anti-social spirits, called bad spirits (*ngafa nyamuisia*). Hovering all over the neighbourhood, they were also called hovering spirits (*kangafoisia*). "They were particularly dangerous for women who bathed at night, because they could end up giving birth to a monster instead of a human being when they become pregnant." These bad spirits might be driven away by employing special practitioners of *hei* – mostly elderly women – who applied their knowledge of particular herbs and plants to alleviate the problem. The ritual of "putting cassava sticks around the graves of a suspected deceased person" was an important component of driving away the hovering spirits and preventing it from bringing havoc on the living.

Jinangaa

A second type of non-ancestral spirit is the *jinangaa*, which is a generic name for spiritual beings living outside the social domains of the village. The relationship of these cosmological beings to individuals in the village community was often based on care and avoidance, as well as fear and awe.

One type of the *jinangaa* is the *ndɔgbɔyosui*[70], which were the most notorious and troublesome. The forest trickster is a creature of the wild areas beyond the village. The village community believed that the forest trickster usually resided on high mountains and thick forests. From there, it played different tricks upon the living, such as assuming the form of a human being – usually an old man, a hunter (*kamajoi*) – and appearing in farm houses. The forest trickster never appeared in the form of a woman, but always as an old man. At times, people in the village could hear all of a sudden the sound of beautiful music with different types of instruments coming from the big mountains; this kind of beautiful music was usually interpreted as one of the many cunning and annoying tricks of the forest trickster.

The relations that the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde maintained with the *ndɔgbɔyosui* are articulated in stories such as the following.

> A hunter and his wife left Ngiema early in the morning at sunrise, in order to get some food from their farmhouse located on their rice field several miles from the village. Upon their arrival, the old man told his wife to wait in the farmhouse until he had returned from hunting. The woman waited for her husband patiently, but there was no sign of him. However, after waiting for a long time, the forest trickster came to the woman assuming the form of her husband. Upon seeing the forest trickster, the woman, not knowing that it was the forest trickster, said joyfully to herself: 'Oh my husband has finally arrived!' The forest wizard then asked the woman to take a basket and follow him in order to fetch the game he had been hunting, since he alone cannot transport the game because it was a big animal. At this instruction, the woman followed him expecting a big meal afterwards. They passed through many thick bush forests and high mountains, so that the woman could no longer find her way back to the village alone. After several miles, they finally arrived at a place, which looked like a small village located near a thick forest with big cotton trees around it, but in (the) fact, it was a very big and thick forest. The forest trickster asked her to spend the night there.

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[70] *Ndɔgbɔ* means 'bush', 'semi-forest' and *yusui* means 'deep/recess', "indicating that this is the spirit of deep bush" (Gittins 1987). However, further indications of this word reveal that *yosoi* derives from *jusui*. The latter, derived from *Josolui*, in one sense means a stage magical entertainment, and a *josolui gamui* is a magician who performs on the stage, but can also mean wizard who can perform his (magical) rituals for the sake of entertainment and sometimes for causing unnecessary trouble in the village. In this sense, *ndɔgbɔyosui* can only convey the meaning of "forest wizard" (Harris and Sawyerr, 1968). When so conceived, the *ndɔgbɔyosui* can be understood only in one aspect of its dealings with individuals living in the village, which can be extremely negative. But a further description can add some other nuances. I shall therefore translate it as 'forest trickster'.

Meanwhile the true husband had returned from his hunting activities, but did not see his wife. After searching for her in the vicinity, he raised the alarm by reporting the matter to the village, and everybody in Ngiema went looking for the woman in the forests, hills and mountains, but there was no sign of her. After searching in vain, the people decided to consult the most famous village soothsayer, who told them that the woman was still alive and in a good condition of health and that there was nothing to worry about, since she was still with the forest trickster. In order to find the woman, the village community must offer a sacrifice to the ancestors, asking them for their help, to stop the tricky behaviour of the forest trickster. After the people had offered the sacrifice, they saw the woman under a cotton tree near the village. She then explained everything as it happened. Such annoying tricks by the forest trickster were common in Ngiema.

There were also many other aggravating tricks done by the forest trickster, such as making people take the wrong way in the forest, asking travellers difficult and tricky questions and the like (cf. Harris and Sawyerr, 1968).

In Luawa chiefdom, narratives were widely spread about spirits who temporarily assumed a visible human identity in order to engage in exchange relations. The forest trickster "also did deeds of kindness to individuals whom he chose as friends." Nevertheless, such a friendship was rather rare, because the "forest trickster was notoriously known for his recalcitrance, and not for his sincerity." If the forest trickster became friendly with a particular person, he normally appeared to him or her in the form of an old man, and disclosed his identity as a forest trickster. Such a disclosure normally followed a strict warning not to make known this meeting to the village community. If that person kept his warning, the forest trickster rewarded such secrets with extraordinary gifts.

On a few occasions, the forest trickster made an agreement with "an individual in return for personal wealth, advantages, power and prestige, lasting several years." Such a pact, however, was dangerous, since "the forest trickster could one day subjugate that person, take him away into the deep forest and take control over him." In one instance after a long time, the person eventually ran away from the *ndɔgbɔyosui* and finally found his way back to the village where he lost his mind as a result. The Ngiema people usually interpreted such events as a warning to the village community, not to be selfish or self-indulgent, looking for personal welfare rather than that of the community. Anybody in the village could see this cunning and troublesome forest trickster anytime, but it was up to the individual to resist its flattery and empty promises. People usually had

to make a choice: either to give in to his enticement and become momentarily wealthy, or to resist and reject his empty promises, knowing that nothing lasting go will come from them. Thus, even though the village community generally regarded the forest trickster's behaviour as anti-social, nonetheless they also recognised that such a non-ancestral spirit negatively sanctioned their social order.

One had an ambivalent relationship to this type of non-ancestral spirit. In spite of the negative opinion the community had of the forest trickster as the most notorious and troublesome, yet it seems that he was in some ways a member of the village community. They knew very well that this non-ancestral spirit could take the form of a human being, an old man, a hunter, husband or a lonely traveller to name only a few. Hence, Kɔɔ-Mɛnde people had even given the forest trickster a typical Kɔɔ-Mɛnde name – Blama. Thus, the forest trickster became known as Blama Joso. Irrespective of being capable of playing different tricks on individuals, the community did not conceive Blama Joso as a general threat to their village. The reproduction of relationship required that Blama Joso be withdrawn from the cosmological sources and become embodied in a human being and hunted for game in the forest. To release a perversion from Blama Joso was to subordinate him to the ancestors.

A second category of *jinangaa* is the *jinei* (plural *jineisia* or *jinangaa*). Like the forest trickster, the *jinei* belonged to the non-social domain, but in contrast to the former, it resided mainly under big trees and on riversides, as well as in the deepest parts of a river (*palei*), but seldom in thick forests. The invisibility, which the kangafoi spirits share with the *jinei* and the *ndɔgbɔyosui* in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde thought, means that such cosmological beings "no longer partook in ordinary social communication". The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde believed that there could be a good *jinei* as well as a bad *jinei*. In rare cases, a group of good *jinei* can contact the village community for particular reasons, as the Dodo Kortuma case exemplifies (see chapt. 1). On the other hand, bad *jinei* (in contrast to Blama Joso) even entered the village to possess people, bringing much distress to the community. Women, especially those fair in complexion, were particularly desirable for the *jinei*. For this reason, it was not advisable for such women to bathe naked at a riverside or to take a bath at

night, because when the *jinei* saw such a woman, she became an object of desire. The male *jineisia* obviously outnumbered their female counterparts.

The *jinei* sometimes tried different forms of enticement to enter into a relationship with women. A common way of proposing a relationship was to drop a beautiful and foreign object in front of a woman walking on the roadside, so that she may pick it up. If she did, it immediately became a sign for the *jinei* that she had given her consent to the proposal. This would then be the beginning of an unwanted and uncontrollable relationship on the part of the woman with the *jinei*. For this reason, people became very careful about taking objects from roadsides, especially when these objects were extraordinarily beautiful. "The message behind this lesson was to warn individuals to resist the temptation of having too much concern for personal wealth and advantages, rather than promoting the common interest of the village."

The relationship between an individual and the spirit gradually intensified from the time the human person accepted the proposal of the spirit. According to informants, the first encounter with the *jinei* was normally at night. While sleeping, the spirit came to the women in the form of a man, and confessed that he had dropped the object. The relationship between them normally ended up in sexual contact and gratification, the consequence of which may sometimes end in the production of a monster or disabled offspring. "Such intrusions are indexed by particular forms of asocial conduct, such as erratic, treacherous or violent behaviour" (Platenkamp, 2007b: 114). These non-social characteristics imposed by the *jinei* upon the afflicted person, eventually led to the lethal de-socialisation of the possessed. In most cases, however, there were ritual healings by *jabissaah* elders that helped rescue the woman from the *jinei*.

The third and last group of *jinangaa* are those also associated with water – rivers, big streams and waterfalls. The most common and notorious among them were the *tingoi*, which normally lived in big pools, in secluded and dangerous deep parts of a river (*paleija*) and at the foot of waterfalls. The *tingoi* belonged to the category of benevolent non-ancestral spirits. They were mostly linked with people associated with the

marvels of water (*nja malei-blaa*) who sometimes did miraculous things for the community. "The *tingoi* usually assumed the form of a woman, fair in complexion. She appeared only to the man of her choice, who happened to be at the riverside by showing him her head. She usually did this once or twice, after which the man became afraid in most cases." If he was prudent enough not to tell anybody in the village of his strange experience, the *tingoi* appear to him a second time at the same place. If he continued to keep these happenings a secret, then the *tingoi* would come to him, but this time in a dream. She then disclosed her identity as a spirit and proposed friendship – not of a concupiscence nature – to the man, who usually accepted the invitation. She asked the man to go to the river again the next day. Such a meeting usually took place very early in the morning at sunrise, when people had still not left the village for their farms and gardens. Upon her arrival, the *tingoi* told him that if he had indeed accepted her offer of friendship, then he must be prepared to go and see where she lived the next time they meet.[71] The *tingoi* normally promised

the man extraordinary powers, eyes to see the wonders of the [cosmos] and to understand events that were yet to come to the village, as well as other events that benefited the community. A necessary condition for fulfilling such promises, hence continuing the friendship was secrecy. The spirit warned him not to tell anybody about their meetings; if he did, the spirit never fulfilled her promises and he would never see her again. After such a compact, the *tingoi* asked him to come again the next day to the same place at the same time. If he did, the *tingoi* usually asked him if he was brave enough to go with her to the deep parts of the river so that he could see her dwelling place. If the man were willing to go with her, she then rubbed her hands on his face four times.[72] They then sank together into the deepest part of the water where the current was mostly strong and dangerous. Under the river, the man saw a big and beautiful town with its inhabitants. He normally stayed with the *tingoi* one whole day, until the evening, and she showed him many marvellous things – things he had never seen before. At sunset or at dusk the *tingoi* accompanied her human friend back to dry land and the man's clothes were all dried as if he had never been under the water, meaning by that he returned to his [earthly state].

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[71] This idea differs from the one expressed in Gittins' study, which states that the *tingoi* for the [Kpaa]-Mɛnde is a malevolent spirit, according to the information given by one of his informants (cf. Gittins, 1987: 77).

[72] This ritual enabled him to temporarily lose his contingent human nature and to assume that of a spirit

Thereafter, the man began receiving many gifts from the *tingoi*, especially those of wisdom, knowledge and the ability to foresee and interpret events that were to take place in the village. With such ability, he could warn the community of dangerous events caused by malevolent spirits. From his behaviour, especially in foretelling future events, people noticed that he had entered a pact with the *tingoi*. Such people influenced by the *tingoi* were called *nja malei-blaa*. They were able to work marvels on the water, and usually paddled their boats and canoes in a different way than anyone else in the village. "People sometimes saw them walking on the water – on the deepest and most dangerous part, especially when the rivers had flooded their banks." The *nja malei-blaa* even went under water and stayed there for several hours, and communicated directly with the *tingoi*. They warned their communities about times when the rivers and big streams were going to be dangerous, and when people should avoid fishing and swimming.

The traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde relations to *jinangaa* in general can only be conceived in terms of the wider framework of their relationship with the cosmos. To assert that all non-ancestral spirits were mainly bad, selfish and had almost nothing positive to do with the group (cf. Gittins 1987: 52-82; Little 1967: 223ff) cannot be entirely valid for the socio-cosmic order of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. This may apply largely to modern Mɛnde societies, which have been undergoing many changes with seemingly individualistic concepts of society projected in ideas about spirits and the like. In this respect, it is also worth mentioning that the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde and the Kpaa-Mɛnde have some different cultural ideas about most non-ancestral spirits, especially those associated with water, such as the *tingoi*. There are substantial differences between the description of this spirit and the ideas associated with it as made by Gittins (1987: 77) and my own field research data. Besides, "there are water spirits that are known and recognised by most Kpaa-Mɛnde communities, but which are not even known by the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde let alone recognised by them as such."

The relationship, therefore, between these non-ancestral spirits and the village community may not have been merely complementary but also asymmetric (cf. Platenkamp, 2007b). People ascertained the nature and

characteristics of the domains belonging to these spirits by means of the transformations identifying the futures of the social order. The infliction of the identity of the spirits on the social order of the village would result in the breaking up of this order. Thus, for the social order to reproduce itself, an ongoing intrusion of ancestral authority over the domains inhabited by these spirits was required. "The domains therefore relate as different parts to socio-cosmological order as an encompassing whole" (*op. cit.*: 125).

Chapter 5 Cosmology and Ritual Cycle

This chapter describes an analysis of traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde cosmology and the perennial rituals that were indispensable for the social life of the village community. The Ngiema people employed cosmological categories in most rituals involved in rice farming which was an important component of the recurring rituals necessary for social reproduction.

Cosmology

Aristotelian or Thomistic philosophers (cf. Wallace, 1977) have maintained that cosmology, as a scientific disciplined enquiry, investigates the physical universe in its most general aspects, operating at the first level of abstraction. Thus, they consider its object as containing sensible matter, which starts its abstractive process with individuals that impress themselves upon man's senses and terminates into universals whose definitions contain a reference to sensible matter (*op. cit.*: 34). At variance with such a conception, Kɔɔ-Mɛnde understanding of cosmology was never conceived in abstract terms, devoid of a network of social relationships.[73] The following paragraphs describe how people viewed the physical universe or cosmos around them and the categories employed in understanding and relating to the cosmos in general. They also related these categories more vividly to their farming activities.

Cosmological Categories

In an interview with some elders in Ngiema about the origins of the universe, they described how their ancestors pondered fundamental questions about how the universe in which they lived came into being, as well as where human beings original from.

> For the ancestors the world began with only one big forest, but there were no human beings living in this forest. Gradually the first first first ... people started coming from the east (Kɔɔ) or upper part of the forest. They were very confused and knew

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[73]   A scientific model that was fundamentally anthropocentric. See Doppelfeld (1994) for further descriptions on the subject of African homocentric interpretation of the physical universe.

nothing about their own origin; neither had they any explicit knowledge about *Leeve* and his wife, *Maa-ndɔ*, though the sky, the sun and the clouds were [imposing cosmological entities].The first first people lived on the land; they tilled it and got everything from it. The sky or the clouds gave them rain and the earth gave them food. Because of these gains from the cosmos, they started asking themselves, whether there was somebody who made the skies, moon and the sun as well as human beings, and how they could develop a relationship with this person. These first people organised themselves and settled in groups after clearing a forest bush. However, some of them went forth after some years to form different settlements in other vicinities, which they called the oldest bush forests (*tombo wova-wovei*). These settlements gradually became villages and extended to the whole world of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. The eldest in the village community became their *demowai* [ancestral lord] and at the same time their leader.

The primordial impetus to enter into a relationship with the cosmos was exchange. This primordial exchange exemplified in the myth is what constitutes the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society in relation to the Highest Deity and the ancestors. The humans originally coming from the east shows the origins of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, which is an important factor in the formation of their identity as a society. The beginning of the universe with only one-forest group settlements in bush forests indicates the importance farming occupied in the life of the village community. From their experiences with imposing cosmological entities, they sought to construct ways of relating to the cosmos and Highest Deity, which ritual activities were to facilitate. Migration favoured the founding of new village communities headed by elders. From the beginning, seniority had played a crucial role in the political organisation of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society.

In their narrations, the village community found ways of explaining the lunar and solar systems, according to their own representations. In their efforts, for example, they tried to explain the relationship of the moon to the sun and the effects this may have on the social organisation of their village as a whole. In what follows, I attempt to render such explanations as given by traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society through oral history.

Solar and lunar relationship to Society

The skies (*ngelei*) and the sun (*folei*) as well as the moon (*ngawui*) were all conceived to be the dwelling place of *Leeve Njeini* (Sky Deity) "because he withdrew at night to have his rest." During the night, he

continued to keep the whole cosmos in order and in motion until the next morning. "At daytime, he resided in the sun, giving light to the earth." If the daylight furnished by the sun ceases to be, then the social life in the village will come to a halt. The same applies to the light that comes from the moon. For this reason, the eclipse of the sun or moon (*nyagobaa*) "was greeted with the beating of a special drum together with some other instruments and the entire village danced until the eclipse was over." Other rituals of a sacrificial nature were also performed. Failure to perform them meant total breakdown of the social order, since the eclipse never ended. Inasmuch as the cosmos followed fixed laws of order given by the Highest Deity, social and religious activities in the village must stand in some kind of relation to these laws. That is to say, the village community explained the cause of the eclipse as a distortion in these relationships.

Stars in the heavens (*tumbekeisia*) had a completely social dimension in Ngiemna village. "They were sometimes called village weaverbirds (*sokeisia*), because they gathered around the moon in groups, like these birds." They represented people who came together to make the daily arrangements (*hungbateisia*) concerning the social life of the village, in order to put their affairs in order – affairs about marriage, politics, rituals and sacrifices to *Leeve* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ* as well as venerating the ancestors.

The concept of time

There is a tendency for modern societies to conceptualise time as a continuous, measurable quantity in which events occur in a sequence proceeding from the past through the present to the future. Such a notion of time can hardly apply to the pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde concept, which was mainly a religious and anthropocentric ontology. [74]

Time for the traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde referred primarily to those events, which were to occur inevitably or with a high degree of probability. In other words, they were not concerned with an academic

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[74] Mbiti (1999) has undertaken an extensive research on the concept of time among African societies, especially those of East Africa.

form of categorising time, so that what had not actually taken place or was not likely to take place usually fell outside the category of time. Instead, the village community conceived as time all events that fell within the regular recurrence of the cosmological order.

From the proposition that time mainly refers to those events which fell within the practical experience of the community or were necessarily going to occur in the immediate future, a two-dimensional notion of time becomes evident. Firstly, there was a long past, and secondly, a present now, with virtually no distant future (Mbiti, 1999), unless this future had eschatological dimensions. A distant and indefinite future was virtually beyond the conception of time for its events had not yet taken place, hence likely unrealisable. However, the concept of *kulɔmei* was sometimes associated with the idea of an unforeseen future; but without reference to a particular ritual activity, it practically remained irrelevant for the community.

However, events which were necessarily going to take place, because they were part of the rhythm of the cosmological order, were covered by the traditional concept of time. This we may call "potential time", because it has not yet been fully accomplished (*ibid*.). Actual time, on the contrary, is what was in the present and in the past since these events, particularly in the form of ritual actions had actually been realised. Therefore, time had to be experienced by the community in order to make sense and become a reality. A person experienced time as member of a society that extended for many past generations beyond his own birth. Abstract future and indefinitely remote events did not make much sense to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, for they had not actually experienced these events. People incorporated the very near future into the present only for specific and concrete ritual purposes.

Since time itself was a composition of concrete events, numerical calendars did not exist. Instead, what was important is what we may call social calendars, in which the community connected events or phenomena that constituted time in relation with one another. These social calendars constituted an essential part of their time reckoning. For instance, the village community divided and reckoned the day, the month, the year, one's lifetime or the history of the community, according to their specific

events. This way of constructing time enabled them to interpret their daily activities as meaningful.

The rising sun was an important cosmological phenomenon recognised by the entire community. The sun was used as an orientation for farmers in calculating the amount of work done on the farm and to know when it was time for them to return to the village. Therefore, it did not actually matter, whether the sun rose at 5 a.m. or 6 a.m. and set at 6 or 7 p.m. Rather what counted was the fact that the sun rose and set as such, and that they were able to go to their rice farms or perform a purification ritual at Sagbeeja stream. It was period of time in which the event should take place that was meaningful, not the numerically ordered identical time intervals of hours, minutes and seconds. Therefore, if the community stipulated that the ritual of naming and welcoming a newborn baby was going to take place "tomorrow at sunrise", it did not matter whether it actually took place at 9 a.m. or very early in the morning. Relevant for the community was the ritual taking place during the general period of sunrise. Time, in this sense, had to be ritually or otherwise socially marked in order to become meaningful. Hence, the traditional village community connected most of their religious practices with this concept of time. The following description of the days and months of the year, as we call them today, illustrates more concretely what the preceding paragraphs have been trying to describe.

People thus divided time (figure 1) into times of morning, which was between dawn and sunrise; the afternoon from the time the sun began to get hot until sunset; while the evening was reckoned from dusk to the time the moon started to shine. The night was usually conceived as total darkness and when the whole cosmos was at rest, especially the village weaverbirds. When, for example, the community decided that a particular event was to take place 'in the morning', then it meant between the period of dawn and 'sunrise', while 'sunrise' meant until 'midday', or slightly after; likewise, the afternoon and the evening. Once again, the classification of time was subject to social activities and not *vice versa*.
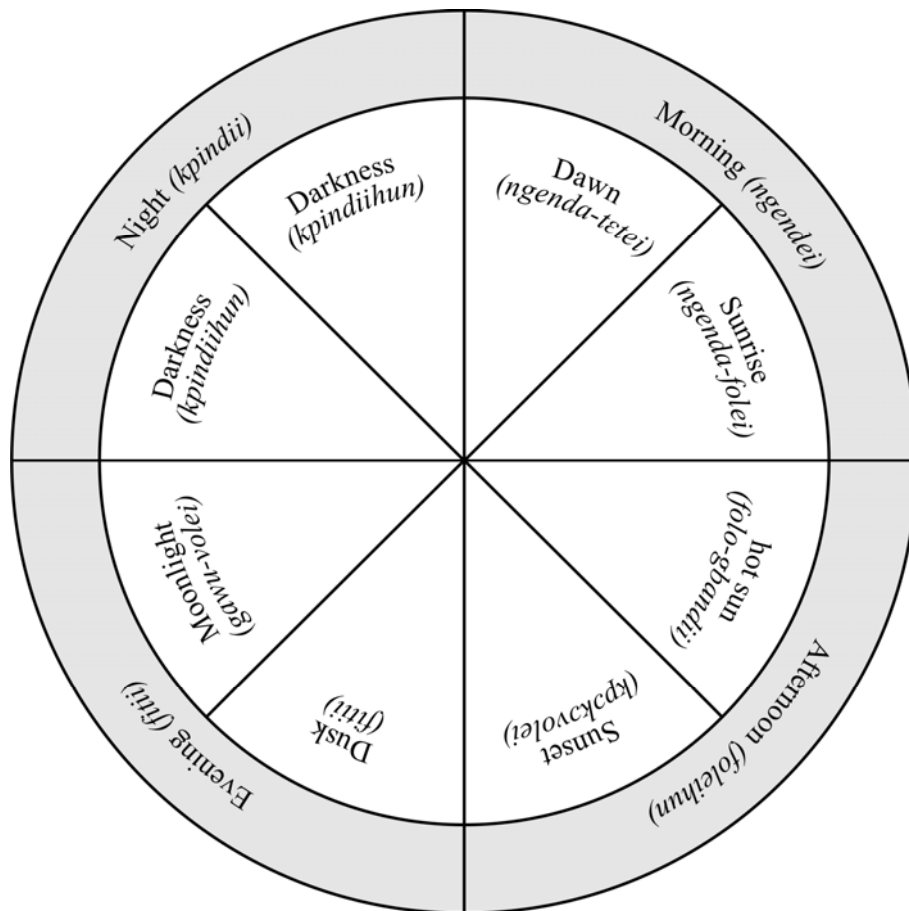
Figure 1: The division of time

Days

The Ngiema people identified normal day according to significant events. These included their daily activities as well as ritual processes. The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde lexeme *folei* means both "the day" and "the sun". It marked the timing of different types of work on the farm and some important ritual

performances. The shining of the sun as a cosmological entity was favourable for both social and ritual activities, as well as for various agricultural tasks that took place outside the village.

Days were not part of a seven day week. Rather they referred to their past, present and immediate future. People reckoned past and future events as removed from the present three days at most. This conceptualisation of time always circled around today as the present (*haa*), yesterday as the past (*gbengii* or *gboii*) [75] 'a day before yesterday (*gbengii yekei* or *gboii yekei*)[76], tomorrow as the future (*sinaa*) and a day after tomorrow (*sinaa agbuahun*). If, however, one referred to a future time period longer than one day one would say *sinaa tagida gbuahun*, literally a day after tomorrow after a day after tomorrow. In most cases indefinite and distant future was virtually absent as actual time, even though *kulɔmei* could sometimes give the idea of an unforeseen future which may have no immediate social relevance for lack of concrete ritual activity.

Furthermore, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde had developed another way of time reckoning. This was composed of the days on which various exchanges of goods and services among different surrounding villages took place, based on the principle of rotation in the respective communities. People rotated the days on which these exchanges took place on the villages concerned, and named the days in question after them. If, for example, the exchange of goods took place on a certain day in Ngiema, the village community called that day Ngiema day (*Ngiema volei ma* or *Ngiemei ma*). Similarly, if another exchange took place, in Talia on another day, that day was called Talia day (*Talia volei ma*). A typical answer to the question, "When are you coming to see us?" was always "I will come on *Gbeworbui ma* or *Gbeworbu volei ma*", which means the day on which the exchanges take place in Gbeworbu.

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[75] *Gboii* literally means last night.
[76] *Goii yekei* literally means a night before last night.

Months

The Lunar cycle was the sole valid form of calculating the days within the lunar months. Various farming and ritual activities were associated with particular months, so that these were named either according to them or the prevailing weather condition. For example, the harvest months of the rice farms did not really matter, whether they lasted twenty-five or thirty-five days. The community perceived as important, events of harvesting or hunting and fishing as the case may be, rather than the mathematical length of the month. The social and ritual aspects of rice farming describe in detail such a dimension of "time making".

The different months of the year (see table 2, p. 91) corresponded to the different seasons (wet and dry) of the year, harmonizing the social organisation of the village in terms of rice farming. Therefore, people were not interested in the month having or not having only 30 days or any other number.

Lunar	Gregorian	Connotation
podoe	December	From *pui*, meaning "print/sign/impression" and *ndui*, "that which is left behind"
peegbaa	January	From *pɛlei*, meaning "hut/house" and *kpawa*, "to count". (*Peegbaa* was the month in which the elders counted the huts and houses in the village).
vui	February	From *wu*, which corresponds to the "sound made by the felling of trees in the farm"
nyawoi	March	From *nyaa nyaa woi woii*, meaning the sound made by the breeze and light wind during the dry season.
buloui	April	From *buloui*, meaning "a palatable red fruit".
golei	May	From *gole*, meaning "to be dirty", implying white with dust".
sojoe	June	From *sooh-jooh*, meaning the "sound of the first drops of rain at the beginning of the rainy season".
nanoi	July	From *nanoi*, meaning "chilly/wet".
dawii	August	From *da vi gor*, meaning "having been closed up".
saa	September	From *sawei/saa*, meaning "rule/law/prohibition."
galoi	October	From *loga*, meaning "to remain on", implying "the rain/water has remained on it".
lugbunjawui	November	From *lugbuii*, meaning "clouds/ dew" and *gawui* "month".

Table 2: Pre-modern social calendar

Ritual cycle

The year (*foi*) encompasses two distinct periods: dry season (*ngevolie*) and wet season (*haamei*). Each of these periods was identified by certain ritual or social activities. Initiation rituals were always performed during the dry season, while most farming activities on the rice fields and other plantations occurred mainly during the wet season. The year as a whole was considered as passed only when these activities had been completed especially in relation to rice farming and *Poro* initiation rituals. In other words, a year was not considered a numerically defined period of lineal time, but as a repetitive ritual cycle. It was part of a perennial flux of impending being, becoming and concluding. A motion of temporal eternity beyond such a ritual cycle was irrelevant except when concerning an eschatological return of ancestors.

Birth and death rituals were the fundamentals of all rituals in pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. Inasmuch as life had a particular rhythm of its own for any person in the community, it included birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, as well as the relationship with spirits leading up to the community of ancestors. Births and deaths rituals formed a cycle of ritual events. There were two dimensions to the phenomenon of the birth and death of a person: "ordinary birth and death", and the "social death and birth" accomplished by means of the initiation ceremonies of *Poro* and *Sande*. The following paragraphs describe the first form of births and deaths.

Birth

The birth of a person was a gradual process that started even before the actual birth; by going through a number of rituals, it was believed that the ancestors gave the unborn child proper cosmological protection from all malevolent spirits and other negative influences.

Procreation was conceived in cosmological and social terms. From the time of conception until her parturition, a woman observed a series of taboos accompanied by many rituals. In this way, she related in a special way to the ancestors, who ensured a less complicated labour and safe delivery. If, however, for some reason, there was something wrong with

this relationship, then the time for delivery revealed its true nature. When the pregnant woman was in labour, the elderly women took her to a special place known as the labour room (*hawahun*), to which men were forbidden entry, "because this was an affair for women, and not men." When the childbearing pains lasted longer than usual, an investigation of the causes started. One way of doing this was to go to the village soothsayer who then consulted with all the cosmological powers at his disposal. If ancestral relationship was disturbed, he informed the village community accordingly, but also warned that she must confess her wrongdoing in order to reinstate or repair the damaged relationship, so that she could give birth safely. Otherwise, she would succumb to her pains. In such cases, the woman usually confessed having broken a particular taboo. The community believed that "after a purification ritual performed by the elderly women responsible, she then gave birth. All this happened to the exclusion of men and young girls not yet initiated into *Sande* being present."

Having given birth to a child, the new mother continued to observe other taboos, like "staying in the big house immediately after birth for three consecutive days," where only the elderly women who performed a number of rituals were allowed. A rule that "no male member of the community, not even her husband, was allowed to enter the big house and see the mother and her newborn child during this time was to be observed." On the seventh day, the male elders introduced the child formally to the ancestors. The most senior elder, usually the House head, took it into his arms, standing at the door of the big house where the mother and the child had been staying for the past days. The whole village community was eagerly waiting to see and welcome their new member. He then called the ancestors of the village by their names and asked them to take care of the child and to welcome it into the community by giving it wisdom and good repute, and to teach it to follow all the cultural traditions, social values and etiquette of the village. "This welcoming ceremony was followed by offering sacrifices to the *kɛkɛni* ancestors, as well as a big feast being celebrated in the village."

When a child died at birth or immediately afterwards, its funeral and burial rituals were done in quite a different way than that of an adult. The

child was buried in the village dust bin, together with some sticks. This burial was very simple and quiet, with no messengers sent to have relatives in other villages informed; they only heard about it informally. A week later, the bereaved mother and a non-initiated innocent boy of the patrilineal House into which she had been married were to go through the ritual washing or purification in the Sagbeeja stream. The elderly women who were to preside over this ritual went to prepare the *hei* – usually different medicinal herbs – at Sagbeeja. A white cock and a handful of cleaned rice was also taken to the stream. Two of the elderly women then washed her and the little boy using the leaves they had hitherto put in the water, while saying: "we have washed you clean. May all what was unclean in you be washed away and now be a matter of the past. May your next child survive and grow strong in this village." Afterwards one of the elderly women gave some (of the) cleaned rice to the cock, saying: "if this woman will bear another child in the future and if it will survive then eat this rice, but if she will never give birth to a child that will survive then don't eat this rice." Thereafter, the bereaved woman gave the clothes she wore during the ritual cleansing to the elderly women, and put on new ones instead. Meanwhile, everybody waited in the village to hear whether the cock ate the rice. If it had actually done so, the women happily said to those waiting, "Let us all thank the ancestors for the ritual ceremony and for helping us." However, if the cock did not eat the rice, all the women returned to the village downcast and without saying a single word to the people.

Moreover, if this tragedy happened to the same woman a second time, special female elders then put a mark on the child before burial, normally on its forehead or on one of the jaws, to verify if the next child born to her actually had the marks. In case the next child really had these markings, then they marked it a second time, but on another part of the body, to see if the child would indeed come back after its burial. If indeed the same woman gave birth to another child with the same mark, then the whole village community understood that their ancestors had been involved, probably as a sign of their being angry with the whole village. Thus, the socio-cosmic system of thought did not conceptualise individual offenses against the Highest Deity and the ancestors, since this was

always a collective affair. For such collective offences, only ritual purifications and sacrificial offerings involving the entire village would appease their anger. For such rituals, "the village elders had to forewarn the ancestors and inform them a day or two before that the village was about to make a sacrificial offering on a particular time." Then the people cooked some rice and went to the designated place. They made their intentions known to the ancestors, in this case to ask them not to take the child from the woman again after birth. Afterwards, they put some of the rice on a big leaf under the tree and then went back to their village. "It was expected that from that moment onwards, all subsequent children born to the woman would survive and grow to maturity."

Death

Similar to the process of birth, the death of a person did not end his existence. Instead, the village community attributed a much wider significance to it, namely, that of a breakdown or malfunctioning of the exchange processes between the social and the cosmological worlds, and ritual actions that resulted from such processes among members of the community.

The ceremonies that accompanied the ordinary or physical death of a person involved a ritual called the death business/affair (*haa hindei*). At death, all the elders and other members of the deceased House gathered for funeral rituals at the death house (*haa wɛlei-la*). A messenger was to inform other relatives and friends in surrounding villages with the message: this person is finished (*numuiji gbɔɔyoa!*). After properly washing the corpse, those performing the ritual wrapped the remains into a white cloth, (*kasangei*). Immediately after the burial, the proper death ritual began. This involved killing an animal, mostly a fowl, and cooking some rice, which people mixed with the fowl, forming small balls. The animal's head belonged to the House of the deceased, whilst the other parts were for other affinal relations. The rice was then mixed with the soup and given to the children born to the deceased (*kohun-lengaa*) who "must receive it in their hands, because this was a sign of humility and blessing from the ancestors." While receiving the rice and chicken meat,

the elders offered prayers for them so that they may grow strong, be blessed and protected from all malevolent cosmological forces.

The rituals, which started after the burial, had different phases or stages, including the observance of some taboos from the first phase on. For example, the women living at the deceased's house and other women present at the funeral were forbidden to plait their hair until after forty days. During all these phases, relations of the deceased wore a strip of white thread on their shoulders. "The sons and daughters wore it on both shoulders, but those who wore the white strip of thread on one shoulder were either nephews/nieces or grandchildren." The first phase, called the three days funeral (*jii-sawei*), took place three days after death. Much rice was prepared to feed the mourning guests. In addition, a white hen and some cleaned rice were kept until the last phase of the mourning period. The second stage included the seven days funeral (*jii-wɔflei*) that took place seven days after death, while the last phase, the forty days funeral (*labinaani*), took place on the fortieth day. These rituals marking various stages were important for the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde because "they believed that the spirit had left the body at different intervals: after the third and the seventh day, the "spirit" had actually left the body, and after the fortieth day the flesh had separated from the skeleton and decomposition was well advanced."

The rounded soaked rice flour (*lɛwɛɛ*) which elderly women made for the deceased was also part of the funeral rituals. They soaked some cleaned rice seeds for one or two hours and then pounded the rice in a mortar to form rice flour. Some water was added to make it pasty and moist, which they moulded into small balls. At each stage of the funerary rituals, sacrifices were offered and the rounded soaked rice flour was placed in the room where the corpse was kept prior to the burial. It was believed that "the spirit of the person was present at the death house, and the rounded soaked rice flour was supposed to be for that deceased person." Thus, rice was a life giving substance not only used for nourishment, but also for different ritual purposes including the death ritual.

Funeral rituals for pregnant women took a different form. At the death of a pregnant woman, all the women gathered at the main road

leading to the village. They put the body on a stretcher made of sticks and carried it on their heads, while singing and going around the village once. Having done so, "the corpse was buried not in the normal cemetery but in the bad bush (*ndɔbgɔ nyamui*) very close to the village. Afterwards, they went on with the normal funeral proceedings."

When one's elder sister's husband passed away, all the *jemɔɔmoisia* (see chapt. 2) gave a white cloth, to the parents of the deceased, saying, "this is our husband who has died. We thereby put this white cloth on him, asking your permission to begin the mourning." They never weep publicly while the mourning rituals were still in session. According to one elderly informant, "the reason for this is the *jemɔɔmoisia* must also give courage and strength to both wife-giver and wife-taker Houses to cope with their loss, but always in a joking manner." The *jemɔɔmoisia* mourning rituals continued alongside the usual funeral rituals.

After permission had been granted, the *jemɔɔmoisia* also asked for the *jemɔɔmoisia* mat (*semoi-yaa*), on which they were to sit for the duration of the mourning rituals. "The youngest among them wore one of the clothes worn by the deceased, put on his hat, took his walking stick and his pipe, and sat on the mat placed at the entrance of the death house." It was part of the ritual that the *jemɔɔmoisia* "behaved and talked like the deceased and imitated him in whatever he liked doing during his lifetime." In this way, they were representing the social image of the dead man (*hamoi*). Anybody who came to the death house to sympathise with the bereaved House had to pass by the *jemɔɔmoisia*, and greet them first before starting to mourn. They controlled everything the visitors brought for the House as a token of sympathy, which were mostly fire wood, vegetables, clean rice, cola nuts, household utensils and a few other commodities necessary for the funeral.

Very early on the morning of the seventh day, the *jemɔɔmoisia* "prepared two big basins of rice with a delicious sauce and brought it to the death house." This rice, called the *jemɔɔmoisia* rice (*jemɔɔ-mbei*), was to be eaten only by the siblings of the deceased. Additionally, on the last and most important day they prepared another *jemɔɔmoisia* rice, but this time to be eaten only by all elders present at the death house. Afterwards the elders asked the *jemɔɔmoisia* to show them all the gifts they had

received from relatives and friends who came to the funeral. In a joking manner, they returned the clothes, the hat, the walking stick and any other property belonging to their "deceased husband". However, this should be reciprocated by a token of any household object such as pots, spoons; otherwise, they refused to give back the property.

At the end of the funeral rituals, "the elders of the wife-giver House handed their daughter to the House of her deceased husband who then asked the wife-givers to put her in the plantain leaf (*tigii waa maana-geihun*)." This ritual, which became known as the plantain leaf sacrifice (*manaa gaa jaa*), was a ritual of severance of the relationship connecting the widow to her deceased husband. "Elderly *Sande* women who performed this ritual took the widow to Sagbeeja and washed her clean in the stream". She then put on new clothes and gave her old ones to those who performed the ritual who were called the plantain leaf people (*maana gaablaa*). Afterwards she was to sit on the plantain leaf mat (*hei maana yaama*) at the death house for about fourteen days. By shaving her head and rubbing a special type of fine white clay (*kpanaa*) on it, she was preparing for another ritual cleansing in the stream. This fine clay, known as the *hojei*, was taken from Sagbeeja; it was sometimes made from rice flour mixed with water. On the fourteenth day, those performing the ritual took her to the stream again in order to clean the plantain leaf (*maana gei wa*) by mixing some leaves and plants and putting them in the stream. They then rubbed some of it on the widow's skin three times, before asking her to submerge into the water three times. While sitting on the streamside, the elderly women took a small whip and gave her three strokes, saying "oh! you! Never ask for another person's heart. The heart you once possessed has passed away." Afterwards, they went back to the death house, where she continued to sit on the plantain leaf mat.

When sitting on this mat, the elders of the wife-giver House asked her to take the small stick (*faa wumbu*), meaning to give them the name of another man who was to be her future husband. That man was nobody other than the brother of the deceased, if available. This formal question was necessary even though they knew that there was no other person in question other than the younger brother. The elders of both Houses must first inquire whether he had been giving the widow gifts during the

general period of sitting on the plantain mat. After the man had been asked to come and climb the trunk of the tree, (*wa bi lɛ ngukpei ya*), the brother of the deceased responded saying, "I am climbing the trunk of the tree", meaning "he was putting his feet into his deceased brother's shoes by taking all responsibilities and obligations towards the widow."

The Institution of Poro

Poro and *Sande* were – and still are – the most important socio-religious institutions of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society.[77] *Poro* was conceived by the village community as the means of transferring and embodying the *hei* that came from the ancestors, and as indispensable in accessing this cosmological "power" from *Leeve* through the mediation of the ancestors.

Origins

According to some informant *Poro* may have been "the anglicised form of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde word *poie'y*, meaning 'the soil, the ground, the earth', which can ultimately be applied to *Maa-ndɔ*," signifying a binding relationship to the Earth Deity. There have been conflicting reports from informants about the exact origins of this institution. According to one oral tradition

> an old man had a dream at night, in which an ancestral spirit instructed him to go to a particular spot in the deepest part of the forest, where he was to find particular objects. These objects were sacred and were to be kept in secret, and only those who were initiated into the *Poro* and venerate the *Poro* ancestors were allowed to see it. They were to be hidden in a particular place in the forest, to be a holy shrine forever. One may not disclose the identity of these objects. In order for the old man to receive the objects, he must be courageous. He must pass by four dangerous animals.[78] Only after he was able to pass these animals without fear was he qualified to see and possess the objects. These objects must be preserved at the most sacred

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[77] Some scholars have observed the existence of *Poro* and *Sande* among other societies living along the West Coast of Africa around the 16th century. According to Schröder (1987), *Poro* had developed its classical form in the 16th century. Zetterström (1966) maintains that the Portuguese sailor Fernandez between 1506 and 1510 first mentioned *Poro* and *Sande*. Dapper (1668) renders a description of the *Poro* and *Sande* found among different societies around the coastal areas of cape mount in Liberia as well as in Sierra Leone. See also Schwab & Harley (1947) and Höllmann (1988: 27-30) for more details.

[78] Informants have repeatedly refused to disclose the nature of these animals.

> spot in the deepest forest, which became known as the *kamie* [the sacred grove], and the village community must remain attached to the *Poro* ancestors.

Future generations must develop a special relationship to the soil, on which this sacred shrine was built. This must become a sacred place for offering sacrifices to the *Poro* ancestors and for establishing a link with the *hei* derived from particular cosmological powers. For this reason, the ancestors established a rule that the *Poro* must unify those who have been initiated. The ancestors sought to achieve this by forming a special alliance which was gradually transformed into a covenant demanding loyalty towards the institution and its ancestors, including the spiritual beings associated with it.

When referring to the "organisational unity" of those initiated, most scholars speak of the *Poro* as "*Poro* covenant" (Höllmann 1988: 27). A closer look at this word in a general sense renders a better understanding of *Poro* as a covenant. Citing Max Weber, Nippa (1987: 30) generally describes the word "covenant" as a religiously grounded, but effective political union between autonomous clans. He further explains that other sociological descriptions of "covenant" include the dimensions of "community" and "society" as basic concepts. For him, the genesis of covenant is social in character, while its essence is based on unity. Drawing from this general description, it can be maintained that the social aspect of *Poro* was crucial, since community life became an integral aspect of this institution.

The stress put by its founding ancestors on the social unity of the *Poro* gradually resulted in the *Poro* becoming a strong operational defence alliance against intruders of any kind. In protecting the wider village community and its settlements against possible enemy attacks, the *Poro* alliance invented different secret signs. Particular words, phrases and physical marks were used as signs to identify *Poro* initiates, and it was said that all events that took place in the sacred grove must be kept secret from non-initiates. Secrecy still plays an important part in *Poro*, at least in principle. Informants normally refuse to disclose certain ritual activities. In certain cases, I add information from the relatively good social anthropological literature on the subject.

Initiation rituals

The whole initiation ritual of being separated from the village community, staying in the sacred grove for a period of transition and transformation, and being incorporated into the daily life of the village community again, is what Van Gennep (1909) had called the "rites of passage". The *Poro* initiation rituals were held periodically according to the ages of male adolescents living in the village. After consulting with the ancestors through the soothsayer, the elders decided to organise and perform the initiation rituals. "In Ngiema village, the *Poro* initiation rituals usually took place in the dry season, after harvesting the rice, because there should be enough food for the duration of the rituals."

Preparations

For the actual rituals of the *Poro* called *hei,* ample preparations were to be made. In order to make the initiation rituals into a legitimate session, the *Poro* elders must first consult with the elders of the *Sande* institution. The idiom "they have given the bush" means, "the women have now allowed the men to start preparations for the *Poro* initiation rituals. Such a decision-making process could last up to about six months."

Preparations did not begin until the general decision by the *Poro* elders expressed in the phrase, 'let us proceed now with the initiations rituals of the *Poro'* (a *mu hei waa*) was reached. This meant that a definite time for the initiation was now set, normally about three months in advance. After this time had been fixed, the elders must inform their "big wives who were actually first wives of the ancestral lord and the leaders of the big houses about the decision, so that they could also start their own preparations." They made sure that there was enough food during the entire initiation period.

The elders did the final and most important preparations in the *Poro* sacred grove, where they gathered at dawn to discuss about organising prospective initiation candidates into different groups. The *Poro* elders also consulted with the ancestors, by offering sacrifices to them at the foot the holy shrine (*kamei*), asking for their protection against negative influences for the duration of the initiation rituals. In turn, the ancestors gave *hei* in order to prepare and perform the protective ritual in the entire

Poro forest, usually lasting until evening. Hence, "the presence of the ancestors dispelled all evil spirits, as well as witches that might eventually threaten the safety of every initiate and those involved in their training." Witches especially dreaded all social spaces belonging to the *Poro* sacred grove, because they automatically lost their power in these territories to do evil. The village community also believed that the *Poro* protective rituals were able to block or contain all such negative influences.

After these protective rituals had been performed, on the eve of the initiation rituals one of the *Poro* masks representing its founding ancestors known as the *heiwai* entered and made its appearance in the village. This was followed by a great celebration with dance, music and many songs that lasted all through the night. Shortly before dawn, all non-initiates were requested to stay indoors for a few hours, while preparations were made to welcome the first candidates into the sacred grove. For all the candidates, this event marked the beginning of the period of seclusion from normal social activities. News about the initiation rites quickly spread to other villages, so that those already initiated into the *Poro* were free to enter the sacred grove while the initiations were in session.

The period of seclusion

As part of the initiation rituals, candidates were to be secluded in the *Poro* forest, located about a few hundred metres from the village (photograph 18). Long palm leaves designed by a special group of *Poro* elders marked the entrance. The sacred grove itself was situated a few kilometres away in the forest. There were huts to accommodate the novices, who had their food brought to them from the village. Informants generally refuse to provide information about how *Poro* was organised, claiming that "the spirits of the ancestors are responsible for the organisation". During seclusion, the young novices[79] were instructed in knowledge of the past, of the cosmos and its beings and the social rules of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde life in the village community.

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[79] "The first novice to step on the soil of the sacred grove was called throughout the initiation rituals the mother of the children (*ndole jei*)," which has very little to do with the fact that this particular novice had spiritual endowment from above.

For a successful instruction the *Poro* elders took great care to discover and help develop different talents of each novice in the sacred grove. Of particular importance was the discernment of special spiritual capacities, such as leadership believed to be transferred by the ancestors. It focused on the different relationships with the ancestors, the different annual cults, and the sacrifices offered to the ancestors as well as the Highest Deity. The novices were also taught special forms of singing and dancing for particular occasions in the village after their re-integration.

Additionally different skills were learnt during the time of seclusion. Proficiency in hunting, fishing, techniques of setting traps, and methods of climbing a palm tree and cutting the palm kernels were taught, as well as how to cultivate rice farms. The *Poro* elders attached much importance to the art of raising a family and taking proper care for one's offspring. Instructions in the rules, norms and sanctions of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society were also part of the training. The *Poro* elders taught the novices how to settle disputes, including important decision-making processes in the village at different levels.

The young men were further trained in the arts of traditional warfare, which was important because they must be in the position to defend their community, in case of any attack from intruding enemies. An intensive training demanded difficult exercises, which included organising the novices into various groups and simulating different types of violent acts using hand-made weapons of warfare. "As part of their training, the *Poro* novices sometimes attacked and raided farms and small farming settlements around Ngiema, but the damage caused was minimal." When people in these settlements noticed that the bush people, (*ndɔgbɔblaa*) as the novices were called, were coming, they temporally left the farms or their settlements. "This was a legitimate form of attack because the security of the whole village community depended upon how successful these trainings were." Novices who were particularly brave were given a special training, something like an elite group. These special novices, controlling their own groups, were practicing the art of leading and organising potential warriors by themselves.

All novices had to go through a number of ordeals, not only to teach them how to endure suffering, but also to prepare them to face the hard

side of normal life. This was a prerequisite to being accepted fully as a responsible member of the community. The novice had to prove that he was able to withstand suffering, before given the responsibility to defend his future wife and children from all kinds of danger.

The novices were supposed to get along with one another in the sacred grove, since their entire training was geared towards fostering a good community life. By living together in the sacred grove, they must develop a strong sense of solidarity, and the readiness to help one another in times of difficulty. The word *togbei*, literally "co-initiates", "comrade" became an obligatory form of addressing one another. This obligation extended beyond the period of seclusion to become a life-long duty. As part of the *Poro* covenant, failure to meet the responsibility of mutual help was punishable by the *Poro* elders.

Meanwhile, a whole set of taboos were to be observed by the village community during the entire period of seclusion. Such taboos included the following: "Women were not allowed to wear shoes, neither were they allowed to speak loud. Instead, they should sing, especially when going to their farms and when passing a few kilometres away from [the sacred grove]." The men were prohibited from quarrelling in the village, especially with their neighbours, and were not allowed to wage any kind of war. "Above all, they were to abstain from sexual intercourse, at least [twenty-four hours] prior to entering the sacred grove. Any man entering it would swear an oath before the sacred shrine to confirm his state of abstinence." All these taboos were indicators of the general rule that initiation rituals must preclude all forms of adult male aggression.

It was also necessary that the community reflect on this most important event of the year. In order to remind them of this, a special *Poro* spirit[80] embodied by a particular mask– which non-initiates were not

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[80] Authors like Zetterström (1990) have misunderstood the socio-cosmological identity of this spirit-mask by claiming that its main aim was to frighten women and children. This mask-spirit, according to him, forced women and children through terror into accepting social norms dictated by the men in societies with *Poro* initiation rituals. Zetterström gives a rather mundane interpretation of the purposes of such an event and neglects the religious aspect governing it. This he does by claiming that the leaders of *Poro* heavily depended on supernatural powers of witchcraft and sorcery to threaten weaker members

allowed to see – visited the village three times a day: early in the morning before dawn, in the afternoon and in the evening. "His voice could shake houses and all non-initiates must stay indoors until he returns to the sacred grove." Whereas men from other village communities were allowed to visit the novices and share food, these visitors were screened. To this effect, a special ancestral spirit-mask located near the sacred shrine detected and dispelled unchaste people as well as those with evil intensions like witches from entering the *Poro* sacred grove.

Towards the end of their seclusion in the sacred grove, the *Poro* elders started preparations for the ritual death and rebirth of the novices by offering sacrifices to the ancestors. The death and rebirth was accomplished by certain ritual proceedings, which up to the present day informants refuse to describe. They confirm that social "death is enacted to the initiates" by certain ritual proceedings, but they are bound by oath not to disclose them to non-initiates. Such problems have led to controversies among social anthropologists[81] some of whom speak of the ceremonial death, "through which candidates enter the world of the spirits of the ancestors" (Hall, 1938: 4). Having gone through the ritual death,[82] the novices were yet to be ritually reborn. It was normally followed by a general ritual bathing for all the novices in the Sagbeeja Stream, located just a few yards from the sacred grove. "The novices were now transformed into new human beings with new lives, who knew more about the world of the ancestors and were ready to embrace news forms of life in the village. Each new initiate received a new *Poro* name"

At the end of this ritual, the *Poro* elders would then agree upon a particular day on which the new initiates were to be reintegrated into the village community. After reaching a decision, they must inform the elderly women of the big houses in the village, who made sure that there was enough food for the festivities. About two days before the stipulated time, the village was plunged into a wave of celebrations, and there was

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of the institution and to display their authority and power over the women and children by forcing them to accept community morality.

[81] See Zetterström (1990) and Harley (1950) for various conflicting accounts.

[82] The information I got about this ritual birth and rebirth is very scanty, since the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde keep this as part of their intimate and secret knowledge.

much singing and dancing and a lot of joy in a big feast called the celebration of accomplishment (*gbojo gomie*).

The day, on which the new initiates were to return to the village, the last ritual purification in the stream took place very early that morning. Afterwards each new initiate got new clothes to wear, a further indication of their new life, since "they should abandon all their old behaviour as children, and adopt new and mature behaviour as adults capable of assuming responsibility in the community." Before leaving the sacred grove, each new initiate received a particular sacred object, (Harley 1941: 17; Little 1948: 13; Winterbottom 1803: 135). This object embodied special *hei* relating to the ancestral powers embedded in the shrine of the sacred grove. This was to strengthen their relationship with the ancestors, who guaranteed fidelity to the *Poro* covenant and above all the personal protection from all negative influences. Consequently, "each took an oath of secrecy and loyalty to the traditions of the *Poro* ancestors."

The new initiates proceeded to the village in a procession, covering their heads with a traditional country cloth, mainly made from cotton. "They headed straight for village square, the place (where) the ancestors performed the first protective ritual, known as the *kpakpeihun*, where the village community was waiting to welcome the new initiates of the *hei* (*heijoweisia*)." They were no longer the non-initiate fools (*kpoweisia*). On the contrary, they were now full *Poro* initiates (*sowo-hiinsia*). Since they have learnt about the ancestors and the cultural traditions of the village, they have become full members of the village community. These young men could henceforth get married, have children and were ready to assume responsibility. The village leader addressed the whole community in words alluding to the ancestors and rebirth of the initiates:

> Let us give thanks to all our ancestors, to all of them who have helped us throughout this *hei* [initiation] period. In a loud voice we all say thank you, because you have protected and brought back all your grandsons, whom you have transformed through the *hei* you prepared for them. They have all come back, well fed and in a very good condition of health. Keep watch over us all.

Everybody applauded by saying, "so it is" (*hojooh*). After such an acclamation, every House took its own new initiate to their respective compounds and there was much celebration in the village. Further

instructions included sitting in a specially and beautifully decorated bench, so that the new initiate of the *hei* was able to sit or lie down on it four consecutive days as stipulated by the ritual. "During this time, family members treated him like a newborn child, and many people visited and brought him gifts; his mother or sister fed him as they would feed an infant."

On the fourth day, the elders performed the last ritual of formally welcoming each new initiate into the community. With this ritual, all new initiates were allowed to leave their compounds and walk around in the village.

Relation of *Poro* to *hei*

Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society conceptualised the legitimation of all their ritual actions in terms of *hei*, ultimately coming from "embodied presence" of the Highest Deity in the cosmos, but only mediated by the spirits of the ancestors. The ancestors gave the *Poro* full authority of the power derived from *hei*, by making a covenant with its elders in the sacred forest. Thus constructing a chain of relationships that could be traced back to the origin of cosmological order must be constantly at work. Making such a link with its origin became a necessary condition for the efficacy of the power inherent in the embodied presence of *Leeve*. *Hei* was often used by the village community as medicinal herbs obtained from particular roots and leaves or plants as well as other cosmological entities, like water from streams and rivers, rainwater, the sun and the soil.

A thorough comprehension of the relationships between living beings and the ancestors, between the cosmos and the social presupposes an understanding of *Poro* as a religious and social institution. Such relationships have a social relevance for the village. The society maintained and reproduced itself by means of ritual aggregation of successive generations of people to the village community through the initiation rituals. *Hei* protected and aided this ritual effort of bringing about the aggregation of the individual to the group of those already initiated. By means of initiation, social adulthood was included into the youth, who now shared a socio-cosmological relationship with all those initiated both living and dead.

The *hei* of ancestral spirits provided the protection and maintenance of the village community, social coercion and the regulation of individual conduct through moral precepts. In this respect, special ancestral spirits associated with the *Poro* covenant penetrated into a wide area of social life – not restricted to local groups – because *Poro* was for the common good of the entire Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. This applied also to other non-Kɔɔ-Mɛnde communities who localised the *hei* derived through mediation by their own founding ancestral spirits of the *Poro* covenant, thus establishing a relationship to this common origin too. In this way, the world of the living came together in the *Poro* covenant to provide the strength of *hei* to the various local groups. It also provided communication between the cosmological and social world and thereby conceived as linking the various aspects of day-to-day life.[83] Hence, the *Poro*, in a wider sense, dispensed and administered ritual authority, having both a religious and a social dimension through the relationship of *hei*. In *Poro*, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde socio-cosmic order became institutionalized in the true sense of the word, because it provided access to the most powerful spiritual agencies administering *hei*.[84] Without *Poro*, the cosmological power and authority of *hei* could not be assessed. And since these *Poro* ancestral spirits were once *Poro* initiates themselves who transferred the responsibility of organising the institution to living elders of *Poro*, successive performance of the *Poro* ritual ensured the reproduction of this socio-cosmic order. Some scholars maintain that the Kpaa-Mɛnde do not recognise *Poro* as the embodiment of *hei*, but rather *Wunde* as their legitimate source of power (cf. Gittins, 1987). *Wunde* like the *Poro* was the main means of socialising young people and of reproducing their proper order.

There was a general belief that the more important a particular ancestor was in relation to the founding and history of *Poro*, the more powerful his spirit was, in guiding and protecting *Poro* initiates during periods of seclusion, since his spirit was to live on in order to animate and

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[83] See Fulton (1972) for more comparative analysis of this logic of relationship and communication.

[84] See Gittins (1987: 147) on similar ideas about the *hei*.

inspire the living, as particularly related to *Poro*. Reinhardt (1973: 6) also underlines the authority of *Poro* in reference to its ultimate relationship with the ancestors.[85]

The preceding analysis of the *Poro* would be enriched by an examination of the *Sande*, the main channel of formally and ritually socialising young Kɔɔ-Mɛnde girls. Even though I was given the privilege as a local researcher to visit the *Sande* house in Ngiema and to talk with its elders, my knowledge of this institution remain scarce. I noticed during the interviews that these elders were not at ease to answer certain questions. Therefore, I decided not to pursue such a line of research that could embarrass the elderly women. However, in spite of this difficulty, I was able to identify certain salient points about the *Sande*, when reviewing and analysing my own research material, but also in reviewing some of the vast and relatively good anthropological literature on its rituals.

Like the *Poro*, the *Sande* was a socio-religious institution that had the aspect of covenant. An even more important aspect is that both covenants were *pari passu* in the sense that they complemented each other. The initiations that led to the aggregation of the young into the village community were based on the principle of rotation that corresponded to the idea of ritual cycle I have already described. Even in the process of important decision-making that affected the life of their communities, both institutions must give their approval in order to reach a decision about war or peace, for example (cf. Harley 1941: 31-32). Moreover, the *Sande* leader must support her male counterpart in

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[85] Some scholars like Little (1967: 246- 247; 1954: 114), and Reinhardt (1973) have rendered a seemingly confused assessment of the *Poro* ancestral spirits, by arguing that in addition to the ancestral spirits, there are also non-ancestral *Poro* spirits, which they identified as secular masks, and confused different types of masks relating to *Poro*. There is also a tendency by Gittins (1987: 151) to divide *Poro* spirits into sacred and secular. This may be a new development in the history of the *Poro* in general, but was certainly different in traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, since the masks spirits served as the embodiment of ancestral spirits.
Reinhardt (1973: 11-12) further confuses the masks of entertainment with those of higher ranking associated with *Poro* and calls the *Falui*, *Jobai*, *Yavie*, etc. spirits. These are *not* spirits, but dancing masks used for entertaining people at some feast days, and have little to do with masks associated with *Poro*, as far as my own data can prove.

important decision-making or the execution of important duties of the *Poro* (cf. *op. cit:* 1941: 12; 1950: 14-15; Little 1948: 6; 1965; 1966: 360-361; Baumann 1955).[86] It is not surprising, therefore, that special women who had past the age of giving birth and were considered to have extraordinary spiritual abilities could be initiated into the *Poro*.[87]

Certainly, the ostensive realisation of religious representations of pre-modern socio-cosmic order was materially re-presented in the form of masks. The *Sande* functionaries were allowed to represent particular ritual acts in the form of masks sometimes meant to entertain the public during celebrations (cf. Bledsoe 1980: 143; Philips 1978). The various *Poro* masks also represent the spirits[88] of the ancestors.

The social and political influence of *Poro*

I have identified *Poro* as the most important socio-religious institution of pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, by virtue of its religious and social character. The common classical anthropological description is that of a "Secret Society". By stressing the secret aspect of *Poro*, some scholars have hardly considered its religious dimension (cf. Butt-Thompson [1929]2003; Cole 1866; Frobenius 1898; Fyfe 1964; Schurtz 1902; Zetterström 1990). However, Gittins (1987) sees the use of this term in relation to social groupings among the Kpaa-Mɛnde much more critically, and warns against applying such a term to religious and social institutions among the Mɛnde in general.

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[86] But Büttikofer (1890: 303) does not agree with these authors in maintaining that *Poro* and *Sande* are far from each other and do not have any relationship with each other. Little (1965; 1966: 356) seems to support this idea, and thereby contradicting his own earlier statement.

[87] See MacCormack (1979) and Little (1967: 245) on the aspect of women initiation, which has been described as ritual transvestism.

[88] Writing on the Kpelle in Liberia Fulton (1972: 1226) distinguished such spirits into "five categories, viz, (1) ancestral spirits, (2) genii, (3) miscellaneous bush and water spirits, (4) spirits of the associations, and (5) specific *Poro* spirits." Such a classification would support my argument that the understanding of local spirits is also locally conditioned, generating the question, in this respect, what actually are miscellaneous spirits for Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. Among the spirits found in this category, the following could also be found among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde: category 1, 2 and 5 though they may have different concepts.

> The term 'Secret Society' is of such wide currency in West Africa that it is difficult to abandon it; yet the longer it continues in circulation, the more it loses its value. Though I know of no better name – unless we simply drop the word 'secret' – I do find it necessary to distinguish among the congeries of social groupings to which the term 'Secret Society' has been uncritically applied [...]. The term 'Secret Society' itself is emotive and redolent of many things for different people. But the longer one lives among the people famous for their 'Secret Societies', the more one is faced with a simple choice: either you believe that there is an underlying, real and significant secret, or you do not. The very term predisposes one towards the former option, but the almost casual way in which people proceed about their business, either in the town or in the direction of 'bush' especially reserved for meetings, makes one severely sceptical about the existence of any secret, as opposed to a body of specialized, perhaps even esoteric knowledge (Gittins, 1987: 137).

Poro as a socio-religious institution was not a secret in the village community. On the contrary, its omnipresence emanating from the "all-pervading presence of *Leeve Njeini*" (*hei*) mediated by the ancestors was an indispensable instrument of social control and a necessity for social aggregation and cohesion. For this reason, its social structure was a form of social differentiation among members of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. *Poro* was divided into three main social strata, viz, the commoners, the political dignitaries and the healing and enchantment dignitaries.[89]

The *Poro* elders had the last word in any decision-making process concerning political affairs. In this way, *Poro* also united the community, especially when it came to problems concerning the execution of political and social decisions. Many political decisions affecting the social lives of different communities became an act of judgement taken by *Poro* elders and dignitaries in the sacred grove, after due consultation with all the actors involved. Besides, in most important cases they also included the *Sande* elders and dignitaries in political decision-making process, such as the decision to go to war. In such a case, all *Poro* elders gathered before the ancestral shrine in the sacred grove, and went through a process of deliberation, asking the ancestors for their aid. After reaching a unanimous decision, they took an oath of solidarity and unity of action in accordance with the collective decision they had taken. "Such actions

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[89] See Harris (1865-1866: 32) on the structure and inner dynamics of this hierarchy. His descriptions carry credible weight since, though a British merchant, he was also initiated into the *Poro*.

made the *Poro* a powerful social instrument of protection for the village community in times of crisis." The authority of political leaders was only legitimate only if they had the support of the *Poro* (cf. Fulton 1972: 1227-1229, 1230; Jones 1983b: 39-41; Little 1948: 4-5). Without this legitimacy, there was no political authority, since the latter based on the former guaranteed a certain degree of continuity (cf. Mendelson, 1974: 31).

Poro – by virtue of its authority and power – became the last resort in instances of jurisdiction concerning the day-to-day affairs of community life. Hence, in the dispensation of justice, *Poro* became legislative, judicative and executive instances, which enabled it to make judgements over offences of all kinds and to punish offenders (cf. Höllmann 1988). In this way, the institution was able to give moral sanctions and prevent acts of deviation from traditional values.[90] It was also common in the exercise of justice for people who felt threatened or unjustly treated by their village elders to appeal to the *Poro* (Jones 1983b: 187; Dapper 1670: 415). The *Sande* also exercised justice in the sense that it had the authority to punish, especially ritual misconducts. If it disagreed with a particular decision of the *Poro*, then the elders took their complaints to a special gathering representing the two institutions. All parties involved conducted negotiations, until the elders were able to persuade the *Sande* institution to accept the decisions. "There were

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[90] For more details on the role of the *Poro* covenant in local jurisprudence in general see the following:
Matthews (1788: 83) puts more emphasis on "most singular law."
Büttikofer (1890: Vol. II, 305)
Dapper (1670: 415-417).
Fahey (1971).
Fulton (1972: 1228-1229).
Harley (1950: 11, 14, 16-17, 19-22).
Jones (1983b: 19, 182-183).
Newton (1788: 107).
Owen (1746: 31, 75).
Winterbottom (1803: 136).
Other authors who describe the instances of traditional justice dispensations by the *Poro* in other societies like the Mano for example are the following: Harley (1950: 16); Zwernemann (1966: 293-319).

instances in the history of Ngiema, where the *Sande* became powerful, in punishing ritual misconducts but only with *Poro* backing."[91]

Poro and *Sande* were also responsible for the necessary stability and peace among the various communities in regions under their jurisdiction, as well as for the continuity of cultural practices handed down by the ancestors (cf. Höllmann, 1988). Different societies that had *Poro* as an institution maintained contact among one another, even though such jurisdictions were spatially not well defined in pre-modern times. In this way, *Poro* assumed a special diplomatic authority and influence, acting as a peacekeeping channel and providing for the necessary stability and peace. This was desirable because, in times of dissension and war among different societies who had *Poro* as an institution, the *Poro* elders were able to settle misunderstandings and disputes, by acting as intermediaries in solving inter-group conflicts (cf. Little 1965, 1966: 362-365; Fulton 1972: 1229-1230). *Poro* and *Sande* socio-religious institutions prohibited all forms of hostilities between the different groups while initiation rites were in session. (cf. Dapper 1670: 413; Harley 1941: 6, 31; 1950: 12; Jones 1983b: 40; Matthews 1788: 84) Therefore, no group was allowed to start an attack on another group without the explicit agreement of *Poro* and *Sande* elders. Harley (1941), Schröder (1987), Schwab & Harley (1947) as well as Zetterström (1990; 1980) have rightly pointed out that the *Poro* also had an inter-ethnic dimension in many of its rituals. It fostered good relationships between the different societies that practiced *Poro* initiation as rituals of aggregation.[92] Bellman (1980) has also pointed out that even though there was a great deal of common features in the *Poro*, nonetheless there were also considerable local differences.

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[91]   For comparative analyses, see other instances cited by MacCormack (1979: 36).
[92]   There have been indications that *Poro*, in the course of its history to the present day, had accepted Europeans as initiates, especially in Sierra Leone. On the principle of inter-ethnicity in the *Poro* see Fyfe (1964), Harris (1865) and Höllmann (1988).

Rice farming

Rice farming had social and religious dimensions, which the village community expressed in many rituals. By linking weather conditions and months of the year to the respective activities on the farm, the Ngiema people gave these activities their proper social and religious meanings, conceived from the idea that agricultural and cosmological cycles were part of the same order (table 2).

Relating months of the year to rice farming

Clearing the forests and bushes for rice farming normally started around the end of December (*podoe*).[93] It lasted until February (*vui*), after which the cleared plots were left to dry for burning. This usually took place in March (*nyawoi*). Sowing and ploughing the fields after burning were done in April (*buloui*), May (*golei*) and June (*sojoe*) or even July. The early harvesting took place in August (*dawii*), but the upland rice fields were normally harvested around the end of November (*lugbujai*).

At the beginning of the dry season when the harvesting of the rice plants was about to begin, the water in the swamps began to evaporate. By then the swamp waters and those water from other small streams that people usually crossed when going to their farms, no longer reached their knees, but rather only the feet, leaving the footprints of anybody walking in the swamp or through the evaporating streams. This signalled that it was the month of *podoe* (*pui* means "print", "sign", impression and *ndui* "that which is left behind"). It was also believed to be the foot of a dead person (*hamui gɔwei*), that is, an unknown person. *Bi gɔwei ye pui a lolɔhun*, meaning "your footprint will remain in it". Sometimes people who had to clear a difficult forest area for farming already began doing this in *podoe*.

Harvesting of the rice fields sometimes continued until the beginning of January (*peegbaa*). Afterwards there was little work to do on the farm, so that most people preferred to stay in the village. By then the

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[93] According to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde logic of division and classification, December was the beginning of the lunar year.

local leaders started counting the number of huts inhabited by the members of each house so that they could know the number of people living in village under their jurisdiction. A House paid its yearly dues to its leader and the elder responsible for the entire region, by mainly giving part of the harvested vegetables and rice to the village leader. To estimate these yearly dues, it was necessary to know the number of huts in all the farming settlements and villages. *Pɛɛ* from (*pɛlei*) means hut or house, and *kpawa* means to count. Hence the name of *Peegbaa* for this month. Clearing the forests for upland farming started towards the end of this month. In addition, the farmers cleared fields for planting products like groundnuts and swamps for planting other vegetables during this time. Normally initiation rituals into the *Poro* or *Sande* started in *peegbaa*, but sometimes even earlier in *podoe*.

This first preparation and clearing activities continued into February (*vui*). By then the big trees in the forest were cut down. This was not only the most tedious part of land clearing but also dangerous, because felling trees sometimes fell on people who were not quick enough to escape. The sound of trees falling on the ground was called *wu*. (*A mu guwei ji wuga-wu,* a *mu pegaa wu,* "let us cut this big tree in such a way that it falls with a mighty fall on the leaves or the ground. Let us put it on the ground").

The month of March (*nyawoi*) brought a scourging heat for only a few hours at a time. *Nyawoi-volo mia; ii wei lɛmbi va* ("it is a March sun, it cannot stay long, but only for a short time"). This hot burning sun, which brought strong winds, favoured the drying process of the fields already cleared. Towards the end of March, these fields were dry enough for burning. The breeze blowing when burning the cleared fields sounds like *nyaa nyaa woi woii*. Hence the name of this month *nyawoi*.

The month of April is called *buloui* after the palatable red round fruits ripening in the forests and bushes around the farms that have been burnt. This month also indicated that the time was right to start planting the *batti* rice, which was preferred, because of its fast growth. People usually harvested it a few months earlier; it was the first plant to produce "the new rice". The *batti* was normally cultivated at the foot of the main farm very close to a river or stream near which the main rice farm was cultivated. For this reason, the *buloui* was sometimes called the *batti*

month (*batti yawui*). The *buloui* month also indicated the time for processing the red palm oil. Therefore, whenever the *buloui* fruits became ripe, people knew that the time for palm oil processing was near. Abundant growth of *buloui* fruits indicated an increase in the number of palm kernels, which resulted in the production of plenty of red palm oil.

May (*golei*) was the time for removing and uprooting big roots and tree trunks left in the fields after the burning process. This was done to prepare the soil for sowing and ploughing in the fields. The expression "let us go and put dust on the tree trunk" (*a mu gukpei gole*), meant ploughing the fields. The dust that came from the fields during the ploughing covered one's feet and knee so that this activity on the farm was called makes the knees dirty, full of dust (*a bi maa gole lɔ*). Therefore, this month was called *gole-yawu lɔ, a nu maa gole lɔ*, "a *golei* month, which makes one's feet white, implying white with dust." It signalled to proceed to the next step in rice farming. After burning the fields, people remained vigilant to see another sign from the Sky Deity. As soon as the very small edible mushrooms called *golei* began to grow on the sticks burnt in the fields, people knew that time for ploughing was near. They said, "This is the month of the *golei* mushrooms" (*golei*-la). By now preparations for ploughing were in full swing, extending into the following month.

After harvesting the mushrooms, other farming activities followed. The rains increased after the first light rains marking the proper beginning of the rainy season. S*ojoe* was the name given to the different sounds, which rains made at intervals. These sounds indicated that the month of the rainy sounds (*sojoe*) has begun.

After enough rains from Sky Deity had dropped on Earth Deity, the first rice plants shot up and after a few weeks, they had developed into small rice plants almost reaching up to the knee. This condition favoured the weeding activities to start in the wet month (*nanoi*). The elders of the rituals that cured mental illness (*njayei*) closed all shrines and suspended their work of healing the mentally sick until the following month. This was partly because the heavy rains possibly leading to dangerous flooding of the streams and rivers around Ngiema. Only then could people begin to plough the fields. Because of this weather condition, most people got

constant headaches and fever. "He or she has got the July sickness" (*nanoi mia gu hoi*).

With the month of being closed (*dawii*), the month of August, heavy rains were more frequent, which caused people to abandon their activities on the farms. Most people set traps around their farms in order to prevent animals from eating the rice plants. There was some amount of flooding, but not a threat to the village community. Farmers who ploughed their fields by then were sure of having a very slow growth of the rice plants. Owing to the continuous rain, everything in and around the farms including the rice sheds (*kpuwui*) was closed up. People said that *davii lɔmu hun*, meaning "we are in *davii*, in the month of *davii* having closed up everything, even our sheds, to prevent the water from destroying them." Now the *batti* rice was ready for harvesting.

The month of rule (*saa*) brought little rain during the day, and heavy thunder and lightning during the night. This was responsible for the slow drying of the harvested rice put on platforms. The month of rule was dangerous, because it caused the rivers and streams to overflow their banks, destroying or blocking footpaths and bridges mainly resulting from previous rains. Consequently, many settlements and farms became inaccessible. For fear of possible accidents, the elders passed a rule (*sawei*), prohibiting people to cross bridges connecting the villages with the farms, and from swimming in the streams and the rivers. *Mahangaa ti sawei /saa laa njeisia ma* ("The rulers have put a law on the waters") *Saa* is from *sawei*, which means law or rule. The month of rule was the month "when laws were passed on the waters, when it was forbidden to go to the farms and to climb palm trees." Towards the end of September, after the situation had become more relaxed, people still harvested some of the *bati* rice.

After the heavy rains from the past two months had passed, people resumed their daily activities in the following month for the small rains (October). Drops from the small rains normally remained on the leaves and little plants in the bush as well as on the rice plants. Hence this was known as the month of water on the leaves (*galoi*). This was also a time to keep animals and birds from destroying the rice plants.

By now, the weather had changed: it was getting cooler and the village community started preparations for the harmattan winds[94] that were about to begin in November. The dew (*lugbuii*) in the morning gave this month its name of the month of dew (*lugbuiyawui or lugbu-yei*), from the words *lugbuii* (clouds, dew) and *gawui* (month). Farmers then started to prepare for harvesting the rice.

The lunar months thus were linked to annually recurring activities on the farm and to the cosmological entities involved. These activities and the corresponding division of the different months of the year reflected not a rigid numerical order, but a particular relationship connecting time and social activities to the cosmological order at large. This becomes evident from the following analysis of the rituals accompanying these activities.

Social and ritual aspects of rice farming

Rather than an individual affair, rice farming was a community-oriented activity, giving it a high ritualistic character; hence, the Houses cultivated rice farms and not individuals. There were two types of such a communal rice farming, namely the big rice farm of the House (*mawɛɛ gbaawai*) and the big rice farm for the leader of the village and the entire region (*ndemɔɔwai gbaawai*). In the first case, the head of the House and his first wife, planned and decided on the exact area of the farming before informing other members.

In the second case, communal rice farming involved the entire village and its environs under the jurisdiction of a warrior-leader. This kind of service must be understood in terms of a social exchange. The epical ancestor, "*maada* Gan, for example, gave the Ngiema people his protection; they cultivated the community rice farm as a sign of their gratitude." The products from such farms were mostly community property; they did not exclusively belong to the leader. Part of it also covered the tributes to the highest authority of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, exerting his jurisdiction over a large area in the region of the Gola forest. Another

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[94]   Harmattan is a dry dusty wind from the Sahara that blows toward the western coast of Africa during the continental winter.

portion of the products was kept for distribution, in case of famine. For this reason, the leader built sheds for storing mainly rice sheaves for emergency cases. Consequently, if a particular House were in dire need, then he assisted the House. To appreciate the dynamics of the social and religious aspects of such farming activities, it is important to take a closer look at the ritual processes involved in both types of rice farming.

The first ritual to be performed was that of the dropping of the leaf (*tufei gula*). The elders went to a spot they had chosen in the forest bush and cleared a small portion of that land. They then cut a branch of leaves from one of the trees, put it on a stick and placed it half way in a hole they had previously dug. This served as a sign to all passers-by not to use that piece of land again. After pouring a libation of palm wine on the spot for the ancestors who were the original owners of the land, the elders put some cleaned rice in a circle on the spot where the libation had been poured. In this way, the ancestors were to render this particular plot fertile. It was said that by then the people have put the leaves on the bush (*nunga ti tufei gulaa ndɔgbɔi ma*).

Before clearing the forests for farming, a purification of the bush was necessary. Any contamination resulting from people having (had) sexual intercourse in the bush would result in crop failure. Such purification rituals performed by the *humoi* elders was to rid the land of all disorder that may have resulted from the breaking of such pronounced taboos. This ritual consisted in washing the bush (*ndɔgbɔi waa*), in order to restore its correct relationship with the cosmological world (cf. Little, 1967: 250-251). In case the bush had been contaminated by sexual intercourse, the *humoi* elders should purify it. This ritual was a community affair meant to help its members in examining the way the taboo had been broken. Such an act performed by two individuals offended the well-being of the entire community.

The *humoi* elders prepared some leaves and particular herbs, partly from the sacred grove and mixed them with some water from Sagbeeja. They then walked from the village to all the different farming settlements in the surrounding area, and then to each rice farming plot of that year. "On their way, they sprinkled the leaves into the bush and the liquid on the footpaths while saying forgive/forget (*fofoi*, *fofoi*, *fofoi*)." In this

manner, "the village was asking *Maa-ndɔ* [Earth Deity] not to punish the community for any transgression and lack of respect." By washing the bush, the relations between the community and the cosmos represented by the Earth Deity were restored. Again the ritual indicates that these relations even if damaged by individual acts were the responsibility of the entire community. The atonement was always a community affair, because not individuals, but the village as a whole suffered the distortion in relation to the cosmos.

Another component of this ritual was the goat or more often cow horn, which the *humoi* elders blew to remind everyone that they were in that area for people to receive them at their various farmhouses. "The sound of this horn embodied the power of the ancestors, which dispelled all evil spirits from the forests in the entire neighbourhood." At the sound of the *humoi* horn, people from different farming sites went out to meet the *humoi* elders, and gave them a big welcome by preparing a meal of rice with cassava leaves sauce. Each House gave them a bundle of rice sheaves as food given to workers on the farm (*Kɔndei*). This must always be a bundle of rice sheaves; no other objects were allowed, because rice itself represented life. At the end of the *humoi* ritual, there was normally a final invocation and a common offering to the ancestors. Thereafter, the *humoi* released the bush/forest (*ndɔgbɔi vaii*), hence making them available for farming since the *humoi* elders had cleansed the bush (*humoblaa ti ndɔgbɔi waa*). This ritual was normally done between December and February, pending upon whether the initiation rites of *Poro* and *Sande* were in session. In this way, they helped reinstate the right order of relationships.

The third step entailed clearing the forest or bush area chosen for farming which was also a social activity. Clearing the forest or bush was heavy work using cutlasses and other tools. It was "a time for meeting other people (friends and relatives living far away) and for singing, cracking jokes and teasing one another during the work." The men must do the clearing of the forest or bush, divided into portions among those who had lived in the same farming settlement before. As already described in chapter 2 this was an essential component of the various sections, which gradually developed in Ngiema. The felling of big trees

(*poei*) was a dangerous task, and therefore done only by specialised people. Before doing this, the community offered sacrifices to the ancestors, asking them to protect those involved in it. After such a hazardous farming activity, "the workers received rice with some palatable cassava or potato leaves prepared for them by the women as reward for their service."

The piece of land that had been brushed for farming (*ndoikei*) was left to dry for few weeks, in order to make it ready for the fourth process, burning the cleared forest. This was the most dangerous of all activities, since fire related accidents occasionally happened. Specially trained people who knew how to put out fires when they got out of control also did the burning of the farm (*kpaa mɔ*). Each time a House performed this task, the whole village community participated. Everybody gathered at the farm on that day, pouring libations for the ancestors and asking them to protect those involved in the burning. While burning was going on, the onlookers were singing in encouragement. This activity was the most social of all in the process of rice farming, since "it involved the whole village, and different entertaining and dancing masks came to the scene to grace the occasion." The successful completion of the burning process was marked by offering another sacrifice to the ancestors, not only in giving thanks, but also in asking them to procure a rich harvest. After the burning, the farmers went on "clearing the burnt field of big sticks and cutting smaller ones into even smaller pieces as well as sowing seeds, such as benniseed and okra, for planting in the fields at a later stage." While waiting for the first rains, the women fished in the streams and rivers while the men hunted game.

The rains turned the plot into a cleared field easy for ploughing (*mɔɔtii*) which marked the fifth stage in the process of rice farming. Sowing and ploughing were simultaneous activities, and highly social in character, since they "gave the people a feeling of togetherness not only manifested in the many songs each group sang while doing their various portions of labour, but also in supporting the less strong." Those who finished their own portion before others helped the ones who were still working at theirs, even if sometimes it meant making jokes about the "lazy ones". For example, "a wife-taker helping his wife-giver was quite a

spectacle, because they sung a special song and made jokes about the lazy wife-giver."

There was a change in the division of labour based on gender in the next stage of rice farming. The men dominated the various farming activities described thus far because these involved very heavy and even dangerous labour at times. It was now time for them to take a backseat, even though they were still involved in other activities around the farm. Women had been contributing in different ways to the general success of these activities, such as cooking and organising the household chores. At this stage, the sticks and leaves were removed from the ploughed fields (*nguii gbɛɛkpɛɛ*) so that the rice seeds would grow. The women undertook this task. They also did the weeding (*ngui gbuia*), normally some weeks later, and when the rice plants were in their first stages of growth.

If the ancestors were satisfied with all rituals performed prior and during different working activities on the farm in acknowledgment of the relationship connecting the living to them, then the ploughmen found a carved stone buried in the middle of the rice fields. "These pieces of fined carving in a human form, normally of an old man or sometimes an old couple were known as the *nomoli*. They represented gifts from the ancestors of those Houses making the rice farm", or from one of the great ancestors of Ngiema village. The *nomoli* was placed near the farmhouse (*kpuei*). The original *nomoli* was then placed in the middle of the rice plants a few yards to the farmhouse. People treated it with much reverence by feeding it. After cooking, they took some ordinary rice and mixed it with some of the sauce forming small balls out of it. They then placed these balls of rice before the *nomoli*, saying, "This is your own share of the rice, which we harvested last year by the help of the ancestors. Therefore, we are asking you to help bring more rice to this farm." If, on the other hand, no *nomoli* was found, the farmers made a replica of it out of leaves from plants in the nearby forest and placed it at the entrance of the farmhouse. A whip was placed near it and someone occasionally whipped it, giving it three strokes at a time, and repeatedly saying: *wa a mbei kpaa jihun*; *waa mbei Kpaa jihun*; *wa a mbei Kpaa jihun*. This means, "you have to bring more rice to this farm, you have to bring more rice to this farm; you have to bring more rice to this farm."

The *nomoli* commands the provision of rice in the sense that it shows the relationship between ancestors and the rice. It also reveals the dual relationship between rice, which is perishable and the stone, which is imperishable; between the owners, who are eternal, since they are now ancestors, and the owned, who are contingent human persons. Ideally the owner had a human shape, but appears as a spirit in form of a stone known as *nomoli*, revealing a contrast between material shape and spiritual appearance of ancestors. The material shape of humans in the earth resembles that of a corpse being buried, which presents a link between the life cycle of rice and humans. If an ancestor was found in the fields not in spiritual form, but in a physical human shape that governs the cycle of rice farming, then there was going to be more rice harvested. The relationship between the ancestor in material and spiritual forms is hierarchical, because these two forms are a gift from the ancestors. The gift in material form relates only to the rice fields which govern the cycle of rice cultivation, while the ancestors in spiritual form are a gift for the whole village.

Meanwhile the farmers took all necessary measures to protect the rice plants against invading animals, such as squirrels. In order to protect the young rice plants from being eaten by these animals, the men made fences round the farms, setting traps alongside them. Yet some of the animals were so recalcitrant that they evaded these traps cleverly made by humans to get into the rice fields. If this persisted, the village community was quick to find out through the soothsayer who was really behind such stubborn actions. It could not have been the ancestors who were angry with the population, because all required rituals had been performed and the bush had been purified. The soothsayer revealed that such animals were bad spirits taking the form of animals, in order to bring famine to the population. In such a case, they resorted to the use of *hei*, which possessed cosmological powers. The oldest form of this type of *hei* was the one represented by the blacksmith stone (*gakpa-gɔtii*) found in the smithy, used for sharpening cutlasses and other tools. This stone had the powers of *hei*, because, the smithy as indicated, belonged to the territory of the *Poro* sacred grove, which dispelled witches, evil spirits and other negative influences.

This special *hei* ritual was performed at a fixed time set by the elders, normally on a day when nobody was allowed to work on the farms. It included taking the blacksmith stone and bringing it to the spot where the mysterious animals had been eating the rice, in order to carry out the ceremony of the curse (*sondui*). After everybody had gathered, the elder leading the ritual put his right hand on the blacksmith stone, while reciting the following spell addressed at the ancestors:

> Oh! you stone, we have brought you here to represent the power of *Leeve* [Sky Deity] and his wife *Maa-ndɔ* [Earth Deity] who, by the mediation of our ancestors, always protects us from evil and provide us with the necessary food in the form of rice, which makes us live and reproduce. Now these animals want to bring calamity and famine to the whole of Ngiema village. We have struggled and worked hard all the time on this farm without a single help from them, now they are coming to destroy our existence by eating the rice plants, which give us life. We are asking you to take revenge on these animals, and let justice be done.

Such rituals of the curse were quickly effective, "because the next day farmers actually found some dead animals near the place where the stone had been put." For this reason, this stone became known as deer killer (*dopa waa*).

As soon as the rice began to carry seeds, birds called *mbakui* began eating them. This was another problem, but not as serious as compared to "the witch animals", since the community "did not attribute these birds to evil spirits or witches, but to normal birds." In this case, they undertook all human strategies necessary to stop the birds from eating the rice seeds. One of these strategies was to shy the birds away by erecting different metals made of old saucepans and cups. Those driving the birds away just shook these pans, and the noise easily frightened them away. People also constructed scarecrows in the effigy of an old man and his wife working on the farm and put them on platforms. They then put one at the entrance of the farm, the other in the middle, while another was placed near the farmhouse. Whenever these birds saw them, they took them to be farmers working on the farm, in which case the birds would fly away. Mainly children who were old enough to work, and sometimes women were responsible for this type of work.

Harvesting was primarily done in groups of women, divided according to the various Houses. When the rice was ripe (*mbei biya*), people were about to reap the harvest of their labour. This gave them great joy. It was usual for a particular House to invite affinally related Houses living in other farming settlements. The work of harvesting the rice (*mbaleelei*) was a rather informal activity. "They did not divide the work into portions; rather people worked along with friends and persons they liked." The atmosphere was relaxed; the harvesters sung songs of satisfaction and happiness. At the end of each day, each woman received a big sheaf of rice as their food for work, which was for their respective households. These had sheds, in which the harvested rice was stored for long periods, even years.

Palm oil and palm tree

The most important complimentary activity to rice farming was the production of the red palm Mɛnde oil (Mɛnde *wuloi*). This oil had an important social and cultural meaning. Its production usually started immediately after harvesting the new rice. The palm tree (*tɔkpoi*), which still produces palm kernels for oil production, has an important social meaning. Since they grew everywhere, one believed that the ancestors had planted palm trees. Living members of the village community planted another type known as the *mɔɔsangei* whose oil was of an inferior value, because the ancestors had not planted its palm tree.[95]

To avoid future conflicts relating to palm trees, "the ancestors instructed their progeny to use them as a community property." In Ngiema, each House was free to use the palm trees for oil production, and for other purposes such as the traditional black soap and the black oil (*ndaa wuloi*). The latter is actually "palm kernel oil" which can be extracted in two ways, the process accounting for whether the oil is 'black' (actually 'dark') or 'white (which is actually 'light'). Both the black oil and the black soap were used for ritual purposes. Those

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[95] The palm tree serves as a political symbol for the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP). Over ninety-five percent of SLPP members belong to one of the three Mɛnde-speaking groups.

responsible for performing rituals of purification used the black soap to cleanse people who had been guilty of breaking particular taboos in the Sagbeeja stream. The soap was also used as medicine against skin diseases of any kind, while the black oil was used to dispel any kind of "bad food one might have eaten." Palm oil production was simple and less tedious than rice farming, and above all sometimes very amusing. After cutting the kernels from the palm trees, people took them to the processing spot, called the *yindeilaa*. It was a pit usually near the river, sometimes covered by stones. After cooking the palm kernels in big drums, they were placed in the pit until the next day when the people began the actual processing.

Social importance of rice and palm oil

We can only understand the cultural importance of rice and palm oil within Kɔɔ-Mɛnde system of socio-cosmic representations in their relation to the reproduction of the society itself. Rice was not a mere foodstuff; rather it represented a gift given by Sky Deity in relation with the Earth Deity, mediated by the ancestors. It was part of exchange between the domains of the cosmos and that of the social.

A gift of rice mediated the life of each person, and terminated it at death. "From the very beginning, we have always received rice from our ancestors through the process of breast-feeding." A newborn child, in its early hours of infancy was given the great rice (*mba wai*), that is, the mother's milk given through breast-feeding and the lukewarm water given to the infant three times a day: one in the morning, another in the afternoon and a third in the evening. This lasted for several weeks. It was called the great rice because one conceived it to be the very first step that every person made toward eating rice. Hence, for the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde "the life of a person began and ended with rice, because rice itself is life". When the infant refused the great rice after some weeks, it was given another type of rice, known as the rice water (*mba nyei*). "It is a rice pap cooked and moulded by the mother. As the infant grows, one fed it with the water from cooked palm kernels pressed together for some weeks." This was thought to be a healthy complementary food for infants, because rice and palm oil were valued not only for their nutritional essence, but also

because of their ritual importance. "The child occasionally received a bit of cooked rice, and gradually rice mixed with the red palm oil processed from the palm trees planted by the ancestors." This ritually important combination was necessary for building up the child's resistance against different types of illnesses. The new member of the community eventually ate rice with the many local sauces prepared with palm oil.

Apart from rice and palm oil products, there were also vegetables and fruits given to the infant at various stages of development. According to local belief, the red palm oil was capable of killing all kinds of tiny bad animals (*fuhani nyamuisia*). "Even animals who fed on the scraps of palm kernels left under the palm trees were thought to be healthy, and palm oil put on grass would cause it to wither away."This was a further proof of the ancestral "power" of the red palm oil. Life ended with rice just as it had begun. At the death of a person, the funeral rituals began and ended with the sacrifice and consumption of rice.

PART TWO: PRE-COLONIAL INTER-CULTURAL INTERACTIONS AND THE INTRODUCTION OF MODERNITY

The following chapters describe how pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society became increasingly involved in exchange systems with various groups of people from different cultural backgrounds. It further analyses the processes by which the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde reacted to such pre-colonial inter-cultural interactions.

Pre-colonial inter-cultural interactions include early contacts, mostly with traders of Arab origin and influence,[96] as well as Europeans[97] prior to establishing British rule in West Africa.[98] By early contacts, I mean the interactions between various groups, which started from about the 15th to the 19th century. My primary concern, however, is not to postulate accurate historical dates, but to show how the social and religious ideologies, especially of the Arab, have influenced the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. Such interactions resulted from long-term direct or indirect trade relations, which paved the way for Islam to gradually inculturate itself into the local culture. This chapter is also concerned with the increasing European influence that facilitated the spread of Christianity and what I have called colonial modernity.

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[96] Sometimes, they were also mere travellers, engaged mainly in adventure rather than trade. I am employing the term 'Arab' to include those of Arab descent as well as close associates – affinal or otherwise.

[97] These would mainly include Spanish and Portuguese traders.

[98] For present-day Sierra Leone, it means before the British extended their administration to the hinterland of the Sierra Leone colony in 1896.

Chapter 6   Pre-colonial Inter-cultural Interactions

The early contact with various peoples of Arab origin consequently led to exchange relations marked by a different economic ethos from that of autochthonous exchange systems. Development of trade eventually became a fertile ground for the growth of Islam. Islam mostly made peaceful efforts in implanting its cultural ideology on Kɔɔ-Mɛnde soil, even though the spread of Islam sometimes took on the form of *jihad*s. Although Arab traders established contacts with the hinterland of Sierra Leone as far as the Gola forest[99] towards the end of the 17th century (cf. Fyfe, 1964: 1), nonetheless Islam and eventually the Arabic writing gained grounds only about 1750 (cf. Kup, 1961: 12). Moreover, this period which became one of great cultural transformations among Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, directly or indirectly led to impositions of new political and religious ideologies.[100]

Trade and Islam

The early contact between Arabs and the peoples of West Africa mainly took the form of exchange transactions in goods (cf. Davidson 1971; Davidson, 1981; Fyfe 1964; Jalloh and skinner 1997 Kup 1961; Rodney 1970). Trade or commerce, and not missionary activity, became the primordial motivating principle for establishing and maintaining any long-lasting relationship with the peoples of West Africa. What favoured the spread of Islam was the multiplicity and successes in trading activities. From this perspective, Islam became inevitably associated with trade, to the extent that many Kɔɔ-Mɛnde traders, who had been converted to Islam, were at the same time acting as Muslim missionaries.

Before the gradual movement of Muslim traders into the hinterland of Sierra Leone among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, exchange processes in goods and services were mainly between different communities characterised by kinship ties. Therefore, in view of these prepositions, I do not think, "the

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[99]   Gola Forest can be said to be part of the forest area that Rodney (1970) calls the Upper Guinea Coast.

[100]   See Gilbert and Reynolds (2009) for a general reference on African History.

forest peoples [including the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde] lived secluded lives (…)" as Fyfe (1964: 1) seems to suggest. By the time Islam made its first inroads, the cultural groupings of these forest areas were clearly differentiated. Davidson (1981: 62, 81) maintains that the early peoples living in the grassland plains, scrublands and forests towards the coast and hinterland of present day Sierra Leone, were in constant contact with one another.

The local exchange systems of goods and services that prevailed among different communities of the Gola Forest were to experience gradual changes as more and more Arab traders came to the scene. Muslim merchants became instrumental in bringing about new forms of economic activity. For a better understanding of the nature of this new trade, the changes it generated and the activities of the various parties involved, a brief look at the historical background leading to the origins of Muslim trading activities in West Africa is expedient.[101]

Origins of Muslim trading activities in West Africa

After the Muslim conquests of North Africa in the 8th Century A.D., the Berbers of North Africa began to show increasing curiosity about the Western Sudan, located beyond the Sahara Desert (cf. *op. cit.*: 28; Trimingham 1970: 13). The primary motive behind such interests in peoples of the Western Sudan was trade. Consequently, the Berbers started organising expeditions, in order to establish partnership with the central Sudanese peoples. To exploit this partnership in trade, they helped in the formation of large states and empires in western as well as central Sudan, such as Timbuktu, Gao and Jenne, whose main purpose of these empires was to conduct trade across the Sahara. Berber thus traders exploited the many forms of wealth possessed by Western Sudanese peoples and their Guinea neighbours.[102]

In the Trans-Sahara trade, Berber Muslim traders from the Sahara exchanged salt for gold and ivory that were the main products coming

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[101] Such an approach is what Howard calls a "diffusionist savana hearthland approach", against which he strongly warns (Howard, 1997: 22). Notwithstanding, it is appropriate to employ such method of approach in this study for the sake of presentational clarity.

[102] This is one of three preliminary points, which Davidson (1981: 29) outlines about these states.

from the ancient states of West Africa (cf. Bovill 1958: 67ff; Hunwick 2006: 16). Apart from salt, other items, such as copper, silks, metal ware (like pots, pans and swords) were added to the needs of West Africans with the passage of time. The Berbers sold these goods bought from the Western Sudan to Arab traders of North Africa. The latter in turn sold them to Europeans and Asians. This helped goods supplied by European and Asian goods to come down to West Africa by similar means. Such exchanges of goods formed the early beginnings of long-distance trade, which developed into a more complex and wider system of economic exchange with the rise of powerful Muslim states in North Africa. By the mid 17th century, this system had developed into a well-organised littoral trading activity with Europeans around the shores of West Africa.

There were three major routes across the Sahara connecting West and North Africa in the long distance trade. The dynamics of simple exchange of goods along these routes located in West Africa in their basic setting included, as already indicated, the export of gold, ivory, and other products, as well as domestic servants. In return, they imported salt, copper, iron, kola nuts and many luxury goods for the privileged and the wealthy like horses, fine cloths, silk garments, steel weapons, as well as books for Muslim scholars.

Of all these products, kola remained very important for its cultural value in West Africa. I have already argued in chapter 3 that among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, kola was an important object of exchange, since it was used in religious rituals such as initiation ceremonies, and was associated with property rights. It was also used as a stimulant, a yellow dye, for medical purposes, as a symbol of hospitality and in diplomatic relations between rulers, and it was particularly highly regarded later among Islamized peoples (cf. Rodney, 1970). The best-known kola trade routes ran north and north-west from the forests of the Gulf of Guinea, part of which includes the area covering present-day Luawa and environs, where kola trees grew in profusion, and became important exports to markets in the Western Sudan. Part of what is called Sierra Leone today was on the periphery of an important route, which stretched from the upper valley of the St. Paul river through Kankan and Kissidougou in present day Guinea. It is highly probable, therefore, that from early times, traders sent some

kola across the Niger from the area now held by the Koranko and Kono in the hinterland of Sierra Leone, because they both adjoin Kissidougou. The coastal kola, however, was only fully exploited after the arrival of the Portuguese, who initiated a shipping link between Sierra Leone and the rivers north of the Geba (*ibid*). Like most other trading projects on the Upper Guinea Coast, the kola trade was organised on an annual basis, involving a fleet of boats, which traded exclusively in that product.

Establishing other trade relations with the ancient West African empire of Mali had resulted into the formation of many little states in Mali and elsewhere, such as Jenne and Futa Djalon.[103] These states became deeply engaged in trade with the Western Sudan. In the trading centre of Jenne, a powerful Mandinga trading community emerged that formed a co-operative group called the Dyula and began to link different trading centres with the Western Sudan. They also found new and bigger markets, responding to the general wind of change in trade and exchange relations as a result of the formation of these new states. The latter became interested in the many inland societies inhabiting the forest regions around the coastal plains of Upper Guinea Coast. The Dyula were thus "buying and selling agents, just as the Berber traders of the Sahara, further north, had settled in towns like Kumbi and Timbuktu and Gao" (Davidson, 1981: 81).[104] In this respect, Timbuktu became one of the wealthiest markets and trading centres of West Africa. It also became famous because of its many institutions of higher learning, which trained Islamic scholars. The establishment of many other trade routes caused Dyula traders of the Mali Empire, the Hausa traders of northern Nigeria and other trading peoples to open new trading and Muslim centres of high reputation. Following these trade relations, many Arab traders began organising expeditions[105] to various areas on the West African coast,

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[103] This refers to the hill region that lies in the centre of modern republic of Guinea. On the climate, vegetation, ecology and social organisation of Futa Djalon, see Trimingham (1963: 165-170).

[104] See also Rodney (1970) on the Dyula and their trading activities.

[105] Authors like Skinner (1997: 2ff.) argue that many expeditions were mainly from the ancient Mali Empire, mostly organised by Sunjata, and that Mandinka settlers were living in that region decades prior to these expeditions.

establishing centres, from where they sent smaller groups into the interior or to more forested areas.

Dynamics of trade with the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde

Trade links with present-day Sierra Leone may go back to the time of the Mali Empire, but only developed fully in the 17th century (cf. Fyfe 1979; Person 1968; Suret-Canal 1971). These trade relations experienced changes in the course of its history, especially in relation to long distance trade. The latter became crucial to the whole dynamics of economic exchange processes in the region.

With the penetration of Fula[106] and Mandingo Muslim traders into the forested Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages, the local population began to take part in this new type of exchange system. The Fula and Mandingo traders organised expeditions to the territories of various societies, including Kɔɔ-Mɛnde territories, such as in present-day Kailahun and Koindu, and established centres of trade there. They exchanged salt and other items mainly against kola nuts. Until shortly after these initial contacts for purposes of trade, there was no evidence of intensive Islamization in the eastern part of Sierra Leone as a whole.

Eventually, by the late 17th century, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde themselves started getting actively involved in this type of trade by covering long distances on foot from villages like Ngiema and Gbeworbu to the main commercial centres. The later became important places for regional and inter-regional exchange (Howard, 1997: 22). In this way, people were able to move freely in regions that we now call Liberia and Guinea-Conakry, since they were not politically separated from present-day Sierra Leone. These regions formed part of a large exchange sphere. It is important to remember that one major incentive to partake in such exchange processes was the local demand for commodities only obtained when people moved them across complementary ecological zones. Products from the drier interior areas, such as cattle, were exchanged for

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[106] According to tradition, the Fula are of Arab origin. Both the Mandingo and the Fula were instrumental in fighting the holy war of Futa Djalon. See (Fyfe, 1964: 78) for a more detailed presentation of the origins of Fula society.

products of the forest or seaside, especially kola nuts and salt (cf. Brooks 1993; Levtzion 1971). "Usually people from Ngiema and the surrounding villages brought articles like kola nuts, pepper and some other minor commodities to barter mainly for salt dried on the seashore."

The exchange of goods with Muslim or Arab traders gradually took on "some forms of profit making." For the first time people did not only exchange pepper to receive the amount of salt needed for their own households, rather they needed more to be able to exchange part of it for other commodities. This became a legitimate practice by the indigenous actors involved in the process, and started gathering momentum with the introduction of a money economy, as part of colonial and post-colonial interventions.

In the later pre-colonial era, traders from Upper Niger, Futa Djalon and other inland areas moved cattle, sheep, goats, shea butter, rubber, gold, ivory, and a variety of less valuable commodities to the Sierra Leone hill country, forest, and coast (cf. Howard, 1976). In those regions, they obtained kola, salt, slaves, and imports from abroad and other goods they brought inland. There were also inland routes between Futa Djalon and present-day eastern and southern Sierra Leone, facilitating the transport of Cattle, since it became the most interesting commodity for the nomadic locals. In the far east of Sierra Leone, ancient routes continued to link the upper reaches of the Niger with the Luawa area, which means the villages around Ngiema as far as the present-day Liberian and Guinean borders.

Traders coming from areas other than Luawa required resident hosts, facilitators of exchange, and political supporters. After the spread of Islam, resident Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Muslims had the task of serving as hosts or trade mediators and as patrons or protectors of trade. These mediators were necessary in order to secure trade relations between different peoples of highly diverse origins. Many middlemen continued to host traders for several generations, changing when necessary the commodities they handled and their modes of business. Without these mediators, religious and commercial linkages with the interior would have been much weaker, if not impossible. Thus, they aided greatly in spreading Islam among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde.

Therefore, all these processes gradually became important factors for the organisation of political space as well as the spread of Islam in present-day Sierra Leonean villages (cf. Howard 1997; Skinner 1997: 1; 21ff.; Suret-Canale 1971). In addition, migrant traders who had been converted to Islam played an important role in spreading the Islamic cultural and religious ideologies among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde.[107]

Islamization among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde

The Arabs themselves were not actively engaged in propagating Islam in West Africa. Berber merchants from North Africa conducted the primary Islamization of its people (Trimingham, 1970: 20). The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde who had been converted to Islam eventually succeeded the Berbers in spreading Islam to every corner of their territory. Trade continued to play a major role in this gradual spread of Islam, since such missionary activities were only possible and effective in relation to exchange systems of goods and services, especially in its early stages (cf. Trimingham, 1963: 32).

Therefore, Islamization among Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society did not in principle preclude the processes of exchange. In exchanging goods among different societies, especially in the main trading centres, inter-cultural dialogue became possible. The various parties did not only meet to barter for goods, but may have also exchanged ideas and discussed issues relating to religion, politics and ritual practices. One important result of such meetings was the exchange of marriage partners between various groups. Daughters and sons were given in marriage to Muslim stranger families who later became resident traders in various village communities. In this way a special relationship arose, making it possible and legitimate for these Muslim strangers to bring up their offspring according to their own religious convictions and ideologies. They gradually started preaching and converting other communities; hence, Islam gradually began to spread, as some of the indigenous Kɔɔ-Mɛnde became devout Muslims. It is highly probable therefore, that such initial exchange of

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[107]   These migrants were mainly of Mande-speaking stock (cf. Massing, 1985).

ideas must have been one of diplomacy rather than confrontation. However, since trade was to bring economic prosperity, which was mainly associated with Islam, it stands to reason that conversion to Islam among rulers entailed political and economic reasons. "The rulers of many Kɔɔ-Mɛnde towns forged alliances with stranger groups through inter-marriage, formal treaties, trade relations and Islamic celebrations."

However, the propagation of Islam achieved its goals not only by peaceful means and by exchange of ideas, but also through conquest (cf. *op*. *cit*.: 16), and by other violent means in the form of *jihad*. The most famous *jihad*, which became important for the spread of Islam in the region around the Gola forest, was the holy war of Futa Djalon. According to tradition, the Fula were originally of Arab origin, who mostly settled among the indigenous non-Muslims, like the Soso and Yalunka. However, by the 17th century, Fula Muslim pastoralists eventually settled in the Fulacundas,[108] providing the social base for the *jihad*. They eventually joined with Muslim Mandinka in a *jihad* (Fyfe, 1964)[109] against their local neighbours. There was an effort to make Futa Djalon a Muslim state, this they had eventually achieved towards the end of the 19th century. *Jihads* of this kind became the first Muslim movement to violently shake much of West Africa for a century and a half. (*op. cit.*: 4; Jamburia 1919).

The following traditional account of the Holy War by a Fula elder in Futa Djalon backs up arguments about the role of the Fula and Mandingo in the propagation of the Islamic faith in West Africa. "The Gehad or Holy War began at Talangsan: the people who started it were twenty-two; some of these were Arabs, who afterwards formed the Foulah tribe. Ten of them were Mandingo or blackmen and the twelve Arabs were named as follows […]" (*op. cit.*: 78). They later drove many Soso and Yalunka out of Futa Djalon, both Muslims and infidels in about 1725. Those Yalunka migrants who became Muslim moved inwards in the forested area of the

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[108] The Fulacundas were special dwelling places for Muslim Fula pastoralists in Futa Djalon.

[109] The history of the *jihad*, which produced the Islamic and Fula-dominated state of Futa Djalon, is outside the scope of this study. For a detailed account, however, see (Rodney, 1970).

Upper Guinea Coast, where they started trading with, and spreading Islam among the local population. The *jihad* also ignited many small wars among various societies living in this region, and the *Jihadists* subdued almost all those who resisted them. This developed into a situation for Muslim migrants, who "sometimes warred with the indigenous inhabitants, but usually they settled peacefully and intermarried with members of the ruling families" (Skinner, 1997: 2). Most of the organised resistances were crushed with the utmost brutality, mainly through the help of their Arab allies who supplied firearms and the necessary moral support.

The period that preceded the *jihad*[110] had been generally characterised by socio-political upheavals in West Africa (Trimingham, 1963: 194). These petty conflicts and wars were to continue for much of the 18th and 19th centuries. At the same time, it marked a period of great cultural, political and religious transformation in the whole of West Africa. Consequently, the direction in which Islam spread was southwards from the Gambia and westwards from Futa Djalon, which formed part of the trading pattern of Upper Guinea, mostly served by Mandinga *marabou* (koranic schools). The *jihad* did not only have a religious motive, but also became a political expression of authority among different leaders and rulers. The Holy War of Futa Djalon went even further than the invasion of the Mane towards creating a ruling class, which was unified in interests and ideology, throughout Sierra Leone and other sections of Upper Guinea Coast.

Among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, Islam mainly spread through diplomatic or peaceful means. One way of doing this was to provide resources for resident Muslims through interregional trade. This was a means to

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[110] An example of such *jihadist* movements is the one led by Samori Toure. He was neither a Muslim cleric nor a devout and educated Muslim, but a warrior who made use of the Islamic Holy Wars as a means to conquest and as an aid to organisation, in order to achieve his own ambition of creating a Mandinka statee (cf. Trimingham, 1963: 190). Uthman dan Fodio, in contrast to Samori, was a learned and devout Muslim cleric. As an Islamic scholar, he was determined to spread Islamic belief and Ideology as far as he could by leading *jihads*. For instance, he set up a *jihad* in the Sokoto region of North Western Nigeria in 1804, creating an Islamic empire out of most of the Hausa states there (cf. Hunwick, 2006: 26). See also Bovill (1958: 220 ff.) for details on Uthman dan Fodio. He used 'Usuman' instead of the conventional 'Uthman'.

strengthen their households as units of production and reproduction, and to give greater density to Muslim networks (cf. Howard, 1997: 23).[111] Such social networks[112] became necessary for the process of inculcating Islam. Traders contributed to building Islamic institutions, like mosques and madrasats. In this way, they converted commercial resources into Islamic institutions. This approach to Islam emphasised social reproduction as well as religious institutions and culture. The historical actors that were essential in this respect included traders, especially petty traders at the village level, women in households and other Muslims who were not well-trained teachers or did not hold Islamic titles, but could also teach in village koranic schools.

There is enough evidence to claim that although Mande- and Pular-speaking traders introduced Islam centuries ago, nonetheless it was reinforced "by the commitment of those whose ancestors have long been present" (*op. cit.*: 23) among indigenous peoples. For instance, Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Muslims whose ancestors spoke Loko, Kissi, Fula, Mandinga and Gbandi are presently living in the areas now encompassing the Luawa chiefdom, extending as far as Guinea and Liberia. They have contributed to localizing Islam despite its external origins.

The process of Inculturation

Although inculturation is a term most frequently employed in Christian missiology (cf. Schineller 1990; Shorter 1988), nonetheless I have decided to adopt it from a social anthropological perspective. By inculturation, I mean the process in which Islamic ideas, values and practices were adopted by and adapted to Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. Inculturation entailed a complex process of reciprocal exchange, in which Islam shaped the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social and religious life, and at the same time was moulded by the Kɔɔ-

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[111] Such networks were local, regional and inter-regional, which consisted of immigrant and indigenous families both Muslims and non-Muslims.

[112] In about 1790, a self-proclaimed *Mahdi* (an emissary of the prophet Mohammad) appeared in West Africa (cf. Arcin 1911; Fyfe 1964; Wadstrom 1789). According to local history, he travelled as far as the Luawa area among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. From traditional sources, this individual appears to have come from Bambuk in Senegal. For a while, he was very successful, until a coalition of the Soso effected his death in 1793 (Fyfe, 1964).

Mɛnde in the triadic structures of myth, cult, and fellowship.[113] This process had enabled Islam become indigenous, so that one can speak of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Islam when comparing it with orthodox Islam.

Up to the end of the 18th century, most Europeans referred to Muslims in West Africa as "Mandingos", probably because the Fula and Mandingo traders who had become Muslims were the main standard-bearers for Islam in West Africa (cf. Skinner and Jalloh, 1997). They were instrumental in founding Islamic institutions of learning and religious cultivation, since most of them were not only traders, but also scholars who had studied at Islamic institutions of higher learning. The fostering of Islamic institutions and ideas were encouraged by non-Muslim rulers with whom Muslim migrants have established trading relations; these rulers even sponsored the settlement of Muslim traders and clerics. Such settlements indicated that it became more appropriate to spread religious ideological values of Islam as well as cultural values of the Arabs, especially when the indigenous themselves started to take responsibility of attainting scholarly education in Islam. Getting higher education in Islamic religious and social life from renowned Islamic centres established in Upper Guinea gave these local scholars the chance to teach in their own communities. Where necessary, they also trained local teachers, so that the Islamic faith and ideology became more localised. However, prior to the training of local Islamic scholars in the late 1700s, Muslim migrants from Futa Djalon may have followed a pattern of local adaptation and cautiousness towards the indigenous Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture, for example. Such attitudes belong to what I have called the diplomatic or peaceful means of spreading the Islamic faith.

Islam placed much emphasis at this time on conversion and education. Muslim missionaries established small mosques as well as substitute places of worship in the villages. They also established a large mosque in every main centre, and opened small madrasats in most surrounding villages, where children were taught the basics of the Arabic language. It appears that when Mandinga and those trained by them

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[113] Trimingham (1970) describes this process in a similar way though he never uses the term "inculturation".

trained children in their schools, they were in a sense, incorporating them into a special class of Muslim traders, who enjoyed freedom of movement in the entire Upper Guinea and who in turn set up small Muslim nuclei (cf. Rodney, 1970). This can also be seen as having a great influence in localising Islam and Islamic values and ideology among the local population. One important result of such training for the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde was the emergence of a "special group of Muslims" believed to be the descendants of the Mandingo living in present-day guinea, who became known as the *Kɔmendeisia*.[114] Their cultural practices were in many ways similar to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. At some point, these "special group of Muslims" became the sole group in establishing Islam among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, by training most local teachers of the Islamic belief.

Writing about the ability of Islam in adapting to the indigenous cultures in the Upper Guinea Coast in general, Walter Rodney makes the following observations:

> Muslims were extremely tolerant of the African way of life, and were not regarded as aliens. Their forbearance was in distinct contrast to the attitude of some Catholic priests, who went about breaking ancestral *Lares* and demanding the limitation of the number of wives of the polygamous peoples they were trying to convert. On a fundamental issue such as initiation and circumcision, a marabou could become the individual in charge of the ceremony. This involvement was possible because African Muslims still shared most of the basic conceptions of their society, especially with regard to metaphysical force. Even when there was no suggestion that people in a given area embraced Islam, Muslim traders were welcomed and revered as dispensers of 'greegrees' or amulets. Any object or collection of objects could constitute a 'greegree', but Muslims standardised their prescriptions by writing on a piece of paper and sewing it up within a decorated leather bag. There was more than a hint that 'greegrees' were perverted into a pardoners' trade (*op. cit.*: 230-231).

Such a tolerance also characterised the inculturation of Islam within the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture before British penetration. According to Kɔɔ-Mɛnde oral traditions, Islam modified pre-Islamic ritual practices in many ways. Instead of destroying, Islam has appropriated these rituals and concepts.

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[114] Some informants say that the etymology of the word *Kɔmendeisia* betrays the true origin of this group of privileged Muslims.

The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde make a valued distinction between what they conceive as representations and institutions of non-Islamic characterisation and Islamic characterisation. In order to express the "originality" of the former in relation to the latter, they cast the distinction in the mode of an historical development. The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde adduce the following instances. Since fundamental concepts were in operation, it is important to consider these concepts first, before embarking on any further examination of Islamic adaptation.

Religion, cosmology and the concept of the Highest Deity

The Highest Deity identified as Sky Deity (*Leeve Njeini*) dwelled in the skies, but was permanently involved in the wellbeing of the entire cosmos. That is to say, he held everything in *order*, the proper harmony between the cosmos and human beings. In its efforts to inculturate the concept of *Allah* as Highest Deity among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, Islam used this indigenous notion, but at the same time introduced previously unknown categories. Thus, in this process there are mosaic elements of both replacement and retainment. Islam translated *Allah* as *Ngɛwɔ*, using local cosmological categories. *Ngɛwɔ* literally means "the greatest, biggest and the highest sky or thundercloud", which is in fact a combination of "sky, lightning or thundercloud" (*ngelei*) and "greatest, highest, biggest" (*waa*). *Ngɛwɔ*, in this connection, was conceived as the creator of the universe, which the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde had known before the advent of Islam. The Highest Deity remained to be the centre of social life for the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, as the process of inculturation unfolded itself.

However, a major transformation had taken place concerning the relational aspect of the Sky Deity (*Leeve Njeini*) to his wife, the Earth Deity (*Maa-ndɔ*) as conceived by Kɔɔ-Mɛnde belief systems. Islam, stressed the transcendent attribute of *Ngɛwɔ*, rather than his immanent nature, and gradually downplayed the concept of family or community, which the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde attached to this Deity, prior to their encounter with Islam. *Leeve Njeini* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ* expressed this relational side of community and family life known by the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde in articulating their collective representations. Therefore, for them, the concepts *Leeve Njeini*

and *Maa-ndɔ* were categories, which showed a structural connection between the cosmological and the social world.

According to the religious conviction of Muslim missionaries, however, such metaphysical family relations cannot fit into the theological or religious ideology of Islam, since *Ngɛwɔ* as a transcendent Being cannot have a wife, neither a son nor children. Human Beings are not sons and daughters of *Allah*, but "slaves and servants" who must always be ready to carry out his divine will and to serve him. Hence, this became a legitimate theological argument in trying to enlighten the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde that anything other than *Ngɛwɔ* is idol worship. The consequence of such a theological doctrine was the prohibition, in principle, of using the concepts of *Leeve* and *Maa-ndɔ* as well as offering sacrifices to them. *Ngɛwɔ*, who dwelt in the skies, replaced the concept and ritual practices of offering sacrifices to *Leeve Njeini* and his wife *Maa-ndɔ*, and became materially associated with the skies, which they called heaven. With the passage of time, *Ngɛwɔ* became *Ngɛwɔwaa*, meaning by that "the greatest of the greatest skies". Another attribute of the Highest Deity introduced by Islam was that of "chief or king" (*mahei*), so that *Ngɛwɔ* gradually became *mahei Ngɛwɔwaa*, to mean "the king of the greatest of the great thunderclouds or skies." This shows the political undertone of such a religious ideology. Islam also had the ambition at that time to build theocratic states through the *jihads*. It portrayed *Allah* in this sense as king and ruler of all Islamic states, a king who was a just, but transcendent ruler. Since the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde attached more importance to rulers, it became legitimate for Islam to 'replace' the concept of *Leeve Njeini* having a wife *Maa-ndɔ*, with that of kingship associated with the cosmos.

Closely related to inculturating the idea of *Allah* as *Ngɛwɔ* were the various sacrificial rituals directed to Him. Sacrifices to the king of the greatest of the great thunderclouds or skies known as *saa* among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde were legitimate only if they were made in the name of *Allah* and his prophet, and not to *Leeve Njeini* and *Maa-ndɔ*. These were now to be offered to *mahei Ngɛwɔwaa*. The ritual language became Arabic, using verses from the Koran. "At the initial stages [of Inculturation], the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde continued to offer sacrifices to the ancestors, and performed other ritual practices according to their traditional belief." Until the new

doctrine of Islam took roots, Kɔɔ-Mɛnde traditional belief systems were largely undergoing a period of transition with some elements still practiced, while Muslim missionaries modified or changed others, according to the precepts of the type of Islam they presented.

The concept and relationship to spirits

Whereas Islam has identified the concept of *Allah* with the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde concept of *Ngɛwɔ* – depriving it of most of its social relational features – it has also transformed the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde spirit representation. This transformation is still very strong today. As a result of this type of Islam and its doctrine, there are fundamentally two types of *jinangaa*.

The first type falls into the category of good spirits (*jina yekpeisia*), while the second is classified into bad spirits (*jina nyamuisia*). The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde mostly referred to the latter as *kafii-jinei*, meaning that they do not pray five times a day, as stipulated by Islam, and therefore not submissive to the will of *Ngɛwɔ*. "These are very evil spirits that do only harm and bring unhappiness to the community in contrast to the good ones." Each *jinei* has a name deriving from Arabic, similar to those given to Muslims. These spirits have become part of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social life, thus enabling them to interact with individuals.

In accordance with the religious practice of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Islam, there are learned Muslims some of whom claim direct descent from the prophet Mohamed, hence holy men (*kamoh*). These holy men can take notice of the presence and behaviour of the spirits. They can also make direct or indirect contact with both good and bad spirits, and can inform the community about their behaviour. "In order to establish contact with these spirits, the holy men through the help of the head of all the spirits (*jina musei*) must perform special rituals and read particular verses from the Koran, not disclosed to the village community." In this way, the holy men have become mediators between the cosmological world of the spirits and the social world of human beings. In order to make this process of transformation more effective, those who propagated Islam studied the traditional practice of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde mediation with different spirits as in the case of the *njayei* people. The holy men, because of their ability to contact spirits, are sometimes called the *jina museisia*.

In attributing the mediating role between spirits and humans to the holy men, Islam was in fact transforming local concepts of mediation into Islamic ones. These holy men attributed particular illnesses to bad spirits only after thorough investigations. For example, in the case of mental illness, relatives of the sick person approached him asking for his mediation. All the parties involved gathered at the holy man's house at a convenient time, to invoke the *jinei* in question. This ritual of invoking the spirit took place behind closed doors with only the patient, two of his relatives and another male person who usually had the ability of falling into trance. His presence is necessary to facilitate the conversation with the spirit as the holy man himself did not speak to the *jinei* directly it. With the help of the *jina musei*, who is the head of all the *jinangaa*, the holy man was able to invoke the spirit in question for the sessions, after using some particular rituals and prayers from the Koran. Thus, the person who fell into a trance was responsible for carrying out the conversation with the spirit, whose message was then translated to those present. We have here different speech registers, which involved a common understanding between spirit, holy man and the person involved in talking to the spirit.

The session began after ample ritual preparation by the holy man such as the normal ablution for daily prayers. Afterwards the person who was to converse with the spirit fell into a trance, shivering heavily. When this happened, he would see the spirit and understand his language. "The *kamoh* [holy man] normally gave him a special mirror, which contained writings from the Koran on its front and back. These writings enabled the *kamoh* to invoke the *jinei* by making it appear on the mirror." The conversation with the *jinei* usually began by asking him to disclose his name. At the end of the conversation, "the holy man then commanded the *jinei* not to disturb the patient again, but to restore the patient's health and mental faculties." Sometimes, after a thorough negotiation, the spirit agreed to meet the wishes of the relatives of the patient. However, it happened at times that the spirit became very recalcitrant, refusing to leave the patient in peace. In this case, the holy man had the option – under favourable conditions and after thorough investigation with the help of the head of all the *jinangaa* – to imprison the *jinei*. He can only do this

after getting the patient's relatives' consent. "Sometimes, the *jinei* could be killed, provided he had also killed a human being. The holy man himself did not carry out these sanctions, but the head of the *jinangaa* in the spirit world. There is a general tendency today to categorise all spirits as *jinei*," even though they might be quite different in form and social function.

The concept and practice of hei

The dispenser of *hei* became *mahei Ngɛwɔwaa* mediated by his holy prophets, the earthly dispensers being the holy men, while its elements now derive from the writings of the Koran through the holy men. These writings corresponded to particular verses written on paper or the wooden slat using the traditional ink called the *lubei*. All were now to replace the leaves and plants from the forest and water from the streams at least in princple.

Hei began to take different forms as consequence of the Islamic transformation process, since it gradually came to be associated with amulet. The latter has proven in the history of its employment in West Africa to be positive as well as negative – mainly having a destructive force. Muslim traders and sometimes scholars were welcomed and feared as dispensers of powerful amulets, which included writing on a piece of paper some inscriptions from the Koran to make the amulets powerful and effective. This phenomenon of making amulets with the help of papers stimulated and increased the demand for paper among Muslims in West Africa. People in West Africa also needed paper for books and manuscripts, upon which Muslims placed great value as the basis for their program of education.[115] To this effect, Muslims established several schools in the hinterland of Sierra Leone, including among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, as Islam grew stronger. With the monopoly of literacy and the ability to prescribe powerful spiritual amulets added to their role as

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[115] Even though paper at that time was prohibited by Manueline legislation from being sold to Africans, nevertheless some Europeans, especially the Portuguese "did carry small supplies to Upper Guinea, particularly the Gambia, where in Coelho's time four quires of paper had the same purchasing power as an [eighth] of an ounce of gold" (Rodney, 1970: 231).

traders, Muslims formed a close alliance with traditional rulers as well as warriors, though the latter invariably remained committed to the beliefs of their ancestors. Two authors, for example, have commented on the rising power of Muslim clerics relating to the power of the amulets they were making. Owen maintained that among the Bullom of the Sherbro-Cape Mount area Muslim amulets men had become privileged individuals by mid 18th century (cf. Rodney, 1970: 232). Matthew also commented: "I have never visited a town in this part of Africa [Sierra Leone] where I did not find a Mandinga man as prime minister, by the name of book man, without whose advice nothing was transacted" (Matthews, 1788: 69).

Furthermore, intrinsic to the concept and practice of *hei* were the different ritual practises, which also saw tremendous transformations due to the inculturation process. "Those who first brought Islam to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde did welcome and encourage the use of ceremonies, but always in accordance with Islamic and Arabic precepts." This became particularly relevant in the area of the protective ritual, by altering its ritual formulas and contents. The ritual formulas were based on verses from the Koran. Concisely, the contents and elements used in *hei* were now almost exclusively koranic. The holy men were responsible for determining the contents and formulas of the rituals according to the holy words from the Koran, though some came also from the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde traditional practices.

Without the holy men, the ritual ceremonies could hardly take place for they presided over all ceremonies. Mourning and burial rituals have also been inculturated into Islam. The ritual ceremonies were performed according to Islamic practices, but with many elements of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde traditional practices. The three days, the seven days and the forty days sacrificial ritual ceremonies after the death of a person took on Islamic elements, but some of the traditional practices remained in place. The rounded soaked rice flour and the kola nuts became even more important for Islamic ceremonies, since all the Islamic ritual sacrifices (*saa*) necessarily involved in some way or another these objects. Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Islam believes that "the good spirits like kola nuts and the rounded soaked rice flour if ritually prepared by the holy men."

Islam first tolerated – to a certain degree – the initiation rituals of *Poro* and *Sande*. The localization of *hei* in the *Poro* sacred grove was

becoming increasingly diffused, as the holy men became more and more powerful dispensers of *hei*. Individuals started taking advantage of the protection the holy men gave them in using the *hei* against their neighbours. This practice was used more often in colonial and post-colonial times. *Sande* became even more relevant for the process of inculturation, since it was largely supported by the *Kɔmendeisia*, but was modified according to their own judgments. Hence the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde came to distinguish two sorts of *Sande* initiation rituals, viz: *Sande* of Mɛnde (Mɛnde *jandei*) and *Sande* of Islam (*seku jandei*). Whereas the *Sande* of Mɛnde performed rather secular rituals according to Islam, the *Sande* of Islam was religious. During the Initiation period of seclusion, the Imam himself read verses from the Koran, and gave orders for people to sing for joy each time initiates visited the village.[116] These songs were regarded as holy songs (*suquii*), because they were taken from the Koran. "It gave people in the village a sense of belongingness to the Islamic religion, even if it was a foreign religion." Despite the atmosphere of tolerance, nonetheless there were differences between these two types of *Sande*. The major difference was that *Sande* of Islam did not approve of the *sowei*, which is a famous *Sande* mask, symbolising womanhood, but also mainly associated with the most powerful *Sande* ancestors. Muslim clerics rejected it on grounds that "because they regarded all masks that cannot speak in public as potentially evil, since their primary purpose was not to entertain the village community, but to perform rituals behind closed doors."

Moreover, the public appearance of different Mɛnde masks has various social meanings, which normally conformed to specific events in the village. One of the dancing masks known as the *ngafa ngɔtii*, became particularly interesting for Islam. People respected and feared it whenever it appeared in the village mainly because it flogged troublemakers and those who did not behave well during public appearances of *Poro* and other masks with two medium-sized sticks it usually carried. Especially children, women and non-*Poro*-initiates became victims.

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[116] The author of this study had witnessed the celebrations of these Islamic initiation rites in Ngiema village on several occasions towards the end of the 1970s.

Local Muslim clerics used the *ngafa ngɔtii* as an element of inculturation. In preparing protective figures (*kafiee*) for people, the holy men normally write particular verses from the Koran on a piece of white sheet, and draw the *ngafa ngɔtii* holding sticks in middle of the same paper or any other object they were using. This paper became sacred through many prayers, which the holy men said in secret, usually by night, thereby transforming the *ngafa ngɔtii* to a protective figure, which people could hang on top of a bed or on doorposts in bedrooms. "It was supposed to protect all those living in that house or sleeping on the bed, especially small children from the power of witches and other evil forces." The village community hence believed that such protective figures would beat and even kill any witches or evil spirits attempting to harm under their protection. They are still a well-known Islamic religious symbol of supernatural protection.

Islam also appropriated the concept of time and its corresponding social and religious activities through the process of inculturation. It has already been indicated in the last chapter that the position and direction of the sun provided an orientation for calculating the amount of work farmers were to do and to discern whether evening was approaching or not. Islam saw the importance of the solar position, but only in relation to the different times of prayer. To this effect, the sound of each town drum (*taa-mbilii*) was to remind everybody, especially those working on farms, of the different times of prayer, but it also acted as orientation concerning the hours of the day.

Arabic names for the days of the week gradually replaced the traditional ones used prior to the advent of Islam. The corresponding Kɔɔ-Mɛnde names that eventually came to be in use were thus Arabic derivatives, which were employed until about the end of the 1960s, when they became more and more suppressed by English ones. Accordingly, the following words were derived from Arabic: Saturday (*sibiti*) is from the Arabic *yawn al-sabt* (Saturday, the day of Sabbath). Secondly, Sunday (*lahadi*) from *Yawn al-Ahad* (Sunday, the first day). Similarly, Monday (*Tene*), from *Yawn al-Thnayn* (Monday, the second day). Tuesday (*Taata*) from *Yawn al-Thalatha* (Tuesday, the third day). Wednesday (*Alaba*) has its derivation from *Yawn al-Arba* (Wednesday, the fourth day). Thursday

(*Alkamissa*) is from *Yawn al-Khamis* (Thursday, the fifth day). Finally, Friday (*Juma*) is from Yawn al-Juma, (Friday, which is day of congregation). Most people interviewed, however, argued that these are the traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde words for the days of the week, even though they are out of general use in most post-war communities.

Kinship, marriage relationships and other forms of inculturation

The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde present a certain normative relation about their own history. That normative relation about the past claims "originality" which makes it higher valued than Islam. Such "originality" essentially entails "authenticity". The point, however, is not to see the historical accuracy of the development of their local institutions, but the value they always attach to the rituals inherent in these institutions.

Islam stressed the importance of kinship relations during the first phases of propagating its belief systems and ideology among different village communities. It also regarded all Muslims as belonging to the same family of believers. This gave the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde a sense of belonging to one family of Muslims.

In order to keep this community alive, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde valued marriage and procreation highly, while, on the other hand, they detested celibacy in any form, and perceived it as something against the will of *Ngɛwɔ*.[117] Islam built upon such values by promoting marriage alliances with the traditional rulers. Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society maintains that "original" Mɛnde institutions have been transformed with the advent of Islam. For instance, the practice of polygamy before the introduction of Islam was for practical reasons such as labour, political power and social kudos. They also claim that those who brought Islam did everything to adapt to this local value of having as many wives (not only four) as a man could afford. Islam also enhanced the practice of free marriage (*amadei*) and interpreted it as a gift to *Ngɛwɔ*, and those making such gifts were given

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[117] Even after centuries of Muslim influence, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde have always and still use *Ngɛwɔ*, *mahei Ngɛwɔwaa* as categories of the Highest Deity, instead of the Arabic word *Allah*.

special honour by Muslim clerics since it further contributed to the strengthening of political alliances.

Local chiefs who had become Muslims are said to have allied with their wife-givers of free marriage to exercise social and political control in the village. Thus, people with titles of authority derived from Islam gained prestige and social status, and were given the right to make decisions in their own spheres.[118] In this way, marriages are said to have helped to lay the foundation for a permanent political presence, including claims to residency and political office. An example of such political ties resulting form marriage relations that have developed over the centuries in Ngiema is the emergence of the authority of two chiefs who were devout Muslims in post-colonial times, especially in the 1960s. These two, Alhaji Joe Musa (who made a pilgrimage to Mecca) and Chief Momoh Lassie, "even though they were originally strangers coming from outside, had great influence on the moral, social and political lives of people in Ngiema for generations." The incorporation through giving in marriage also qualified them to gain moral authority in *Poro* and *Sande* institutions.

Hence, so it is argued by my informants, marriage paved the way for a permanent political presence of strangers. It was usual, not only among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, but also among other societies in present-day Sierra Leone, for Muslim traders or their kin to marry into influential families. "They did this mostly to gain titled offices and to head sections in local polities, or in colonial times, to become paramount chiefs." Marriages and other networks crossed language and cultural borders, linking immigrants to long-present families and contributing to the process by which Islam became indigenous. Kinship relations became a core of Islamic identity for generations or even centuries, particularly in Ngiema. Even today most people in Ngiema argue that the elder siblings spouse relationship (see chapt. 2) "derived immediately from the Islamic concept of God. So this relationship must play an important role in connecting other kinship groups with one another."

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[118]   See also Howard's PhD. dissertation "Big Men, Traders, and chiefs: Power, Commerce, and spatial Change in the Sierra Leone-Guinea Plain, 1865-1895." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison., 1972.

One also maintains that before the advent of Islam the language used in various ritual activities was Kɔɔ-Mɛnde.[119] Arabic as Islamic language became the legitimate language of religion and rituals as well as that of spirits. Whenever a holy man invokes spirits, the language he must use is Arabic, "since they do not understand any other language."[120] Even the original Mɛnde script, the so-called *kikakui*, entails some slightly modified forms of the Arabic script, though this form is largely out of use nowadays in favour of the Roman script. Some words of spoken Kɔɔ-Mɛnde have adopted some Arabic words.[121]

Another aspect, which helped strengthen Islam among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, was the sense of communal belongingness. Since they had already known this aspect of social life in their representations, it became easy for them to integrate it as part of Islamic religious ideology. This suggests that the basis of Islam was community, which includes various public or private ceremonies that should bind the community of believers together. Such a basis for community generated the possibility of belonging to different networks in the form of brotherhoods. West African Muslims have belonged to several important brotherhood-communities, or *tariqas*. After 1600, the two chief *tariqas* became the *Qadiriyya* and the *Tijaniyya*. The *Ahmadiyya*, important today, took shape early in the last century. But there were also the different types of *Maliki* Islam in operation (cf. Reeck, 1976).

Consequently, various local communities had identified themselves with different types of Muslim brotherhoods. "Among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, the most common to have influenced them at various times in history

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[119] This was also the case elsewhere among sub-Saharan African Muslims, since Arabic was regarded as the main language of religion and literacy for many centuries after the introduction of Islam (cf. Hunwick, 2006).

[120] Because of its role and influence in Africa over the past millennium, Hunwick (2006: 53ff) has described the Arabic language as the "Latin of Africa." Arabic also came to be used for political and diplomatic correspondence, and clerics became scribes and interpreters to rulers.

[121] In other parts of West Africa, there have been proofs of similar development. As such, many authors like Hunwick have maintained that "the writings of medieval Arab authors from North Africa, Andalusia, and Egypt, constitute the sole written sources for the History of West Africa before the arrival of the Europeans on the coast in the fifteenth century and the beginnings of local historiographical traditions in Arabic in the sixteenth [century]" (*op. cit.*: 20).

were the *Ahmadiyya*, the *Ansaru*, the *Maliki* and the *Tijani*." The latter, which started in Morocco, had profound influence in West Africa as a whole. It is a *sufi* way that owes its origins to the teachings of *Sidi* Ahmad Al-*Tijani*. In Ngiema, the *Tijani* and *Ahmadiyya* brotherhoods had been mostly active among the village community for generations even before colonial rule. These communities provided wealth through trade and agriculture mainly engaging in the production of cash crops. They also stimulated political change and expansion, while introducing a set of cultural institutions and rituals that enhanced development of networks and relationships over a wide area. By virtue of their spiritual powers, Muslim scholars mediated in disputes between various ruling houses; sometimes they became mediators between various groups of ordinary people in the village.

Since spreading Islamic religious and cultural ideology among Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society in its early stages was principally based on consent and reception of ideas in many respects, the process of inculturation was by no means an automatism. "Muslim converts in big trading cities were sometimes at loggerheads with ordinary people living in the countryside, because the latter wanted to continue practicing their indigenous religious traditions." This also implies that the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde did not just accept these new religious ideas and doctrine blindly, but required a considerable length of time before they were internalised. Normally such a process involved constant testing and retesting of religious and cultural ideas introduced by Islam. This was useful in order to verify the usefulness or any relevant role Islamic cultural ideology might play in relation to their religious representations. *De facto*, during colonialism and shortly afterwards, there were still a number of traditional beliefs and values practiced by Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, even though the process of inculturating Islam into their culture had started some centuries earlier.

Pre-colonial trading contacts with Europeans

About 1400, European captains sailed into the west coast of the Atlantic, mainly from Portugal, Spain, England and France. Hitherto, there had been virtually no contact between Europeans and the rest of West Africa (cf. Fyfe, 1964). However, the activities of these sailors were limited to

the coastal plains until the 19th century when they began penetrating into the forested areas of West Africa (cf. Trimingham, 1970: 220). For such initial contacts, the primary motive was exploration and ultimately trade,[122] rather than political ambitions for territorial expansion. The latter only became of a prior interest mainly between the 18th and 19th centuries, when different European powers aimed at colonial domination.

Shortly after 1500, many more ships from Europe began arriving on the West coast of the Atlantic so that "a new system of trade with sea-merchants began to expand along many parts of the coastland of Upper Guinea" (Davidson, 1981: 154). This arrival meant that changes were to occur in the hitherto existing coastal trade and, consequently, in social and political structures of the local population. Antecedent to any serious commercial activities with the West Africans, the work of exploration was sometimes violent and destructive on the part of the European explorers. Early captains often engaged in pillaging and raiding, which were mostly met with stiff resistance by the respective coastal guards. Such ravaging eventually changed into peaceful trade and the so-called treaties of friendship with the local population (*op. cit.*: 198).

A major event that led to the increasing European contacts with West Africa and the involvement into the affairs of its people was the discovery of the New World by European sailors. Especially after establishing large plantations in the Americas, Europeans became in need of cheap and free labour which they could only get with the introduction of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. In both technological and navigational discoveries, Europeans now saw the need to take advantage of such developments and engage in a new long-distance trade with West Africans living on the coast (cf. Rodney 1970; Trimingham 1970). It further paved the way for new commercial relations, which both Europeans and their West African counterparts saw as promising in terms of advantages and benefits. The coastal peoples were quick to perceive the advantage of such novel trading, because they realised that merchants sailed directly to their shores in order to exchange the goods they needed.

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[122] See also (Davidson 1981; Rodney 1970; Trimingham 1970; Kup 1961; Bovill 1958; Fyle 1981; Fyfe 1964; McCall 1969).

This was convenient for them, since they no longer needed to go through intermediaries from Western Sudan in order to exchange the goods they wanted. Europeans also realised that they could now trade directly with the coastal peoples in West Africa without going through middlemen from North Africa. Thus, both trading partners welcomed this new coastal trade and they did everything to promote it. The vast majority of West Africans, who were living in the forested areas of Upper Guinea, among them the Kailahun area, were not yet drawn into such commercial activities. They continued trading overland by the central and eastern routes connecting them to the Sahara. Different communities from the interior continued to trade in the same items, using more or less the same methods and trade routes.

Trade in humans and firearms

However, this new form of trade partnership between West Africans and Europeans experienced a considerable change after their European partners introduced two major commodities. These two articles were trade in human beings and items of firearms, which became extremely important articles of exchange for the Europeans. Trimingham claims, "when Europeans eventually arrived in West Africa, they engaged mainly in the traffic of human beings" (Trimingham, 1970: 221). This assessment from Trimingham does not do justice to history, since the Europeans who first arrived in West Africa were originally involved in diverse forms of trade such as gold and other mineral resources (cf. Davidson, 1981). At the beginning of their trade relations, these two parties became partners, since they bargained keenly with one another, and at the same time were able to respect the fairness of trade at least in principle. Such a partnership and corporation broke down only at the advent of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and trade in firearms.

It is worth stressing that the slave trade and the sales of firearms by European sea merchants developed in the course of history owing to crucial discoveries that took place in the western world. Such new aspects mainly had to do with technological development, opening the gates for a dominant Atlantic trade in human beings. This changed the whole dynamics of the previous trade with West Africans in relation to the fair

acquisition and exchange of goods. That is to say, even though the Africans "could decide to some extent what articles the Europeans wished to exchange, or sell them, they could however not control what Europeans wished to buy from them" (*op cit.*: 212). It subsequently led to new political and social structures that affected most West African societies including the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde.

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade

Different forms of servitude had existed among Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society before Europeans introduced the Trans-Atlantic trade. Arabs as well as those of Arab origin were already engaged in some form of slavery in most parts of West Africa.[123] The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, however, which replaced many other articles of exchange, came into being owing to demands beyond the Atlantic. An important factor in these activities was economic, and especially the Spanish made huge profits out of this trade. Besides, the slave trade became an economic system that aided greatly in building the industrial and technical progress of Western Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries (cf. Davidson 1981; Rodney 1970).

The Trans-Atlantic trade "began, as a large and regular system of trade, only after about 1625" (Davidson, 1981: 212). By then, a number of Europeans established companies abroad. For the Portuguese, Brazil became more interesting in their economic pursuits; the Spanish established mines and plantations on other parts of South, Central and North America; likewise the English, French, Dutch and Danes were on the islands of the Caribbean Sea. More and more mines and plantations were established as a result. Because they wanted more and more slaves, they went to the West African Coast to find the free labour they needed, and found millions of them on the Upper Guinea Coast. The Atlantic slaves "were stripped, branded, and pushed into airless under-decks, crushed together, often chained by hand and foot (Davidson, 1981: 285). Thus, human beings became mere commodities rather than true 'objects' of exchange in the Maussian sense of the word (cf. Mauss [1925] 1983).

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[123] For a detailed analysis of the slave trade among the Arabs, and how they considered and related Africans with slavery in general, see Hunwick (2006).

The good rapport that once existed between European and African traders gradually began to deteriorate.[124]

The master-servant relationship that existed in most African societies and elsewhere in the world at that time, greatly contributed to the success of the slave trade. Rulers in the Upper Guinea Coast exchanged captured prisoners of war for other services, especially during the time of the *jihads*. The European slave merchants built on this practice to carry out the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, easily persuading rulers and other political authorities to engage in it. For this reason, it became easy for European kings to persuade their African counterparts to engage in the trade. More than what one might think, there was a great deal of diplomatic activity going on in relation to the trade in humans.[125] For instance, in exchange for military help given to some rulers around the coastal plains of present-day Sierra Leone, the English captain, Sir John Hawkins, received many prisoners of war from them, whom he sold as slaves in about 1562 (Rodney, 1970).

In the course of the 17th Century, some European sea merchants themselves started raiding villages for slaves. Such actions devastated many villages not only along the coasts, but also in the interior (*op. cit.*). Especially those living in forested areas of the Upper Guinea Coast suffered the brunt of this cruelty. Villages affected were burnt at night, and most people who resisted or attempted to escape the raids were brutally put to death. Gaining economically from it, many rulers and rich merchants also played a part in this cruel aspect of the Trans-Atlantic trade. Sir John Hawkins, who had negotiated the sale of slaves peacefully, now became a notorious English slave raider. Additionally, King Geema Fonda of Sulima made it his main occupation to raid the Kissi and Limba for captives. He sold them to Mandingo and Soso merchants coming up from the coast with European manufactured goods (Laing 1825: 400; Rodney 1970: 237). The Trans-Atlantic slave trade largely provided the

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[124] For the historical beginnings and organisation of the Atlantic slave, see (Davidson 1981; Rodney 1970).
[125] For more on the diplomatic aspect of slave trade see Rodney (1970).

most attractive material prospects for the ruling class on the Upper Guinea Coast.

Even if local rulers had known the outcome of this trade and the dangers to which they were exposing their own people, whom they were selling to European merchants, they would not have stopped the practice. They were possibly under two growing pressures not to do so. Whereas at the beginning of the sea trade Gold and Ivory were highest in demand among European traders, now the economic profits made in the slave trade superseded the demand for any other commodity. If one ruler or king at one market along the coast refused to deal in slaves, the European traders would simply go to his neighbour and get the slaves. At one point, European slave dealers refused to accept alternative commodities; they wanted only slaves in return for their manufactured goods. As indicated earlier, the *jihads* were the greatest recruiter of slaves in the latter part of the 18th century. For instance, "when the Sulima joined forces with the Fula, fighting for Islam against the Limba and Kissi, their brutal activities were not essentially different from those of the European slave raiders." Secondly, since there was a general insecurity in Upper Guinea, owing to incited wars and slave raiding, the rulers increasingly needed guns, which only the Europeans could provide at that time.

Firearms

Guns became necessary for the rulers because they proved to be more effective in fighting and raiding. In the same way as iron spears and some other weapons had showed to be more effective than clubs and stones many centuries earlier, muskets became a more powerful weapon (cf. Fischer and Rowland, 1971).

Rulers did not only use firearms for self-defence against slave raiders but also for slave raiding in other villages to be exchanged for European manufactured commodities. "Apart from a few that came south through the Sahara, all the firearms had to come by sea. Yet the Europeans insisted on selling their guns in exchange for captives" (Davidson, 1981: 213). Hence, the overseas slave trade developed into a big export enterprise involving the shipping of human beings. Seeing how useful and convenient firearms were, many traditional rulers resorted to

the use of these firearms. That is to say, the arrival of firearms generated the rise of professional armies and an increase in wars and troubles for much of the 17th and 18th centuries in many West African territories. Davidson, though relating his observation to the entire West Coast of Africa, commented on this situation in the following way: "Large quantities of muskets now began to be imported. From England alone, at the height of the eighteenth-century Guinea trade, the gunsmiths of Birmingham were providing more than 100,000 a year" (*ibid*). There were economic interests behind these activities, which had gains as well as losses. The rulers bought more and more guns, thus waging more wars that primarily aimed at capturing war-prisoners who were then sold to the European slave dealers.

The customary practice of exchanging war prisoners as household servants took on new dimensions with the introduction of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Increasingly most rulers and elders looked upon war prisoners in the 17th and 18th centuries as commodities, which could be sold or exchanged for other commodities. In this way, they contributed to sending millions of fellow Africans as slaves across the Atlantic. The West African rulers at one point preferred to have their prisoners of war who had served as domestic servants to remain at home and continue to occupy a social place in households. Therefore, they organised many kinds of tactful resistance, but without success. Other rulers elsewhere on the Upper Guinea coast attempted this too, but their efforts were in vain. Elsewhere in Africa, there were attempts to end the Atlantic trade.[126] All these attempted resistances failed, because the slave trade had become – until after 1800 – a central part of the commercial system of the western world (cf. Wallerstein 1970; Polanyi 1944).

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[126] Davidson (1981: 286-287) gives a number of examples where some rulers did everything they could to halt the ocean trade, but to no avail.

Effects of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade

Whatever position prisoners of war or captives had in the local society, they were never treated as commodities. Reducing the status of a free person, to that of a domestic servant, or translocating him from one society to another, did not deprive that person of his standing as a *social* being. It is only when the slave trade became an object of commercial market exchange, subject neither to the rules of exchange that prevailed in African societies nor to those that governed market exchange in Europe that the African servant or war captive was turned into a commercial commodity, and deprived of his humanity.

In bargaining for goods, European and West Africans revealed contrasting conceptions regarding the exchange process (cf. Davies, 1957: 235). One cannot underestimate such fundamental differences in attempting to reconstruct any effects the slave trade may have had on local systems of exchange.

Consequences for local exchange systems

Exchange systems among societies such as the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde described thus far were mainly based on the logic of barter without profit in the modern capitalist sense. During this time the first European sea merchants started to exchange various goods with different societies on the Upper Guinea Coast, the principle of the exchange of equivalents was fundamental. For example, when the Ngiema people exchanged kola nuts for salt with the Fula traders from Guinea, the operation went smoothly, because they bartered in principle equal amounts of the one for the other.[127]

The logic behind this kind of exchange morality was the conviction that "people should refrain from exploiting exchanges for profit. They should instead live on the proceeds of their labour." A transgression of such moral value meant punishment of the entire community by the ancestors. Such values entailed the exchange of measure for measure – a calabash of palm wine for a gallon of palm oil, a basket of dried fish for a

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[127] Winterbottom (1803: 283) has described a similar process among the Fula and other societies in the northern province of Port Loko in present-day Sierra Leone.

basket of kola nuts, a basket of breadfruits for a dish of cleaned rice, and the like. This principle became a yardstick for the barter economy (precluding all rigorous modern measurement of mathematical exactitude). The latter may represent the view that one exchange for a basket of dried fish could become two baskets of beni seeds in exchange for one or any simple fixed equivalent (cf. Thomas, 1959).[128] As already indicated, among the forms of measurement, the most outstanding one used in Upper Guinea was that of iron bars, since this must have been the most convenient standard of measurement in latter exchange processes. In connection with this practice, the Ngiema people may have developed their own form of measurement in terms of a valid medium of exchange.

Therefore, the fundamental differences that existed between the European and African partners in terms of conceptions relating to economy must be taken into proper account. The barter or subsistence economy differed from the capitalist economy in ethos.[129] Many sea merchants who traded with different societies on the Upper Guinea Coast had remarked that Africans usually calculate mainly for their present material needs, and for the immediate future, that means for only what is necessary (Owen 1746; Atkins 1735; Winterbottom 1803). That is to say, calculated activity by the European partners was oriented towards accumulation of profits on price differentials. In commenting on this state of affairs, an English merchant by the name of Nicholas Owen had the following to say. "I have found no place in all these several countries of England, Ireland, America, Portugal, Caribes, the Cape de Verd, the Azores and all the places I have been in, I say I have found no place where I can enlarge my fortune so soon as where I now live" (Owen, 1746: 97-98). Another English trader, John Newton, confirmed such claims by commenting that Africans were viewed during this time of commerce as a people to be robbed without mercy, since the Europeans

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[128] See also Park (1799) for similar observations among the Mandinga. He maintains, however, that at some point, prior to the contacts with Europeans the Mandinga, being mainly influenced by the Mande, were utilising profit making in their transactions. He therefore questions the theory of 'barter without profit.'

[129] See Rodney (1970) for details on the varying morality of economic activity between Africans and Europeans in general.

employed every means to cheat them (Newton, 1788: 81). According to him no article was delivered without tampering – false heads were placed in the kegs that contained the gunpowder, lengths were cut from the middle of clothes where missing portions were not readily noticed (*ibid*.). However, Newton also maintained that in reacting to this type of capitalistic spirit, the Africans also became jealous and wanted to take revenge by adopting the new methods. To complete such vicious circles, the unpleasantness and dishonesty of African rulers encouraged the Western merchants to continue their capitalistic tricks. In trying to make more and more profit, the European merchants regarded themselves as being under the obligation neither of following the traditional African exchange ethos nor of trading according to European standards. Such differences in value systems often led to conflicts.

The second major difference between the barter economy and the capitalist economy of the Europeans trading with Africans was in relation to the concept of time. In bargaining for goods and equivalents, the atmosphere prevailing among African partners mainly centred on relationships among themselves (Rodney, 1970). European traders normally complained that Africans had little or no consciousness for time, because they could spend hours trying to settle palavers among themselves before coming to the actual bargaining. It was important to settle differences that had arisen among them even prior to the transaction. For the Europeans this was a mere waste of time, and they were highly impatient during the transactions, because it became extremely difficult to reconcile the different groups making the palavers (*ibid*.). Hence, such an attitude to time mostly clashed with the strict regard for the clock that had become the touchstone for capitalist discipline.

It seems to me that the European trading system led the Upper Guinea Coast to a proto-colonial situation. The sophisticated operation of such a system – that was at first foreign to the various local communities – aimed at making as much profit as possible out of the different trade relations with these communities. Such profit making at the expense of local communities became essential for the European counterparts in serving the wider interests of commercial capitalism. Hence, initially European commercial systems expanded beyond their frontiers in Europe

to embrace the various levels of the African barter system. In so doing, it assigned to these indigenous communities specific economic roles in accumulating the capital to boost western economies. Such a boost was largely possible from conducting trade relations in Africa, and above all from the purchases of slaves and their employment in the so-called New World.

The changes brought by European traders had repercussions on the general economic relations that hitherto existed between littoral and inland peoples in Upper Guinea. With the arrival of Portuguese trading sea vessels, coastal peoples were presented with new possibilities of doing trade, and were no longer depended on the interior to maintain exclusive commercial relations with them. New commodities introduced by European merchants like alcohol, utensils, weapons and glass beads were becoming more and more attractive to both littoral and inland traders. As the demand for these articles increased, both areas began to pay less attention to locally manufactured goods. A situation arose where the coastal peoples and those from the hinterland like the Kailahun area preferred only to obtain these goods from the Europeans in exchange for other articles. Again, European imports were in danger of replacing products like salt, which used to flow between the interior and the coastal end. When the Europeans started importing salt, the situation became very critical, especially in the late 18th century. To this effect, some African rulers put a ban on European imports of salt, since the latter was the only coastal commodity and thus a very important means of maintaining commercial relations with the interior at that time (Matthews, 1788). Nevertheless, this ban did not prevent European merchants from importing salt to the peoples of the hinterland that resulted in a strong competition.

The indigenous peoples, however, could not stand this competition owing to the fact that Europeans were requesting and supplying new types of goods, which were virtually unknown to the African exchange systems (Rodney, 1970: 226). Granted that both littoral and inland peoples were eager to possess European goods, the overall impact of trade with the

Europeans would be a greater movement of goods between littoral and hinterland communities.[130] Even though a nucleus of the old trade remained in place, such as that in cloth, salt, cattle, and shea-butter, another type of trade, became more important, that is, that of humans, alcohol, utensils, weapons and glass beads. Whereas previously the trading visitors presented the chiefs with kola nuts as a gift, and once the kola was chewed, a bargain could begin and eventually completed, as the trade in humans advanced, such rituals began to disappear.

Political consequences

In a number of ways, the slave trade contributed greatly to changes in administration by different rulers of various polities in the Luawa area and elsewhere, especially in the 18th century. In relating to their subjects, rulers were no longer fully in the position of carrying out the functions of maintaining order and giving security to their own people. Maintaining such order became virtually incompatible with the mode of production adopted in response to the lure of European manufactured goods. Thus, they had almost entirely neglected their responsibility for the security of their subjects during the centuries of supplying European slave ships. In many respects, even the *Poro* Institution, the greatest pillar of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society and other Mane-speaking societies, was no longer a cementing social force when it came to the supply of slaves for guns, but simply an instrument in the hands of slave-trading rulers (Winterbottom, 1803: 127). Most rulers actively assaulted their own subjects by raiding outlying villages, sometimes under cover of darkness. They did everything to protect themselves and their relations from being sold into slavery, and in

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[130] Those who maintained some control over long distance trade were mainly coastal rulers. In order to maintain this monopoly they discouraged direct contact between Europeans and the sources of the interior. They presented a picture of the interior as being dangerous and barren to the Europeans. To the Africans who were living in the interior, they stressed the danger of being captured by slave raiders on the coast (Lawrence, 1930). This strategy did not quite work, since towards the end of the 17th Century, we find that some Kɔɔ-Mɛnde travellers were already taking part in economic barter even further along the coast.

extreme cases, even sought the return of any noble who had unknowingly been shipped to the Americas.[131]

The slave trade brought general anarchy and great confusion to the Upper Guinea Coast. Many of the religiously sanctioned rules of conduct governing Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society at that time were now largely weakened, in order to facilitate a trade that became a constant threat. Since they were no longer safe in the hands of their own local rulers and elders, individuals or groups of individuals had to look for means of securing themselves. They never risked walking even a mile from home without firearms and other means of protection (cf. Atkins, 1735: 151). Besides, in many territories including Luawa, villages were re-located in hideouts that were unreachable for slave raiders. This can be a further proof of the general insecurity facing the local population (Rodney, 1970: 259).

The spread of wars and disorder, caused by dealing in human beings among the different communities, contributed to the weakening of political structures. Political leaders began to lose their political and moral authority, as these wars became rampant and got out of control. Lured by European goods, local communities found it hard to organise military resistance against slave raiders or other intruders. Thus, the whole of West Africa became militarily weak, since they were divided by internal conflicts over the slave capture. The Europeans were able to take advantage of this discord and confusion by invading much of West Africa in order to proclaim colonial hegemony after the official end of the slave trade. Hence, the slave trade became "the father of the colonial invasions" (Davidson, 1981: 286), because it acted as a prelude to "the colonial system that was to follow in the second half of the nineteenth-century" (*op. cit.*: 285-286).

After legal interdiction of the Atlantic slave trade, Western powers looked for alternative commodities. These included ivory, palm oil, palm kernels, camwood, rice, millet, gold, beeswax, pepper, hides and pelts, civet, ambergris, indigo, cotton, resin, soap, raffia mats and citrus fruit

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[131] For example, the ruler of Bissau wrote to the King of Portugal in 1792 "demanding the return of fidalgo Ijala, who had been carried to Maranhao, and also the recall of the official who permitted this" (Rodney, 1970: 258).

that would serve the purpose of exchanging goods between Europeans and Africans (Jones 1983a; Rodney 1970). Dealing in such commodities was now supposed to constitute the only legitimate trade (Rodney, 1970: 152ff.). As indicated earlier, slaves were never the exclusive export of the Upper Guinea coast. Rather, most other commodities had been on the agenda for exchange even before the introduction of the slave trade, but had become largely neglected as the trade in human beings boomed.

In Kɔɔ-Mɛnde territories, the European traders turned their attention mainly to camwood as a commodity in the so-called legitimate trade. They did their best to fit this activity neatly into the agricultural cycle of the lives of the people involved. The commerce in natural products of the territory, though different from the Atlantic slave trade was destined to have negative impact on the society in the long run. For whatever advantage the former had over the latter, constant cutting of the forests resulted in foreseeable environmental problems, the consequences of which we know today.

Some remarks about the Trans-Atlantic slave trade

Supporters of the slave trade had contended that slavery itself prevailed in Africa before the Atlantic trade (cf. Mannix and Cowley, 1963). Such propositions imply that various forms of African servitude did indeed facilitate the rise and progress of the Atlantic slave trade. This widely held view about 'indigenous' African society at the time must nevertheless be closely re-evaluated. The so-called African domestic slavery as an institution involved relatively small numbers, and is in no way comparable to that of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. McCulloh furnishes us with the following observations.

> From a chronological assessment, it can be demonstrated not only that these tenets are inapplicable but that, on the contrary, it was the Atlantic slave trade, which spawned a variety of forms of slavery, serfdom, and subjection in this particular area. Not only did Upper Guinea have a lengthy association with the Atlantic slave trade, beginning in the 1460s and extending over four centuries, but it is also a very useful exemplar as far as the present problem is concerned, because the so-called African slavery was known to be widespread in this region during the colonial period, and emancipation was eventually brought about by intervention of the metropolitan powers involved. Sometimes what one found was the quasi-feudal exploitation of labour by a ruling elite, who received the greater portion of the

harvest. At other times 'domestic slaves', as they had been termed, were members of their master's households. They could not be sold except for serious offences. They had their own plots of land and/or rights to a proportion of the fruits of their labour; they could marry; their children had rights of inheritance; and, if born to one free parent, often acquired a new status. Such individuals could rise to positions of great trust, including that of chief (McCulloh, 1964: 28-9; 68).

Rodney (1970: 263-4), in continuing this line of thought, has postulated that other possible connections between the Atlantic slave trade and the pattern of social stratification among most African societies should be considered. According to him, a direct link consists in the fact that captured individuals already became victims "with the view of being sold to European slave traders" (*ibid*). However, those captured also remained in the servitude of their captors, and becoming part of the master's households. The villages of local serfs became overcrowded slums used as breeding grounds for supplying the European slave dealers. For Rodney,

> this was the ultimate degradation to which the Atlantic slave trade had brought African [societies]. Without doubt, as far as the Upper Guinea Coast is concerned, to speak of African slavery as ancient, and to suggest that it provided the initial stimulus and early recruiting ground for slaves exported to Europe and the Americas is to turn history on its head. When the European powers involved in this area (namely Britain, France, and Portugal) intervened to end slavery and serfdom in their respective colonies, they were simply undoing their own handiwork. Much of the destruction caused by the Atlantic slave trade was slowly put to rights in the colonial period through the efforts of the West African peoples, who displayed tremendous resilience. They were sometimes aided by metropolitan powers who were forced to remedy some of the chaos they had formerly encouraged and, instead promote production of primary products such as cocoa, palm oil, and groundnuts (*op. cit.*: 270).

Further analysis of this problem shows that the presence of slave-buying Europeans was gradually transforming local rules and institutions. Prior to the beginning of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, the practice in Luawa was that "when a subject was in danger under one ruler, he could seek the protection of a higher ruler. He then remained in his care and became a household servant until his case was considered." When the Trans-Atlantic slave trade began, these refuge-seekers became liable for sale to the Europeans. Most observers arguing for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade often overlook features such as chattel slaves, agricultural serfs and

household servants and put all of them under the same category of slaves, hence equating it with the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (*ibid.*)

The Atlantic slave trade also contributed to the spread of Islam in that in most cases Muslim believers were protected from being sold into the hands of the Europeans. This meant that the category *karfi*, meaning a non-believer, became a cultural stigma for those who became vulnerable to be transported as slaves to the Americas. The Mandingo took as much *karfi* as they could in all the *jihads* they led in Upper Guinea. The Mandinga and Fula merchants collected their debts from traders annually and the rulers collected their tributes seasonally. Both were exploited to meet the increasing demand for slaves. It was a normal routine that in most Kɔɔ-Mɛnde communities and in other societies, individuals who could not pay their debts were liable to be sold as slaves – unless they were Muslims (Cannot, 1928: 92). The Muslim elite of the 18th century in the Upper Guinea Coast were protecting their own people and interest. Therefore, "a great number of people in the Luawa area converted to Islam for fear of being sold into slavery, since Islam would protect them from succumbing to this fate." For the Muslim societies of West Africa, this fate could sometimes be avoided when non-Muslim believers converted to Islam. The European slave traders on the other hand did not allow for even such an option.

Even with the abolition of the slave trade, sale of firearms mainly by Dutch, English and French merchants increased. Thus, firearms continued to play an important role as being the most wanted European commodity on the Upper Guinea Coast in pre-colonial times. This situation made guns and powder more important towards the end of the 18th century,[132] though before this period, the societies living in the interior of Upper Guinea were not in frequent possession of these arms. Hence, firearms from European merchants came relatively late to the interior of Sierra Leone. Some authors would argue though that it was only during the great *jihad* of Futa Djalon that these European weapons started penetrating the interior of Upper Guinea (Cultru 1913: 207; Matthews 1788: 88; Rodney

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[132] Rodney (1970: 176) argues this same point in relation to other ethnic groups or societies in the hinterland of Upper Guinea Coast.

1970: 176-77; Winterbottom 1803: 155). However, despite all the insecurities and confusions characterising the cultural and social landscapes of Upper Guinea, nonetheless trade continued to be important for much of the 18th and 19th centuries. Goods of exchange for this trade included metals, cloth, alcoholic beverages, weapons, and finally a mixture of baubles, bangles, and beads, and to a lesser degree slaves, however, since illegal slave trading was still going on.

For Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, the 19th century became the most turbulent and revolutionary century in terms of the impact on their social and religious structures of two great forces: the introduction and expansion of Islamic religious and cultural ideologies on the one hand, and European economic, territorial and political expansion on the other. The strains these two forces produced upon the various communities and societies involved became unbearable, until the European powers finally gained complete control, at least politically, and the process of recovery and readjustment could begin. However, this process of recovery and restructuring was characterised by a number of new lethal conflicts, leading to modern developments of warfare, especially in the 19th century.

Chapter 7 Pre-modern Warfare and its Incipient Transformations

This chapter presents an analysis of the rituals involved in pre-modern warfare among Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society and how these rituals gradually changed in the course of the 19th century. Thus, it seems expedient to divide this chapter into two major parts. The first part describes pre-modern warfare prior to any pre-colonial inter-cultural interactions, while the second part analyses the transformations that took place in the rituals of this warfare, especially during the 19th century.

Part one: pre-modern warfare

The first part of this chapter analyses the relation between defending the village against wild animals conceived as a particular type of warfare and the relevance the Ngiema village community attached to it. In Kɔɔ-Mɛnde understanding, warfare only gradually developed from a primordial situation in which men fought animals but not humans.

I identify two main transformations in the praxis of pre-modern warfare. The Ngiema people, in the understanding of their own past, maintain that there was no war, but in hunting, social status was generated. Attacks by people from unknown settlements forced them to defend their village and to turn their hunters into warriors. The idea of unknown settlement is crucial, since it points to the idea of transforming an unknown animal into an unknown warrior. In this first transformation, there was no social identity.

The second transformation entailed converting the relationship of warrior non-social human into warrior social human. After this second transformation, the village community introduced a vital practice called hand-to-hand fighting ((*tooko lapii*). From this perspective, the exchange of violence could be transformed into an exchange of values. The systems of exchange involved must, however, be authorised by the cosmological order and therefore the presence of the ancestors who were the true defenders of the village.

Humans as warriors

Hunters (*kamajoisia*)[133] were those whom the village community regarded as strong. Hunting game and protecting various settlements against fierce animals such as leopards, lions and elephants, were the principal tasks of these hunters. Therefore, "every male person must learn basic hunting skills during his initiation into *Poro*. These skills were further cultivated after the period of seclusion, through various exercises with experienced hunters." Being a good hunter was a means of attaining a high male social status because the social dimension of this type of hunting was of fundamental importance.

> The hunters divided themselves into groups, each headed by the leader of a particular settlement, who was the most skillful. Before going out to hunt for game, they offered sacrifices to the hunter-ancestors to ask for their assistance, especially to protect them from danger. These hunting [rituals] were performed in each settlement, in order to receive the support of the community who raised the morale and courage of the hunters with special songs sung by the women.

The more animals a group of hunters killed, the more recognition they received, and subsequently the more people joined their settlement. "The leaders of these hunters, who had nothing more than just bows and arrows, often had to use their bare hands in fighting wild animals, when the situation became critical." Due to the dangers involved, the community believed that hunting activities were only possible with the help of ancestral power. This power could manifest itself in the "ability to disappear suddenly when a wild animal became aggressive and wanted to attack." Such hunters became indomitable, increasing their prowess and fame in the neighbourhood.

Oral traditions mostly stress the importance of fighting wild animals and of the village obtaining protection from their attacks through ancestral power for future generations. An example of such narrations is that of the elephant has crossed river (*helei nja lewia*), in which "a big elephant,

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[133] We shall see in chapter 11 that the cultural practice of hunters as warriors was again taken up during the civil war in Sierra Leone, when in most Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages and towns some "civil defence groups known as hunters" organised themselves to protect their villages or towns against the rebels.

which was thought to have threatened a certain farming settlement across Sagbeeja stream was forced back into the forest area by a group of hunters." As far as the social relevance of such hunting activities was concerned, the Ngiema people graced it with singing and dancing. As different settlements extended and the villages increased in population and size, such forms of ritualised hunting developed into a form of warfare with peculiar techniques and specific ways of organising inter-group conflicts.

Primordial inter-group conflict

In the course of its history, hunters in Ngiema became more concerned with defending their village against human intruders than against animals; hence they were turned into warriors. Some of these intruders were believed to have come from a distant and unknown settlement. The image of such unknown warriors for the village community were mostly associated with attributes such as 'valour', 'prowess', 'indomitability' and 'wickedness'. Most informants, however, maintained that because these warriors and their territories were unknown, the village community sometimes took them to be the ancestors. "They came back to the village in this way to remind the people that it was only they who could protect the village and that the villagers had to submit to their protection."

Causes of conflict

The main reason for getting into conflicts with other known farming settlements, far away from Ngiema was a general scarcity of food and valuable property. For example,

> if a farming settlement around Ngiema was in dire shortage of food, owing to poor harvest, then some young and strong men of that settlement came to get some food from the sheds in Ngiema by force. After some time, the victims will also go to regain their food, and in this case fighting broke out between the two groups. Such fighting was mainly hand-to-hand fighting that normally ended in making peace and placing fines on the intruders. The same applies to conflicts involving important goods like tools, pots and fishing nets. Groups who were experiencing shortages in these items grabbed them from another group by force, and the latter in turn defended itself by forcefully reclaiming the property.

Another reason for conflict between different settlements and villages had to do with women.

> Sometimes young men – after some kind of celebration or feasts in a particular village or settlement – took women who were not yet married for several days to other villages without permission. The community referred to such young men as troublesome and stubborn people (*ngund-nyamu blaa*). In regaining their women from the *nguda nyamu blaa* violence broke out between these groups.

These causes built part of inter-group conflict characterised by forming alliances that were common in village communities. Such group dynamics form the quiddity of social interaction in conflict as employed more or less by Simmel (1890, 1908).

The above-mentioned "primordial" causes of conflict among various farming settlements were minimal in their actual effects. This is because they were mainly carried out among groups who in one way or another had obligations to one another through different forms of alliances. Such conflicts must be seen as forming a system of communication between them. Their social importance was appreciated by all the parties, a fact which could be readily seen in the manner of resolving the conflicts that usually ended in fining the transgressors or aggressors and asking them to apologize to the victims.

After most Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages had developed from simple farming settlements into small village communities, their political situation began changing as they developed into small towns and large areas of jurisdiction under the hegemonic rule of a particular warrior. Owing to local dynamic processes, Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society had developed a rather more complex form of conflict that could be categorised as warfare. In view of such developments, complex reasons for waging war on other groups became more relevant with different social meanings. In order to understand the dynamics of such warfare in its proper social and religious dimension, one needs to examine the nature, organisation and the ritual contexts involved.

By then warfare in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society was highly ritualised, characterised mainly by making offerings to the ancestors. It became in many respects a system of exchange that allowed communicative interaction between different groups involved in any conflict. Such a

communication in violent conflicts was aimed at the incorporation of the opponent. These exchange processes mediated by a cosmological system of communication gradually led to group identity, which in the course of time resulted in locally formed polities.

Weapons and skills

Crude weapons, such as clubs, bows, arrows, slingshots belonged to conventional weapons for warriors. Before the introduction of knives, spears and guns there was another method of fighting known as strength fighting (*kahun-lapii*), similar in many ways to hand-to-hand-fighting. This type of warfare was mostly organised on a representational basis. For example, the leader of all the warriors of Sacambu – present-day Kailahun – also represented Ngiema, Dodo Kortuma and other villages in the vicinity as their war leader. All these villages were under his jurisdiction and protection.

The strength fighting "was an organised form of hand-to-hand fighting between two great warriors representing their villages, which took place at least twice a year." Before the fighting began, it was customary to make ritual preparations often months prior to the event. It included offering sacrifices to the warrior-ancestors of each group, asking them for their assistance to win. Such ritual sacrifices followed much celebration in the various communities involved. On the day of the fighting, there was much singing and dancing, accompanied by a high competitive spirit, with each village community hoping to prove that its warrior was the strongest. For them, it did not actually matter who won or lost, since such an occasion mostly served as a meeting place and reunion for friends and relatives who were living far away from one another. They discussed many topics of common interests and obligation, sometimes leading to arrangements for possible exchange of marriage partners.

Common weapons used in this type of warfare "were special clubs made from the branch of a particular tree believed to possess *hei*, which was supposed to make the opponent weak and to recognise quickly the strength of the person using the club." The making of such a crude weapon was subject to a number of ritual sacrifices to the ancestors. According to two elderly informants,

Poisoned arrows and bows were seldom used on human enemies during war. Hunters only used this on animals, because it was forbidden to kill human beings in such a way. If they were ever used on human enemies, then it was an exceptional case for very good reasons, since all these conflicts were subjected to strict rules. Guns were introduced as weapons later.

The war fences

It was the strong hunters who were transformed into warriors that first fortified the village from attacks by making fences around it, using ropes, sticks and the cotton trees planted by the ancestors. By then the practice of building war fences (*gɔeesia*) in villages and settlements among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde was popular and continued into the 19th century. "The cotton trees in Ngiema became useful in building the war fence around the village to prevent enemy warriors from attacking it. They became the *gɔee wuisia*, [meaning trees used in making a war fence]." The place around them was *gɔee lamei*, which means "place where the war fence was built."

The first war fence built at Ngiema[134] corresponded in many ways to the manner in which the village was built. The round mud huts covered with thatches were crammed together in the closest possible means on all sides. Such a closely packed form of building huts favoured narrow irregular passages, about four to five feet wide. These war fences were mostly surrounded by a triple stockade, which was 20 feet high, and of posts 6 to 10 inches in diameter. "They were well interlaced and tied with strong ropes, the top trimmed and brushed. Through this fence, a small door was the only entrance to the village, which was about four feet by two, located near the Sagbeeja stream."

To make sudden approaches by intruding warriors more difficult, all paths leading to the village were left as narrow and as overgrown as possible. Through such a structure, it was only possible for someone to proceed to the village along these paths in single file, since only a single road mainly the one crossing Sagbeeja led into the village, which could be easily blocked. The actual gate to the village was so narrow that it could

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[134] For various forms and similar practices of erecting war fences in villages among other Mɛnde groups and elsewhere in West Africa, see Alldridge (1901); Anderson (1870); Little (1967: 33); Malcolm (1939: 47); Winterbottom (1803: 87).

barely admit one person. The round mud huts covered with thatches were packed so close to each other in such a way that it became extremely difficult for attacking warriors to find their way in the village. Three fences encircled and guarded the village. The cotton trees played an important role in this respect, because the outer fence consisting of sticks and tree branches, were piled up between the cotton trees and tied with strong ropes to other trees usually in a semi-circle form. This made a strong fortification along the banks of Sagbeeja and Kɔ-gbege, which separated the village from the outside world. Its main object was to provide a temporary brake on the attack from invading warriors. Such fortifications were not only for human enemies, but also as a preventive measure against attacks from wild animals.

Part two: Warfare in the nineteenth-century

The general insecurity among different societies of the Upper Guinea Coast has led to many forms of warfare among these groups, so that "by the second half of the 19th century, professional warriors had emerged" (Abraham, 2003: 3). By then warfare had become different from its pre-modern version in many respects, though there were still some of its cultural representations, mainly in terms of rituals. Although Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warfare was adopting new forms, owing to the general transformation process in West Africa, its fundamental war ethics virtually remained the same for much of the 19th century. In it, the incorporation of the opponent played a crucial role. Three phases of warfare can be distinguished at this time. First, the extension of village communities and settlements under ancestral protection; second, the formation and expansion of a centralised ancestral polity; third, the different wars and conflicts triggered by the 'illegal' slave trade and increasing British influence.

Phase 1: Expansion of an ancestrally protected community

The fundamental cultural value of warfare leading to a particular war ethics was not to destroy the opponent, but to incorporate him. It aimed at the enlargement of the community by bringing people together. The conquered communities became part of the conqueror in the sense that they were subjected to the protection of the ancestors of the conquerors.

Consequently, the aim of warfare was to expand an ancestrally protected community, either by consent or by coercion. The opponent was to be convinced by means of the display of prowess that he wished to be under the protection of the ancestors. For this reason, Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warfare by the early 19th century remained highly ritualised. Hence, the wish to incorporate the opponent was only fulfilled if he was not destroyed. Such incorporation entailed a number of rituals.

The most common ritual was that of announcing war.[135] This ritual implied that the opponent had to be informed by sending a special envoy, known as the War Messenger, since each village community and region had its specific War Messengers. His task was actually more of an invitation to make peace, than of announcing a fight. The messengers should invite the village leader as a warrior not to put up resistance, but to be humble enough to accept the invitation of subduing himself, so that his entire community would be incorporated into that of the challenger. It was then up to that village leader to accept the invitation for peace or to decide for war. The War Messenger, when dressed in war attire, should carry half-burnt green leaves to the village leader who was being challenged, green representing peace and the half-burnt leaves representing urgency, in this case the threat of war. At the sight of the War Messenger, all the villagers knew that there was an important decision to be taken – either for peace or for war.

When war was imminent, a libation was to be poured to the ancestors and sacrifices made, inviting warrior ancestors to assist in war. No war could be waged without performing this ritual, because it was believed that it gave the actors a sense of security and success. However, Islamic rituals were gradually replacing this practice. Through the process of Islamization, the use of different types of *hei* became a recurrent phenomenon in warfare. Instead of pouring libations to the ancestors, warriors now had the option of going to the amulet maker (*moimui*) – any Muslim who claims to make charms and amulets – and asking him make

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[135] This does not apply to slave raiding wars that came as a result of the Trans-Atlantic trade. In raiding villages for slaves, war was not organised, and there were no rules to be followed.

amulets for them. "These were to be attached to the warriors and their guns to give them protection against witches and deadly weapons, thus making them invincible." The 19th century saw an increase in the use of small charms and amulets before going to war. Interestingly, the warriors usually came back to the tradition of pouring libation to warrior ancestors, if the amulets were not effective enough for them. Sometimes both rituals were performed to ensure success and protection against enemies. Towards the end of the century, however, the form and success of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warfare was becoming more and more dependent upon the work of the amulet maker.

Early 19th century Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warfare also saw the development of new military techniques. The Ngiema village community continued to build ever stronger and sophisticated stockades for protection[136] against human intruders, especially slave raiders. Villages not adequately prepared were usually taken by storm, and attacks normally followed regular procedures. The fighters only made an assault on the village when their leader gave the command. Prior to the operation, spies, known as the *nenejiaga blaa* (literally "those who walk in shadows") studied the layout of the village the warriors were about to attack. They also listened to every single conversation in the community that might concern military tactics, and then gave the necessary intelligence to their commanders in order to plan the strategy. The outcome of the attack strategy depended much on the cleverness of the spies. War strongholds, however, had also been developed so as to resist any surprising attacks. Besides, the warriors defending the village saw to it that all gates to the village were closed in the evening, and they conducted a house-to-house search for any male strangers. Those found were subjected to an interrogation and possibly detained; but if the spies were fortunate enough to escape capture, they opened the gates to the warriors hiding in the surrounding forests to let them in. The actual assault was led by the needle (*miji*), followed by the

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[136] This type of defending settlements against intruders was not something that was peculiar to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, but was also found among other societies in the surrounding region, especially in the Liberia Hinterland north west of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde (cf. Anderson, 1870: 66-7).

thread (*fandei*), the wax (*kanyei*) and ladder carrier (*haka houmui*). They approached the outermost fence, each with a number of combat warriors (*kugbangaa*). If the fence was too high, the ladder carrier must help the needle with the ladder over the fence. "Then the assault on the village began with the needle boldly making the declaration of combat in the expectation of a response from the opponent war party." The war leader of the village under attack did not lead the fight against the intruders himself, unless his men were unable to defend the village.

The very concept of 'thread', 'needle' and 'wax' seem to refer to the basic purpose of warfare, that is to say, to "sew together" two communities under the protection of one's own ancestors. It seems to refer to a relationship that was performed when a group of people subjected themselves to the authority of a warrior protector by offering him the fertility of the land "sewn" into a piece of cloth.

The use of secret signs and passwords was necessary so that each party was able to distinguish comrades from opponents, since the battle usually went on at night. If, for example, Kai Londo's group had as password the strong men (*Hingaa*), all the fighting combatants were supposed to know this word. Anyone giving a different response was taken to be the enemy, and he was eventually attacked and seized. "These passwords were constantly changing, since it was part of the work of the spies to discover them."

All traditional forms of warfare were powered by a specific war ethics governed by particular taboos. The *Poro* institution sanctioned the regulations guiding the conduct of warriors and the taboos surrounding warfare, which all parties must observe. For instance, "a ruler was not allowed to wage war on another party while the *Poro* or *Sande* initiation rituals were in session. Initiates were neither to be molested by the fighters nor were they to be conscripted as warriors." It was generally believed that "the *hei*, which came from the *Poro*, was more powerful than the spears and other weapons used by parents of the initiates," and as such, an assault on novices had disastrous cosmological consequences unmatched by any physical wound inflicted by weapons. "War parties were not to attack defenceless people. Indiscriminate massacres of village populations were not allowed, and women and children were always taken

away from the scene of the fighting." Such war ethics sanctioned by the authority of the *Poro*, were undermined in the course of the 19th century, when trade in human beings became more of a demand in new forms of economic exchange systems introduced by European traders some centuries earlier. Drinking the palm wine (*kotii gbole*) was also part of the war ritual. The *kotii* is a very strong kind of palm wine, which warriors drank before the actual combat. To drink this wine entailed a public display of boldness. However, later in the 19th century, the expression *kotii gbole* came to mean the public acrobatic display of swords by war leaders before the actual combat (cf. Abraham, 2003).

Among the weapons used in early 19th century were the sharp long fighting knives fabricated in the smithy prior to the introduction of swords by European traders. The social and psychological meaning attached to the use of knives was relevant for each village community. When travelling to another village, it was customary for war leader to take their fighting knives with them, accompanied by several warriors equipped with small knives. Upon entering another village, they performed an acrobatic display of knives, which was not only meant to be a sign of the warrior's skills and prowess, but also a means to impress any other warrior who might be present in that village. "It was a kind of formal greeting to the villagers. Such [rituals] were always to be observed, even if the warriors were on a peace mission or to attend a burial ceremony."

In case of fighting between two warriors, the acrobatic display of weapons by all parties was an indispensable sign of skill and valour. This dexterity earned the warrior the admiration and respect of the village spectators. By using swords and knives in fighting, it was also customary that the whole village community be present for the spectacle, because without on-lookers this type of war was socially meaningless. The fighting came about when one party had rejected the invitation to be incorporated into the other. According to an elderly informant, in such a case,

> the acrobatic display of knives resulted in fighting that normally ended in one of the parties surrendering to the stronger one, or, in extreme cases, the warriors took to their heels. Those caught were ultimately taken as dependents or domestic slaves. Upon their arrival, the victorious warrior instructed women and children to stay indoors. He then cut some of the mud from the house where the prisoners of war

were kept, saying, 'You are now my slaves and you are not supposed to leave this house again.' He also kept the weapons he had seized from them in his residence.

Anderson also gives us a graphic description of how prior to the 19th century these wars were fought:

> The wars of these people are, however, not attended with any sanguinary results; they consist mainly in surprising a few individuals where they can be suddenly come upon. Sometimes the roads are waylaid wherever their respective traders are supposed to pass. These, together with other petty annoyances, constitute their principal mode of warfare. The large walled towns are seldom taken. Pitched battles are seldom fought; and even when these people may be said to take an open field, most is done by some war Chief by way of displaying his individual prowess (Anderson, 1870: 16).

Phase 2: The formation of a centralised ancestral polity

External influences brought fundamental social, economic and political changes,[137] manifested mainly in building and expanding polity under the protection of the ancestors. This came at a time when the whole Upper Guinea Coast was in a state of turmoil and conflicts owing to the social and economic changes brought about by the Atlantic slave trade, the increasing European activities and the *jihads* set in motion by Muslim rulers.

Informants have referred to this type of warfare, which was also aimed at establishing the polity as the Mɛnde War (Mɛnde-*goi*).[138] The conventional value and warfare ethics remained operative, but were mainly aimed at expanding the territorial integrity of stronger or more powerful rulers who started to build large political units. According to most informants, owing to the 19th century situation of insecurity that prevailed in the Upper Guinea Coast, establishing such political units was

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[137] On the general changes in African societies at the time, see Ajayi & Smith (1971) and Ijagbemi (1981).

[138] According to Simpson (1967: 53), during the Mɛnde war there was a general trend of migration, since it ransacked the country and caused incalculable suffering and devastating much of Luawa, especially under Mbawulomeh, a Gbandi warrior and lieutenant to Ndawa. There was no possibility of making farms for almost a decade, which resulted in famine. See also Abraham (2003) for details on other types of warfare in the 19th century.

believed to be a way of keeping law and order as part of the overall process of transition and reconstruction. Therefore, polity formation and extension were primarily conceived in terms of social cohesion, rather than "political power" in the modern sense of the word.

In analysing the process involved in building up pre-colonial political units, I am mainly concerned with the formation of "Greater Luawa" (cf. Abraham, 1978) as a centralised polity.[139] Evidence based on territorial organisation has shown that Ggreater Luawa was founded under the rule of a warrior ancestor known as Kai Londo. Ndawa, another warrior ancestor, also became an important figure for the dynamics involved in forming the Luawa polity, though was not directly involved.

Kai Londo and Ndawa

The relationship between these two warrior ancestors,[140] which ended in a battle, is highly significant, since it forms the basis of understanding how warfare was generally conceived by Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society in the 19th century.

Oral history maintains that Kai Londo[141] was born to Dowii Kohmei and Kefue Mambeh in a village belonging to Luawa called Komalu near present-day Mano Sewalu in the Kailahun district (Abraham, 2003). His father, Dowii Kohmei[142] was a great Kissi warrior, who lived at Dunoko, a town in the present-day republic of Guinea. At the time of his son's birth, Dowii decided to name him after the powerful Gbandi chief of Kissi Tongi, Kai Londo, who was forced to capitulate after having been defeated by Kohmei in a fierce battle. Giving the name of the defeated warrior to his newborn baby was a sign of good will from Kohmei in the

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[139] This is what Abraham calls pre-colonial states. He distinguishes two types of Mɛnde states, as he puts it, namely coastward territorial states and interior hegemonies (Abraham, 2003: 73). The first type of state includes Sherbro, Lugbu, Gallinas, Bumpeh and Kpaa-Mɛnde, while the Tikonko state of Makavoray, the Kpanguma state of Nyagua, the Gaura state of Mendegla, and the Luawa state of Kai Londo belonged to the hegemonies (*ibid*).

[140] Scholars like Gorvie (1944) and Migeod (1926) have described the background of each warrior, as well as the relationship that existed between them.

[141] See the following on the background of Kai Londo's opponent, Ndawa: Abraham (2003: 85-37); Gorvie (1944: 12ff.); Hollins (1929: 14-15).

[142] *Kohmei* means "a fighting place", indicating that he was a great warrior.

peace deal agreed on by both parties. "The young Kai Londo was raised at Komalu, but trained in the fundamental techniques of warfare by a renowned warrior ancestor of Ngiema called Kpao Bondowulo." Under the apprenticeship of the chief of Mendekelema in the area called minor (small) Bo as a trumpeter, the young Kai Londo fought in the war that broke out between Mendekelema and Kenema. Due to his gallantness in this war, Kai Londo became a famous warrior and his reputation grew in the whole of Luawa. He returned to his hometown and built Mofindor close to Kailahun town that started as a small village called Sacambu. In commenting on the political situation of towns and villages at that time, Hollins, maintains that "No chief as we know them [today], ruled in Luawa; but every town with its neighbouring villages was ruled by its [own ruler], who clung to a doubtful freedom and gave fealty to strong chiefs when forced to" (Hollins, 1929: 12). Instead, the basic unit of administration was one major town, which had many dependent villages. Such administrative towns became the walled towns and many of the villages formed the country that became 'Luawa country' (cf. Abraham, 2003: 84ff.).

Ndawa was a "freebooter" who pillaged much of Luawa.[143] "He was fond of wearing a particular yellow country-cloth gown, and of decorating himself with many horns filled with charms and amulets." Some elderly informants maintained that the amulet maker who worked for Ndawa "closed himself up in a room for more than a month, fasting and praying, while preparing the amulets and charms for him; at the end of his work the amulet maker demanded more than fifty slaves and concubines as his pay." He then gave Ndawa the yellow country-cloth gown, which was supposed to make him invisible and invulnerable, especially to bullets. Likewise, "Kai Londo also wore amulets around both ankles which another amulet maker gave him before he met Ndawa for the great fight [of the century]." After working for seven days behind closed doors, he instructed Kai Londo and his warriors to perform a ceremony with a snake, which all of them were forced to touch. Despite the fact that the

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[143] See also Hollins (1928: 15). Abraham (2003: 83) calls him "a great Mɛnde warrior […], who was notorious for his predatory habits."

two warriors were once allies, each respecting the other's prowess in war, they became bitter opponents, which ended in a conflict. Therefore, Kai Londo and Ndawa fought a historic battle in Ngiehun-Luawa, not only to show their military prowess and superiority, but, most importantly, for the expansion of hegemonic political rule. The following is a narration of this conflict.

When Luawa was in a state of impending threats from the warriors in the area, Ndawa came and threatened the peace of Ngiehun, a centrally located town in Luawa. But he also threatened the peace of the whole of Luawa, by soliciting the support of some chiefs in Ngiehun and Sacambu. Many of the terrified chiefs asked Kai Londo to help them in driving out Ndawa, who challenged Kai Londo, calling him a 'mere woman'.[144] After the necessary preparations of amulets by his amulet maker and offering some sacrifices to the ancestors, Kai Londo set off to meet Ndawa, who sent some of his fighters as preliminaries to meet the warriors of the opponent on the way. Then they started advancing towards each other, before meeting at Ngiehun. Such advances in movement to meet the opponent was normal among warriors in pre-colonial days, and the booty and prisoners of war were sent back to the villages of the advancing warrior until the two warriors finally met at a point for a more formalised fighting.

Ndawa had fortified Ngiehun with stockades, and was waiting for the arrival of Kai Londo. Meanwhile people from the whole area, together with warriors and fighters from the respective regions had gathered at Ngiehun-Luawa to witness this [historic] fight between the two great warriors. Using all the local and military techniques at his disposal, Kai Londo managed to go through all the stockades. Upon entering Ngiehun, Kai Londo announced himself by making a loud cry: 'Here am I, Kai Londo; I have jumped to meet you.' Ndawa responded by saying: 'Yes, you have met Ndawa – remember you are a mere woman.' The two warriors who were once allies were now to try their strengths in physical combat.[145]

Before the real combat, they performed the drink the palm wine (*kotii gbole*) [ritual]. That is to say, both warriors began to gesticulate with their swords, making passes in the air and beating the ground, each demonstrating a gesture of self-confidence. The warriors started fighting with knives and as they crossed swords, Kai Londo was hit on his right arm, but he dexterously passed the sword to the other hand. After been hit on the forehead, Ndawa lost his sword. This second phase of the combat began, when both warriors started a close hand-to-hand combat, especially when Ndawa dropped his knife, but tried to regain it, after being wounded by Kai Londo. The latter then threw Ndawa on the ground and held his hands and feet, so that the former was unable to move. Afterwards Kai Londo asked his fighters to

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[144] The phrase 'mere woman' in traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society was a way of underestimating the opponent, since women were allowed neither to take part in any battle, nor to become warriors.

[145] Both warriors were nicknamed. Ndawa was known as *Mendegendei,* meaning one who moves the Mɛnde around, while Kai Londo was called *Gendemeh* meaning short and robust (cf. Abraham, 2003: 92).

bring his knife, but Ndawa pleaded with him not to kill him, reminding Kai Londo [of the traditional Kɔɔ-Mɛnde war ethics], that 'a great warrior never kills another great warrior', which has become a Kɔɔ-Mɛnde proverb: *Kɔgugba ei ngi mba kɔgugba waa*. Kai Londo then asked him, 'If I leave you, will you quit this country?' Ndawa promised never to threaten the peace of Luawa again. Kai Londo released Ndawa and his fighters, but also told them that it would be better for them to come to him for training in the arts of warfare, and be subsequently brought under his jurisdiction.

Meanwhile the whole episode of Kai Londo defeating Ndawa in the fight at Ngiehun-Luawa became one of the most famous Mɛnde songs, which goes like this: *Kai Londo i Ndawa ngulanga .... i yee ya-ee* [Kai Londo has defeated Ndawa and brought him to the ground]. This was how the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde people used to live and fight their wars before the white men came. When the colonial rulers came, they settled at Kpedebu. From there they controlled the whole territory. In Ngiema, the footpath leading to Baa village was the main and only road to other parts of the country. The white men had their lodging place and their barracks on top of the hill in Nganyawama.

Formation and expansion of Greater Luawa under Kai Londo

The whole of Luawa was obviously impressed by Kai Londo's unwavering strength and prowess. This prompted all leaders, elders, warriors and the people come to Kai Londo and ask him to be their protector. They appointed him to be the leader of Sacambu territory. At a ceremony,

> the people took some amount of moist mud and put it into a white cloth sealed with white stripes and handed it over to Kai Londo saying, 'We have given ourselves, this whole land and this territory into your hands today. From now on, be our leader and protect us from intruding warriors. Do not allow them to raid our property and take our women away, but above all do not allow strangers [i.e. warriors other than you] to rule this land.'

The general method of acquiring political and territorial right in the 19th century was mainly through annexation by conquest as well as suing for peace and protection. Political leaders who were usually defeated in war or those who felt threatened and wanted the protection of a more powerful leader,

> normally assembled all their sub-leaders, and [ritually] presented a number of large white country cloth (*gbalii*), and one large gown (*ndoma hina*), to the victor or prospective protector. A young girl, usually fair in complexion, a close kin of the vanquished or afflicted chief, with a piece of earth signifying the territory, in a white

cloth on her head, would be presented to the victor or protector as his wife.[146] The [ritual] formula 'This is your country; defend it, rule it. We shall never resist you', usually accompanied the presentation.

The gift of the fertility of the land is unmistakeably connected with the gift of human fecundity embodied in the bride. In other words, legitimate political authority is part of a relationship linking it to regenerative fertility.

After Kai Londo became leader and protector of Luawa, he settled at Sacambu, after which the people decided to change the name of the town, and to name it after their protector and ruler Kai Londo. Thus, Sacambu became *Kai-la-hun*, literally 'the town that belongs to Kai', which has remained to this day. The reputation for defending the people of his territory grew beyond Luawa as far as Liberia. Luawa expanded from being a "core country" to that of being a major polity mainly through warfare. War was aimed at absorbing many smaller polities that had led independent political lives in Luawa, before the forest land of Upper Guinea as a whole was brought into political and social turmoil. The territorial integrity of the Luawa polity depended much on the personality of its founder, Kai Londo. "After being defeated, Ndawa greatly contributed to the building and expansion of the Luawa state by forcing many other chiefs to bring their territories under the jurisdiction and protection of Kai Londo." In this way, Kai Londo created, expanded and consolidated the territorial frontiers of his polity, and ultimately gained a dominant political authority over Luawa. Hollins correctly argued that "the early history of Luawa is that of its founder Kailondo [Kai Londo]" (Hollins, 1929: 11).

Meanwhile Kai Londo continued to expand his territory's frontiers by undertaking a series of expeditions protecting weaker polities against aggression by absorbing them. He also inflicted punishment on troublemakers who attacked his people by engaging in "punitive expeditions" against their rulers and capturing their territories, while at the same time conquering neighbouring polities that were not willing to

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[146]   See also Little (1967) and Clarke (1957).

submit to his rule. The method of defending the peace of weaker rulers and protecting their territorial integrity against illegitimate intruders can be illustrated using Ngiema as an example.

> During the time of Kai Londo, Ngiema enjoyed the defending power of this great warrior. One day, certain warriors from the east [meaning Liberia] came to attack Ngiema. The Ngiema people sent word to Kai Londo, to come and drive out the invading warriors. Upon this request, Kai Londo sent his War Messenger to tell the warriors to quit Ngiema, and be ready for possible incorporation into his territory, but they became defiant and refused to leave the village. After sending his Messenger to Ngiema a second time and warning them of the consequences of war, the warriors laughed at them and made fun of Kai Londo. He then gathered all his warriors and weapons, including the War trumpet (*kɔ-bulii*) and set off for Ngiema. When Kai Londo and his men reached Bandajuma, about five miles to Ngiema, he sent his War Messenger again to the warriors, but they refused to listen. When Kai Londo reached the Sagbeeja stream, he sent his Messenger again in order to avert confrontation, but without success. Upon arriving at Yawaju, he again sent another Messager, but the invaders remained defiant. He then instructed one of his warriors to blow the war trumpet. At the sound of the trumpet, all the invading warriors gathered at the main entrance of the village. He sent his Messenger again, but the invading warriors became even more defiant. After instructing one of his men to blow the war trumpet again, Kai Londo came as far as the entrance to the war fence. He warned the invading warriors again to leave Ngiema, but they refused and challenged him to come and fight them. Before entering the village, Kai Londo climbed the cotton tree and turned his back on the warriors who then shot at him with the Mɛnde gun. After climbing down, he ordered his men to advance and wound or capture any of them. This [ritual] might have been part of the instruction given to him by his amulet maker. When the invading warriors saw that Kai Londo and his men were stronger than they were, they took to their heels. In their efforts to cross the Kɔ-gbege stream, most of them drowned, while others were taken as slaves.

Some scholars have identified such an early form of a centralised Kɔɔ-Mɛnde polity as "a fluid state system" (Barrows 1971: 3, Brown 1951: 275; Wylie 1969: 295, 1976; Little 1966: 64). During the 19th century, it was neither a common practice to base the election and office of a ruler on the principle of primogeniture, nor was it based on a hereditary system *per se* (cf. Winterbottom 1803: 124; Abraham 1971). Thus, to attain political authority in the community was not restricted to a particular family line, or ruling class, because the 19th century polity system did not permit of institutionalised ruling houses. By then political authority was attained through achievement, especially victory in war, rather than hereditary (Abraham, 2003: 74). Because rulers were not exempted from the law,

subjects could challenge them, by calling on the intervention of a neighbouring ruler, for example (cf. Hollins 1928: 26; Winterbottom 1803: 124).

Phase 3: Commoditization of human beings

When the Europeans traded in slaves, human beings became reduced to commodities on the market, serving as incentive for different wars on the Upper Guinea coast even after the abolishment of the Atlantic slave trade. In the course of the 19th century, a fundamental change had taken place regarding the techniques and ethics of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warfare. The ideas and values about traditional warfare have undergone a transformation, entailing the redefinition of the strength of the ancestors. Informants have constantly pointed out that such a change came about when Kɔɔ-Mɛnde chiefs and warriors started torturing and killing their opponents, and sometimes even massacring defenceless people. Discourse on warfare is a discourse on the relative value of warfare, and these informants still recount the prevailing ethics of warfare at that time in reference to the actions of Europeans, particularly the British. When informants talk about the putative massacre of people, they also argue that what happened should not have happened in the first place, thus valuing such actions in reference to an ethical continuity in 19th century Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warfare.

Towards the end of the 19th century, warfare among Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warriors became crucially different in many ways from that practiced some centuries ago. Most of these new forms were taking on lethal or brutal forms, especially against innocent people in many respects. By then, warriors who attacked settlements and villages massacred some of their opponents in war, while taking others as slaves to be bartered for European manufactured goods such as guns and swords. In order to obtain enough slaves to be exchanged for these objects, attacks mostly took place at night. In this case, fighters never performed the ritual of notifying the opponent. Warriors increasingly put their opponents to death. Kai Londo ordered the deaths of the chiefs who had collaborated with Ndawa and his lieutenant Mbawulomeh, by having them "deftly strung to heavy stones in the river Keeya" (Abraham, 2003: 100). He was also thought to have ravaged the Gbandi country by looting and burning villages in pursuing

Mbawulomeh, because the burning of villages and settlements of civilians had become part of this new form of warfare.

Nevertheless, certain regulations were still in place, such as the idea that an ordinary fighter or a junior warrior had no right to kill a great warrior, because only a counterpart could put an end to a renowned warrior's life. But this already signalled a gradual change in the rules of warfare during this period, since it was common in pre-modern times that "no warrior could put an end to the life of another." In spite of such changes, it still was not the practice of warfare to aim at a mass destruction, as we know it today. Anderson (1870: 16) confirmed that mass and indiscriminate destruction was something characteristic of the Western imperialist wars but not of traditional warfare, so did Clarke (1957) and Hollins (1928; 1929) many years later.

By then, the sharp long knives fabricated in the smithy were replaced by sophisticated swords, which the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde obtained in exchange for slaves and other commodities. Whereas the use of firearms was not decisive before the advent of European and Muslim traders on the West Coast (cf. Abraham, 2003),[147] by now new weapons included European knives, swords and guns, "a staple of European trade in Africa" (*op cit.*: 49), since acquiring them through barter was only possible through the sale of fellow Africans. As these weapons, especially guns however became scarce, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde began to fabricate replicas of guns. These self-made guns known as gunpowder gun (*ndɛhɛ-gbandei*) were also used in hunting game. One recalls how

> after the hunter had fired the gunpowder gun, he sat down for a moment; afterwards he changed the moistened palm leaves (*humui*). The latter favoured the smooth loading of the gunpowder (*ndɛhɛ*), after which the moistened leaves were also put into the gun until they became very hard after the loading. The cartridges were processed locally from the smithy, where small metals and pieces of iron from old cutlasses or machetes, hoes and pots were collected and put together in a big smithy pot (*ngai vei*). Some charcoal was then put on top of the objects and melted for several hours. Afterwards, some ashes from the coals were put on the ground while the melted substance was taken by a pair of pliers/pair of pincers (*gbanyii*), and were then put into the ashes. This was done so that the melted iron and metal pieces

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[147] See also (Fisher and Rowland 1971: 219; Legassick 1966: 95-115; Smaldone 1972: 591-607).

turned into small balls of iron. The latter were used as cartridges usually put on top of the palm leaves […]. Some matches or easily ignited cords and wicks were then put into the gun – exactly into the hole connecting the trigger and the cartridges, which was locked afterwards. Furthermore, there was another iron fixed near the trigger, which enabled it to set the gun for shooting after igniting the gunpowder, which made the cartridge go out with a violent force and a mighty sound. This was how the Mɛnde guns looked like in the days of old and they could even be used to kill a human being.

By the end of the 19th century[148], all major Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warriors like Kai Londo[149] had made use of guns and artillery. Isaac (1969: 17) has argued that gunfire could be used to instil terror on opponents. These weapons inflict greater harm than locally made bows and arrows, clubs, spears and the like.[150] It appears that guns only featured prominently when around the middle of the 19th century, the "illegal hunt for slaves" became more desperate.[151] Nevertheless, the time it took to be re-loaded, and their unreliability made it difficult for these weapons to be widely used in battle.[152] Local weapons were still used at that time, but were increasingly replaced by the end of the century.

European observers and historians on Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Warfare

Most European observers have described the on-going wars in the 19th century in general as savage, ignoring the fact that their presence and their slave trade had induced this in the first place.[153] Such valorisations may have a long history in the study of race, culture and evolution in social anthropology (cf. Stocking, 1982; 1992). Professional warriors from

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[148] The gun that Kai Londo captured from one of his military raid-ventures into Liberia can be seen in the Paramount chief's residence in Kailahun up to this day.

[149] Names of warrior ancestors like Kai Londo and Ndawa were important not only for the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde in the 19th century, but also for the British colonial administration.

[150] In pre-modern warfare, "spears were usually poisoned for use in killing animals, and seldom on fellow human beings."

[151] European traders offered ammunition liberally, and prepared to welcome the captives (Wadstrom, 1795: 77).

[152] It was estimated that there were small amount of guns used – approximately one gun for every hundred warriors (cf. Simpson, 1967: 54).

[153] Examples include descriptions such as the following. Normally coming from the north, the Mɛnde invaders were forcing their way into the country, and waging war against anyone who was opposed to their settling in those areas. Thus, such an attitude helped Mɛnde establish warfare as a special function and institutional form (Little 1967: 28; McCulloch 1950: 7; Siddle 1968: 49).

various Mɛnde-speaking groups formed a fighting force, and were sometimes hired as mercenaries to fight in other areas (cf. Little, 1967). Therefore, a dominant 19th century European interpretation was that these activities had become a cultural pattern and the main form of activity and institution.[154]

Little (1967: 23-42) devotes a whole chapter to the analysis of traditional culture and warfare.[155] He bases the greater part of his arguments and analysis on reports written by European missionaries and travellers of the 19th century. However, as evident from the data presented above, such reports must be considered misrepresentations. Little (1967: 23ff) maintains that most of these scholars portray the Mɛnde as a warlike and primitive people, because of their involvement in the ongoing wars in West Africa at that time. Villages and towns were undergoing a process of transformation into locally formed polities throughout West Africa. Such dynamic transformations took on the character of war, which most Europeans saw as evidence of savagery.[156] Little summarised observations on the plight of Mɛnde immigrants who had fled to Freetown as refugees from these wars in the following ways: "The general conception gained of the up-country Mɛnde was of an entirely 'barbarous' people, lacking in morals and 'civilised' qualities" (*op. cit.*: 24). Also elsewhere, we read that the Mɛnde were "savages", who were constantly waging wars against other people and among one another (Clarke 1843a, 1843b; Vivian 1996). Little quoted the Reverend William Vivian who maintained that

> 'The moral temper and character of these Mendes combines various elements. They have long been known as fierce, brutal, and war loving people; and would, in all probability, quickly return to the exercise of these qualities if British influence were withdrawn from their country. But they are not simply a brutal people by any means …. I met people in the country who were repulsive in their condition, and despicable in themselves; but I met others who in demeanour, presence, and character called up to my mind pictures I have seen of Old Testament times' (Vivian 1896, cited in Little 1967: 24).

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[154] See also Alldridge (1901), Ijabemi (1981); McCulloch (1950: 7) and Siddle (1968: 49) for similar views. But Abraham (1969: 36) does not agree.

[155] Most European authors had wrongly referred to Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warfare as tribal (Abraham, 2003:51).

[156] Such ideas had been largely criticised especially by contemporary scholars. See (*op. cit.* 41).

Instead of interpreting these wars as evidence of savagery[157] and general anarchy, they should be regarded as part of a general response to processes of transformation in the course of the 19th century precipitated by the slave trade and the commoditisation of human beings. Thus, one cannot offer an explanation of the emerging brutality in warfare in terms of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde internal social dynamics alone, but must also take into account their relationship with Muslim and European traders (cf. Boahen, 1989).

The putative brutalities in the mid 19th century warfare, which were not characteristic of late 18th century society, should be understood as reactions to the general state of insecurity in the Upper Guinea coast. A process of restructuring and recovery was initiated when the British changed from slave traders into colonial administrators, and a Pax Britannia was imposed. This entailed new forms of political administration and the demarcation of new political and economic boundaries, ultimately leading to what I have called the interventions of colonial modernity.

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[157] A Liberian explorer commented on such observations as sheer exaggeration, because for him it became a common practice among Europeans to interpret any petty palaver among different African societies as a brutal universal war (Anderson, 1870: 11).

Chapter 8   Colonial Modernity

This chapter presents an analysis of the influences of colonialism and the type of modern ideologies introduced especially among Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society in Sierra Leone. Following historians of epochal modernity (cf. Grasskamp, 1998), one might argue that the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, like any other society, were not totally outside the realm of modernity in their own specific ways, as there are different types of modernities (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993), which every society can adopt in its own cultural articulations. I am not primarily concerned, however, with such conceptions of modernity, as they do not seem to correspond to the social reality of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, particularly in Ngiema village. Rather what is of immediate relevance is the ideological impact of colonial modernity on this society.

Simmel's conceptualisation of modernity, exemplified by the social impact of money economy on modern societies (Simmel [1900] 2006) is crucially important for the following analysis. It serves as a theoretical frame of reference in describing how colonial and post-colonial interventions ultimately introduced the modern ideology of individualism (cf. Dumont, 1986). In describing the fundamental features that constitute modernity, Simmel pinpoints the fundamentals of modernity in describing modern forms of social interactions. For him, the roots of modernity lie in capitalist money economy as it greatly contributes to changes in relations between people and between subject and object. I apply this Simmelian theory of modernity in order to understand how attempts have been made to replace pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde cultural traditions and values with new "modern" ones. In interpreting Simmel's theory of modernity, Lichtblau (1997) maintains that normally such attempts of replacement inevitably generate tensions between novelty and oldness, between that which it endeavours to replace and the replaced. Modernity in this sense creates tensions and conflicts, which mostly leads to fragmentation (Simmel, 1900).

The intervention of colonial modernity resulted in the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social and religious values undergoing gradual changes. Winds of change blew into this society during the entire 19th century; as that century

passed, pressures of transition continued to grow unabatedly. New challenges faced not only the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, but other societies in West Africa as well, for increasing British influence in the last half of the 19th century accelerated these new challenges in many respects. Already the activities of Europeans on the West Coast and its hinterland had prepared the ground for British penetration (cf. Corker and Massaquoi, 1972). The entire 19th century up to the beginning of the 20th century had been one of the most disquieting ages for West Africa.

During the colonial period, pressures of social and religious changes took on different forms, which I have divided into three modalities, viz, the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-religious ones. These are the *sine qua non* indicators of change that affected Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social representations in the wake of colonial as well as post-colonial interventions.

Politics and territory

Examining the political aspect of colonial modernity is important for understanding the economic goals underpinning early colonial penetration and subsequent occupation of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde territories towards the end of the 19th century. To realise these economic objectives, Great Britain had to gain far-reaching political authority beyond the confines of the Sierra Leone colony, which was then restricted to the Freetown peninsula and Sherbro coastal lands. "British interest in the interior of the Sierra Leone Colony considerably increased during the last quarter of the 19th century and this was to be the prelude to the establishment of a British protectorate over the area" (Fyle, 1981: 93). Consequently, the British ambition extended to Kɔɔ-Mɛnde regions. During this period Samori Toure, who wanted to build a theocratic empire in the Upper Guinea Coast, "was [expanding] his empire into the hinterland of the Colony, and this at a time when European powers were claiming for territories in Africa. This brought Samori in direct conflict with the British" (*ibid*).

Giving a précis of the socio-political structure of Ngiema and other areas in Luawa can shed light on our understanding of British territorial expansion and subsequent amalgamation of the different Kɔɔ-Mɛnde territories. Pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society appointed political leaders.

This was a principle based on seniority, which continued for much of the pre-colonial time, until towards the mid 19th century, when it started adopting new forms. With the advent of colonialism, this practice subsequently changed into the practice of electing political leaders, mostly under duress of Governors representing the colonial administration (cf. Abraham, 2003).

The different Mɛnde-speaking groups have never developed a unified polity. Throughout late 18th to mid 19th centuries, rulers who derived their legitimacy from ancestral traditions were ruling towns, villages and their respective divisions. Elders were also appointed as representatives of the chiefs; they helped him in the day-to-day running of the various administrative sections of villages. The chief who ruled was known as town chief (*taa-mahei*), village chief (*fula-mahei*) and section chief or elder in a particular village (*kuwuloko-mahei*) respectively (cf. *ibid*.) We have seen similar administrative divisions of pre-modern political life in Ngiema village (see chapt. 3). There was a further unit or collection of towns, villages and the surrounding agricultural lands, generally called *tatei* or *tateisia* (pl.). They were ruled by a higher category of chiefs called (*tata-mahagaa*). Furthermore, "the country" – referred to as such by the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde themselves – comprised a number of different *tatesia*, which were the largest unit with quite a particular identity. Such a 'country' was called *ndoei*, ruled by the *ndo-mahei*. A combination of the *ndoei* built the polity. It was only the ruler named the *maha-mahun-mahei*, or the *Mɛnde -mahun*, who had the legitimacy of ruling the *ndoei*. We have seen this exemplified in Kai Londo of Luawa (see chapt. 7). During the greater part of the 19th century prior to British penetration into greater Luawa, these rulers were often active war-leaders. Thus, they became known as war chiefs (*ko-mahagaa*); they remained responsible for planning war strategy, even when they grew too old to go to war themselves. (cf. *op. cit.*: 4).

I have also argued in the last chapter that the expansion of Luawa in the 19th century depended much on the political and above all the military prowess of Kai Londo. He undertook a series of expeditions in order to attain and uphold Luawa hegemony, or at least its sphere of influence. As far as the different Mɛnde-speaking groups were concerned, throughout

the 19th century, polity development was going on through the expansion of frontiers under warrior-chiefs. These wars took on different forms since warfare at that time, with all its local rituals, formed part of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde cultural representations as a whole (cf. Little, 1967).

European powers have originally used the on-going wars in Africa as an excuse for occupying the continent. Under the pretext of bringing order and peace to the chaotic and violent situation, the colonial rulers penetrated the Upper Guinea Coast. According to Bauman (2005, 2007), this is exactly what modernity tries to do in its many subtle articulations, namely to bring order, where there is really no chaos. Before going into any further details about the colonial encroachment of territories under the legitimate jurisdiction of the Luawa polity, a summary of some important historical events could be illuminating. These developments are worth mentioning, because they are significant in understanding the circumstances that eventually led to the proclamation of the protectorate by the colonial administration.

After the abolition of the slave trade in 1787 with the help of British philanthropists, the freed slaves became destitute and homeless. Jobless and roaming the streets of London, they became a social nuisance for the city. To address this situation, the philanthropists found the "Black Poor Society", in order to facilitate the repatriation of the "Black Poor" from the streets of London and elsewhere in England to the Sierra Leone peninsula (Fyle, 1981: 34). Their new settlement was called the "Province of Freedom" (Peterson, 1969). In this way, the British became gradually involved in the affairs of what is now Sierra Leone (*op. cit.*). Among the many problems, however, that surrounded the new settlement was conflict with rulers. After getting land from the Temne ruler, a dispute broke out between the local community and the freed slaves, with dire consequences for the settlers, since the outrageous Temne completely burnt down the "Province of Freedom".

As the British government refused to refund the "Province of Freedom" due to lack of finance, the philanthropists lobbied among some business tycoons in England to undertake the task. The result was the formation of the Sierra Leone company in 1791 with the board of directors controlling the colony from London (*op. cit.*: 35). They helped

build new shelters at a different site for the scattered settlers, which they called Grandville Town after Grandville Sharp, who was a leading philanthropist. The company preferred its capital to remain at the old site, calling it Freetown instead of the old name – the "Province of Freedom". The company was again involved in bitter clashes over land with the Temne and the ex-slaves from Nova Scotia who had rebelled against the company. With the company's refusal to adopt true land reforms suggested by the Temne ruler, the local population became hostile to the company, which ended in a bitter war between them. This conflict finally ended in 1807, when "the Koya Temne accepted a new treaty by which they lost the entire peninsula to the Company" (*op. cit.*: 37).

Meanwhile, the British navy – represented by the Sierra Leone Company – continued to trace slave ships off the shore of Freetown. At the same time, the Sierra Leone Company had suffered heavy economic losses because the proprietors could not make profits. Such situations prompted them to ask the British Government to take over the Company, a decision that later proved to have serious consequences for the different societies of Sierra Leone. Since Sierra Leone was the ideal place for trying owners and crews of slave ships, the British Government decided to take over the Sierra Leone peninsula. This facilitated the trial of offenders before a British court, and vice-admiralty courts were set up in Freetown for this purpose. The British Government officially declared the Sierra Leone peninsula as a British Crown Colony in 1808 (Abraham 1978; Fyle 1981), but at this initial stage, local rulers living around the peninsula and in the hinterland were still independent. One could argue that the declaration of Sierra Leone as British Colony became an important effect of the abolition of the slave trade. The Sierra Leone colony under the British Crown was to save the economic constraints of the Sierra Leone Company.

With the foundation of the British Crown Colony, contact with the Temne and the Sherbro living around the coast became necessary. Further inland contacts continued for much of the early 19th century. Economic reasons prompted the many expeditions to the hinterland that were to follow in the second half of the 19th century. Expeditions to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde living further in the interior, close to the present border with

Liberia and Guinea in the Luawa area, came much later that century. These expeditions subsequently turned into systematic annexing of land and political jurisdictions of the various societies in the interior. The British territorial incursion or predatory inroad into the Luawa eventually changed existing local political structures, leading to the demise of the Luawa hegemony. By the end of the 19th century, "the British imperial presence among [Kɔɔ-Mɛnde] halted the development of [the polity of Luawa] and subjected it to colonial rule, fragmenting [it] into smaller units that we know today as chiefdoms" (Abraham, 2003: 75).

Territorial expansion of the British

We have seen that Kai Londo formed and expanded the territorial jurisdiction of Luawa by undertaking a number of expeditions. About this time, the British colonial government began changing its policies towards the interior of Sierra Leone. The colonial administration was determined more than ever to draw up new boundaries in view of extending its administrative jurisdiction as far as the present Guinean and Liberian borders. The motive was economic, since the British wanted more trade to flow to the Freetown colony, in order to balance its financial constrains by raising more revenue.

With the convocation of the Berlin conference of 1884-1885, European powers scrambled bitterly for Africa and divided it among themselves after laying down rules for occupying its territories (cf. Abraham 2003; Fyle 1981). In this way, the demarcation of the international boundaries in Africa came into force, which was to have serious consequences for the understanding of space by the different societies affected by these frontiers. Afterwards, the French were threatening to advance upon the colony of Sierra Leone, which was *de facto* British territory, according to the terms of the Berlin Conference. To secure all borders in the hinterland, the colonial administration in Freetown must stop the French from advancing into 'its territory'. The British wanted to extend the territories under their jurisdiction in the Colony as they "got local rulers to cede their territories" (*op. cit.*: 94), a policy, which was to continue during the second half of the 19th century, and was implemented by different British governors in Africa.

The colonial administration appointed two commissioners, who were to start travelling in 1889, aiming at signing treaties with all local rulers and in the hinterland of the Colony, including Luawa. The authorities of the Colony prepared official treaties in Freetown, which were then formally put forward for acceptance to all parties involved as "treaties of friendship" (Abraham, 2003). The latter, being highly authoritative in character, bound the chiefs and to allow British subjects free trading access. The signatories were to keep peaceful relations with the colonial administration representing the Queen of England and they were to desist from all wars that would interrupt trade. Above all, these so-called treaties of friendship prohibited the rulers from entering into further treaties with other foreign powers, particularly the French. Any ruler who had signed the treaty was to receive a yearly stipend, provided he observed its terms. The amount depended much on the importance and the level of co-operation of individual rulers. Even though these treaties did not provide any protection clauses for the signatories, the colonial administration in Freetown used them as grounds for declaring the protectorate at the turn of the 19th century.[158]

The colonial authorities appointed a long-resident trader in the Sherbro by the name of T.J. Alldridge, to be "one of the Travelling Commissioners" in 1890 (*op. cit.*: 102). He supervised the signing of the treaties in all the different Mɛnde territories. That same year, Kai Londo signed a treaty with Alldridge, who was obviously impressed by not only his strong character, but also his willingness to co-operate with the colonial government on friendly terms. He was given a yearly allowance of ten pounds sterling in return for his allegiance and observance of the treaty, making him a strong ally of the British.

This friendship was to end in a nightmare for Kai Londo, as the alliance with the British did not produce the happy conclusion he had expected. The first disappointment for him was the division of Luawa into two parts, which came as a result of the Anglo-French border deal in 1894. Secondly, during the terms of the treaty obligations, Kai Londo got

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[158] On the fraudulent basis of declaring the protectorate see Abraham (1978: 115ff).

virtually no help from the British, when rival warriors threatened and attacked Luawa.[159] In the face of these threats, Kai Londo asked the colonial government for permission to rebuild war fences around most of the villages under his jurisdiction. The British government, however, declined to do this and suggested instead that he needed to exert moral influence in order to prevent his enemies from attacking him. He was in a difficult situation, because the terms of the treaty forbade him to undertake war expeditions. In this way, Kai Londo was weakened considerably.

The proclamation of the protectorate

After Kai Londo and other rulers had signed the treaty with the British, the protectorate ordinance was now ready for proclamation by the colonial administration. According to official arrangements in Freetown, this granted the British legitimate authority to increase their sphere of influence in every corner of Sierra Leone by annexing more and more territories. Moreover, the British government was increasingly interested in driving out unwanted rivals for control of trade routes.

When Sir Frederic Cardew took office as governor of the colony in 1894, he started extending British influence to its hinterland. Even before establishing any official rule over the hinterland, the colonial government had been employing the term "protectorate" as early as 1893, when referring to the interior. "In August 1895, an Order-in-Council was passed in accordance with the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1890, making it lawful for the legislative council of the colony to exercise jurisdiction over the adjacent territories" (*op. cit*.: 185). This indicates that the protectorate project was well planned, and to enforce it, Cardew himself had initially toured the hinterland trying to persuade the local populace into accepting British rule. The so-called treaties of friendship were to legitimize the

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[159] For instance, Kai Londo clashed with the *sofas* of Samori Toure at Wende. (cf. Fyle, 1981: 96). On the nature of this clash between Samori and Kai Londo, see Abraham (2003: 102). A second example is that of the troublemaker Mbawulomeh, who was constantly attacking Kai Londo's territories without British intervention. Kai Londo was instead prohibited to make war on his adversaries.

official declaration of the Protectorate.[160] Despite protests from prominent Sierra Leoneans like Sir Samuel Lewis, the promulgation of the Protectorate took place on the 31 August 1896 (Fyle, 1981: 103). The British argued that it was in the best interest of the indigenous peoples to put their territories under the protection of Her Majesty.[161]

The so-called Protectorate Ordinance had several implications. First, the declaration gave the Colonial Government the authority to pass laws and to rule the interior. To attain this they demarcated and redefined boundaries that had not previously existed in the minds of the local population. The British thereby created the conditions necessary for the future formation of the nation-state of Sierra Leone. Hence, the modern understanding of such a nation-state did not at all concord with the pre-modern understanding of polity and legitimate jurisdiction of land. Existing boundaries deriving from autochthonous polity formation at the beginning of the 19th century no longer existed from the perspective of the British.

Demarcation of the Luawa frontiers

The declaration of the Protectorate further meant for Greater Luawa that its spheres of jurisdiction were no longer valid, for it was now part of the British Empire. Since British colonial expansion defined Greater Luawa as part of the queen's jurisdiction, the Colonial Office organised the administration of the Protectorate by setting up five districts (map 5) viz: Bandajuma, Ronietta, Panguman [Kpanguma], Karene and Koinadugu (cf. Abraham 2003; Fyle 1981). In 1907, the number of districts was increased (map 5). Further changes were made in 1920, 1939 and in 1946, which have remained to this day (cf. Abraham 1978; Howard 1969: 31). They have now been transformed to the main administrative areas (map 6) of the post-colonial state (cf. Clarke, 1969b:29).

In 1896, following treaties signed by the British, the French and Liberia, Luawa was cut in two by a straight longitudinal line placing Kailahun itself and Ngiema under Liberia. But the Sierra Leone

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[160] Some authors like Fyle (1981) have argued that not all the rulers signed such treaties.
[161] See Abraham (2003: 185) on more reasons for declaring the protectorate.

Protectorate boundary was at Luawa-Yiyehun (Ngiehun Luawa). This caused many problems, prompting a renegotiation in 1917 whereby part of the Gola forest region in Sierra Leone was exchanged with the Liberians for the "Luawa Salient", bringing Kailahun within the boundaries of the Sierra Leone protectorate (Abraham, 1978). Furthermore, the colonial administration divided Luawa in two. The then governor in charge forced Fa Bundeh, who succeeded Kai Londo to endorse this new position of the administration "by renouncing claim over half of his territory" (Abraham, 2003: 104). The drawing of national and international borders was followed by introducing the institution of the police force, because the hitherto independent polities, especially of Luawa were now part of British West Africa. The police force also became a direct means of enforcing colonial policy towards the hinterland. This further implies that border demarcations created more conflicts pertaining to land and jurisdiction over territory among different traditional rulers who had become confused about their own role and legitimacy.

The colonial demarcation of Luawa prompted Fa Bundeh's enemies to wage war from across the border, with little or no help from the British. "The notorious Mbawulomeh was constantly implicated in such troubles." Such threats only stopped with the help of a grand coalition, which Fa Bundeh built up with some British aid. Hollins described this situation in the following way.

> Sergeant Clement [...] was then stationed in Kailahun with twenty-five men of the Sierra Leone Frontier Police. This stout-hearted Sierra Leonean set out with Fa Bundeh and his 'war-master' Kongani, routed Bau-wure-me [Mbawulomeh] at Mendikema and drove him over the Muawa [river]. After them came the two chief local warriors of that time, Major Fairtlough and Chief Njagua [Nyagua]. They crossed the Mauwa in rafts together with Fa Bundeh and Kongani and burnt Vahun [Guma Mɛnde]. Bau-wure-me fled into Gbandi country and thence to Lowoma in Baluland [Lorma country], where he died (Hollins, 1929: 22).

The November 1898 minutes papers from Governor Cardew also indicate that there were conflicts surrounding the newly defined colonial boundaries. He reported that there have been rumours "through native sources that there was a big war coming down from over the Eastern

Frontier; that the sofas, Golas and Bauwureme's [Mbawulomeh's] people were coming down over the border."[162] These and other disturbances across the border were to continue until the early years of the 20th century, and they had forced the colonial administration to take some additional measures. Because major incursions had taken place in 1904, 1905 and 1906, the Freetown government was forced to establish a battalion headquarters on the Moa river at Daru 1906 (Abraham and Turay, 1987: 31-35).

After the colonial administration had successfully annexed as many territories as they could, they then went on to restructure the existing political landscapes of different societies living in the protectorate. They accomplished such ambitions by amalgamating all previously existing traditional polities into a unified British Colony of Sierra Leone. These new structures have led to changes in the cultural, political and social landscapes of early 19th century Kɔɔ-Mɛnde polities, leading to major processes of political fragmentation (map 4), not only among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, but also other societies in Sierra Leone as well (cf. Clarke 1969a: 33).

Fragmentation and demise of Greater Luawa

At this stage, a closer look at the process that led to the fragmentation and eventual demise of the Luawa polity is necessary. Classifying and dividing existing Kɔɔ-Mɛnde polities as well as those of other societies and incorporating them into a unified British Colony of Sierra Leone greatly fragmented Luawa. "In 1914, […] the final dismantling of the remnants of Kai Londo's state [polity] into the 'independent' chiefdoms that we know today" (Abraham, 1978: 209) took place. In describing such a process of fragmenting the Luawa polity as "From Greater to Smaller Luawa" (*op. cit.*: 202), Abraham argues that the British dismembered local polities, precisely because they feared that large ones could be powerful enough to destabilise colonial government.

As part of restructuring the political landscape, the colonial government modified and renamed the original divisions of the five

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[162] Minute Papers, local confidential, 108/98.

districts in the course of the 20th century. The railway and other developments of modernisation (monetization of the economy, rise of urban centres with central place functions, especially around the main railway towns), social change was constantly revealing new problems for the administration. Part of the response to manage these colonial social problems of change was to redefine the administrative boundaries every ten years (Abraham, 1978). This also affected the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde polity of Greater Luawa. By mid 1900, the original division of Sierra Leone was so modified that Ngiema village now became part of the new Kailahun District (maps 1, 6 and 7).The name Eastern Luawa derived from such divisions.

In order to make the new protectorate administration more effective, the British set up a double system of administration.[163] Understanding the operation of this new administration is of crucial importance, because it shows to what extent these systems changed the political culture of Greater Luawa. The new protectorate administration operated by taking several measures, including the appointment of District Commissioners, establishing paramount chiefs and the implementation or enforcement of state power in establishing the police force. The latter made up the frontier police, which became notorious for its indiscipline and brutality.

The District Commissioner (D.C., as it later came to be known among local people) of Kailahun or Eastern Luawa was appointed by the governor and was directly responsible to him. As head of that district, he had a small staff, which consisted of a clerk, an interpreter, and up to about ten court messengers. The main tasks of the latter were to serve writs, summonses, and aid in the collection of taxes, which was of utmost importance for the British administration. Among the extraordinary political and judicial powers vested in the D.C. was the ability to banish individuals suspected of disturbing the peace and security of his district. As the highest authority in the Crown Colony, the governor received his appointment directly from the British government or the colonial office in London. Therefore, a number of powers were reserved for him, allowing

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[163] See Fyle (1981) and Abraham (1978, 2003) for general details on the administrative structures of the colonial administration.

him to remove from office a chief in any chiefdom that he may judge unfit for the responsibility and to appoint another in his place.

The second level of policy administration favoured by the protectorate ordinance was that of demoting and taking away the independence of important local leaders and rulers. They established Paramount Chiefs or P.Cs. as they were later called so that "the title of 'king', frequently used in the treaties, was replaced by paramount chiefs" (Abraham, 2003: 186). This was in no way justified by the treaty Kai Londo had signed some years ago. Moreover, the new political structure, which introduced the system of paramount chiefs, also divided Kailahun district into several chiefdoms and sections, valid up to this day (map 4). The chiefdoms became the headquarters and official jurisdictions of the paramount chiefs. There were several sections in each chiefdom, which were all under the authority of the paramount chief, who was "not subordinate in his ordinary jurisdiction to any other chief" (*ibid*). Hence, the protectorate ordinance completely wiped out the existence of pre-colonial Kɔɔ-Mɛnde rulers and their polities, generally demoting them to the status of paramount chiefs. The colonial legislation greatly limited their authority in many respects, and particularly the D.Cs. "were taking every opportunity to demonstrate that they held Supreme authority" (Fyle, 1981: 105). However, while they were allowed theoretically to rule their people, (the so-called indirect rule),[164] nonetheless the local rulers could only attend to minor cases in their own courts.

The third level of administrative policy for the day-to-day operation of the protectorate was that of the institution of police force. The police force had actually been established under the label of the Frontier Police in an ordinance already proclaimed in 1890 (cf. Fyle 1981; Abraham 1978). The formal proclamation of the protectorate enforced their activities. They were composed mainly of a number of police officers from the regular police and some from the military. The official explanation to the chiefs for establishing the Frontier Police was that the latter were just acting "as soldiers to protect them from the inroads of their

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[164] Abraham (1978) contests this so-called British colonial system of indirect rule.

enemies [...] and that there would be no interference whatsoever with their manners and customs [...]."[165]

The Frontier Police were scattered all over the countryside in small numbers. They were supposed to be composed in a way that represented the different societies in Sierra Leone. Their duty was to keep the peace, defend the territorial integrity of the frontiers by pushing back attacks that came from outside and preventing rebellion among the people. They were not to get involved in the internal affairs of the people, especially in local disputes, domestic institutions. Above all, they were to respect the chiefs and encourage them to promote trade, but block, by all means, the "transit of large slave caravans" (Moore, 1890: 54-6).

According to local history, Ngiema village had always played a strategic frontier role in Sierra Leone. "Some soldiers from Freetown were also based at Ngiema. They erected their tents (barracks) on the main road leading to Pendembu, just before the Sagbeeja stream." The Frontier Police, who were also based in Kailahun since 1893 (Abraham, 2003: 102), became notorious for abusing their power by maltreating the very people they were sent to protect. Knowing that they had the backing of the colonial government in Freetown, they took every opportunity to exploit the people. According to one elderly informant in Ngiema,

the Frontier Police and the police in general were very brutal. They seized the property of our grandparents and even flogged some of our chiefs. Our parents recalled that a police constable even took off one of Kai Londo's wives by force and raped her. The police were in the habit of intimidating and taking money by force from people, since they did not respect our chiefs. The Frontier Police in Luawa largely undermined traditional authority and even Kai Londo suffered much under them. He became so fed up that he thought of refunding all the money he received from the British and expelling them from his territory, including their Frontier Police they brought. They carried guns with them all over the place. We were very afraid and insecure.166

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[165] CO 267/375/10,18, Hay to SS, 1889.
[166] In Kpaa-Mɛnde Senehun, a Frontier Police sergeant forcefully installed his lover as chief (Fyle, 1981: 102). Though she had no right to be the chief according to local customs, the British supported this course of action against the will of the people, probably because they saw in her a very faithful spirit in promoting British interest. There are many examples of such abuse (cf. Abraham, 2003: 182).

Even though the British government was still hesitant in fully adopting its own legal laws in the Protectorate, they introduced British legal rules that in many respects were alien to indigenous values (*op. cit.*: 102). The very fact that Laws and precepts for the protectorate were made almost exclusively by British nations in the legislative council in Freetown accounts for this. These British-made legislations found their practical applications in the number of courts established by the administration, which were indeed hierarchical in character. The lowest in this scale of hierarchy was the Native Administration Court, which the local population usually called the N.A. Court. It was composed of native chiefs, presided over virtually by the paramount chief and other chiefs in the district; likewise, it judged over all criminal cases. A higher court, that of the D.C., "had the power and authority to settle any matter within the district" (Abraham, 2003: 186). In all these instances, the final decision always lay with the District Commissioner, who may use his veto power in any court ruling. Apart from these, the D.C. also decided cases pertaining to the illegal forms of trade in slaves, "which was declared unlawful and therefore punishable" (*ibid*). The colonial administration also set up a special court in which the D.C. sat with the native chiefs to hear and decide cases of criminal offence such as the sale of land. The British colonial intervention thus resulted in imparting territorial, political, legal and executive concepts of government and authority that were fundamentally at odds with Kɔɔ-Mɛnde representations and values pertaining to legitimate political rule.

Trade and monetization

The underlying objective of British political endeavours of West Africa as a whole was economic. The colonial administration could only attain this goal by maintaining the many social contacts it had established with local societies. These contacts, which initially took on forms of trade relations, culminated in various political and social actions that had economic undertones, which sometimes ended in conflict. After the abolition of slavery, trade in other goods developed as the most important factor in maintaining these relationships, especially between the Colony and the interior (cf. Fyle, 1981: 41). Consequently, commercial activities became

a subject of interest for people in the Colony as well as the hinterland, accounting for growing British influence in the interior.

Establishing trade relations with Luawa

One of the most important methods adopted by the British in establishing and maintaining economic relations with the interior of the so-called protectorate was to introduce the use of intermediaries, who were mostly local traders. A similar procedure had been in use already a century before, when European traders had attempted to economically colonise West Africa. The colonial officials continued this method, which seemed to have been very effective; while doing so, they invented new ones, some of which are still in use today.

Colony traders as intermediaries in trade

When the Sierra Leone Company got into financial difficulties, the colonial office in London could not afford to pay off impending bankruptcy. Therefore, they decided that the only way out of such a crisis was to intensify trade. For this reason, Colony officials sent more traders into the interior, as far as villages and towns around the Luawa chiefdom. These traders were mostly "recaptives",[167] who took along European manufactured goods from Freetown in exchange for goods such as piassava, cocoa, coffee and other cash crops. Local people generally regarded these Colony traders as "white men" for they dressed like Europeans (*ibid*). The memory of visits of such agents in Ngiema has been preserved in oral history and some people in Kailahun relate that these agents were very wealthy, because most of them were acting as intermediaries for "far wealthier shop owners in Freetown." Since the colony was much concerned with encouraging trade, one way of doing this was to mediate in disputes among various local communities, and by sending Christian missionaries into the interior.

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[167] Recaptives were former slaves recaptured by the British navy patrolling the waters around Freetown as part of their efforts to discourage trade in human beings, after the official abolition of the slave trade.

What is of fundamental importance is how and why these different social groups interacted in their economic activities. The Luawa people welcomed their guests for different communities conceived them as bringing trade, which, according to the promises of the colonial administration would bring prosperity to the local population. Trade transactions were not only moments of unequal exploitation by a stronger and more wealthy party, but also at times opportunities for interaction and exchange of gifts. Even with European merchants who visited local communities, social interaction was possible. Both parties had the obligation to make and accept gifts, otherwise there was sure to be a palaver and bad feeling of hostility (cf. Rodney, 1970). Therefore, on many occasions, "colony traders presented their hosts with gifts and [sometimes] paid rents for their living" (Fyle, 1981: 44), and the local population reciprocated with such gifts as country cloths and kola nuts. Above all, guest traders sometimes entered into marriage relationships with their hosts, by taking wives mainly from the ruling class. Such interactions paved the way for a complex relationship of exchange systems, similar to the relationship with Muslim traders a number of decades earlier. In view of such developments one could argue that at its early stages, the relationship of the British to the people of the interior was not only based on the principle of exploitation but also on reciprocity.

Notwithstanding the good spirit of co-operation, there were occasions of tensions and problems between traders and local rulers. These tensions sometimes grew into serious conflicts demanding the administration's intervention. In such conflicts, the administration mostly sided with the traders for they were mainly interested in protecting trade. Therefore, the Colonial office undertook every measure to reduce or prevent such problems, and in such efforts to avoid palaver, they unavoidably interfered with the internal or political affairs of the local population. By interfering openly with the politics of local communities, the British usually deposed rulers, who refused to comply, and, if need be, by using the power of the gun (*op. cit.*: 45). The colonial government intervened and mediated in most of the wars between local rulers, cynically something in which they themselves were involved.

The buying and possession of local estates

The gradual appropriation of land through leasing was another strategy of British territorial extension. Initially, the administration had no possessive control over the various local estates, but could only get access to land on a temporary basis.[168] Colonial officials, however, quickly tried to secure the possession of land by renting through contracts from local rulers.

Before Luawa came under colonial administration, land in Ngiema belonged ultimately to the ancestors, and was distributed according to the needs of different Houses. After the Protectorate Ordinance and the eventual annexation of Luawa territories, the British colonial government now had the legal right of administration over its territories. Therefore, land in the whole of Sierra Leone became an administrative issue, implying authority to administer land in British territory. "The colonial government stipulated that all private landowners in towns should register with the Ministry of Housing and Country Planning." The official reason for such a restructuring was that "the administration should be able to account for all its assets and organise them for building purposes, if necessary, especially in towns." As for the interior and in most Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages like Ngiema-Luawa, traditional practices of administering land continued to a certain extent, though there were also changes made by the colonial administration. The ministry also registered land or assets bought from local people by government officials, since the colonial government did not expropriate the traditional or original owners of the land straight away.

This situation of land leasing and restructuring had several implications for Ngiema-Luawa. Firstly, they had no choice but to adjust to the new laws stipulated by the administration, which brought some changes in the process of possessing land. As property belonging to the ancestors, land was not eligible for sale, but obtainable only through certain exchange processes between particular groups having affinal obligations to one another. Now, however, "people started to sell land to

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[168] For example, the British rented land for the Colony from a certain Dala Modou for an annual payment of 500 bars of iron. However, "in 1826, he received 500 pounds sterling for his services" (Fyle, 1981: 43).

strangers." When, for example, government officials came to make arrangements to build the Methodist Primary School in Ngiema (photograph 9), the chiefs gave permission to proceed after receiving some token from them. Part of that land had become a government property. Besides,

> the colonial government introduced a common variable unit of land measure, known as acres. However, this was mainly applied to the swampland around the village, especially the light and deep swamp. This swamp had an important [cosmological] meaning for the village, since it became the dwelling place for the [totemic ancestor, known as] the *Maada* Crocodile. Following the division into acres and with permission of the village elders, members of certain Houses and sections started cultivating rice in this swamp. One particular group normally used a certain number of acres for rice farming in a year, and then another group the following year. Since such a practice consequently led to tensions, the chiefs interdicted it, and ruled instead that the swamp be used for community rice farming.

Another change imposed by British administration was that conflicts pertaining to land or borders were now under the jurisdiction of the Native Administration Court set up by the colonial office in Kailahun. All cases pertaining to this issue must be resolved at this initial and local level first, before bringing the case to a higher Court, that is, the provincial court, and eventually the highest court in Freetown. It is obvious that in such a case, traditional processes of solving serious land disputes, and customary healing processes involving local customs of ritual reconciliation were largely undermined, and in most cases ignored. Therefore, serious land disputes had led to long-standing antagonism, which has sometimes ended in violence even during colonial days.

Monetization of the economy

The colonial administration suffered new economic constraints as they appropriated more territories in the interior. A major reason for such financial limitations was the high administrative costs in maintaining the new political landscape they had created. To alleviate the financial crisis, it was crucial for the British to introduce a new form of economy that could pave the way for modern form of taxation.

Pound sterling as a monetary unit and legal tender

Prior to the imposition of the pound sterling as a monetary unit, society had practiced different forms of exchanging values or goods. They had engaged in economic relations that mainly involved "communal exchanges of goods and services" (see chapt. 3). In this process, they gradually developed and adopted various mediums of exchange, which became standard according to their own needs as local currencies over time. Thus, at some point in their history, "they were using iron bars or country cloth,[169] as forms of currency, which even survived into the colonial period. It is interesting that in using iron bars, pieces of coins, known as 'Kissi pennies'[170] were still in use in the early stages of colonialism." This became the currency, which was in use in the entire region[171] until the last half of the 19th century, when the British colonial administration introduced and gradually imposed a free market economy with the pound sterling and eventually the leone and cents as legal mediums of exchange. These Kissi pennies, however, were still in use until about 1950, when they were finally suppressed by the pound sterling and the leone. The British pound that was in use even after independence was alien to the indigenous societies in one fundamental regard, for the images on this bank note did not represent their own ancestors, but British people; hence they had no cultural relationship to these icons.

The introduction of the pound sterling as the basic monetary unit and legal tender for all societies in Sierra Leone has fundamentally changed the cultural economic conceptions of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. It also affected previous economic activities and social relations between groups. With the consolidation of Sierra Leone as a colony, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde were confronted with new forms of economic relations and activities. Basic means for attaining goods, and in some cases, services needed among the local populace was largely altered; people could now afford to buy the

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[169] Some scholars like Fyle (1981) put the use of iron bars by most societies in Sierra Leone up to the 1820s.

[170] These were twisted pieces of iron with a 'T' point at one end and a 'fishtail' at the other. The Kissi named it *Chilindo*.

[171] Among other societies using this 'currency' were Kpelle, Gbandi and the Lorma (Gio).

goods they needed with the pound sterling, without necessarily forming group alliances, as was mostly the case in pre-modern times. To develop the new economy Britain had to establish companies like British Petroleum, commonly known as BP. People could now work entirely or partly for money obtained in the form of wages, salaries or business profits. Essentially this was a change to money economy, which precipitated a way of living that depended on earning cash, in which most people live today.

A far-reaching aspect of this type of money economy was capitalism, which favours the practice of accumulating wealth (cf. Katznelson, 1992). The markets that were organised in Luawa chiefdom on a rotational basis began to take on such capitalist forms of buying and selling with the aim of making more and more profit. The periods on which goods were displayed and exchanged in pre-colonial Ngiema that had now become "weekly market" can only serve as an example of this new type of market economy. Particularly in the 1960s, the legal tender of Sierra Leone started playing a crucial role in local economies that had become part of the state economy, thus becoming increasingly less personal (cf. Simmel [1900] 2006).

Although it became illegal from the perspective of the British, some Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages continued to engage in traditional forms of exchange that gradually took on barter systems, especially in the 1920s, but on a very small scale. In accordance with traditional morality of exchange, people worked in order to grow food for consumption or made the goods they personally needed. A farmer grew enough rice for his family needs and for the purposes of exchange for other foodstuff or commodities. Similarly, a blacksmith made tools such as hoes or cutlasses, which normally corresponded to the needs of the community so that in return he got the goods and commodities he needed. In this way, people maintained the circulation of wealth among communities that took part in such an exchange process. By the beginning of the 1960s, however, such traditional systems of exchange had almost completely vanished. Money increasingly became the core symbol of exchange systems.

With the steady progress in modern production, people increasingly entered a market economy characterising a capitalist system of

globalisation. Such forms absorbed local exchange systems like that of Ngiema into the world economy controlled by industrial powers of the west. Money economy then becomes "a site of modernity" (*op. cit.*: XX) and plays a vital role as a universal medium of exchange between objects and people in Sierra Leone. As the all-reaching equivalence of all values in modern capitalist ideology, money gives attention to the sphere of circulation, exchange and consumption. According to Simmel, each time we participate in such a process, we are necessarily entering a sphere, in which we distance ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, from objects by means of the mediator, which is money (*ibid*).

Among the new forms of capitalist money economy introduced by British colonial rulers, the modern system of taxation also played a crucial role. Collecting taxes on an individual basis later developed into a form of acquiring money for the administration and the subsequent government of the Sierra Leonean state. The house tax collected in 1898 became one aspect of modern economic forms imposed by the colonial administration on the various societies of the new Sierra Leone. Paying taxes in such a form was predicated on economic individualism that was fundamentally at odds with the praxis of pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde in which the whole village, represented by the leader, gave dues in kind to the main warrior leader in the area, rather than individual Houses or families.

In forcing the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde to pay the tax in the form of money – new British coins that had no cultural relevance for indigenous peoples – the colonial administration was starting an era of economic and bureaucratic administration. This had some far-reaching implications and consequences for the social networks of future generations. Money thus began to assert itself and gradually proved to be the yardstick of relationships among different societies (cf. *op. cit.*). The modern ideology of individualism (cf. Dumont, 1986) behind such political and economic systems was gradually being introduced. It has manifested itself mainly in relations of political power in post-independent Sierra Leone.

It follows that for the colonial administration, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde was an individual, in the sense that each person was taken and assessed as a distinctive, private unit in the group, which constitutes Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. We have seen that in the pre-modern village community, the

opposite was the case (see chapt. 2 and 3). This colonial projection on Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society of the tax-paying individual reached its peak with the introduction of a series of modern tax systems, such as the house tax, income tax, which an individual had to pay in pound sterling or leones and cents as representing the form of money economy[172]in Sierra Leone. For the house tax initiated by governor Cardew, individuals who owned a house or houses not the village community were to pay to the administration. "Economic Individualism" of this kind was certainly outside the familiar frame of reference and value system of a Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. Such modern developments eventually became a threat to the community-oriented consciousness, which was reflected in proverbs like "Because we are, therefore I am" and "It is only together in a community that we can live and survive as a group."[173] The colonial rulers, however, were more concerned with acquiring tax revenues through various strategies than with respecting and upholding various indigenous cultural values. They imposed modern values based on the acquisition and accumulation of money and other new forms of wealth that gained momentum in late colonial and post-colonial era.

Forms of economic development

Introducing new forms of so-called economic developments in the Protectorate was to be part of the strategy of boosting the fading economy by the turn of the 19th century. Under these development plans, some European companies such as British Petroleum (BP) became well established even in many parts of the interior, and Lebanese traders started flocking to the main centres in about 1892, since they could also have greater access to loan capital with the help of the colonial government. These companies eventually became big employers by creating job opportunities for the local populace.

For Ngiema-Luawa, several attempts were also made to bring new forms of development and economic activities that could ultimately

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[172] For similar analysis concerning colonial intervention in Africa as a whole, see Seeberg (1989).

[173] See also Doppelfeld (1994) and Sundermeier (1997) for similar proverbs in other African societies.

benefit the world markets of big capitalist economies. In this way, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde were gradually being included into global economic system. To achieve these aims, however, the colonial administration undertook major economic development programs, which was to have far-reaching effects on the Ngiema-Luawa people, and on their local systems of politics and social networks like that of co-operative groups.

One of the earliest programs for economic development was the construction of the railway and motor roads, to facilitate a steady flow of produce and raw material from different parts of the protectorate to the Colony. Besides, a railway could also help extend British territorial influence in the interior, in the face of the bitter competition with the French for spheres of influence in Sierra Leone. The construction of the railway reached its eastern terminus at Pendembu in 1906 (cf. Fyle, 1981: 130), which served as an important strategic point for the administrative officials. Since palm oil was in great demand in England for the manufacture of glycerine and margarine, the British government made every effort to develop palm agriculture. Therefore, constructing of railways and roads became useful for transporting palm kernels brought from places like Ngiema to Pendembu. The demand for palm kernels helped people develop sophisticated methods of harvesting palm kernels, rather than the usual gathering of these wild fruits (cf. Jones, 1983a).

The transportation of palm kernels from Kɔɔ-Mɛnde and other territories in Sierra Leone by train had an immediate impact on export trade.[174] In order to reach the most remote villages, which were rich in palm and other produce, the colonial administration undertook the construction of roads. Additionally, a number of European firms had found their way into the protectorate by the 1920s, and had opened trading stores at different towns such as Kailahun and Pendembu. As a result, most young people left villages like Ngiema to go and work in Kailahun or Pendembu, so that they could now earn money for their living. This led to an increase in population in these towns, as people became more and more mobile. Such developements made it easy for the administration to

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[174] By 1908 the exports of palm products had almost doubled in tonnage, and in 1936 the export reached a peak of over 84 000 tones (Fyle, 1981: 131-132).

implement its bureaucratic plans. One could see the influence of the capital in most towns from how local populations built their houses and the material they used. Thus, it can be argued that the railway and motor roads did not only bring economic balance for the colony in increasing its exports, but they also brought social dynamics to the hinterland.

We have to remember, however, that in some ways the railway and roads had some effects on the local people's relationship to space. When the construction of motor roads reached Ngiema, the administration decided to proceed to other villages such as Talia and Gbeworbu. The roads leading to these other villages became a problem for the people, because the surveyors found it necessary to cut down one of the cotton trees, which, as described in chapter 1 are of basic cosmological value. "The colonial government insisted upon making the road and the people had no choice, but to let the construction go ahead. Subsequently, the elders cut down two more so that only one of the four cotton trees remains in Ngiema to this day." One of the adverse effects of railway and road buiding was that with easy mobility, there was an increase in delinquency, as those delinquents could easily escape without problems. Secondly, the steady flow of manufactured goods from abroad had a repercussion on commodities produced locally, such as country cloth and iron tools in that they were no longer on the list of priority goods before the introduction of the foreign goods.

In order to enhance the development of agriculture in general, administrative officials thought it necessary to come up with new plans even though these were mostly unsuccessful based on inadequate knowledge of the local situation. Accordingly, the Department of Agriculture was founded in 1911, but owing to poor organisation, it was only in 1936 that it started making grounds with proper programs for rice growing. The Department of Agriculture started encouraging people to become more involved in swamp rice farming around the 1920s.[175] In Ngiema, people started cultivating swamp rice, even though the beginnings were not that all successful. The new development policy of

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[175] There have been indications that the Temne started this type of rice farming in Sierra Leone as early as the 1880s (*op. cit.*: 132).

the government meant that swamps near the village were now divided into acres, the idea being that Sierra Leone must be more and more involved in the well-being of its citizens, by providing them with fertilisers for the growth of rice in swamps. Small subsidies were given to farmers to entice them to undertake the new project of swamp rice farming, mostly to the detriment of upland rice farming which Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society had always preferred. Moreover, "cultivating rice in the light and deep swamp caused the *Maada* crocodile to move northwards into the swamp."

When the palm oil boom began to decline, officials in Freetown turned to other crops, which had been neglected for decades. The successful export of palm fruits meant that less attention was paid to other cash crops that may be of importance to the economy. With the palm trade diminishing, efforts were made to introduce new varieties of coffee and cocoa, which were only profitable for Freetown in terms of exports not earlier than the 1950s (cf. Fyle, 1981: 133). In Ngiema, farmers were given seeds of the new variety of cocoa and coffee, with new methods being developed. Their rapid growths, especially in the Kailahun district brought much profit to the colonial economy, but there were also calls for a common marketing policy that could be of benefit not only for the colonial economy, but also for the farmers.

For this reason, the colonial administration set up the Sierra Leone Marketing Board (SLPMB) in 1949 (*op. cit.*: 134). This was to be part of the general policy for the African Marketing Board, whose purpose was to protect farmers from any negative consequences that may result from price fluctuations on the world market. That is to say, if prices on the world market were high, farmers would receive a little less for their products and the accumulated surplus would give them a normal price, if prices for such produce on the world market fell. However, such hopes for fair play turned out to be a mere illusion, because prices of coffee, for example, remained competitively so high on the global markets that the poor farmer in Ngiema had no chance of getting the right price for his labours. Instead, the SLPMB began taxing farmers unnecessarily, and there was no extension of the plantations. In addition, the authorities never spent "the accumulated money from the excessive taxation to develop schemes for the benefit of the farmers. Until independence, the funds were

handed to the Government for 'development purposes' and what was left was invested in British Government securities" (*ibid*). Thus, from such activities, the capitalist determination of making more and more wealth for economies in the Western World became apparent.

Despite the government's offensive to improve rice farming, particularly swamp rice cultivation, this program had experienced a series of setbacks resulting in the deterioration of rice production for a number of reasons. First, the negligence of officials to conduct any detailed research about local cultural ecology and the indigenous understanding of rice cultivation with its rituals that were important for the local community. Such a negligence ended not only in failure to yield enough rice from the swamps, but also contributed greatly to community-based problems with breaks from cultural traditions as the Ngiema case may illustrate. Secondly, with the discovery and development of various minerals,[176] especially diamond-mining fields, most young men left the village for the town of Tongo Field – a famous diamond-mining centre in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde territory. Migrating to the diamond districts became even more rampant after the colonial government had started a scheme for alluvial mining, by granting licenses to individuals who could mine and sell diamonds to approved centres. Some succeeded in making quick money, while others ended up in poverty and misery.

The influx of young men to the diamond areas in order to make a quick fortune adversely affected agriculture as well as the supply of food in Sierra Leone as a whole. Notwithstanding the fact that most of these young men were illicit miners, trade in diamonds and other minerals boomed for the colonial economy, which was generating large profits for the British Empire and its traders in London. Such a transfer of labour was to have serious effects on the socio-cultural values of Ngiema village. Effects on the ritual cycle, on marriage relationships, local forms of exchange and economic activities were seen quickly and these structures soon seriously deteriorated. These I will elaborate on in the coming chapter.

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[176] See Fyle (1981: 134) on development and mining of Sierra Leonean minerals under colonial rule.

Missionary activities

Since there was a link between colonialism and Christian missionary activities, I have identified the third modality of colonial modernity as religion in the form of Christianity. Islam spread quickly and strongly among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde some centuries ago. In the 19th century, they were increasingly confronted with other evangelising activities from Christian missionaries, who usually collaborated with administrative officials in disregarding local cultural values.

Both the missionaries and the colonial masters were strongly convinced of their mission to civilise and convert the "barbaric" Africans. Such attitudes reflected a fundamental theoretical model that developed in modern times of differentiating between 'Us' and 'Them' mainly portrayed in moral and evaluative terms (Platenkamp and Prager, 1994). The missionaries, like the European traders, depended very much on British protection. The proclamation of Sierra Leone as a British Crown Colony and the Ordinance for protecting its hinterland gave Britain full and legitimate influence over that part of West Africa. For the British Colonial power, this also meant, in principle, that only missionaries affiliated with England were allowed in British territories. The same was true for other European powers possessing colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the French in Ivory Coast would allow mostly French missionary congregations and societies to work there. This practice continued until the middle of the 20th century. Therefore, we find that on a number of occasions colonial government intervened in conflicts between missionaries and local communities in the colonies.

The Governor in Freetown mostly commissioned some colony officials or traders to undertake the so-called friendly missions of bringing Christianity to the interior. Such an official accreditation was the case when Governor Rowe commissioned some Colony officials to undertake a friendly mission into Mɛnde country in Kwellu (cf. Abraham, 2003: 62). Thus, the early stages of missionary activity – which I call the first phase – were focused much on developmental and educational projects; the building of schools was high on the agenda during this phase. Noteworthy about such developments was the idea that recognising Christianity mostly favoured the realisation of development projects. In some extreme

cases, "pupils were obliged to attend divine services in the schools, even though more than ninety percent of them may have come from Muslim families and other African religions. Christian converts were given priority when seeking employment in social institutions run by the missionaries."

We also have to remember that Christianity also came in a fragmented form, in the sense that there was strong division between Catholics and Protestants, which reflected the various institutions they represented. There was thus much tension between these two groups, to the extent that "catholic institutions usually had the inscriptions RC, to send a signal that only Roman Catholics, not Protestants, were to be given priority." However, by the 1970s, this spirit of suspicion became less and less important. I am limiting early contributions of the Christian missionaries in developing the British Crown Colonial of Sierra Leone to former education.[177]

Christian missionaries as colonial educators

Among the development schemes brought by missionary activity, the procurement of western education was the most widespread in the colonial era. I am concentrating here on the spread of western education in the protectorate, especially Kailahun District in the Luawa chiefdom. One aim of establishing educational institutions for young people from the protectorate was to breed a new crop of people who were able to contribute more effectively to the colonial system. In the light of this, one may find that especially in the 1930s, (a) new Protectorate elite emerged, who were to expand educational institutions and aid in westernising their compatriots. The so-called Mɛnde mission included opening schools in all major districts and possibly in all chiefdom towns.

In Kailahun, the pattern of combining education with conversion by Christian missionary societies was evident in every aspect. Even in Ngiema, Pupils were made to attend Sunday services and learn prayers and some verses from the bible by heart. However, prior to the establishment of the Methodist Primary School in Ngiema and the

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[177] See Gittins 1977 on the Mɛnde and missionary activities.

Methodist Secondary School in Kailahun, a small teacher training institution was started by the Methodist Missionary Society at Bunumbu in 1924 (cf. Fyle, 1981: 112). This soon extended into a Union College, after a joint project by the Methodist and other protestant missions, which came to be known as the Bunumbu Teachers College in 1933. Graduates from this institution were to be teachers in Ngiema and other Kɔɔ-Mɛnde towns and villages, as well as other parts of the country.[178] The whole idea of training for the colonial administration was the training of young people in

> a wide range of practical subjects, and [for them to] return to improve the life in their chiefdoms and possibly become good paramount chiefs. By 1910, there were 71 schools in the protectorate with 2,229 pupils on roll, and in that year the colonial government started supporting some of the schools financially (Fyle, 1981: 112).

When the Colonial Administration established the Methodist primary school in Ngiema by mid 1900, it seemed that many people were now ready for the new reality of embracing western education. However, this also meant adapting to certain changes that were brought into the day-to-day life of the village. For example, parents were bound to attend a series of meetings held by the pastor and those responsible for teaching their children. Sometimes they must attend stipulated divine services that were totally at variance with their own religious practices. There was more to this than just attending churches. Some of those who became pastors and even some of the missionaries were preaching Christian doctrine and condemning traditional religious values as primitive and inferior, and that outside the church there was no salvation. Despite engaging in development projects like building schools, the missionaries achieved very little in the field of evangelisation. Much or relative success was attained in education, even though the method of learning was modelled on that of the western one.

Emphasis on English as the official language in the educational system, especially in schools hampered the development of indigenous

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[178]   However, the colonial government also "started some secondary schools as well as other institutions, mainly for the sons and nominees of chiefs" (Fyle, 1981: 12).

language in many respects. Towards the end of the 18th century, a new Mɛnde script appeared using symbols to depict sounds. It was thought to have been invented by a man called Kisimi Kamara in Potoru in the Barri chiefdom (Fyle 1981; Abraham 2003). According to him, he had travelled widely in Liberia and then shut himself in his house for two months and 15 days before he developed the complete alphabet. Tailors and carpenters used it in the 1940s to note down measurements. Despite this invention, the Mɛnde language did not develop to the extent of becoming a general and literate language among indigenous people, which could have enabled them read and write their own language. This is because colonial administration was determined to spread the western form of Literacy among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde and other societies by using English alphabets in schools and institutions of higher learning. English language became the standard language in schools and colleges, and in most schools, students were punished for speaking local languages. "Stop speaking vernacular" was a typical instruction from English teachers.

The conflict with the British

The colonial intervention ultimately led to conflict. Not only the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde were to react to it, but also other societies in Africa, whose social, political and religious values had been turned upside down as a consequence. Before Kai Londo discovered the real imperial motives of the British, it was too late for him to withdraw the so-called treaty of friendship he had signed. The same British Governor, Cardew, who had praised him as a man of great talents and particularly impressed by his readiness to work fully with the British has now "censured Kai Londo for not obeying my instructions to come to Vahun [Vaahun]."[179] The governor further threatened him saying, "His position would become intolerable."[180] Another Kɔɔ-Mɛnde ruler, Nyagua of the Kpanguma polity also had similar quarrels with the British.

It was evident that Cardew had a rather supercilious attitude to the local societies and their cultures (Abraham 2003; Fyle 1981), regarding

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[179] CO 267/417/61, Cardew to SS, 1895.
[180] CO 267/417/61, Cardew to SS, 1895

them as savages, to whom the British were morally obliged to bring civilisation and development. In any case, it eventually became evident to different rulers that by co-operating with the British, who promised to be peacemakers and promoters of trade, they were putting their sovereignty at risk. They further recognised that the treaty they had signed did not bring them the promised "friendship" and "protection", but in the final analysis, their territories had been taken away from them (cf. Abraham, 1978). This was contrary to what the British promised them, that they were not intending to seize any of their territories and that they would never interfere with their local customs and traditions, neither would they take away their sovereignty (cf. Abraham, 2003). It however became apparent that local rulers in conjunction with their subjects had many grievances against the administration. It was just a matter of time for such resentments to burst into a large-scale conflict.

The straw that broke the camel's back was when the administration in Freetown started the collection of the house tax. According to Governor Cardew, the rationale behind the house tax was, local communities should pay for the privilege of British administration, for bringing civilization and light into the darkness of their lives. The governor decreed that inhabitants of the new protectorate should pay tax on the size of their huts or houses. The owner of a four-roomed house would pay ten shillings a year and five shillings for those with smaller huts. Those districts such as Koinadugu and Kpanguma that were farther away from the colony were exempted from the house tax for two years, as well as those villages having less than twenty huts. In this sense, the conflict did not affect Luawa directly, because Kpanguma District, to which Luawa administratively belonged at that time, was exempted from paying the tax. Secondly, as indicated earlier, Kai Londo was a strong ally of the British during the early stages of British occupation, though he himself did not live long to witness such conflicts. In spite of the fact that the conflict with the British, which became known as the Hut Tax War, had no direct bearings on Luawa, it is necessary to give a brief outline of this conflict, in order to see how it affected other Mɛnde-speaking groups and ultimately the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde living in other regions. The paramount chief of Mandu was deposed, because the administration suspected him of

sympathising with the resistance. Consequently, the governor divided Mandu chiefdom, with half placed under the administration of Luawa. Another Kɔɔ-Mɛnde ruler, Nyagua of Kpanguma was implicated in the uprising several times by the administration, and was finally sent into exile.

The Hut Tax War

Opposition to the house tax was not limited to those on whom it was imposed.[181] The grievances of the rulers, chiefs and the protectorate people against Colonial rule escalated into a rebellion, when Cardew decided that the administration was to make the local populace pay for their administration. This was part of his policy to reform in order to meet the economic constraints of the colony. A house tax of ten shillings on every dwelling house was to be paid in coins. However, this proved to be highly controversial, since the money for the administration was to be raised locally and the colonial office in London was not enthusiastic about the idea, because it felt that it was too ambitious and was deemed to fail (cf. Abraham, 2003). However, the governor, having a rather cavalier attitude to the local people, was determined to deal firmly with the issue, showing force where necessary, because "the West African negro has a traditional dislike to direct taxation such as a house tax."[182]

At the proposal of the colonial office in London, Cardew made some modifications, though this would not abate the rebellion that led to the first serious lethal conflict with the British. Instead of the original plan, people were now to pay annually ten shillings on houses of 4 rooms or more, and five shillings on houses with 3 rooms or less. Where coins were not available, payment would be accepted in kind. Chiefs would be responsible for collecting the tax and would receive a five per cent rebate on amounts collected. This did not change the situation on the ground that

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[181] This opposition came from groups such as the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, the Freetown Press, which coined the word "Hut Tax War", merchants residing in the Sherbro and the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. In protesting against this tax, they argued that the people were too poor to pay the tax. Therefore, they advocated its withdrawal (cf. Abraham, 2003: 188).

[182] CO 267/409/Conf. 45, Cardew to SS, 1894; CO 267/427/Conf. 53, Cardew to SS, 1896.

much, because they could still not afford to pay the stipulated amount set by the governor. On the grounds that they were too poor to pay the tax, the majority of the chiefs petitioned with Cardew to drop it. The governor declined and insisted that they pay the tax. A few chiefs like Madam Yoko, who collaborated with the British, obeyed the ordinance and paid. The British against the will of the elders and the cultural traditional practices of the Kpaa-Mɛnde had installed her as the so-called "queen of Senehun" (see chapt. 11). It is not surprising that she paid the tax, while other rulers remained defiant and refused to pay. A number of arrests, depositions and other abuses through the officials followed such actions.

The Temne and Mɛnde Uprisings

Meanwhile the renowned Temne hero, Bai Bureh, had organised a guerrilla war in the "Temne country in the north." His "well-organised resistance," which became a cause of disagreement for the British army, gave him much fame and success against the Colonial rulers, holding out against them for several months. Simultaneously, by the 28th of April 1898, the resistance spread in almost all the major centres of the south, which mainly included parts the Kpaa and other Mɛnde-speaking groups (cf. Fyle, 1981). Thus, when governor Cardew and other colonial officials spoke of the Mɛnde in this context, they meant the Kpaa and Sewa-Mɛnde.

The Mɛnde warriors, according to the observations and reports of most contemporaries, carried out mass killings of British subjects as well as those associated with them; there was much looting of property including the plunder of trading stations (cf. Fyfe 1962, 1979; Abraham 1978). It appeared that the whole of Sierra Leone was virtually in armed resistance fever, and, according to the reports of sub-inspector, Johnson, "the whole of the natives rebelled against the Government, [...], from Upper Mendi [Mɛnde] to Rotifunk."[183]

The so-called Mɛnde uprising was different from the one led by the Temne chief, Bai Bureh, in two ways. Firstly, most observers at that time had seen it as nothing more than the indiscriminate killings of innocent

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[183] CO 267/438/Conf. 37, enc. 2, Johnson to Moore, 1898.

civilians. As Fairtlough puts it, "Parties of warboys raiding [a]round and plundering and murdering any Creoles [Krios] or Frontier Policemen they could get hold of."[184] The looters seized the property of unsuspecting officials, missionaries, traders and their families (Krio, European and American alike) and killed many traders and missionaries. The angry war boys attacked Shenge, Rotifunk, Taiama and Mano Bagru, which were the main centres of missionary activity. Systematic killings of the missionaries and looting of their property, as well as destroying mission buildings also took place. The so-called Mɛnde warboys were not only looking for the missionaries, but also for those wearing European dress and copying a European life style, and above all those who collaborated with them. Madam Yoko and Nancy Tucker escaped narrowly with their lives.[185] Meanwhile, riots also broke out in Bandajuma District, and Fairtlough blamed Nyagua for being behind much of the atrocities, since he had been under observation for quite a long time.[186] This led to his arrest in early May, because he was believed to be the prime mover of the insurrection (Abraham, 2003).

In the counter offensive, the Colonial administration used all force to suppress the rebellion, including the use of heavy artillery, grenade and heavy weapons. This offensive of the British led to the subsequent capture of Bai Bureh, but governor Cardew was ready to grant amnesty to the Temne. He was determined, however, to deal firmly with those Mɛnde guilty of committing atrocities against civilians by burning their towns and villages. Most people tried in the courts were condemned to death and were subsequently hanged.[187] Bai Bureh, Nyagua and others accused of being ringleaders were taken as prisoners, and later sent into exile to the Gold Coast in present day Ghana on 30 July.[188]

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[184]   CO 267/447/Conf. 68, Fairtlough to Colonial Secretary, 1898.
[185]   "Much damage was caused by the war. Senehun, Yoko's seat, was utterly destroyed by the warriors quite unsurprisingly. Moyamba was also largely destroyed by the war, only 40 huts remained inhabitable within the demolished stockade" (Ranson, 1971: 56).
[186]   Fur further information on the trouble with king Nyagua, see Abraham (2003; 1978).
[187]   The death sentences were for murder; since Cardew could only grant amnesty to those who simply rebelled, he could not forgive murder. See CO 267/445/15, Cardew to SS, 1899.
[188]   CO 267/445/67; CO 267/447/230/; CO 267/447/Conf. 68, Fairtlough to Colonial Secretary, 1898.

The second observation made by contemporaries about the so-called Mɛnde uprising is that it lacked a charismatic leader like the Temne uprising headed by Bai Bureh (Fyfe, 1962: 572). After the first assault, the movement had relapsed into a series of spontaneous attacks that were far from being organised against everything western. According to Fyfe, they were "fighting as a disorganised rapacious rabble, incapable of sustained opposition, but formidable in a sudden offensive against unsuspecting opponents" (*ibid*). The weaponry used, such as cutlasses, clubs and a few trade guns were less effective than the more sophisticated modern weapons employed by the British army. The traditional fashion of combat was not conducive for a sustained war. Above all else, however, the British received intelligence reports from some collaborators they had among the chiefs; this caused the Mɛnde to lose.[189] Such a tactic of using the indigenous against the indigenous and getting intelligence reports from them in realising the colonial project belongs to the type of modern fragmentation, resulting from such a conflict as a whole. Achebe describes such a fragmentation in his "Things Fall Apart" thus,

> How do you think we can fight when our brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and we allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (Achebe, 1965: Viii).

The above ethnographic account of the uprising against British colonial rule allows for some comments. In comparison, the Temne uprising was different from the Mɛnde in some fundamental ways. There have been indications that the *Poro* (see chapt. 5) became an important means of planning the insurrection among the Mɛnde who took part in the rebellion (cf. Abraham, 2003). It was supposed to be a bond of unity among their fighters, in mobilising them to take up arms against the British, in accordance with the traditions of this institution. It was the *Poro*, which facilitated the accomplishment of the concerted intension to resist, though

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[189] On the Hut Tax War in Sierra Leone in general, see the following works from Abraham (1978); Fyfe (1962); Alldridge (1901); Mannah-Kpaka (1953); Fyle (1981); Little (1967).

it was not as effective as the actors had intended, since there were already great divisions among the people.

Noteworthy is that different Mɛnde-speaking societies attached much secrecy to the organisation of their war against the British, which, in all probability, must have come from the instrumentality of the *Poro*. The resistance, however, failed for lack of a centred organiser or war leader. In this respect, there was a general agreement even among colony officials that *Poro* had played an instrumental role in organising the rebellion,[190] but they recognised this fact only after the war ended, and they were quite surprised by this. One reason was that they never thought the local societies, which they so despised as savages had any institutions capable of such an organisation. If they had thought otherwise, they would have encouraged the chiefs and rulers to use the *Poro* to collect the tax, instead of relating to them in a disparaging manner. This might have averted the Hut Tax War[191] in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde territories. We have seen that in pre-modern times, the *Poro* was also instrumental in bringing peace among competing parties.

The preceding paragraphs favour the argument that warfare or lethal conflict as a social action is culturally specific, which is subject to change. Such a dynamic aspect of warfare allows us to compare its different cultural forms, if we are to understand warfare as a social action. For pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, different rituals handed down from the ancestors must be performed before going to war (see chapt. 7). Such rituals were essential in order to appease the spirits of the ancestors. These rituals were to aid the incorporation of the opponent, and amalgamate him into the society and value system of the conqueror. Thus, one became part of the other. With various inter-cultural interactions, Kɔɔ-Mɛnde warfare had started taking different forms, especially when colonial influence

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[190] CO 267/436/Conf. 35, Cardew to SS, 1898; CO 267/440/Conf. 68, Fairtlough to Colonial Secretary 1898.

[191] There may be various reasons for the unrest and rebellion, but my main concern here is not the causes of the war, rather the social processes involved in it. However, there have been many causes of the unrest which, according to colonial officials may include, among others, the increasing police brutality, the Press in Freetown, resentment to missionary impact, the abolition of the internal slave trade, Krio dishonesty in their trading practices, and most of all Cardew's personality (Abraham, 2003:196).

became more and more apparent. The traditional aspect of ritual incorporation of the opponent in warfare had started taking different forms in the sense that demoralisation of adversaries, as well as indiscriminate killings of civilians were more characteristic.

Kɔɔ-Mɛnde rulers were facing mounting internal pressures from their compatriots to remain faithful to ancestral traditions on the one hand, and the external pressures to engage in trade with the Europeans. This often led to crises of local values, and as they increased, the co-operation reached a point of being under intolerable pressure from one side. In such a case, the rulers often gave in to one pressure; hence becoming inevitable, that collaboration gave way to resistance.

Governor Cardew who had been much involved with the situation of resistance to colonial rule, and whose knowledge of the local reality is undisputable, offered the following interpretation of the British colonial intervention of the Mɛnde and their resistance to it:

> The true causes, in my opinion [...] lie far deeper down, and they are a desire for independence and for a reversion to the old order of things such as fetish customs and slave dealing and raiding. It is practically a revolt of the chiefs, whose authority has been lessened and whose property has suffered through the abolition of slavery. They are sick of the supremacy of the white man [...] they see the old order of things passing away, and the fear and reverence paid to their [...] customs diminishing, their authority going from them, their slaves asserting their independence, their children being taught by the missionaries a purer [?] religion and methods of civilization, and on top of it all, comes the house tax, which is the last straw that breaks the camel's back [...] (Cardew 1898, cited in Abraham 2003: 197).

In his analysis, Cardew implicitly accepts the fact that the whole repercussion of British involvement in the cultural traditions of the people was to undermine traditional society. The sovereignty of the rulers and chiefs and indeed the entire independence of the people were taken away by the British after the promulgation of the Protectorate over the hinterland. This was equivalent – as the governor himself puts it – to a social revolution,[192] which the house tax only acted as a symbol of its pinnacle. The colonial rulers themselves were expecting some kind of

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[192] CO 267/438/Conf., 28 May, Cardew to SS.

resistance to their presence from the various local societies, but they were not expecting the bloody dimension it took.

Their decision to rebel against British rule was an expression of the desire – as Cardew observes – to regain their sovereignty and to go back to their traditional cultural life, which they had lived before and was going on without the British. Certainly some might argue that the forces of change outside the African continent largely contributed to the way the British were dealing with the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde rulers and chiefs. "Industrial, economic and political changes taking place on the international scene were gradually sucking Mɛnde [Kɔɔ-Mɛnde] into the global capitalist system, the extent of which they never quite appreciated" (*op. cit.*: 197-8). For these and similar reasons, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde were caught up with the affairs of the global affairs, and, under British administration, it was impossible for them to revert to their previous political life.

"The *puu-goi*", which the local populace remember in their oral traditions as "the war against the Europeans, and mainly referred to as the Hut Tax War," might have been without doubt suitable for a well-organised pre-modern warfare. However, in modern times and against a modern industrial power like Britain, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde had absolutely no chance of defending themselves. Capable of leading a sustained campaign and by using far more sophisticated and modern weapons, the colonial powers were successful in intimidating them. They were humiliated, subjugated and defeated by the British, and losing their independence to Britain, they spent the better part of the twentieth-century under British foreign rule (*op. cit*).

The British colonial system of indirect rule also required that Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society was to become part of a nation state known as Sierra Leone created after independence. It also meant that they were pressurised into giving up most of their traditional values, at least externally, and account to the central government through its various representatives. The British were not to remain in Sierra Leone forever; they were, sooner or later, to give up power to able Sierra Leoneans who would continue ruling according to western values of democracy and the capitalist monetary economic system introduced by colonial rule.

Chapter 9   Post-colonial Modernity

In order to understand the impact of post-colonial modernity on the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, I recapitulate in this chapter the most incisive colonial institutions that have survived independence. Analysing these institutions serves as a prelude to a series of post-colonial interventions, and examines the social impact left by the colonial rulers for their local successors, mainly in the domains of politics, economics and culture. In this way, the effect of post-colonial interventions can be directly related to its very cause, which is colonialism.

The political heirs of Sierra Leone took on the British legacy and continued the line of succession with little or no room for substantial changes or critical re-assessment, especially regarding political power and authority. These new leaders were even less concerned with the question how colonialism affected religious and social representations of the various societies now belonging to the artificially created state. State for these politicians became identical with society, though Loko, Temne, Limba and Mɛnde-speaking groups continued to draw lines of social and cultural differentiations. Yet they found themselves belonging to or becoming part of the Sierra Leone nation state with other societies having different religious values and social representations. The consequences of colonial modernity were highly articulated after gaining independence in 1961. Hence, the years that followed became crucially important, since they were generally a period of great cultural and social transition. An outline of how colonial modernity transformed social and political institutions of different societies and the effects it still has on these institutions is important in understanding the social transitions of post-colonial modernity.

The transformation of politics, power and authority

Apparently, administering the new nation state of Sierra Leone became more and more problematic for the colonial rulers and their local collaborators. This difficulty certainly had to do with a number of issues pertaining to indigenous political values, which appeared to the British as incomprehensible, since they did not conform to the concept of their

political rule. To alleviate such problems the colonial administration needed to restructure the very structures they had created. In doing so, they further fragmented the various political cultures of indigenous societies. The following is an outline of some of these structures, which *ipso facto* became the "heritage" of colonialism.

A case study of colonial intervention in traditional politics

Like the Luawa polity under the rule of Kai Londo, Kpanguma under Nyagua became a victim of British colonial rule, when the process of building and expansion this polity went directly against colonial interest. After Nyagua's removal, the British fragmented his polity into its component towns and villages according to colonial demarcation.

To make this process of fragmentation more effective, Britain saw the need to reorganise the local government their colony had created in the provinces into a more effective Native Administration system by 1937, following the same model that existed in other West African countries (Fyle, 1981). The British were now mainly concerned with maintaining law and order, so that the rebellion of 1898 could not be repeated. This they did by inducting into office those chiefs who were ready to serve their interests. Recalcitrant chiefs were made to understand that maintaining their positions now depended very much on good relations with the administration, and that only submissive chiefs could be installed as paramount chiefs (cf. Wylie, 1969). According to an elderly informant in the provincial headquarters of Kenema, "there were a number of instances, where the District Commissioner brought his own nominee to be elected as Paramount Chief." Candidates nominated by the colonial administration were considered more vigilant in pursuing the collection of taxes and punishing tax evaders. The underlying principle remained thus an economic one.

In contrast to the traditional principle of seniority – which was the necessary condition for attaining political authority and legitimacy – former rulers were to realise that their position now depended on the colonial government, and not on any cultural practice of legitimacy. There are well-known examples of this British policy, but the most notorious

one in the history of Sierra Leone is the case of Madam Yoko, who 'controlled' the Kpaa-Mɛnde country.

Replacement of cosmological authority by colonially installed offices

The best example that illustrates such a political fragmentation is the case of Madam Yoko. Madam Yoko (1849-1906)[193] was called Sama as a child, but after her initiation into the *Sande*, she acquired the name Yoko. She gradually rose to prominence in the *Sande* institution, probably because of her graceful dancing during the period of seclusion. Yoko was first married to Gbenjei, the chief of Taiama, but after his death, she married a renowned warrior-chief at Senehun by the name of Gbanya, who used Yoko in diplomatic missions to the British and other chiefs.

These diplomatic missions came at a time when British influence in the hinterland among different Mɛnde-speaking societies was already being felt even before the formal declaration of the so-called protectorate. After conniving with Colony officials, the administration put her in charge of Senehun, a Kpaa-Mɛnde town. With the authority of governor Havelock in 1882, Madam Yoko constantly undermined the local chief of Senehun (cf. Fyle, 1981: 95). She started settling disputes on her own, sometimes aided by the Colony government, if a case was too complicated to handle. Above all, to the gratitude of the colonial government, she could protect traders, and they sent her two police officers to help her in this. Colonial officials by-passed the legitimate local ruler and started dealing with Yoko instead, when it came to matters concerning the Kpaa-Mɛnde. After the king's death in 1882, the Colony administration crowned her as 'queen of Senehun'. Hence, "the Kpaa-Mɛnde became powerless, since in the face of such a confusing situation, they could not elect a new king who was to base at Senehun. Protests from the local community were in vain."

Madam Yoko was only able to control the town of Senehun, and not the entire Kpaa-Mɛnde polity, as most people refused to recognise her authority. Colonial officials did not hesitate to imprison any chief who

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[193] See Abraham (2003); Barrows (1976); Fyle (1981); Ofosu-Appiah (1988); Turay *et al* (1988).

openly defiled her authority and challenged her power. In this way, they consolidated her power without any moral authority and legitimate sovereignty, and as Dr. Hood observes, "the majority of her sub-chiefs were not loyal to her, and paid little attention to her orders."[194] He further maintains that, "Such interference helped the Colony to spread its influence in areas where troops or a gunboat could not easily be sent to spread fear among the people. In this way, the hand of the British extended much further into the interior".[195] Additionally, Madam Yoko became even more unpopular after asking the Kpaa-Mɛnde people to pay the house tax, and collaborating with the District Commissioner and the Frontier Police in enforcing it (cf. Abraham, 2003: 161). In this respect, Governor Cardew wanted "Yoko to be informed that I much appreciate the loyal manner in which she has acted throughout the present crisis."[196]

One event, which failed to honour the traditional politics, was when the so-called 'Queen of Senehun' decided to reside in Moyamba,[197] because she needed to be near the seat of local power. The decision to take up residence in Moyamba caused a lot of tension and confusion in the political structure that already existed there. Though she had no right to land, "according to customary law", nevertheless she was imposed on the existing local chief there. This breach of tradition[198] meant in effect that the existing chief became a subject in his own land, because, in accordance with British law established in Sierra Leone, Madam Yoko was now the legitimate authority. With their power behind her, she was officially a superior chief, under whose sway the local chief was now

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[194] Minutes papers, Conf. 1/98.
[195] Minutes papers, Conf. 1/96.
[196] Minute papers, Native Affairs, 135/98.
[197] According to an eye-witness report, among the attendants accompanying her were 16 to 20 attractive maidens, 12 hammock boys, 100 women, many small children, as well as Mandingo, Fula and Soso traders (Ranson, 1971: 61).
[198] One reason why she had a good relationship with the British officials, according to sources like Fyle and some of the Kpaa-Mɛnde informants, is that "she had a famous *Sande* bush from which she is said to have found concubines for visiting Colony officials, thus strengthening relations with them" (Fyle, 1981: 95). This was also a break of tradition. Because of her power, she was able to manipulate the *Sande* initiation for her own individualistic ends, "something quite unthinkable in the olden days."

bound. Most of her sub-chiefs, however, remained defiant and flouted her authority.

Madam Yoko largely contributed to the demise of the Kpaa-Mɛnde polity, which – like Luawa – was in formation when the British arrived on the Upper Guinea Coast. Due to her ineptitude to control it, chiefs from different Kpaa-Mɛnde regions preferred to do what was fitting for them, each operating in different directions; this weakened the polity significantly. Therefore, through colonial intervention, a process of fragmentation was now set in motion, which subsequently led to the collapse of the Kpaa-Mɛnde polity. This was followed by problems of succession and continuity. Consequently, the colonial administration suggested breaking up the Kpaa-Mɛnde polity in 1910, which was officially completed nine years later. Abraham graphically puts the situation thus:

> Thus towards the end of the nineteenth century, Kpaa Mɛnde history suffered an aberration when under British influence, Madam Yoko became ruler of this war-state. The process of disintegration, which set in, was deliberately encouraged by the British rulers as a cardinal aspect of colonial policy. Once the British and Madam Yoko, their creation, were in the saddle, it was only a matter of time before this state would vanish into history (Abraham, 2003: 167).

The case of Madam Yoko reflects the fact that local communities and societies were made to fight one another through the encouragement given by the British. The colonial office did this mainly by cunning ways, such as by means of guns or by using the attraction of money and other goods, in order to pursue their political agenda. Achebe further describes such a process of fragmentation caused by colonial modernity, by proposing that "the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world [...]. In the Process many heads rolled; new worlds, new usages and new applications gained entrance into men's heads and hearts and the old society gradually gave way" (Achebe, 1965: V).

Replacement of seniority by colonial co-operation

Replacing seniority with colonial co-operation can be interpreted as replacing ancestral representation by that of colonial representation. The question of seniority was fundamental to the social order in pre-modern

socio-cosmic order of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. "It was unthinkable for young men to become political leaders of village communities." Any person under the age of fifty, for example, could not be a leader, because they needed men of experience (cf. Migeod 1926: 112; Hollins 1928: 28). Elderly women who were strong enough could also become village or town leaders. They could not, however, have a sovereign authority over a number of villages or settlements in a particular region, since they could not defend them against intruding warriors. Only men became warriors in pre-colonial times. Therefore, the British crowning of Madam Yoko as "queen of Senehun" was not only a misnomer, but also a deliberate attempt to turn tradition on its head (Abraham, 2003).

Leadership was also identified with moral authority, since the leader was at the same time a religious leader. We have seen that since pre-colonial political leaders operated within a system – mainly through the *Poro* institution – that provided constant checks and balances, there was virtually no room for totalitarian or despotic rulers (Winterbottom, 1803: 124). Hollins gives a general idea of what this kind of situation was like at that time, in stating that

> [Even though] their position and powers are not narrowly defined, and vary somewhat according to the personality of the chief [...] it may be confidently stated that a Mɛnde chief is not a despot, but a constitutional ruler – custom rather than strict law framing the constitution. Custom forbids him certain acts and insists that in an important matter he should only act after consultation with his 'big men' (Hollins, 1928: 26).

When, for instance, there was a dispute between a ruler and his subject, the latter usually had the right to seek protection of a neighbouring ruler. Such a move was never considered an indignity towards "the king" in question (Bokhari, 1919: 54), but can be interpreted as an indication that political leadership was limited in its administration of authority.

Political leadership was not restricted to a particular ruling family, since attaining leadership was not necessarily based on the principle of hereditary rights of succession, but mainly on prowess and mettle in war (cf. Abraham, 2003). Furthermore, such a leadership was based on cosmological principles, which gave the leader a high degree of religious authority. This type of authority could be ascribed even to strangers who

fulfilled such customary prerequisites as the case of Kai Londo shows. According to Fenton, "almost any influential person might make a bid for a Mɛnde chiefship [...]" (Fenton, 1933: 4).[199] This tradition of ascribing political leadership to exceptional valour continued until colonial rulers took over the protectorate. They undermined such traditional practices and attempted to replace cosmologically sanctioned authority with political power. Therefore, by the end of the 19th century, a political leader was no longer necessarily a religious leader for colonial politics became increasingly combined with power. I employ power in this context to mean the use of a special privilege deriving from the honour of holding political office to exploit, rather than to represent the social and religious interests of the community, which elected the leader.

By renaming already existing polities into chiefdoms and electing or approving paramount chiefs to rule over them, the British administration paved the way for the struggle to acquire political power. Political office was so associated with power, that it gradually became the ultimate goal of the newly created rulers, including the so-called paramount chiefs. After the British had defeated the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, "it became a privilege to serve under them. Those who co-operated with the British were rewarded with political office, money and other material goods, usually European manufactured goods; but critics and rebels were punished." Thus, a mixture of fear and privilege became local ingredients for co-operating with the colonial administration.

It eventually became a habit by local rulers to exploit their subjects, using power given to them by the British. In making full use of political exploitation, new institutions such as the system of hereditary succession emerged. "Clinging to political power, and seeing how it benefited individuals and their immediate family members, those holding political offices did everything to remain in power or to keep the power for their family relations." This is what I call the "individualisation of political power", which allows for a closer examination. Contrary to this view, in the pre-modern socio-cosmic order of society, and in pre-colonial times

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[199] See also Davis (1876) for ideas on such practices among the different Mɛnde-speaking groups.

political leadership was never a family property (cf. Hollins, 1928: 28), but with the advent of colonialism, "the office of the chief in Mɛnde country is usually regarded as the property of the family [of the chief] (...)" (*ibid*). Sometimes if a candidate with a direct descent was unavailable, the people would seek another candidate with a rather vague relationship. In Nongowa chiefdom, the head wife of Nyagua's father, who later came to be known as Madam Maatolo, was chosen to succeed Vangahun. Like Madam Yoko, she owed her position to the colonial administration (cf. Abraham, 1978).

Meanwhile, as colonial rule spread to all corners of Sierra Leone, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde had to accept and adjust to the new situation that electing political leaders was now based on the power of the colonial rulers, and their successors. A modern form of attaining democratic power was now at work at the wake of 'violent' implementation of this new British policy at the turn of the 19th century, "The new chiefs created by the colonial administration had tested the sweetness of such a political power, and hence did everything possible to maintain it." Promoting the interests of colonial officials at the expense of traditional practices became the major means of clinging to power. The chiefs, being collaborators of the administration in Freetown, and knowing that they had all its backing, could easily exploit their own people, who were now seen as subjects. The colonial administration only opposed such abuses, if it was against its interests; otherwise, they never cared about them.

Political power became for the local paramount chiefs and other rulers serving in the colonial administration something to possess for their own interest and that of the administration. The legitimacy of authority was no longer based on cosmological order, nor was it socially sanctioned by the ancestors, but had to do with power sanctioned by the colonial government. Rulers had power to rule, since religious authority became subordinate to it in many respects. Because the chiefs obtained this type of modern political power, they constantly demanded and obtained, mostly through coercion, that their subjects labour for them.

Whereas in pre-colonial times, tributes to rulers for the most part, were paid in kind, that is to say through exchange of services, mostly resulting from marriage relationships, colonial modernity introduced the

payment of taxes in money, sometimes paying large sums of money as taxes to the chiefs by the 1930s. For this reason, "Chiefs therefore became by far the wealthiest individuals in the Protectorate and could take advantage of the attractions of European goods" (Fyle, 1981: 115). Therefore, to be a chief was to have the opportunity of becoming wealthy, and those concerned undertook everything to achieve this goal. A new social practice of attaining the assistance of *hei* gradually developed among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, mainly to attain political power by negatively using it to harm political opponents.

The misuse of political power by the colonial chiefs in maltreating their subjects became so precarious that the administration began listening to the complaints of the people. Deposition became an appropriate solution for the colonial administration in the sense that as soon as reports about maltreatment of subjects were received, those responsible for such abuses were deposed at once. It did not contribute however, to any long-term solution, since the British feared that chiefs were losing their power, causing them to change their course of action, and started levying fines on them for lesser offenses rather than deposition. The idea behind such a confusing situation was that, if the colonial rulers continued deposing chiefs for any petty complaint, the common people would stop respecting the authority of the chiefs, and that would mean the collapse of the institution of chieftaincy. This was the last thing the colonial administration wanted to happen. At the same time, they were trying to prevent chiefs from exploiting their subjects. Thus, the policy they implemented was now making issues complicated for their administration, since no strict policy could be formulated to achieve both goals. The British wanted to bring order and sanity to societies they considered as "primitive" and "uncivilised", by imposing new structures and values in their social, political and religious representations.

Native Administration units

Regarding local administrative systems, the colonial government undertook the following reforms. After breaking up the various Kɔɔ-Mɛnde polities into different components of chiefdoms, it became necessary to reorganise these chiefdoms for administrative reasons. Thus,

they transformed each chiefdom into a unit of Native Administration, which the local people called NA. This was modelled on the one practiced in northern Nigeria. According to this model, the following were to be called 'tribal' authorities within the NA unit. These were Paramount Chiefs, the town and section chiefs, the councillors as well as some prominent people, nominally elected by the people. "The colonial administration also introduced the system of Chiefdom Treasury as a separate financial system with each NA." In this respect, an essential change occurred as each "Paramount Chief began to receive salary in pound sterling from the Colonial government in Freetown." It replaced the traditional dues in pre-colonial times, which were mainly aimed at forming alliance relationships. Taxes, collected by the Paramount Chiefs through their chiefdom administration were for the Native Treasury, from where they could carry out basic services, under the direction of the District Commissioner. Since many of the newly formed chiefdoms proved very small for the British political landscape, they followed a new policy of amalgamation by combining smaller chiefdoms were with large ones.

Scholars like Fyle (1981) have argued that Paramount Chiefs were not forced to join the NA system, though some amount of pressure was used to convince them to join. "The colonial administration did everything to realise its objective, since it employed both the violence of intimidation and diplomacy through the enticement of money and material goods." Replacing traditional sources of revenue with money in the form of salaries would mean that the chiefs would officially receive less income, and so some were reluctant to join the system. However, "the colonial government tried to offer attractive salaries as an alternative to lure the chiefs to accept salaries instead." After some Paramount Chiefs saw that it would lead to great personal wealth by combining the two, that is to say, the official salary and the illicit collection of traditional dues, many of them became more than willing to join the system. For mainly these reasons, all chiefdoms eventually adopted the NA system.

The NA system benefited the colonial project of subduing and fragmenting existing pre-colonial political systems, but did not bring the financial improvement to the indigenous people the chiefs were supposed

to represent. Despite the many constraints brought by this system of political administration on the local population, the NA structure introduced by the colonial masters continued even after independence. The new government of Sierra Leone adopted it, when the British handed over power to the Sierra Leoneans themselves.

District councils

Another issue that needed much attention was the establishment of District Councils to assist in providing necessary services, as the number of protectorate administration increased. The main purpose of the District Council set up in 1946 was to be an advisory body to the administration, and to make sure that a number of reforms or transformations take place within the administration (Fyle, 1981: 117). Initially the members of this administrative body included Paramount Chiefs, who were to act as ex-officio members and a representative of the people in each district. The so-called Tribal Authorities "were responsible for choosing the latter, which followed a rather nepotistic tendency, because the Paramount Chief mostly chose one member of his family for this post." Admitting that the composition of this council was narrow and did not bring the bright ideas the administration had hoped for, they decided to amend it after an ordinance in 1950 (*ibid*). This modification included the appointment of three extra members to the council, this time by the District Officer himself, who could be natives of either the district or just resident, but had to be literate in English. The chairperson of the council was the District Commissioner, who was represented by the Paramount Chief when absent. The British administration decided on all issues, while the local population had almost no say in their own affairs. However, there was much reform in this respect after some riots in 1955 (*ibid*), meaning that the District Commissioner ceased to be a member of the council. Instead, council members now elected its president who was formerly nominated by the governor.

From the funds provided by the NA Treasury, the District Council Members were able to undertake a number of social services for their districts, Provinces and chiefdoms. These services included the building of roads and assisting in agricultural works. It was also geared towards

animating communities to take the initiative of more involvement in self-help projects, especially at community, such as village level. The District Councils endured into the independence era and with little modifications, the succeeding members of the government of Sierra Leone did their best to continue what the British had started.

The Police Force and formation of the Military

By the turn of the 19th century, the colonial administration was determined to bring the Frontier Police under the West African Frontier Force. In doing so, they wanted it to be part of the one Police Force started by Lord Lugard in Nigeria, which was not supposed to be a full military. However, the Frontier Police was transformed into a complete military body and afterwards constituted a battalion, which came into the barracks in 1901 (Abraham, 2003).

Those acting as Court Messengers were now charged with the functions of the Frontier Police in different parts of the Protectorate, including Luawa. Eventually, the administration transformed the Frontier Police into a force with full police duties. The former Frontier Policemen now took on full duties mostly in the District Offices in the Protectorate. New methods of enlistment into the new Police Force were developed and maintained, amid increasing demand for their services and protection. After 1939, the force was taken up into the Central Police of Sierra Leone. At the same time, the Chiefdom Police emerged in the various chiefdoms in the country. The structure underlying the various domains of the administration as conceived by the British colonial architecture was to remain virtually unchanged for the post-independence decades. The effect of these structures on the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, and how they have changed their cultural representations, has not yet received the consideration they deserved.

Independence and Post-Independence era

The end of the two world wars brought tremendous changes in colonial politics, by helping in the process of moving most West African countries into a unified form of Government that gradually led to independence from colonial rule. A speedy movement towards independence only came

about after World War II, when a wave of decolonisation began after the colonial powers started negotiating political autonomy for their respective colonies. Subsequently, the Protectorate and Colony in Sierra Leone were brought together in a Legislative Council, leading to the final independence for Sierra Leone in 1961. This autonomy paved the way for an eventual one-party system of government under president Siaka Stevens lasting several decades. Before independence, however, a famous Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Muslim preacher by the name of kamoh Mustapha Koroma from Kenema in the Nongowa chiefdom had foretold this event. "He travelled in all the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde territories, preaching and warning people, about coming events in post-independence era" (see chapt. 11). Most people are now taking his words seriously in the Luawa chiefdom. In the words of one informant, "everything he said have now come to pass and we are still expecting more to come."

The problems of the new independent state were quick to surface as a social menace. Attempts to make political and economic reforms[200] failed, and social pressures from different societies that were undergoing tremendous cultural transitions (in post-independent years) increased, as the new republic of Sierra Leone began facing a political and economic crisis. An obvious reason for such difficulties was the attitude to sharing political power among different societies brought together to form the republic of Sierra Leone. In accordance with the principles of democracy, the various government departments and offices were supposed to be represented by the different societies of Sierra Leone, in order to ensure a just and smooth running of the republic. Such principles were predestined to flunk or to fall short of the expected success, since these various societies, which were artificially put together to form the state, had different cultural values and notions relating to politics and social solidarity.[201] For instance, when Sir Milton Margai's brother, Albert Margai, replaced him as Prime Minister, it caused many problems, and accusations of nepotism and corruption from opponents increased. It

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[200] A full 'litany' of these problems and reforms can be found in Fyle (1981: 137ff).
[201] Examples of such a social solidarity in relation to different cultural values among societies has been described by Platenkamp (2007a)

brought a lot of political turmoil ranging from coup d'états and counter coups in the new Sierra Leone.

The national elections, which took place in 1967, gave the All Peoples Congress (APC) a win over the incumbent Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) headed by Sir Albert Margai (cf. Fyle, 1981: 142). In an effort to keep Albert Margai in power, the army, led by brigadier John Lansana, shortly took over the country. However, Lansana was overthrown a day after assuming office by some officers, who then formed the so-called National Reformation Council (NRC). The latter succeeded in making some economic reforms, by adopting measures proposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (*ibid*). Since the NRC senior officers started exercising and enjoying *power*, without considering their junior ones, the army again overthrew them in 1968. This coup d'état subsequently brought Siaka Stevens to power as Prime Minister, under whose regime Sierra Leone officially became a republic in 1971 (*ibid*). The decades following this new political culture of the republic of Sierra Leone were characterised by outstanding violence and brutality against political opponents as well as liberal and critical civilians advocating a change of government policy. From the complexities of such a modern political system, regional politics (cf. Abraham, 1993) and new systems of social services developed as a result.

Chapter 10   Between Independence and Civil War

This chapter analyses the social changes that occurred from independence to civil war. These changes, prompted mainly by the political and economic relations of post-colonial modernity, have initiated a series of post-colonial interventions in the social and political structures of various societies in Sierra Leone. For the government of Sierra Leone, these societies are now comprised of citizens of the State with little or no consideration of differences in their political and social values. The phenomenon of globalisation plays a more prominent role in the various interventions of modernity, as it is their highest common factor, though not much debated in the 1960s.

The social and cultural changes triggered by political independence were also largely due to a combination of both internal and external factors that have led to a deterioration of the economic, political and social relations at both national and local levels. Among the internal factors contributing to these changes are the struggles for political power inherited from the colonial rulers by Sierra Leonean elites, and the desire of continuing the politics of statehood. The external factors are the various foreign interventions upon whose operation the political elites were highly dependent in running their government. In their endeavours to address and end the political, social and economic problems, the different foreign interventions adopted a policy of globalisation that corresponded to western ideologies, especially the modern ideology of individualism (cf. Dumont, 1986). The following paragraphs highlight how these post-colonial socio-cultural changes have occurred among Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. I limit the following ethnographic analysis to Ngiema-Luawa in relation to the Sierra Leonean state. For the sake of clarity, however, these changes or "moments of transition" are categorised under the following few headings.

Changes in Political structure

In relation to politics, the changes that continued in new forms after independence mainly consisted in the political culture of the state and the exercise of political power. The tradition of ruling houses came into being

which facilitated the restriction political power to certain lineages and family groups, hence preparing the ground for hereditary succession (cf. Abraham, 2003). The latter was not part of the political process in pre-modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, where political authority was ascriptive in character. The new development of lineage succession normally took a patrilineal form among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, whereas the Kpaa-Mɛnde adopted a rather matrilineal one. We find that nowadays certain political institutions that were created by the colonial administration have become part of indigenous ones. Among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, the *Poro* socio-religious institution continued to play an important role, though not as important as in pre-colonial times. Candidates for the paramount chieftaincy must have been initiated into the *Poro*. Before the war, this institution continued to play a major role in the political life of paramount chiefs, though it was no longer legitimate from the point of view of the State. The *Poro* as an instrument of checks and balances controlled to a certain degree the paramount chief though it became much more difficult for it to carry out this function. A major reason for such a setback is the continual interference of the central government in political institutions in the provinces, since it considered itself as the sole legitimate power for monitoring those holding political offices.

The chiefs increasingly continued to exploit the communal labour obligations of young people for their own individual advantages. In many respects, the political atmosphere also determined how much communal labour was done, and how chiefs imposed sanctions for failure to comply. Political power thus became highly institutionalised and respected following the colonial impositions of its own structures on the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. Attaining this type of modern political power entails that those involved in the struggle employed every possible means, especially bad *hei*, like human sacrifices, sorcery and ritual killings. Attacks, physical or otherwise, on political opponents still belong to such power struggles.

Religious and ritual practices

By the 1970s, the process of inculturation had advanced in such a way that most cultural traditions had been incorporated into indigenous forms of Islam. We have seen how at its initial stages Islam tolerated many

indigenous cultural traditions and even adopted some of them. Such a tolerance, however, began to take a different course as orthodox Islam made its way to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, especially in the years that followed independence. For example, at least by mid 1970s, the pre-modern local concept for the Highest Deity was now almost entirely replaced by the concept that was introduced by Islam, known as *Ngɛwɔ*. The latter became part of the daily vocabulary of the village community. Sacrifices were neither offered to Sky Deity (*Leeve Njeini*)[202] and his wife Earth Deity (*Maa-ndɔ*) nor to the ancestral spirits and other forms of spirit representation. The only legitimate spirits were the *jinangaa* who are believed to be Islamic spirits even nowadays. According to my informants, "Places of ancestral cult, and yearly sacrifices had been virtually ignored. Feeding the ancestors on top of high mountains, in deep forests and at the riverside as a village community had gradually lost its significance in favour of Muslim rituals." For these informants, an obvious reason for such "radical" changes is that, orthodox Islam had forbidden such practices as pagan. As a local researcher, I searched for these places in Ngiema and other research sites in vain. The only socio-religious institutions still active are *Poro* and *Sande*, though they had also experienced many changes in their social structures. The festivities marking the end of Ramadan were mainly graced by the public appearance of different masks that entertained the village community. According to Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Islam, the rituals involved in such public events were legitimate, since they aimed at bringing joy and entertainment to the village community.

The various manifestations of the Highest Deity known in *hei* and the relationship of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde to it (see chapt. 4) have also been changing over time, with new forms developing. An important development in this regard is that more and more individuals wanted to have personal access to *hei* mainly through Islamic spells, as practiced by the Muslim holy men. The latter was increasingly "becoming a more socially legitimate practitioner and dispenser of *hei* which gave them

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[202] The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde sometimes shortened it to become *Leeve*. For this reason, I also simply employ *Leeve* from time to time without the *njeini*.

much power and moral authority in the community." In pre-modern village community, *hei* was an all-pervading presence of the Highest Deity embodied in parts of non-domesticated plant and animal species in the cosmos, especially represented by the ancestors in the *Poro* sacred grove.

Another aspect that had developed in relation to the cultural practice of *hei* is the ritual of the curse. In pre-modern times, this ritual was mainly performed by special elders, when the village community was threatened, as in cases when animals destroyed the rice plants, which could lead to poor harvest. Post-independence Ngiema saw a new development in the sense that more and more individuals, through the help of Muslim holy men, began performing rituals of the curse, which "are still acts of cursing through the recitation of particular spells. Verses from the Koran were used to curse culprits or offenders; when done in this way, it became the *aifa*, which was believed to be an even greater curse." Besides, many people were getting access to *hei* through different means, in order to perform the ritual of the curse. The social importance of these ritual acts lies in their effectiveness and possible impact on the village community. Therefore, these spells are important in communicating their meaning by pronouncing particular words in performing them. In cases of theft, the recitation of the spells always went in accordance with the wishes of the stolen property's owner, such as the culprit confessing his guilt at his sick bed. In such a case, the spells could be reversed, so that they can no longer have their original effect and power. "The elaborate rituals involved in this were social deterrent for criminal offences." Gittins' definition of the modern form of *hei* as power demonstrates such a change in the relationship to *hei* and its practices. "By 'power' [*hei*] is meant a capacity extrinsic to the object or person in which it may be found: a creative or destructive element transcending the intrinsic capacity of object or person and being a manifestation of the Supreme Being. Such 'power' may be localised or diffused" (Gittins, 1987: 44). In my view, Gittins' definition seems to deny the fact that *hei* is a social being.

Most socio-religious institutions responsible for rituals of healing and purification like the *njayei*, *jabissaah* and *humoi* in pre-modern times (see chapt. 4 and 5) gradually vanished with the advent of orthodox Islam.

The Muslim holy men who also became healers now replaced them. "By reciting particular verses from the Koran, they could invoke the spirits (*jinangaa*) who gave them the necessary instructions about the different medicinal herbs used for curing the sick." Because of such a religious privilege, "these holy men started monopolising the knowledge of different medicinal herbs and giving it to their family members and those closely associated with them." They became practitioners of *hei*, and usually kept the knowledge as a family secret.

Nevertheless, in spite of such changes and modifications, *hei* is still such a basic value that it permits of different social relationships, which can be seemingly contradictory. In other words, *hei* is a social value when it valorises social relations. In this way, it is able to determine different types of such relationships that may sometimes appear to contradict the various social actions resulting from its employment. The very construction of State and the civic community has generated a different type of religious society in relation to *hei* in the sense that through Islam *hei* has been nationalised. That is to say, Islam becomes a level at which the cultural specificity of social cosmological order – conceptualised par excellence through the concept of *hei* – becomes transcended so that the Muslim holy men parallel to *Poro* have become dispensers of *hei*. Thus, one may find that parallel to the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, other societies in Sierra Leone have versions of *hei* in their respective languages, which Islam has introduced. In the late 1970s, a central taboo for Ngiema was broken, which nearly brought catastrophe to the whole village.

> Some government officials from Kailahun and two men from Ngiema killed a crocodile from the *Maada* family [totemic ancestor] in river Keeya allegedly by mistake. That very night an old woman had a dream, in which *Maada* gave her the following instructions. 'Since the village community had broken the covenant they made with us, within weeks the whole village was going to be destroyed, unless the Ngiema people offered a sacrifice to avert our [*Maada* Crocodiles] anger. This sacrifice must include one hundred dishes of cooked rice with various sauces, as well as hundred pieces of white cloth and hundred white kola nuts. Meanwhile people should avoid river Keeya until the sacrifice had been offered, because all those who go to the river were going to be attacked by the crocodiles.' Indeed, the crocodiles attacked all those who went to the river. The attacks stopped after the Ngiema people offered the sacrifice.

This shows that Islam had not fully replaced the ancestral based socio-cosmological order of the community. Nevertheless, the role played by cosmological entities in the religious representations of the people were becoming more and more linked with Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Islamic beliefs by the 1970s.

Following in the footsteps of the founding ancestors, the protective rituals were always performed while laying the foundation stones for each house built in pre-modern Ngiema. All houses built in the village must first go through this ritual, but by the 1980s, this practice had almost disappeared. Those that still performed it use the Islamic form instead (see chapt. 6).

Economic activities

After the introduction of capitalist market economy, post-independence Ngiema saw an increase in the number of people engaging in small retail trading, purposely to make profits and increase their prospects of 'economic boom'. Abandoning agriculture, most young people took on this type of small trading such as cigarettes and various articles. Diamond mining in other Kɔɔ-Mɛnde towns, such as Tongo Field became an alternative as most young men went there in order to make quick cash. In pre-modern village society, the House facilitated communal farming. Apart from using harvested rice and other produce for households in the community, some of it was also used for sacrifices to the ancestors.

There were also certain changes in the social aspect of rice farming, mainly because "the activity of rice farming increasingly became an opportunity to earn money." Thus, we see a rapid decline in the number of big farms being cultivated as compared to pre-modern times. Instead, individual chiefs made farms large enough to feed their families and their immediate relations. Groups of people or families who owned affinal obligations to one another sometimes embarked upon collective rice farming. Chiefs, who once assumed the responsibility of feeding the whole village community, were now exclusively doing this for their own individual families. Since the labour force became scarce, because more and more young people were engaging in petty trading and most wanted to make quick money in the diamond mining areas, there was inevitably a

shortage of food, especially during the rainy season. To solve this problem of labour shortage both for individual chiefs and for groups of families, "people formed clubs, which became a kind of co-operative groups. These groups started working on the various farms for daily wages to be paid in Leones, the national currency." Some chiefs and individual families hired these different clubs to work on the rice farms. The section chief of Lower Kpombali resident in Ngiema and the village chief were nevertheless entitled to free labour, since the whole village community should help them as a sign of solidarity, a further indication of the advantages of political power. The labour was not only restricted to rice farming, but was also done on the cocoa and coffee plantations. Apart from paying people to work on the farms, those with many wives had an advantage of labour capacity. The society respected and approved polygamy, because men having many wives received high social recognition since they were thought to be financially strong enough to take care of their families. There was also the advantage of getting enough labour force for their farming activities, since the children born to these men were all to work on the farm as one big family.

Before British rule, the ancestors and not living people were the real owners of the land. After independence, the State claimed ultimate ownership of national territory. Thus, land in Ngiema became, in principle, part of the republic of Sierra Leone, since politically the state has the right to exercise authority over its boundaries drawn by the colonial administration, making land the monopoly of the State. Thus, the pattern of land distribution was to follow this pattern of new boundaries made by the colonial administration. Whereas there was no strict demarcation of boundaries in the pre-modern society, people were now expected to stay within the boundaries that were formed by the colonial administration. After transforming Luawa into chiefdom divided into many sections, the authorities demanded a proper respect for each territory.

Houses and marriage relations

The big houses gradually lost a great deal of their traditional social structures after independence, but towards the end of the 1970s, they had become virtually a practice of the past. An example of such a change is the form of building houses: the big house gradually disappeared in favour of the more modern family house of four or five rooms in the late colonial period. Whereas the pre-modern society conceived the big house of the big houses as a social unit, where members of a particular House were living together as one big family, the building of houses took a more individual form in post-colonial modernity, restricted to individual families. However, the traditional House as a social unit did not all of a sudden disappear after independence, but only in a gradual process, which ended towards the end of the 1970s and in about mid 1980s. "One of these houses was still in Nganyawama 2 section of the village though it was not as organised as it used to be."

Another aspect of social relationships that changed in post-colonial times is marriage relations between different Houses of the village and in different Kɔɔ-Mɛnde communities. The years that followed independence, saw a sharp increase in Christian marriages in big towns and cities, and Islamic marriages in villages like Ngiema. Such developments imply that the number of people willing to take part in traditional marriages was in a decline, though a mosaic of Islamic and traditional marriage rituals were still performed. Most village communities who were predominantly Muslims preferred giving their daughters to Muslims in marriage, unless the families of the prospective husbands were rich. Christians, on the other hand, were not so keen on this type of endogamy. Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Islam promoted the idea of involving parents and other members of the extended family in choosing marriage partners for their children, especially daughters. Thus, the will of the parent involved remained predominant.

A substantial change in marriage relations was the role money played in contracting them. Wife-givers increasingly demanded material help and mostly money from (prospective) wife-takers prior to giving their daughters in marriage. Money seemed to have replaced pre-modern ritual objects of exchange in marriage, such as the kola nuts and other

objects already described in chapter 2. However, if these objects were ever used they were only playing a symbolic and subordinate role to money. Such a practice has generated a number of social problems.

Some families who wanted to have more money and material profits from the prospective wife-takers "would even force their daughters into marrying someone from a well to do family." After a groom's family had spent a lot of money in different ways on the wife-givers, and had taken over the expenses of the initiation of the future wife into the *Sande*, it often happened that she refused to marry the proposed husband, because she wanted to choose her own partner. "In such a case, the village court demanded that the woman's parent refund all the expenses for her initiation and other expenditure." This practice became known in the so-called customary law as laying the stone (*kɔtii haei*). If the girl's parents were too poor to refund the expenditure, they had no choice, but to pressurise their daughter into marrying the proposed husband. In worst cases,

> if she still refused to marry him because she did not love him, she left the village and went into hiding in the forests, for weeks and sometimes for months. She stayed in the forest without coming to the village. Normally such a case was treated as a criminal case, and a region wide search for her was stepped up. If found she was treated like a criminal, and was taken to the village court in case she again refused to marry the man. This was a legal action taken by the prospective husband, according to customary law.

This type of practice, which became known as the *Sande* initiate refusal (*sadewulo ngangaa*), was certainly not typical of pre-modern Ngiema and other Kɔɔ-Mɛnde village communities. Sometimes the marriage will even take place without her consent; the young woman will be forced to stay with her husband, and if she remained adamant, the relationship between the wife-givers and the wife-takers would deteriorate and end into a long conflict.

A by-product of this practice was that of confessing the names of lovers or boyfriends of married women and young women not yet initiated into the *Sande*. "Such a practice which became known as woman palaver (*nyaha-yiei*) was again an opportunity for the chiefs to exercise power and earn money. The chiefs levied heavy fines on the men involved, and

young men were most likely to be guilty of such offences." There have been instances where most young men whose parents had no means of paying such fines had only one choice – "the choice of running away and leaving the village forever." Thus, the principle of alliance acquires an increasingly economic character, which was gradually running the risk of becoming a class phenomenon for marriage.

Chapter 11   The Civil War and its Aftermath

It is only the war and its aftermath that brought modernity upon Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society in all its positive and negative dimensions. Whereas in the colonial and early post-colonial, pre-war days most Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social institutions still functioned, the war and the presence of the State and foreign organisations impacted radically on Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, bringing modernity with all its beneficial and adverse effects. In this respect, it is expedient to distinguish between the pre-war and post war situation as between pre-modern and modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. The following is a summary of the political events that led to the civil – classified as Post-colonial Warfare – and a description by informants of its severity.

According to most informants, Sierra Leoneans had been generally dissatisfied with the All People's Congress (APC) government for decades even before the civil war broke out in 1991. This civil dissatisfaction "had largely contributed to the outbreak of the war. Since independence, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC) have been tussling for political power, which has led to a series of political and social crises." These two political parties are differentiated according to ethnic backgrounds. While the majority of the APC members are Temne and Limba from the North, the SLPP are mainly Mɛnde-speaking societies from the Eastern and Southern regions of the country. Differentiation among political parties has always reflected the difference between ethnic identities, which may have been an attempt to translate ethnic difference into political parties, but it seems that ethnic solidarity replaces state or civic solidarity.

When the APC headed by president Siaka Stevens came to power, the government gradually suppressed political opponents and critical students' Movements (cf. Fyle, 1981). Siaka Stevens subsequently banned all political parties and introduced the one party system in 1978 (Richards, 1996: 41). A year before, a number of students demonstrated against the oppressive rule of Stevens, which the police brutally suppressed. These students "radicals", according to Richards, were mainly inspired by three sources. These were: the Pan-African Union of Sierra Leone (PANAFU), Colonel Gaddafi's *Green Book* and "the work of American 'futurologist'

Alvin Toffler" (*op. cit.*: 41). The political suppression by the APC government[203] forced some members of the army into exile, and among them was Foday Sankoh who later became the leader of the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF). One of the consequences of such a political repression was the economic decline in both public and private sectors.

Most Sierra Leoneans have maintained that the Annual Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) held in Freetown in 1980 had further contributed to the deterioration of the economy. After leading the economy into ruins, Siaka Stevens then handed over power to Major General Joseph Saidu Momoh in 1985, who continued the one party system and the suppression of political opponents, though he was later pressurised into making some political concessions. Towards the end of the 1980s, however, partly due to the structural adjustment program imposed by the IMF and the World Bank on third world countries like Sierra Leone (Azzellini and Kanzleiter, 2003), the economy of the country was in such a dire condition that president Momoh declared a state of economic emergency. This was followed by years of economic hardship and many social problems, generating more civil dissatisfaction with the APC government. Especially the youth were trapped by economic recession and lack of educational opportunity.

Meanwhile some political exiles were undergoing training in Libya as part of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's Revolutionary program for West Africa. These exiles were instrumental in founding the RUF movement; they received the necessary military and logistical support from the Libyan leader in Benghazi. Charles Taylor, who had served in President Samuel Doe's government in Liberia, went into exile to the USA, after having been implicated in allegations of corruption. While awaiting extradition proceedings, he was, gaoled again for reasons relating to fraud (cf. Richards 1996; Wonkeryor, 1985). Following a "mysterious" escape from prison, Charles Taylor returned to Liberia on December 24, 1989 as head of a rebel movement, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL)

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[203] Abuse of power was by no means limited to the central government, but also became a widespread phenomenon among local chiefs in the provinces (Alie 2008; Stovel 2008)

with the aim of removing President Samuel Doe from office. This movement had a well-equipped army, and its original fighters were allegedly well trained in Libya. "When Charles Taylor started the insurgency in Liberia, Foday Sankoh and the RUF fighters joined the Taylor camp to undergo further training." It was just a matter of time before the RUF could attack Sierra Leone. The mismanagement of the economy by corrupt government officials has largely contributed to the conflict, since most

> people could not afford to send their children to school. As a primary school teacher, I could hardly afford to feed my family. Due to arrears of wages, I had to go without salaries for months, sometimes up to nine months. In such a situation, I sometimes had to rely mainly upon my students for a living. These students had to buy my pamphlets, and had to make some other contributions I impose upon them. Similarly, a police officer who was not paid his salaries resorted to harassing lorry-drivers by demanding money from them in order to feed his family. This was normal, so you find out that corruption became a legitimate tool for survival. The country became almost ungovernable and most people could do whatever they wanted. There was no infrastructural development. We did not even have good roads, as the ones built by the British were no longer repaired. During the rainy season, Kailahun town was totally cut off from the outside world, because the roads were unpassable. All these factors, in my opinion, have contributed to the war.

The dire economic and social problems generated by years of mismanagement on the part of the political elites have led many Sierra Leoneans to despair, totally losing faith in the nation State. According to some informants in Kailahun and Ngiema village, the reasons for the civil war are manifold. "The civil war became so bad that it was no longer human." This is mainly because

> we Sierra Leoneans have not been disciplined enough in the face of the economic problems. The war was caused by greed, selfishness, indiscipline, nepotism committed by all Sierra Leoneans, and it is a fact that Sierra Leoneans do not love one another enough.[204] They prefer foreigners and strangers to their own compatriots. Everybody seeks his own personal happiness instead of the affairs of the entire country. President Momoh himself legitimised such attitudes when he said 'where a person ties a cow, is where it eats grass'. Such a situation has contributed mainly to the inhumanness of the war that the RUF brought from Liberia.

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[204] One of the SLPP campaign banners for the 2002 elections read: "Sierra Leoneans, love one another as God loves you"

Post-colonial warfare

The civil war that started in 1991 epitomises Post-colonial warfare. When it first broke out, most people in Sierra Leone and abroad did not take it seriously enough, but regarded it as a rebel incursion from Liberia, perpetuated by a band of criminals sent by Charles Taylor (cf. Fyle 1994; Zack-Williams and Riley 1993). Eventually people realised that it was indeed a serious conflict, which needed international attention, from politicians and scholars alike. The activities of the rebels and the various parties involved devastated much of Sierra Leone during the conflict.

A summary of the chain of events underpinning the conflict is necessary for one to capture the dimension of its influence on the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. Furthermore, in outlining these events of the war, I mainly consider personal experiences of people who were with the rebels in Ngiema and elsewhere. Giving preference to these indigenous experiences does not imply that various scholarly works on the war are irrelevant or inadequate in describing what happened. On the contrary, such works are important for comparative analysis. In this respect, a major reference book on the Sierra Leone Civil War is the edited volume, *Between Democracy and Terror* (Abdullah, 2004).

In articulating the indigenous perspective, I rely largely on interviews conducted with former rebel commanders and fighters, as well as ordinary people affected by the terror. The following verbatim narrative is from an interview with a former rebel commander who joined the rebels at about the age of twelve, and spent eleven years with them. He travelled with me for a week and showed me places where the rebels were mostly active in the Luawa chiefdom.

> The war met me in Ngiema. When we heard that the rebels were coming, I went and climbed a mango tree, in order to hide from them. However, when they saw me, they commanded me to climb down and join them. Therefore, I joined them on the 30th March 1991. The group of fighters who came to Ngiema called themselves the

Special Forces.[205] They seized all the native guns used for hunting from people in Ngiema.

When the Special Forces first attacked Ngiema, they approached the people nicely and called a general meeting of the villagers. Everybody was to gather in the village square, where they lectured people about their mission: to free Sierra Leoneans from the corrupt APC regime and the sufferings caused by the one party system.[206] The rebels gave the local population every encouragement, and people were living well in Ngiema. At the beginning, they never harassed the local populace. For this reason, some Ngiema people even escorted the rebels as far as Kailahun town, and some even volunteered to join them.

However, this honeymoon with the rebels was to change rapidly after the arrival from Liberia of another Special Forces called Tapp 20, who wasted no time in rounding up most young people (male and female), and in forcing them to join the rebels, and fight for freedom. The Tapp 20 group, which was composed of Geo people, were very vicious. They started committing atrocities such as rape, looting of property, beatings and killings; they imposed heavy and unnecessary laws on the populace. To escape the rebels, most people fled into the bush and nearby villages, as the wave of atrocities spread to other towns and villages in Kailahun district. After some negotiations, the Tapp 20 halted their intimidation and terror, so that civilians started coming back to Ngiema and other villages and towns, and life in Ngiema started to return to normality.

Meanwhile another group known as Tapp 40 arrived from Liberia. It is certain that when the rebels first attacked Ngiema, many of the youths joined the rebels voluntarily, but this Tapp 40 Special Forces recruited many against their will. These Special Forces were particularly notorious for killing both civilians and the young combatants they themselves were training. As a result, some people escaped into Liberia for fear of being captured by the rebels, but as they could not fit into the system there, they returned to Ngiema and joined the rebels. The situation became so precarious that the trainees who had guns decided to rebel against the Tapp 40 group. [The straw that broke the camel's back] was when they killed a popular rebel trainee. All the rebel trainees liked him. Consequently, we [the rebel trainees] were mobilised by our leader to form a defence group, which we called the Tapp Final. The main purpose of this group was to fight the Special Forces from Liberia – the Tapp 40 group. Based at Ngiema, the Tapp Final attacked the Tap 40 from four main directions; they consequently disarmed them, pushing them back as far as the Liberian border. In this way, we were able to disarm and drive these dogs out of Kailahun district. From capturing mainly from government troops during the fighting, the rebels were able to get the weapons and ammunitions they needed. They also got most of their ammunitions and guns from the Liberian rebel leader, Charles Taylor.

I started my first serious combat at Bunumbu, where my courage was really tested. Even though I had all the opportunity to escape, I decided to stay and fight until the end, because we were given great promises if the rebels succeeded in

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205 See also Abdullah (2004: 60) for a detailed description of this idea of 'Special Forces' and other categorizations within the RUF structure.
206 For a similar description of the relationship of the RUF with local population, see also Richards (1995).

overthrowing the APC government. I therefore decided to fight on to the last. From Bunumbu, we went to Kono. At first, the rebel fighters never targeted civilians upon entering a town or a village. The civilians were always panicking, whenever they saw rebels; but they also welcomed them by clapping in appreciation, and calling them Freedom Fighters. The civilian population in most villages gave the rebels food, and thanked them for fighting for their freedom. This was only at the beginning.

In defending the areas they had initially captured, the rebels mostly suffered heavy casualties in fighting with the government soldiers or the ECOMOG[207] troops. On more than one occasion, the rebels were pushed back as far as the Liberian border; things became so bad for them that even the rebel leader, Foday Sankoh fled and took refuge in Ngiema. He lived in a house at Nganyawama, where he usually passed the nights, but he spent the day in the thick-forested area near the village. Eventually the RUF made Ngiema their headquarters, at least for some time, which they called Camp Burkina. From there the rebels launched assault on other towns and villages in the country. Attempts to capture Camp Burkina from the rebels by government troops and their allies failed. Such attacks, which were always repelled by the rebels, were becoming so frequent that Foday Sankoh started sleeping in a house very close to the Sagbeeja stream near the road leading to Baa village. In fact, the government troops never reached Ngiema. This village was not destroyed even though most people fled. Ngiema became the stronghold of the rebels, as I have already said. Foday Sankoh decided to take a jungle way of life by becoming a combatant and fighting alongside his boys in the thick Gola forest zone.

We attacked many places, and in these attacks, we usually suffered heavy losses.[208] For this reason, we [the rebels] changed our tactics. Each time there were losses on the rebel side, we embarked upon attacking civilians. This happened in many towns and villages, and I can give you many examples of such atrocities. The common one was the burning of towns and villages in Kono and Kailahun districts. From the thick forest zone, the rebels attacked villages to instil fear in the local population. The deadly attack on Biawala is another example. When reinforcements from Ngiema arrived, the rebels captured a lot of ammunition and guns from the government soldiers, and from there they went to Kono district where they killed civilians and soldiers in their thousands, and committed many atrocities. Civilians were captured and women were raped. Those captured civilians who attempted to escape were brutally killed.

The rebels also adopted another method, which they applied in all parts of the country. Civilians never lived alongside rebels if they settled in an area close to villages and towns. That is why they embarked upon killing civilians indiscriminately and burning houses as well as destroying property. The idea was to get rid of civilians. Furthermore, the rebels never wanted the civilians to know their tactics, because civilians were a threat to them and were seen as potential informants to government soldiers. A rebel by the name of Komba Gbundema, who was nicknamed Civilian Killer, was the main person behind such operations. When the

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[207] Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group.
[208] This statement gives credence to what Abraham (2004: 104-120) has been arguing about the weakness of the RUF army, which qualified claims that the war could have ended after a year, had some state officials not connived with the RUF.

first attack at Mala hills, which was aimed at making an assault on Freetown, failed, the rebels grew mad, in that as they retreated they vowed to destroy everything and kill anyone they found on their way. At the suggestion of Civilian Killer, the rebels agreed to call this action Operation Non-Living Thing. This means destruction, destruction and destruction, and everything that lives must die. Another course of action adopted by the rebel leaders was that of the principle of elimination. Rival rebel commanders systematically tried to undermine each other and the leaders were co-operative in eliminating popular commanders.[209]

In the training camps, the rebel commanders and leaders put more emphasis on disciplining the conscripts. For example, every morning we had to recite the RUF national anthem. Anybody who did not know the national anthem by heart was mercilessly beaten. A rebel was shot dead by the commander for coming too late for the morning parade. This was meant to be an example to others who might refuse to take instructions. There were also morning and evening prayers, and anyone who failed to attend was harshly punished. We said Christian prayers and Islamic prayers. There were many harsh rules for the rebel trainees to follow. The RUF also built churches and mosques in their respective camps in the thick forest to allow the combatants to practice their religions. In the East of the country [among the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde], the *Poro* and *Sande* were forbidden, and there were no initiation ceremonies. However, the rebel commanders allowed initiation ceremonies among the Temne in the North. Sometimes they even forced rebels to be initiated in case they have not gone through these ceremonies. We started the mutilation of innocent civilians, though the government soldiers and the *kamajor* [Civil Defence Forces] copied this later; but this practice of cutting hands and limbs started with the RUF. When the information reached Foday Sankoh, he was appalled at this and cried. He then, warned the rebel commanders to desist from such practices.

The rebels also made use of different *juju* [forms of *hei*, in the lingua franca]. Different forms of *juju* were given to the rebels, but the most powerful one was the *gbulamei* made by an elderly Kissi man from Koindu, a few miles from Kailahun. If I have the *gbulamei* in possession, whatever I tell this *juju* or ask it to do, it will do. For example, if I tell the *gbulamei* to make me bulletproof against gunshots from the enemy, I will be invulnerable, or if I want to become invisible to my enemies. However, the effectiveness and success of the *gbulamei*, like any other *juju* that was given to us, depended on my ability to keep special laws or rules accompanying it. If I do not strictly observe these laws, the *juju* will be useless and ineffective. For example, a woman was not allowed to set eyes on the *gbulamei*, and the possessor of this *juju* should abstain from all sexual activities as long as he has the *gbulamei*. If I do not keep these rules, the *gbulamei* will not work. Because these laws were difficult, most rebel fighters were unable to keep them, with the consequence that the *juju* became ineffective. However, as time went on, those old men who performed the ceremonies were brutally killed by the rebels.

The RUF and the government soldiers were coalition members for some time, attacking villages, burning houses, killing, and looting as a team. Many of the civilians we captured from other parts of the country were taken to Kailahun in order to work on various rice farms for the RUF. Even after being freed, many of them returned to the rebels and joined them, because they were used to jungle life.

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[209]   See Abdullah (2004) for similar observations in the RUF.

The rebel commanders and elders also put more emphasis on the deployment of the Small Boys Unit (SBU) squad, because they believed that SBUs were very brave, and were to act as examples for the cowardly adults. The SBUs were virtually child soldiers who were not afraid of anything and were known for disrespecting their elders, especially if they acted cowardly during combat. They were also known for using RPG killer guns, G3 rifles and for motivating their elders to fight on and face the enemy.

Talking to civilians about their experiences in the civil war in Ngiema and other Kɔɔ-Mɛnde villages and towns mostly confirms the above descriptions by the ex-rebel commander. In Combema, "the rebels used civilians as slaves to carry looted property for them, and committed many atrocities against the local population." The civilian population in that village quickly understood from such actions that the freedom, which they promised the local population, was nothing but a nightmare. According to the then town chief of Ngiema, most people were "waiting for a change of government, since they were fed up with the APC dictatorship of one party system that had held power for about 27 years. So most people welcomed the rebels and were happy when they heard that the rebels have come to free them." After pausing with much disappointment, he continued, "Soon, the rebels showed us their true colours and we quickly realised that they were not the freedom fighters they had claimed to be, because they started raping our daughters and women and forcing us to carry looted property to Liberia". He further maintained, "the Sierra Leoneans formed many local defence forces in different parts of the country known as *kamajoisia* [hunters] to help the government in flushing out those criminals from Sierra Leone."

These narratives tell us much about the civil war in general and how the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde experienced it. However, we need a more specific ethnographic dimension to this conflict for us to have an idea about how it affected their collective representations. An interview with the main informant in Ngiema who also became civilian commander against his will under the rebels, gives a general picture of the situation in Ngiema.

Sometime towards the end of February 1991, we received a letter from Foday Sankoh telling us that within two weeks the rebels will be in Ngiema and that we should be ready to welcome them. We had heard several times from other sources that the war had entered the country. Then all of a sudden, the rebels invaded Ngiema using the bush road leading to the *Kpanguima* [the *Sande* house], after

crossing the Sagbeeja stream. Taking this route was a big surprise to us, because we were expecting the rebels to take the main motor road that leads to the village, assuming that none of them knew the way that leads through the Sagbeeja stream. That evening, the rebels gathered all the villagers at the village square, they explained that they had come to topple the corrupt APC government and to free Sierra Leoneans in restoring justice and democracy. They talked nicely to us and they asked all civilians not to be afraid of anything, but to cooperate with them.

At the beginning, the rebels tried to use our cultural traditions for their own strategic ends, which could ultimately lead them to success. Knowing Ngiema's historical successes in battle under its warrior ancestors, the rebels asked the people to invoke the warrior ancestors for their intercession so that their mission would be a success. They further asked whether war had ever destroyed Ngiema. After narrating the story of the *Maada* Crocodiles and the Korgbeege stream, they decided to stay in Ngiema and make it one of their headquarters.

Nevertheless, as time went on, situations began to change rapidly for the worse, and the living conditions of the people began to deteriorate beyond expectation, as the rebels maltreated civilians. They openly beheaded civilians, raped our daughters, and worst of all, they went into the *Sande* house, raped some of the women and violently put an end to the initiation ceremony that was in session. During these public and indiscriminate killings of civilians, the people were not allowed to weep for their loved ones, but were told instead to laugh, dance and sing for joy. The attitude of the rebels drove people away from Ngiema, making them flee into Liberia and Guinea. Most of those who fled returned to Ngiema after a while, but ran away again after seeing all the atrocities going on in the village. However, some people decided to stay in Ngiema and protect the village. As an elder and one of the chiefs in Ngiema, the RUF thought it necessary to turn to me and ask me some questions. They then asked me about my place of origin, and why I decided not to run away, but to stay in Ngiema. I stayed in Ngiema throughout the war. Comparing Ngiema to other villages, like Gbeworbu, Bandajuma and a few others, little damage was done to the houses.

The rebels asked me about the achievements of any warrior ancestor. I gave them the information and told them about *maada* Gan, who had his residence in Mbotima. All the major leaders of the RUF were at Ngiema at that time including Foday Sankoh himself. Therefore, they asked this ancestor for his help and promised that after the war they will make the *lahinei* to him, which is a special sacrifice offered to an ancestor or a deceased family member, using Islamic rituals. They further asked me whether – and I was wondering why they kept asking the same questions – war had ever destroyed Ngiema. When I told them about the historic war between Ngiema and warrior invaders, and the miraculous overflow of the Kɔ-gbege that led to the drowning of the enemies, they became very interested. They were even more interested when I told them about the *Maada* Crocodile – even though they had heard it before – in the Kɔ-gbege stream, who used to give us warning sounds when enemy warriors were about to invade the village. Indeed, the government forces never destroyed Ngiema, nor were they able to defeat the rebels there, but the rebels were able to repel all attacks coming from outside. Meanwhile Foday Sankoh himself called a second meeting of the whole village and told us that the war did not come to harass civilians, rather it came only to drive the APC dictatorship out of power and free the people of Sierra Leone. I was given the post of civilian commander, that means to be in charge of civilians, and had to organise things pertaining to the civilians in the sense that if any civilian was caught, he or

she was taken to the court near my house. I did not want this post. But if I had refused, they would have killed me. The rebels were harassing me, so one day I ran away from them and escaped into the bush.

As I have already said, the rebel commanders were very interested when I told them about *Maada*. Up to now that crocodile is in the swamp near the Kɔ-gbege, but remains invisible and does that what He is supposed to do. A week before the rebels were about to invade Ngiema, the *Maada* Crocodile gave us warning sounds. However, the people never took it seriously, partly because the educated people and modern civilisation normally ridicule such things and even call us primitive people. It was only after the rebels came that most people remembered and took the *Maada* seriously again. The war brought hardship to Ngiema, and there was a shortage of food – no rice, no salt, no vegetables. Most people started eating bush yam and wild fruits. After some time, certain people came from Freetown to supply us with food.

The transformation of the different pre-colonial polities to be part of the modern state of Sierra Leone with a centralised government also meant that henceforth, organised war or lethal violence became the monopoly of the State, as the sole legitimate body to control violence. "The immediate post-colonial period, from independence in 1961 to 1968, was characterised by a tussle for power between the two organised political machines: the SLPP and the APC" (Abdullah, 2004: 44), which ultimately paved the way for the rebel war. There have been a number of interpretations from international commentators on the lethal violence in Sierra Leone from the Neo Barbarism Thesis (cf. Richards, 1995)[210] to the Greed not Grievance interpretation (Collier, 2000). They all claim to look for reasons in explaining the civil war. What, however, is common to all of them is their tendency to generalise and link it to all conflicts on the African continent without considering local differences. Sierra Leonean scholars (cf. Abdullah, 2004) have recently challenged such lines of interpretation. This is exactly what may happen when war is only analysed from the point of view of causes rather than seeing it as a social process.

These Sierra Leonean scholars argue – and this is what this study has also been arguing – that any interpretation of the Sierra Leone conflict should consider the historical situation peculiar to the country. In his critique, Abdullah examines western authors for employing a line of

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[210] Richards coined these words from the commentaries on the war in Sierra Leone from Kaplan (1994).

interpretation that puts the Sierra Leone war in a general picture of Africa, rather than situating it in its own historic and cultural contexts. He places Richards (1996), Kaplan (1994), Reno (1999, 1995) and to some extent Chabal and Daloz (1999)[211] in the centre of his examination (*ibid.*). Africanists such as Richards postulate that the main reason behind the war is the failed patrimonial system of the APC rule, reflecting a general patrimonial system of rule in Africa. The flaw in such general arguments is the failure to include cultural specificity, in favour of general arguments about an African patrimonial crisis, which is in effect a crisis of modernity, that "fits the Sierra Leone data and reality" (Bangura, 2004: 15). In line with such arguments, I maintain that global economic politics use every means to engulf all African societies into global political values, with more discourses on general state building rather than culturally specific societies. Obvious consequences are political conflicts and disorder in need of reform and order (cf. Harbeson and Rothchild, 2008).

In addition to the criticism levied by Bangura and others, this study advocates the premise that such a lethal conflict should be understood as a culturally specific social process. When viewed in this way, it can unveil certain contingent historical processes, which are important in understanding the social meaning of such a conflict, and seeing what cultural values and representations are important for the society in question, and what consequences the war has for them.

Socio-cultural changes during the war

Recent research has shown that the various societies in Sierra Leone experienced the war and its effects on their social lives in different ways. The following outline depicts the socio-cultural changes on the Ngiema people during the eleven-year civil conflict. For the sake of brevity, I delineate the following points mainly based on interviews with informants.

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[211] Chabal and Deloz are supposed to give themselves the duty of interpreting Africa to the world (Abdullah, 2004).

Religious practices

When the war started, "there were no communal religious practices, and we were not allowed to go to the mosque and pray. Everything was confused and came to a standstill." According to most informants, it is also evident that "the rebels deliberately contaminated the forests and sacred places, by having sex and killing people in these places during the war". Thus, all major taboos were broken and the protective ritual laws were not kept by the rebels, nor were the Ngiema people allowed to perform the rituals necessary for the reinstatement of the social order as prescribed by the founding ancestors.

> The rebels upon entering and attacking Ngiema broke all the *kpapkei* [protective ritual] rules and taboos. Even before entering the village, important taboos that were to be observed in the forests belonging to Ngiema and its environs were never respected, let alone kept. Such actions made it impossible for the *hei* behind these rituals to be effective, and for the ancestors to protect the village accordingly.

Indiscriminate killings of human beings polluted the social and environmental order of the village. "Civilians who died in the bush and those who were killed were not buried, but were thrown away into the forests and the streams or in river Keeya near the village." The streams and the river were contaminated, and people could no longer drink water from the Sagbeeja nor could they use it for purification rituals.

The RUF rebels did not only forbid initiations into the *Poro* and *Sande*, but they also desacralized their respective sacred shrines. The *Sande* suffered the most depressing humiliation in the history of its existence. "These dogs [rebels] came and went to the *Sande* house and raped some of the women there. They also took the *Sande* sacred masks meant only for the women and gave them to the men for dancing around the village." In this way, the rebels did not only abuse the old women, but also the ancestors. "They publicly displayed and burnt the most sacred *Sande* objects. Some of them were taken to Liberia for sale."

Likewise, "some *Poro* sacred masks meant only for particular *Poro* elders were publicly displayed, and were given to women and children to wear by force." Hence, the powers embodied in these sacred masks and objects were lost, and the rebels did not respect the laws and taboos of

these objects. In pre-war Ngiema, the mask dancers were protected from witchcraft, sorcery and other negative influences by the cosmological presence of *Ngɛwɔ* inherent in the *hei*, which also helped bring good luck, fame and success to the village. According to an angry *Poro* elder, "the most serious offense was when these dogs started beheading their victims in Ngiema and in the forest considered as part of *Poro* territory." In this way, "they went against important taboos given by the ancestors. It was a deliberate attempt to humiliate us, since they had sophisticated guns, like AK47s. They had the power of the gun, and we were powerless." Apart from *Sande* and *Poro* sacred masks and objects, different masks used to entertain people in the village were destroyed. "These mask dancers killed by the rebels were never replaced, mainly because after the war, Islam and government officials had forbidden such cultural practices." The socially legitimate norms for organising duties and actions in the community were no longer valid during the war.

Since the intervention of Islam up to colonial and post-colonial times, the pre-modern social structure had been undergoing constant transformations. The post-colonial form of conflict epitomised in the 1991 civil war became a climax for the breakdown of many aspects of the old social order. Particular social and religious rituals that the pre-modern society performed in order to link social and cosmological domains, and to maintain certain relationships with the ancestors are now found wanting. Though one could argue that there is some amount of continuity in the forms of particular rituals on the individual level, the lack of their performance as a village community still renders this community vulnerable a number of setbacks in its religious and social representations.

Marriages and social relations

The Geo rebels who arrived from Liberia, the so-called "Tapp 20" group, were the first to put the social order of marriage relations on its head. "They chose their sexual partners by the barrel of the gun. After killing their husbands, they raped the women and take them as wives, and group raping became the order of the day for this group of rebels."

With the expulsion of the Geo rebels, such practices of open gang rape and forced marriages ended. The rebel commanders established a

new social order. "At the instruction of Foday Sankoh, they then ruled that no woman was allowed to be single in Ngiema during the war. They should all get married by registering with the commanders in question." These were mostly women whose husbands had been killed during the fighting, or had fled to refugee camps. "The normal procedure was that the women must recommend a potential husband to the rebels, who then asked his consent. But with guns everywhere, he had no option other than giving his consent." The interesting point here is that "even the rebels themselves were not exempted from this rule, but they should also register, if they wanted to have a relationship with women in the village." After writing the names of the couples, the commanders then proclaimed them husband and wife. This "rebel war wedding", as it was called, was very simple and "there were no marriage rituals as we know them in times of peace; anyone caught transgressing on the wife or husband of another was severely punished, mostly by being shot; the old social order was turned upside down." However, according to customary law, these women remained the legal wives of their husbands prior to the conflict, since rebel marriages were declared illegal by the paramount chief of Kailahun at the end of the war.

Economic activities during the war

When the rebels attacked Ngiema, some people had just harvested their crops for the second time, but "they took everything from them. Farming was still going on during the war, but these rice farms were cultivated only for the rebels." During the war, communal aspects of labour were transformed into slave labour for the rebels; people in Ngiema and elsewhere were forced to work on the farms. "The rebels used drastic laws in different ways, usually by the use of guns to enforce this slave labour in villages and towns under their control." The purpose of this labour was to sustain the rebel commanders, not the village community. "Eventually, they abandoned farming for alluvial diamond mining, after discovering diamonds around the Sagbeeja and Kɔ-gbege streams." The mining site was out of bounds for civilians, and mining activities were done under strict surveillance. "Any civilian caught around the mining site was shot dead. Petty trading was never allowed during the war in Ngiema. There

was famine and much suffering as people did not engage in any form of farming activities for themselves."

Local politics and land ownership

With the presence and activities of the rebels in Luawa chiefdom, all local political activities halted, because "they abolished existing rules of social conduct and established their own laws; they appointed their own chiefs, whether the latter liked it or not." Thus, by confusing everything, the RUF rebels introduced a new political order. Different groups of rebels elected different chiefs according to their own tastes, and mostly for a very short time. "Sometimes these appointed chiefs were suppressed and even beaten to death. The rebels controlled everything and did whatever they wanted."

During the war, they condemned old political institutions and those holding political power before the insurgency. The RUF fighters were particularly on the look for political authorities associated with the APC government. They disgraced, beat and killed many chiefs. Some chiefs managed to escape to neighbouring Guinea, among them the late section chief in Ngiema pa Momoh Kowah. The misuse of political power inherited from the colonial rulers that continued after independence created an atmosphere of tension between chiefs and youths in the countryside, including Luawa chiefdom. The indirect banishment of youths from some villages for crimes committed against the moral values of the community played an important role in the brutal killings of political authorities associated with the APC, mostly chiefs. Some banned youths came back to take revenge on chiefs, who levied heavy fines upon them. Incredible things were done to the chiefs. In the 1980s, there was a case when "the chiefs levied heavy fines on a young man because of woman palaver. As he and his relations could not pay the fines, he ran away from Ngiema, but the chiefs were still waiting for him to return, so that they could arrest him."

Rebels controlled the sections of the village according to their tastes. For instance, "the radio for receiving messages was in Nganyawama, which was controlled by the Rebel leader himself, Foday Sankoh, while Kporneibu was under the control of Isaa Sesay. Strangers mostly rebels and those associated with them used to go and come out of

Ngiema." The civilian population made hideouts in the forests near the village, which served as small temporary settlements made of palm thatches and sticks. These shelters came to be known as *Jobuisiahun* or *Sokuisiahun*. Eleven good years of civil war, Ngiema saw a further fragmentation of its social structure in that "there were neither section, nor sub-sections as it used to be before the war, but the rebels imposed their own structures, naming them as they wished."

Socio-cultural changes after the war

The following interview with the main informant epitomises changes caused by the civil war and post-colonial modernity. The situation in Ngiema is very different from the situation with close contact to the ancestors, because

> We have largely abandoned what our ancestors used to do. Now after this war, people have adopted new ways of living and new forms of thinking. This also explains why life is difficult for us and why we are living in hardship. Before the war, things were different; there was respect for authority, especially the elders in the village. Before the white man came, everybody was under control and children hardly flouted the authority of their parents, and there were neither private, nor individual affairs. Instead, our ancestors did everything for the common good. Now after the war, there is nothing like that again. Furthermore, today initiation is no longer a prerequisite to marriage, since marriages are contracted at a very early age, and there are many teenage pregnancies today in Ngiema, because most young boys and girls do have sex at a very early age. Sex is no longer a taboo topic, but young people talk about it openly. When a young woman gets pregnant before marriage, the young boy in question normally denies the pregnancy, but if he decides to face the responsibility, he would marry the girl, without formal ritual ceremonies, while remaining under parental care himself. The children always insist that they have the right to their freedom and choice, and that the extended family should not interfere too much. This is what is going on today in Ngiema: children are having children. Most of these early marriages normally end up with husband and wife living in their small house or room and making farms on their own, and for themselves, rather than making it for their parents and helping them with the work. Most people do not take the advice of their elders, as it used to be in the past. Even when a meeting is called people prefer to come at their own convenience, and sometimes they do not come at all, because everybody goes about his or her own business.

It is evident that during the years after the war most people in Ngiema like comparing the past with the present but they also have an uncertain hope for the future. Some important aspects of past cultural traditions people like remembering are the ideas expressed in the songs of prominent Kɔɔ-

Mɛnde musicians. Most of these songs have had great impact on Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social education in the past, especially those sung by Salia Koroma.[212] Salia Koroma became very popular in the post-colonial era, especially in the seventies and eighties, but did not survive the civil war. Many people in the Luawa Chiefdom and other Kɔɔ-Mɛnde areas still listen to his songs on the radio and cassette players. They like his songs "because they can educate people – they teach people about good manners and advice them how to lead good and virtuous lives. Salia Koroma sang many songs whose lyrics invoke reflection about life and its meaning." Thus, he attracted thousands of people to his concerts and performances.

Throughout Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society, there is an attempt to valorise the atrocities of war and to give meaning to it in terms of Islamic prophesies. Above all, the inspirational prophetic teachings of kamoh Saffa Koroma are also present in the minds of many in Luawa chiefdom. He lived during the colonial period. Post-war Ngiema now appreciates his prophetic statements about the consequences of lost traditional values and of the civil war. These statements not only serve as vehicles of appraising Kɔɔ-Mɛnde traditional values, but also draw comparisons between the past and the present, allowing people to view the future with a mixture of uncertainty and hope. Though his contemporaries took his prophesies with a grain of salt, most people now believe that "kamoh Saffa Koroma was sent by God, who aimed at delivering his message to the whole world."[213] For example, he prophesised that "the colonial rulers will leave and give the affairs of the country to the natives, who will then continue to rouge and disrespect their own people, and that there will be an earthquake in Sierra Leone, and many other events."

In his prophesies about the civil war, kamoh Saffa Koroma warned, "If the war came from the south, then it would be harmless. On the other hand, if the war came from the east, it will reach as far as 'the seashore',

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[212] Salia Koroma has been described as "the king of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde traditional songs". But there was another popular singer before him called Temgbeh Kijei. It is said that "even the colonial rulers liked his songs, because they were full of wise teachings." He was mostly popular during colonial days. Because Temgbeh Kijei had an amazing ability to sing, it is widely believed that "he never died a natural death, but was taken away by the water spirit dwelling in the deep ocean."

[213] This means all Kɔɔ-Mɛnde areas of jurisdiction.

that is to say the capital Freetown. But this war will cause great suffering to the people." Kamoh Saffa Koroma further prophesised that after the civil war, "the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde cultural traditional values would be derided, and the influence of western education and civilisation would reach its peak," while at the same time poverty and misery would be rampant in Sierra Leone. "Things that used to be taboo and hidden from the public will now be accessible to all, and children will flout the authority of their parents and their relatives."

He went on to prophesize another type of war that was to come from the east led by Muslim fanatics. This war will be a *jihad,* and would be bloodier than the war in the 1990s, causing much distress among the local population, until the whole world has been converted to Islam. But it would take a very long time, before this war breaks out; at the end of the war, years of prosperity would follow, where happiness and justice would be restored and prevailed, marking the end of the world. While the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde expect and psychologically prepare for this war, they look with hope towards the future, but with the kind of hope that reflects on the past that would help preserve their cultural traditions.

From these propositions, one could deduce a model of loss with regards to Kɔɔ-Mɛnde cultural and socio-cosmological identity, which was increasingly replaced by universalistic Islam. They linked up traditional cosmology with Islamic millenarian prophesy as part of a grand cosmological scene. The millenarian prophesy that gives meaning and value to the idiosyncrasy and contingency of a civil war generated by national and international political development by situating the war within a grand long-term scheme of World History culminating in prosperity and peace. Entering the reign of "global Islam", it would also however bring about the final disappearance of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde ancestral based religion.

Foreign Charity Organisations

Charity and non-governmental organisations such as "Oxfam", "Save the Children", "Fifty-Fifty", "International Rescue Committee (IRC)" have been rendering aid and running different development projects some months after the war. Oxfam works mainly with indigenous Sierra

Leoneans from other local NGOs to alleviate poverty in areas most affected by the war in Sierra Leone. The "Fifty-Fifty" group, which is a British NGO that has a branch in Sierra Leone, is a non-partisan campaign advocating a higher number of women in politics and public life through training and advocacy. The IRC, which is a non-profit agency, provides relief, resettlement and renewal to refugees and victims of armed conflict around the world. "Save the Children" fights for children's rights, and delivers immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide. The Ngiema people do not normally differentiate between these organisations since "they are all NGOs who come and go."

The NGO workers who visit the village have a say in almost all aspects of social life. However, according to my informants, such "interferences are not always in the best interest of this village." Most people complain about their negative attitudes towards local cultural values. They are however not bold enough to publicly challenge them for not paying due respect to their culture, since the village depends on them for development aid. In an interview conducted in English, the village chief had the following to say:

> Obviously, the war has changed many aspects of our cultural traditions [...]. The NGOs are trying to kill our culture away. For example, we have some NGOs who sometimes denounce our culture, as they would not like the initiation of girls into the *Sande*, which is part of our culture. Some even do not encourage the public appearance and performance of traditional dancing Kɔɔ-Mɛnde masks. They have also introduced the so-called Fifty-Fifty concept, which now allows our women to challenge us.

It is certain that "equality", "individuality" and "freedom" are part of modern ideology propagated by most 'agents of modernity'. The major problem, however, is that the meanings and implications of such modern ideologies are not adequately explained by NGO representatives to local people living in villages, which has led to misunderstandings of all kinds. According to the village chief, "most women in Ngiema take "Fifty-Fifty" to mean an opportunity to challenge and disrespect their husbands in all aspects." Some women in Ngiema who have former education, however, welcome the "Fifty-Fifty" idea about the gender equality, since according to one of them,

> some men suppress the women. It is time for the women to suppress the men. Besides, if women are given power to control the daily affairs of this country [Sierra Leone], things will change for the better. The Men have failed this country through corruption and bad governance. Due to their [men] incompetence, most Sierra Leoneans are suffering economic hardship. Yes, for decades the men have failed us politically.

On a political level most young Sierra Leonean men including the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde I spoke to support the idea of giving political power to the women in Sierra Leone, because they believe that "women will change the political and economic situations for the better."

The universal human rights, especially the rights of children belong to the modern values, which the Ngiema people are supposed to inculcate. Today "children have the right to report their parents to the police in Kailahun if they are threatened and maltreated by them." The most spectacular event in this respect was when an eight year-old boy wanted to report his father to the police in Kailahun after some disciplinary punishments. He went as far as Bandajuma, some two miles to Kailahun, when relatives stopped him on the way. "Some members of the

'awareness group' representing the NGOs in the village incited the whole drama since they are there to make children and young people aware of their human rights, freedom and equality in the society." Villagers' resentments to NGOs interfering with local customs and lack of respect for their cultural traditions have been reported in Luawa chiefdom. In Baiwala, about 10 miles from Ngiema, "an outraged village chief expelled the IRC from his village, because he was displeased at their interference with the customs and traditions of his village."

Obviously, the NGOs are making notable inroads in terms of economic and environmental development with remarkable achievements for the population, including the drilling of wells for the supply of drinking water, as well as health and sanitation projects. But unless the local population is willing to understand and accept their values, forcing such ideologies on them only results in further fragmentations of communities.

NGOs have lectured people in most villages on the advantages of western education and it seems that the government of Sierra Leone has been supporting this idea. The Ministry of Education has been promoting formal education since the war ended in 2002. Much emphasis has been placed on the necessity of formal education. According to government officials, every child in Sierra Leone should be given the opportunity to have at least free primary school education in principle. This seemingly free education is at the behest of parents who have to bear a huge financial burden for their children's schooling. Poor villagers have to cover the prices for text and exercise books and other expenses for their children. Yet many people seem to have appreciated the short-term benefits of school education, especially when they were refugees in foreign countries, like Guinea and Ghana.

> Those with a formal education could easily acquire jobs with the different NGOs working in these camps and were thereby able to earn extra money in order to support family members. Such people would now prefer to send their children to achieve western education in schools, rather than sending them to the *Poro* or *Sande* bush schools.

It is also certain that there are many pseudo rescue organisations, which come to the village and make empty promises about bringing some kind

of development project to the people, after taking registration fees from the poor populace.[214] Most informants complain, for example, that during the rainy season a year before I began fieldwork in Ngiema, some NGO group "came to the village, and told us that they want to bring agricultural projects. They wanted to help us have fertilisers for our crops, but everybody should pay a registration fee of 2000 Leones each. After collecting the money, they disappeared and we never saw them again."

The concept of House and family

The pre-colonial concept of House as a social unit no longer exists, and the word denotes more or less a physical structure only. The government of Sierra Leone now considers these houses as family houses, which include individual family members or friends, not as a group or village community as was the case in pre-modern times. Even the only "big house" that existed in Ngiema during the 1980s is now a ruin in the village (photograph 6).

This modern ideological concept of the family is now greatly influencing the village community. After the war, charity organisations that brought development aid to the village in solving its many post-war problems, also contributed to this transformation process. In order to take part in the village community projects, each individual must register with the development agency, not as a House as a unified social group, nor as elders living in the house who bear responsibility for those under their care, as it used to be in pre-modern times. The same method applies to tax collection. Individuals, not by a family, now pay taxes. This has brought much confusion to the village community, because it is far from economical for the family members, who would like the family head to pay for all family members, as was the case in early colonial times. There were a few protests, but as registration according to this model was a necessary condition for receiving aid, people had to accept this new situation. An elderly informant describes it as follows: "An NGO group came to this village to launch some project in the area of sanitation. They

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[214]   I witnessed this type of modern exploitation not only in Ngiema, but also in other villages in the South and North of the country during fieldwork.

said each individual must register according to families, which means for these NGOs, only wife, husband and child or children living in a household," not including other relatives of the extended family. Thus, the House as a social unit has been fragmented into a conglomerate of individual nuclear families, which is in sharp contrast to the more community or socially oriented notion in pre-colonial times. The consequence of such developments is that "more and more young people want to live in a nuclear type of family (photograph 4), in order to be modern, and not to be primitive."

Relationships between the different Sections

The sections and sub-sections are undergoing the similar changes, but they are still living in relative harmony with one another. This is because there has been no serious land dispute in post-war Ngiema, at least for now. The only exception is the conflict over the swamp near the Kɔ-gbege stream between the youths of Nganyagoihun section and those of Kokolu, which I will examine under the topic of land dispute. "There is unity, but it is indeed shaky, since the sections and sub-sections mostly prefer to do things on their own," and everybody wants to assert his own personal freedom. "It is regrettable," says one of the informants, "to see that young people no longer sit near their elders to hear the narration of 'old things' in order to get wisdom. Despite this, I can say that we do not have misgivings against one another in the different sections of the village." The co-operative groups are not as successful in coordinating the affairs of the village as it used to be before the war. This is a common view among most people, and as one young man puts it, "people are no longer committed. For instance we do not have a village herald anymore, because no one is willing to render this service to the village." Fortunately, some well-to-do descendants of Ngiema have solved this problem by donating a megaphone.

In Ngiema, most people treat the question of who the real and direct descendants of the ancestors are with seeming contempt. Thus, any attempt to describe families or members of particular sections in terms of their genealogical origin is socially incorrect. A possible reason is that "most people who held political and ritual positions in the history of

Ngiema were strangers, whose children and grandchildren had now been integrated into the village community." Informants maintain that for these people, it would be unfair to describe them in terms of their origin as strangers. Besides, the ancestors, especially *maada* Gan had prohibited the progeny of Ngiema to describe one another in terms of their genealogical backgrounds. Another reason, in my opinion, has to do with the Sierra Leonean State in the sense that the notion of the State and the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde as equal citizens of that State has an impact on the social articulation of descent origins.

Giving in marriage

After the war, the government of Sierra Leone ruled that women who were married to their legal husbands before the war must reunite with them. Sometimes in good faith, the legal husband would approach the caretaker husband, as they later came to be known, nicely and thank him for taking care of his wife during the war. The situation became complicated "if she refused to return to her legal husband, because she already had children with the caretaker husband". Depending on the good will of the caretaker husband, "she could take the children to her legal husband, provided he accepts them." It can also happen that the caretaker husband refuses to allow his former wife to take the children along with her. These are problems, which the government of Sierra Leone has not yet addressed. As we have seen, most people in Luawa are not surprised at these changes, since "all these events were prophesied by Kamoh Saffa Koroma. He also said that after the war, traditional marriages would be abolished and new forms of marriages that do not bring happiness to the community would be introduced."

In pre-colonial days, people gave daughters to friends, influential and religious people so that the grace (*lɔɔnei*) behind the influential and religious people could be transmitted to the children, and would stay within the village. "After the war, our daughters prefer to bring their own partners to us and insist on the freedom of loving and choosing marriage partners, rather than the parents looking for marriage partners for them." The practice of giving daughters to religious leaders and prominent personalities known as the *amadei* has disappeared, and is regarded as

primitive, since the modern Kɔɔ-Mɛnde girl is more self-conscious than ever. Important marriage ceremonies are no longer taking place. According to most informants, "it is difficult at times for the family to come together as one big family because family members usually have other things to do which for them are more important". Most people think that because the young marriages, especially between teenagers, are not contracted by means of the proper marriage rituals, they are not stable and divorces are common. "NGOs support such marriages, insisting on the free judgment and choice of the individuals involved."

When it comes to relationship between men and women, "there is a tendency of general mistrust between them. This certainly has to do with a growing awareness among women about gender equality, thinking that men have not been taking them seriously enough." The "Fifty-Fifty" NGO group has propagated this awareness. Among affluent or educated Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, this can be part of the project of modernity, and they can easily come to terms with its demands. However, for post- war village communities like Ngiema, where other values are more important, it can pose many practical and social problems.

Communal labour

Post-war social changes have also had repercussions on all aspects of communal labour. Communal labour in pre-modern times was performed whenever the village elders decided to fulfil particular needs, by working together as a community, either on rice farms or in the village. This type of labour was a continuous process aiming at sustaining the needs of the community, which motivated people to work together in groups for the common good. Communal labour in this sense included making and repairing roads, cleaning public places in the village, building the *Sande* house and other sacred places, as well as making farms for the village head.

Today also, "communal labour is supposed to include repairing the main road leading to Kailahun and other bush tracks to the neighbouring villages, as well as cleaning up the village's social and community buildings, like the health centre." By taking part in communal labour during fieldwork myself, I saw only a handful of men who went to repair

the road to Kailahun, though it was obligatory for all able adults. Slashing the grass around the health centre is mainly the work of women, but only few women were present.

The refusal by most people today to do communal labour is not only a post-war problem, but started even before the civil conflict. After independence, the chiefs made it a habit of levying fines on those who refused to do community work, mostly by paying large sums of money. This practice generated many cases of abuse similar to the abuse of power characteristic of colonial times. Nowadays people challenge the idea of communal labour as well as the fines imposed, yet most prefer paying the fines, instead of doing communal labour. "If, however, the fines become too high, they normally challenge such sanctions by taking the matter to Kailahun. The refusal, especially of young men, to do communal labour also means that public places and roads remain unrepaired."

People unwilling to work only pay their fines to the chiefs. There are no further questions about their unwillingness to work for the common good, and this has largely undermined the chiefs' authority. Those committed to communal work often complain, "such practices do not enhance community solidarity." They insist that those who refuse to work must be compelled to do so, by threatening them with severe penalties. A disgruntled young man stated that "in Ngiema, if you have money, you can do anything."

More than any other community project, prospecting alluvial diamond has been the main project in post-war Ngiema. For this project to be successful, it was necessary for the community to sacrifice a lamb according to Islamic rites, which was then shared among the people. However, many people complained that "the eating of this sacrificial food was not done in the village square as it used to be. Instead, this meal took place in individual houses, and there were even complaints that some people never partook of this community food."

Co-operative groups as social networks

After the war, the village community tried by every possible means to revive the different co-operative groups. These co-operative groups now locally known as clubs (*kobisia*) have members in each section and sub-section of the village. There are different types of such networks operating at various levels in post-war Ngiema. Examples are the different clubs, such as "The Limei Descendants Association", "The Boys Boys Club", The "Nganyawama Young Men's Club", etc. Their members may come from all walks of life, be male and female, young and old. Interestingly, gender and age specifications exist in the sense that women usually form their own exclusive clubs such as the "Ngiema Muslim Women's Association", and the children's club such as The "Boys Boys Club". These co-operative groups must first register with the chiefs in Ngiema, who in turn should register with a higher authority up to the interior minister, before being granted the permission to be officially launched. Normally the registration fees vary according to the number of persons in the clubs. There are also committees, such as The "Ngiema Health Committee", which operate in more or less the same way. This Committee discusses health matters such as maternal health care and prevention of HIV, operating mostly in collaboration with Oxfam.

In addition, each of these co-operative groups has particular objectives. Nonetheless, some disgruntled youths maintain that "there are many administrative problems and misgivings regarding the embezzlement of club funds, which has led to the dissolution of many clubs and the founding of new ones." A fundamental development that makes these clubs essentially different from their pre-modern counterparts is the role money continues to play. "Today all these clubs work almost exclusively for money, and money seems to play an important role for the success of their objectives, which sometimes leads to a number of problems." A farmer can hire one of these clubs to work on his farm for a fixed price, depending on the type of work done. If that person is a member of a particular club, he/she could employ his/her own club members. In such a case, he/she pays less; otherwise, it becomes too expensive for him/her. From another perspective, one could argue that the

clubs compensate for the disintegration of pre-colonial communal labour. The reason for this is obvious, since "people prefer to make rice farms as individual families, mostly comprising three to five people."

Religious practice

Ninety-eight percent of the Ngiema population are Muslims, and only two percent are Christians. There is no place for a professed atheist in that community. Muslim clerics stipulate that people, who do not attend prayers in the mosque during their lifetime, will not be buried according to Islamic rituals after their death. This same rule applies to the rather small Christian community. An individual should be seen praying in the mosque or in the church; it would not be enough to pray at home. These two religious groups are very tolerant towards each other and co-exist peacefully.

The Oxfam workers called a meeting of the whole village one afternoon. It is normal for most communities to begin a meeting of any kind with a prayer, asking God for his assistance, to make the discussions a success. For this particular meeting the opening prayers were both the Al-fattier and the Our Father. After the meeting, I asked some people why they never invoked the ancestors before the gathering. The answer was that the Muslim clerics as well as local clerics of the New Apostolic Church have banned such practices and have condemned them as primitive.

> These two religious groups have derided as primitive and pagan the traditional religious practices. That has caused people to abandon these practices [at least in principle]. The ancestors have been largely neglected, and no periodical traditional offerings have been made as a village community in their honour as it used to be in the past.

Some months after the war officially ended, the Freetown government suggested that people in rural areas perform reconciliation rituals for those who have committed atrocities against their own communities during the war. Such rituals were also held in Ngiema. It mainly involved ex-rebels participating in prayers headed by the Imam of the village, which were

mainly offering prayers for the perpetrators, asking *Ngɛwɔ*[215] to forgive them. In addition to this instruction from Freetown, "we also decided as a village community to offer prayers for all the descendants of Ngiema killed brutally in the war, simply because they were never given proper burial rituals. This Islamic ritual for the dead has been performed only once since the war ended."

Places for ancestral sacrifices and venerations no longer exist. There is no trace of shrines built for the great ancestors of the village. However, the relationships between living beings and the dead of individual families have been revitalised in some practical ways. "The yearly sacrifices in honour of individual family members who died or were killed served as 'healing or curing sessions', in the sense that individual families gather together to remember them according to Islamic ritual sacrifices." In contrast to pre-modern times, such a post-war sacrifice for the dead is not done on village level. "We no longer feed the ancestors as we used to do in the past." People are now quite aware of the fact that

> the relationship between us and the ancestors is not like in the olden days, because our ways and their [ancestors] ways are no longer the same. They could warn and advise their children, who listened to them and obeyed them. But today they could no longer warn us, because we never listen to them anymore.

Meanwhile, Pentecostal or Born Again churches like the New Apostolic Church in Ngiema condemn such practices and "in fact claim that they can heal people believed to be possessed by casting out devils from their souls." Presumably, the ulterior motive for such missions is to spread their own message and win over the local population. Some ex-combatants, who have been converted to Christianity, have become pastors in these churches. These young pastors now condemn the culture, which has socialised them. Their sermons and public debates are mainly addressing the socio-religious institutions of *Poro* and *Sande* as evil and unbiblical. These young pastors, of course, no longer actively participate in their cultural traditions and rituals; at least they pretend not to. Thinking of the atrocities committed, the young pastors distance themselves from the

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[215] *Ngɛwɔ* still denotes God for Christians and Allah for Muslims.

societies they contributed to displace, polluting the sacred objects and places, which were part of their value systems, and seek a new identity in the Christian churches. Through the Catholic sacrament of absolution, for example, ex-rebels and those who committed atrocities during the war could have their individual sins forgiven after confessing them to the priest. Such an individual remission of sins is certainly at variance with the collective recognition of guilt in the pre-modern society, which allowed the society to take part in the exchange of gifts.

The practice of *hei*

Through the Muslim holy men and other practitioners who claim to have extensive knowledge of *hei* (see chapt. 10) more and more individuals are now making use of *hei* for different reasons. Since anybody can access *hei* for his or her individual use, "there is now a lot of fake *hei* around, because most of those who claim to have a good knowledge of it, demand huge sums of money for their services, and are now making a lot of money." We have to remember that in spite of such developments, "there is also good and authentic *hei*, whose practitioners always go back to the [cosmos] as representing the all pervading presence of *Ngɛwɔ*. Such genuine practitioners do not ask for money."

Therefore more and more people are becoming sceptical about the ritual effectiveness of the curse (see chapt. 5 and 10), which in many circumstances acted as deterrents for larceny and other anti-social behaviour before the war. For this reason, Ngiema has seen a rapid increase in delinquency. Purification of the bush and forest and other purification rituals are no longer being performed. Most young people do not even know the *njayei* and *humoi* rituals or other socio-religious institutions performed in the past (see chapt. 4). Paradoxically "most people now feel the need to go back to the cultural traditions of the ancestors, but do not have the courage to do so openly, since they do not want to be identified as primitive people."

Poro and *Sande*

Initiations into *Poro* and *Sande* still take place, though not regularly, as it used to be. In 2005, about 250 young men from Ngiema and the surrounding villages were initiated into the *Poro* in Ngiema. A year before, a good number of young women were also initiated into the *Sande*. In spite of this, it is certain that changes have taken place regarding these initiations, especially the *Poro*. The *Poro* elders are now demanding more payments for their services, which most people see as an abuse of duty towards the community.

> The initiates must now pay 20,000 Leones (approximately 5 Euros) which is the price for an average family's rice consumption for less than a month. They should also give 12 pans of cleaned rice, plus one barrel of palm oil. This does not include expenses covering the feeding of initiates, which their families should bear, and other contributions imposed by the elders. Many families have to go into debt in order to get their children initiated. These elders keep the money and foodstuff for themselves; they are unwilling to share with other *Poro* members.

Before the civil war, "everything initiates contributed was put together and shared among those who were most helpful and instrumental during the period of seclusion." Some people interviewed have argued that "money plays an important role in *Poro* initiation rituals nowadays." According to one *Poro* elder, "some rich people even pay money so that their children do not go through the hard part of the rituals. These rituals value the whole initiation. After this war, initiation into *Poro* has become like business dealings for money, and is now commercialised." The period of seclusion in pre-colonial times was a time when young people were instructed in the cultural traditions of the village and were prepared to take up responsibility in the community. The training normally lasted years before the initiates were able to inculcate these cultural and religious values. The duration of the initiations has also been considerably shortened in modern times, especially after the war, which adversely affects its educational aspect. "Sometimes particular initiates could take only a month, two weeks or even three days, depending on the particular circumstances, mostly because they do not like to miss lessons at school."

In pre-colonial days, "a person visiting the *Poro* forest during the period of seclusion spent enough time with the novices since this was a duty for every initiated person." The circumstances today are different in the sense that "people just come and go there and as they like, spending very little time in the forest with the novices." Even the practice of sharing the sacrificial food with strangers who enter the *Poro* sacred grove is gradually dying. As an elderly informant puts it, "food was shared with all visitors, but this aspect of belonging to one *Poro* community is now under threat, and whoever thinks he can eat free rice in the *Poro* forest is making a serious mistake."

Some people are now complaining that "in some villages in Luawa, communities publicly discuss the validity of the *Poro* with strangers [meaning the NGOs] and questioning the moral rightness of its initiation rituals." Those against *Poro* and *Sande* argue that their initiation rituals are violating human rights, "because these NGOs reduce them to bodily mutilations. This is something unthinkable in pre-colonial times." The Pentecostal Christian churches and various Islamic communities also attack this tradition in no lesser ways. A major reason for rejecting these institutions, as "primitive and evil is that their initiation ceremonies are incompatible with Islamic and Christian teachings." Some young people in Kailahun maintain that at one stage, "the paramount chief in Kailahun even decided to ban *Poro* and *Sande* by law in Luawa chiefdom, but this was met with stiff resistance from the common people in the chiefdom." There is now an upsurge of tension and conflict between Ngiema and the administration in Kailahun. In 2006, a row broke out between Kailahun and Ngiema *Poro* elders. The paramount chief fined them for having one of the *Poro* masks appear in the village after the death of one prominent descendant of the village without his permission. It seems that "some people want to follow the instructions of Islam in condemning even the non-*Poro* masks as "agents of Satan" and as such, they should be banned from appearing in public."[216] In spite of all the vicissitudes, most people are determined to uphold this aspect of their cultural tradition. *Poro* in

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[216] Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Masks of entertainment belong to this category.

pre-modern times aimed at uniting the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, but there are now growing concerns among some elders that "unity within the *Poro* will be destroyed, if these attacks continue to divide us."

Thus, the authority of *Poro* as an instrument of social solidarity and control has experienced a sharp decline since most of its laws are no longer in force. In the light of these developments, "a group of *Poro* elders held a meeting in the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde town of Seigbema in order to consider the relevance of *Poro* in the state of Sierra Leone today." The outcome of this meeting ended in dispute, "because a handful of the formally educated delegates denounced *Poro* as no longer modern, while most elderly delegates remained adamant and maintained that the *Poro* is necessary for Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture even today; and there was much debate." In the end, the delegates, though divided in opinion, decided that *Poro* initiation rituals should continue. In pre-modern times, the rules of *Poro* had a religious and moral force, and the community acted in respect of them. Yet today, with vigorous attacks especially from Islamic circles, "the government of Sierra Leone is bound to see *Poro* no longer as a religious institution, but a secular and primitive organisation." One wonders why Islam had changed its course of tolerance towards such an important institution for the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, especially if one considers how it tried to inculturate itself into the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture. It may have to do with new groups of Islam, which are now present in the area and to which some leaders like the Paramount Chief of Kailahun belong. Although the authority of the *Poro* has been thus undermined, some leaders are keeping a watchful eye on recent developments and are doing their best to defend the integrity of this institution.

Most people in the Luawa chiefdom partly blame the chiefs for such developments; they are calling for reform within the *Poro* hierarchy, because the latter are now stressing the economic aspect rather than the traditional and social values of the *Poro*. It was impossible for me to verify these facts through participant observation, since there was no initiation ceremony in session during fieldwork.

Economic activities

The monetary market economy in the republic of Sierra Leone as a nation state has continued to prevail, also determining economic activities of Ngiema. Although the rice yield is hardly enough to feed the village population throughout the year, most people sell a portion of it to have some amount of cash income. The same applies to palm oil production. Some people sell some of it to clients in Guinea and Liberia, as well as the surrounding villages on a very small scale. Subsistence farming remains to be the major economic activity as the population can barely rely on these sales to make ends meet. Contrary to pre-modern times (see chapt 5) rice farming in post-war Ngiema has increasingly taken on individualistic tendencies since

> everyone fights for himself because farming is now done on an individual basis. For this reason most of the work on the farm is unsuccessful, and the farms do not yield as much as before. The traditional practice of cultivating big rice farms no longer exists and nobody pours libations to the ancestors or performs other rituals before cultivating rice farms and other farms.

In the past, "the village community profited from whatever farming activity they undertook, especially rice farming and palm oil production, because there was one big labour force." That is to say, people worked together, which gave strength and blessing to the workers and they brought in a large harvest. The community benefited in the sense that there was enough food, and famine was averted. Work on the farms even up to the 1970s was not very tedious, because it was done in groups and there was ample time for relaxation and recreation in the village. "Today, however, during one season, a man and his wife would cultivate a rice farm, a cassava farm and at the same time undertake swamp rice farming and the like. Individual labour, rather than labour in the community is dominant." Owing to such an individual labour force, the farms belonging to these couples "are normally small and sometimes the work becomes so tedious that they become overstrained. This is because a man would be ploughing his fields and at the same time be quite busy with other jobs such as cutting palm kernels for palm oil processing." A situation like this sometimes forces them to abandon the work without finishing the rice

farming. "For this reason, there are many unfinished farms today, a situation contrary to pre-colonial times. As such, the harvest is usually small, not even enough for the family in question and in the middle of the rainy season there is not enough food to eat." In early colonial days, there was enough rice to last for the whole year. "Some elderly women even made *hoji* [fine white clay mainly used for initiation into the *Sande*] out of the cleaned rice." The situation today is that "even if brothers or uncles do live under one roof, each person prefers cultivating different farms, working with his wife and eventually children, instead of making one big farm together as it used to be."

Work on the cocoa and coffee plantations is tedious and the annual harvest brings a rather small income. The Luawa chiefdom remains the largest coffee and cocoa producing region in the country. Therefore, the harvests from these two cash crops remain the major source of income. Before the civil war, there was a co-operation of local farmers in Ngiema called the "Co-operative Society", whose main aim was to guarantee a fair and better cocoa and coffee price for the farmers. The leaders of the "Co-operative Society" worked directly with the Ministry of Commerce in Freetown. Although this was not a perfect partnership, it was definitely better than nowadays. "The co-operative society no longer exists and its building is a ruin in the village. Local farmers are now at the mercy of Lebanese traders who set the price for the products, since the government does not care." People complain that the "government does not protect our interests and the Lebanese traders do whatever they want by giving us very little money for our produce." Apart from farming one can also find a great number of petty traders in articles like soap, batteries and some foodstuffs.

Political structure

Apart from a few elderly men who serve in the local court or as section leaders, the chiefs are much younger than they used to be. Both the town chief and the section headquarter chief are young men with a formal education. "Their age poses serious questions about their propensity for wisdom. For this reason and similar reasons, most young people in

Ngiema mistrust their political leaders, especially the young chiefs democratically elected through the ballot box."

Besides, most chiefs in the Luawa chiefdom have a formal education and some are even graduates. Some of the young, however, accuse them of not having adequate knowledge of, and respect for the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture, arguing that "these chiefs are not much interested in the affairs of the village; they do not successfully mobilise people to brush the bush tracks leading to other villages in the vicinity and even Ngiema village itself is very bushy." I witnessed a theft case tried in the local court, where chiefs demanded money as fines from the parties involved before they could even start investigating and deliberating on the case, arguing that "such acts are legitimate, since they are in accordance with local custom." The woman accused of stealing a fowl was unable to pay, while the man who accused her was forced to pay. He was grumbling afterwards, that the chiefs lacked fair-mindedness, because they never put pressure on her to pay the fine. The chiefs did not deliberate on the case that evening, but told the parties involved to report to them again after a few days. Finally, the plaintiff[217] asked me to take note of the episode as evidence that "the chiefs are not really interested in administering justice." It should be said, however, that the chiefs, do their best to bring a certain amount of social control to the village by punishing those who do not work for the common good. The aspect of money, however, continues to play a very important role in post-war Ngiema.

Traditional political authority has continued to lose ground since the war, mainly as a result of "awareness programs" organised by the government in collaboration with some NGOs in the country. Consequently, "people have started asking questions, and challenging the authority of the chiefs, because they are now enlightened enough to follow basic democratic principles." As already indicated the Small Boy Unit (SBU) rebels flogged and demoralised chiefs who were old enough to be their grandparents. Chiefs who had been using their power to gain

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[217] The woman was caught red-handed stealing the fowl and many people gathered around her when she was caught. It was a great spectacle in the village that evening, which I also witnessed.

respect from their subjects were now disgraced and a new social order was introduced. The loss of authority and respect for chiefs during the war thus continues after the war, though it is now largely regulated. While elders were appointed as village leaders, today chiefs are elected in secret through the ballot box. In pre-modern days, "people used to stand behind their candidates openly without fear. This system continued to a certain degree during the colonial rule until after independence." Today, however, there is a lot of anonymity in politics for "fear of being attacked by political opponents. This ballot box system has brought a lot of violence."

The government in Freetown is trying its best to reintroduce the legitimate forms of politics that existed before the war, and to bring some amount of order into the political landscape, after the chaos created by the rebels. The authorities, therefore, reinstalled the chiefs or elected new ones. Yet most people believe that the changes brought by the war cannot be quickly undone. An example of this is the new form of power struggle among the candidates for attaining political office, which may sometimes end in violence.

The criteria for becoming a chief have also changed in the sense that more emphasis is put on the economic advantages of the chieftaincy. "Today people even buy the chieftaincy, since the material aspect is much more important than in the days of the ancestors." The prerequisite for partaking in such an election "is the payment of some amount of money, together with one goat and a barrel of palm oil, one bag of rice and other articles to the paramount chief and the administration in Kailahun. Losing the election also means forfeiting everything." Such political ambitions can bring a lot of resentment, leading to conflict among the different sections, as the history of Ngiema, especially in the 1970s tells. Each section in Ngiema normally sends its own candidate for the chieftaincy. Most people are not pleased with the way the chiefs run the affairs of the village. "The principle of seniority, which had a cultural value of wisdom and experience, no longer applies, since most NGOs and the government consider it archaic which partly explains why the chiefs in post-war Luawa are mostly young." Another criterion is former education. The candidates must have attained at least some kind of western education,

mostly at tertiary level. "These educated young chiefs know very little about their culture and history of their traditions."

Land conflicts

Property rights on land are now mainly inherited from a man's parents or derive from marriage relationships with the families that own the land. Disputes concerning land are one of the major social conflicts in post-war Sierra Leone. The potential for such conflicts varies from place to place. Land issues in the Luawa chiefdom pertaining to ownership have become even more confused than when the British first took over. This is because the rebels redefined the boundaries made by the colonial administration. During the war, most documents were also burnt, thus making it difficult to prove the ownership of a particular piece of land. In such a situation, some people took the opportunity to seize land from other people unlawfully. This has led to serious conflicts, especially in Kailahun.

In Ngiema, this is not the case, since the elders have tried their best to avoid conflict over land, by mainly monitoring land ownership. However, there was one instance of conflict about land distribution for farming. An argument broke out among some young men, concerning the right to cultivate rice in the light and deep swamp[218] around which the Kɔ-gbege stream runs the dwelling place of the totemic ancestor. This dispute almost resulted into a hand-to-hand fight in the village.

The conflict "started in 2004, when some young men from the Kokolu and Nganyagoihun sections of the village claimed it to be theirs." The argument escalated when these young men started describing their genealogical relationships to the ancestors of Ngiema. One of them felt very offended by the remarks that he was not even a descendant of Ngiema. "I know where your great grandparents are hailing from. They are not even from Ngiema. Therefore, you do not have to tell me anything concerning the affairs of this village." The offended then vowed to wound his opponent with a cutlass for such an abusive language. People from the two sections took sides and the dispute almost spread to the whole village.

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[218] Disputes over swamps are usually very ignitable in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde regions.

A council of elders (but not yet the local court) was then convoked at the initiative of the section speaker to consider the matter. The elders consequently demanded that all descendants of Ngiema should follow the footsteps of their ancestors, and stop being selfish, greedy and individualistic, and that the swamp belongs to the ancestors of Ngiema. In saying this, the elders wanted to stress that the swamp actually belongs to the village as a community, and not to individuals or groups of individuals. The elders also reiterated that land issues should never serve as a deciding factor in Ngiema, because

> having common ancestors, we all belong to one family and as such, the different sections are the same. These sections are so conceived that one cannot exist without the other, since they all depend on one another for their existence. Therefore, we should not allow such disputes to bring division to this village. We are all related to one another.

In the face of all the changes one could observe in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social structure, the elders were nevertheless trying to remind the community of the social norms set up by the founding ancestors for their descendants to follow. The elders, however, decided to deliberate on the case later in the near future. Here again, some critics accused the chiefs of not taking an active part in the deliberations, and were "not courageous enough to say the truth, and decide straight away between the two parties."

Social problems

Most young ex-combatants, after ten years of looting and living off the work of other people, now find it difficult to work on the farms. After successfully absolving the demobilisation and disarmament process and undergoing training in crafts such as carpentry and masonry in Freetown and other urban centres, many are unable to find jobs as the government of Sierra Leone hardly caters for them. Knowing that life in these centres can be difficult without jobs and source of income, these young men opt to return to the village, but refuse to work on the farms since "we are no longer used to the hard work on the farm". With such an attitude, they can hardly make a living.

Obvious consequences are an increase in delinquency, associated with many other social problems, the most common being larceny,

especially among these ex-combatants. Thus, "there has been a wave of thefts, especially of livestock, vegetables from gardens as well as produce from coffee and cocoa plantations. It is easier for most of them to steal rather than to work." They normally wait until the gardens and plantations are ready for harvesting, and then steal the produce at night. To address such problems, the owners of these gardens and plantations have performed different rituals of the curse by sending down curses upon the thieves, but to no avail. Therefore, they resort to the use of *hei* in the form of snakes as watchdogs to stop the stealing. According to most people, these snakes could bite or chase thieves, according to the particular spell the owner has pronounced over his or her property. "This is the most effective way of stopping the stealing of vegetables and other goods in Ngiema." In spite of such a success, this practice has also brought misgivings and grudges in the village, "because on some occasions these snakebites have been deadly."

Conclusion

In spite of the many changes described in the previous chapters, some fundamental representations and ritual practices of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde persist. This concerns in particular the representation of *hei* and the performance of *Poro* and *Sande* initiation rituals. The persistence of such representations suggests that their values occupy a high position in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde hierarchy of values for they are not just cognitive principles, but fundamental values on which the entire structure of social and religious relations are based. Thus, the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde have been uncompromising about maintaining these cultural institutions and representations. They refuse to replace indispensable representations and actions and the values, which they express by modern ones. This is what I have called the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde counter-discourses to modernity.

Counter discourses of Poro and Sande

Among the cultural and social institutions of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, the *Poro* and *Sande* remain the most important, with the *Poro* being higher in the hierarchy of values for reasons already given in chapters 4 and 5. It is evident, however, that these institutions have come under the most vicious attacks from "agents of modernity", who often "expose what they believe, using their own value systems, to be the moral weaknesses of these institutions." They carry out this moral judgment by comparing those Kɔɔ-Mɛnde cultural values inherent in *Poro* and *Sande* with western and Arabic ones, which they claim to have universal validity.

To this end, some of the local people themselves, especially the educated, usually support these agents. That is to say, those who have been socialised into the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture through these institutions, by enticing them with money and material goods. Therefore, it is common to see local pastors of the Pentecostal or born again churches, as well as Sierra Leoneans working with international organisations mobilising people against *Poro* and *Sande,* by attacking them in their sermons and public debates and condemning them as immoral and unchristian. "On several occasions, the Paramount Chief in the Luawa Chiefdom, resident in Kailahun, has attempted to interdict the initiation rituals of *Poro* and

Sande in his chiefdom, but to no avail. He argues that such practices are against the moral precepts of Islam."

Counter to such discourses, most people in Kailahun district, especially the elders argue that "particular cultural traditions transmitted by the ancestors are more important for us today than what Islam and the white people are telling us to do." There has been much and anger frustration, especially among elderly people and some even accuse the paramount chief by maintaining that "this young paramount chief, who has a Masters of Arts degree, lacks basic knowledge and respect for his own culture." Initiation rituals of *Poro* and *Sande* are still being performed, and the process of maintaining this aspect of the culture still exists. Even though the political authority especially of the *Poro* is diminishing in the face of global pressures, it has not completely lost its religious authority. On the contrary, these socio-religious institutions remain the sole traditional means of socialising individuals into the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture, though there have been many changes in this regard. To this effect, just about three years after the war *Poro* and *Sande* initiations were organised in Ngiema. According to some of my informants, "even president Kabba [former president of Sierra Leone] was initiated into the *Poro* shortly before re-elections in 2002. His campaign officials had argued that he did this in his old age to show that he was a Mɛnde, though some people claim that he is a Mandingo." Politicians, who sometimes used such institutions for their own political agendas, had taken a similar course of action in the past. Such an ambivalent attitude is all too typical of modernity itself, which takes up discourse on the level of globalisation, democracy, human rights and religion. In the midst of mounting pressures from Islam to ban *Poro,* "some elders are even thinking about taking the imam of Ngiema by force to the *Kamei* [sacred grove], in order to remind him of the oath of allegiance he swore to the ancestors when he was initiated as a boy in the village."

The majority of people in Luawa blame "the civil war and the interference of foreign organisations for the many changes in the chiefdom," especially about the social structure of the *Poro* and *Sande*. Since "sacrifices are no longer offered to the ancestors, and places of worship are no longer venerated as holy places, such as big mountains and

rivers as it used to be, we have to live with the consequences." A group of elderly informants express this idea in the following way.

> Maybe the ancestors are angry with us, because we do not cry to them anymore as our fathers and grandfathers did. In the past, whatever we asked our ancestors in prayers they granted. The yearly sacrifices were the pinnacle of these events, and the [social dimension] was very important, because it lasted a whole day, and there was much dance and music with different masks to entertain the public. However, today we have become Muslims and Christians, Islam has told us to stop doing these things, because they are not in line with the official Islamic teaching.

The Kɔɔ-Mɛnde may have abandoned many traditional religious practices such as the yearly sacrifices and socio-religious institutions of *jabissaah* and *humui*, (see chpt. 4), but "the *Poro* and *Sande* will never be abandoned" according to some people. "If the government uses violent means such as sending soldiers to stop *Poro* sessions and to put an end to the seclusion of boys in the forest, then you can be sure of another civil war. We are ready to fight to the end, for the preservation of this legacy [*Poro* and *Sande*] from our ancestors." They are ready to do so because the demise of *Poro* and *Sande* would be tantamount to the breakdown of the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde traditional social order. Here are some examples that epitomises the resoluteness of people to keep these institutions. Firstly, "a group of educated young women went up to Freetown for an audience with [former] president Kabba, asking him to respect their traditions by halting the proposed ban on the *Sande*." The angry women insisted upon having an audience with the president, who finally received and re-assured them, knowing that he needed their votes for the elections, that his administration will never ban *Sande*. Secondly, during a field visit to Kenema, the *Sande* women in this provincial headquarters of eastern province went on air warning men and non-initiates to stay indoors, while a special *Sande* mask made a ritual parade through down town, which lasted some three hours. According to *Sande* tradition, this mask accompanies the *Sande* ancestral spirit. Thus, Life in down town Kenema was paralysed for the three hours the *Sande* spirit was in town.

Insofar as these institutions are undergoing rapid social changes prompted by modern interventions in most cases, they nevertheless remain important for Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. This is indicated by most of its

members, who emphatically disapprove of the negative modern influence on their culture. The Ngiema chief, who also has a tertiary education, vividly puts it in the following way.

> We should not allow the western culture to kill our culture. We should not continue like this. It will take time for the NGOs to educate us, but it will also take time for them to listen to us. The NGOs [provide] funds for development projects, but they should have nothing to do with our cultural traditions; they should not interfere with our cultural affairs. Taking our children into the initiation forests is not evil at all, as most NGOs and these small churches say. Those descendants of Ngiema that condemn *Poro* and *Sande* are those who are working with NGOs, or those that have become pastors. It is because they have joined organisations, which condemn these practices, so they too have to live according to the laws of these organisations and churches. They have become alienated from their own culture – Kɔɔ-Mɛnde culture, which is very rich.

Human rights activists have viciously attacked particularly the *Sande* in recent times for its social and cultural role, "which they obviously reduce to bodily mutilations without seeing the broader cultural value behind such acts." Counter discourses from the adherers of the *Sande* institution, therefore, appear more prevalent and fiercer in the international press such as the BBC and public debates about its moral correctness. We know that the concept of universal human rights itself is an *a priori* western category that was not present during colonial times (cf. Platenkamp, 2007a). Where necessary, the *Sande* reverts to the use of violence to defend itself against such attacks. For example, according to a female UN human rights activist against female genital mutilation, "our organisation went to Kailahun town for a workshop in order to raise awareness among the women about the evils of this practice. But some *Sande* women came to our workshop and attacked us, and I was badly wounded in the attack. But I thank God for saving my life." In the provincial headquarter town of Kenema "three female local journalists and a local female UN worker were stripped naked by *Sande* elders and were made to parade on the streets." Such a humiliation was meant to be "a warning for all those working with the white people to keep away from our cultural traditions and to respect our society."

Counter discourses of hei

The concept of *hei*, though its practical purposes are certainly changing with time, is still important today. Scholars such as Gittins (1987), Harris and Sawyerr (1968) and Little (1967) who have investigated religion among Mɛnde, consider this concept relevant only in late colonial and early post-colonial times. Yet a careful and proper description of the changing social meanings attached to this central concept is indispensable. Thus, by tracing the cultural significance of this concept in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde religious representations, it is apparent that there have been shifting methods of applying *hei*. Partly resulting from the dynamic developments within Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society itself, *hei* may be utilised for both positive and negative purposes, depending on how the various communities view it.

Individuals in the society have no qualms about practicing their traditional beliefs and cultural values, when confronted with serious existential problems. For instance, during the war those who fought as government soldiers and as rebels were constantly employing *hei*, mostly with the help of the Muslim Holy men who did not only use the Koran and Islamic rituals, but also other traditional means. Kaplan (1994, 2001) refers to this type of expert as *Juju* warriors, who use "primitive superstitious" beliefs in warfare.[219] According to a former rebel commander, "these fighters did not only rely on the power of the gun, but on the effectiveness of the *hei*." Thus, *hei* continues to play a fundamental role in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde social representations.

Recourse to the use of *hei* remains to be the major frame of reference. That is to say, *hei* still fundamentally informs a structure of customary values which communicate social and religious ideas and regulate behaviour. For such an important social function of *hei*, no Kɔɔ-Mɛnde – and I do not yet know of any exception – is prepared to compromise this cultural practice. Even those who vigorously attack its use in public as unchristian and primitive, make use of it in some way, when confronted with challenging existential problems. "Pentecostal or

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[219] Shaw (2003) refers to such descriptions as the 'Primitivizing of an African Conflict', and accuses Kaplan of practising '*Juju* Journalism.'

born-again pastors, priests, civil servants living a western way of life and indeed people from all strata of life are all included in the social list of those making good use of different forms of *hei*." The significant point about this is that most of those I call "local agents of modernity" who passionately criticise such practices as primitive and unchristian, "would never admit that they make some use of *hei* secretly." Everybody in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society knows quite well that the practice of various forms of *hei* is socially indispensable, and that claims by some people that it is irrelevant for their individual lives is untenable. One of those who perform various rituals pertaining to *hei* maintains that

> even the big politicians and those in high offices as well as priests and pastors sometimes come to me, asking me to prepare various forms of *hei* for them. They need the *hei* in order to be successful in their careers and to be protected from evil people. However, they come in secret. They park their cars far off and then walk to me, because they do not want other people to see them.

In further reference to Islam, it is worth bearing in mind that due to processes of inculturation, the traditional concept and practice of *hei* have been incorporated into Kɔɔ-Mɛnde Islam in a number of ways. Yet the two seemingly operate on different levels in practice. The traditional practitioners of *hei*, who are very rare nowadays, always make use of cosmological entities such as particular plants, leaves and running water from streams and rivers in preparing their *hei*, while those who put emphasis on Islam employ only verses from the Koran. These two co-exist, and in some cases, practitioners use both the Islamic and the traditional means of preparing *hei*.

One major problem concerning the preparation of *hei* by using the forest and other cosmological entities around Ngiema is the pollution of the forests during the civil conflict. There are now calls for ritual purification of the forests, rivers and streams around the village. Particular taboos were broken during the war, and "unless special rituals are performed, and the forests and bush around Ngiema purified, according to the instructions of the ancestors, *hei* will never be effective enough." Such rituals are important for the reinstatement of the right socio-cosmological order, "but with Islam so strong and the NGOs present everywhere most people are afraid, because they do not want to be referred to as primitive."

It will take time for Ngiema to realise this traditional practice, taking into account the many oppositions to such customary practices by foreign interventions and pressures Islam exerts upon people in this regard. Since the former *Poro* sacred forest cannot yet be purified accordingly, "the *Poro* elders had no alternative, but to look for another forest to act as the *Poro* [sacred grove]." Most people lament the fact that this former sacred grove suffered the most brutal desacralization during the war by the rebels of the RUF. "Looking for another forest brought many [ritual] constraints on these elders, because of the unwillingness of Islam to support them."

I have described how present-day Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society can be understood as the outcome of a long, complex, and partly extremely violent historical process. In order to identify these, in many respects, radical discontinuities as well as the fundamental continuities, I have employed a model distinguishing modernity – in its manifold ideological and practical dimensions – from pre-modernity. It should be emphasised that the historical development of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society does not represent a unilineal process towards modernity. Modernity and pre-modernity in my view refer to configurations and values (Dumont, 1980). Even though the proponents of them would argue them to be mutually exclusive, I have demonstrated that in their various dimensions both configurations co-exist in present-day Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. This co-existence is conflict ridden. Those with former western education, representations of the State, advocates of "development" (indigenous and foreign alike) and representatives of Christian churches and Islam all propagate the imposition of modernity in one dimension or another on Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. Whether advocating political power based on democratic elections, challenging the cosmological foundation of traditional authority propounding a market economy as the road to economic prosperity, or destroying social solidarity based on communal labour on ancestrally owned land or preaching the exclusive adherence to a monotheistic religion condemning ancestral beliefs and rituals as primitive and pagan superstitions, all such forces contribute to the social transformation taking place in Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. However, not only are the socially disruptive effects clearly perceived by Ngiema, the village population also maintains a set of values that is fundamentally different from the ones characteristic

of modernity. In my analysis such non-modern values that dominated the pre-modern society of *hei* – this all pervading force of cosmological origin – and in the enactment of the *Poro* and *Sande* rituals, also appear to take a very high position in the overall system of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde values. This is evident from the fact that the rituals in question are still conceived as the means per excellence to socialise individual men and women into full social persons according to Kɔɔ-Mɛnde understanding of sociality by connecting them with the ancestral origins of Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society. In addition, the ritual distribution of *hei*, even though subject to certain forms of commoditisation, is still considered the indispensable condition for physical, social and mental wellbeing. It would be hazardous to predict the direction in which Kɔɔ-Mɛnde society will further evolve. Nevertheless, it is equally hazardous to presume that this society has sacrificed all of its values to the attractions and delusions of modernity.

Sources

Public and official records and references

The public and official records and documents are mainly concerned with reports from colonial and other officials who had worked in the colony. In some cases, I have also considered the flow of correspondence between private traders, missionaries, priests, rulers and the British Government. The main sources were archives in Freetown and documentary information received from people who had access to these places. A second and important source of information for these official records and documents was the public Record Office and British museum in London, received mainly through correspondence with scholars who have had access to these places. These records and documents pertaining to letters from London officials and agents in Sierra Leone are cited in the footnotes, generally using the number of the Governor's correspondence with other officials in Sierra Leone to establish the identity of the particular document without supplying the full date of the dispatch. For example, I have used 'CO 267/417/61, Cardew to SS, 1895.' This actually means correspondence from governor Cardew to the Secretary of State (SS). The first number, 267, is the CO series, the second, 417, the volume number, and the last, 61, the number of the dispatch from Sierra Leone. Similarly, 'CO 267/375/10,18, Hay to SS, 1889', would mean the correspondence from Hay to Secretary of State (SS) in 1889. The first number is the CO series number; the second, the volume number; the third, the sub-section flagged in the volume and the last 10, 18 the number of the document in that sub-section. This same pattern applies to Minute Papers, local confidential, 108/98.

I also made use of the media as a further documentary source. In this respect, the BBC radio and television service on Africa under "Sierra Leone – the most dangerous place on Earth" broadcast in January 1999 provided the main source for this study.

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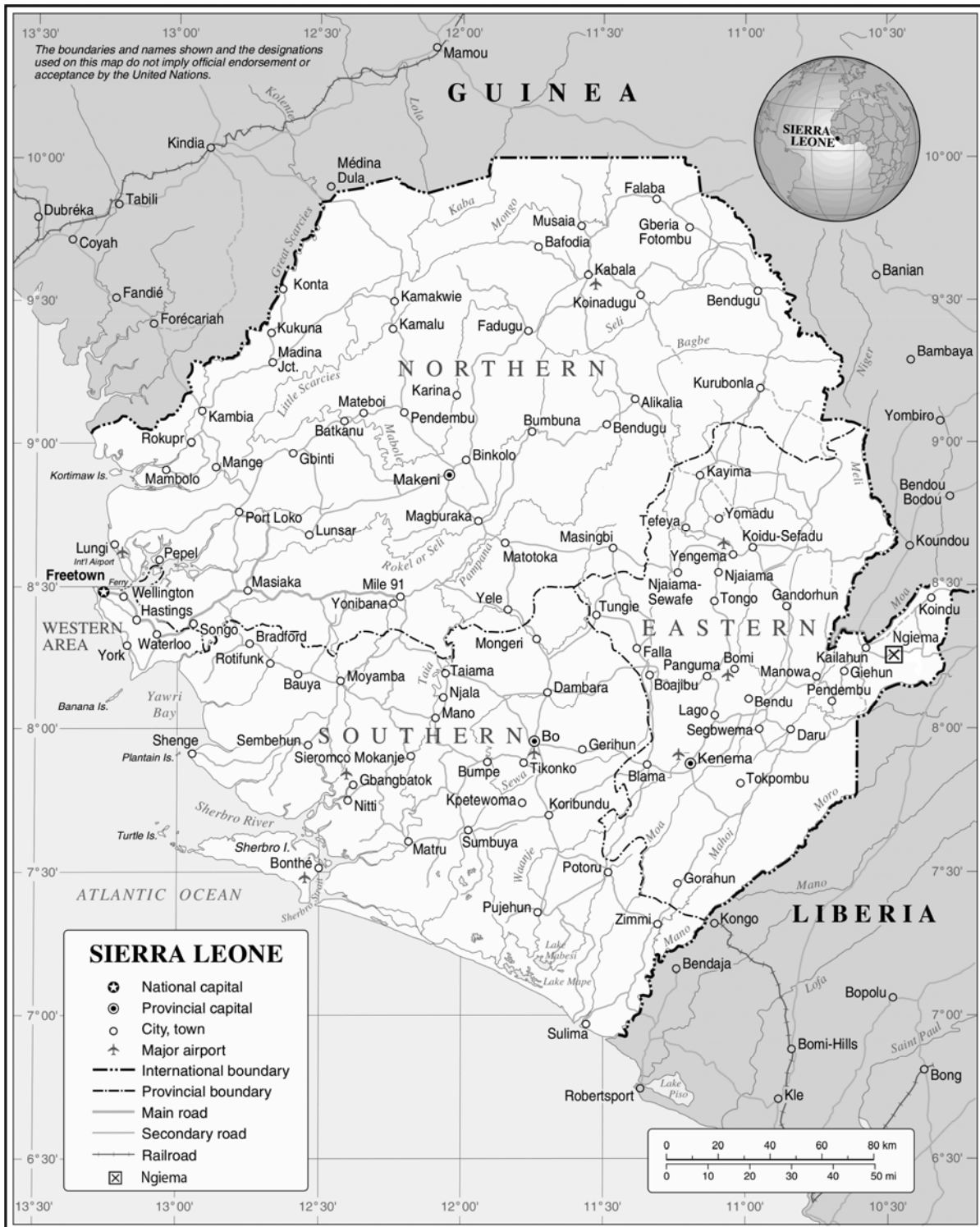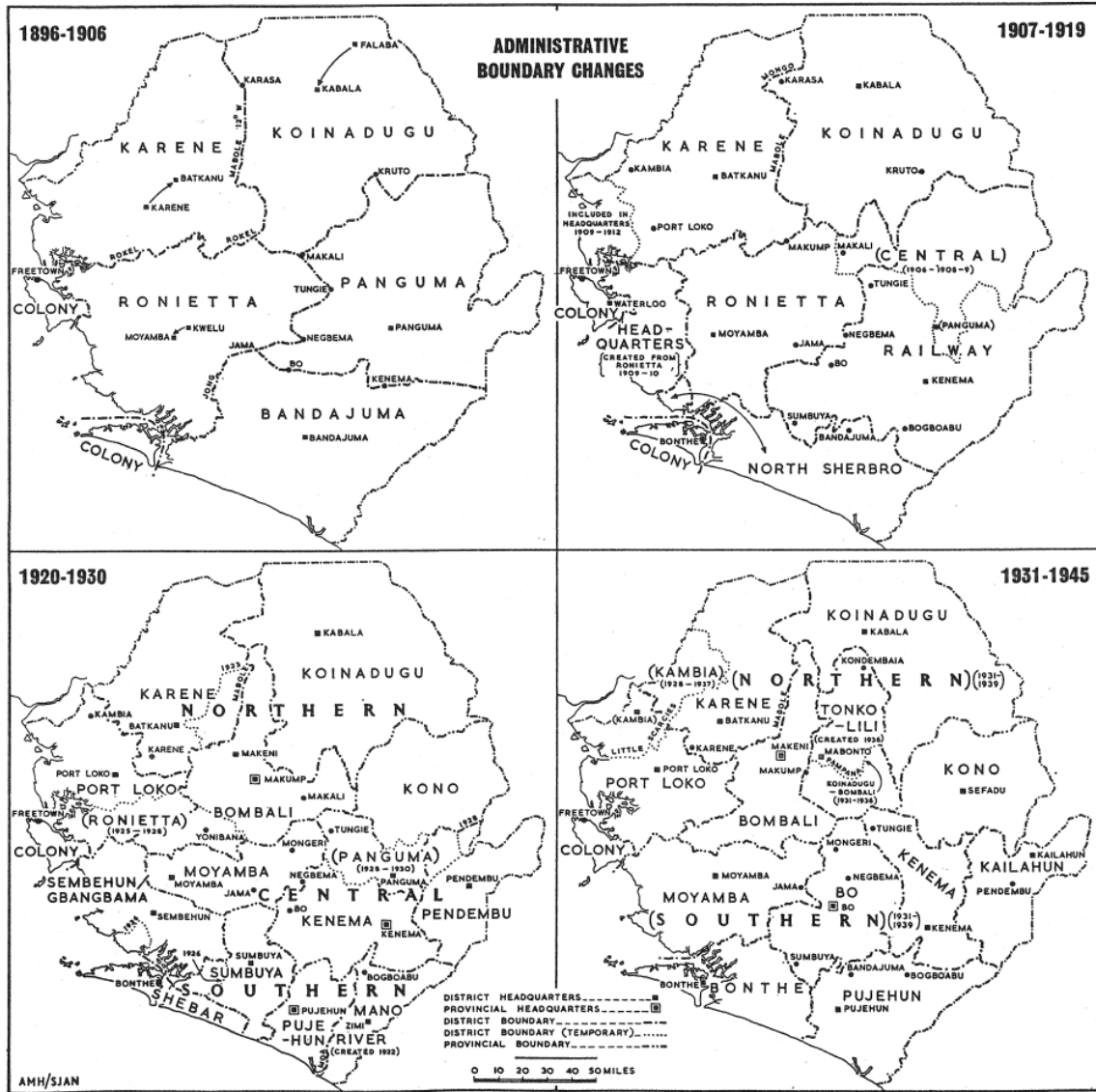
Map 1: Contemporary Sierra Leone showing cities, towns and some villages including Ngiema. Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image: UNsierraleone. png, with slight alterations from the author.
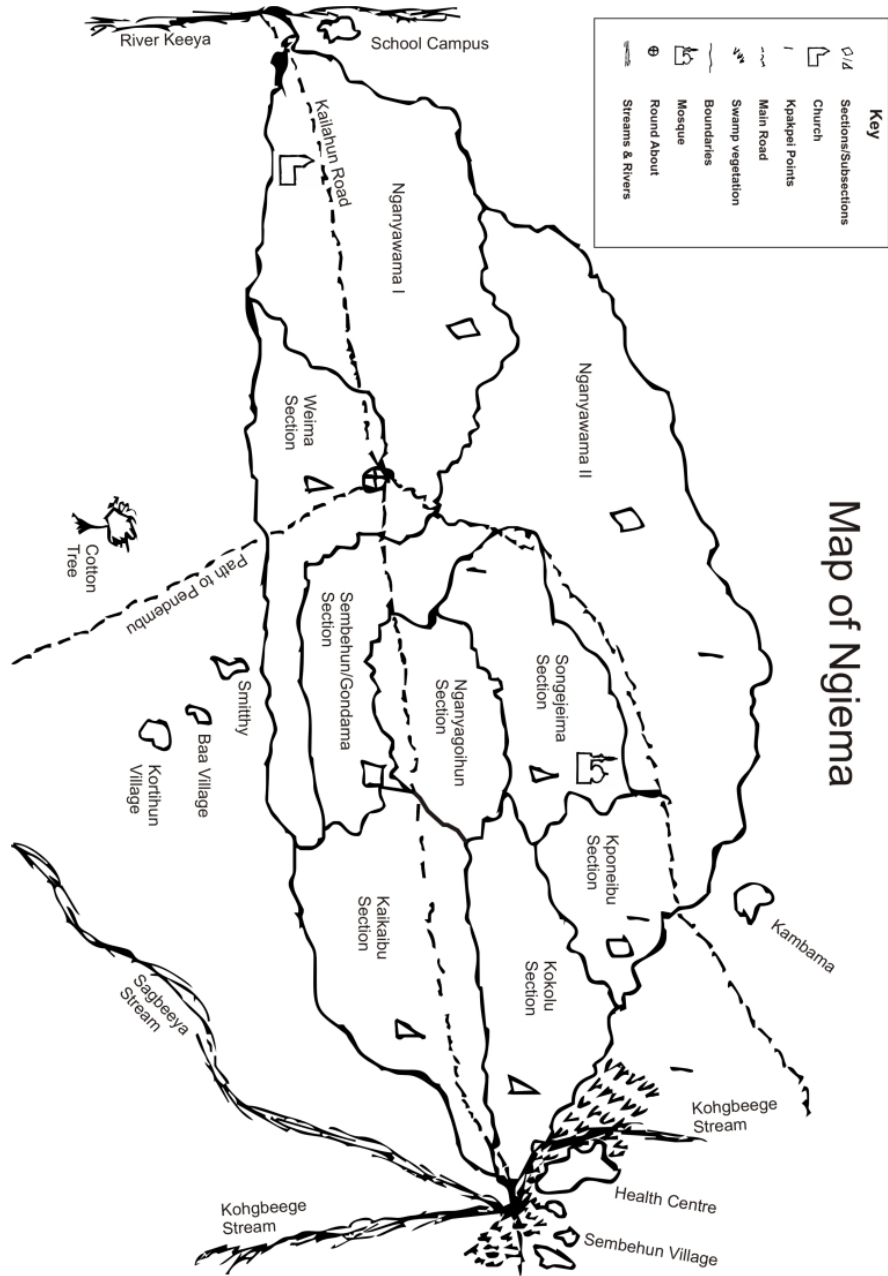
Map 2: Ngiema indicating sections, sub-sections and other important places.
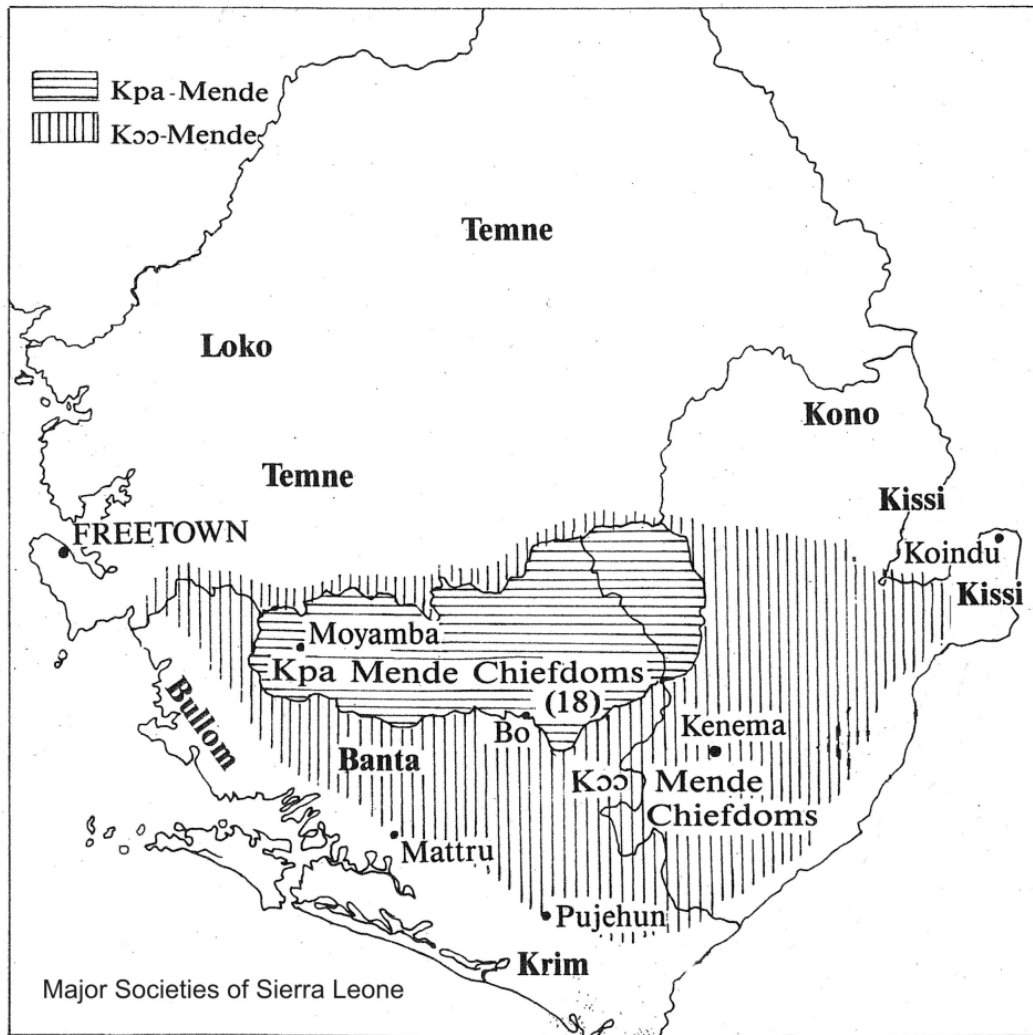
Map 3: Major societies of Sierra Leone, including the Kɔɔ-Mɛnde. Source: Gittins (1987: 26) with some modifications.

Map 4: Indicating political fragmentation of pre-colonial polities into chiefdoms. Source: (Clarke 1969a: 33) with few alterations.

Map 5: Temporal administrative frontiers in the Colony of Sierra Leone to the present day. Source: Howard (1969: 31)

Map 6: Post-colonial administrative areas of the Sierra Leonean state. Source: Clarke (1969b: 29)

Map 7: Provincial and District boundaries of contemporary Sierra Leone showing political boundaries. Source: Fyle (1981: 4).

Photograp1: Main road into Ngiema from Kailahun and Sandeya village

Photograph 2: River Keeya on the main road leading to Ngiema from Kailahun

Phtograph 3: Roundabout showing roads to the four corners of Sierra Leone

Photograph 4: A young family of four in Ngiema

Photograph 5: Household- A woman preparing the evening meals

Photograph 6: The ruins of a big house

Photograph 7: The New Apostolic Church

Photograph 8: The Ngiema mosque

Phtograph 9: Methodist Primary School, Ngiema

Photograph 10: English lessons in class 4
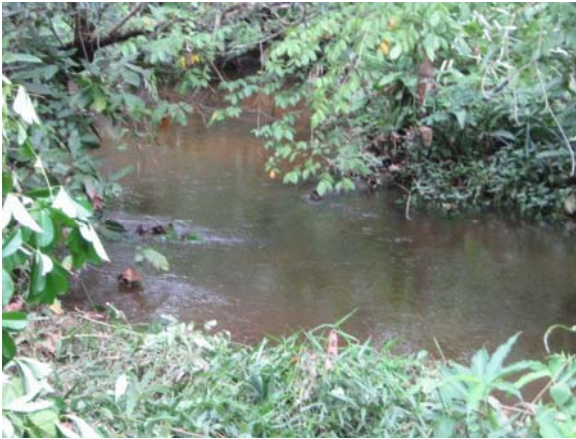

Photograph 11: The smithy

Photograph 12: The health centre

Photograph 13: Mbotima section

Photograph 14: Keeyama section showing mosque

Photogrpah 15: The Kɔ-gbege strean

Photograph 16: The Sabgeeja stream

Photograph 17: The Kɔ-gbege running through the light and deep swamp – dwelling place of the 'Maada Crocodile'

Phtograph 18: Former Poro initiation forest showing the cotton tree

The Influence of Modernity and Modern Warfare on the Koh Mende Society of Sierra Leone

John M. Combey

In der vorliegenden Arbeit werden die sozialen Prozesse des in den 1990er Jahren stattfindenden Bürgerkriegs in Sierra Leone sowie die Folgen dieser Veränderungen bei den Kɔɔ-Mɛnde analysiert. Dabei wird die Annahme, dass sich insbesondere afrikanische Gesellschaften durch endemische Gewalt auszeichnen, grundsätzlich abgelehnt. Der Autor identifiziert hingegen kulturspezifische und historisch kontingente Faktoren, die zu diesem Bürgerkrieg geführt haben, und stellt einen Bezug zu deren Einfluss auf die Sozialstruktur der Kɔɔ-Mɛnde her. Die Sozialordnung der Kɔɔ-Mɛnde wurde von verschiedenen externen Faktoren sowie durch den Einfluss der Moderne nachhaltig transformiert und weicht in ihrer heutigen Form stark von ihrer zunächst holistischen und soziokosmischen Struktur ab. Dennoch haben einige grundlegende Repräsentationen und Ritualpraktiken weiterhin Bestand und spielen eine zentrale Rolle in der Wertehierarchie der Kɔɔ-Mɛnde, auf der die gesamte Struktur der sozialen und religiösen Beziehungen basiert.