INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

PATTERNS OF RURAL PROTEST: CHIEFS, SLAVES AND PEASANTS IN NORTHWESTERN SIERRA LEONE, 1896-1956

ISMAIL O.D. RASHID

Department of History
McGill University
Montreal

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

March, 1998

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on slaves and peasants as self-consciousness actors in northwestern Sierra Leone between 1896 to 1956. During this period, which covers almost the entire duration of British colonial rule in the region, these subaltern groups used covert and violent actions to protest the various demands -- labour, tribute and taxation -- of the state and the local elite. Covert actions like evasions, escapes and migrations became interwoven into the fabric of colonial rule.

Violent actions, which tended to be spasmodic, erupted when social and economic conditions deteriorated sharply. Four major rebellions occurred during colonial rule in region. The first, spearheaded by local rulers, took place within the general context of African resistance to colonialism in 1898. After the rulers were coopted by the colonial state the burden of resistance fell on peasants and slaves. In 1919, after enduring excruciating war-time experiences, peasants, petty-traders, slaves and the urban unemployed rioted against Syrian traders who they believed hoarded and profited from rice. The rural destitution created by the Great Depression and a major locust attack led many ex-slaves and peasants to join the millenarian movement of the itinerant muslim cleric, Idara Konthorfili in 1931. Idara called on his followers not to pay colonial tax and tried to mobilize them to fight against the state. In 1955 and 1956, peasants and other rural groups throughout northwestern Sierra Leone rebelled against high taxation and the despotism of their chiefs. In its timing and virulence the anti-chief rebellion of 1955 and 1956 represented a major paradox in African history. It had occurred during the moment of decolonization; a period when the colonial transfer of power to the new African elite was following formulaic and relatively peaceful lines.

The state responded to subaltern protest with repression, paternalism and readjustments in existing social relations. By their actions, slaves and peasants forced the state and elite groups to acknowledge and respond to their concerns. The balance which emerged out of this process of resistance, repression and accommodation became the moral economy of colonialism in Sierra Leone.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse porte sur les esclaves et paysans, acteurs politiques conscients dans le nord-ouest du Sierra Leone entre 1896 et 1956. Pendant cette période, qui couvre la majeure partie du règne colonial britannique dans la région, ces groupes subalternes ont eu ressort à des actions clandestines et violentes afin de s'élever contre les exigences diverses--travail, tribut, et taxes--de l'État et des élites locales. Ces actions clandestines, évasions, fuites, et migrations, devinrent partie intégrante du tissu du règne colonial.

Les actions violentes, souvent spasmodiques, éclataient lors de détériorations brusques des conditions socio-économiques. On compte quatre rebellions importantes dans la région pendant l'ère coloniale. La première, menée par les leaders locaux, s'inscrit dans le cadre de la résistance africaine contre la colonisation en 1898. Une fois les chefs cooptés, la résistance incombe aux paysans et esclaves. En 1919, suite à d'amères expériences durant la guerre, paysans, petits commercants, esclaves, et citadins sans-emploi se révoltèrent contre les commercants Syriens coupables, selon eux, d'avoir stocké le riz et profité de ce monopole. Face à la pauvreté rurale dûe à la Grande Dépression et suite à une importante ruée de sauterelles, plusieurs anciens esclaves rejoignirent les rangs du mouvement millénaire créé en 1931 par le clerc musulman itinérant Idara Konthorfili. Idara exhortait ses disciples à refuser de payer l'impôt colonial, de même qu'il essayait de les mobiliser pour lutter contre l'État. En 1955 et 1956, les paysans et autres groupes ruraux dans le nord-ouest du Sierra Leone se rebellèrent contre les taxes prohibitoires et contre le despotisme de leurs chefs. La rébellion de 1955-56 contre les chefs représente un paradoxe dans l'histoire africaine, de part sa violence et le moment de son éruption. En effet, la rébellion s'inscrit dans le contexte de la décolonisation, une période où le transfer du pouvoir à la nouvelle élite africaine peut être qualifié de relativement calme et organisé.

L'État répondit aux protestations subalternes par la répression, le paternalisme, et des réajustements dans les relations sociales. Par leurs actions, les esclaves et paysans ont forcé l'État et les élites à reconnaître leurs demandes et à y répondre. C'est l'équilibre qui émerge suite à ce processus de résistance, répression, et accomodation qui constitue l'économie morale du colonialisme au Sierra Leone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the long journey which eventually produced this dissertation, I have benefitted from the generosity and moral support of many people who cannot all be mentioned by name here. My eternal gratitude extends to them. My sincere appreciation goes to my supervisor, Professor Myron Echenberg for his unflinching support, intellectual guidance, and for making my tenure at McGill University challenging and rewarding. Thanks also to Professor Catherine Legrand and the late Professor Robert Vogel for their encouragement and scholarly guidance. My sincere appreciation also extends to the other members of my thesis committee, Professors Colin Duncan, Elizabeth Elbourne, A Turgay, Gil Troy and M. Kramer for contributing to the enhancement of this work. Professor Martin Klein of the University of Toronto also deserves acknowledgement for his insightful suggestions and comments on the dissertation. To the staff of the McGill History department, Mary McDaid, Georgii Mikula, Celine Cutinho and Joan Pozer, I am grateful for your smiles and assistance.

! am indebted to Dr. Ibrahim Abdallah (I.B.) of the University of Western Cape South Africa, Professor Richard Rathbone of the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) and Professor Barbara Harrell-Bond of Oxford University. I.B. first sparked my interest in peasant protest and provided regular scholarly insight and suggestions. Professor Rathbone gave generously of his time and intellectual experience while I was doing my research in the United Kingdom. Professor Harrell-Bond generously allowed me access to her research materials and provided me lodgings while I was researching at Oxford.

My gratitude also to the archivists and staff at the following institutions for their help in the retrieval of documents: Inter-Library Loan Office of McGill University; Sierra Leone National Archive, Public Records Office, British Library, Rhodes House Library and the Church Missionary Society Archive, University of Birmingham. The staff of the Sierra Leone National Archive deserve extra recognition, especially Mssrs. Albert Moore and Mansaray, who went out of the way to locate and copy archival documents under extremely trying circumstances.

To my community of friends in Montreal who provided moral support and help in proof-reading the dissertation -- Edward Kissi, Maureen Malowany, Malcolm Coker,

Margaret Coker, Steven Usitalo, Rebecca Mancuso, Phillipe Salvi, Joelle Zahar, Celia Williams, Dave Austin, Olayinka Leigh, Isata Kanu, Memuna Kanu, Barbara Morgan, Victor Ong'Ngo and Adrian Labor. Edward gave generously of his time and ideas in the early stages of the writing of the dissertation.

My appreciations extend to my family (Mummy, Naffie, Abdul, Isatu, Ibrahim and Ralia) and that of my wife (Ms. Sarieu and Uncle Fattah) for their encouragement throughout my studies in Canada. My sister-in-law, Adiatu Gibrill, deserves special mention for providing accommodations for Anifa and I during my research in London. Finally, to my wife Anifa, companion and fellow traveller, whose sacrifice and support made the journey easier, I can only say *ekushe* and *ekabo*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I: Maps

II: Tables

INTRODUCTION

MYTH, HISTORY AND SUBALTERN RESISTANCE

Riding on the crest of imperial triumphalism, the newly appointed British Secretary of State for Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, announced to his parliamentary colleagues:

> I regard many of our Colonies as being in the condition of undeveloped estates, and estates which can never be developed without Imperial assistance ... I shall be prepared to consider very carefully myself, and then, if I am satisfied, to confidently submit to the House, any case which may occur in which by judicious investment of British money, those estates which belong to the British Crown may be developed for the benefit of their population and for the benefit of the greater population which is outside.[1]

In Africa, Chamberlain envisaged that the great imperial venture would hitch British capital with African land, resources and labour under the watchful gaze of colonial administrators. Given the "agrarian" idiom (estates) utilized by the Colonial Secretary, that labour without saying, was expected to be mainly rural. Yet, the Colonial Secretary said nothing about the character of that labour, how it would be marshalled or how it would react. His omission was deliberate and part of the colonizing myth. The destiny of Empire, as far as he was concerned, was to organize, transform and lead a "backward" and "static" continent onto the path of progress. This myth became the foundation of colonialist history and historiography in Africa.[2]

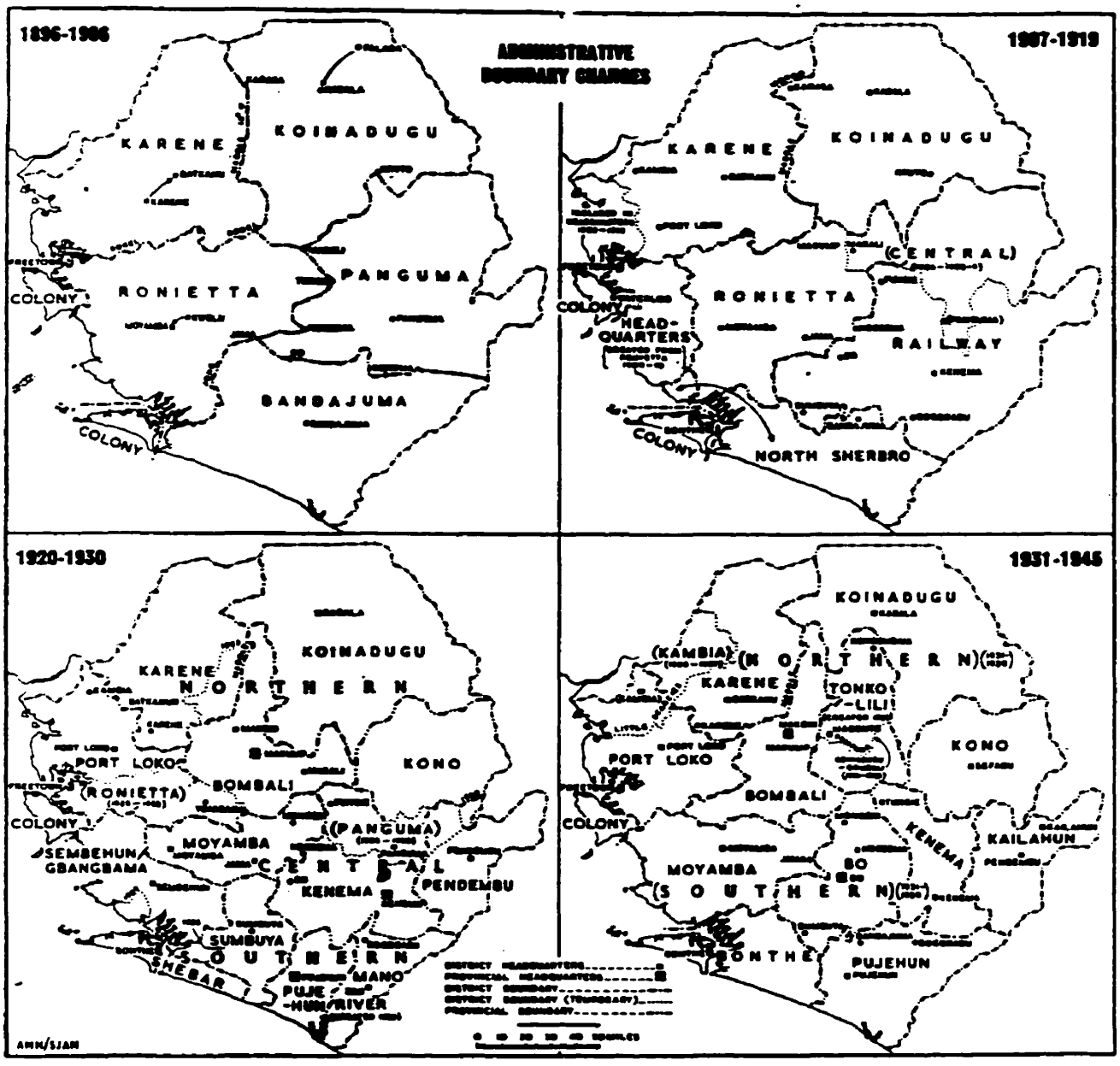
In Sierra Leone, colonialist history found a terrain where it was simultaneously reinforced and contested. Being one of the oldest British colonies in Africa, Sierra Leone became an example of what empire could achieve. The British sponsors and promoters of the colony celebrated its philanthropic foundations and defended the

---

[1]. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates (Commons) 4th Ser. XXXVI, 641-2, 22 August 1895.

[2]. For colonialist expressions of this myth see Frederick Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa (Edinburgh, 1929) and Charles B. Wallis, The Advance of Our West African Empire (London: Fisher Unwin, 1903). For a scholarly examination of these myths see, V.G. Kiernan, Lords of Humankind: European Attitudes Towards the Outside World in the Imperial Age (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1969); Eric Wolf, Europe and the People without History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

MAP 1: Adminstrative Boundaries of Sierra Leone, 1890-1960



Source: J.I. Clarke, Sierra Leone in Maps, p.31.

cultural, religious and commercial achievements of its African inhabitants.[3] The Creoles, as these African inhabitants became known, in time produced their own historians who celebrated their own agency, especially that of their upper classes, in the making of the colony's history. Thus, they indirectly challenged their sponsors' historical construction of their colony as mainly the product of British benevolence.[4] But, their challenge was a limited one. Since their history was generated within the ideological confines of British colonialism, they also tended to reinforce rather than dispute the whiggish elements in the colonial historiography. Thus, the uncontested outlines of creole history became that of a group whose destiny was to spread progress -- Christianity, commerce and civilization -- to the backward natives in the hinterland of the country and in West Africa. In short, it was a sub-set of the greater British imperial project.

The theme -- of Creoles as the beacon of civilization in West Africa -- became the signature of their history in particular, and of Sierra Leone's past in general. The intellectual and spatial confines of that past broadened as the Creole and their colony came into contact with other Sierra Leonean groups.[5] The most comprehensive expression of this form of historiography is A History of Sierra Leone by Christopher Fyfe. This 773-page treatise, which is regarded as the definitive history of Sierra Leone, documents the travails of the coastal colony and its inhabitants from its

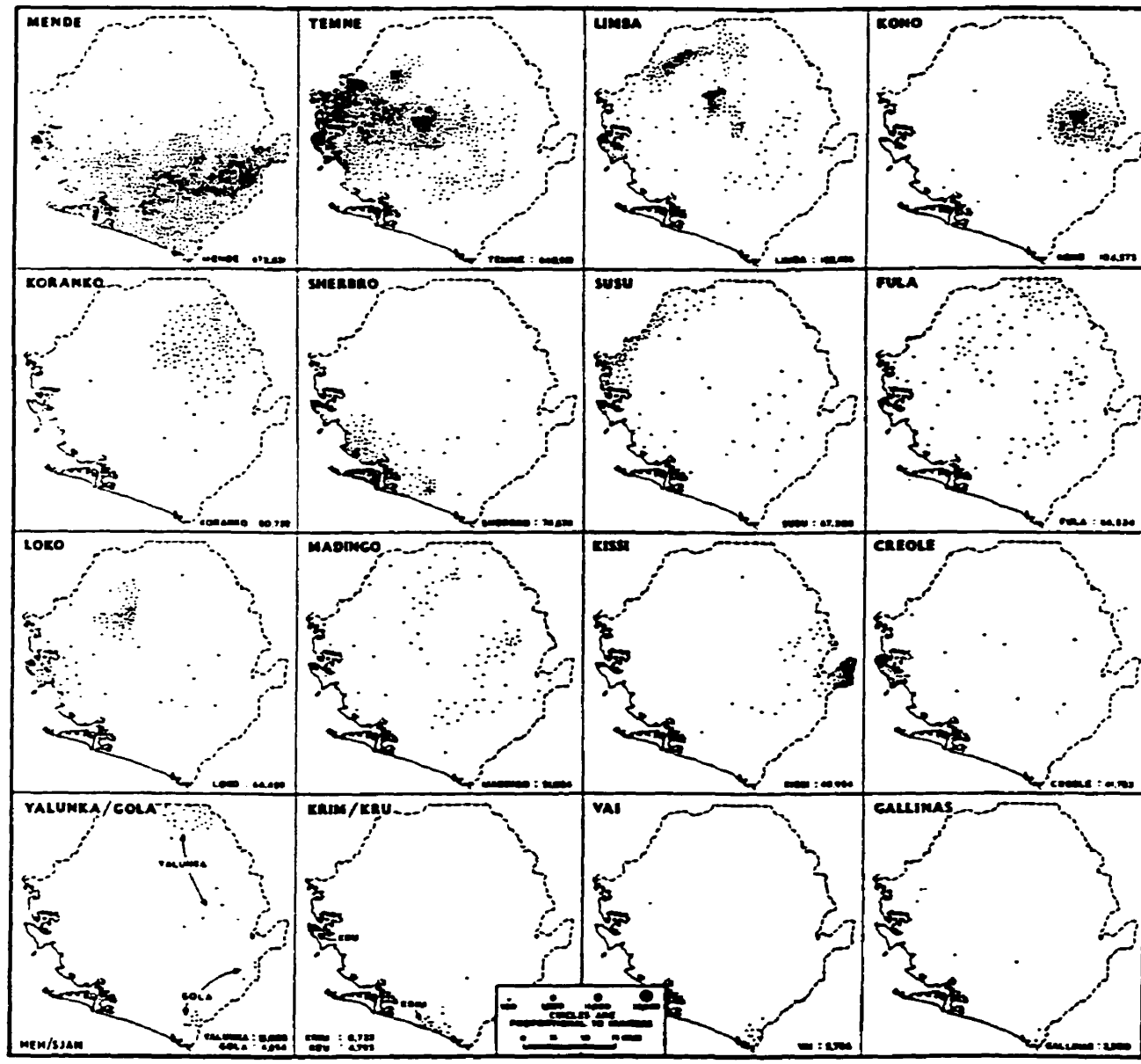
---

[3]. Granville Sharp, Memoirs, (London, 1820); K. Macauley, The Colony of Sierra Leone Vindicated from the Misrepresentations of Mr McQueen of Glasgow (London, 1827); Ernest Graham Ingham, Sierra Leone After a Hundred years (London: Frank Cass, (1894) 1968); J.J. Crooks, History of Colony of Sierra Leone (London: Frank Cass, (1868) 1903).

[4]. A.B.C. Sibthorpe, A History of Sierra Leone (London: Frank Cass, 1881); In 1937, the Sierra Leone Weekly News ran two serials celebrating the colony's 150th anniversary. The first by an amateur historian, Collingwood George, was titled, "Our Course in the Sun: Or an Outline Historical Survey of Sierra Leone." The second was a panegyric poem written by Dixon Baker titled, "A Century and Fifty Years (Sierra Leone 1787-1937)."

[5]. Arthur Porter, Creoledom: A study of the Development of Freetown Society (London: 1963); Gustav Deveneaux, "The Political and Social Impact of the Colony on Northern Sierra Leone, 1821-1896." (Ph.D Dissertation, Boston University, 1973); Akintola Wyse, The Krio of Sierra Leone: An interpretive History (Freetown: W.D. Okrafo Smart, 1989).

MAP 2: Distribution of Ethnic groups in Sierra Leone.



Source: J.I. Clarke, Sierra Leone in Maps,

foundations to the end of the nineteenth century. Only twelve pages of the volume are devoted to the pre-Creole inhabitants of Sierra Leone. These inhabitants appear in the volume only when their fortunes intersect with that of the coastal colony.[6]

A generation of scholars writing in the 1960s and 1970s chipped away at this conception of Sierra Leone's past. These scholars shifted attention to the other regions and peoples of the country. Reflective of the broad trend in African history and historiography at the time, they looked at the precolonial and early colonial fortunes of different ethnic groups and regions of Sierra Leone. Their studies greatly broadened the canvass of the Sierra Leone past. Some of these studies focused on, or devoted space to the history of northwestern Sierra Leone. Ade Ijagbemi, one of the first historians to look at the region, examined the fortunes of different Temne polities in the nineteenth century. He concentrated mainly on trade and warfare among these polities during the transition from the Atlantic slave trade to "legitimate" trade.[7] Allen Howard looked at the political networks and dynamics of trade and spatial control in the Upper Guinea Plains between 1865 and 1895. He illustrated how by the end of the nineteenth century, European colonialism had restricted the economic and political networks of Africans.[8] Kenneth Wylie, who built on the works of Ijagbemi and Howard, looked at the survival of, and transformations in Temne political institutions up to the 1910.[9] M.J.M. Sibanda extended the history of the northwestern region with his examination of colonial political and economic development policies and competing group interests in the region between 1896 and 1939.[10]

---

[6]. Christopher Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

[7]. Ade E. Ijagbemi, "A History of the Temne in the Nineteenth Century," (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1968).

[8]. Allen M. Howard, "Big Men, Traders and Chiefs: Power, Commerce and Spatial Change in the Sierra Leone-Guinea Plain 1865-1895" (Ph.D diss., University of Wisconsin, 1972.)

[9]. Kenneth Wylie, Political Kingdoms of Temne: Temne Government in Sierra Leone, 1825-1910 (New York: Africana Company, 1977).

[10]. M.J. M. Sibanda, "Colonial Policy and Development in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1896-1939." (Ph.D diss., University of Birmingham, 1978).

The writings on Sierra Leone in the 1960s and 1970s contained many of the hallmarks and shifting concerns of the contemporary nationalist and Africanist historiography. In general, the scholars emphasized African political (state-building) and economic (trading) autonomy, acumen and dynamism. Peasants, appeared in the literature mainly as "economic" men or proto-capitalist farmers.[11] Other subaltern groups, like slaves and women, had even more limited visibility in the literature. Generally, these scholars saw political action, including protest and resistance, as being mainly the domain of the elites. Thus, their studies tended to emphasize actions, ideas and relations of elite groups.

The African "nationalist" elite, which had strategically seized the decolonization moment, staked their claim to the colonial state and the pre-colonial African heritage of autonomy and dynamism. That heritage became their legitimizing myth. The constitutive fragments of these myths were both appropriated from, and reproduced within the scholarship of the era.[12] Thus, studies of resistance and protests in the 1960s took the form of searching for the antecedents of this elite, and its linkages with those who had initially resisted the imposition of colonialism.[13] The literature on resistance, therefore contained a tinge of positivist teleology in which the "nationalist" posture of the independence elite flowed from anti-colonial protest of their precolonial antecedents. Only a few scholars like Frantz Fanon rejected the claims of

---

[11]. See especially the discussions of peasant production in Sibanda, Colonial Policy in Northwestern Sierra Leone," and Martin Kaniki, "An Economic History of Sierra Leone, 1929-1939," (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1972). Sibanda is critical of the notion but nonetheless makes use of it when he discusses what he suggested were moments of "opportunity" in the 1920s and 1930s. Kaniki makes the stronger case for peasants as economic men in the 1960s. For the literature on West Africa see A.G. Hopkins, Economic History of West Africa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973) and Polly Hill, Migrant-Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

[12]. A. Temu and B. Swai, Historians and Africanist History: A Critique (London: Zed Press, 1981), pp. 2-60; John Lonsdale, "States and Social Processes in Africa: A Historiographical Survey," African Studies Review 24, No. 2/3 (1981). pp. 139-226.

[13]. T.O Ranger, "Connexions between "Primary Resistance Movements" and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and central Africa I & II," Journal of African History, 9: (1968) pp. 437-454 and pp. 631-641.

the nationalist elite and made a forceful, if somewhat overstated, case for the political agency of peasant and other subaltern groups.[14]

By the mid-1970s, the rejection of nationalist claims became more evident in the historical literature. The elite had failed to deliver the autonomy and dynamism they had appropriated from the past. Intractable political and economic problems plagued every corner of the African continent by the mid-1970s. Radical Africanists and Marxist scholars, therefore, challenged the "modernist" paradigm that undergirded most of the earlier historical works. These scholars devoted greater attention to the dynamics of African social and class structures. They looked more closely at the place of subaltern groups, especially workers, slaves and peasants in African societies. Using the underdevelopment paradigm of Latin American scholars, some of the more radical scholars contended that colonialism and the global capitalist economy undermined the African capacity to develop and locked the continent in a trajectory of impoverishment.[15] Within the underdevelopment paradigm, the dynamic "economic" peasants or proto-capitalist farmers became hapless victims, making "futile gestures" against powerful historical forces.[16] Although slaves, peasants and women featured in the social and class analyses of the literature of the period, their political struggles did not.[17]

In the 1980s and 1990s, scholarly attention has shifted to the political actions

---

[14]. See especially his chapter titled, "Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weakness," Frantz Fanon, Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, (1961) 1968). pp. 148-105.

[15]. The most influential of these works was Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972); Samir Amin, Neocolonialism in West Africa (London: Penguin, 1973). For Sierra Leone, see the critical review of underdevelopment theory by M. J. M. Sibanda, "Dependency and Underdevelopment in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1896-1939, African Affairs, (October 1979), pp. 481-492.

[16]. Frederick Cooper, "Peasants, Capitalists and Historians: A Review Article," Journal of Southern African Studies, 7, 2, (1981), pp. 288.

[17]. Allen Isaacman, "Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa," in Frederick Cooper, F.E. Mallon, S.J. Stern, Allen F. Isaacman and William Rosberry, Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 214.

and agency of workers, peasants and women. The shift partly reflected the deepening of political and social crisis of the continent, and the demand by new voices, especially feminist voices, to be heard. In the 1980s, the African crisis was most evident in falling agrarian production and a consequent decline in food supply around the continent. The crisis forcefully drew attention to the fact that the majority of the continent's population was still rural, and that women made up the majority of the population.[18] Scholars in the 1980s and 1990s therefore paid attention not only to the structure of rural production but also to the politics of rural problems. In some of these studies, subaltern rural groups, including women, emerged as autonomous political agents in their own right.[19] Recent studies of women and the working class in Sierra Leone have been situated within this general trend of restoring the agency of previously neglected groups, especially that of workers and women.[20]

This dissertation continues the revisionist trend in the African and Sierra Leonean historiography. It heeds the call made by Asian scholars, especially those of the subaltern studies group that the voices and actions of common people must be

---

[18]. See an excellent review of the literature by Sara Berry, "The Food Crisis and Agrarian Change in Africa: A Review Essay," Africa Studies Review, 27, 2, (June 1984), pp. 59-112.

[19]. Elizabeth Schmidt, "Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain: Men, Women and the Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1939," Journal of Southern African Studies, 16, (1990), pp. 622-648; Marcia Wright, Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life Stories From East/Central Africa (New York: L. Barber Press, 1993). Simi Afonja, "Women, Power and Authority in Traditional Yoruba Society," in Leela Dube, Eleanor Leacock, Shirley Ardener (eds.) Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 136-157; Jean Boyd and Murray Last, "The Role of Women as 'Agents Religieux' in Sokoto," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 19, (1985) pp. 283-300.

[20]. Ibrahim Abdallah, "Colonial State, Mining Capital and Wage Labour in Sierra Leone: A Study of Class Formation and Action, 1884-1945," (Ph.D diss., University of Toronto, 1990); Arthur Abraham, "Women Chiefs: A Historical Appraisal" in Arthur Abraham (ed.) Topics in Sierra Leone History (Freetown: Leone Publishers, 1976), pp. 75-89. Sylvia Ojukutu-Macauley, a colleague and former classmate of mine has recently completed a dissertation titled, "Women, Power and Change in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1896-1993," (Ph.D diss., Howard University, 1997). We have had several discussions and did a joint presentation at the African Studies Association Conference at Columbus, Ohio in November, 1997. At the time of writing, I have, however, not had the opportunity of reading the final copy of her dissertation.

rescued from the grand narratives of capitalism, colonialism and nationalism.[21] Thus, this dissertation focuses mainly on slaves and peasants as self-conscious actors in northwestern Sierra Leone between 1896 and 1956. During this period, which covers almost the entire duration of British colonial rule in the region, subaltern groups had to react to the various demands made on them by the state and local elite. This dissertation does not cover the whole range of subaltern reactions, but focuses instead on protest, one of the mechanisms by which subalterns contested and negotiated these demands. It poses the following questions: What was the nature of slave and peasant protest under colonial rule? What were the causes and context of their protests? Against what and whom were protests directed? How did slaves and peasants articulate and organize their protests?

Slaves and peasants in Sierra Leone have not had their actions and voices retrieved from the grand narrative of Sierra Leone history. One Sierra Leonean historian even challenges the idea that internal slavery and slaves existed in the country.[22] Slaves, however, did exist in Sierra Leone and have formed the subject of two monographs and a number of articles. The first monograph, written by John Grace, addresses British colonial and philanthropic efforts to abolish domestic slavery in Sierra Leone.[23] The other, by Adam Jones, looks at how the slave trade and the transition to "legitimate" trade affected the politics and economy of Galinhas country

---

[21]. The thinking and ideas of the Subaltern Studies Group are published in the journal edited by Ranajit Guha, Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984-). See also Ranajit Guha, "On some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," in Ranajit Guha and Gyatari Chakravorty Spivak, (eds.) Selected Subaltern Studies, (New York, 1988); Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for Indian Pasts?," Representations, 37, (1992), pp. 1-26; For critical reflections on subaltern studies see Gyatari Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," Subaltern Studies, 1985, pp. 330-363; Gyatari Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Larry Grossberg and Cary Nelsons (eds.) Marxism and the Interpretations of Culture (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313.

[22]. Arthur Abraham, Mende Government and Politics in Sierra Leone: A Historical Study of Political Change in Sierra Leone: 1890 - 1937 (Freetown: Sierra Leone University Press, 1978), pp. 18-30.

[23]. John Grace, Domestic Slavery in West Africa with Particular Reference to Sierra Leone (London: Frederick Muller, 1975).

in southern Sierra Leone.[24] Both authors, however, treat slaves as objects. Grace sees them as objects of external concerns and politics. Adams conceives of them mainly as trade items in the economic and political transactions among elite groups and Europeans in the southern Sierra Leone.

Peasants have featured even less in Sierra Leone history. Martin Kaniki and M.J.M. Sibanda, in their construction of the pre-Depression colonial political economy of Sierra Leone devoted space to peasant and rural production. Except for the Idara revolt which is examined in chapter five of this work, they paid little attention to peasant politics. Both dissertations terminate around 1939 and therefore did not examine the 1955-56 anti-chief rebellion. Two historical dissertations by David Moore-Sieray and Joe A.D. Alie examine colonial agricultural policies between 1896 to 1990.[25] Moore-Sieray, who looked at rice production between 1896 and 1945, approached his study mainly from the vantage point of the policies and institutional dynamics of the colonial agricultural department. Alie also focuses largely on the efforts of the state but incorporates the perspectives of farmers. Although Alie highlighted peasant concerns and problems, both scholars ignored rural politics and conflicts. In fact, they avoided the use of the politically charged term, "peasant" and used the more descriptive word, "farmer," to describe rural producers in Sierra Leone.[26]

Class, Appropriation, Protest and Accommodation

Part of the reason why Alie and Moore-Sieray stayed away from the term, "peasant," may have been the difficulty of defining and conceptualizing it. Mukonoweshuro, who has mapped out the class and social contours of Sierra Leone,

---

[24]. Adam Jones, From Slaves to Palm Kernels: A History of the Galinhas Country (West Africa) 1730-1890 (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1983).

[25]. David Moore-Sieray, "The Evolution of Colonial Agricultural Policy In Sierra Leone: With Reference to Swamp Rice Cultivation 1908-1939." (Ph.D diss., School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London, 1988); Joe Anthony Alie, "Agricultural Policies and Strategies in Southeastern Sierra Leone: 1945-1990," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1993).

[26]. Ibid.

contends that throughout the colonial period peasants remained a "poorly formed class"[27] Allen Isaacman, in his illuminating review of the literature on peasant protests in Africa, concedes that peasants are "an ambiguous social category. They are difficult to define and their political behaviour defies most generalizations."[28] This ambiguity becomes more pronounced in northwestern Sierra Leone which had no major land scarcity, stratification or income differentials among peasants. Also, the region never became a significant export crop producing area during or after colonialism. In spite of the difficulties associated with the term, peasant, it remains the most useful category for understanding rural producers and their politics in northwestern Sierra Leone.

Some of the most violent and unexpected rural protests originated from this region. One such protest was the 1955-56 anti-chief rebellion, which occurred at a time when Sierra Leone and the rest of West Africa were moving relatively peacefully towards independence. How can this be explained?

Let us start by considering the social and "class" distinctions that existed among the rural population of northwestern Sierra Leone. Historically, the most significant social distinction in the region was between subalterns (commoners) and the elite. This precolonial elite, which was later coopted by the colonial state, included all of those who by virtue of their political, social or religious position were able to enforce authority, and extract resources from commoners. It consisted of chiefs, headmen, warriors, title-holders, large traders (who were sometimes chiefs), religious figures (indigenous as well as Islamic) and heads of indigenous societies. Among the subaltern groups (commoners), the main social distinction up to 1928 was between the "free" and the "unfree (slave)." The majority of the "free" were peasants, although they also included petty traders, artisans and other smaller rural groups. The "free" had more autonomy and control over their labour, work and resources. Slaves, who are fully discussed in the first chapter of this work, had less of all of these. But what united the "free" and the "unfree" was their relative subjugation to the elite and

---

[27]. Eliphas Mukonoweshuro, Colonialism, Class Formation and Underdevelopment in Sierra Leone (Lanham, MD.: University of America Press, 1991), p. 238.

[28]. Isaacman, "Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa," p. 205.

impoverishment. In fact, throughout the colonial period, the main characteristic of the "commoner" population in the northwestern region was its relative poverty vis-a-vis the inhabitants of the southern and eastern areas of Sierra Leone. Colonialism accentuated, rather than reduced that gap, by giving the inhabitants of the northwestern region less access to education, and to social and economic opportunities.

Given the absence of land problems and stark rural differentiation (two key issues which inform most of the studies on rural protest), the primary sources of conflict in northwestern Sierra Leone were the attempts by the precolonial elite, and later the colonial state, to appropriate slave and peasant labour and resources.[29] Their appropriations took the form of "customary" and coerced labour, tribute, taxation and unequal exchange of values. Taxation included not only direct cash appropriations from peasants but also dues taken off their goods. Unequal exchange took place mainly in the market place. With the rural impoverishment in the northwestern region, big traders balanced the risks they incurred by trading with peasants on credit by reaping high levels of profits in return. If taxation, labour and commodity exchange rates (prices) became the main objects of rural protests, three main targets also emerged in the region. The elites, epitomised by chiefs, emerged as the primary targets of slave and peasant protests. The colonial state became the second target. The third target of protest were big traders, who during the colonial period were Europeans and Syrians. The Syrians were the more vulnerable of the two trading groups. They had more direct associations with Africans and they were initially perceived as lacking the support of the colonial state. The attempts made by the state and these elite groups to increase their extraction of resources from subaltern groups, sometimes in difficult times, attracted protests.

However, the fact that clear grievances and political targets existed did not mean that protests in northwestern Sierra Leone always assumed dichotomous forms as sometimes implied in some resistance literature.[30] Although moments of

---

[29]. Mukonoweshuro, Colonialism, Class Formation and Underdevelopment, p. 240.

[30]. James Scott has drawn this kind of sharp dichotomy in protest movements, referring to the different groups as dominant and dominated. See James Scott,

confrontation give the impression of sharply drawn battle-lines, there is a danger of seeing only the polarities in protests. Fanon's extreme characterization of colonial resistance, especially that of Algeria, as a violent "Manichean" struggle exemplifies this danger.[31] As demonstrated at several places in this dissertation, protests and resistance could be multi-layered. Different forces from opposite sides of the social divide could unite momentarily for their own dissimilar ends.[32] This was clearly evident in the 1898 rebellion with slaves fighting on the side of the colonial state; in 1919, with chiefs giving license to subaltern groups against Syrians traders; and in 1955 with sections of the local elite providing leadership and support for peasants against chiefs.

Implicit in the use of the term "protest" up to this point is that it involves the subaltern contestation of real or perceived unequal relations and oppressive practices by elite groups. What within this dissertation constitutes protest? Studies of subaltern resistance in Asia, Africa and America have uncovered an arsenal of weapons ranging from covert and seemingly harmless acts to violent confrontations organized by subaltern groups to challenge the power of elite groups. Covert and innocuous actions, now popularly labelled "weapons of the weak," include rumour-mongering, feigning illness, evasions, refusals to work and absenteeism.[33] For the historian, these strategies of protest pose some problems. Deployed at individual and collective levels, they are usually very difficult to track or decipher. Second, if protest is conceived as a struggle against power, care must be taken to separate the actual

---

Domination and the Arts of Resistance: hidden Transcripts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). pp. 198-201.

[31]. His chapter "Concerning Violence," focuses on the polarization of African life under colonialism. See especially his discussion on the Algerian situation, Fanon, Wretched of the Earth, 41-49.

[32]. Anshan Li makes the same observation in his study of rural protest in the Gold Coast. See Anshan Li, "Social Protest in the Gold Coast: A Study of the Eastern Province in the Colonial Period," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1993).

[33]. Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, 1972); Ranajit Guha, Elements of Peasants Insurgency (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); James Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1985).

contestation of power in the use of these strategies from the banalities of every day life.

Power generates protest, sometimes condones it, but does not desire it. Ultimately, it seeks to repress or control protest. How the local elite and the colonial state responded to subaltern protest constitutes a secondary focus of this dissertation. In precolonial and colonial Sierra Leone, those who wielded power tried to suppress, contain or reduce subaltern protests to the level where social "peace" could exist. They used violence (or the threat of violence), social institutions, culture, law, and most important, periodic adjustments of power relations to reduce subaltern protests. Those periodic regulations of power, sometimes involved the legitimation and redress of subaltern grievances by the elite. The contention that power, African as well as colonial, in the face of resistance produces periodic regulations of power relations, forms the crux of this dissertation. Throughout the dissertation, the concept of moral economy, first developed by British social historians, is employed to elaborate on this theme.

How the precolonial moral economy of servitude emerged in northwestern Sierra Leone and was refurbished by the colonial state forms the subject of the first chapter of this dissertation. The chapter examines the precolonial social and economic context as well as the patterns of elite domination and slave protest. It situates the struggle between elite groups and slaves within the transition from the Atlantic slave trade to "legitimate trade" and the general crisis it generated in northwestern Sierra Leone. The chapter investigates how the struggle between slaves and masters, and of Africans against encroaching European colonialism produced a moral economy of colonialism.

The ultimate establishment of that moral economy entailed the demonstration of British imperial might, administrative and legal hegemony, and paternalism, as well as the cooptation of the precolonial elite. Chapter two explores the operation of the colonial moral economy and its contestation by subaltern groups. Its looks mainly at the covert strategies employed by subalterns to resist the demands of the colonial state and the local elite.

The covert weapons used by subaltern groups in the pre-war period gave way to open conflict with the state in 1919. Chapter three investigates the conditions

which transformed covert acts of resistance into a wave of anti-Syrian "riots" in Freetown and the major towns in northwestern Sierra Leone. The chapter poses the following questions: Against whom and what were subaltern groups "rioting?" What was the effect of the riots on the moral economy of colonialism in the region?

The riots forced the colonial government to tackle the issue of food production and rural labour in the 1920s. Chapter four investigates the attempts by the government to increase rice production in northwestern Sierra Leone. It discusses the consequences of government efforts concerning rural production and the structure of rural labour. It focuses especially on the processes and conditions leading to the abolition of slavery. Lastly, it looks at the conditions under which slavery was abolished and the consequences for northwestern Sierra Leone.

The 1929 abolition of slavery came on the eve of the great depression and a locust attack on the region. The despondency and the destitution among ex-slaves and peasants created by these developments provided the requisite elements for a Muslim cleric, Idara Konthorfili, to contest the hegemony of the colonial state. Chapter five investigates how Idara attempted to convert latent rural discontent, using Islamic revivalism, to protest the local chieftaincy and the colonial state. It examines how the rebellious project of the cleric was constructed and utilized against the state. What the cleric sought to achieve and the significance of his rebellion for the colonial moral economy constitute additional concerns of this chapter.

In the aftermath of Idara's revolt, the economic basis of the colony shifted with the discovery of minerals. Chapter six examines the continuing effects of the great depression and the impact of minerals on rural protests in northwestern Sierra Leone. How did lingering economic difficulties and the shift in the political economy of colonialism affect subaltern protest in northwestern Sierra Leone? What new forms of protest did they engender and how did the colonial state and the local elite respond to these forms?

Colonial response to rural protest and attempts to produce a new moral economy in the 1930s and 1940s led to the reorganization of local political and social institutions. The outbreak of World War II interrupted the colonial reorganization process. The resumption of colonial efforts after the war led to a peasant rebellion against their chiefs in 1955 and 1956. Chapter seven investigates the origins, context

and character of this peasant rebellion. It poses the following questions: What were the peasants protesting against and why did they target their chiefs? Why did peasants choose the decolonization moment, a relatively tranquil period in West African history, to protest? How did they justify their actions? What did the rebellion reveal about the decolonization process and the relations between the state and the local elite, on the one hand, and peasants on the other?

The dissertation is based mainly on archival sources from the Sierra Leone National Archive, and the archive of the Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone in Freetown; the Public Record Office in Kew; the School of Oriental and African Studies Library in London; the Rhodes House Library at the University of Oxford; the CMS archive at the University of Birmingham Library; and the Royal Commonwealth Library in London. It also draws on the vast collection of government documents and reports, and newspaper holdings of the Campus African Microfilm Project (CAMP) of the Centre for Research Libraries.

One major omission in the dissertation is oral testimony. I am quite conscious that in a dissertation which seeks to give agency to subaltern groups, their collective memory should have been recorded and their voices given greater prominence. This was my intention. However, collecting oral evidence during my research in Sierra Leone between December, 1994, and June, 1995, was impossible. During that period, the insurgency by the Revolutionary United Front against the government extended to within 18 kilometres of Freetown and effectively curtailed travel to the northwestern region of the country. While sitting in the National Archive, alone for most of the time, I could sometimes hear the guns of war. Under these circumstances, research was painful, and travelling and talking to people about events which seemed far from their daily concerns about preserving their lives, even more difficult. I did have informal discussions with people who had lived through some of the events recounted in the dissertation, but these helped more in the clarification of my thinking than in the substance of my writing. Nonetheless, I have sought to give full expression to subalterns in those instances where they have left documents or where their testimonies have been recorded by the state. As much as possible, I tried to be vigilant about the mediative and refractive biases of colonial recorders in the documents. With peace now slowly being restored to the country, I am hoping to

definitely include the voices of subalterns in my continuing research on their actions.

CHAPTER ONE

RESISTANCE, CONQUEST AND CONSOLIDATION, 1790-1899

The Atlantic slave trade, which ensued from European contact with Africans from the fifteenth century onwards, left its imprint on the West African coast. The trade affected the development of economies, societies and polities in the region. In the area which subsequently became northwestern Sierra Leone, it engendered intra-elite conflicts and resistance from slaves. By the end of the eighteenth century, the trade was in decline. Britain, which had been a leading slave-trading state, became the foremost advocate for the retrenchment and abolition of the Atlantic slave trade and the institution of "legitimate trade" in raw materials.

British efforts to curtail slavery and promote "legitimate commerce" produced a structural crisis in the hinterland of Sierra Leone. Their actions intensified pressures on the indigenous elite groups, who fought to maintain their position in the changing global and regional economy. Slave resistance heightened and occasionally assumed a violent character. By the late 1880s, the British decided to impose a *"pax britannica"* over the hinterland.

This chapter investigates the specific character of the crisis in northwestern Sierra Leone and the circumstances leading to the *"pax britannica."* It focuses mainly on the dual resistance of slaves against elite control and domination, and that of African kings against the encroachment of British colonialism on northwestern Sierra Leone. It examines the patterns of pre-colonial domination and resistance, and looks at how they set the tone for colonialism.

Economy, Society and Politics in Precolonial Northwestern Sierra Leone

Resistance occurred in a constantly shifting context in which centuries of migration, trade and Islam played a vital role in the development of society and politics. The Limba and Bullom peoples were the earliest inhabitants of northwestern Sierra Leone. The date of their arrival into this predominantly inland plains region cannot be

established with any certainty.[1] Temne and Soso speaking peoples began encroaching on the region from the late fourteenth century onwards from the Futa Jallon and Upper Niger areas. The Temne eventually occupied the northwestern, coastal and central portions of contemporary Sierra Leone. The Soso concentrated their settlements in areas spanning the Guinea-Sierra Leone border, close to the Limba.[2] Portuguese observers, who journeyed to Sierra Leone in the sixteenth century, collectively labelled these earlier groups *Sapes*.[3]

The later migrants joined the earlier inhabitants in a tropical environment of rainforest, savanna grassland and riverine mangrove swamp. The environment supported small rural economies based largely on rice production, animal husbandry and vegiculture. The uneven fertility of the soil forced cultivators to shift their farming operations periodically. Although small quantities of wet rice could be grown on swamps and river banks, the bulk of the rice crop was cultivated on upland farms. The two major seasons of this tropical coast, wet and dry, dictated the farming cycle and labour rhythm.[4] Forest and bush clearing, cutting and burning in preparation for farming were completed before the onset of the rainy season, between December and March. The crop was sown at the beginning of the rainy season, April to June.

---

[1]. Ruth Finnegan mentions that Limba traditions assert that they had always been in the region. She maintains that it is impossible to reconstruct with any degree of accuracy the earliest history of the Limba. In fact, before the nineteenth century, access to information about the Limba was scarce since they lived mostly in inaccessible mountain villages. Ruth Finnegan, A Survey of the Limba of Northern Sierra Leone (London: HMSO, 1965), p.14 and ff.

[2]. See PRO CO 879/25/332, Particulars Relating to the Tribes and Districts of Sierra Leone and its Vicinity, compiled by J.C. Parkes of the Aborigines Department from information furnished by T.G. Lawson, Government Interpreter. See also J.C. Ernest Parkes, Elementary Geography of the Colony of Sierra Leone and its Hinterland (Freetown: J.T. Sawyerr Excelsior Printing Works, 1894); J.I. Clarke, Sierra Leone in Maps (London, University of London Press, 1966), p.39.

[3]. See Christopher Fyfe, Sierra Leone Inheritance (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) pp. 30-35.

[4]. J.I. Clarke, Sierra Leone in Maps, p. 20; George E. Brooks, Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society and Trade in West Africa, 1000-1630 (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 13, 21-22.

Harvesting started from September. Farm work was usually structured along gender lines. Men prepared the farms and sowed the crops. Women and children weeded. Children scared off birds. Everyone participated in the harvesting of the crops.[5] Since settlement patterns revolved around family households, villages and small towns, agricultural production was organized largely around family and communal groups. The elites, with larger households and access to tribute labour, commanded more substantial labour resources. Specialized labour was also expended on hunting, fishing, salt-making, pottery, cloth weaving and dyeing, and leather-working in addition to agriculture.[6]

Trade complemented agricultural production. Exchange of agricultural products and manufactured goods took place primarily within the region. Long distance trade in kola nuts, gold and salt developed to complement local trade patterns. As the trade in kola nuts, gold and slaves grew, different trade networks emerged which connected Futa Jallon and the upper Niger region with the Atlantic coast.[7] The two Skarcies Rivers, the Rokel River (Sierra Leone River) and the Melakori River played a crucial role in the development of these networks. Their strategic islands (Tasso, Baunce, Tombo) and river-side towns (Port Loko, Mange, Rokon, Mambolo) became important nodes in the developing regional and Atlantic trade.[8]

The early political institutions and processes which developed among the Limba, Temne, Bullom and Soso peoples are difficult to reconstruct. Migrational patterns, defence, settlement fragmentation and other factors seemed to have led to a strong emphasis on small territories encompassing a number of villages. The individual villages had between twenty persons to thousands of inhabitants. The actual number,

---

[5]. Walter Rodney, A History of the Upper Guinea Coast 1545-1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp.23-25; Finnegan, The Limba of Sierra Leone, pp.99-110.

[6]. Rodney, History of Upper Guinea Coast, pp. 23-25; Peter Kup, History of Sierra Leone, 1400-1787 ((London: Cambridge University Press, 1961) p.120.

[7]. Brooks, Landlords and Strangers, pp.70-71.

[8]. Kup, History of Sierra Leone 1400-1787, pp. 4-5.

size and population of such territories varied over time.[9] Captain Gordon Laing, who sojourned in the region in the early nineteenth century, noted that the Temne had four large polities.[10] However, at the onset of the Protectorate in the late 19th century, about forty such territories or chiefdoms occupied the northwestern region or Karene District as it was called by the British.[11]

Walter Rodney pointed out that these early societies were far from stateless or classless. Distinctions were drawn between the elite (*fidalgos*) and the (*plebues*) commoners in power, wealth, attire, pomp and circumstance.[12] Among the Temne, the elite comprised kings (*obai*), their officials (*kaprs*) and lineage heads (*ogbonli*). They ruled the different territories and exercised much control over trade. The kings, chosen for their age, wisdom and knowledge of local laws, exercised judicial, legislative and executive functions.[13] Temne king-making became highly ritualized over time. Temne kings were crowned and "buried" by *Ragbenle*, a secret society. Once installed, the kings became theoretically semi-divine with absolute powers over

---

[9]. Ibid., p.4; D.J. Siddle, "The Evolution of Rural Settlement Patterns in Sierra Leone *circa* 1400-1968," Sierra Leone Geographical Journal, 13, (1968), pp.33-43; Rodney, History of the Upper Guinea Coast, p.27.

[10]. Captain Gordon Laing, Travels through Timannee, Kooranko and Soolimania Countries in West Africa (London: John Murray, 1825).

[11]. Making up of this number were four Bullom chiefdoms, Kaffu Bullom, Lokko Massama, Mambolo and Samu; approximately 25 Temne chiefdoms: Lower Loko, Marampa, Mange, Romendi, Buya, Makama, Tinkatupa, Dibya, Kasseh, Mapaki, Malal, Bureh, Makonteh, Talla, Magbema, Billeh Magbema, Munu-Masumgbala-Kasseh, Dixing, Sanda and five Bombali chiefdoms (without distinctive individual names); six Loko chiefdoms (without distinctive individual names; four Soso chiefdoms: Tambacca (Southern), Tambacca (Northern), Koinmakka and Soso-Limba; and Two Limba chiefdoms: Tonko Limba and Sella Limba. SLNA, Decree Book: Karene District, 1904.

[12]. Rodney, History of the Upper Guinea Coast, pp. 33-38.

[13]. Crooks, A History of Sierra Leone, p.17; A. Ijagbemi, "Oral Tradition and the Emergence of Temne Chiefdoms," African Research Bulletin, (March 1977), 26-32; Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, p. 33-35.

their people and could not be deposed.[14] They embodied the unity and will of their people, and were supposed to receive their unquestioned obedience. Temne kings "owned" their people and "lived" off them. Kings had access to the labour of commoners for their farms and their houses. However, they did not own land, and had limited power in its apportionment. In return, they were expected to be paternalistic, to be the "father" of their people, protecting and providing for them in times of need.[15]

Different mechanisms were built into the political system to check possible despotic behaviour by kings. Their *kaprs* and their counsellors (who included family members such as mothers and sisters) were expected to moderate their behaviour. Bad kings could also lose the protection of God and be harmed by witchcraft. Most important, their people could desert them. In a period when people could easily establish new settlements, desertion could be a serious blow to a king. Kingship among the Limba, Soso and Bullom, who also lived in small territories, was similar to the Temne. Among these groups, however, ritualism and absolutism were less marked and the rulers lacked the semi-divinity associated with Temne kingship.[16]

Various "secret" societies such as *poro, gbangbani* and *bundo* also played an important role in the social and political processes among the Temne, Bullom and other

---

[14]. Theoretically, Temne kings did not die. They merely returned to Futa Jallon. New kings represented a continuity rather than break in rule. Dead kings were buried with the heads of their of predecessors to symbolize that continuity.

[15]. Esu Biyi, "The Temne and How They Make Their Kings," Journal of the African Society, 12, (1913), pp. 193-199; Bai Inga, "Ceremonies on the Death and Crowning of Chief in Temne Country, Sierra Leone Studies (old series), 2, 1919; V. R. Dorjahn "The Changing System of the Temne, Africa, 30, (1960).

[16]. Kings were called *manga* among the Soso and *gbaku* among the Limba. Finnegan noted that little was known of the Limba political system before the 19th century. The Tonko Limba kingship, however, bears close resemblance in conception, coronation rituals and powers to that of the Temne. Being closest to the Temne, Finnegan argues that Tonko Limba must have been influenced by them. Finnegan, The Limba of Sierra Leone, pp. 20-43. See also M. McCulloch, Peoples of Sierra Leone (London: International African Institute, 1950).

groups. The origins of these societies are much debated among scholars.[17] *Poro* (*gbangbani* among the Limba), an exclusively male institution, socialized young men, made and enforced local laws, mediated community conflicts and carried out many other functions. Although kings participated in *poro*, the political influence and sanctions of the society on them were unclear. *Bundo*, its female counterpart, socialized young women into adulthood. It was a powerful group which had the power of sanction over the behaviour of men, especially on matters involving *bundo*.[18] Other groups, some of which accepted both male and female members, existed among the various societies. They usually had different functions and orientations from *bundo* and *poro*.

The political and social processes among the various ethnic groups were very far from static. The incursions of newcomers into the region brought new influences. In the mid-sixteenth century, the *Mane*, a Mande-speaking group from the disintegrating Mali empire, overran the Sierra Leone hinterland and much of the upper Guinea coast. Only the Limba and Soso successfully resisted them. Mane invaders conquered and imposed their rule over the Temne and the Bullom. They organized four large autonomous kingdoms under the suzerainty of *Mandemanca* in Cape Mount (contemporary Liberia).[19] In less than a century, the Mane conquerors had been repelled and absorbed by the locals -- but not before they had left an enduring demographic and social impact. The Loko, a Mande people who later occupied

---

[17]. Kenneth Little, "The Political Function of Poro: Part I" Africa, Vol 35, (1965), pp. 349-365; Kenneth Little, "The Political Function of Poro: Part II" Africa, Vol 36, (1966), pp. 62-73; Rodney, History of Upper Guinea Coast, p.67; Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, pp. 23-25.

[18]. F.W. Butt-Thompson, Secret Societies of West Africa (London, 1929); V.R. Dorjahn, "The Initiation and Training of Temne *Poro* Members" in Simon Ottenberg (ed.), African Religious Groups and Beliefs (Delhi: Archana Publications, 1982) pp. 35-62; Simon Ottenberg, "Male and Female Secret Societies Among the Bafodea Limba of Northern Sierra Leone" in Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E. A. Van Beek & Dennis L. Thomson (eds.), Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression (London: James Currey, 1994), pp. 363-387.

[19]. Fyfe, Sierra Leone Inheritance, pp. 43-49. For an excellent and critical analysis of the Mane invasion and its impact on Sierra Leone see Chapter 2 of Rodney's History of the Upper Guinea Coast, pp. 39-70.

territories contiguous to the Temne in central Sierra Leone, emerged from the Mane invasion. Mande names became common among Temne and Bullom peoples.[20]

The Mane left a contradictory historical legacy. Successful resistance against the powerful Mane invaders became a part of Limba and Soso historical memory. In contrast, the Temne inherited a memory of unity and strong military and political institutions. Farmi Tarmi, one of the Mane military generals, became the "father of the nation" for many Temne polities, especially Port Loko, which later became the most important centre of Temne activities.[21] Tarmi gave the Temne political and military unity which they did not possess before the invasion or subsequently. The Mane temporarily coopted earlier political institutions and territorial units into their larger kingdoms. However, the kingdoms did not survive the eclipse of Mane for long and the conquered groups slowly reverted to small autonomous polities.

Mande influence in northern Sierra Leone was also evident in the spread of Islam. Mande groups (Soso, Mandingo and Serakuli) and Fulbe missionaries, traders (*dyula*) and warriors slowly pushed the Islamic frontier southwards to the Sierra Leone hinterland. Muslim teachers, administrators and traders exposed Temne, Bullom and Limba to the new religion.[22] Islam brought literacy and new knowledge to the region. The indigenous elite profited from the administrative, political and military benefits that came with the religion. Political titles among the Temne, Limba and Bullom like *Almamy* and *Alkali* came to reflect Mande and Islamic influences. Powerful Muslim *morimen*, who were believed to have the capacity to divine, heal and protect,

---

[20]. Ibid; Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, pp. 14-30.

[21]. C.F. Schlenker, A Collection of Temne Traditions, Fables and Proverbs (London: Church Missionary Society, 1861), pp.3-5. Ijagbemi argues that these traditions of Farmi Tarmi are not common to all Temne chiefdoms. Southern Temne chiefdoms attribute their origin and kingship to other figures. Ijagbemi, "Oral Tradition and the Emergence of Temne Chiefdoms," pp. 2-25.

[22]. David E. Skinner, "Mande Settlement and the Development of Islamic Institutions in Sierra Leone, International Journal of African Historical Studies, 11, 1 (1978), pp. 32-62; David Skinner, "Islam in the Northern Hinterland and Its Influence on the Development of the Sierra Leone Colony," in Alusine Jalloh and David E. Skinner (eds.), Islam and Trade in Sierra Leone (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press Inc., 1997), pp. 1-20.

enhanced the power and prestige of rulers. They protected king and commoners from ailments, natural and supernatural. Many Islamic proselytizers were able to successfully insert themselves into positions of power and authority, and create new ruling lineages in the process.[23]

Islam became a source of conflict in northwestern Sierra Leone. Islamic influences did not always intrude peacefully into the region. Sometimes, they came in the form of jihads. The most famous were the Futa Jallon jihads of the eighteenth century.[24] These Jihads bred resistance from those they sought to convert and those they enslaved. Limba and other groups in northern Sierra Leone, as well as *Hubbu* refugees fleeing the jihadists, resisted fiercely.

Overall the impact of Islam on the region was uneven. In all groups in the region, some sections of the population became muslim, but some groups became more Islamicized than others. The Limba and Loko were the least Islamicized. Among the Temne, the northern sections of their population became more Islamicized than those in the south. In terms of religion, Temne polities divided into those which still had *poro*, and those who had abandoned it after their acceptance of Islam. As a consequence, historians have tended to separate the Temne polities into muslim and *poro*.[25] Although, the yardstick is fairly accurate, the actual religious and cultural boundaries were less firm. The emergent religious milieu in many areas was a flexible and syncretic arrangement of Islamic and indigenous elements.

By the seventeenth century, the Temne had sufficiently profited from the different influences in the region to dominate the landscape, demographically, linguistically and spatially. Thomas Winterbottom, a British medical surgeon who

---

[23]. Skinner, "Mande Settlement in Sierra Leone," pp.42-45; Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, pp. 36-45.

[24]. On the oral account of the Futa Jallon Jihad see Omar Jamburia, "The Story of Gehad or Holy War of the Foulahs," in Sierra Leone Studies (old series), 3, (1919) pp. 30-32; Walter Rodney, "Jihad and Social Revolution in Fouta Djallon in Eighteenth Century," Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, IV (1968) pp. 269-284; David Skinner, "Islam in Sierra Leone During the Nineteenth Century," (Ph.D diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1971), pp.53-54.

[25]. Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, p.33; Sibanda, "Colonial Policy and Development in Northwestern Sierra Leone," pp. 45-47.

travelled around the upper Guinea coast in the late eighteenth century, noted the strong "Timannee" presence in northern Sierra Leone. He recorded how the Temne had pushed south to the Atlantic coast, displacing the Bullom in the process. Temne had occupied the areas around the major rivers and their branches.[26] They had seized control of the strategically located Port Loko, Magbeli and other towns in the region. Temne spatial dominance placed their elite in a strategic position to benefit from the Atlantic slave trade which peaked in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Spatial domination invited challenges from other groups. Those groups which could deploy violence and control trade routes effectively profited most from slavery. Ijagbemi, Howard and Skinner, and Wylie have elaborated on the extensive inter-elite competition between the Temne, Lokos and Sosos for the control of Port Loko, Magbeli, Rokon and other important trade centres.[27]

The Atlantic slave trade also facilitated an increased usage of servile labour locally. Slaves were used in transportation, agricultural production and war. Many kings and headmen owned and employed between 200 and 1,000 slaves.[28] Large precolonial polities like Futa Jallon and Moriah on the Sierra Leone-Guinea border were dependent on slave labour. The elite of Port Loko derived much of their wealth from the trade and use of slaves. Among the Temne, Limba and Loko, servile labour complemented but never supplanted communal and kinship labour. Nonetheless, the struggle to acquire slaves and control trade networks became crucial to the evolution of the economy and politics of the region.

Looking at the dynamics of migrations, Islam, slavery, trade and warfare, historians have generally tended to analyze politics in northwestern Sierra Leone mainly in terms of the interaction of elite groups. They have focused on political institutions,

---

[26]. Thomas Winterbottom, An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone: Part I (London: C. Whittingham, 1803), p.3.

[27]. Ijagbemi, "A History of the Temnes in the Nineteenth Century"; Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, pp. 71-89; Allen M. Howard and David E. Skinner, "Network Building and Political Power in North-Western Sierra Leone, 1800-1865," Africa, vol. 54. 2 (1984) p. 3.

[28]. J. Matthews, A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone (London: 1788), p.149.

famous kings, dominant lineages, and the webs of alliances that were spun.[29] In his study of trade networks and spatial dynamics in the upper Guinea plains, Allen Howard maintains that precolonial politics were essentially "a contest among big men ... and families arrayed in alliances."[30] He identified big men as chiefs, office-holders, war leaders, and all others with a strong political base: those who commanded prestige, wealth, allies and compounds of relatives and dependents (essentially the *fidalgoes* mentioned by Rodney). It is undeniable that the elite occupied a significant and hegemonic position in precolonial politics, but the thesis that the historical process was essentially a "contest" among them needs modification. Subalterns, especially slaves, played an active and important role in influencing and shaping that contest. Slaves undertook actions which had major consequences in the pre-colonial period. In fact, the crisis of transition in the hinterland of Sierra Leone in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century cannot be understood without looking closely at slavery and slave resistance.

Slavery in Northwestern Sierra Leone

The nature of slavery and status of slaves in Africa has provoked much debate among scholars. The debate has been instructive in demonstrating the fluidity and variation in the position of slaves and their conditions of servitude.[31] The variations, however, did not erase the subjugation and alienation which characterized the lot of the slave. The person, labour and reproductive capacity of the slave primarily

---

[29]. See Ijagbemi, "A History of the Temnes in the Nineteenth Century;" Howard, "Big Men, Traders and Chiefs;" Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, pp .208-216.

[30]. Howard, "Big Men, Traders and Chiefs." p.4.

[31]. Walter Rodney, "Slavery and Other Forms of Social Oppression in the Context of the Atlantic Slave Trade, Journal of African History, 7, (1966), pp. 431-443; J.D. Fage, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of West African History;" Journal of African History, 10, (1969), pp. 393-404; Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977); Frederick Cooper, "The Problem of Slavery in African Studies," Journal of African History, 20, 1, (1979), pp. 103-125; Paul Lovejoy, The Ideology of Slavery in Africa (London: Sage Publications, 1981), pp. 11-40.

enhanced the interests and status of another person.[32] Violence, custom, oaths, religion and marriage were used to subordinate slaves to masters. Recapturing the enslavement process among the Temne, Northcote Thomas, a colonial government anthropologist, noted:

> The slave was stocked for four days after he was purchased and had to name his country and his parents; bread was sacrificed and he was sworn on it not to run away; but he was not trusted for a year; and two years would elapse before he went to reside in a slave village.[33]

The infringement of this unequal agreement attracted flogging, stocking, execution or other punitive measures.

Some of the societies in the region etched the marks of servitude on slaves. John Matthews, a British naval officer-turned-slave-trader and pro-slavery propagandist, saw distinctions between slave and freeborn in late eighteenth century northwestern Sierra Leone. In his anthropological and pro-slavery treatise, A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone (1785), Matthews noted differences between slave and freeborn in apparel, body tattoos, food, settlement, mannerisms and demeanour.[34] He maintained slaves had different "tattows" from freeborn, slept on the ground rather than elevated "beds" and ate poorly.[35] Unlike the rest of the population, slaves ate mostly cassava. Consumption of the crop became a mark of servitude. By the late nineteenth century, the statement, "[h]e eats cassada like a slave" was considered a major sneer against an enemy.[36] Slaves continued to be fed poorly. During his survey, Thomas noted that many slaves had "poorly developed" physiques.[37]

Not all Europeans saw distinctions between slaves and masters. Winterbottom revealed strong bonds of affection between master and slave. In his medical and

---

[32]. Lovejoy, The ideology of slavery in Africa, p. 11.

[33]. Northcote W. Thomas, Anthropological Report on Sierra Leone: Part 1. Law and Customs of the Timne and other Tribes (London: Harrison and Sons, 1916), p.158.

[34]. Matthews, A Voyage to River Sierra Leone, pp. 93-94.

[35]. Ibid.

[36]. Anti-Slavery Reporter, January-March 1897. p.29.

[37]. Thomas, Anthropological Report on Sierra Leone, p.158.

anthropological treatise, Account of the Native Africans (1803), Winterbottom mentioned that the heir-apparent of a headman ate with the "meanest of his father's people" and that slaves were treated with the "greatest humanity."[38] Thirty-three years later, another anti-slavery polemicist and Christian missionary, F. Harrison Rankin, supported Winterbottom's perceptions in his two-volume work, The White Man's Grave (1836). Conceiving Africans as some kind of "noble savage" corrupted by European avarice, he observed that the slave among the Temne had "virtual liberation." Rankin wrote, "No distinction was perceptible between the treatment and comportment of the bondsmen and the free." Children of slaves and the local Temne King associated and played together, he observed.[39] Yet he added a caveat suggesting that these conditions were not universal.

European observations of slavery in Sierra Leone in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were pregnant with prejudice and tainted by the acrimonious discourse over the system in Europe. Even when observers purported to give a fair representation of slaves and slavery to Europe, their biases shone through the "facts." Matthews had no problems with the trans-Atlantic slave trade and New World slavery, while Rankin and Winterbottom abhorred the system. What can be extracted from the competing discourses and observations of slavery is that African societies and groups in the region made distinctions between different types of servitude.

The distinctions, if European observers had looked closely, were partly a function of time, work, and labour control on the part of masters. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many African societies differentiated "ordinary" slaves from "house" slaves. Newly acquired slaves were regarded as ordinary slaves, less attached to their master and his society, and requiring the greatest degree of coercion. They consisted of war captives, purchased persons and unredeemed pawns. Regarded as disposable chattels, they were usually, "fixed to the soil," working on rice farms and transporting goods.[40] They laboured from "sunrise till sundown," usually under close

---

[38]. Winterbottom, Account of Native Africans, p.127.

[39]. F. Harrison Rankin, The White Man's Grave: A Visit to Sierra Leone in 1834: Vol 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1836), p. 76-77.

[40]. Matthews, A Voyage to River Sierra Leone, p.150.

supervision.[41] During the slave trade, they were sold to European traders almost immediately after harvests or on delivery of their cargo. Matthew, who gave the most vivid description of this labour strategy, said it was most common among the large Mandingo and Foulah slave owners. Ordinary field slaves could be tied down by their masters and have their conditions ameliorated. Masters rewarded "well-behaved" and hard-working "field slaves" with slave wives, personal farm plots and incremental "free" days.[42]

Time, force and the slave's conduct thus influenced the ability of masters to control slaves. The position of house slaves or *olisos*, illustrated a different strategy of control by masters and their societies. Being long-serving or second generation slaves, *olisos* were more integrated into the household and kinship group of their owners. They required less physical coercion and control. They acted as domestic servants and the males acted as squires for their masters in war. They could be hired out for wages and be used as pawns and pledges.[43] Treated as kin and allowed their own farms, *olisos* could not be sold except if they committed grave offenses.[44] For the fragmented societies and polities of northwestern Sierra Leone, dependent on lineage control and careful household production strategies but possessing a minimum degree of military power, "olisos" constituted an efficient way of accumulating and maintaining labour.

Indigenous laws and elite paternalism complemented the strategy of absorbing slaves into the larger community. Paternalism and custom alleviated the position of slaves. Local customs limited excessive abuse and cruelty against house slaves.[45] Where masters became unduly harsh, kings, especially among the Temne and Soso, had an obligation to respond to appeals of slaves and provide protection for them.

---

[41]. Ibid.

[42]. Thomas, Anthropological Report on Sierra Leone, p.159

[43]. Matthew, A Voyage to River Sierra Leone, p.150.

[44]. Thomas, Anthropological Report on Sierra Leone, p.154; Matthew, Voyage to River Sierra Leone, p.153.

[45]. Correspondence Relating to Slavery.

These societies also provided ways out of servitude. The kin of slaves could purchase their freedom. Slaves could free themselves by purchasing other slaves to take their places.[46] A slave could also be emancipated if a childless man adopted him and "put him in his own belly." Such adoptees, however, had limited inheritance rights and could not benefit from corporate kinship assets.[47] Attempts at creating fictive kinship relations, however, did not efface the "natal alienation" suffered by slaves.[48]

Descriptions of the paternalism or brutality of slave owners among the different ethnic groups shifted with the time, perceptions and prejudice of authors. Temne owners, however, come off as better paternalistic figures who mediated the interests of their slaves and community well.[49] Mandingo, and to a lesser extent, Fulbe, developed a reputation as hard task masters. They reportedly alienated, drove hard and inflicted cruel punishment on their slaves.[50] Furthermore, these groups displayed the least inclination to absorb slaves into their wider society. Being more Islamicized and socially stratified than other groups, Fulbe and Mandingo made clearer social and religious distinctions among members of their societies. These groups controlled powerful polities like Moriah and Futa Jallon where the use of plantation slave labour was more extensive. The most violent slave protests in the region were usually directed against slave owners from these groups and states.[51]

---

[46]. By the twentieth century, largely due to the decline of the slave trade, this ability had become much circumscribed, even for rich slaves. Thomas, Anthropological Report on Sierra Leone, p.159.

[47]. Ibid.

[48]. For an analysis of natal alienation and social death, see Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 35-76.

[49]. Rankin, 'Whiteman's Grave,' pp. 76-77; Wylie, Kingdoms of the Temne, pp.77-79; Correspondence Relating to Slavery.

[50]. Correspondence Relating to Slavery; Matthew, A Voyage to River Sierra Leone, p.73;

[51]. See C. Magbaily Fyle, The Solima Yalunka Kingdom: Precolonial Politics, Economics and Society (Freetown: Nyakon Publishers, 1979), pp. 79-81; John Ralph Willis, "The Ideology of Enslavement in Islam," in John Ralph Willis (ed.), Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa: Vol 1, Islam and Ideology of Enslavement (N.J: Frank Cass,

The treatment of slaves and conditions of servitude varied with master, group, place and prevailing political circumstances. Not all societies absorbed slaves equally or provided for the attenuation of their condition. In northwestern Sierra Leone, the intersections of trade, violence and religion seem to have influenced the slave's position and the masters' options. The steady decline of external and internal slave trading, and of the military strength of the elites in the nineteenth century curtailed their ability to dispose of or regulate slaves easily. The creation of slave villages and the extraction of tributes from them offered a better option than plantation-type strategies. The elites of all the Northwestern Sierra Leone groups seemed to have adopted this strategy at one time or another.[52] How did slaves react to the efforts by their masters to control them and maintain servile relations?

Resistance from Below: Rebellion, Marronage and Escape

Like many subalterns, slaves resisted. Social historians and anthropologists have considerably broadened the scope and our comprehension of subaltern resistance. Resistance now includes a variety of open, covert, violent and pacific strategies adopted by subaltern groups to challenge and accommodate their oppressors. Historians have also demonstrated how slaves utilized this arsenal to resist servitude in different parts of the globe.[53] This dissertation does not aim to capture fully the range of contentious actions adopted by slaves; it merely points to the existence of familiar yet unexplored dimensions of slave resistance which include revolt, marronage, escape, court challenges and labour withholding within Sierra Leone.

Slave revolts and rebellions entailed maximum risks for potentially maximum

---

1985) pp. 1-26; James Steel Thayer, "Religion and Social Organization among a West African Muslim People: The Susu of Sierra Leone." (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1981), pp. 71-74.

[52]. See Wylie; Kingdoms of the Temne, p.77; Thayer, "The Susu of Sierra Leone," pp. 71-74.

[53]. Eugene Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll: The World The Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Press, 1972); James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Gary Y. Okihiro, (ed.) In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean and Afro-American History (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).

gains. As C.L.R. James demonstrated in The Black Jacobins, a successful slave revolt like the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 could radically redefine society and send shock waves far and wide.[54] Setbacks, which were more common, produced extreme consequences for the instigators as evidenced in numerous slave revolts in the Caribbean, Latin America and the United States. Many unsuccessful rebels died at the hands of hangmen.[55] Historians of Sierra Leone have pointed to several slave insurrections but have not analyzed them in detail.[56] Only Bronislaw Nowak took the pioneering step of examining a slave revolt in depth. Using the accounts of Matthews, Winterbottom and Azfelius, he reconstructed the Mandingo Slave Revolt of 1785-96.[57] Nowak ascribed the revolt to the American War of Independence which produced an "excessive amount of 'live commodity'" and a fall of slave prices on the West African coast.[58] He credited the longevity of the revolt to an ongoing war between the Soso and Mandingo. He fails, however, to give equal credit to the slaves for initiating and sustaining the revolt for a decade.

The Mandingo Revolt represented one of the earliest examples of violent resistance against internal servitude in northwestern Sierra Leone. It began in the 1780s and lasted between nine and thirteen years.[59] It involved a group of Temne, Baga and Bullom slaves owned by the Mandingo elite in Moriah, a kingdom in

---

[54]. C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingue Revolution 2nd ed., Rev. (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

[55]. See Eugene Genovese, From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the New Word (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1979); Michael Craton, Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies, 1627-1838 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Hilary Beckles, Black Rebellion in Barbados: The Struggle Against Slavery (Bridgetown, Barbados: Antilles Publication, 1984).

[56]. Butt-Thompson, Sierra Leone in History and Tradition, pp. 57-58; Kup, History of Sierra Leone, 1400-1787, pp. 167-168.

[57]. Bronislaw Nowak, "The Mandingo Slave Revolt of 1785-1796," Hemispheres, (Poland) 3, (1986), pp. 150-169.

[58]. Ibid. p.153.

[59]. A. Afzelius, Sierra Leone Journal, 1795-1796 (tr. & ed. by Peter Kup) (Uppsala: 1967) p.126.

contemporary southeastern Guinea and northwestern Sierra Leone. The slaves, who constituted about 80 percent of Moriah's population, provided most of the agricultural labour for rice production. The harshness of their servitude and the tyranny of their masters contributed to the revolt.[60]

The slaves seized the opportunity presented by a war between the Soso and Mandingo to assert their freedom. Led by one "Tambee," between 600 and 800 slaves escaped their owners and took refuge at Yangiakuri.[61] They attracted other slaves by "threats" and "coaxing" to multiply the number of their settlements. In 1795, the Soso ceased their hostilities with the Mandingo after their own slaves became restive. Together, they attacked and destroyed Yangiakuri and the other strongholds of the rebellious slaves. The majority of the inhabitants were killed or sold into slavery.[62] The crushing of "Republicans," as the slave rebels were called by colonial anthropologist and historian, Captain F.W. Butt-Thompson, ended the revolt.[63] Only a small number of the surviving rebels, led by one Mambee, were allowed to resettle in a town called Bennay.[64]

F.W.H. Migeod, a colonial historian, mentions another successful revolt which took place in Yana around 1825-26 in northwestern Sierra Leone. Apart from occurring in the same region and being directed against the Soso, there seems little to connect this later revolt with the earlier Mandingo Revolt of 1785-6. Migeod, who constructed the event largely from oral sources, identified the armed slaves as being largely Kuranko and Kono. Led by one Tamba, the rebels killed their Soso owners and their families, and all free persons in the town.[65] They subsequently settled in

---

[60]. Ibid; Matthew, A Voyage to River Sierra Leone, pp. 154-155.

[61]. David E. Skinner, Thomas George Lawson: African Historian and Administration in Sierra Leone (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1985) p.60.

[62]. Winterbottom, Account of Native Africans, pp. 154-158; Kup, History of Sierra Leone, 1400-1787, pp. 167-168.

[63]. Butt-Thompson, Sierra Leone in History and Tradition, pp. 57-58.

[64]. A. Afzelius, Sierra leone Journal, p.122.

[65]. F.W.H. Migeod, A View of Sierra Leone, (London, 1926) p.49-50.

Tambakka country where they retained the Soso language of their owners. Migeod suggests Tambakka was eponymously named after the leader of the revolt.[66]

The pan-Africanist, Edward Wilmot Blyden, while on his ambassadorial trip to Falaba sponsored by Governor Arthur Kennedy in 1872, drew attention to yet another slave revolt, the Bilali Revolt.[67] The revolt occurred during the period of intense British interest in the region.[68] Bilali was the son of Alimamy Namina Sheka Dumbuya, the Soso king at Kukuna, and a Kuranko slave woman. Though Sheka did not publicly acknowledge him, he ensured that Bilali received Koranic and military training. In 1838, Bilali fled and established a refuge for freed slaves at Tonko Limba when his kin failed to free him after his father's death as had been promised. For four decades this "new Spartacus" supported by Limba and other groups, resisted Soso kings. The Temne joined the Soso in their campaign but were unable to defeat Bilali.[69] On his remarkable charisma and achievements, Blyden wrote that Bilali:

> succeeded in forming a large powerful party, and in rousing among a large portion of servile population not only a devotion to the idea of liberty at any price, but a strong attachment to himself and a hatred for all those who hold slaves; and he is by no means scrupulous as to the price he pays for their support.[70]

In 1872, the Soso and Temne leaders appealed for British military assistance against this redoubtable ex-slave general. Blyden recommended that the Soso and Temne leaders should reconcile with Bilali, who should undertake not to grant asylum to fugitive slaves.[71] John Pope Hennessy, the colonial governor on the coast, took Blyden's advice and negotiated a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

---

66. Ibid.

67. PRO CO 267/316, "Report on Expedition to Falaba, January to March, 1872."

68. Skinner, T. G. Lawson, p.217; Fyfe, History of Sierra Leone, p. 283.

69. PRO CO 267/316, "Report on Expedition to Falaba,"; PRO CO 879/25/332, "Particulars relating to the Tribes and Districts of Sierra Leone and its Vicinity" compiled by J.C. Parkes and T.G. Lawson.

70. CMS Archives, CA1/024/25. See Blyden's letter To Governor Arthur Kennedy, January 10, 1872; Blyden to Kendall, January 12, 1872.

71. CO 267/316, "Report on Expedition to Falaba."

> The three revolts discussed above were far from exceptional. Migeod suggests:
>
> > A rising like this [Tamba Revolt] and there were others, of which the memory has come down, Laing mentioning one in 1756 [and] another against the Fula and Sulima, shows that the negro slaves are not always so happy with their negro masters as European apologists for slavery at the present day would have everybody believe.[72]

At least one other historian of Sierra Leone supports this view.[73] A major consequence of slave revolts was the creation of slave free communities of Yangiakuri, Yana and Tambakka which offer tantalizing examples of "maroon" communities (if they could be so called) which became refuges for rebellious and escaped slaves. Communities like Yangiakuri, Yana and Deserters Town with their hostility toward servitude easily became magnets for fugitive slaves. Though escaped-slave communities in Sierra Leone offer a tempting prospect for comparison with other parts of the world, further research is needed before definitive statements can be made.[74]

Escape, which contributed to the creation of these "maroon" communities, was perhaps the most common strategy of resistance adopted by slaves. Individuals or small groups of slaves occasionally succeeded in eluding their masters. They created their own settlements, sought freedom in receptive communities or returned home.[75] The historical record, however, generally tends to be silent on the efforts of generations of escapees. Instead, it focuses on spectacular cases of individual resistance and achievement. The story of Gumbu Smart, a Loko, who escaped slavery and served as an agent for his former masters on Baunce Island is well recounted in Sierra Leone's history texts.[76] Smart accumulated sufficient wealth, slaves and

---

[72]. Ibid.

[73]. Skinner, T.G. Lawson, p. 73.

[74]. The general strategy and response of owners bears some resemblance to Brazilian style *quilombos*. See Stuart B. Schwartz, "The *Mocambo:* Slave Resistance in Colonial Bahia, Journal Social of History, 3, 1969/70, pp. 313-333. See also the "Introduction" in Gad Heuman (ed.), Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World (London: Frank Cass, 1986).

[75]. Fyfe, History of Sierra Leone, pp. 53-54; Kup, History of Sierra Leone, 1400-1787, p. 123.

[76]. Ibid., pp. 65-66; Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, pp. 80-82.

power to become an independent chieftain in the Rokon. He waged war against the Temne and was eventually killed by them.[77] Escape, revolt and "marronage," though frequently utilized as separate strategies, could also constitute different stages in a single process of slave resistance.

How can slave strategies of resistance in Sierra Leone be assessed? Did some slaves have a discourse or consistent tradition of resistance which is retrievable? Around what ideas did they organize their revolt and their settlements? These questions, and the many more raised by slave resistance in the region, require further research. What needs to be emphasized in this chapter is that slaves rallied around ideas, which their literate contemporary observers like Blyden translated as "freedom" and "liberty." Their actions demonstrated a strong revulsion against servitude and the domination of the slave-owning elite. Nonetheless, such revulsion was also balanced by accommodation by slaves, who came to realize that sometimes freedom came in incremental steps. The struggles both for complete freedom and to defend those rights, as Butt-Thompson recalled, did not vanish into the trash-can of history; they became part of the historical mentalité of the people in the region.

The Precolonial Moral Economy of Slavery in Northwestern Sierra Leone

Arguably, the constituent fragments of that historical mentalité came to constitute the moral economy of servitude in pre-colonial northwestern Sierra Leone. European social historians first fashioned the concept of moral economy to understand the actions and *mentalité* of pre-industrial protestors in Europe. They posited that in a given society different social groups agree as to what are, and what are not legitimate practices and behaviour, and they argued that this consensus was based on a shared perspective of traditional social norms encompassing the functions, the rights, and the obligations of each group. According to them, subaltern groups viewed any

---

[77]. Document culled from 'Journal of Zachary Macauley' in Fyfe, The Sierra Leone Inheritance, p.107-8.

violation of this moral understanding as occasion for rebellious actions.[78] Social historians and anthropologists writing on Asia and Africa have elaborated on the concept of moral economy and have utilized it to analyze the actions of peasants, workers and other groups.[79] John Mason renovated it as the "moral economy of the lash" to investigate the *mentalité* and actions of a single slave, "Mey," and the reactions of his master and the Colonial Protector in the Cape Colony in the early eighteenth century.[80] Jonathon Glassman creatively utilized the concept and Gramscian notions of hegemony to examine popular slave riots along the east African coast.[81]

The concept of moral economy, while useful in understanding the mentality of slaves and masters, should not obscure the fact that their voices are inherently unequal since the masters are dominant and the slaves subordinate. The concept should also not be read to imply that the actions and ideas of subordinate groups were fixed and incapable of innovation. The discursive elements of a moral economy, as Glassman and others have noted, are utilized in neither purely defensive nor offensive manners by subalterns. Rather they tend to be fluid in construction and usage over time. Equally the creation or existence of a moral economy of servitude should not imply that slaves and subalterns struggled primarily to define a "moral consensus" rather than to destroy oppressive relations. A moral economy or consensus emerges as the result of a tense process of "accommodation in resistance" in the confrontation between master and

---

[78]. See E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," Past and Present, 50, (1971), pp. 76-136; George Rude, The Crowd in History 1730-1848 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981).

[79]. James C. Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Ibrahim Abdallah, "Rethinking the Freetown Crowd: The Moral Economy of the 1919 Freetown Strikes and Riots," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 28. 2 (1994), pp. 202-213; T. Dunbar Moodie, "The Moral Economy of the Black Miners Strike of 1946," Journal of Southern African Studies, 13, 1, (October 1986), pp. 1-35.

[80]. John Edwin Mason, "Hendrick Albertus and his Ex-slave Mey: A Drama in Three Acts," Journal of African History, 31 (1990), pp. 423-445.

[81]. Jonathon Glassman, Feast and Riots: Revelry, Rebellion and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast 1856-1888 (London: James Currey, 1995).

slave.[82]

As demonstrated above, the moral economy of servitude in precolonial Sierra Leone was manifested in the social differentiation and treatment of slaves, in their acquired "rights," and the obligations expected of masters and other members of societies. In return, slaves were expected to provide labour, loyalty and other forms of support to their owners and host societies. The balance between the rights and obligations of masters and slaves emerged historically from the dynamic intersection of the precolonial mode of production, politics and customary laws, slave resistance and external influences acting on the slave-holding society.

Anti-Slavery, Legitimate Trade and Colonial Expansion:

A profound external influence which began to impinge on societies in northwestern Sierra Leone towards the end of the eighteenth century was Freetown. Freetown, a colony for repatriated Africans, came into existence in 1787, right in the middle of the Mandingo slave revolt. The colony was as much a response to demands by ex-slaves for repatriation to Africa as it was a bridgehead for British abolitionists and philanthropists to extend the three "Cs," Christianity, commerce and civilization, into the African mainland. The inhabitants of the colony historically became known as Creoles. The importance of Freetown was buttressed with its designation as the site for the Anti-Slavery Mixed Commission Court and Naval Squadron. The squadron and the court were mandated to stop the "illegitimate" Atlantic slave trade.[83] Anti-slavery actions by the British administration did undermine the slave trade in the northwestern region. Christian proselytization, however, had minimal influence. Throughout the nineteenth century, British and African missionaries made little headway against Islam and indigenous beliefs. In 1896, the Church Missionary Society

---

[82]. Eugene Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 597-599.

[83]. Fyfe, History of Sierra Leone, p. 137.

(CMS) counted only 163 "adherents" in its Temne Mission.[84]

The nascent anti-slavery colony had been founded on tenuous economic and financial foundations. The fertility of its soil, much touted by the abolitionist propagandists, proved to be bogus. The African colonists found themselves unable to extract a livelihood from agriculture. The government of the colony found itself without much of a revenue base but with annually increasing expenditures. The Imperial Exchequer had to provide grants-in-aid to maintain the colonial administration.[85] For their livelihood, the majority of the settlers had to depend on commerce with people in the surrounding regions. They eventually succeeded, amidst many obstacles, in establishing long distance trade with towns on the Melakori and Skarcies Rivers, and in the Upper Niger regions.[86] The emergent "legitimate trade" in timber, hides, rice, gold and cattle in exchange for guns, gunpowder and other European merchandise slowly supplanted but never completely replaced the slave trade. Local chieftains, and even residents of Freetown, continued to profit from the declining slave trade against the efforts of the colonial administrators.[87]

The quest to end the slave trade, extend the commercial radius of the colony and spread Christianity led to the entanglement of the Freetown colonists and the British in the affairs of indigenous people in northwestern Sierra Leone. The entanglement became the source of cooperation and conflict. Between the 1820s and 1880s, the British administration despatched several diplomatic missions to the various polities. Gordon Laing, Winwoode Reade and Edward Blyden all went as emissaries

---

[84]. The Missions of the Church Missionary Society, The Sierra Leone Mission (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), p. 25.

[85]. N.A. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa: The Sierra Leone Experience (London: Denis Dobson, 1961), pp. 152-160.

[86]. Winston McGowan, "The Establishment of Long-Distance Trade between Sierra Leone and its Hinterland, 1787-1821," Journal of African History, 31 (1990), pp.25-41.

[87]. Fyfe, History of Sierra Leone, p. 270; Mitra Sharafi, "African Collaboration in the Illicit Slave Trade, 1791-1849," Historical Discourses: The McGill Undergraduate Journal of History, 10, (Spring 1996), pp. 45-70.

of the colonial state to open the trade routes to upper Guinea.[88]

The colonial administration succeeded in extracting numerous treaties of friendship, cooperation and trade with potentates of Koya, Port Loko, Kambia, Samu, Tonko Limba, Loko Massama and many other polities. The colony acquired strategically placed islands like Tasso, Tombo, Banana and Kikonkeh, as well as other territories to monitor, promote and tax trade. Colonial administrators also became embroiled in regional politics. Contestants for the kingship in important trading areas like Port Loko and Kambia lobbied British colonial support to buttress their claims. Intermittently, administrators despatched punitive military expeditions against unyielding chieftains to protect and extend the interests of the colony or those of its allies.[89]

By the 1870s, the trade networks between Freetown and the hinterland had been severely disrupted by endemic warfare among the different polities and ethnic groups. The "trade wars," as they were labelled by Adeleye Ijagbemi, were partly the consequence of the establishment of "legitimate trade."[90] Controversies over the control of commercial networks and servile labour, lineage and succession rights, territories and boundaries also became invested in these wars. The wars were waged mainly by professional warriors called *krugbas*. Some *krugbas* came from ruling lineages, while others became rulers by virtue of their martial prowess.[91] *Krugbas* "bought" wars on behalf of competing rulers and lineages against their enemies. They received payments from the spoils of war, including the enslavement of defeated parties. Their activities devastated settlements and farms. The intensification of these disruptive wars coincided with the global "great depression" of the 1870s and

---

[88]. For accounts of these missions see Winwoode Reade, The African Sketch Book Vol 11, (London: 1873); Laing, Travel in Timannee; PRO CO 267/316, "Report on Expedition to Falaba."

[89]. Fyfe, History of Sierra Leone, pp.157-159.

[90]. Ade Ijagbemi, "Chiefs, Warriors and the Europeans: Warfare and Diplomacy on the Rokel in late Nineteenth Century," Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 10, 2, (June 1980), pp.13-34.

[91]. Ibid.

1880s.[92] This crisis threatened the economic position of the Freetown colony.

The crisis occurred at a time when the European "Scramble for Africa" was gathering steam. Historians have debated considerably on the reasons for the rapid extension of European influence and control from small coastal enclaves to the interior of the continent.[93] John Hargreaves' influential interpretation of the scramble in West Africa emphasizes the agency or "ill-calculations" of individual European politicians and men-on-the-spot.[94] He sees the expansion and enclosure of the Sierra Leone hinterland largely as a function of the zealous efforts of French expansionists in the region. The French had enclosed a large area of the surrounding region and were in the process of taking over the hinterland of Sierra Leone. The British took over the hinterland to stop them and protect the lifeblood of the coastal colony. Although it has much merit, this interpretation needs revision.

In Sierra Leone, the expansion of colonial influence and control over the hinterland had grown steadily throughout the nineteenth century. The final imposition of British control and declaration of a protectorate over the hinterland was merely a logical extension of the process of safeguarding the financial and commercial position of the colony. By 1885, the colony was close to insolvency.[95] Colonial expansion was a function of African as well as British agency. Long before the scramble, Creole traders had developed a vocal and persistent public lobby which resisted as well as

---

[92]. A. G. Hopkins, Economic History of West Africa (New York and London: Longman, 1973), p. 135.

[93]. Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, with Alice Denny, Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism (London, 1961); John Lonsdale, "The European Scramble and Conquest in African History," in Roland Oliver and G.N. Sanderson (eds.), The Cambridge History of Africa, Vol.6: 1870-1905 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 680-766; Michael Adas, High Imperialism and the New History (Washington: American Historical Association, 1993).

[94]. John D. Hargreaves, "The Chronology of Imperialism: The Loaded Pause," Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol VII, 2, (June 1974) pp. 231-239. For a more elaborate expression of this view see J.D. Hargreaves, Prelude to Partition of West Africa (London: Macmillan, 1963).

[95]. The editorial of Sierra Leone Weekly News noted, "[T]he real problem before the Government is how to turn a shilling into 15 pence, or in other words, how to add, twenty-five percent to the present revenue." SLWN, August 8, 1885.

manipulated British colonial policy. With the intensification of the trade wars, Creoles pressed for the extension of British colonial control over the hinterland.[96] Within the colonial bureaucracy, Creoles were also instrumental in shaping colonial policy. Two Creole officials who acted as government interpreters and ambassadors to indigenous rulers, T.G. Lawson and his successor, J.C.E. Parkes, played an important role in extending British influence over, and collecting useful intelligence about, the hinterland.[97]

In the 1880s, the administration acted to end the trade wars, establish a *Pax Britannica* and complete the ongoing economic transition. It dispatched a series of military expeditions against the belligerent kings and groups. With the help of Temne, Loko and Limba chiefs, a British detachment curtailed the war activities of Karimu, the Soso chief of Samaia Chiefdom. Captain De Winton led another military expedition against the Yoni Temne under Bai Simera of Masimera, who had adopted a belligerent posture toward the British.[98] The British also expelled the *sofas* of Almamy Samori Toure from the northern region of the country. During the 1870s and 1880s, Samori, a Madinka, and his armed horsemen, *sofas*, conquered a wide area around the Upper Niger including parts of what became the northern Sierra Leone. For a brief spell, the British and Samori had maintained a diplomatic relationship which led to an upsurge in the caravan trade to Freetown. However, once Samori's position weakened against the French, the British went on the offensive against his *sofas*. British military expeditions invariably had the support of the Creole commercial class, who had long

---

[96]. Gustav Deveneaux, "Public Opinion and Colonial Policy in Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone," International Journal of the African Historical Studies, 9, 1 (1976), pp. 45-67.

[97]. See PRO CO 879/25/332, "Particulars relating to the Tribes and Districts."

[98]. Adeleye Ijagbemi, "The Yoni Expedition of 1887: A Study of British Imperial Expansion in Sierra Leone," Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol VII, 2, (1974), pp. 241-254.

advocated such punitive actions.[99]

The net result of the British actions was the incorporation of indigenous rulers and their territories within an expanded Sierra Leone colony by 1896. The borders of the new territories, which encompassed about 27,000 square miles, were delineated with the French on the north and west, and the Liberians on the east. No one knew the exact population of the new territories, which was estimated to be anywhere between 250,000 and 500,000 persons.[100] The Protectorate Ordinance of 1896 divided the protectorate into five administrative districts, Karene, Koinadugu, Bandajuma, Panguma and Ronietta. Each district was to be administered by a commissioner. The Creole elite welcomed the protectorate but they were very disappointed with the administrative arrangements, especially the employment of British district commissioners. With their education and administrative experience, they had hoped that the task of "developing" the protectorate would have devolved on them. They opposed the five shillings protectorate house tax that the government proposed to collect to help with administration. The Creole press felt that two shillings and five pence was adequate.[101]

Governor Frederick Cardew, an impatient imperialist who took over the Freetown colonial administration in 1894, became a major actor in the consolidation of the *Pax Britannica* in Sierra Leone. He toured the hinterland extensively and put in place a rudimentary administrative structure. Cardew was inspired by the economic potential of the hinterland but personally irritated by the persistence of slavery and the conflicts it bred.[102] During his tour, he stopped trade caravans and freed slaves being transported for sale. More than any preceding governor, he provided incentives to slaves from the hinterland who wanted to escape. Cardew committed government

---

[99]. Sierra Leone Times, March 23, 1893, Sierra Leone Times, April 22, 1893; Sierra Leone Times, December 9, 1893; Sierra Leone Times, December 28, 1893; Sierra Leone Times, May 19, 1894.

[100]. Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone, pp. 476, 501, 517-21.

[101]. SLWN, Jan 30, 1896; SLWN, March 14, 1896. See also Sierra Leone Times, 15, July 1893 for the early signs of krio displeasure.

[102]. CO 267/409, Cardew to Ripon, June 6, 1894.

resources to help resettle escaped slaves in Freetown. He gave wide latitude to government officials and the Frontier Police, established in 1891, to curtail slavery. They aggressively accosted slave-traders and released slaves from their captors and masters.[103] British colonial officials adopted an intolerant posture toward the system, refusing to countenance requests by owners for assistance in retrieving their slaves.[104] Masters who attempted to retrieve escaped slaves received no help from the colonial administration.[105]

Given this tolerant and supportive government climate, Kikonkeh Island became a beacon of freedom for escaped slaves in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Kikonkeh Island had been the site of factories for the lucrative timber trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1876, Governor Rowe secured and converted it into a customs point for taxing the trade on the Skarcies Rivers.[106] Men, women and children of all ages, from four months to fifty-five years, fled to the island, seeking British governmental protection against their owners. Initially, the reception of fugitive slaves was ill-organized and poorly monitored. In 1894, Governor Cardew instituted a more systematic registration of the fugitives. Between 1894 and 1897, over 300 escapees registered at the post. At the peak period between 1894 and 1895, for which surviving records are most reliable, 262 persons sought refuge at Kikonkeh.[107]

John Grace has compiled and analyzed the data on the escaped slaves. He sorted the fugitives by sex, age, ethnicity and geographical origin, and he also

---

[103]. For example in October, 1893, the Frontier Police seized and freed thirteen slaves at Robiss village. SLNA MP (Sierra Leone National Archive Minute Paper) 514/1893 Police Department, 13 Rescued Slaves, October 19, 1893; See also Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone, pp. 522-523.

[104]. SLNA MP 74/1894 Boccary Seasay, 1894.

[105]. SLNA MP 49/1893, Alimamy Sourie, Kambia to Secretary of Natives. Letter trans. by M. Sanusi, Govt. Translator.

[106]. Government customs points at Tagreen, Mahela and Isles des Los close to Freetown also attracted escaped slaves, but the documents are fragmentary. See SLNA MP 195/1897, Escape Slaves from Tagreen Point Forwarded, From Superintendent of Police to Secretary for Native Affairs, June 12, 1897; See Skinner, Thomas George Lawson, p.79.

[107]. Grace, Domestic Slavery in West Africa, pp. 276-285.

suggested which areas and masters lost the most slaves.[108] Many of the slaves gave three key reasons for escape: ill-treatment, fear of resale, and the desire for freedom. The first two reasons, ill-treatment and fear of resale, indicate the harshness and insecurity of the condition of slavery; the third points to a clear awareness by the fugitives of their disadvantaged status in the relationships and societies they were escaping. Many gave the "desire to be free" as the main reason for fleeing slavery. Using the data, Grace challenged and criticized the colonial supporters of domestic slavery who suggested that the system was benign and the escapees were idlers and vagabonds.[109]

Grace saw the escaped slaves as predominantly beneficiaries of a favourable anti-slavery British attitude. What he did not recognize and therefore did not emphasize was the importance of the slaves' own initiatives and their active, conscious, and sometimes well organized actions. Slaves escaped in groups ranging from three to twenty people, including males, females and children.[110] For example on March 2, 1897, a group of nineteen slaves including six men and thirteen women, escaped their masters, Amara and Murmodo of Mafallah village.[111] The active role of women in the escape process challenges the notion that they were less likely to escape servitude than men. Half of those who fled to Kikonkeh were women. Some came on their own; others came with children.[112] They included women of all ages and from different places in northwestern Sierra Leone. Nonetheless, Grace used the Kikonkeh data to rightly challenge and criticize the colonial officials and the Freetown Creole elite who insisted that the system was benign and the escapees idlers and vagabonds.[113]

---

[108]. Ibid, p. 285.

[109]. Ibid, pp 91-94.

[110]. SLNA MP 223/1896 List of Escaped slaves, from officer in Charge to Supt. of Police; See also SLNA MP 275/1896; SLNA MP 529/1896; SLNA MP 95/1897.

[111]. SLNA MP 95/1897, 20 Escaped Slaves from Kikonki, March 17, 1897, Superintendent of Police to Secretary of Native Affairs, 1897.

[112]. SLNA MP, 147/1897 6 Escaped Slaves from Kikonki, Superintendent of Police, 29, April 1897.

[113]. Grace, Domestic Slavery in West Africa, pp 91-94.

The Creole elite opposed the government's abolitionist efforts and the resettlement of escapees in Freetown. They feared that abolition would disrupt trade and that resettlement would create serious problems for the city. The Freetown press strongly argued that domestic slavery was inextricably interwoven into the economy of the hinterland and radical abolitionist actions would damage the trade on which the colony depended.[114] It maintained that the resettlement of freed slaves in the city would lead to poor sanitation, disease and vagrancy.[115] The Creole elite also feared the presence of a large freed slave population could create a labour glut in the city. The Creole press insisted on stringent controls on "immigration" to the city, including the creation of a labour bureau to issue work visas and to monitor the movement and employment of rural immigrants.[116] Despite Creole concerns, the government only adopted legislation to restrict the movement of rural labour in 1905 and 1908. The strong criticisms of the Creole elite, and objections of African chiefs forced the government to end the official reception of escaped slaves at the Kikonkeh Customs station. The government also ceased resettling them in Freetown.

Resistance from Above: Bai Bureh and the Hut Tax War

By 1898, the tolerant official atmosphere at the Kikonkeh Customs post had

---

[114]. The Sierra Leone Times, for example, argued that "the suppression of the system of domestic slavery would strike an irreparable blow at and paralize[sic] the trade of the colony." Sierra Leone Times, May 18, 1895; Sierra Leone Times, June 9, 1894.

[115]. The editorial of the Sierra Leone Times opined, "We have our cities invaded by a countless army of aborigines, hailing from every quarter of the interior; a purposeless, wholly insanitary band of escaped slaves; drawn hither in their search after the hitherto unknown luxury of idleness, and freedom from restraint." Sierra Leone Times, December 15, 1894, Sierra Leone Times, April 27, 1895; See also the paper's xenophobic opinions about Mende migrants to the city. Sierra Leone Times, Sierra leone Times, Janaury 23, 1897; February 13, 1897; Sierra Leone Times, Jan.7, 1898; Sierra Leone Times, October 1, 1898, Sierra Leone Times, October 8, 1898; Sierra Leone Times, April 1, 1899.

[116]. Sierra Leone Times April 27, 1895; Sierra Leone Times, May 16, 1896; Sierra Leone Times, April 15, 1896; The Sierra Leone Times, July 1, 1899; Sierra Leone Times July 8, 1899; Sierra Leone Times July 15, 1899; Sierra Leone Times, July 22, 1899, Sierra Leone Times, September 2, 1899.

disappeared. In that year, inhabitants of the hinterland revolted against the new colonial state. In the northwestern region, the revolt took the form of a protracted guerilla war under the leadership of Bai Bureh, ruler of Kasseh country. In the south, the insurrection was coordinated largely by *poro* societies. There, the insurrectionists killed colonial officials, missionaries, and Creole traders and their families. They looted churches, government buildings and trading outposts.[117]

The cluster of factors which triggered the revolt and its course have been discussed in detail by historians.[118] They only need to be briefly recounted here. Generally, indigenous rulers detested the replacement of the previously consultative and diplomatic relationship with open colonial hegemony. They despised the arrogance and depredations of the Frontier Police who flogged, hand-cuffed, arrested and jailed chiefs. The Temne considered these actions "masem" (prohibited) because they violated the person and institution of the kingship.[119] The elite detested the curtailment of the slave trade and colonial interference with internal slavery. Above all, they hated the idea of paying a five shillings "tax" for their houses as stipulated in the 1896 Protectorate Ordinance. They found support among Creole traders, British commercial interests and some British parliamentarians, who also opposed the house tax.

The chiefs clearly expressed their opposition to colonialism and the tax. Many rulers avoided the meetings organized during Cardew's tour of the hinterland between 1894 to 1896 to explain the Protectorate and the new institutional arrangements.

---

[117]. For discussions of the insurrection in the southern region, see Richard Corby, "The Mende Uprising of 1898 as It Affected the United Brethren in Christ Mission at Rotifunk," Africana Research Bulletin, (January 1975), pp. 3-20; John Davidson, "April 27, 1898, The Mende War Revisited," Sierra Leone Studies at Birmingham, 1983 (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1984), pp. 86-102.

[118]. J. D. Hargreaves, "The Establishment of the Sierra Leone Protectorate and the Insurrection of 1898," Cambridge Historical Journal, 12, I (1956), pp. 56-80; La Ray Denzer, "Sierra Leone-Bai Bureh," in Michael Crowder (ed.), West African Resistance (New York, 1971), pp. 233-267; La Ray Denzer and Michael Crowder, "Bai Bureh," in A. Mazrui and R. Rotberg (eds) Power and Protest in Black Africa, (New York and London, 1970) pp. 169-212; Arthur Abraham, "Bai Bureh, the British and the Hut Tax War," International Journal of African Historical Studies, 7, 1, (1974), pp. 99-106.

[119]. Denzer, "Bai Bureh," p. 240.

Those who attended the meetings remained "muted." Cardew took their silence for consent. J.C. Parkes, the Secretary of Native Affairs, was more sceptical.[120] He was right. In 1896 and 1897, chieftains in Karene District sent petitions to the district commissioners, the governor, the Legislative Council and the Queen. They called for the restoration of their "ancient rights and power," non-interference in their customs, cancellation of the house tax, and a modification of the 1896 ordinance.[121] Governor Cardew ignored all protests against the tax, including those from the colonial office. He merely gave the chiefs a small commission from the collected tax and exempted temporary farm buildings.[122]

In response to the governor's intransigence, chiefs in Karene District met secretly and plotted a general strategy of resistance. When the collection of the taxes began in January 1898, chiefs and their people refused to cooperate with district commissioners. Hostile crowds greeted district commissioners and the Frontier Police everywhere. In Port Loko, even Creole traders joined in the protest. They acted out of fear of recriminations from the Port Loko people and their own long-held aversion to colonial taxation.[123] The colonial administration responded by fining resistors, deploying colonial troops and arresting uncooperative chiefs. Bockari Bamp, the acting Alkali of Port Loko, and four sub-chiefs were arrested. The district commissioner quickly tried and sentenced them to prison terms of 12 to 15 months with hard labour.[124]

The chiefs took up arms against the colonial state in February 1898. An anti-government coalition led by Bai Bureh of Kasseh country had the support of Bai Kura Hari of Tinkatupa, Bai Forki of Maforki and Almamy Lahai of Massumgbala, Bai Farima

---

[120]. Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, p.148.

[121]. Report of Her Majesty's Commissioner and Correspondence on the Subject of the Insurrection in the Sierra Leone, 1898. Part I: Report and Correspondence (London: HMSO, 1899) pp. 16-21.

[122]. Denzer and Crowder, "Bai Bureh," p. 174.

[123]. C. Braithwaite Wallis, Advance of West African Empire (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), p. 54.

[124]. Wylie, Political Kingdoms of the Temne, p. 251.

of Saffroko and Bai Fonti of Romeni and Bai Simera of Masimera and Alimay Amarah and Fodi Barika of Sanda Temne country.[125] Not all Karene chiefs supported the insurrectionists. Bai Sekka of Dibbia, Bai Koblo of Marampa and Bai Inga of Magbema and many other chiefs allied with the colonial state. Using guerrilla tactics, Bureh and his allies harassed colonial troops and selectively killed White commanding officers. Stockades and villages provided defence for the insurrectionists. From February to April, 1898, Bureh held the military initiative and successfully hampered British access to the Karene District headquarters at Karina.[126] British troops had little knowledge of the terrain. They relied on unwieldy supply lines and long trains of porters, which retarded troop movement and made them easy targets for the insurgents.

Bureh also went on the offensive on the propaganda front. Using the sympathetic Freetown press, he accused colonial troops of military atrocities against the Temne and insisted his war was a defensive one. In a message sent through Reverend Elba, a missionary, Bureh stated:

> it is your Government that will destroy everybody in my country because they are fighting with me: but I will not kill you in revenge for what your soldiers have done to my people and the country, you are not here to fight, therefore I will not fight with you, nor in any way injure."[127]

Creole sympathy with the rebels reflected their often acrimonious relationship with the colonial administration, their aversion to taxation and their exclusion from the higher echelons of protectorate administration.[128] Their support for Bureh waned only after the outbreak of insurrection in the southern region in April 1898.[129]

---

[125]. PRO CO 267/502, Map of the operations of the Karene Expeditionary Force, 26 February to July 1898.

[126]. See La Ray Denzer, "Diary of Bai Bureh's War: Part I: February 1st to April 1st: Bai Bureh Holds the Initiative." Sierra Leone Studies, (new series) 23 (July 1968), pp. 39-65; La Ray Denzer, "Sierra Leone-Bai Bureh," in Michael Crowder (ed.) West Africa Resistance (New York: Africana Publishing Corp, 1971), pp. 233-267.

[127]. SLWN, April 23, 1898.

[128]. "The Crisis in Sierra Leone: Revolution, Death, Famine, Poverty and Bloodshed" April 2, 1898; "A system of civilized and legal plundering." SLWN, April 2, 1898; SLWN, April 9, 1898.

[129]. Sierra Leone Times, 27 July, 1898.

By April 1898 also, the tide of war had changed in favour of the British in Karene District. British troops went onto the offensive. They cut wide paths in the bush to reduce sniping and ease troop movement. Rather than attempting to engage Bureh's elusive troops in pitched battles, they began the systematic destruction of defensive stockades and villages. They destroyed nearly all the settlements in Kasseh country. About ninety-seven settlements were razed.[130] The sacred burial sites of Temne Kings in Mapolontor village and other places were not spared the onslaught. The British then organized regular military patrols between Port Loko and Karina to deter the guerilla activities of insurgents. The actions of colonial troops dealt military and psychological blows to insurgents.[131] In November 1898, Bai Bureh surrendered and thus ended the war.

Colonialist and Africanist interpretations of the 1898 insurrection tend to intersect. Colonialists, administrators, soldiers and missionaries saw the insurrection as a defence of local autonomy and a rejection of "civilization" by essentially backward African societies.[132] John Hargreaves, the first historian to reevaluate the insurrection, rejected the moralist undertones of what he called "whiggish" colonial interpretations. His contention that the revolt was "rather the reaction of small *static communities* against external influences which had been felt long before 1896," however affirmed rather than disproved colonial arguments.[133] Other historians, Arthur Abraham, Michael Crowder and La Ray Denzer, have essentially elaborated on

---

[130]. La Ray Denzer, "Diary of Bai Bureh's War: Part II: April 2nd - June 20th 1898: British Strategy and Counter Offensive and Bai Bureh's Surrender," Sierra Leone Studies, (new series) 24 (January, 1969), pp. 52-68.

[131]. SLWN, April 23, 1898.

[132]. PRO CO267/437/18388, Enclosure from Prince of Soudan Mission in the despatch from Cardew to Chamberlain, 28th July 1898; See also the enclosed report by Capt Fairtlough in Cardew to Chamberlain, 23rd August, 1898; Wallis, Advance of Our West African Empire, pp.1-2.

[133]. Hargreaves, "Sierra Leone Protectorate and the Insurrection of 1898," p.57. Emphasis mine.

the idea that Africans fought to defend their sovereignty and independence.[134] They argued that even Cardew recognized this when he maintained that the insurrection had not been prompted solely by the hut tax but reflected a "desire of independence," and "a general rising against white rule."[135] While the Whiggish and positivist interpretations of the revolt lost credence, the Africanist perspectives have been plundered by Sierra Leone political regimes to promote national consciousness. Bai Bureh and the Hut Tax War have come to represent a veritable symbol of Sierra Leone nationhood.[136]

The career of Bureh rekindled memories of the great Farmi Tarmi in Temne mentalité. His pugnacity and belligerency highlighted those traits which were central to Temne expansion and which were taken to be characteristic of them. The greatest of the nineteenth century *krugbas*, he epitomised both the apex and the twilight of the institution of indigenous professional soldiery in the nineteenth century. For almost thirty years, Bureh successful "bought" and fought wars on behalf of different chiefs.[137] In that period, he allied with British colonial forces to fight Karimu, a Soso

---

[134]. Denzer, "Sierra Leone-Bai Bureh," pp. 233-267; Denzer and Crowder, "Bai Bureh," pp.169-212; Arthur Abraham, "Bai Bureh, the British and the Hut Tax War," pp. 99-106.

[135]. See especially Denzer and Crowder, "Bai Bureh," p. 170.

[136]. Successive governments have used the image of Bureh and other prominent Sierra Leoneans to promote national consciousness. The SLPP regime (1961-1967) supported the publication of a booklet of collected essays from the Sierra Leone Studies journal which documented the contributions of prominent figures in Sierra Leone history. Bureh was one of the few non-Creoles highlighted in this collection of essays titled, Eminent Sierra Leoneans (Freetown: Government Printing Department, 1961). The National Redemption Council (NRC) of A. T. Major Juxon-Smith, citing the "integrity" of Bai Bureh, declared him to be one of the symbols of nationhood. Major-General J. S. Momoh's government (1986-1992) sponsored the publication of Sierra Leone Heroes, (Freetown: GPD, 1987) which included the biographies of fifty "great" Sierra Leoneans. During the reign of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) government (1992-1996), the image of Bai Bureh decorated many walls in the city. See Joseph Opala, "'Ecstatic Revolution!': Street Art Celebrating Sierra Leone's 1992 Revolution," African Affairs, 93, (1994), pp. 195-218.

[137]. CO 267/445/4892, Bai Bureh and his Antecedents, enclosure in Cardew to Chamberlain, February 10, 1898.

chief, whose activities were considered inimical to colonial interests. When the British attempted to curtail Bureh's own military activities, he resisted and eluded capture by the Frontier Police.[138] Bureh's military reputation earned him the crown of Kasseh country and the leadership of the 1898 insurrection. During the insurrection, his brilliant and humane conduct of the war also earned him the respect of his British opponents.[139]

While Bureh and other chieftains defended their common folk as the normal responsibility of every Temne sovereign, to look at the Hut Tax War solely through their actions is elitist and excludes the interests and perspectives of slaves. One pervasive and recurring cause of the war was slavery. Bai Bureh was a slave owner and trader. Like many of the chiefs in the anti-British coalition, he enslaved and sold his defeated enemies.[140] Chiefs, missionaries, the Freetown press and the colonial state all agreed that the abolition of the slave trade and slavery helped precipitate the war. The colonial government, chiefs and the Freetown press couched the issue in economic and political terms. Missionaries latched on to the humanitarian, cultural and religious dimensions of anti-slavery. Historians also reiterated the importance of the slave question, but, like their predecessors, their perspectives have been essentially elitist.

While the elite viewed colonial encroachment as a crisis, many slaves saw it as a moment of opportunity. As shown above, many slaves escaped and sought refuge from the encroaching colonial regime.[141] Many ex-slaves joined the colonial Frontier Police Force which played a major role in the institution of the *pax britannica*. As members of the force, ex-slaves could, and did undermine the power of their former

---

[138]. Ibid.

[139]. See Wallis, The Advance of West Africa, pp.50-51.

[140]. PRO CO 267/445/4892, Bai Bureh and his Antecedents, enclosure in Cardew to Chamberlain, February 10, 1898.

[141]. According to Wallis, the real grievance of the elite "is that their former domestics are leaving them and they have no one to work their farms and look after their homes as before." Wallis, Advance of our West African Empire, p.212; Denzer and Crowder, "Bai Bureh-Sierra Leone," p.175.

masters. In 1895, the Sierra Leone Times drew public attention to the deleterious actions of the Frontier Police:

> The highhanded and despotic conduct of the Frontier Police was urged at the time as offering a strong drag on the trade of the colony, by those who knew what would be the outcome of sending back to the interior escaped slaves armed and uniformed, to work their sweet will upon their former masters.[142]

Former slave resisters had become part of the colonial state. Their erstwhile oppressors took on the role of resisters. This process of subversion of masters by former slaves was reproduced in different parts of Africa.[143] Seen from this perspective, the Hut Tax War, which was partly a consequence of the antagonism of the elite to anti-slavery measures, also represented the continuation of the precolonial struggle between elite and subaltern groups.

Looking at Hut Tax War from the slaves' vantage point reveals the multiple layers of resistance embedded in the Hut Tax War. It becomes possible to think past the conceptual dualism of Africans versus foreigners embedded in nationalist historiography. Like many of the conflicts during the scramble, the 1898 insurrection brought into sharp focus the many-layered conflicts that had shaped precolonial history. These conflicts included the resistance of subalterns against the elite, wars between different kings and societies and that of Europeans against Africans.

Conclusion

The dual resistance of slaves against masters and African kings against colonialism had placed the colonial administration in a moral and political quandary. They could not abolish slavery and count on the collaboration of the precolonial elite

---

[142]. Sierra Leone Times, May 18, 1895; Paramount Chief J. C. Mannah-Kpaka, an educated chief of Kpaka Chiefdom, trader and staunch supporter of British colonialism echoed the same sentiments. He maintained "... Among the Frontiers were freed slaves who decided to lord on their former masters. Paramount Chief J.K. Mannah-Kpaka, "Memoirs of 1898 Rising," Sierra Leone Studies (new series), 1, (1953), pp. 28-39.

[143]. Myron Echenberg, "Slaves into Soldiers: Social Origins of the Tirailleurs," in Paul Lovejoy (ed) Africans in Bondage (Madison: African Studies Program, 1986), pp. 311-33; Myron Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Senegalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960 (London: Heinemann, 1991), pp.7-24.

in the colonial enterprise. The state lacked the financial resources and the manpower necessary to administer the colony without the aid of the rural elite. Therefore, after the hut tax war, pragmatic accommodation and the incorporation of elite interests took precedence over abolitionism. Paradoxically, the same economic and political necessity which had driven the British administration to attempt to eradicate slavery in the hinterland later led to its tolerance. The British, however, sought to ensure that the context within which slavery continued was different. Legal and administrative mechanisms which further ameliorated the conditions of slaves, but did not undermine the position of the elite were put in place. In short, the British colonial government tried to redefine the precolonial moral economy of servitude. The redefinition applied not only to the narrow regulation of servitude but in fact to the broader management of colonial overlordship in the Protectorate. For the next three decades, the administration sought to mediate the competing interests of chiefs, slaves and the colonial state within this redefined consensus. How this process of mediation, accommodation and resistance was constructed and how it played out in the years before World War I forms the main subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO
RESISTANCE IN DOMINATION, 1899-1914

The British victory over Bai Bureh and his allies in the Hut Tax War in 1898 sealed the fate of chiefs as military factors in colonial Sierra Leone. The British deprived the chiefs of their capacity to wage war. Military power and victory, however, did not ensure automatic compliance. Some chiefs continued to dispute British rule. Cognisant of this, the British fashioned a consensus which stressed their military supremacy and political hegemony but also made paternalistic accommodations to African interests. Chiefs retained control over "native" jurisdiction and administration under the supervision of British officials. In return for the collecting of taxes and maintaining of public order, the chiefs were allowed to keep their slaves, and they received commissions and access to "communal" labour. The chiefs grudgingly but eventually accepted their contradictory role as agents of the state and "protectors" of their people. Peasants and slaves bore the burdens of the colonial arrangement: taxation, labour demands and commodity production. Weak and poorly organized, they resorted to strategic acts of protest against these burdens. This chapter looks at the nature of the colonial arrangement, and peasant and slave protests in Karene District between 1899 and 1914.

The Art of Colonial Domination

The Colonial Office began the reconstitution of post-bellum Sierra Leone with the appointment of a Scottish lawyer, David Chalmers, to head a commission of enquiry into the 1898 insurrection. Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for Colonies, instructed Chalmers to investigate the causes of the rebellion and to provide recommendations for the good governance of the colony.[1] Between July and November 1898, Chalmers heard and recorded over 700 pages of testimony from chiefs, peasants, missionaries, colonial officials and African and European traders in Sierra Leone. The testimony covered nearly all aspects of the insurrection and African life in the protectorate, including local politics, economics, trade, war, religion, slavery,

---

[1]. Report of the 1898 Insurrection.

family, marriage, land tenure, secret societies and inter-group relations.

Chalmers distilled the information into an eighty-eight page report to the Colonial Office and the British Parliament. The report scathingly censured Governor Cardew, his administration and the Frontier police. It disapproved of Cardew's tax policy and the measures employed by his subordinates to collect the taxes. Chalmers contradicted Cardew and attributed the insurrection solely to the Hut Tax, its "implied meaning," and the "severities used in enforcing it."[2] He noted that Africans viewed the tax as "obnoxious," "oppressive" and "derogatory to liberty."[3] Chalmers recommended the discontinuation of the Hut Tax and suggested that the colonial government should find alternate sources of revenue. He criticized the administrative structure of the protectorate and suggested that district commissioners be replaced with resident magistrates to supervise chiefs. Chalmers also proposed a general amnesty for participants in the insurrection and advised that the rebellious chiefs should not be prosecuted. The Colonial Office did offer amnesty to some, but not all of the participants.[4] Chamberlain wavered briefly on the tax issue but he eventually supported its continuation. He also ignored Chalmers' recommendation to reorganize protectorate administration.[5]

For the Colonial Office, the commission served two purposes, one "hidden," and two "public." The obvious public purpose, internal to the office and the imperial metropolis, was to review the actions and conduct of their "men on the spot" and assess the extent of their culpability for the insurrection. Thus, it provided a modicum of institutional accountability within the Colonial Office which appointed the Sierra Leone officials. By the same token, it provided accountability to the British parliament which formulated overall principles, allocated funding and ultimately oversaw the

---

[2]. Ibid., p. 60.

[3]. Ibid., 66.

[4]. PRO CO267/441/1118, Cardew to Chamberlain, December 28, 1898.

[5]. PRO CO267/450/14238, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce to Chamberlain, June 5, 1898; PRO CO267/450/14475, Manchester Chamber of Commerce to Chamberlain, June 7, 1898; PRO CO267/450/20000, African Section, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce to Chamberlain, July 28, 1898.

British imperial project. Chalmers' report was not favourably received at the Colonial Office. Some officials felt he had been "one-sided" and "emotional" in his criticisms of Cardew.[6] Cardew defended his own conduct with a forty-seven page rebuttal to the report. He was, however, not able to remove the "cloud" which hung over his tenure as governor of Sierra Leone.[7] A hidden purpose of the commission may have been the collection of intelligence about African life and psychology to help in the formulation of efficient colonial policies for Sierra Leone.

The other "public" purpose, on the other hand, was that of assuaging the antagonism of Africans and restoring their belief in "the humane and paternal character of the English Government."[8] For this purpose, the Chalmers commission represented of Her Majesty's Government and was not part of Governor Cardew's administration. From this political and moral high ground, the commission presented a "neutral" and "impartial" forum for the ventilation of social tensions within the colony. Chiefs, traders and peasants spoke openly about their grievances against Cardew's government. The benign interlocutory and sympathetic approach of Chalmers contrasted sharply with the belligerence and militarism of Cardew. Thus, the enquiry process not only blunted the truculent edge of African resistance, but it also became an instruction in high-minded British paternalism and liberalism for chiefs and their people. With this, it was able to partially mask its hidden hegemonic purpose which was the preservation of the British colonial power.

The colonial paternalism represented by the commission did not imply weakness or willingness to concede readily to African views. The colonial state sharply underlined this point in the measures it took to affirm its power and hegemony in Sierra Leone. It punished insurgent chiefs, paraded its military prowess, unilaterally legislated and created the elements of protectorate administration. The state exiled or detained leaders and suspected leaders of the 1898 insurrection without trial. Bai Bureh and two other chiefs were sent off to the Gold Coast in 1899. Bureh was only allowed to

---

[6]. CO267/450/3396, Colonial Office Minute, February 3, 1899.

[7]. See Cardew to Colonial Office (May 2, 1899) in Report of the 1898 Insurrection, pp.89-137.

[8]. Report of the 1898 Insurrection, p.86.

return home in 1905.[9] His allies, Alimamy Sattan Lahai of Rowula, Bai Kura Hari of Tinkatupa, and Bai Forki, Chief of Maforki were sentenced to between 10 and 15 years in prison with hard labour for "levying war."[10] Ninety-six people, including many chiefs and headmen who had been involved in the insurrection in southern and eastern regions, were executed for killing European missionaries and Creole traders.[11]

The colonial state had no legal precedent or power to inflict punishment on the insurrectionists. Chalmers had highlighted this in his report. The state needed no precedent. It had appropriated that power in conquest. For purposes of imperial legality, it passed an ordinance in 1899 affirming the state's power to detain the chiefs as "political prisoners."[12] This fictive legality removed a technicality in British laws which would have made it difficult to punish the chiefs. Before the war, neither the chiefs nor their territories were under British jurisdiction. As colonial officials recognized, had the chiefs been aware of British laws, they could have mounted a defence based on the fact that their insurrection was just and in protection of their sovereignty. The state converted this ignorance into an act of goodwill and shortened the sentences of the chiefs. Officials hoped the act would persuade chiefs into becoming less hostile partners in the colonial process. The state released Bai Forki and Alimamy Lahai in 1901 and 1903 respectively. Bai Forki adjusted and grudgingly accepted the colonial reality. Alimamy Lahai remained intractable. He refused to accept administrative changes that had been made by the state in his chiefdom. The state jailed him again for three months in 1904 for his resistance.[13]

---

[9]. Arthur Abraham, "Bai Bureh, The British and the Hut Tax War," International Journal of African Historical Studies, 7, I, (1974), p.106.

[10]. PRO CO267/463/30172, King-Harman to Chamberlain, July 7, 1902.

[11]. PRO CO267/438/13266, Confidential Despatch, Minute, Cardew to Chamberlain, May 28, 1898; Richard A Corby, "The Mende Uprising of 1898 as it Affected the United Brethren in Christ Mission at Rotifunk," Africana Research Bulletin, January 1975, p. 13.

[12]. PRO CO267/445/10395, Acting Governor Nathan to J.C. Chamberlain, April 10, 1899; PRO CO267/453/27065, Governor F. Cardew to J.C. Chamberlain August 1, 1900.

[13]. SLNA MP 1125/1904, Magisterial returns for February 1904, March 4, 1904.

To further underscore its power, the state organized a protectorate-wide display of its military might. Between January and April 1899, three columns of the West African Regiment (WAR) paraded the length and breadth of the Protectorate. They started simultaneously from Port Loko, Bonthe and Freetown and eventually converged at the Liberian border. The commander of the troops, Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham, was unequivocal about the purpose of the parade: "to mak[e] the chiefs understand the extent of our power and thus deter them from any thought of rising."[14] The long trains of soldiers, uniformly clad under white officials portrayed imperial order, military efficiency and discipline. As Captain Wallis observed:

> "the Government show of force had good effect upon the country, as natives saw for the first time large bodies of organized troops in every district throughout the hinterland."[15]

Before the 1898 insurrection, indications of British power had been largely restricted to intermittent passage of a "handful of Frontier Police" and brief military expeditions.[16] The subsequent strategic deployment of military detachments in parts of the protectorate including Port Loko, the centre of anti-tax resistance in Karene, demonstrated clearly that military hegemony had passed from the chiefs to the colonial state.

With the loss of military power and independence, the autonomous kingship of the precolonial era disappeared. The "chiefs," as they were labelled by the colonial state, lost their time-honoured rights and ability to negotiate treaty and stipendiary relations with the British crown. Governor Cardew made it known to Karene chiefs that they had abrogated precolonial treaties with the British crown by their "act of war" in 1898. He made it clear that the chiefs could no longer exercise the rights or expect the privileges flowing from these treaties. One such right, their annual stipends, became dependent on the "pleasure of the government" and their "good

---

[14]. PRO CO267/446/8916, Cardew to Chamberlain, March 24, 1898.

[15]. C.B. Wallis, Advance of Our West African Empire, p.200.

[16]. PRO CO267/446/8916, Cardew to Chamberlain, March 24, 1898.

behaviour."[17] Bai Yanke of Mayanke Chiefdom, who had been "friendly" during the insurrection and had collected the hut tax, received a yearly stipend of £5.[18] Those who had fought against the state or had been "recalcitrant" had their stipend withheld or forfeited.[19] These acts of domination - punishments, display of military prowess, deprivation of stipends - amounted to an expression of colonial power and a deterrence to Karene chiefs.[20]

Protectorate law and administration reflected and reinforced the dominant position of the colonial state. The basic law, the Protectorate Ordinance (first passed in 1896 and amended almost yearly to reflect changing colonial conditions), outlined the powers of the defeated indigenous potentates. The prime responsibility of chiefs was to maintain local law and order. Although their elections were still to be based on precolonial processes, their coronation as substantive chiefs had to be endorsed by the colonial state. The precolonial political structures and paraphernalia of power within the different chiefdoms were maintained. Chiefs continued to preside over their courts but they adjudicated only "civil cases arising exclusively between natives."[21] Chiefs had no legal jurisdiction over Europeans and non-natives.

While at first it might seem as if the colonial state preserved the chieftaincy almost intact, the reality was that chiefs lost most of their judicial, legislative and executive powers to district commissioners. They had no jurisdiction over taxation, homicide, slavery and witchcraft. These were deemed crimes against the state. While they could extract fines in their courts, chiefs lost the ability to administer punishments like stocking and flogging. Court messengers, appointed and paid by the colonial administration, replaced "warriors" as enforcers of law and order in the

---

[17]. SLNA MP 2054/1901 Governor to D.C. Karene; see also SLNA MP 2125/1901, Governor to District Commissioner karene, May 8, 1901.

[18].SLNA MP 232/1901, District Commissioner Karene, January 4, 1901.

[19]. SL NAMP 275/1901, Santiggi Moriba to Governor, January 1, 1901.

[20]. For an insightful discussion of the symbolism and value of public demonstrations of power by dominant groups see James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) pp. 45-69.

[21]. See SLNA MP C49/1901 for copies of the Protectorate Ordinance, 1901.

chiefdoms. As a concession, the state allowed chiefs to recommend candidates for court messengers. In its final form, protectorate administration expressed not only the hegemonic structure of colonial power but also the accommodation of the interests of chiefs and the colonized communities.

The Creole elite in Freetown criticized the arrangements in the protectorate. They accused the state of giving too much legal responsibilities to untrained district commissioners. Although colonial officials accepted that district commissioners sometimes used "crude and peculiar procedures" in legal matters, they showed no inclination to replace them with Creole barristers, which was desired.[22] Many of the legal powers of the district commissioners pertaining to severe and capital crimes were later transferred to Protectorate Circuit Court created in 1902. European barristers presided over these circuits courts which were held irregularly.[23]

For the chiefs in northwestern Sierra Leone, especially among the Temne, colonial domination and the structural changes which accompanied it amounted to *masem:* the violation of their person, their kingly institution and ideology. It deprived them of their prestige and position as the "fathers" and unquestioned leaders of their people. What they lost, the district commissioner and colonial state acquired. People regarded and treated district commissioners like big chiefs. They expected them not only to represent colonial interests but also to play the "paternalistic" role chiefs had played. It was evident in the reactions of their people to the new hierarchy. After 1900, many Africans increasingly took their cases to the court of the district commissioner instead of the native courts.[24] The chiefs no longer had immunity from the complaints of their people. Two Karene chiefs went to prison after being found guilty for slave trading.[25] In the new dispensation, people regarded chiefs as "tax

---

[22]. PRO CO267/459/44590, King-Harman to Chamberlain, December 6, 1901.

[23]. For Protectorate Circuit Court Ordinance 1902, see PRO CO267/463/19900, June 6, 902. See also Protectorate Courts Jurisdiction Ordinance, 1903 in CO267/468/20943, July 4, 1903.

[24]. SLNA MP 235/1901, D.C. Karene to Colonial Secretary, January 2, 1901.

[25]. PRO CO267/467/16288, Despatch 83 King-Harman to Chamberlain, April 16, 1903.

collectors" with little real political power. Despite the insistence of the administration that chiefs still had much power, it was difficult for them to believe it.[26]

The flux in the power of the chieftaincy created by the construction of the new colonial hierarchy provided opportunity for ambitious sub-chiefs. They attempted to benefit from the colonial subordination of their superiors by arrogating "the right of trying cases, taking fees and fining people outside the limits of their jurisdiction".[27] The case between Sub-Chief Alimamy Samba of Lungi town and Paramount Chief Bai Sherbro of Kaffu Bullom Chiefdom exemplified this kind of opportunism. Samba set himself up as an independent chief collecting and keeping fines due to Bai Sherbro. He dissuaded people from going to the court of Bai Sherbro and he wore his insignia of office to denote that he was a paramount instead of a sub-chief.[28] A similar case erupted in Samu Chiefdom. The Alkali of the town of Kychom who was under the authority of the Bai Sherbro also staked claims to autonomy in an analogous manner.[29] The state used deposition and deportation to discipline these ambitious sub-chiefs, uphold the authority of paramount chiefs and maintain colonial order.

WEAPONS OF THE WEAK I: RESISTANCE TO TAXATION

Given the fact of colonial hegemony and what it meant for the chieftaincy in Karene District, it was therefore not surprising that the chiefs and their supporters continued to resist openly and surreptitiously. Resistance against colonial rule continued to be directed primarily at colonial taxation, the direct financial nexus between the colonized and colonizers. It was also the aspect of colonization where the

---

[26]. Ibid.

[27]. SLNA MP 1546/1905, Report on Karene District, 1904. April 7, 1905.

[28]. SLNA MP 5710/1905, Acting District Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, November 11, 905.

[29]. See SLNA Decree Book, Karene District, Entry March 16, 1906. pp.43-45. See also the case of Kandeh Turay, a sub-chief under Paramount Chief Brima Sanda of Sanda Chiefdom. He interfered with the chief's authority and thwarted his efforts in resolving cases. He was deported to Ronietta District in 1910 and allowed to return as Santiggi, a lesser position in 1912. SLNA MP 125/1910, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, March 14, 1910.

chiefs could hope to garner popular support and sympathy because it affected almost everyone. So the chiefs and the rural populace used defiance, non-cooperation, rumour-mongering and manipulation to frustrate and negotiate the efforts by colonial administrators to collect the tax. Alimamy Namina Modu, the chief of Port Loko, complained of "difficulties" in collecting the tax in 1901. The district commissioner threatened to withhold his stipend. Bai Sebora of Bombali openly refused to collect the tax and warned his people not to pay. He was promptly arrested, tried and jailed for a year by the district commissioner.[30]

Chiefs and peasants fomented and circulated rumours which exaggerated the instability in the colony and the actual resistance to taxation on the ground. The British press picked up and amplified these rumours. The *Manchester Guardian* and *West Africa* magazine, hostile to the Cardew administration, reported continuing rancour against the tax and predicted "another insurrection within a few months."[31] Cardew tried to dismiss the rumours and to assure the Colonial Office of tranquillity in the colony without much success. His subsequent departure and the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 merely fuelled the rumours. Word spread that two events meant the discontinuation of the tax. When J.C Maxwell, the Karene District Commissioner, attempted to collect the tax, the chiefs and their people refused to pay. They accused Maxwell of collecting the taxes for his own use. C. A. King-Harman, who succeeded Frederick Cardew in 1901, arrived in a colony where "profound discontent still prevails, and threats are openly expressed of resistance to the collection of the House Tax and of a renewal of the disturbances of 1898-1899" in the colony.[32] The governor's first major undertaking was a tour of the Protectorate to dispel the anti-tax rumours.[33]

---

[30]. SL NAMP 2194/1901, Magisterial Returns, D.C. Karene, April 1901.

[31]. Articles from the Manchester Guardian and West Africa were enclosed in a despatch to from Cardew to Chamberlain sent in August 1900. See PRO CO267/454/38627.

[32]. PRO CO267/457/4307, King-Harman to Chamberlain, January 14, 1901.

[33]. PRO 267/462/6282, "Second Tour of the Protectorate" King-Harman to Chamberlain, January 29, 1902.

The presence of a new governor and the crowning of a new sovereign of the Empire presented an opportunity for chiefs to attempt to manipulate the transition in their favour. The same chiefs who had fought the British in 1898 mobilized their families and followers to pledge their loyalty to the empire in 1902. They marshalled a large entourage of 12 paramount chiefs and their 44 wives, 72 sub-chiefs and their 77 wives, and 244 followers from Karene District to Freetown to commemorate the coronation of Edward VII, the successor to Queen Victoria. In Freetown, the chiefs used the occasion to petition for the discontinuation of the taxes. King-Harman received them well but firmly reiterated his intention to maintain the tax.[34]

With the ineffectiveness of open and surreptitious resistance, chiefs slowly resigned themselves to their role as tax-collectors. The growing recognition that they could benefit from the ill-designed colonial tax system also reduced their impulses to resist. The colonial tax assessment and collection strategies were based on annual registrations of houses in each chiefdom. Court messengers and representatives of chiefs tallied the houses and reported to district commissioners. District commissioners were supposed to check and verify the registration and assessment.[35] In most cases, they did not. They merely estimated. The estimates were either grossly deflated or inflated. Where they were deflated, chiefs kept the surplus including their commissions. Many chiefs were accused of illegal extortions or "eating the tax."[36] In cases of overestimation, chiefs fearing official reprisals collected more than five shillings from their people and complained later.[37] The cooperation of the chiefs meant that by the end of the first decade of colonial rule in Karene District, tax revenues averaged around £9,000.00 yearly.

The cooperation of chiefs with the colonial administration shifted the burden of

---

[34]. PRO CO267/463/30296, King-Harman to Chamberlain, July 9, 1902; SLWN, July 5, 1902; SLNA MP 1936/1904 D.C., Karene to Governor, May 5, 1904.

[35]. SL NAMP 1546/1905, Report of the Karene District, 1904, March 3, 1905

[36]. See SL NAMP 1257/1903, Hut Tax collection in the Protectorate, March 21, 1903.

[37]. SL NAMP 3968/1903, District Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, September 7, 1903.

resistance to peasants and other subaltern groups. Peasants used "all manner of subterfuges" to evade the tax.[38] Unarmed and "weak," they resorted to dodging, refusal, neglect and alteration of their living arrangements to resist taxation. Refusal and neglect to pay taxes constituted criminal offenses. Tax dodgers faced fines of about £1 to £2 in the District Commissioner's Court. The administration warned chiefs and made them liable to fines for making wrong assessments and failing to collect taxes.[39] The number of tax evasions cases varied yearly but between 1910 and 1913, it jumped from 3 to 497.[40]

The alteration of living arrangements by peasants represented the more ingenious form of evasion, and did not constitute a crime. Since the tax focused on huts rather than persons, the strategy was to redesign their living arrangements. Two different approaches emerged. Between 1898 and 1905, when villages with less than 20 houses were excluded from taxation, peasants evaded tax by breaking up larger towns into smaller ones. New villages appeared rapidly.[41] When the exemption disappeared, taxpayers increased the number of families within a single "house" by attaching extra rooms to it. The Karene District Commissioner noted in 1904:

> houses have been pulled down and the owners have built conchos on to the sides of other existing houses turning women into the middle room, In this way I have known as many men - all with wives - living in the same house under the impression that the whole six men would pay 5/- on the house tax for the year.[42]

In one chiefdom, the number of houses fell from 370 to 250 as larger houses replaced smaller ones. *Conchos* or *lean-tos,* as the additional constructions were called, offered taxpayers the ability to spread the tax among as many people as possible. Chiefs and

---

[38]. SL NAMP 717/1903, District to Colonial Secretary, February, 1903.

[39]. PRO CO267/574/42982, Governor to District Commissioners, October 30, 1904.

[40]. PRO CO267/539/11447, #120 Governor Mereweather, to Harcourt, Secretary of State, Colonies, March 30, 1912. See Karene District Reports, 1912-1914.

[41]. PRO CO267/467/16288, Dep. 83 King-Harman to Chamberlain, April 16, 1903.

[42]. SL NAMP, 3607/1904 District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, September 12, 1904.

headmen also constructed *conchos* to evade payment for the huts of their dependants. The strategy tended to be prevalent among the Loko, Limba and Bullom chiefdoms which were among the poorest in the district.[43]

The colonial administration tried to control *conchos* with a mixture of legislation, administrative fiats and intimidation. Conchos represented not only a loss of revenue but also potential health hazards. A mild outbreak of small pox in Magbema and Kambia chiefdoms highlighted the health risks.[44] The Public Health Ordinance (1905) was passed to improve sanitation and prevent further disease outbreaks. Under this ordinance, people could be fined £2 for concealment of smallpox.[45] Unable to stop overcrowding or tax evasion by controlling the building of conchos or health ordinances, the administration tightened the system of collection. New house cards, receipts and a better system of assessment were introduced in 1910 and 1911.[46]

Prosecutions, fines and threats of withholding tax commissions to chiefs reduced but did not eliminate the *conchos*.[47] Chiefs were not enthusiastic about discouraging peasants from the practice since their chiefdoms benefitted little from tax revenues. They felt that their tax money went into improving Freetown. By the outbreak of the First World War, colonial taxation had became a fact of life for the protectorate populace. The strategic and non-violent protests against the tax, and the power it represented, also became part of the colonial tapestry.

WEAPONS OF THE WEAK II: DOMESTIC SERVITUDE AND SLAVE RESISTANCE

Labour, more precisely slave labour, constituted another terrain of anti-colonial

---

[43]. See descriptions of Chiefdoms in Karene District in SLNA Decree Book, Karene District 1904.

[44]. SLNA Decree Book, Karene District, District Commissioner Entry February 18-22, 1905. p. 9; SLNA MP 1731/19105, District Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, April 6, 1905.

[45]. SLNA MP 425/1905, Principal Medical Officer, March 6, 1905.

[46]. SLNA CSO MP 4865/1909, Haddon Smith, Colonial Secretary to District Commissioners, 1910.

[47]. PRO CO267/574, Circular from Colonial Secretary to District Commissioners, December 29, 1904.

struggle, consensus and accommodation. It was perhaps a more crucial area of colonial struggle and negotiation than taxation. For domestic slave labour undergirded what little was left of the real power of the chiefs. Unlike taxation, the state did not compel obedience in the form of abolition. Instead, it created a consensus which accommodated the chiefs as well as British anti-slavery sensibilities. Within this consensus, the government recognized the existence of slavery and the "rights" of masters over slaves. It toned down its anti-slavery rhetoric, calling the system "domestic" servitude and insisting on its mildness.[48] The government incorporated the precolonial parameters of servitude by relegating the responsibility for the treatment and the welfare of slaves to chiefs. As Colonial Attorney-General, P. Smyly, maintained, "the status of native living in the protectorate is determined by native laws and customs."[49] The colonial government drew a clear distinction between the coastal "crown colony" and the hinterland "protectorate." The colony was administered under British laws which did not recognize slavery. The government administered the protectorate under an ordinance passed in 1896 which implicitly recognized and tolerated slavery within certain limits. The government banned the slave trade, but it did not prevent owners from transporting their slaves. The government also did not provide guarantees against the re-enslavement of escaped slaves who returned to their former chiefdoms. It further refused to recognize the marriage of slave women to government soldiers without payment of redemption fees to owners.[50]

The government balanced the concessions and rights of masters by implicitly recognizing the "right" of slaves to achieve freedom. It made limited provisions for emancipation and for slaves to contest their masters' control. The amended Protectorate Ordinance of 1901 stipulated that adult and child slaves could be

---

[48]. SLNA MP 16/1901, Confidential, Acting Attorney-General to Governor, March 1, 1901.

[49]. Ibid.

[50]. SLNA MP 2731/1901, Maxwell, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, June 9, 1901; SLNA MP 45/1901 Confidential Despatch, Governor to District Commissioner, Karene May 8, 1901.

emancipated on the payment of four pounds and two pounds sterling respectively to their owners. The same law protected slaves from being sold to another person and made it possible for them to legally contest attempts by their masters to sell them at the district commissioner's court. The right of legal contestation of the owner's actions, limited as it was, represented the most important gain made by slaves within the colonial moral economy of servitude.

The implicit recognition by the colonial government of the conflicting "rights" of masters and slaves produced ambiguity and tensions in the implementation of its policies.[51] Thus, the government neither ignored the complaints of masters nor assisted them in reclaiming escaped slaves.[52] In 1902, the government allowed thirty runaway slaves from French Guinea to return to Sierra Leone, some of whom resettled in Kaffu Bullom.[53] On the other hand, the District Commissioner of Karene, H. G. Warren expressed strong disapproval when Assistant Commissioner W. Addison freed eleven male and female slaves at Rokon in 1903. The slaves, who had been ill-treated, appealed to Addison. Their owner, Sallu Karnu, however, protested against what Addison had done to H. G. Warren. The slaves were never returned to Karnu, but Warren maintained Addison had no right to free the slaves.[54] Many masters, like Sallu, made attempts to re-enslave freed and escaped slaves with mixed results.[55]

---

[51]. SLNA MP 533/1901, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, January 30, 1901.

[52]. SLNA MP 1547/1905, W. St. John Oswell, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, March 23, 1905; SLNA MP 1189/1910, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, March 11, 1910.

[53]. SLNA MP 2264/1902, Acting Collector of Customs to Governor, May 28, 1902; See also the escape of six slaves from their masters, Surubali to Kaffu Bullom. SLNA MP 533/1901, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, January 30, 1901.

[54]. LM 152/1913, Sallu Karnu to District Commissioner: Complaint against Mr. Addison, Re: freeing of Slaves, April 28, 1913.

[55]. SLNA MP 4404/1901, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary September 28, 1901; See the case of Baloo and her mother in Rex vs. Bai Samura, a sub-chief SLNA MP 3849/1903, cases #65/66, Return of Cases tried in District Commissioner Court, 1903; SLNA MP 1547/1905, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, March 23, 1905.

Government policies perpetuated rather than eliminated the ambiguity and tensions inherent in its position on servitude. This was vividly illustrated in a major policy directive from the Governor to the District Commissioners on domestic slavery in 1906 in which he stated:

> You are aware that although the Government has not abolished existing slavery in the Protectorate, the policy has been to stand from the system: in other words, the power of the Government is never used to back up the system of slavery. The system of existing slavery is left to work itself out, and, in a decade or two, will probably cease to exist. [I]t is very difficult to distinguish between a freeman and a slave. This attitude of reserve will, of course, continue in the main to be the policy of the Government, but in the interest of the slave, I think it is better to insist that the native laws and customs respecting their treatment are to be rigidly observed by the natives.[56]

The government did not keep "aloof" from the system. Its continued accommodation with, and support for the local elite shored up the system. The only significant official respite provided for slaves was to ensure that the government's chief representative in the protectorate, the District Commissioner, helped protect the rights of slaves. For slaves, this meant utilizing the District Commissioner's Court to contest the actions of their owners.

Under the provisions of the 1901 Amended Protectorate Ordinance, the District Commissioner's Court provided opportunities for slaves to regain their freedom and be protected from resale. Slave owners could be prosecuted and punished for selling or transferring slaves illegally. Through this loophole, a small number of slaves regained their freedom between 1900 and 1914.[57] Female, male and child slaves in Karene District resourcefully used co-slaves, kith and kin as witnesses to challenge owners and gain their freedom.[58] Children in the process of being enslaved or sold eluded

---

[56]. CSO MP/NA 2425/1906, Governor: Circular #80, Punishment of Slaves, May 28, 1906.

[57]. See SLNA MP 234/1901, Case 62, Returns of Cases, Karene District, January 1, 1901; SLNA MP 2797/1902, Case #41, Return of Cases, May 1902, June 16, 1902.

[58]. See for Example SL NAMP 234/1901, Case 64, Rex vs Gbella, Returns of Cases, Karene District, January 1, 1901.; SL NAMP 1735/190 Magisterial Returns, Karene District, March 1901. April 10, 1901; SL NAMP 3040/1901, Case #39, Magisterial Returns, Karene District, June 1901, July 3, 1901; SL NAMP 5193/1901.

their captors and helped in prosecuting them.[59] Freedom usually came with a price. For female slaves, emancipation sometimes meant separation from their children. Masters retained the children, especially if they were the fathers or owners of the fathers.[60]

The opportunity for emancipation through the District Commissioners Court should not be exaggerated. No guarantees existed that masters would be convicted or that slaves would be freed. Slaves and pawns had limited ability and opportunity to bring up and successfully prosecute cases in the courts. Except in rare cases, slaves had little chance against men of "some standing in their chiefdom."[61] Getting cases brought to court largely depended on the vigilance of court messengers and the cooperation of local Chiefs, neither of whom had any interest in pursuing the matter. The courts sat in only a few locations, Batkanu, Samaya and Port Loko, which restricted their accessibility to slaves. Slave cases constituted a tiny proportion of total cases in the court, and it is difficult to extricate them from those of pawning and pledging which were different.[62]

Slaves usually had to depend on other methods of resistance. Many continued

---

See the case of Yenoh, who marshalled her co-slaves to testify and convict her master, Abdulai, for slave trading in SL NAMP 3040/1901, Case #36, Magisterial Returns, June 1901. July 7, 1901. The case of Gbinti, an escapee, whose son defended her against re-enslavement, is instructive of kinship support. SLNA MP 4377/1903, Criminal Cases, District Commissioner's Court, September 1903, October 1, 1903; S.L NAMP 276/1902, Case #90, Return of cases, December, 1901, Karene District, January 1, 1902.

[59]. See for example, the case of Simebah, who prosecuted his guardians, Yeli Bockari and her husband, Umaru. SLNA MP 1039/1903, Case #1, Magisterial returns for January 1903.

[60]. See SLNA MP 1725/1905, DC Karene to Governor, April 6, 1905.

[61]. SL NAMP DC/K23/1912, Annual Report on the Karene, 1911, February 29, 1912.

[62]. See Allen M. Howard, "Pawning in Coastal Northwest Sierra Leone, 1870-1910," in Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy (eds.), Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 267-284.

to escape and migrate to Freetown.[63] Desperation and harsh working conditions forced others to withhold their labour. This was the theme of an intelligence report to the British War Office in 1904 by Lieutenant Hart of the West African Regiment who was stationed in Karina, the headquarters of Karene District. He noted a "certain amount of unrest among the owners who found it difficult to get their domestics to work."[64] Many disputes erupted as a consequence. Hart remarked that any sweeping change was bound to produce "some kind of rising."[65] The discontent was not surprising since slaves worked harder and longer than other rural labourers. According to W. St. John Oswell, the Karene District Commissioner, "[t]hey work from sunrise till 6 p.m., whereas the freeman concludes work at 4. p.m."[66]

Slave resistance, especially by escape and migration, continued to threaten the power of the chieftaincies and thus, colonial order. Between 1905 and 1908, the government adopted stringent legislation to keep "natives," including slaves, on the land, control their influx into Freetown and repatriate them to their original chiefdoms.[67] Significantly, these measures came at the peak of mass slave desertions from their masters in French colonies and Northern Nigeria.[68]

---

[63]. Michael Banton, West African City: A Study of Tribal Life in Freetown, (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) p.15.

[64]. PRO CO 267/474/15854, Confidential Despatch #3, Report by Hart in WO to CO May 3, 1904.

[65]. Ibid.

[66]. PRO CO267/501 XC/14263, Native Customs & Laws, Karene District, Sierra Leone Protectorate. 1906.

[67]. SL NAMP 4042/1904, Protectorate Native Law Ordinance May 26, 1905. See also Ordinance 19 of 1905 in PRO CO 269/6; See The Tribal Administration (Freetown) Ordinance 17 of 1908 in CO 269/6; SL NAMP 2238/1907 Attorney General's Memo, June 27, 1907; See also the Vagrancy Ordinance, 1908 and Manual Labour Regulation Ordinance 1908, SLWN, June 13, 1908; SLG, May 15, 1908; SLWN, June 13, 1908.

[68]. R. Roberts and M. Klein. "The Banamba Slave Exodus and the Decline of Slavery in Western Sudan," Journal of African History, Vol. 21 (1980) pp. 375-94; R. Roberts, "The End of Slavery in French Soudan, 1905-1914," in S. Miers and R. Roberts, (eds) The End of Slavery in Africa (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) pp. 282-307; Paul Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn, Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of

The attempt to contain population movement and slave resistance was reflected in the resolution of two cases on the Guinea-Sierra Leone border. The cases involved large numbers of escaped slaves who fled from Guinea to the Sierra Leone side of the border. The District Commissioner of Karene and the French Commandant at Farana returned most of them to their masters.[69] Both administrators agreed to help chiefs recover "domestics" who crossed the frontier. This contradicted an earlier assertion by the French Commandant that "the mere fact of their crossing the Frontier, at once gave them [slaves] freedom."[70] The administrators were attempting to curtail opportunities for cross-border escape and reduce conflicts among chiefs on different sides of the border.[71]

The British government framed its actions in terms of the preservation of "customary laws" and the maintenance of colonial law and order. In reality, such actions represented concessions to the local protectorate elite. Colonialism had lessened the elite's control over slaves and peasants, and by extension their power and status.[72] The diversion of the centuries-old northern trade to Conakry by the French restricted their access to alternate sources of wealth and power.[73] The government

Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897-1936 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 60-63.

[69]. See the case between Alimamy Bamba, a sub-chief, in Karene and Alimamy Amara, sub chief in Kindia, Guinea in 1908 involving 25 escaped slaves. Eighteen were returned to Amarra. Only seven who were freed after payment of the requisite amount were allowed to stay in Sierra Leone. SLNA MP C189/1910, H.G. Warren, District Commissioner, Karene, December 7, 1910. See also the case involving the escape of Tennenbah, her three sons and a number of other Limba slaves from Brimiah Chiefdom, Guinea to Tonko Limba chiefdom, Karene District. See SL NAMP 4923/1908, W. St-John Oswell, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, February 11, 1908.

[70]. SLNA MP, Confidential 189/1910.

[71]. CSO MP 2264/1902, Comptroller of Customs to Governor, May 28, 1902; SL NAMP 4259/1903, Secretary of State, Colonies to Governor, Sierra Leone, July 16, 1903.

[72]. PRO CO267/477/16954, "Draft Ordinance: Protectorate Native Law Ordinance 1905," Probyn to Lyttleton, May 4, 1905.

[73]. Annual Report of the Colony of Sierra Leone, 1900; PRO CO 267/462/6282, King-Harman to Chamberlain, January 29, 1902.

strengthened chiefs' control over slaves because it depended on them for cheap labour. Bai Forki, the Chief of Port Loko, for example, controlled a colonially designated labour reserve. He provided large quantities of requisitioned slave labour for the construction of military barracks at Wonkifu, and for railways and to serve as porters for the transportation of colonial officials.[74]

The attempt to control slaves by 1905 and 1908 legislation did not deter escape or migration. Indeed, the colonial government's treatment and remuneration of requisitioned labour sometimes undermined the intent of the legislation. Colonial officials paid and treated slaves badly. Slaves protested to chiefs who sometimes took up the matter with government. Paramount Chief Bai Forki had to warn the colonial administration that "if you do not lessen the burden on me the boys will all run away to another country so they are talking in my absence."[75] The requisition process prevented peasants and slaves from carrying on their "proper avocations."[76]

By the end of the first decade of the Twentieth century, colonialism had produced paradoxical consequences for slaves. The admonition of chiefs, the provisions for redemption and court challenges, and opportunities for migration to other areas compelled some owners to treat their slaves better. Colonial anthropological reports, written by W. St. John Oswell in 1906 and Northcote Thomas in 1916, refer to some of the gains and "rights" acquired by slaves.[77] Both authors maintain that some slaves among the Temne and Soso had access to wives, agricultural plots and incremental free days. These slaves, however, held no title to the land they cultivated. They usually worked four days a week for their owners and three days for themselves. According to Thomas, no master could "force a slave to work on his free day or days." He also mentioned that slaves could freely dispose of products from their plots after

---

[74]. SLNA MP 615/1909, District Commissioner, Karene District to Colonial Secretary, February 1, 1909.

[75]. SLNA MP 615/1909, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, February 1, 1909.

[76]. Ibid.

[77]. PRO CO 267/501 XC/14263, Native Customs & Laws, Karene District, Sierra Leone Protectorate. 1906; Thomas, Anthropological Report on Sierra Leone, p. 159.

payment of tribute to their masters.[78] On the other hand, the colonial administration's intolerance of the slave trade and its support for the owners may have prolonged slavery.[79] The inability of masters to purchase new slaves reduced their incentives to assimilate slaves as kin and fulfil the attendant social obligations.[80] Many masters refused to free slaves except for cash payment.[81] Colonial officials pointed to the low rate of redemptions as a sign of the slaves' contentment and improvement in servile conditions. They, however, failed to take into consideration the material reality of the slaves' position.[82] Some slaves may have secured additional "rights" under colonial rule but not all witnessed improvement in their status and treatment. What in fact the colonial state sought to project to opponents of slavery was that the moral consensus it put in place was holding. It did hold tenuously until the outbreak of World War in 1914.

The Political Economy of Early Colonial Rule, 1898 - 1914

The colonial consensus held because the colonial economy displayed relative stability and growth. The chronic colonial fiscal deficits did not disappear but they became attenuated with the development of formal export trade. The export value and volume of agricultural products, which the economy rested on, grew continuously in the pre-First World War period. Total tonnage of oil palm products increased from 21,135 tons valued at £171,565 in 1901 to 51,669 tons valued at £977,602 in

---

[78]. Ibid, p. 159.

[79]. Mark R. Lipschutz, "Northeast Sierra Leone since 1884: Responses to the Samorian Invasions and British Colonialism," (Ph.d diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1972) p. 184.

[80]. Grace, Domestic Slavery in West Africa, pp.159-168.

[81]. PRO CO267/501 XC/14263, Native Customs & Laws, Karene District, Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1906.

[82]. See Despatch from Governor of Sierra Leone to Secretary of State, Colonies, April 30, 1924, in CMD 3020, Correspondence Relating to Domestic Slavery in Sierra Leone, p. 6.

1913.[83] Total colonial export trade rose from £400,747 in 1897 to £1,731,252 in 1913. Most of the oil palm export came from the eastern and southern regions of the protectorate. Only a small fraction of agricultural exports came from Karene District. The construction of the railway with a main trunk running to the Pendembu in the eastern region and a small branch to Boia in Karene District graphically displayed the contribution and relative importance of the different parts of the protectorate to the "formal" economy.

While its contribution to the formal export trade was limited, Karene District remained important in the production of rice, the staple food of the colony.[84] Over 90 percent of the Karene residents were engaged in rice farming on upland and swamp areas. Swamp rice cultivation had been started by Temne farmers on the Skarcies Rivers in the 1880s. But the transformation of swamp land to rice, however, needed labour, which could only be commanded by a small fraction of chiefs and large farmers. Upland rice was usually harvested after October and swamp rice between November and January. Between May and September many peasants had to endure a "hungry season," during which rice was scarce. Their small farms, simple hoe-technology, uneven soil fertility and limited labour resources limited them to subsistence production. One missionary traveller in the poorer parts of Dibbia Chiefdom noted that all the rice grown there was consumed locally since exportation of the meagre produce could lead to starvation.[85] Many peasants supplemented their diet with yam, cassava and fundi. Peasants in the riverine areas around Port Loko, Kambia and the Skarcies rivers tended to have greater outputs and surplus for the markets.[86]

In the first decade of colonial rule, poor peasants were slowly being entrapped

---

[83]. T.N. Goddard, The Handbook of Sierra Leone (London: Grant Richards Limited, 1925) p. 139.

[84]. See Kaniki, "Economic History of Sierra Leone", pp. 22-24; Paul Richards, Coping With Hunger: Hazard and Experiment in an African Rice-Farming System (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986).

[85]. SLG, November 17, 1911.

[86]. Kaniki, "Economic History of Sierra Leone," pp.23.

in a cycle of debt as they struggled to meet their tax and other financial obligations. The majority sold their rice crops quickly to traders at low prices at harvest time. The traders stocked the rice and resold it to farmers on credit at a higher price during the "hungry season."[87] Colonial officials, who witnessed this development and reported to their superiors, were quick to blame it on peasant improvidence. Little consideration was given to colonial tax and labour burdens.

The vulnerability of peasant farmers was exposed in years of poor rainfall and pestilence. In 1905 and 1909, many areas of Karene experienced famine in the wake of irregular rainfalls and partial failure of the rice crop. In 1905, localized outbreaks of small pox followed closely on the heels of food deprivation. In 1909, the district suffered from irregular rainfall. In desperation, peasants cut and ate palm "cabbage" in contravention of customary laws protecting young palm trees.[88] The food situation in Freetown was equally bad. Rice prices rose in response to the demand by the city's growing population.[89]

The attempt to increase food production and gain access to fertile lands produced many boundary disputes. Disputants seized lands, villages, or destroyed crops and property. Long-running disputes over access to land occasionally led to inter-chiefdom violence.[90] The Karene district commissioner noted in 1913:

> with the current system of agriculture, land suitable for farming is being sought by natives at greater distances from their towns. This gives rise to boundary disputes which are settled by the District Commissioner as soon as possible.

---

87. Ibid., 26-27.

88. SLNA MP 37/1904 District Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, December 25, 1904; PRO CO 267/532/25088 Forest Report, 1911 by Lane-Poole, in Despatch #333, Governor Mereweather to Harcourt, Secretary of State of Colonies. July 18, 1911.

89. Banton, West African City, p.24.

90. SLNA Decree Book, Karene District, 1904; SLNA MP 535/1905, D.C. Karene to Colonial Secretary, January 19, 1905. SLNA MP 1926/1905, Oswell, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, April 7, 1905, SLNA MP 1958/1909.

But for the Government, these disputes will give rise to inter-tribal warfare.[91] Commissioners resolved the boundary disputes with the help of "assessor" paramount chiefs who helped to establish clear chronologies of occupation and ownership of lands and villages. They usually made decisions in favour of the chiefdoms that established their boundaries and land use patterns clearly and coherently. To prevent further disputes, boundary lines were clearly marked and entered in the Decree Book.[92] Nonetheless, disputes over the ownership of farm land and farming villages [fakkais] continued to be an intractable problem that district commissioners had to deal with throughout colonial rule.

After failing to alienate "waste" land as Crown lands between 1898 and 1902, the state committed itself to protecting indigenous land tenure. It passed ordinances vesting the control of communal lands in chiefs and chiefdom councils. The statutes merely recognized the time-honoured role of chiefs in Karene as protectors, registrars and adjudicators of land ownership and transfers.[93] Protectorate land ownership was based on usufruct: clearing and utilization of land. As J. C. Maxwell elaborated, "[t]he fundamental basis for land ownership [was] individual land ownership passing as the family grows into family ownership."[94] The acreage of land owned by a family depended on the labour it commanded from kinship and slave sources. Technically, family land could be pledged or loaned but not sold since it constituted the link between the holders, their ancestors and descendants.[95] However, poor peasants pledged or loaned their land. Strangers also received land in exchange for presents to owners and the chiefs. They maintained usufruct rights over it as long as they

---

[91]. PRO CO 267/557 12628 #162 Karene District Report, 1913. March 25, 1914. In 1913, at least four 4 inter-chiefdom disputes - Buya vs Romendi, Buya vs Saffroko Limba, Romendi vs Maforki, Tonko Limba vs Susu Limba were recorded.

[92]. See SLNA Decree Books, Karene District, 1898-1911, The books, were registers of cases and settlements of various chiefdom chieftaincy and boundary disputes.

[93]. Ibid.

[94]. RHL 710.14 3/1916, J.C. Maxwell, "Notes on Land Tenure in Sierra Leone Protectorate", Enclosure 1 in No.3 of the Correspondence Laid before the Committee, Draft Report and Minutes of West Africa Land Committee Report, 1913.

[95]. Ibid.

maintained their tributary obligations to the owners and the chiefs. If they married locally, their ownership over the land could be concretized. However, they could transfer neither the land nor their allegiance to other chiefdoms. Attempts to do so usually produced boundary conflicts.[96]

Despite the outbreaks of boundary conflicts, the colonial government did not attempt to respond to the agricultural problems faced by peasants by modifying rural land tenure. Instead, it preferred to improve crop production by scientific methods. The experts it deployed to study rural crop production highlighted irregular climatic conditions, escalating deforestation and soil degradation as the main obstacles to agricultural development.[97] They blamed peasant shifting cultivation techniques and advocated the promotion of "permanent" crop cultivation. Permanent crop cultivation became the officially preferred method for the production of viable "export crops." Oil palm, which had established itself as the most viable export crop, became the main focus of government policy. The government vigorously promoted the extension of oil palm cultivation through the protectorate.[98] Between 1905 and 1908, the government set up a number of experimental agricultural stations, including one at Batkanu in Karene District, to promote "economic" crops and better farming techniques. Different varieties of fibres and seeds, including oil palm, were distributed to farmers to encourage their production. Large "Kodalli" hoes and other implements were introduced to raise the level of production technology. Chiefs like Bai Inga of Mange Bureh and Alimamy Sorie of Tambacca embraced them and later abandoned them.[99]

---

[96]. See SLNA Decree Books on Karene.

[97]. PRO CO267/493/1406, Second Report of Mr Dudgeon in Smith to Elgin, March 30, 1907; See also PRO CO267/532/25088 Forest Report, 1911 by Lane Poole, in Despatch #333, Governor Mereweather to Harcourt, Secretary of State of Colonies. July 18, 1911; C. Dudgeon, The Agriculture and Products of British West Africa, (London: Imperial Institute handbooks, 1911).

[98]. PRO CO 267/532/25088 Forest Report, 1911 by Lane-Poole, in Despatch #333, Governor Mereweather to Harcourt, Secretary of State of Colonies, July 18, 1911.

[99]. Moore-Sieray, "Evolution of Colonial Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone," pp. 50-53.

Government agricultural strategies had little impact in Karene. As pointed out, oil palm constituted a small fraction of the regional economy and farmers demonstrated no great inclination to adopt new crops. Administrators paid mere lip service to rice which was the bedrock of the regional economy. Furthermore, administrators targeted chiefs rather than peasants under the assumption that they had the resources and ability to effectively promote agricultural development. Peasants were perceived as slothful, conservative and backward. The colonial experts who studied the prospects for agricultural development blamed peasants for soil erosion. They decried shifting cultivation and suggested peasants should be taught crop rotation and permanent cultivation. In the end, the colonial government's attempts to influence crop production in Karene and the rest of the protectorate in the pre-war period produced few tangible results beyond the creation of a department of agriculture in 1911.[100] Given the relative stability of the pre-war period and the fact that the increase in oil palm production had come largely from African initiative, it could be argued that the colonial state was under no great compulsion to adopt vigorous strategies in that direction.

What was potentially worrying to the government was the competition that was developing over trade. The competition pitted the Africans against the European firms and Syrian traders. The Africans, especially the Creole and protectorate elite, were losing the competition as Syrians and Europeans cornered the commodity export and import merchandise trade. In Karene district, Europeans and Syrian merchants opened warehouses and large stores in Port Loko, Makeni and Batkanu. Large European firms took over the palm trade. Syrians concentrated on the rice and the Kola trade.[101] The railway helped tremendously in the development of Syrian and European enterprise. For Creoles, the loss of commerce merely underlined their gradual loss of power which had begun by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Their disaffection against Syrians assumed racialist overtones.[102] It also became the

---

[100]. Ibid.

[101]. Colony and Provincial Reporter hereinafter referred to as CPR, January 3, 1914.

[102]. SLG, February 9, 1912.

lightning rod for latent anti-colonial dissent.[103] By 1914, this disaffection had translated into a slew of cases in Karene District Commissioner's courts arising from quarrels and petty skirmishes.[104] Before the commercial tensions could be resolved, the First World War started in September 1914.

Conclusion

By the First World War, the colonial state had consolidated its control over Karene and the rest of the Protectorate with military force, administrative dominance and political accommodation. It had cobbled together a supporting ensemble of local chieftains by giving them a stake in the new dispensation. It had effectively suppressed military resistance and violent protest. Less violent and more quotidian forms of resistance persisted as peasants, slaves and chiefs struggled over labour, taxes and food production. The pre-World War I political arrangement held for almost two decades because it rested on a fairly stable economic base. Karene with its rice crop failures and trade tensions threatened to undo the arrangement.

---

[103]. SLG, October 14, 1910.

[104]. Annual Report of Karene District, 1914.

CHAPTER THREE

PESTILENCE, FOOD SCARCITY AND POPULAR RIOTS, 1914-1919: TESTING THE LIMITS OF COLONIAL ACCOMMODATION

The "Great European War"[1] created crisis and confrontation in Sierra Leone. Imperial war demands for revenue, labour and food, and recurrent epidemics intensified hardships for the people of Karene. The colonial state demanded more from chiefs, peasants and slaves. The surreptitious resistance of the pre-war period turned into an open conflict with the state as a wave of anti-Syrian "riots" swept across the country in 1919. Triggered by food scarcity and latent anti-Syrian animosity, the riots were a culmination of the ordeals of the World War I period. The "riots" seriously rocked the balance that had been established between accommodation and resistance.

The Political Economy of Sierra Leone and Karene, 1914-1919

World War I engendered an economic crisis in West Africa.[2] In Sierra Leone, that crisis manifested itself in trade recession, rural labour shortages, food shortfalls, price inflation, unemployment and antagonistic commercial competition. The price of oil palm products and kola nuts, commodities with which peasant farmers supplemented their incomes, fell between 1913 and 1916.[3] The value of palm products exported fell from £977,602 in 1913 to £549,704 in 1916. The total quantity of palm products exported dropped from 51,699 tons to 41,559 tons in the same period. The depression in palm products was largely due to the disappearance of the German market. Export figures and values began to rise in 1917 when Britain took up the German share of the market. Kola nuts collection was temporarily abandoned when prices fell to the point where it was unprofitable.[4] Overall, the total volume and value of trade of the colony declined throughout the war and only rose to

---

[1]. The Freetown Press described World War I variously as the "Great European War," the "Great War" and the "European Armageddon."

[2]. Hopkins, Economic History of West Africa, p. 184.

[3]. PRO CO267/570/15707, Wilkinson to A.B.Long, March 16, 1916.

[4]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, pp. 171-172.

prewar levels after the cessation of the conflict in Europe.

The depression in trade adversely affected government revenues. Total colonial (and protectorate) revenue fell from £618,383 in 1913 to £583,159 in 1918. The most significant revenue loss was in customs and port dues, which fell from £324,401 to £304,470, and railway receipts, which dropped from £163,304 to £148,962. Total house tax receipts, however, increased from £58,000 to £62,000 because of demographic increase and better collection methods. The favourable tax receipts and other fiscal measures helped ameliorate the government's financial position. The government reduced expenditure by curtailing its development projects, retrenching administration and manipulating inflation. The measures helped convert the budget deficits of £46,803 during the first two years of the war to a net surplus of £46,116 at the end of the war.[5]

The government also built its favourable fiscal position partly on the efforts of rural labourers. Throughout the war, it requisitioned both labour and food from rural inhabitants. Up to 1916, peasants and slaves had to provide labour for road and rail construction. In 1916, the Road Department alone utilized 19,400 labourers in Karene. The construction of military facilities, including a barracks at Wonkufu in Karene also engaged many rural labourers. The government requisitioned and "compensated" the labourers through chiefs. Many labourers did not receive the compensation.[6] Other rural labourers migrated to Freetown and worked with urban counterparts in the fortification of Freetown as an imperial naval base and coaling station. They tended to be luckier, and received daily wages of one shilling. The Imperial War Office expended a total of £407,200 on Freetown projects between 1913 and 1915.[7]

The government also recruited about 13,023 non-combatants and over 8,000 fighting men to serve in Cameroon, East Africa, Mesopotamia and other theatres of

---

[5]. Ibid., p. 209.

[6]. PRO CO267/574/17212, Wilkinson to Walter Long, March 14, 1917.

[7]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, p.172.

war.[8] Slaves constituted about 75 percent of the recruited labour.[9] Half of those slaves were Mende. A significant proportion of the rest came from Karene district. Many were requisitioned by chiefs at the behest of the government. Some slaves willingly enlisted in the WAR and its carrier corps with the consent of their owners.[10] Others escaped servitude and joined the corps under assumed identities. In some cases, their masters pursued them and exposed their true identities. When exposed, the government ensured masters and slaves reached an acceptable settlement. In one Karene case, Kangbie, a slave, ran away from his master and passed himself off as a carrier in the WAR regiment under the name Amadu. His master tracked him down, exposed him, and they settled for a £4 redemption fee to be paid in small instalments.[11]

The colonial government accepted slaves into military service but it did not actively encourage their emancipation. Colonial administrators assured chiefs that carriers would be sent to their villages with their pay after the war.[12] The government instructed all chiefs, especially those on the Guinean border, not to harbour slaves and deserters fleeing harsh conscription methods of the French. Even those slaves who had been granted redemption during the war were not to be tolerated. The only ones who were allowed to stay were those emancipated before the war. All others had to be deported to Guinea.[13]

Government withdrawal of slave and peasant labour for construction and military service from the protectorate affected agricultural activity and rural welfare.[14]

---

[8]. Ibid, p. 182; Festus Cole, "Sierra Leone and World War I," (Ph.D diss., SOAS, University of London, 1994), p. 382.

[9]. Grace, Domestic Slaves in West Africa, p. 221.

[10]. Festus Cole, "Sierra Leone and World War I", p. 382.

[11]. SLNA CSO MP 75/1917, District Commissioner, Karene, August 7, 1917.

[12]. Grace, Domestic Slavery in West Africa, p. 198.

[13]. SLNA DC K 27/1916, Return of Deserters from French Territory, District Commissioner, Port Loko, February 10, 1916.

[14]. C&PR, September 30, 1916; C&PR, February 3, 1917.

It created a serious labour shortage in the countryside. The shortage affected food production, work, nutrition and the health of the remaining rural residents. With many able-bodied men away from farm work, women and children bore most of the burden of food production. The shortage of hoes because of the disappearance of the Germany market made life even more difficult for them. The colonial government tried to help with a request of 100,000 machetes from the British Imperial War Office. The order trickled into the colony slowly.[15] The remaining rural labour resorted to the cultivation of less laborious, quick maturing but less nutritious food crops. Throughout the war, large quantities of cassava, regarded as the "lazy man's chop," were cultivated in Karene.[16] As in Lower Niger, war-time epidemics, especially the 1919 influenza Pandemic (discussed below) merely led to the expansion of this trend. In Sierra Leone, the cultivation of cassava declined after the war.[17]

The government compounded the problems faced by rural producers with its requisitioning of large quantities of rice through chiefs to feed its labourers, carriers and soldiers. The producers suffered a double loss from the practice. The food was usually taken "without payment or at a figure below the market rate." Second, "when payment was made the headman invariably forgot to pay his people for their contributions."[18] In 1915, Government purchased 53 tons of rice through Chiefs at seven shillings per imperial bushel. It "was considerably below the local price of rice" and the chiefs, who did the collection, took their cut in cash and kind for their troubles.[19]

Nature also conspired to exacerbate rural problems and further reduce the food

---

[15]. PRO CO267/572/771 #504 Wilkinson to Walter A.B.Long, September 2. 1916; PRO CO267/572/3411, Wilkinson to Secretary of State for Colonies, Walter A.B. Long, December 30, 1916.

[16]. See PRO CO270/47, Sierra Leone Agricultural Reports, 1915-1920.

[17]. D.C. Ohadike, "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919 and the Spread of Cassava Cultivation on the Lower Niger: A Study in History Linkages," Journal of African History, 22, (1981), pp. 379-91.

[18]. PRO CO267/574/17212, Confidential Despatch, Wilkinson to Walter Long, March 14, 1917.

[19]. Ibid.

available in Karene. Early or heavy rains ruined the burning, brushing and sowing of rice in 1913, 1915 and 1918.[20] Farms had to be brushed by hand, a laborious and time consuming task. At the height of the crisis, rice had to be transferred from the eastern region to the thickly populated areas in Karene.[21] The rice shortfall in Karene led to serious food scarcity in Freetown. Many poor peasants, discouraged by the downturn in their fortunes, the government requisition system and the multifarious "customary" obligations, migrated to Freetown, Liberia or Fernando Po in search of paid employment. Some earned money and returned as petty traders. Others stayed in Freetown.[22]

By 1917 and into 1918, there were clear indications that colony and protectorate were in the throes of a serious economic and social crisis. Wartime recession and unemployment were exacerbating the food problem in the colony. Peasants, traders, labourers and all connected with the oil palm export trade, had lost most of their income and employment with the recession. Some peasants shifted to rice production or looked for wage labour. The colonial construction projects which had provided such labour were curtailed by 1916. Dock work in Freetown was also scarce with the sharp decline in shipping because of German submarine warfare. The return of soldiers and carriers from 1916 onwards added to the ranks of the urban unemployed.

The colonial administration tried to mitigate peasant problems and stop their migration by controlling the excesses of chiefs and administrators. Governor Wilkinson instructed district commissioners to discourage the lavish hospitality conferred by chiefs on government officials and fellow chiefs. He called for a reform of the rice requisition system and adequate compensation of peasants. Wilkinson proposed the adoption of legislation and measures to ensure permanent cultivation and stop peasant emigration to Freetown.[23] In the end, much did not change.

---

[20]. PRO CO267/570/23387 Karene District Report, 1916, April 29, 1916.

[21]. PRO CO270/47, Sierra Leone Agricultural Reports, 1915-1917.

[22]. CP&R, February 24, 1917.

[23]. PRO CO267/574/17212, Wilkinson to Walter Long, March 3, 1917.

The government tried to resolve the food problem and war-time inflation with rice importation, export prohibition and price control. The amount of food imported into the colony almost doubled between 1913 and 1919. In 1913, imports represented only 10.9 percent of total consumption. In 1919, the figure was 19.3 percent [24] In 1916, the administration prohibited rice exports to Guinea from Karene. No accurate figures exist for the export of rice to other countries. But the district commissioner estimated exports to Guinea fell by at least a thousand bushels between 1914 and 1915.[25] The state passed a proclamation fixing maximum food prices and appointed a food committee to monitor them.[26] The proclamation and the work of the committee was initially limited to Freetown. Recurrent food shortages and chronic inflation in the protectorate forced the government to extend its scope.

Government efforts proved inadequate. War-time profiteering, reflecting "human nature at its worst," as one Freetown newspaper put it, scuttled government efforts.[27] African, Syrian and European traders sold commodities above the official maximum price. European companies, the Société Commerciale de L'Occident de l'Afrique (SCOA), the Compagnie Francaise de l'Afrique Occidentale (CFAO), the African Association, Paterson, Zochonis and Company (PZ), Peter Ratcliffe and Company and G.B. Ollivant (GBO) combined their resources to fix prices and monopolize the purchasing of export commodities.[28] Elder Dempster, which held a monopoly over shipping, pushed up its freight, insurance and handling costs with the intensification of German submarine warfare. While European seized the oil palm trade, Syrians "cornered" kola, and a chunk of the rice trade. Syrians combined their capital, reduced overheads, and shrewdly utilized their "African wives" to strengthen their grip over trade. They also benefitted from the *sama* system.

---

[24]. Cox-George, Finance and development in West Africa, p.177.

[25]. PRO CO267/570/23387 Karene District Report, 1916, 29/4/1916

[26]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, p.184.

[27]. SLG, September 21, 1917; SLG, October 12, 1917; SLG, October 12, 1918.

[28]. PRO CO267/574/17203, Wilkinson to Walter Long, March 13, 1917; SLWN, March 3, 1917.

Sama was a reciprocal credit system in which chiefs and wealthier chiefdom members provided advances to peasants in lean seasons in return for payment in produce at harvest time. Peasant dependence on the system increased with additional colonial labour and food demands. Syrians insinuated themselves into the system replacing chiefs and the indigenous traders as the major creditors. A short term relief measure for peasants mutated into long-term indebtedness to Syrian merchants. The colonial government recognized the exploitative and inequitable nature of the relationship. It prohibited *sama* in 1918.[29] Old practices, however, die hard. Continuing rural economic and social necessity ensured the persistence of *sama*.

The tensions generated by the war-time crisis became most clearly manifest in trading competition. Creole and protectorate traders became antagonistic to what they perceived as unfair trading practices of European firms and Syrians.[30] Europeans, with their financial resources and strong support of the colonial state, seemed unassailable. The Syrians, who tended to be in closer competition and interaction with African traders and producers, presented easier and more vulnerable targets for local animosity.[31] Throughout the war, Freetown newspapers made ample capital of growing popular disaffection towards Syrians merchants and their trading practices. By 1919, Syrians had become inextricably associated with war-time rice scarcity, hoarding and profiteering in popular perception.[32]

The Small-Pox Epidemic, 1915-1916: the Colonial Response

Colonial war-time demands and climatic vagaries destabilized rural production. The disease epidemics, which followed in their trail, merely compounded the problem. Between 1915 and 1916, smallpox overwhelmed the inhabitants of Karene District. In 1918, an influenza epidemic swept the entire country. Smallpox had a long history

---

[29]. PRO CO267/582, Citizens of Freetown to Milner, September 4, 1919.

[30]. PRO CO267/574/17203, Wilkinson to Walter Long, 13/3/1917; SLWN, March 3, 1917.

[31]. M. J. M. Sibanda, "Dependency and Underdevelopment in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1896 - 1939," African Affairs, (October 1979), p. 488.

[32]. SLWN, January 8, 1916; SLG, January 16, 1917.

in the country.[33] Between 1915 and 1916, it attacked Karene in three waves. According to the reconstruction of colonial medical officials, *variola minor*, a mild strain of the smallpox disease, infiltrated the district through infected traders from Kindia in French Guinea in the dry season of 1915. This created the first wave of infections.[34] The second wave came with the return and relative confinement of people in their homes in the wet season of 1915. This produced "intense local outbreaks" in the different chiefdoms. The final wave followed the failure of the 1915 harvest and outward movement of people to search for rice in 1916. Through the riverine, road and railway network, the disease reached other parts of Karene and Sierra Leone.[35] By March 1916, all the 50 chiefdoms of the district had been infected by smallpox.[36]

Before the colonial state intervened, the inhabitants of Karene responded to the epidemic with a variety of tried and tested strategies. They isolated and inoculated the sick, and consulted local healers. The colonial state only became aware of the gravity of the smallpox epidemic in October 1915, seven months after it had begun.[37] Even then, the state had limited medical personnel to deal with the epidemic. Five doctors, Semple, Clark, Clearkin, Wood and Maxwell, were despatched on a rotational basis to contain the epidemic. They continued the isolation of infected persons, administered vaccinations and fumigated infected huts.[38] They concentrated their efforts in the

---

[33]. Winterbottom documented and studied diseases and prophylactic measures among Africans in the Upper Guinea Coast at the end of the 18th century. He concluded that smallpox was not endemic in the area. Winterbottom, Account of the Native Africans 2, p. 133. Fyfe, however, mentions outbreaks of the disease in 1801, 1824, 1856-1859, 1872 and 1905. See Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone, pp. 135, 150 172, 296 & 564.

[34]. PRO CO267/572/32722, Extract from Blue Book 1915, 24/6/1916.

[35]. SLNA CSO M220/5 John Wood, Medical Officer (at Masimera via Batkanu) to Principal Medical Officer, Freetown, May 5, 1916.

[36]. SLNA CSO M220/15, Report of Smallpox Outbreak in Karene.

[37]. SLNA CSO M176/15, Principal Medical Officer to Colonial Secretary, October 4, 1915.

[38]. CSO M220/15. T. C. Maxwell (Rosenor, Sama [sic] Chiefdom) to PMO January 16, 1916; CSO M 220/15, Clearkin to PMO, December 22, 1915.

Skarcies Rivers area. They quarantined Dixing Chiefdom to prevent infected persons from French Guinea. To protect Freetown, they created an "immune belt." The belt involved the vaccination of almost 4,000 people and the fumigation of their huts in the Karene chiefdoms adjacent to the city.[39] By the time the epidemic subsided in June, 1916, 1,351 cases and 62 deaths had been officially recorded in Karene. Dr. Wood emphasized the figures reflected "probably not more than a third" of actual numbers.[40] In Freetown, only 110 cases and 20 deaths were recorded. Karene had suffered more because it had been left out of the government's vaccination drive between 1908 and 1915 to protect areas adjacent to the railway.[41]

The people of Karene were suspicious and resented colonial medical efforts regarding them as intrusive and restrictive. In many areas, people concealed the disease and refused to accept medical advice. Dr. Woods complained, "[e]very effort was made by chiefs and people to hide not only individual cases but widespread infection in towns and even chiefdoms." Another doctor, Clearkin, reported that Africans pretended to accept advice and ignored it as soon as European medical officers left. Others simply left when the team arrived in their area to administer vaccination. Many people had no experience of vaccination and were afraid of being injected with "juju."[42]

Apart from the novelty of vaccination, people had other concrete reasons to resist colonial medical measures. The measures restricted trade, hampered the movement of people and withdrew labour from agriculture. Quarantine measures obstructed the movement of people in their search for food and resources in lean times. Hut fumigation and the creation of an immunity belt for Freetown took a great deal of labour from agriculture. Each hut took between twelve and twenty persons about three hours to disinfect. People also resisted the medical teams because they

---

[39]. SLNA CSO M220/15, Report on Smallpox Outbreak.

[40]. Ibid.

[41]. CP&R, March 2, 1918.

[42]. SLNA CSO M220/15, Wood to PMO (Mange on Lesser Skarcies), February 6, 1916.

mistook them for military recruiters or tax collectors. The doctors travelled with messengers and their presence coincided with the tax collection season. The Karene District Commissioner had to temporarily suspend the tax-collection in 1916 to enable the medical team to work.[43]

Chiefs found it difficult to help implement colonial measures and also look after the welfare of their people. Many fined resistors as well as helped in the concealment of smallpox fresh cases. African and colonial measures proved inadequate and the epidemic simply ran its course in many areas. The inhabitants of Karene overwhelmed by the magnitude of the outbreak, resorted to fatalism. Many concluded that, "Allah has sent it, it was not man's work."[44] The sense of fatalism was compounded by the outbreak of the deadly Spanish influenza pandemic in 1918. It began when an infected British Naval boat, H.M.S. Mantua, docked at the Freetown harbour on August 18, 1918. From Freetown, the disease rapidly spread to Karene district and the rest of the protectorate.[45] The "flu" attacked a population already "ill-nourished" from food shortfalls, and in Karene, one recovering from the small-pox epidemic.[46] Over 75 percent of the population caught the disease and over 2,000 people died.[47] Many areas had mass burials with twenty to thirty corpses sharing the same grave. In Kambia, the graves of the dead stretched for a quarter mile.[48] Few knew then that the influenza outbreak was part of a worldwide pandemic. Historians continue to trace its deadly path and consequences in Africa.[49]

---

[43]. SLNA CSO M220/15, District Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, March 15, 1916.

[44]. SLNA CSO M220/15, Report on Smallpox Outbreak.

[45]. Cole, "Sierra Leone and World War I," pp.225.

[46]. SLWN, September 14, 1918.

[47]. PRO CO267/578, Report on Influenza; C&PR, January 11, 1919

[48]. Cole, "Sierra Leone and World War I," p.234.

[49]. David Patterson, "The Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919 in the Gold Coast," Journal of African History, 24, (1983), pp. 485-505; David K. Paterson, "The Demographic Impact of the 1918-1919 Influenza in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Tentative Assessment," in Christopher Fyfe and David Patterson (eds.), African Historical

As in the case of the smallpox epidemic in Karene, the colonial medical response had limited impact. Medical personnel were in short supply. The government set up medical centres in Freetown to provide prophylactic remedies and to offer advice on how to cope with the epidemic.[50] It recommended and distributed throat gargle and disinfectant. People were advised to maintain proper sanitation and to consume acidic fruits.[51] In Karene and other parts of the Protectorate, people resorted to local healers and herbal remedies. The devastating and deadly swath that the disease cut across the world, however, demonstrates in retrospect, the difficulties of containing the epidemic in one locality.[52]

Near famine followed closely on the heels of the influenza outbreak in Karene District. Early rains interfered with clearing and burning of farms. Peasants sowed rice on only 60-70 percent of land cleared. Influenza made it impossible for them to keep pace with weeds which in some cases choked the crop. Without labour to drive them away, birds devoured a great deal more than in a normal year.[53] In a tersely written report, Major Lyon, the Karene District Commissioner noted:

> The crops during 1918 were not good and in especial the rice crop was a failure, due in part to the irregular rainy season and to the Influenza Epidemic which ravaged the country in September and October. Another cause of the failure of rice was lack of labour by the absence of so many working men in the Carrier Corps.[54]

Demography, 2, (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 401-431; David Patterson, "The Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919 in Western Samoa," Journal of Pacific History, 2, (1992), pp. 181-191; David Killingray, "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919 in the British Caribbean," The Society for the Social History of Medicine, 7, 1, (1994), pp. 59-87.

[50]. Festus Cole, "World I and Sierra Leone," p. 229.

[51]. SLWN, September, 28, 1918 & SLWN, September 21, 1918.

[52]. Sandra Tomkins, "Colonial Administration in British Africa during the Influenza Epidemic of 1918 -19," Canadian Journal of African History, 28, 1 (1994), pp. 60-83; Sandra Tomkins, "The failure of Expertise: Public Health Policy in Britain during the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic," The Society for the Social History of Medicine, 5, 3, (December 1992) pp. 435-454.

[53]. PRO CO267/581/26643, Agricultural Report, 1918 in Stanley, Deputy Governor to Viscount Milner, Secretary of State, April 7, 1919.

[54]. PRO CO267/581/23343, Report on Karene, 1918.

Peasants in the district made frantic attempts to compensate for the anticipated food shortfall by planting cassava and potatoes. It proved fruitless.[55] In 1919, the colony suffered its most acute rice shortage under British rule. The tardiness of the government in importing sufficient rice as well as hoarding by merchants exacerbated the situation.[56] The pre-war colonial political consensus was under serious stress.

Accommodation and Resistance I: Tax and Slave Protests, 1914-1919

Throughout the war, slaves, peasants and chiefs balanced accommodation and resistance to colonialism with survival. When actions of the administration became more intrusive during the epidemics, they ignored or put up with them. Few openly defied the district commissioner and those who did ended up in his court. Peasants and slaves continued their deployment of "strategic acts" of protests: evading, overcrowding into conchos; and usually as a last resort, migrating to Freetown to avoid taxes and labour demands. However, wartime staff shortages did lead to the relaxation of colonial control.[57] "The evil of lean-to rooms or conchos" flourished. Chiefs remained "the greatest offenders," and the conchos continued to be "nurseries of disease."[58]

The number of convictions between 1914 and 1919 demonstrate minimal open resistance to the colonial system. At the height of the smallpox epidemic in 1915, only 165 people were convicted for tax evasion. In other years the numbers fluctuated between 118 in 1914 and 32 in 1919.[59] Conviction rates for all types of crime averaged 201.8 persons per year. With an estimated 383,000 people, the yearly crime ratio of 0.3 to 0.7 per 1000 in Karene District suggests that the restraining influences of chiefdom administration and the district colonial administration generally

---

[55]. PRO CO267/582/48086, Acting Governor Evelyn to Viscount Milner, Secretary of State Colonies, July 31, 1919.

[56]. PRO CO267/580/7779, Wilkinson to Long, April 27, 1919.

[57]. PRO CO267/581/23343, Report on Karene District, 1918.

[58]. PRO CO267/596/20394, Report on Karene, 1919, in Wilkinson to Viscount Milner, April 6, 1920.

[59]. See Karene District Reports, 1913-1919.

held during the war. People in Karene and millions of Africans resented colonial rule and taxation, but learnt to accommodate both. In fact, the amount of taxes coming out of Karene increased a little during the war from £10,598 in 1913 to £10,749 in 1918.[60]

To measure resistance to colonial rule only in terms of protest against taxation might give a false impression of the overall rural responses during the war. For the most serious challenge to the colonial consensus came from labour, especially slave labour. World War I provided new labour options and new opportunities for slaves to contest the moral consensus on servitude. Some enlisted and served as carriers and soldiers with their owners' consent. Others served at the behest of chiefs who were mandated to mobilize them for the war effort. Although no firm figures exist, a significant proportion of the over 8,000 carriers recruited from the Karene District, who served in East Africa, were slaves.[61] Slaves also ran away and joined the army, usually under assumed identities. Masters pursued them, and in some cases were able to establish the true identity of the runaways and come to some settlement about their status.[62] Even though the colonial government accepted slaves into military service, it did not actively encourage their emancipation. In fact, it instructed all border chiefs not to harbour escaped slaves. Bai Sherbro, the Paramount Chief of Samu, received strict instructions to deport all escapees and deserters from the French side of the border. Even slaves who had been redeemed were not exempted. Only slaves who had escaped and had been redeemed before the war received exemption.[63] Some slaves who joined the army and survived the war were able to alleviate their condition. The wages earned in service and the favourable inflationary economic condition enabled some slaves to redeem themselves. Between 1917 and 1919, a number of slaves took the opportunity and redeemed themselves. No consistent records were

---

[60]. Ibid.

[61]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, pp. 181-182.

[62]. SLNA MP 75/1917, District Commissioner, Karene, August 7, 1917.

[63]. SLNA DC/K 27/1916, Return of Deserters from French Territory, DC Port Loko, February 10, 1916.

kept but Lieutenant G. Warren, the Karene District Commissioner, noted that a total of 178 male, female and child slaves were redeemed in 1917.[64] The numbers were unspectacular. In some instances, slaves found it difficult to redeem themselves since their earnings by "customary law" belonged to their masters.[65]

Despite assurances by administrators to chiefs, many slaves who had served in the war did not return to their villages. They stayed in Freetown and sought employment.[66] These "protectorate aborigines," became the target of Creole censure for food shortage, destitution, congestion and other urban ills. The Freetown Press constantly berated tribal headmen for not sending them back to the Protectorate.[67] Those who returned to their chiefdoms showed a reluctance to engage in farm labour. Instead, they converted their wages to petty trading capital. Slave owners complained to district commissioners about their loss of farm labour.

Those who had stayed on the farms endured the hardships attendant with the war. The shortage of labour, the recurrent epidemics and rice shortfalls made life harsher. They worked harder. Their masters fed them poorly. In times of scarcity, their access to rice decreased and on average they ate more cassava than free peasants. Sedu provides an example of a slave's reaction to the increased hardship. He killed his three children to protest his master's cruelty. Sedu's acceptance of responsibility for his actions and his testimony were unequivocal:

> My name is Sedu. I live at Roinkisa in the chiefdom of P.C. Bai Makari in the Karene District of the Protectorate of Sierra Leone. I am a slave to Almami Koroma. He gave me a slave girl, Musu, as wife. We had four children. Almami Koroma does not give us rice to eat, nor clothes to wear. When farm work begins, nobody rests. When I worked, my sores hurt me very badly. I got sick last August. Musu no longer cared for me when I fell ill. Almami Koroma sent to Musu to leave my house and go

---

[64]. PRO CO267/29356, Karene District Report 1917, enclosure in Wilkinson to Long, June 21, 1918.

[65]. Confidential CSO 107/22, Return of Persons redeemed from servitude in the Protectorate.

[66]. SLG, September 8, 1916

[67]. SLG, August 25, 1916 & SLG, September 8, 1916

> to his with my children Fatu, M'Balu, Derisa, Yeno. I got no medicine for sores. I rubbed cow dung on them. Almami Koroma gave orders for me to be prevented getting anything to eat from the farm and that my "door mouth" should be closed so that I could not get out. Almami Koroma's son Amara cut all my rice. I had none of it. Almami Koroma said that the reason I lived was because I got something to eat, and that steps must be taken to prevent me eating so I would die. All this why I killed the children Fatu, M'Balu and Dambi. I killed them with this axe. My master took my wife, my children and my rice, and that is why I killed the children.[68]

The year, 1919, had been punctuated by excruciating food shortages, influenza and economic retrenchment. Yet, in twentieth century Sierra Leone, Sedu's crime was exceptional as was perhaps the cruelty of his master. His testimony spoke of the inhuman conditions under which some slaves laboured during the war and the desperate actions it forced them to take. W. Addison, then District Commissioner of Karene, who presided over the case, implicitly recognized the legitimacy of Sedu's actions when he trenchantly remarked, "[i]f Sedu had not been a slave, he would not have murdered his three innocent children."[69]

Sedu's actions and testimony raised many poignant questions. Why did he kill his own children? Was he trying to save them from his fate? Why did he not strike the master? What do his actions and words reveal about slave consciousness? These questions cannot be answered with any precision. However, undeniably, the testimony and actions of Sedu were a powerful and poignant expression of the anguish and subjugation of generations of slaves. His discourse was about power and liberty. His master, Alimamy Koroma, had sharply underscored the disempowerment inherent in Sedu's servitude with his inhuman actions. Nowhere was the disempowerment more glaring than in Sedu's lack of control over his family.

In his actions and statement, Sedu tried to reclaim some of that power and control. He explicitly insisted that his master had certain obligations to him. These included the recognition of his humanity and rights to a tolerable existence - food,

---

[68]. Deposition in the Case Rex vs. Sedu in Batkanu, 1919 in secret file titled "Domestic Slavery" n.d.

[69]. Addison, District Commissioner, Karene to Evelyn, Colonial Secretary, December 4, 1919 in SLNA file titled, Domestic Slavery, n.d.

medical care, access to his family. In depriving him of these "rights," and the empowerment contained in them, Sedu contended that his master had violated the "moral consensus" around slavery. By his direct action, he indicated that his master had forfeited claims to either his labour or that of his progeny. In killing his children, Sedu struck at slavery in two ways. He destroyed his "organic" relationship with his master. His crime meant certain death under the colonial system. Second, he deprived the servile system of some of its next generation of slaves. His action was the first serious test of the pre-war colonial consensus that had been established by the state.

Sedu's rebellious and murderous rage, and another high profile case concerning the dubious redemption of a group of slaves by one Mrs. Fibian Williams severely challenged the government consensus on domestic slavery.[70] That challenge, intensified by renewed pressures from European anti-slavery organizations at the end of the war, prompted the government to reconsider its position on slavery.[71] Governor Wilkinson began this reconsideration by proposing a general registration of slaves and the assessment of the financial implications of outright abolition. Although he received the support of the Colonial Office, staff shortages led to the shelving of his plans.[72] The issue of abolition, however, had been put firmly on the agenda of the government by the slave cases and international opinion. It was to occupy the government more fully after the war.

Accommodation and Resistance II: Anti-Syrian Protest and Rice Riots in Karene, 1919

The 1919 Anti-Syrian protest and rice riots represented another rupture in the tenuous prewar equilibrium that had been created in Karene District.[73] The protest started in Freetown on 18th July and quickly extended to all areas of the Protectorate

---

[70]. Grace, Domestic Slavery in West Africa, pp. 224-226.

[71]. Ibid. pp. 229-232.

[72]. See circular from Colonial Secretary to District commissioners, 26 September 1919, in SLNA, Domestic Slavery. n.d.

[73]. SLWN, November 8, 1919

except for Koinadugu district. Between 25th and 27th July, Syrian shops in Moyamba, Mano, and Boia, Kangahun and Makump in Ronietta district were attacked and looted.[74] Government attempts to stave off rioting by placing military guards at Syrian shops in Makeni failed. The three Syrian shops in the town were attacked and looted on July 26th. The guards claimed they had been dispersed by stones and had withheld fire as ordered. The Commanding Officer, WAFF, later discovered that the guards had participated in the riot and looting. Their story had been "fabricated" and the entire episode "prearranged."[75]

The situation alarmed Syrians in other towns in Karene. In Port Loko, the largest town in the district, the situation was tense. The river trade stood still and there were "a lot of idle people" around. The Alkali noted that "the food situation was bad" and people were eating "young casada" which had been uprooted three months earlier than usual. People showed signs of restlessness and readiness to raid Syrian stores.[76] Sensing the situation, Syrians appealed for protection to the district commissioner. Before the commissioner could act, a food riot broke out in the town.[77]

The gathering of three chiefs and their supporters in Port Loko to sign the decree book on the ascension of a new Bai Forki of Maforki Chiefdom on August 1, 1919 provided opportunity for the "rioters." Five out of the twenty-two Syrians shops in the town were looted. Court Messengers arrested ten people. They were summarily tried and imprisoned to dissuade further mob action. The district commissioner declared a curfew in Port Loko on Sunday August 3, 1919. Bai Forki and the other chiefs ordered their followers to return to their chiefdoms. There were no indications

---

[74]. PRO CO267/582/44115, Telegram, Evelyn to Secretary of State for Colonies, July 29, 1919.

[75]. PRO CO267/582/48226, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, August 7, 1919; see also PRO CO267/582/48226, District Commissioner, Port Loko, to Colonial Secretary, August 6, 1919.

[76]. PRO CO582/48071, Evelyn to Viscount Milner, July 31, 1919. See also enclosed telegram from DC. Port Loko to Colonial Secretary, July 26, 1919.

[77]. PRO CO267/582/48226, District Commissioner, Port Loko to Colonial Secretary, August 6, 1919.

they did. Instead, "bands of looters made repeated attacks on Syrian shops" retreating into the bush at the approach of soldiers.[78]

The organized challenge against Syrian shops continued on Monday August 4, 1919. To deter the rioters, the district commissioner ordered Syrians to centralize their property in the Kumrabai's house which was then put under military guard. The guard deterred the "rioters" during the day. At night, a crowd of about 100 people from old Port Loko attacked the house. The European officer heading the guard fired and killed four people. The deaths ended the confrontation and quiet returned to Port Loko. Syrian shops in Kambia were also attacked but a government military detachment quickly restored order. By August 5th, peace had been restored in all the major rice centres in Karene.[79]

Bowden, the district commissioner, suggested the riots in Karene were "a carefully planned scheme originating in Freetown, well organized and not badly carried out."[80] Governor Wilkinson discounted the notion of a Creole or Freetown based conspiracy. To his credit, the Governor suggested far more objective causes for the riots like food scarcity, Syrian hoarding and the Freetown Rail strike. Wilkinson felt, however, Syrians had been unfairly singled out for hoarding since Europeans also withheld rice.[81] The colonial office retained the view that the Creoles had directed the animosity of a "half-starved people" to injure Syrians because of "trade jealousy."[82]

To understand the riots, we must return to the concept of moral economy already discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Ibrahim Abdallah has already creatively applied this concept in his re-evaluation of the role of workers and the urban

---

[78]. PRO CO267/582/51291, Evelyn to Viscount Milner, August 19, 1919.

[79]. PRO CO267/582/51291, Evelyn to Viscount Milner, August 19, 1919.

[80]. PRO CO267/586, Karene District Report, 1919.

[81]. PRO CO267/583/60683, Wilkinson to Viscount Milner, October 9, 1919.

[82]. PRO CO267/583/60683, Minute in Wilkinson to Viscount Milner, October 9, 1919.

poor in the Freetown dimension of the riot.[83] He argues that the Strike and the Anti-Syrian protest of 1919 were direct and disciplined forms of popular action in which urban groups sought to defend their interests and renegotiate their condition under colonialism.[84] Abdallah responded to the caution by Rude, Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson against loosely employing the term "mob," and viewing "riots" as necessarily criminal actions.[85] He agreed with Thompson's formulation that crowds usually act from "a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which taken together, constitute the moral economy of the poor."[86] Glassman also used Thompson's notions and Gramsci's formulation of hegemony to illustrate how crowds of "plebeian" rebels on the Swahili Coast seditiously reinterpreted community ideals for their ends.[87]

The concept of moral economy, with its emphasis on malleable discursive practices over harmonious ideological behaviour, provides a useful starting point for understanding the Karene dimension of the 1919 Anti-Syrian riots. The crowds were drawn from different social groups and therefore did not have a uniformity of ideas. The immediate demands of the moment glued the "rioters" together, but their perceptions of the Syrians did not necessarily have the same roots. The fact that the riots took place within a transient colonial context in which communities were negotiating with new institutions, relationships and ideas was equally important.

This was reflected in the variety of people which composed the "crowds" in Karene. In Port Loko, the crowd consisted of peasants," idle" local and Creole traders,

---

[83]. Ibrahim Abdallah "Rethinking the Freetown Crowd: The Moral Economy of 1919 Strikes and Riot in Sierra Leone." Canadian Journal of African Studies, 28, 2, (1994), pp. 202-213.

[84]. Abdallah "Rethinking the Freetown Crowd," p. 213.

[85]. E.J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959); E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," Past and Present, 50: 76-136; George Rude, The Crowd in History 1730-1848 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981).

[86]. Thompson, "Moral Economy of the Crowd, p. 79.

[87]. Glassman, Feasts and Riots, pp. 1-25.

and members of the WAFF.[88] They were joined by the more than one hundred peasant followers of Bai Forki and two other chiefs from nearby chiefdoms. In Makeni, a town which flourished under colonialism, the entire population seemed to have conspired in the riots.[89] If claims by the district commissioner that "outsiders" participated in the Protectorate riots are accepted, then the Freetown crowd offers additional clues. Historians have identified "up-countrymen," "migrants," "discharged carrier corps members," "aboriginal natives" and "Protectorate people" in the Freetown crowd.[90] These transient "plebeian" elements provided the critical nexus which linked town and country and united the food problems and the protest actions of the city with that of the countryside.

As in Freetown, the Karene crowds were held together by the spectre of starvation and motivated by a desire for food. They were energized by a common animus against Syrians who they believed limited their access to food. Beyond the glue of nutritional necessity of the moment, the various components of the crowd brought with them their multi-textured perceptions of the "Syrian problem." The transient urban and rural poor wanted food at affordable prices from rice merchants. Local and Creole traders had scores to settle with Syrians who had edged them out in the rice trade. The Freetown press had sufficiently focused on the "Syrian Peril" to strengthen popular belief that Syrians merchants were acting outside legitimate limits.[91] For the majority peasant element in the Karene crowds, their grievance and

---

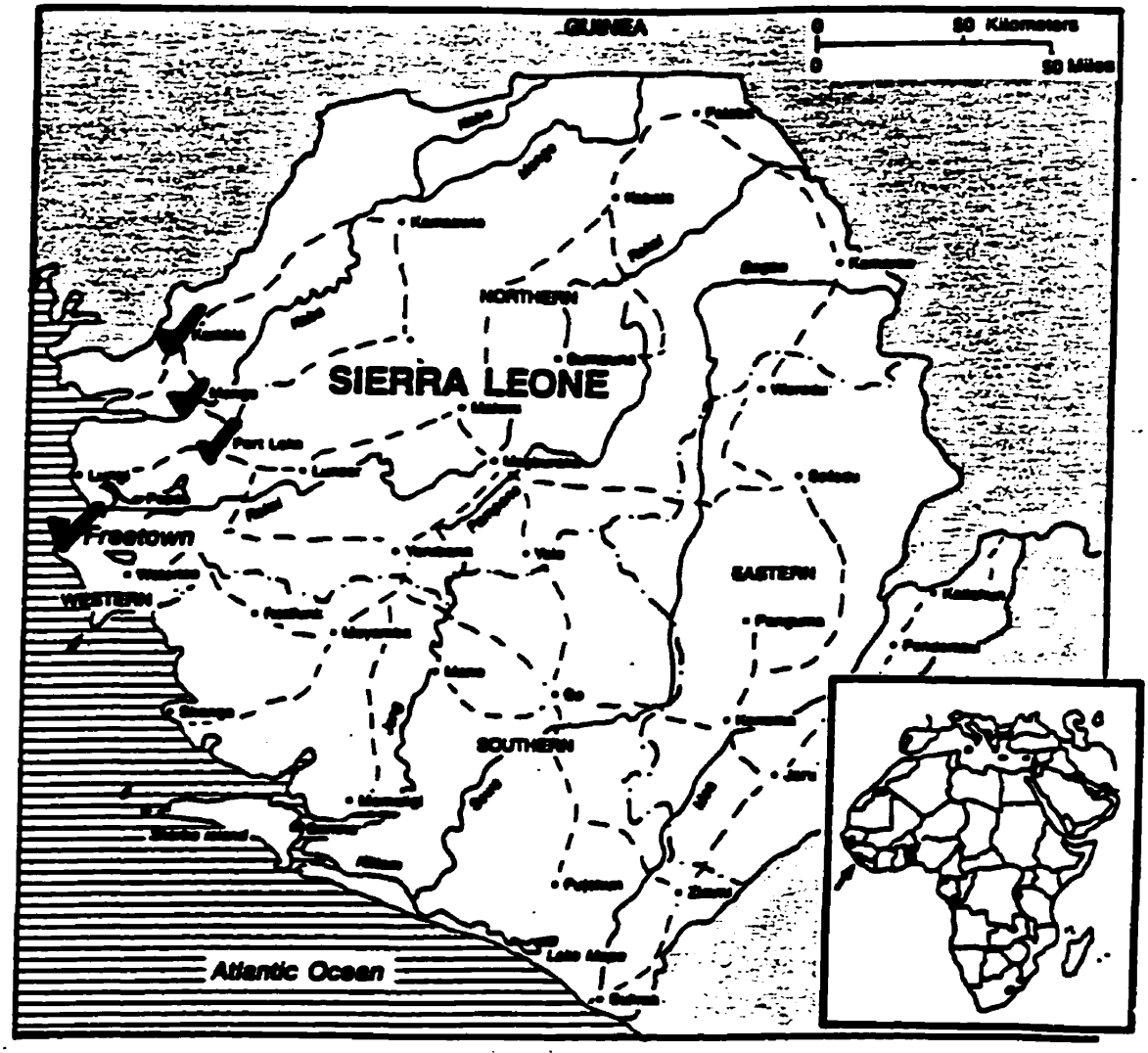
[88]. PRO CO582/48071, Evelyn to Viscount Milner, July 31, 1919. See also enclosed telegram from District Commissioner, Port Loko, to Colonial Secretary, July 26, 1919.

[89]. PRO CO267/582/48226, District Commissioner, Karene to colonial Secretary, August 7, 1919. See also PRO CO 267/582/48226, District Commissioner, Port Loko, to Colonial Secretary, August 6, 1919.

[90]. See Spitzer, The Creoles of Sierra Leone: Responses to Colonialism, 1870-1945 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974). p.163; Abdallah, "Rethinking the Freetown Crowd," p. 210; Martin Kaniki, "Attitudes and Reactions towards Lebanese in Sierra Leone during the Colonial Period," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 7, 1, (1973), p. 163.

[91]. Despite primarily reflecting the opinions of the elite, the Freetown press did reflect popular sentiments against the Syrians. It also influenced the perceptions of the

MAP 4: Areas affected by the Anti-Syrian Protest and Rice Riots of 1919



animus could be traced to the *sama* system. It expressed the essence of their relationship with Syrians. At the height of the food crisis, Syrians were reportedly busy collecting *sama* debts from starving peasants in Karene and refusing to sell rice to the needy.[92] *Sama* which could pass off as a mutually beneficial relationship between Syrian and peasant, was revealed in a time of extreme want for what it really was: an unjust and exploitative relationship. Peasants had to buy or credit rice at more than twice the official rate of £2.5s.0d per imperial bushel (84lbs.) Few could afford such exorbitant prices. Their anguish was intensified by the fact that their labour had produced the rice in the first place.

Syrian hoarding and profiteering had curtailed the limited access to sustenance of peasants during the lean season. By consuming raw cassava and the pith of palm trees (palm cabbage), peasants had been forced to subsist below what Scott termed the "minimally culturally defined subsistence level."[93] Among a people where cassava was considered food for slaves, Syrian activities had infringed on Scott's "moral economy of the subsistence ethic" of peasants.[94] *Sama*, momentarily, lost its legitimacy and morality in eyes of peasants. In rice producing areas like Port Loko, Mange, Mambolo and Kambia, its exploitative nature was enough to turn peasants against the Syrians. Starving peasants, contrary to the district commissioner's view, did not need outsiders to motivate or organize them. Syrians failed to sense their desperation and act magnanimously. Peasants rioted to protest Syrian actions and gained access to that which was necessary to sustain life: rice.

The access to rice regardless of where it was hoarded conditioned the behaviour and actions of the crowd. The records demonstrate, and historians of the

---

urban crowds, albeit, to a lesser extent in the Protectorate. SLWN, November 14, 1914; CP&R, May 30, 1914; SLG, November 29, 1918 & SLG, December 6, 1918. For discussions of the animosity between the Creole commercial elite and Syrians see Spitzer, Creoles of Sierra Leone, p.159 & Akintola J. Wyse, "The 1919 Anti-Strike and Anti-Syrian Riots: A Krio plot?" Journal of the Historical Society of Sierra Leone 3, 1 & 2, (1981), pp. 1-14.

92. Festus Cole, "Sierra Leone and World War I," p. 358.

93. Scott, Moral Economy of the Peasant, p.10.

94. Ibid.

Anti-Syrians riots agree, that the attention of the crowd was centred on food and property rather than on people.[95] In Port Loko, the crowd actually shifted attention from shops to the Kumrabai's house when Syrian goods were relocated there.[96] Three Syrians died during the riots; but only one death could be directly attributed to violence from the crowd.[97] In Karene, not a single Syrian was harmed. Unlike the 1898 insurrection, when Mende slaughtered Creoles, there was no widespread violence against Syrians.

The focus on food, buttressed by the belief that people had a natural "right to subsistence," provided the legitimizing context within which the crowds in Karene acted. Thus, communities and local authorities connived, supported and granted license to the crowds. The colonial administration acknowledged that "most big men" in the affected areas in Karene knew about the attacks, "which would not have happened without their connivance." Chief Bai Sebora of Makeni made no attempt to restrain rioters, retrieve looted goods or apprehend the culprits.[98] African soldiers conspired with the rioters. The Commanding Officer of WAFF noted that "nothing could have happened if there had not been collusion between the Military and the mob."[99] Paramount Chief Bai Sebora and the WAFF soldiers in Makeni abdicated their responsibility to maintain colonial law and order. They provided the license needed by the "rioters." In the end, the government neither arrested nor tried the colluding chief and soldiers.[100]

The license granted to the crowds by chiefs could be further understood in a number of ways. Chiefs, like the Creole traders, had lost ground to Syrians in the rice

---

[95]. Spitzer, Creoles of Sierra Leone, p.162; Kaniki, "Attitudes to Lebanese," p.101; Abdallah, "Rethinking the Freetown Crowd" p. 197.

[96]. PRO CO267/582/51291, Evelyn to Viscount Milner, August 19, 1919.

[97]. Kaniki, "Attitudes towards Lebanese," p. 101.

[98]. PRO CO267/582/51291, Evelyn to Viscount Milner, August 19, 1919.

[99]. PRO CO267/582/48226, District Commissioner, Karene to Colonial Secretary, August 7, 1919.

[100]. PRO CO267/582/51291, Evelyn to Viscount Milner, August 19, 1919.

trade. The situation hampered the ability of chiefs to fulfil a vital reciprocal paternalistic functions; feed their people in times of shortage. Lastly, they felt, like their people, that the colonial government would not offer much protection to Syrians because of their activities. Chief Bai Inga told the Karene District Commissioner that rumours were circulating in Mange that "the Government no gree for Syrians to be here."[101]

The license and support afforded the crowds had its limits. When the crowds overstepped the boundaries of tolerable protest, the administration to forcefully asserted its authority. In Port Loko, the repeated attacks over a two-day period on the house of the Kumrabai, where Syrian property was stored and guarded with African and European officers challenged the chief's prerogative to protect "strangers" and help maintain law and order.[102] The attacks also infringed directly the authority of local and colonial administration. The widespread arrests and detention and the killing of four rioters reestablished the limits of tolerable protest once more.

The colonial administration bore blame for failing to prevent the riots. Major Farrar in his report on the food scarcity, clearly blamed the colonial administration for not distributing the rice stocks it held or importing additional quantities to alleviate the scarcity.[103] The government knew well in advance that food would be scarce in 1919. By June, district commissioners were sending reports of rural destitution and starvation to the Colonial Secretary in Freetown.[104] The Freetown press had appealed for government intervention. Government inaction led to the SLWN suggesting that a deputation "with a Ball of Foofoo in their hands and with the price of rice on their lips" should be sent to the governor.[105] Evelyn, the acting Governor, failed to catch the hint of discontent or distribute the 32 tons of rice lying idle at a

---

[101]. PRO CO267/582/48226, District Commissioner, Port Loko to Colonial Secretary, August 6, 1919.

[102]. PRO CO267/582, Evelyn to Viscount Milner, August 19, 1919.

[103]. PRO CO267/583/60683, Report on Food Shortage by Major Farrar, in Wilkinson to Viscount Milner, October 9, 1919. See also SLWN, July 19, 1919.

[104]. Ibid.

[105]. SLWN, July 12, 1919.

Customs shed. As the editorial of the SLWN rightly concluded, the administration failed to recognize its duty to maintain "law and order" as well as provide for the "well being" of the citizens.[106]

The riots resulted from the conjunctural crises generated by international and local factors in Sierra Leone between 1914 and 1919. World war I placed extraordinary demands on colonies to support the war efforts of their European colonizers. In Sierra Leone, and especially in Karene, the demands coincided with erratic climatic conditions and debilitating medical epidemics. The riots expressed popular disaffection against attempts by a section of the commercial elite to capitalize on the crisis by speculating on scarce food and the inability of the colonial state to provide relief.

Aftermath of the 1919 Riots

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, relief did not come very swiftly to the people of Karene. The upland rice "blight" and anticipated shortage in Karene District continued in 1920. Lack of seed rice and the hunger of 1919 produced half-sown farms and bushes. Unlike previous years, peasants "learned by painful experience." Instead of disposing of their rice at the government price of 22.5d per 84lb bushel, they kept some for the hungry season."[107] The government had still not "attacked the source of the evil" and rice went at "famine rates." Traders -- Syrians and Africans -- continued to hoard and profiteer from rice. A cup of rice continued to be sold at 4 1/2d, almost twice the regulated price of 2 1/2d.[108]

Nonetheless, the riots forced the government to take notice of the food situation and its overall importance in the political economy of colonial rule. It mooted ideas for the extension of riverine swamp cultivation along the south province.[109]

---

[106]. SLWN, July 19,1919.

[107]. PRO CO267/586/29778, Agricultural Department Report, 1919 in Wilkinson to Viscount Milner, April 31, 1920.

[108]. SLWN, October 11, 1919.

[109]. PRO CO267/588/63615, Wilkinson to Milner, December 12, 1920.

Agricultural experts were subsequently appointed to study the possibility. In 1922, a Rice Commission was set up to assess the needs of the country and to find ways of improving production and distribution. In the area of public health, more resources and attention were devoted to disease research and control. Politically, government restructured the protectorate into three provinces and 15 districts to strengthen its control. The second phase of colonialism had begun.[110]

Conclusion

Popular responses in Karene during the wartime crises revealed the attempts by different groups to mediate between resistance, accommodation and survival. The colonial government placed extraordinary labour and food demands on the population. Those burdens were compounded by unfavourable climatic conditions and epidemic disease. Peasants, slaves and other subaltern groups resorted to open confrontation with elite groups when conditions became intolerable and their survival was threatened. They acted not only to defend their interests within a communally justified framework but also to respond to new challenges imposed on them.

---

[110]. PRO CO267/587, Wilkinson to Milner, June 23, 1920.

CHAPTER FOUR

RECESSION AND SLAVE EMANCIPATION. 1920-1929

In the aftermath of the First World War, the Sierra Leone colonial administration faced a number of interrelated problems. It had to raise sufficient revenue to keep the state financially afloat. To ensure fiscal solvency, the administrators had to search constantly for new sources of revenue. As a consequence, they devoted much energy to improving agricultural production for export and internal consumption.[1] The improvement of agricultural production, especially food production, became crucial in the aftermath of war-time food shortages and the 1919 riots. The efforts by the state to improve agricultural productivity ultimately brought into sharp focus the problem of rural labour, especially that of domestic slavery. The accommodation of slavery by the state, which had long been assailed by slaves and abolitionists, increasingly became untenable. The Legislative Council finally abolished slavery in 1928.

Slave emancipation was the largest single social and structural change effected in the first three decades of colonial rule in Sierra Leone. Legally, the categories, "masters" and "slaves," and many of the centuries-old obligations entailed in servile relationships, disappeared. Emancipation created a pool of "free" African labour which had been the constant demand of abolitionists as well as of "progressive" imperialists. Emancipation, however, came at an inauspicious time for both ex-slaves and their former masters in Sierra Leone. Freedom for many slaves and the attendant dispossession for many masters came on the eve of the worldwide depression and a large-scale locust invasion. This chapter focuses not on the immediate effects of abolition but on the circumstances and context within which the state ended slavery in Karene District.

The Political Economy of Colonial Rule in Northwestern Sierra Leone in the 1920s

The social character of Karene and the rest of the protectorate had remained virtually unchanged over a generation of colonial rule. Demographically, the number

---

[1]. Until the discovery of minerals in the late 1920s and 1930s, agriculture was the chief source of government revenue. Kaniki, "Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone," p.369.

of inhabitants in the hinterland grew from an estimated 1,323,151 in 1911 to about 1,450,903 persons in 1921. The Northern Province had an estimated 483,250 people. These were distributed thus: Port Loko district, 153,300 people with a density of 70. 9 persons per square mile; Bombali District, 175,350 persons and a density of 52. 5 persons per mile and Karene District, 154,600 and a density of 52.2 persons per mile.[2] Between the censuses, the character and pattern of social reproduction changed negligibly. The majority of people remained peasants. Slaves made up about 15 to 30 percent of the population. The rural elite (namely, chiefs, big traders and religious leaders), petty traders and artisans still made up a tiny fraction of the rural society.[3]

The protectorate economy rested on the production of agricultural commodities namely palm kernel and oil, rice, kola nuts and ginger for consumption and export. Palm kernel effectively became the chief export commodity while rice remained the staple food. The peasant and slave labour, which produced, processed, transported and marketed these commodities was organized mainly along household and communal lines.[4] Small households as well as communities pooled labour to farm maximum acreage. Chiefs, sub-chiefs, headmen and a small group of precolonial elite, with their possession of slaves and greater claims to community and tribute labour, had more productive agricultural capacity than others.[5]

Economic historians generally agree that the most obvious impact of colonial rule in the early states was its stimulation of the expansion of commodity production for foreign markets and its 'opening' up African economies.[6] By the 1920s, European imports and currency had permeated African societies. Cash, rather than barter, became the major medium of commercial transactions and tax payments. Large

---

[2]. Sierra Leone Census Reports, 1911 & 1921.

[3]. Correspondence Relating to Slavery; The 1931 census recorded that almost 90-95% of the population in the various districts of the Northern Province were 'farmers.' Sierra Leone: Report of the Census, 1931 (Freetown, Government Printer, 1931).

[4]. SLWN, August 30, 1930.

[5]. Kaniki, "Economic History of Sierra Leone," pp.21-22.

[6]. Ibid. p.13; Hopkins, Economic History of West Africa, pp. 167-186.

European firms like AEC, SCOA, CFAO and A. Genet and Radcliffe dominated internal and external trade.[7] They expressed that domination in the scale of their commercial transactions and in the large shops and warehouses which by the 1920s were visible in towns like Makeni, Port Loko and Batkanu in the northwestern region. This domination of European firms meant Africans (in the colony and protectorate areas) and Syrians had to compete for the intermediate strata in commercial transactions. This competition generated acrimony which was expressed in racial and cultural tones, and occasionally in violent outbursts as in 1919 Anti-Syrian and Food riots.[8]

The resort to cultural and religious idioms to express resistance or disaffection should not be surprising. In northwestern Sierra Leone, for example, the colonial impact on culture and religion remained minimal up to the 1920s. Decades of Christian missionary activity had failed to break the sway that Islam and indigenous beliefs held over the vast majority of the inhabitants. Christian influence and missions remained tenuous and restricted to small and insular communities.[9] The government did not force the issue and, like many Christian missions, devoted most of its energy in building and maintaining schools in the southern and eastern regions.[10] Colonial officials only strongly encouraged the sons of chiefs and the elite in the northwestern region to attend Bo School in the Southern region, in the hope of producing a westernized caste of local administrators.

The paramount chieftaincy continued to be the linchpin of colonial administration in the Protectorate. The state fully demonstrated its confidence in that

---

[7]. PRO CO270/54, Annual Report, Northern Province, 1923.

[8]. See previous Chapter.

[9]. SLWN, April 12, 1922; See also Charles W. Carter, A Half Century of American Wesleyan Missions in West Africa (Syracuse, New York: Wesleyan Methodist Pub. Assoc., 1946), p. 181; Filbert Olson, Church Growth in Sierra Leone: A study of Church Growth in Africa's Oldest Protestant Mission Field (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Willan Edermans Pub. Co., 1969), pp. 135-137.

[10]. All of the ten government controlled schools in the protectorate in the 1920s were in the southern and eastern portions of the country as were the bulk of the mission schools.

institution when in 1924 it coopted chiefs into the Legislative Council. The administration nominated three paramount chiefs to seats in the council. One of them, Bai Kompa of Koya Chiefdom, represented the Northern Province in the newly expanded Legislative Council.[11] It ignored the emerging protectorate educated elite, who had made their interests and presence known in the Northern Province with the Committee of Educated Aborigines (CEA).[12] The integration of chiefs into the council had negligible consequences. The council continued to be dominated by European and colony interests. In the long run, however, the cooptation of the chieftaincy opened a breach between chiefs and the emerging educated protectorate elite. It also created a new terrain of competition between the protectorate and colony elite.

If the overall pace of political and social change in the protectorate up to the late 1920s seems tardy, it may be because "transport," which Lugard had referred to as the key to material development in Africa, remained poorly developed.[13] Only 104 miles of the rather limited 330 miles of countrywide railway track ran through the palm kernel enclave of the northern province. Most goods had to be moved by human porterage. The scale of human porterage shocked W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, the Under-Secretary of State, during his tour of West Africa in 1926.[14] The Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province, estimated that about 120,000 people spent around 8 days a year engaged in this "most expensive and wasteful form of transport" in the region. Around 84,200 people were engaged in the Southern Province.[15] The feverish spurt of communications and road construction undertaken by the

---

[11]. Annual Report for the Colony of Sierra Leone, 1924; Goddard, Handbook of Sierra Leone, pp. 97-99, 261.

[12]. Sibanda, "Northwestern Sierra Leone," p. 163.

[13]. Lugard, The Dual Mandate in Africa, p.5.

[14]. CMD 2744, Report by Hon. W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore on his visit to West Africa during the year, 1926, p. 58; Legislative Council Debates, 1926.

[15]. Ibid.

administration in the mid to late 1920s marginally affected the northern province.[16] Only a fraction of the 814 miles of roads constructed by 1932 passed through that region. Consequently, the rapid increase of motor vehicles in that period was felt more in Freetown and other regions. Of the over 800 registered private and commercial vehicles in the colony, only a few were based in the northwestern region. Port Loko, for example, had only three lorries.[17] The northern region continued to rely heavily on river transportation, which was improved by the introduction of motor boats and better jetties, as the quickest route to Freetown.

Economic Crises and the Response of the Colonial Government

The 1920s began in one crisis, the post-First World War depression, and ended in another, the Great Depression. In between the two crises, there was a glimmer of economic prosperity and expansion. Peasants produced and marketed record levels of palm kernels and oil, the mainstay of the export trade. The government invested the increased revenue it extracted from the trade on transportation, road construction, agricultural projects, a geological survey and other infrastructural programmes. European companies, traders and the rural elite also benefited from the short-lived boom. For northwestern Sierra Leone, Sibanda called the short-lived "boom" a moment of "opportunity."[18]

However, as Abdallah pointed out in his study of the Sierra Leone working class, this short-lived upswing should not obscure the reality of the fiscal crisis of the state or the persistence of the post-war economic recession.[19] Close examination of

---

[16]. See RHL (Rhodes House Library) Mss Afr. s399. Letters of Major A.H.J. Dove to his parents while on colonial service in Sierra Leone, 1925-1927. Dove, a sapper in the protectorate geological and cartographical survey in the 1920s, mentioned a local chief who asked that the colonial government construct a railway through the town. The chief was convinced that such a move would bring prosperity to his town. See Letter to Dove's mother dated February 21, 1926.

[17]. Two of these were owned by one Mr. Davies, and the other by the Paramount Chief Alkali Modu of Port Loko.

[18]. Sibanda, "Northwestern Sierra Leone," pp. 177-180.

[19]. Abdallah, "Colonial State, Mining Capital and Wage Labour," pp. 28-30.

the economic data would reveal that while production of palm kernel was improving, kernel prices were in fact falling in the post-war period. Competition from whale oil and seed oil depressed palm kernel prices. Between 1926 and 1930 the price of palm kernel fell from about £21.10s per ton to a record low of £8.15s per ton. Kola nuts exports also fared poorly with the contraction of demand from Nigeria and French West Africa. The French colonial government imposed preferential taxes on imports from other colonies and Senegal, a major importer of Sierra Leone kolanuts, scaled back its demand. Nigeria, the other main importer, increased its local production of the commodity. Furthermore, the officially recorded trade in rice, if that could be used as an indication of overall production, showed net deficit over years.[20]

The specific impact of the economic recession in northwestern Sierra Leone is difficult to gauge because of the absence of reliable economic data. Nonetheless, the economic mood of the region seemed to have reflected the general trend. The Provincial Commissioner noted that the production of commodities contracted. He reported in 1928 that the total tonnage of palm kernel sold, fell from 6,733 in the previous year to 5,894. Less rice, ginger and other commodities were also sold. In response to shifts in the economic climate and fluctuations in prices in the 1920s, peasant producers withheld produce, especially palm kernel and rice.[21] As prices fell, many producers diverted their efforts from palm products to producing more rice for which there was a relatively inelastic domestic demand. They also reduced their consumption of imported items and substituted with local alternatives. Many peasants and petty traders reneged on the obligations to the state by dodging the payment of taxes and license fees.[22] A columnist for the SLWN may have conveyed the general economic mood when he noted in 1928 that trade at Port Loko, one of the key trading towns in the region, was at a "standstill."[23]

---

[20]. Kaniki, "Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone," p. 25.

[21]. PRO CO267/595, Maxwell to Secretary of State, March 23, 1921; See Annual Reports for Northern Province, 1920, 1921 and 1928.

[22]. Sibanda, "Colonial Policy in Northwestern Sierra Leone," pp. 160-162.

[23]. SLWN, September 29, 1928.

Overall, the economic depression negatively affected the colony's balance of trade and its public finance. Governor A. R. Slater's expression of optimism in 1923 that Sierra Leone was finally emerging from its fiscal "slough of despond" was premature.[24] For three years, the budgets recorded surpluses. In 1926, however, the annual budget deficits reappeared and they persisted well into the Great Depression.[25] The financial situation of the colony was made more precarious by the refusal of the Imperial Exchequer to bail out the administration further.

To resolve its financial predicament, the administration resorted to different revenue saving and raising measures. Several European administrative personnel were reduced or retired. One hundred and seven clerks and other administrative subordinates and two hundred and fifty non-commissioned officers of the Royal West Africa Force were retrenched. The salaries and allowances of remaining European and African officials were reduced. The Railway industry was also reorganized.[26]

Government revenue raising schemes generated more controversies than cash. When acting Governor H.C. Luke suggested increases in house, income and other direct taxes, the substantive governor, Slater, opposed the measures. Slater felt that people in poorer districts like those in Northern Region could not afford it. Furthermore, he felt taxes would increase overcrowding in the Protectorate. Chiefs and peasants also vehemently opposed any tax increase.[27] The suggestions to raise import and export duties on palm kernel also generated much debate and opposition from Creole and European commercial circles.[28] With the depression, it was argued that raising import or export duties would not help commodity production.

Even in periods of boom, the colonial administration was fully aware that the economy of Sierra Leone rested on precarious foundations. As pointed out earlier, it tried to diversify and improve the economic base and productive capacity of the

---

[24]. Annual Report Sierra Leone, 1923.

[25]. See Annual Reports of Sierra Leone, 1923-1931.

[26]. Abdallah, "Colonial State, Mining Capital and Wage Labor," pp. 30-32.

[27]. PRO CO267/617/6678, House Tax, September 3, 1926.

[28]. Export Duty on Palm Kernels, Sessional Paper 6/1927.

colony. In agriculture, administrators devoted their attention to expanding and making the production of palm products more efficient while at the same time trying to break the colony's precarious dependence on the crop. The state established a palm kernel plantation in Masanki in the northern province in 1927.[29] It was riddled with difficulties until the 1940s. It vigorously promoted the cultivation of cocoa, sisal and many other products with varying levels of success. Finally, administrators also devoted a great deal of attention to improving rice cultivation for domestic consumption and external exports.

Moore-Sieray has elaborated on how colonial agricultural policy was implemented at bureaucratic, technical and practical levels in the 1920s.[30] The state reorganized the agriculture and forestry departments twice in the decade. It distributed seeds and invited agricultural experts to Sierra Leone to study agriculture and help disseminate new techniques. Administrators vigorously propagated to peasants, through chiefs and the rural elite, new crops and farming techniques. The experimental station and Agricultural College at Njala (and Mabang) also received greater support from government during the decade. Moore-Sieray argued that the efforts of the states during this period in policy formulation, agricultural training and institutional organization laid a strong basis for the expansion in crop production, especially swamp rice in the 1930s. [31]

Moore-Sieray's study is instructive in explaining the evolution of the institutional and practical basis of the colonial government policy but it is deficient in the examination of the socio-political basis on which that evolution was predicated. The efforts by the colonial government to improve agriculture raised serious social and political questions. The most critical of these questions was whether or not the social and political arrangement of protectorate societies could effectively support the policies and practices being suggested by the government. Nowhere was this question more pertinent than in the area of labour strategy. What labour strategy should be

---

[29]. Kaniki, "Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone," p. 71.

[30]. Moore-Sieray, "Evolution of Colonial Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone," pp. 76-95.

[31]. Ibid.

encouraged - servile, peasant or working class labour? These questions were not new or specific to the 1920s. They had dogged colonial administrators from the onset of colonial rule in West Africa.

The importance of confronting and resolving some of the social and political questions became evident during the attempts undertaken by the state to improve agricultural productivity. It was clearly demonstrated with the visit of the two agricultural experts from India, Messrs Chinnatherubi Pillai and G. Naik. Both men, with the assistance of two Temne peasants and three ex-students of the Bo School, toured extensively the rice producing areas of the protectorate. They had favourable as well as negative comments about agricultural development and government agricultural policies in the colony, especially with regard to rice cultivation.[32]

In his final report, Pillai expressed satisfaction with the method of swamp rice cultivation in the Skarcies Rivers area. Since the 1880s, Temne farmers had reclaimed extensive areas of swamp land and had constantly improved their method of rice cultivation. Churchill, the Secretary of State for Colonies, effectively conveyed Pillai's sentiment when he noted: "[i]t is quite evident that there is little we can teach the denizens of the Sierra Leone swamps in the matter of rice cultivation."[33] Pillai advised that swamp rice cultivation should be extended to other parts of the Protectorate along the lines adopted by the Temne farmers of the Skarcies Rivers area. This suggestion become a cornerstone of colonial agricultural policy on rice cultivation.[34] Most of Pillai's Report received favourable reception in Freetown and London. Overall, he endorsed permanent cultivation over shifting cultivation to the satisfaction of Governor Slater and other colonial officials.[35] The most constructive

---

[32]. Sierra Leone Government: Correspondence and Report on the Irrigation and Cultivation of Rice in Sierra Leone by A.C. Pillai (Freetown: Sierra Leone Government, 1927) and Further Report on the Irrigation for Rice in Sierra Leone by A.C. Pillai: Pamphlet # 5 (Freetown: Sierra Leone Government, 1927).

[33], Ibid.

[34]. CMD 2744, Report by Hon. W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore on West Africa. p. 83.

[35]. PRO CO267/600, Governor A. R. Slater to Secretary of State, Colonies, Devonshire. April 17, 1923.

aspect of Pillai's Report, however, may not necessarily have been the suggestions endorsed by colonial officials. It may have been those that they disliked. Pillai disagreed with the official perception that African agriculture was incapable of innovation and in dire need of technological transfer. He maintained that the problem of African agriculture was not one of technology and innovation, it was structural and embedded in the socio-political relations in the protectorate. Pillai maintained that a large increase in rice production could not be guaranteed except:

> when the peasant class, otherwise known as domestic slaves are assured of their independence in matters of labour and security of tenure in land they cultivate...[then] they will reap the result of their labour, without too heavy a drain on tribute.[36]

He recommended that agricultural instruction should be given directly to peasant farmers instead of through the chiefs as was the official practice. Only the Director of Agriculture, Douglas Scotland, supported the need for more direct local instruction and the need for administrative reforms and improvement of the social condition of natives.[37] The acting governor rejected Pillai's views as counter to the strategy of Indirect Rule. He argued that:

> "to attempt anything except through Paramount Chiefs, or on the other hand to ignore the interests of sub-chiefs and village headmen would be prejudicial to success, and to start operations with the disruption of tribal organization as a basis would, in my opinion, be disastrous and quite unnecessary. Although administrative difficulties exist, it is desirable to avoid misconception and exaggeration."[38]

Pillai did confuse the character of the different social groups and may have overstated the nature of the socio-political difficulties facing the protectorate. Nonetheless, he had raised poignant and unavoidable questions about the colonial government's agricultural policy. His critique had two unpleasant implications for official policy on agriculture. First, it challenged the long standing official orthodoxy on the absolute necessity of technical transfer to ensure greater agricultural productivity.

---

[36]. Correspondence and Report on the Irrigation and Cultivation of Rice in Sierra Leone.

[37]. Ibid.

[38]. Ibid.

Second, Pillai's call for radical socio-political change shifted the discussion from purely agricultural practice to the nature of colonial rule, land tenure and the structure of labour relations in Sierra Leone.

The Rice Commission, a local body, set up by the state in 1927 to complement the mandate of Pillai and Naik also touched on the problem of labour and socio-political relations in the protectorate. It did so, however, in a less direct manner. The commission's tasks had been to report on actual and potential sources of upland and swamp rice, examine annual rice price cycles, investigate recurrent price increases in the rainy season and advise government on measures that could be taken to ensure price stability. Like the Pillai mission, the commission had been appointed because of government anxiety over shortfalls in rice production. Over 1000 tons of rice were being imported yearly into the colony. Excepting two years, rice imports had exceeded exports within the last seventeen years.[39]

The commission, consisting of R.B. Mackie, M.T.Dawe and C.F. Loxley, paid particular attention to swamp rice production in the Northern province. The commissioners collected most of their data from chiefs, headmen, traders and peasant farmers in Samu and Mambolo chiefdoms in the northern region over a five day period. They estimated that colony consumed about 157,000 tons annually. Farmers retained about 8,500 tons as seed rice and exported 500 tons, mainly to Guinea. In their report, the commissioners put the overall minimum requirement for entire colony at 164,000 tons. They estimated that to feed the population adequately, production must be raised by 20 percent. This translated to about 187,000 tons of clean rice and 12,700 tons of seed husk rice.[40]

The commissioners believed the protectorate had the potential and ability to produce the needed quantity of rice. They blamed the existing usage and productivity level of rural labour for the existing rice shortfall. According to the commissioners, the processing of rice took up an inordinate amount of labour. It was estimated that about 8,346,000 adult working days were spent in hulling the rice; labour that could have

---

[39]. Sierra Leone Government Sessional Paper 7/1927, Report of the Rice Commission, 25 June, 1927.

[40]. Ibid.

been spent on cultivation and harvesting. To combat this 'wasteful' use of labour, the commissioners recommended that government should provide rice threshing machines in suitable places, and rice hulling machines in each chiefdom. It also suggested the establishment of a rice research station and a practical rice planter to supervise production in each area.[41]

The problem of poor labour productivity was also blamed on the manner in which "native psychology" functioned. The commissioners claimed it affected peasant productive capacity and income. They described Africans as "fond of litigation" and and said they "revelled" in unnecessary court cases after harvest time. For them, this supposedly revealed a "defect in character" and "improvidence" which led to wasted time and labour. Litigation also led to the exploitation of peasants by African and non-African traders, headmen, sub-chiefs and chiefs.[42] The rice commissioners did not examine the material basis of "native psychology" or the root causes of seemingly frivolous litigation.

Instead in their analysis of the socio-political problems affecting rice production, the rice commissioners had seized on the cultural and social form rather than the .substance of local disputations. Had they concentrated on the substance of the litigation, they would have discovered real issues of social injustice including political oppression by the elites and struggles over labour, land and resources embedded in these cases.

Provincial and district commissioners, who presided over these affairs, probably knew that local court cases and disputes were not simply matters of "native psychology." The case between Massumgbala and Tonko Limba in Karene district offers one such example. The inhabitants of the two chiefdoms clashed over farm land and resources between 1919 and 1925.[43] Two people died, several sustained injuries and property worth thousands of pounds was destroyed on both sides. The native tribunal, appointed by the administration to settle the dispute and presided over

---

[41]. Ibid.

[42]. Ibid.

[43]. SLNA CSO Open Policy Files on the Interior, Kambia District Kam-1, NA 34/1935. Tonko Limba/Massumgbala Boundary Dispute, 1925.

by the district commissioner, blamed the people of Masumgbala chiefdom. Both sides were ordered to pay reparations to those who suffered. Massumgbala had to pay the most, about £1,527, while Tonko Limba had to pay only £276. Alimamy Kanlu Kapr, the chief of Massumgbala, eventually "begged" Chief Bombo Lahai of Tonko Limba with £5 and agreed to pay fifty bushels of rice and 1000 kola nuts as reparations.[44] The reparations were paid by April 1923. Although the conflict manifested itself primarily in terms of land and access to resources, it was also fed by a long standing animosity between the chiefdoms dating back to the 1898 hut tax war. The tribunal discovered that the Massumgbala people had been egged on by the Chief of Munu, Bai Kelfa. Kelfa's predecessor and those of Massumgbala had opposed the war while those of Tonko Limba had actively supported it.[45]

A similar animosity underlined the conflict which flared between Marampa and Maforki chiefdoms in 1927 over land. The contested land had been given by a local headmen of Marampa to his "paramour" in Maforki who then passed it on to her relatives. The people of Maforki disputed the right of the woman to pass on the land and the right of her relatives to continue farming it.[46] The grievances of the Maforki people transcended the piece of land given to the woman. They demanded the return of 27 towns which had been claimed by Marampa in the aftermath of the 1898 rebellion. The dispute over those towns began when a sub-chief of Magbeli and regent of Marampa Chiefdom, Pa Suba Momo Rakka, double-crossed his pro-Bai Bureh allies. Momo Rakka supported the British, collected and willingly paid the disputed tax. In the aftermath of the war, he used his favourable standing with the British to claim the 27 towns and villages from Maforki. The people of Maforki disputed the claim and it was settled the "native way." Both sides appointed representatives who "ate bread" on their town's behalf. By 1927, Maforki claimed victory since its representatives survived the ordeal while those of Marampa had died. Marampa refused to return the

---

[44]. Ibid.

[45]. Ibid.

[46]. SLWN, April 7, 1928.

towns.[47]

As much as possible, the colonial government mediated and resolved these conflicts within the framework of "customary law" without changing the precolonial land tenure system. Land remained largely family and communal property and paramount chiefs were recognised as guardians. House slaves had access to land under servitude but were deprived of it on acquisition of freedom except if they reached some kind of arrangement with the owners.[48] Even the seasonal migrant labour and land-seekers who flocked into the northwestern region and helped in the ongoing conversion of swamp land into rice land were treated as strangers with limited tenancy rights over land. Only in a small number of cases did land permanently change hands for cash. Guided by its experiences in other British colonies, the state resisted pressures to amend protectorate land tenure to increase access to outsiders.[49] On its part, the state promoted agricultural development programmes -- including the introduction of agricultural machinery, newer crop varieties and new planting techniques -- within the framework of the existing land tenure system. It continued to support chiefs as the key players in the protection of, competition over, and accumulation of land.[50]

The Removal of a Cruel Stain: Slave Resistance and Emancipation

The state could perhaps afford to avoid the land question, but it could not, however, ignore the labour question. Both the Rice Commission and Pillai Reports had sufficiently demonstrated the degree to which the problems of agricultural productivity and food self-sufficiency intersected with the issue of labour in rural areas. As Abdallah and Sundiata pointed out, the labour problem was hardly one of availability,

---

[47]. SLWN, April 7, 1928.

[48]. See section on land tenure in the protectorate in Goddard's, Handbook of Sierra Leone, pp. 82-93.

[49]. SLWN, March 26, 1929; SLWN, April 13, 1929.

[50]. Ibid.

for the colony had excess labour which was even exported.[51] The labour problem, especially the rural slave labour problem, was in its overall character, its employment, productivity and remuneration. Most important, the problem was its lack of freedom to produce or move freely around. Slave and peasant labour had contributed extensively to road construction, public works and transportation of commodities and officials.[52] Most of the time, this labour was coerced, making it difficult to control and discipline.

Strategic and unspectacular acts of resistance by slaves and peasants against forced and poorly-paid work constantly frustrated the government and rural elite. Labourers hired for road construction and other public projects absented themselves frequently. Carriers recruited by chiefs and colonial government officials disappeared in the middle of long treks.[53] Many peasants and slaves, tired of the exactions of chiefs and colonial administrators, sought the freedom of the city.[54] By resisting control and discipline, rural labourers, especially slaves, demonstrated that they could neither be efficient nor productive under conditions of coercion. Furthermore, as the 1926 Railway Workers Strike clearly demonstrated, the problem of labour productivity and discipline was not limited to rural labour; it was general. Part of the question then that confronted the state in the 1920s was how to make labour - peasant, slave and workers - more productive at a reasonable cost.

The issue of unfree and coerced labour took the centre stage partly at this level. Within the ranks of the colonial adminstration in Freetown and London, proponents of free labour were blaming the post-First World War economic stagnation, financial

---

[51]. Abdallah, "Colonial State, Mining Capital and Wage Labor," p.169; Ibrahim K. Sundiata, From Slavery to Neoslavery: the Bight of Biafra and Fernando Po in the era of Abolition, 1827-1930 (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin, 1996).

[52]. Cox-George, Finance and Development, p.300.

[53]. See Dove Letters, especially letter written from Forodugu, Northern Province to his mother, dated 8.2.26. He bemoans the intractable behaviour of carriers.

[54]. SLWN, June 22, 1922; Sierra Leone Legislative Council Debates, 2/12/1925.

insolvency and depression in the colony for the persistence of slavery.[55] The internal criticisms coincided with international pressure on the Colonial Office in London and the administration in Sierra Leone to abolish slavery. Britain was called upon to live up to its obligations under the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye signed in 1919. The treaty had called for the "suppression of slavery in all its forms" because of the inhumanity of the system. The League of Nations put additional pressure through its commission on slavery. The commission periodically questioned European Imperial powers about the concrete measures they had taken to eradicate slavery in their colonies.[56]

Thus, by the late 1920s, both within and outside the colony, a solid body of opinion had crystallized around the old abolitionist argument that slave labour was inhuman and inefficient. The implication of that argument was that the productive potential of slave labour must be freed by abolition of slavery. With this vigorous recrudescence of abolitionism and the economic conditions in the colony, the state found it morally difficult to sustain its compromise over slavery with the slave-owning rural elite or to shelve the question under the rubric of "native custom" or "domestic institution."[57]

Besides, the state was in a better and stronger position than a generation earlier. Unlike 1898, when the chiefs could have bitterly and violently contested any such attempt, they were in a far weaker and more subordinated position in the 1920s. Their military ability had dissipated and as was clearly shown during the passage of the abolition ordinance, they were also in a weaker position to enforce their authority over slaves. Furthermore, the colonial state clearly had a choice as to how it could deal with the question of unfree and coerced labour. It did not have to focus on all forms of coerced labour, it simply had to deal with the most visible and controversial form, slavery.

The process by which the colonial government attempted to deal with the

---

[55]. SL NAMP CS118/21, Maxwell to Colonial Secretary; CMD 3020, Correspondence Relating to Slavery in Sierra Leone.

[56]. Grace, Domestic Slavery in West Africa, p. 233.

[57]. CMD 3020, Correspondence Relating to Slavery.

question of slavery was, however, marred by administrative indecision and lack of political will. Colonial officials in Sierra Leone expressed conflicting views on the nature of domestic slavery, the timetable for abolition, and the consequences of general emancipation. Many of the views expressed by the officials were based on personal perceptions of the system rather than on concrete data. Governor R.J. Wilkinson, therefore, instructed district commissioners to collect information as a prelude to general registration of slaves.[58] He saw a general registration as essential to the development of clear abolition strategies. Despite the support Wilkinson received from the Colonial Office, the project never materialized due to the shortage of staff.[59]

Governor Slater, who succeeded Wilkinson in 1920, also made the collection of information on domestic slavery a priority. He succeeded in getting a rough idea of the scale of servitude in Sierra Leone. The various district commissioners estimated the slave population to be about 15 to 30 percent of the total Protectorate population.[60] Beyond that, little else was achieved. The governor spent much time mediating among the conflicting views of district commissioners, interests of the Protectorate slave-holding elite and vocal Creole public opinion.[61]

The colonial administration eventually framed its anti-slavery legislative options around the abolitionist precedents in Gambia and Nigeria. The Gambian Anti-Slavery Ordinances of 1895 and 1906 freed slaves born after the promulgation of the ordinances and all others on the death of their masters. The Nigerian Ordinance of 1916 supposedly abolished slavery without compensation, a perception which subsequently proved erroneous.[62] With the support of the Colonial Office, Slater suggested an amendment to the Protectorate Ordinance of 1901 along the lines of the

---

[58]. Evelyn, Colonial Secretary to District Commissioners, 26 September 1919, in 'Domestic Slavery' n.d.

[59]. CMD 3020, Correspondence Relating to Slavery.

[60]. Ibid.

[61]. Grace, Domestic Slavery in West Africa, pp.168-169 [238-239]; SLNA MP 1300/1923, W.B. Stanley to the Colonial Secretary, May 23, 1923.

[62]. Slavery persisted in Nigeria and was finally abolished only in 1936. See Paul Lovejoy, Slow Death for Slavery, pp. 280-284.

Gambian precedent. The amendment did not arouse much debate in Legislative Council but it did attract strong objection from the Protectorate elite.

The eloquent contribution of Bai Kompa, the paramount chief of Koya Chiefdom and representative of the Northern Province, who had been appointed to Legislative Council in 1924, illustrated the stake of the masters in perpetuating servitude. The chief argued:

> About the slave matter. We own slaves. We, all black men, are slaves, because Chiefs are the people Europeans tell not to do certain things. They gives us orders. They say we must set slaves free. Suppose, we set them free, will we be paid? We work for the people and our slaves work for us. Since we chiefs enter this council I have said nothing about anything, but as to this slave matter, we do not agree to it. If the slaves want freedom, they should redeem themselves so we can put money into the bank.
>
> They say when the master of a slave dies the slave must be set free. How can the master of slave die when he has got a child? He is only dead when he has no children... In the case of the master and slave, the master bears children also, they grow together and live as brothers. When the master dies his son takes the slaves. If on the death of the master the slave is set free, who will work for the children of the master, who will support them.[63]

In retrospect, Bai Kompa's singular dissent may seem futile since all slaves in Sierra Leone were emancipated in 1928 without compensation to owners. Yet, his speech was important in its revelation of the *mentalité* of masters and the discourse of slavery in Sierra Leone. Articulated seven years after, it presented a counterpoint to the statement of the slave, Sedu.[64] Like Sedu, Bai Kompa spoke within and appropriated discursive elements of the moral consensus of servitude to defend what he felt was a commonly understood and accepted relationship between masters and slaves.

While Sedu had defended the rights of slaves, Kompa defended the rights of owners. He insisted on the role and function of slaves in producing wealth and perpetuating the status of his family. Kompa spoke like a true paternalist who viewed slaves as extensions of the family. He would never have supported the actions of Sedu or his master, Almamy Koroma. Almamy undermined the paternalism of the

---

[63]. CMD 3020, Correspondence relating to Slavery.

[64]. See previous chapter.

masters and violated social norms pertaining to the treatment of slaves. On the other hand, Sedu violated customary as well as colonial criminal laws with his murderous acts. Both transgressed the limits of tolerable social behaviour and threatened the communal consensus on slavery. Kompa saw that same threat within the colonial attempt at emancipation. He was adamant that the children of owners needed the next generation of slaves to perpetuate themselves. On the proposition to free slaves on the death of their master, he asked, "How can the master of a slave die when he has got a child?... who will work for the children of the master, who will support them?"[65] In other words, how would the slave owning elite of Sierra Leone reproduce itself?

Both Sedu and Bai Kompa spoke within the discourse of negotiated rights and obligations, and of the expected duties and roles of masters and slaves. What Bai Kompa refused to accept was that the "moral consensus" at the centre of this discourse had been challenged by slaves like Sedu and the realities of the post-war politics and economics. His colleague Paramount Chief Bai Comber had a more realistic grasp of the situation. Comber indicated the willingness of the Protectorate elite to cooperate with the colonial government on the issue of abolition.[66]

Bai Kompa's views and insistence on compensation received the support of the Creole political class and its press. A.E. Tobuku-Metzger, one of the elected representatives to the Legislative Council for the "colony," maintained that the slave owners should be compensated along the lines of the former British slave owners in the Caribbean in 1834. The Sierra Leone Weekly News, while welcoming the pending abolition of slavery as the "removal of a cruel stain" on the reputation of Sierra Leone, nonetheless endorsed Tobuku-Metzger's views.[67] Creole upper class opinions on abolition shocked external observers. A columnist in the Daily Mail, a newspaper in Britain, found it ironic that the "descendants" of slaves would defend the institution

---

[65]. CMD 3020, Correspondence relating to Slavery.

[66]. Ibid.

[67]. SLWN, Sept 17, 1927; SLWN, October 1, 1927 & SLWN, November 19, 1927.

of slavery.[68] Metzger and the Sierra Leone Weekly News insisted their views had been grossly misrepresented. They argued they had merely invoked British sense of "fair play" and requested that slave-owners in Sierra Leone be treated like those in the Caribbean.[69]

Creole views were definitely not grossly misrepresented. Within the pages of the same Sierra Leone Weekly News, a guest columnist writing the under the pseudonym Modibo strongly criticized Creole upper class views. He argued that compensation to chiefs should be an "act of grace and not to be expected of right."[70] Pointing out the inherent oppression in the institution of slavery, Modibo asserted:

> No human being can ever have a right to the ownership of his fellow human. The liberty of man is an axiom that finds acceptance even among the most barbarous communities.[71]

He opined that slaves, not masters, should be the ones getting reparations for the "untold miseries they and ancestors have endured for generations."[72]

Creole upper class concerns about emancipation transcended questions of compensation. They had long had an antipathy towards rural migration to the city. They feared that sudden abolition would merely compound this trend, and its resultant social ills, namely, vagrancy, crime and unemployment. The Creole upper class wanted the state to discourage slaves from leaving their masters. They wanted arrangements which would keep them with their former masters. In 1927, the SLWN repeated its call for a labour bureau to register and monitor all workers in the colony.[73]

Creole upper class sentiments and the dissatisfaction of the slave-owning elite, expressed through Bai Kompa, failed to sway the colonial administration. The anti-slavery amendment, known as Protectorate Amendment Ordinance No. 3 of 1926,

---

[68]. Daily Mail (London), October 10, 1927.

[69]. SLWN November 19, 1927.

[70]. SLWN October 8, 1927.

[71]. Ibid.

[72]. Ibid.

[73]. SLWN, December 31, 1927.

passed easily in the Legislative Council.[74] The government instructed provincial and district commissioners "to stop helping slave owners recover runaway slaves because it was now illegal for Government Officers, even in their executive position, to recognize the legal status of slavery."[75] The amendment was a half-measure. It did not emancipate slaves. However, it did provide an opportunity for slaves to seize the moment once more. Many slaves ran away with the expectation that their owners would not receive aid from the colonial government to recapture them. In Karene and Bombali districts, Loko and Limba slaves from Biriwa Limba left their Mandingo masters and returned home to Sanda Loko and Sella Limba Chiefdoms. Others refused to work for their masters.[76] Slave owners attempted to reassert their crumbling authority by forcibly recapturing fugitive slaves and compelling them to work. The recaptured slaves appealed to the district commissioners. In Karene district, these appeals led to the arrest and conviction of Nfa Nonko, a Mandingo sub-chief, and several other slave owners for assault against former slaves. The convicted slave owners however took their case to the Court of Appeal in Freetown. The judges ruled in their favour. Three out of the five appeal judges decided Nfa Nonko and the other owners had used reasonable force in recovering their property.[77] The legal struggle between the fugitive slaves, Nfa Nonko and his colleagues, and the state exposed the limits of the anti-slavery amendment of 1926. Nfa Nonko and his colleagues effectively demonstrated that the colonial state had not abolished chattel slavery. They also exposed the limit to which recaptured slaves could legally challenge their owners.

The masters, however, had merely achieved a pyrrhic victory. The appeal court verdict in favour of Nfa Nonko and the other slave owners embarrassed the British Colonial Office. It exposed the unresolved ambivalence in the Colonial Office's policy on slavery in Sierra Leone. Conscious of the international anti-slavery sentiment and

---

[74]. See Annual Report of the Sierra Leone Colony, 1926.

[75]. Grace, Domestic Slavery in West Africa, p.241.

[76]. Ibid., p.224; SLWN, Sept 17, 1927.

[77]. CMD 3020, Correspondence Relating to Slavery.

the restive mood of slaves, the Colonial Office issued fresh instructions to the Sierra Leone administration to draft a new law abolishing slavery completely. It discounted arguments put forward by Governor Slater about compensation and postponing the abolition date. A Bill entitled "Ordinance 24 of 1927 - Legal Status of Slavery (Abolition) Ordinance, 1927," was passed, abolishing slavery from the beginning of 1928.[78]

In general, the history of servitude and its abolition in Sierra Leone confirms Martin Klein's general observation that for many slaves in French West Africa, "emancipation involved a struggle that often lasted generations."[79] Yet, the experience and struggle of slaves in the hinterland of Sierra Leone contains an element of profound paradox, if not shock. Emancipation had come a hundred and forty-one years after the foundation of a colony on the coast of Sierra Leone as a haven for freed slaves, and ninety-five years after Britain abolished slavery in its Caribbean and African colonies.

Generations of struggle had finally culminated in an ordinance which severed the legal bond between slave and masters. For that reason alone, the abolition of slavery was a pivotal point in the history of Sierra Leone and the northern region. It marked the end of a "mode of production" that was centuries old and that had defined the socio-economic and political character of the region. The ordinance did not immediately alter the social and material circumstances of slaves, but it did ensure that "masters" and "slaves" ceased to exist as legally recognized social categories. It was a hiatus, which signified not the end, but certainly the transmutation of generations of struggles against a particularly invidious form of rural coercion.

The state did not proceed beyond the passage of the act of emancipation. Former slaves and their masters were left to work out and decide their future. The majority stayed and worked out new relationships.[80] Others stayed in the chiefdom

---

[78]. Annual Report of the Sierra Leone colony, 1927.

[79]. Martin Klein, "Slavery and Emancipation in French West Africa," in Martin Klein (ed.) Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p.190.

[80]. Annual Report for the Sierra Leone Colony, 1928.

of their enslavement but refused to work for their former owners. Some ex-slaves left their ex-masters and returned to their chiefdom of origin. Still others joined the stream of migrants to Freetown and other urban centres to search for non-existent jobs.[81] The state made no attempt to deal with the issues of access to land or the creation of alternate employment opportunities for ex-slaves. In general, for both slaves and masters, the abolition ordinance came at a particularly inauspicious time. The country was beginning to feel the crunch of the depression. The price of commodities had just began their tumble in the European and local markets.[82] The discovery of gold and iron ore offered a ray of economic hope but it would take some time for its effect to be felt.

Pestilence and Depression, 1928-1930

Till then people in the northwestern region had to cope with a despondent economic and social atmosphere which was exacerbated by an unexpected plague of locusts. The locust swarms, travelling at about eight miles per hour in a south and south-westerly direction, invaded Sierra Leone from Guinea in May 1928. Individual swarms, 300 feet across and 20 feet deep, covered areas as large as 20 to 30 miles in length. The rice producing areas of the Skarcies rivers bore the brunt of the locust attack. Areas like Tonko Limba and Mange Bureh were also particularly hard hit.[83] The swarms inflicted incalculable damage on crops and farms. They fed ravenously on cereal crops including rice, maize, fundi, guinea corn and millet. They also attacked cassava, groundnuts and seed potatoes. In many instances, peasant cultivators had to re-sow rice and fundi. The locust plague lasted for over three years, subsiding only in July, 1931.[84]

---

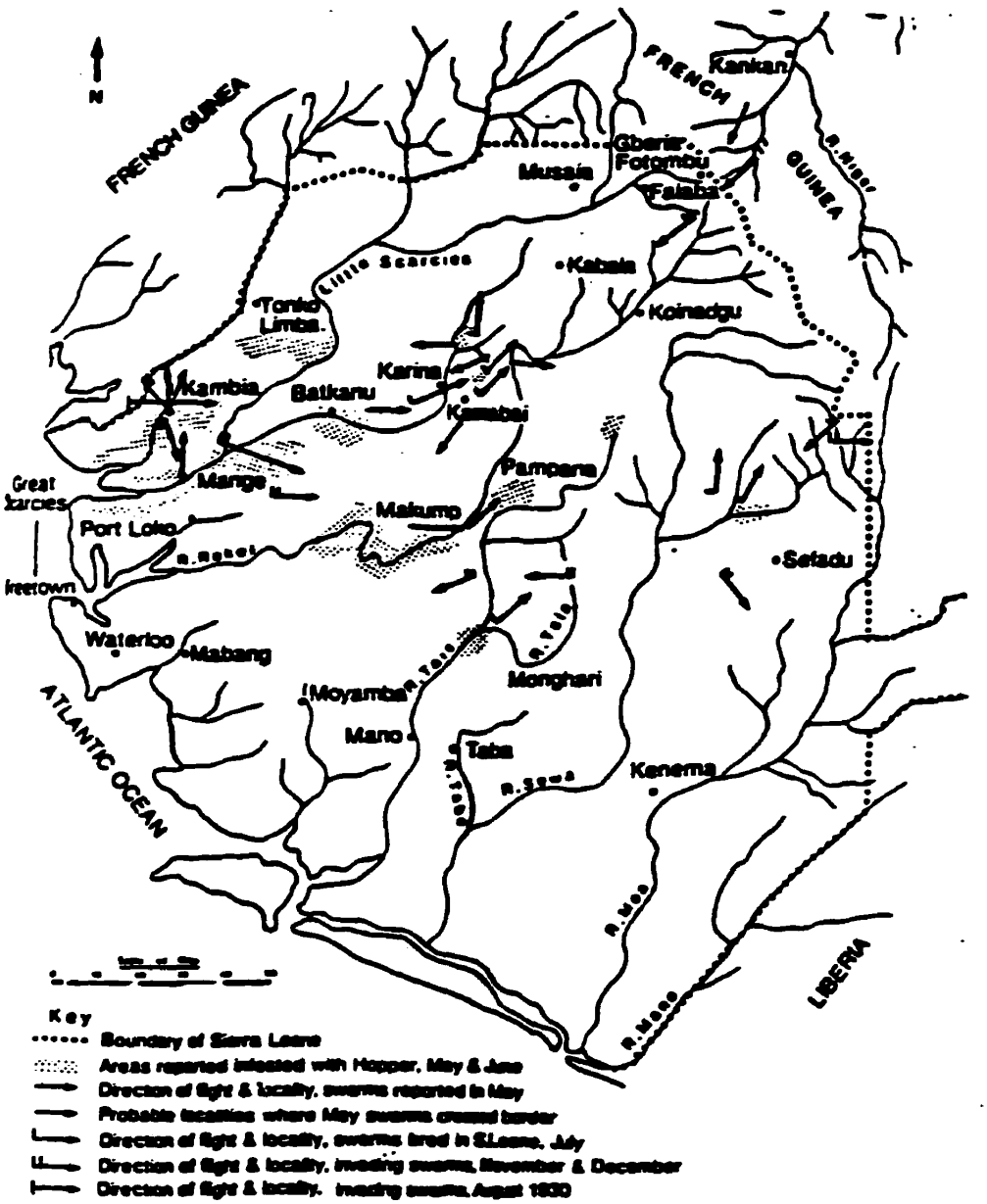
[81]. Abdallah, "Colonial State, Mining and Wage Labour," p.162.

[82]. See Sierra Leone Reports, 1929 and 1930,

[83]. SLNA A/90/29 Telegram, District Commissioner Stocks to Department of Agriculture, April 30, 1929; Douglas Scotland, Director of Agriculture to Colonial Secretary, Freetown. May 1, 1929.

[84]. PRO CO 554/87/9, Acting Governor Cookson to Secretary of State, Lord Passfield, January 26, 1931.

MAP 3: Areas attacked by Locusts between 1929-1932



Source: D. Moore-Sieray, "Evolution of Colonial Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone."

Peasant farmers and their communities responded to the plague with their time-tested methods. They dug trenches, beat whole swarms and flamed their farms.[85] These measures proved minimally effective against the initial waves of attack. The trenches trapped a good number of locusts but could not stop the movement of large swarms. Burning produced better results during the day when the swarms were inactive but was less effective at night when they were active. It also posed the danger of inadvertently destroying large areas if not properly controlled. Furthermore, the growth of new grass, after burning, tended to encourage locusts and burning therefore had to be deferred until the end of May. The natural enemies of the locusts also helped in reducing their numbers. Nematode worms destroyed the locust eggs. Humans, birds, monkeys, fish, dogs and other animals feasted on them.[86]

The Agricultural department and RWAFF complemented the efforts of the peasant farmers and their communities.[87] They provided arsenical compounds and poisoned bait to farmers to help combat the plague. The poisoned bait consisted of sodium arsenite, paris green, sawdust and salt; they were used to dust their farms. Farmers used dust guns and canisters to spray the mixture on their farms.[88] The mixture attracted the hoppers. Cannibalism among the locust swarms multiplied the effect of the poison. The mixture, however, scorched crops. To combat cases of poisoning among people, the medical department provided antidotes.

The combined efforts of the farmers and the administration had produced limited success against initial waves but they learnt valuable lessons of how to deal with successive ones. Entomologists in the Agriculture Department devoted much time to studying the movement, behaviour, feeding patterns and life-cycle of the locusts. Through the Imperial Bureau of Entomology, they benefited from the Nigerian

---

[85]. SLWN, April 7, 1928.

[86]. PRO CO 554/87/9, Acting Governor Cookson to Secretary of State, Lord Passfield, January 26, 1931.

[87]. SLNA A/90/29. Secret Despatch titled "Subject:-Locust Campaign" From OC, Troops Batkanu to Adjutant RWAFF, Wilberforce Barracks.

[88]. SLNA A/90/29, Director of Agriculture to Colonial Secretary, August 11, 1930.

experience in dealing with locust infestation.[89] The studies revealed that the locusts bred in mainly waterlogged grassy areas during rainy seasons, especially areas which had been burnt. They illustrated why the rice producing areas of the Skarcies Rivers had been most vulnerable to the locust attack. To effectively counter the plague, the state also increased the amount allocated for locust control from £150.00 in 1930 to £1500.00 in 1931.[90]

The Agriculture Department condensed the information it had from studying the locusts into a pamphlet which it printed in English, Temne and Mende and distributed widely. The pamphlet provided instructions on methods to deal with locusts, including the preparation of poisoned bait. Officials mobilized the support of chiefs in educating peasants and dealing with the plague. The colonial administration complemented popular education with an early warning mechanism and strategic placement of nine dumps of poisoned bait around the country. The locust early warning system consisted of a telegraph relay system which incorporated French Colonial administrators.[91] By 1930, Africans had become more experienced. They destroyed large hordes in Kambia, Port Loko, Bombali and Moyamba districts.[92] Locusts, however, continued to plague the region well into the 1930s.

Conclusion:

For the northwestern region of Sierra Leone, the 1920s had been a decade of mixed developments. On the one hand, the social character of the population had undergone a change with the disappearance of domestic slavery. Fifteen to thirty

---

[89]. SLNA A/90/29, Guy A.K. Marshall, Director, Imperial Bureau of Entomology to Under Secretary of State, Colonies September 18, 1930; A. Fiddian, Colonial Office to Director, Imperial Bureau of Entomology. November 24, 1930. See also enclosure titled "Locust Infestation in Nigeria."

[90]. PRO CO 554/87/9, Report by Entomologists at Njala, January 14, 1931.

[91]. SLNA A/90/29, Lt Governor, Conakry, Guinea to Governor, Freetown, Sierra Leone. June 20, 1930; Governor, Freetown, Sierra Leone to Lt Governor, Conakry, Guinea, July 19, 1930; Governor, Freetown, Sierra Leone to Lt Governor, Conakry, Guinea, July 26, 1930.

[92]. PRO CO 554/87/9, Report by Entomologists at Njala, January 14, 1931.

percent of the population started the decade as slaves; they ended the decade as peasants or lumpen-proletarians. On the other hand, the decade ended as it had begun, in economic depression and social despondency. The ensuing crisis cut across all classes, localities and ethnic groups. The locust attack accentuated this sense of despondency. Peter White, a sapper with the cadastral team which was surveying the protectorate, conveyed the sombre mood in the colony in a letter to his family. From his station in Kabala in the Northern Province, all White could see was a colony steadily going "bankrupt," its people and trade becoming "poorer," and hordes of locusts "advancing" on the local communities.[93] White never liked Sierra Leone and his impressions have to be taken with a grain of salt. Nonetheless, his letters did convey the gloomy atmosphere of the period. To alleviate the crisis, chiefs, peasants and ex-slaves searched for relief and succour from colonial as well as indigenous sources. In 1930, a man arrived in the Northern Province who claimed he "knew" about the "locust palaver." It is to the story of this man and his eventual clash with the colonial state that we must now turn.

---

[93]. See Letters from Peter Francis White to Sheshe written from Kabala dated December 28, 1929 and December 30, 1930. RHL MSS. British Empire s.280.

CHAPTER FIVE

MILLENARIANISM AND MAHDISM: THE IDARA REVOLT OF 1931

The locust plague and the economic depression propelled Idara Konthorfili, an itinerant Muslim cleric, into prominence in the politics of colonialism in the 1930s. Idara became an alternative source of relief in a period when the colonial state and indigenous institutions proved inadequate. The competing source of authority and succour that he provided for the distressed rural populace -- peasants, ex-slaves and chiefs -- through his healing "powers" and his religious mission eventually pitted him and his supporters against the colonial state.

This chapter focuses on the Idara Revolt of 1931. It studies the cleric who mobilized popular support and led a revolt against a local chieftain and the colonial administration. It investigates Idara's use of Islamic revivalism and messianism to justify his actions. Although quickly suppressed, the revolt challenged both local and colonial authority and revealed the depth of crisis of the colonial political economy in northwestern Sierra Leone during the depression period. After Bai Bureh in the 1890s, Idara was the first to invoke the hated Hut Tax as a justification for resistance, and to use violent military means to challenge British colonial rule in the region.

Idara Konthorfili and the Bubuya Movement, 1930-1931

Not much is known about the origins and life of Idara before his entry into Sierra Leone. His contemporaries described him as a "thin, pale complexioned man of medium height with a face disfigured by numerous scars left by small pox" and teeth discoloured by snuff. His Limba and Soso informants remembered Idara as a man of about 30 to 35 years old, who sported a turban and pointed canvas shoes.[1] They

---

[1]. This physical description of Idara comes from David Moore-Sieray who did extensive oral interviews among the people of Tonko Limba Chiefdom. See especially Chapter Four of David Moore-Sieray's "Idara Konthorfili (1880-1931) and the 1931 Insurrection in North West Sierra Leone" (B.A. Hons. Thesis, F.B.C., University of Sierra Leone, 1978), pp. 70.

recalled that Idara was decorated with ***sebbeh***, and he carried a sword and a thasbir.[2]

Idara arrived in Yana, Tambakkha Yobanji Chiefdom around May 1930. His sojourn in Sierra Leone could have been considered part of the centuries old movement of Islamic clerics and *morimen* from Guinea to Northern Sierra Leone. Kambia district, where he attempted to sink his roots, had long been an Islamic frontier of partially Islamicized communities.[3] What set Idara's arrival apart from earlier clerics was its timing. He arrived in Northern Sierra Leone at the height of the locust invasion and the worldwide depression. The Kambia District Commissioner, Sayers, claimed to have met and denied him entry to the country. Somehow, Idara stayed and spent six months in the Yana area. In that time, his religious zeal as well as his powers of divination, healing and protection became legendary. Chiefs and commoners alike flocked to him for succour.[4]

Idara's fame spread rapidly in the region. The suppliant pilgrims who flocked to Yana spoke of the "angel" who knew about the "locust palaver."[5] Bombo Lahai, the paramount chief of Tonko Limba, heard about the reputation of Idara from those who passed through his town en route to Yana. Anxious to rid his chiefdom of locusts and save the rice crop on which they depended to meet their annual tax obligations, Bombo Lahai dispatched his son, Amadu, to acquire some "medicine" from Idara. The cleric sent an emissary, Amadu Serifu, to the chief with a promise that he would stop at Bubuya on his tour of Port Loko, and Freetown. Bombo Lahai's consultation of Idara was rooted in the *mentalité* and culture of the Limba and surrounding groups. Idara was seen as a great *moriman*. Chiefs and commoners routinely consulted *morimen* for

---

[2]. The thasbir is the string of beads used for prayer and meditation by Muslims. It is also sometimes used for divination by *morimen*.

[3]. J.S. Trimingham, A History of Islam in West Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) pp. 228-229.

[4]. SLWN, January 3, 1931.

[5]. See Testimony of Chief Alimamy Bombo Lahai during the Commission of Enquiry in Kambia. Encl.1 April 17, 1931 in PRO CO267/633/9569.

divination, propitiation and healing.[6]

After a brief stop in Samaia, Idara took his curative and protective powers as well as his religious mission to Tonko Limba in October 1931.[7] He provided "medicine" to protect the people, land and chieftaincy of Tonko Limba from the plagues and distress. Idara made protective charms for the chief, sub-chiefs, headmen and commoners for personal use and for their farms. He demanded neither money nor food in exchange for his services.[8] Instead he called for, and obtained willingly, the destruction of symbols and materials relating to Limba indigenous practices of divination and healing. Idara destroyed many "blys," "swears," "krifis," and "sebehs."[9] He humiliated local "sorcerers" and "healers" by shaving their heads and beards. Many of them resisted his attacks unsuccessfully. Idara's own practices and claims did not differ radically from the practitioners he sought to replace.

The rigour and intensity with which he pursued his campaign eventually alienated many Limba.[10] Many complied with his actions only out of fear and respect for the chief who hosted him. The willingness of the chief and some of his people to destroy their local religious symbols and paraphernalia revealed the seriousness of the locust crisis and depression, and the consequent weakening of confidence in local belief systems.

Idara linked his attack on indigenous healers, beliefs and practices to his professed religious mission. He assured the Bombo Lahai and the colonial administration that his goal was to spread Islam. Idara connected the success of his curative activities and the propitiation of general crisis to individual and general spiritual

---

[6]. For a description of religious and cultural beliefs of the Limba and adjacent groups in Northern Sierra Leone, see McCulloch, Peoples of Sierra Leone, pp. 47-74.

[7]. See Testimony of Chief Alimamy Bombo during the Commission of Enquiry in Kambia. Encl.1 17th April 1931 in PRO CO267/633/9569.

[8]. Moore-Sieray, "Idara Konthorfili," p.71.

[9]. Ruth Finnegan, "Swears among the Limba," Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion, 6, 1, (June 1964), pp. 8-25; J. L. Littlejohn, "The Temne *Ansasa*," Sierra Leone Studies, 13,(June 1960), p.32.

[10]. Moore-Sieray, "Idara Kontorfili," p. 106.

purification. He declared Islam to be the vehicle of this purification and preached constantly about its virtues. All that was deemed un-Islamic in Limba society - drunkenness, sloth and licentiousness - was attacked by the cleric. Idara exhorted people to pray regularly as specified by the Koran. Some did so willingly and others complied through coercion. Children were assigned Islamic instructors. Idara disapproved of single women and requested they should be married. As an example and as a seal of allegiance to Chief Bombo Lahai, he married his daughter, Bintu.[11]

The Colonial Government Response

The government responded to Idara with a mixture of cautious tolerance and surveillance of his activities. Officials were particularly apprehensive since they were centred in an area of Karene District which had been hostile to the state during the 1898 Hut Tax War and volatile in the 1920s. Nonetheless, as long as colonial administrators felt Idara's activities uplifted the morals of the "natives," they tolerated them. Furthermore, Idara had assured officials of his pacific and religious intensions. He praised the "English" for their tolerance of Islam.[12] Colonial administrators accepted the praise grudgingly. Despite the concern that Idara was a "hot gospeller" who could excite the "unsophisticated natives" in the Northern province, the administration balked at repressing his activities. They feared it might alienate "Loyal Mohammedans" and make a "Martyr" of him. Administrators, nonetheless, kept a watchful eye on him. They made enquiries with French colonial administrators about him and his activities. The French had nothing on him.[13] Both the cleric and the administrators maintained an uneasy accommodation until January 1931.

The confrontation between the cleric and the administration began when the Commissioner of Northern Province, N. G. Frere, informed the Governor on January 23, 1931 that Idara had become "subversive of good order. " Frere reported that Idara

---

[11]. Moore-Sieray, "Idara Konthorfili," p.88.

[12]. See Idara's letter in B. M. Jusu, "The Haidara Rebellion of 1931," Sierra Leone Studies, (December 1954), pp. 147-153.

[13]. PRO CO267/633/9569/31, Ag. Governor, C.E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, P.C. Passfield, February 21, 1931.

had advised people not to pay the tax. The Kambia District Commissioner immediately recommended his deportation. The Governor's deputy, Mr. T. N. Goddard, quickly drafted an order and the Commissioner served it to Idara at Bubuya. Idara ignored it. It was then, according to the district commissioner, that Idara "quickly showed his hand as being a fanatic of the "Mad Mullah" type."[14] His antagonism against the state and Chief Bombo Lahai intensified. Idara chased government officials out of Bubuya and threatened to cut off the head of the commissioner if he showed up.

Tensions between Idara and the state heightened considerably. One Saturday, February 14, 1931, the Northern Province Commissioner informed the Governor by telex that Bubuya was tense and unstable. The telex, which disrupted the Acting Colonial Secretary's serenade at a Hill Station dance, stated Idara had disobeyed the expulsion order, threatened to "kill white men" and incited people not to pay the hut tax. The messenger who furnished the information to the Commissioner claimed the town was "overcrowded with people from French Guinea (who) came daily."[15] The messenger reported Idara had proclaimed that "the English Government power is now over" and no one should obey the District Commissioner. What frightened the Commissioner was the information that Kombo Koroma, the son of the late Bai Bureh of Kasse, had gone to the town with numerous people armed with swords, cutlasses and guns.[16] The presence of Kombo in Bubuya raised the spectre of the 1898 Hut Tax War and the highly effective military campaign waged by Bai Bureh. The Commissioner immediately requested troops to contain the situation.

The state responded promptly. The Acting Governor and top officials agreed to despatch a detachment of RWAFF to Kambia to help arrest Idara. The Commanding Headquarters of the RWAFF was alerted and two platoons were prepared for departure to the district. The first platoon, made up of Lieutenant Holmes, Lieutenant Land,

---

[14]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Telegram, District Commissioner, Kambia District to Colonial Secretary, February 11, 1931 in Confidential Despatch, Ag. Governor C.E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, P.C. Passfield, March 3, 1931.

[15]. PRO CO 267/633/9569, Enclosure VI, Telegram from Provincial Commissioner, N. G. Frere, Northern Province to Colonial Secretary.

[16]. Ibid.

Sergeant B. Culm and 34 African troops, left for Kambia at 7. 20 am on February 15.[17] The second platoon, under Lieutenant Nugent, remained on standby. Lieutenant Holmes' platoon made it to Kambia by 6. 30 pm on the 16th February with instructions to fire on the insurgents if necessary.

The feverish telexing between state officials and the speedy despatch of troops to Kambia revealed official nervousness about the incipient crisis and the urgency to contain it. The platoon under Lieutenant Holmes arrived at Kambia with little real intelligence about the situation in Bubuya. The military reports show the speculation within which the political and military officials plotted the arrest of Idara at the district headquarters.

> Idara, the leader of the Outlaw Band, was sitting down at the Bubuya, surrounded by his followers, *strength unknown*, but including a number of French Susu natives, armed with swords and cutlasses. *It is possible* that they might have three or four guns of some description: Apart from the actual followers the inhabitant of the District were giving him no support. Kambia, itself, was quiet.[18]

The plan to arrest Idara illustrated a concern for an impressionistic display of power rather than for an effective tactical military operation. The colonial officials in Kambia decided to congregate at the Maligi Bridge in two separate parties. The troops would then line up and escort the District Commissioner to Bubuya to enforce the arrest of Idara. The first party was to leave for the bridge at 7 am and the second at 9 am. Even before the plan was executed a false sense of confidence and security began to pervade the atmosphere. The district commissioner claimed that on the night of February 16, he received information that Idara had modified his "warlike tendencies" and would probably surrender without resistance.[19]

The troops departed on the only available truck for the Maligi Bridge the next

---

[17]. PRO CO267/633/9569., Encl "C" Military Report From D.A.H. Bannerman, Adjutant, S.L. Bn RWAFF in Confidential Despatch, Acting Governor C. E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, Passfield, April 28, 1931.

[18]. Italicized emphasis mine. PRO CO267/633/9569, The Report of the 1st Kambia Detachment. Enclosure in Confidential Despatch, Ag. Governor C. E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, Passfield, April 28, 1931.

[19]. Ibid.

morning as planned. The first party under Lieutenant Holmes arrived on the scene at 7 am. It decided to rest while the truck went for the second party. It was during this lapse that Idara and his followers surprised them. The group consisting of between 40 to 50 insurgents, armed with swords and cutlasses, attacked the troops. They captured Lieutenant Holmes, took him into the bush, and executed him.[20] They nearly captured another European officer, Sergeant B. Culm. Private Kamanda Konosso saved his life by shooting down one of his assailants. The colonial troops recovered quickly from the ambush and actually shot down four of the insurgents. Sergeant Culm killed two of them. The others fled into the surrounding bush. The skirmish ended as quickly as it had begun. The news of Holmes' death reached colonial quarters and the troops quickly withdrew from Bubuya stalked by the hostile insurgents.[21]

The administration quickly sent in additional reinforcements to Kambia and Port Loko districts. It despatched another platoon under Captain Thorburn, Lieutenant Nugent and Sergeant Greenfield to Kambia on February 16th. The situation in the district remained tense throughout the day.[22] The tension continued into the next day and the Governor contemplated transferring the district administration to the military authorities.[23]

It took some time for the administration to have a clear picture of the situation. They only learnt that Idara had been killed in a skirmish at Maligi bridge through rumours. It was only then that officials retrieved, identified and buried his body in Kambia. After this, Idara's followers at Kambia dispersed.[24] The identification and

---

[20]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Enclosure II, III & IV. Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province to Colonial Secretary, February 17-19, 1931 in Confidential Despatch, Governor C.E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, P.C. Passfield, February 21, 1931.

[21]. Ibid.

[22]. PRO CO267/633/9569, The Report of the 1st Kambia Detachment. Enclosure in Confidential Despatch, Ag. Governor C. E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, Passfield, April 28, 1931.

[23]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Memo from Governor, February 17, 1931.

[24]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Confidential Despatch, Governor to Secretary, February 16, 1931 - February 21, 1931.

burial of Idara's corpse brought a sense of relief to colonial officials. It was obvious that Lieutenant Holmes had blundered and colonial prestige had taken a dent. Had Idara survived the skirmish at Maligi Bridge, his reputation would have grown tremendously. He had gambled on it. The chance shot by Lieutenant Culm had quashed the potentially "serious insurrection in the Protectorate" which Idara had hoped to trigger.[25]

Despite the rapid termination of the insurrection, other districts in the Northern Province felt the reverberations of Idara's actions. Fuelled by the memories of the 1898 Hut Tax War, conflicting rumours of the event at Maligi Bridge spread throughout the country, fostering an air of uncertainty and crisis.[26] Idara's followers seized on the favourable aspects of the rumours and intensified their actions in his name and mission. Twenty four of his disciples flogged people and burnt a sacred bush at Marampa. In Port Loko, Yonibana and several places in Bombali, Mofengre in Moyamba and Newton in the Colony, his followers attempted to spread his message and recruit others. With Idara dead, many chiefs took strong actions against his adherents who attempted to "cause trouble in their district."[27]

Conscious of the popular rumours surrounding Idara's death and the potential for its actions to be interpreted as anti-Islamic, the government issued a public proclamation to reassure the "Loyal Mohammedan Subjects of His Majesty the King."[28] The proclamation related the government's version of the events. It guaranteed freedom of worship and religious instruction, and from discrimination. The proclamation, however, made it clear that the government would "suppress" any attempt, religious or otherwise, to subvert its authority. The authorities overestimated the potential effect of its proclamation. It did not dispel fresh waves of rumours about

---

[25]. PRO CO267/633/9569/31/16, Governor, C.E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, Passfield, P.G. March 6, 1931.

[26]. SLWN, February 19, 1931.

[27]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Confidential Despatch, Ag. Governor, C.E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, Passfield, April 4, 1931.

[28]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Proclamation 1/1931, Enclosure VIII Confidential Despatch, February 21, 1931.

Idara's return and reincarnation.[29] A Muslim cleric known simply as Karawulia called meetings where he denied the death of Idara and passed on messages from him of coming calamities including an uprising in Freetown.[30]

Idara's ill-fated insurrection had jolted the colonial regime out of its complacency. The administration knew that the lone battalion stationed in the Protectorate would have found it difficult to suppress a "major insurrection." Administrators realised that colonial rule rested largely on "political action including even some bluff." Though he lost, Idara had called the bluff.

The colonial state had to reiterate its authority. It did with a visible show of force. As in the aftermath of the 1898 insurrection, a military detachment marched throughout the disaffected areas through the Northern Province at the end of February, 1931.[31] The commanding officer, cognizant that the sermons of Idara and the attack at Maligi bridge had targeted Europeans, took precautions to protect British officials. At Bubuya, the troops inspected the empty compound of Idara and warned Chief Bombo Lahai against further encouragement of seditious strangers.[32]

Publicly, colonial administrators commended the heroic efforts of Lieutenant Holmes, Sergeant Culm and Private Konosso. Both men received promotions. Konosso received an additional £5 compensation. Privately, however, the Colonial Office criticized the inadequate military precautions at Maligi Bridge and misguided preconception that Idara would surrender without resistance. Officers at RWAFF Headquarters defended the military contingent. They refused to accept blame for the poor military manoeuvre at Bubuya. They insisted that the troops had merely gone to

---

[29]. WAMTG, March 7, 1931; SLWN, April 11, 1931.

[30]. PRO CO267/633/5969, Commissioner of Police to Colonial Secretary. March 5, 1931. Enclosure, Confidential Despatch, Ag. Governor C.E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, Passfield. March 6, 1931.

[31]. PRO CO267/633/9569, March of the Troops through Province, Enclosure L in Confidential Despatch, Ag. Governor C. E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, Passfield, April 28, 1931.

[32]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Capt, J.P. Huffman, Detachment, Sierra Leone Battalion, RWAFF in trek, The Report of the 1st Kambia Detachment. From February 15, 1931 - February 17, 1931.

assist the District Commissioner in arresting Idara.[33] The explanation by the military brass did not satisfy the Colonial Secretary, Lord Passfield. Passfield condemned the use of small numbers of troops as police. He maintained that sufficient numbers should have been deployed to "render resistance unthinkable in the minds of the people, who should be impressed by the power and determination of the Government to preserve law and order."[34]

The actions and statements of the government received mixed responses from the Freetown press. The newspapers generally accepted the government line that Idara had been seditious and inimical to public order. The xenophobic and anti-Islamic Sierra Leone Guardian echoed the state's contempt for Idara and his activities. It maintained that Idara and his "rabble," represented another in a long line of "mad mullahs" that had challenged British Imperial authority. The Sierra Leone Guardian expressed strong support for the violence used by the government to contain Idara and his movement.[35] The Sierra Leone Weekly News and the West African Mail and Trade Gazette tended to be more temperate in their assessment of Idara and more critical of the government's handling of the insurrection. The papers empathized with peasants who had heeded Idara's anti-government incitement because of the economic depression and tax burden. They questioned the use of military force to deal with Idara. Both newspapers demanded accurate information on the skirmish at Bubuya, including the number of people killed.[36] Whether supportive or critical of the government, the papers agreed that a "full and frank" commission of inquiry would help dispel pervasive rumours about the incident in Kambia.[37]

---

[33]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Governor. C. E. Cookson to A. Fiddian, Colonial Office, March 5, 1931.

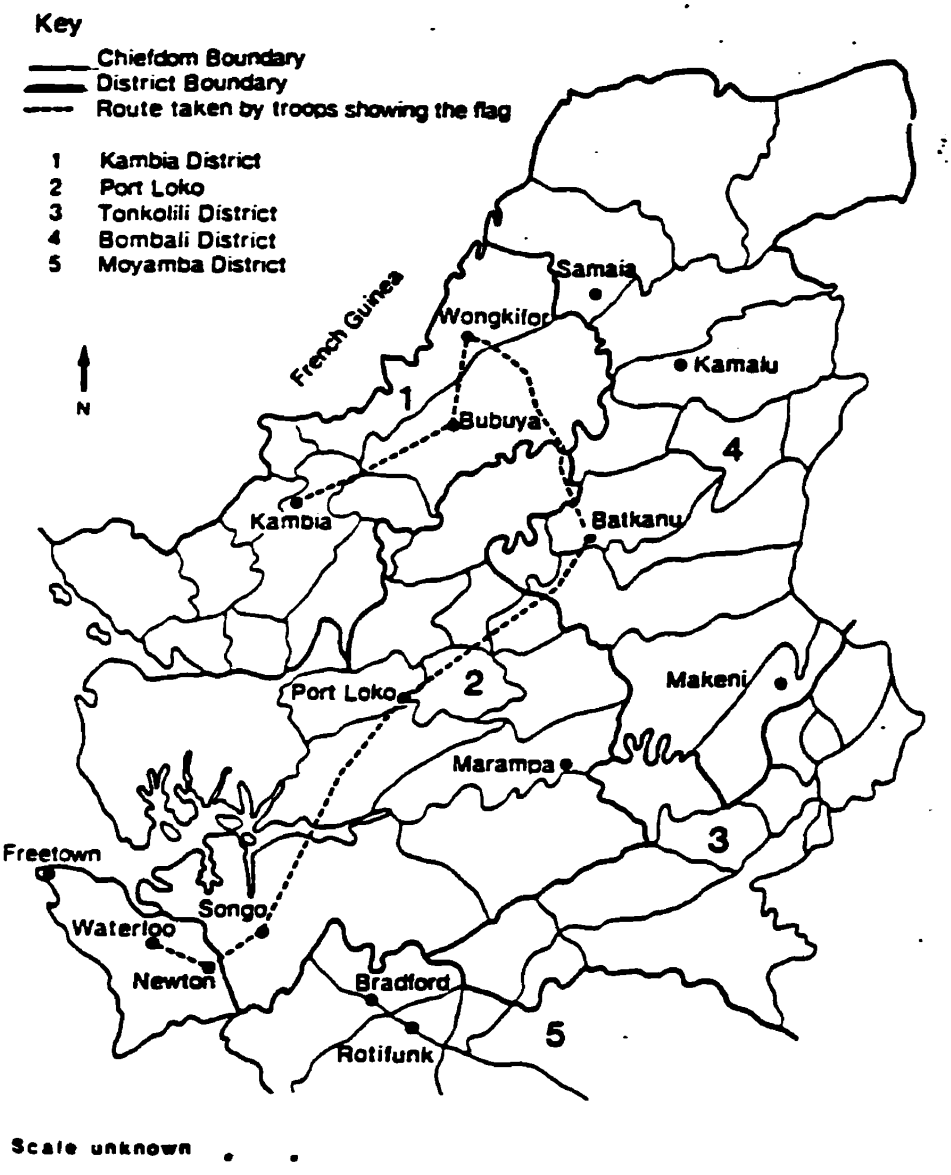
[34]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Passfield to Under-Secretary of State, War Office, June 15, 1931.

[35]. SLG, February 27, 1931; SLG, March 20, 1931.

[36]. WAMTG, February 28, 1931.

[37]. SLG, March 6, 1931; SLWN, March 21, 1931.

MAP 5: Areas affected Idara Rebellion of 1931



Source: Aldridge, "Idara "Rebellion"," p.i.

The Aftermath of the Insurrection: Inquiry, Punishment and Propaganda

The government did set up a commission of Inquiry in March 1931 to investigate the attitude and actions of the Paramount Chief of Tonko Limba during the crisis. The commission, chaired by the Northern Province Commissioner, N. G. Frere, charged Bombo Lahai with: 1) harbouring Idara and permitting him to make seditious speeches and incite people against the government; 2) allowing armed people to assemble in his town without informing the government; 3) permitting Idara to attack an officer warning the government even though he was about a mile from the scene; 4) failure to report the situation and seek assistance from government.[38] The narrow mandate of the commission, which excluded consideration of the context within which the insurrection unfolded, suggested a colonial agenda that was more punitive than investigative.

The Kambia District Commissioner, John Eustace Tyndall, set the tone and framework of the commission. He portrayed Idara as a dangerous religious fanatic and a subversive who incited people not to pay their taxes to the administration. Tyndall depicted Chief Bombo Lahai as a weak and incompetent ruler who failed to restrain Idara or ensure the maintenance of law and order in his territory.[39] The three government witnesses who had been sent to Bubuya during the crisis essentially pigeonholed their testimony into the framework outlined by Tyndall. They testified that Idara was mobilizing popular opposition and organizing armed resistance against the administration. Two of the witnesses, Thomas Taylor, a government clerk, and Dan, a sergeant messenger, attested that Idara had threatened their life. Dan informed the commission that Idara told his supporters the colonial administration had fallen and "all Europeans would die." The third witness, Paramount Bai Kelfa of Munu Chiefdom, confirmed Idara's antagonism toward the administration and Bombo Lahai's vacillation. Having been implicated a boundary dispute between Bombo Lahai and

---

[38]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Enclosure I in Confidential Despatch, Ag, Governor C.E. Cookson to SS, Colonies, Passfield, April 17, 1931. An Enquiry held at Kambia, under the provisions of Section 40 of Cap. 167 of the Laws of Sierra Leone, into the attitude adopted by Paramount Chief Almami Bombo Lahai during the disturbance in Tonko Limba Chiefdom. (Hereinafter called Tonko Limba Enquiry).

[39]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Tonko Limba Enquiry.

another Chief in 1925, Bai Kelfa could hardly be called a neutral witness.[40]

The defence of Bombo Lahai amounted to an apologia and an attempt to deflect some of the blame. His son, Dauda, opened the defence by portraying his father as the beleaguered victim of Idara's wiles and threats. He contradicted the suggestions that his father made no efforts to contain Idara. He maintained his father did try to contain Idara and only fled with his help when his life was threatened.[41] Bombo Lahai built on his son's testimony. He accepted some liability for the incidents in his chiefdom but refused to take all the blame for Idara's actions. Bombo Lahai argued that all the chiefs and their people in Northern Province, excepting Chief Bai Inga of Munu Chiefdom, consulted Idara at Bubuya. The Chief maintained that he tolerated Idara because of repeated assurances that his mission was pacific and religious. He pointed out that Commissioner Stocks met Idara and received similar assurances.[42]

The chief's testimony implied the government had over-reacted to the situation in Bubuya. Bombo Lahai suggested that fears of non-payment of taxes had been exaggerated since people ignored the anti-government rhetoric of Idara. He argued that Idara remained largely tractable until the issuance of the deportation order. It was the deportation order which made him belligerent and antagonistic towards the government. Lahai countered claims that he failed to restrain Idara. In sum, while the Chief accepted some responsibility for the rebellion, he argued that other chiefs and the colonial state should also accept their culpability in the affair.[43]

The chief did not receive extenuation from the Commission or from the colonial administration. The commission found him negligent in the execution of chiefly duties and the maintenance of law and order in his chiefdom. It declared him "unfit" to be chief. The Acting Governor, Cookson, concurred. He felt Bombo Lahai had been irresolute, frightened and weak; that he had allowed Idara to cow him rather than act decisively like other chiefs. The governor cited the case of Bai Sherbro, the chief of

---

[40]. See Previous Chapter.

[41]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Tonko Limba Enquiry.

[42]. Ibid.

[43]. Ibid.

Yonnibana in Bombali district, who had personally supervised the arrest of "an obstreperous adherent of Idara." This "adherent" had assembled a large following and had successfully intimidated a sub-chief and headman.[44] Cookson recommended the immediate deposition of Bombo Lahai and forfeiture of his £10 stipend. Passfield, the Colonial Secretary, approved the decision in May 1931.

The colleagues of Bombo Lahai, including Bai Kelfa, out of collective guilt and solidarity, sought his reinstatement. In a letter to the Governor, eleven Chiefs and sub-chiefs of Kambia apologised for the death of Lieutenant Holmes and for Idara's insurrection. They carefully distanced themselves from the anti-tax incitement of Idara.[45] When Cookson toured Northern Province in April 1931, the Kambia chiefs assembled and collectively admitted "guilt" for dealing with Idara. They maintained that Bombo Lahai had not been seditious; he had merely been sympathetic to Idara out of religious solidarity. Their pleas did not move the governor. Instead he berated the chiefs and their people for allowing themselves to be deluded by Idara.[46]

The Commission served as a concession to demands of the Freetown Press for a "full" and "frank" investigation of the crisis. In reality, it was neither full nor frank. The commission was driven by the desire to punish rather than to uncover the full context and causes for Idara's ascendancy and belligerence towards the government. The virulent condemnation of Idara by the Freetown press had already strengthened the commission's hand in that direction. Cookson, the Acting Governor, even suggested the punishment of the entire population of Tonko Limba chiefdom but

---

[44]. PRO CO 267/633/9569, Ag. Governor C.E.Cookson to SS, Colonies, Passfield, April 28, 1931.

[45]. PRO CO 267/633/9569, Chiefs, Kambia District to Governor. April 6, 1931. Enclosure 2. Confidential Despatch. Ag. Governor C.E. Cookson to Passfield, April 17, 1931. The petition was written by M. Coromah, Writer, Kambia. It contained the marks of eleven chiefs and sub-chiefs: Almamy Kolleh, Braimyah; Bai Farima, Magbenka; Bai sherbro, Mambolo; Bai Kelfa, Munu; Kande Sanah, Koinamakka; Almamy Luseni, Dixing; Almamy Panki, Regent Chief Tonko Limba; Bai Nana, Yala; Almamy Bockari, Yawia; Bai Sherbro Kaba Surie, Samu and Almamy Kanlu Kanre, Massungbala.

[46]. PRO CO 267/633/9569, Confidential Despatch, Enclosure 3. Governor Address, April 4, 1931.

received no support for such an act from the Colonial Office.[47] The primary purpose of the commission it seems, was to identify a scapegoat for the tarnished image of the government. Bombo Lahai, who represented and embodied the colonial state at the local level, was an appropriate one.

The government followed up the commission with the trial, detention, and in some cases, deportation of Idara's followers. Two staunch supporters of Idara, Kolle and Tejani, were unsuccessfully tried for the murder of Lieutenant Holmes. After their unanimous acquittal for the murder, the state retried, convicted and sentenced the two men to long prison terms for sedition. Two others, Kombo Kamara and Amadu Bangura, received seven and twelve years of imprisonment with hard labour, respectively.[48] The farcical commission of enquiry and the punitive trials revealed the insecurity of the administration in the depression period and its desire to reiterate its authority in the face of resistance.

In the aftermath of the insurrection, the government sought to repair that discursive tissue in which the colonial state held the colonized captive and which Idara had sought to rupture. It disparaged the efforts of the followers of Idara and other Muslims to make him a martyr and preserve a potentially useable memory of him. The public image fostered by the colonial state emphasized his fanaticism and the plebeian character of his following. Idara emerged through the lens of the colonial state variously as "a dangerous fanatic," a "Mad Mullah," "a Mohammedan fanatic missionary," and a "hot gospeller."[49] He became known in official discourse as the illiterate" and "ignorant" proselytizer who had inflamed the "imagination" and "passions" of "the ignorant and excitable section of the community" against the government. Those who followed him became "dupes." "illiterates" and

---

[47]. PRO CO 267/633/x9569/31, Lord Passfield, SS, Colonies to Governor Cookson, June 16, 1931.

[48]. SLWN, Saturday, May 23, 1931; Sally Aldridge, "Idara "Rebellion" in the Sierra Leone 1931." (M.A. Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1969), pp. 36-38.

[49]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Ag. Governor, Captain C. E. Cookson. Disturbances in the Kambia District: Official Announcement made in the Legislative Council on 25th March, 1931, by the Direction of His Excellency the Acting Governor. (Freetown: Government Printer, 1931)

"unsophisticated natives" in colonial parlance. The government highlighted the fact that better classes of Muslims stayed away from him. By portraying Idara and his followers in negative terms, the government sought to remove any empathy that its "Loyal Mohammedan Subjects" may have had for them. It consolidated this separation between religion and politics further by insisting Idara was suppressed for his political subversion and not for his religious activities.[50]

From its propaganda, it was evident that the government sought to associate the personality and actions of Idara with some kind of psychotic condition in the mind of the public. The language of official statements evoked images of mental instability, irrationality and violence; images which had always been embedded in the colonial constructions of militant Islam and its proponents.[51] For example, T. N. Goddard, the Colonial Secretary, wrote in a statement to the Legislative council which was later released to the public:

> Mr. Tyndall reported that (***presumably with the rapid mental expansion of the megalomaniac***) Idara extended the scope of threats from false Mohammedans to the British Government, and apparently taking advantage of the low price of produce and the consequent difficulty on the part of the Protectorate native in finding the wherewithal to pay his house tax, preached the immediate and the consequent freedom of the native from necessity of paying his house tax, and terrorized people by threat of war and bloodshed.[52]

The construction of Idara as a psychotic personality by the administration devalued and subsumed the context with which the confrontation took place. The state tried to convince the public that global depression, plague infestation and a burdensome tax became merely an opportunistic excuse for an anti-government religious psychopath. A consequence of this formulation was the attenuation of the economic and political significance of the movement and insurrection. In short, instead of locating the crisis in the political economy of colonialism, they located it in a person. The colonial myth became the man and his movement. Through to the 1950s, agents

---

[50]. Ibid.

[51]. Robert L. Hess, "The 'Mad Mullah' and Northern Somalia," Journal of African History, 3 (1964) pp. 415 -443.

[52]. Emphasis mine. Cookson, Disturbances in the Kambia District.

of the state continued to perpetuate that myth.[53]

IDARA: THE MAN AND THE MYTH

Scholars who have reconsidered the legacy of Idara and his movement emphasize either its political or religious dimension; such a dichotomy which tends to mirror that created by the colonial state. Martin Kilson, a Marxist and modernization theorist, in his work tracing the political development of Sierra Leone, argued that Idara's rebellion illustrated how the rural populace "utilized religious symbols and institutions for political expression." He considered Idara a populist and skilled manipulator of rural grievances against the state as well as a man whose religious movement became "an instrument of peasant political expression."[54] Michael Crowder and Andre Sik endorse this view in their larger historical narratives of colonialism in West Africa and Africa.[55]

Sally Aldridge, Martin Kaniki and David Moore-Sieray disagree with Kilson's interpretation of Idara as a peasant rebel leader.[56] They argued that the anti-colonial and political significance of Idara's movement has been exaggerated to the detriment of his religious mission. Aldridge contended Idara and his movement should be considered primarily as a "religious phenomenon."[57] Kaniki and Moore-Sieray echoed the argument by stating Idara "rose and died as a religious leader. He did not live long

---

[53]. See Jusu, "Haidara Rebellion of 1931," pp. 147-153; C. E, Cookson, Sierra Leone Studies, "Haidara's Rebellion," (June, 1955), p. 229.

[54]. Martin Kilson, Political Change in a West African State: A Study of the Modernization Process in Sierra Leone (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 113-117.

[55]. Endre Sik, History of Black Africa Vol.2 (Budapest: Akadémai Kiado, 1966), pp. 240-241; Michael Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule (London: Hutchinson, 1968). pp. 475-476.

[56]. Aldridge, "Idara "Rebellion;" M.H.Y. Kaniki, "The Idara Rebellion of 1931: A reappraisal," Journal of the Historical Society of Sierra Leone, 1, 2, (June, 1977), pp.57-64; Moore-Sieray, "Idara Konthorfili," p. 184.

[57]. Sally Aldridge, "Idara "Rebellion," p.43.

enough to give his movement a political character."[58] The latter pushed this claim further by suggesting Idara can be considered a Madhist.[59] He did not, however, interrogate that claim and its political as well as religious meaning fully.

The attempt at separating religion and politics in Idara's career does very little justice to the complexity of the historical phenomenon. In his dissertation on Northwestern Sierra Leone, Sibanda realized this and attempted to bridge the gap between the contending analyses. He suggested a reading of the Idara "War" which incorporates both levels of analyses. Thus for Sibanda, the "war" was a "religious revivalist movement of oppressed and poor muslims against more powerful and learned mohammedans. " For him, it was also the manifestation of "accumulated rebellious feelings" of destitute peasants and poor traders suffering from the effects of the depression and a burdensome tax. Sibanda described Idara as an "external organizer" who catalyzed peasant discontent at these two levels.[60] While Sibanda may have brought the two contending analyses together in a single statement, it can hardly be argued that he linked them coherently together. The division between the religious and political elements of Idara's mission remained.

Despite their limitations, important analytical elements emerged in the historical debate over the legacy of Idara. Kilson's brief assessment of the revolt challenged colonialist and nationalist construction of the masses as passive. He also pointed out the importance of linking class, indigenous institutions (culture) and politics; an injunction which he did not rigorously pursue in the case of Idara. Kilson neither demonstrated the class component of the movement (beyond labelling them peasants) nor did he effectively link culture and politics. The critics of Kilson forcibly demonstrate the value of including religion in the analysis. Hence the suggestions of "millenarianism" and "Mahdism" become equally important. Sibanda clearly emphasized the need for an integrative analysis. How then do we pull all these elements - class, culture, religion, politics - together to present a coherent and

---

[58]. Kaniki, "Reappraisal," p.62; Moore-Sieray, "Idara Konthorfili," p. 184.

[59]. Moore-Sieray, Ibid.

[60]. Sibanda, "Northwestern Sierra Leone," pp. 244-245.

integrated analysis of Idara and his mission?

Michael Adas provides an instructive point of departure with his study of the complex links between violent protest and millenarianism within different societies against a colonial order.[61] He paid particular attention to the causes, specific hsitorical contexts, and the nexus of social relationships surrounding the protests and their prophetic leaders. Describing their aims as "revolutionary," Adas posited that millennial movements were "symptomatic of the inherent inequities and injustices of the colonial order."[62] He argued they "rejected or adapted, revived and reworked ideas, artifacts and patterns of behaviour to create a more viable social order."[63] Adas stressed the pivotal role of the prophetic leader in the articulation of alternative visions, galvanization of popular discontent and the direction of insurrection against the colonial order.[64] How much of this can be revealed by looking at Idara and his movement. Who was Idara? How did he construct himself? How did he frame his mission? What aspects of society and the colonial order did he attack? Who were attracted to him and why? How did he deal with the colonial officials and its agents? Answering these questions might reveal how Idara, like the different prophets and movement studied by Adas, welded class, culture and religion into an instrument of anti-colonial protest.

The "real" man who provided the leadership for the movement and brief insurrection is difficult to retrieve from the annals of history. The chiefs and colonial administrators whom Idara antagonized crafted a portrait of him suited for official and public consumption. His supporters framed an image of him based on his claims and their perceptions of him and his activities. Administrators and chiefs posited conflicting versions of his ethnic origins. Paramount chiefs in Kambia suggested he was ""Moshi" from a "savage tribe" in Soudan Francaise (Mali)." The state announced

---

[61] Michael Adas, Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protests against European Colonial Order, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979) pp. xxi.

[62]. Adas, Prophets of Rebellion, p. 189

[63]. Ibid. p.xxvii.

[64]. Ibid., pp.92-121.

to the public that he was a "Mandingo" from French Guinea.[65] Moore-Sieray concluded that from his name and his language, he was a "Susu." Although his deduction seems most plausible, no one knew for certain.

The manner in which Idara constantly refashioned himself and his mission did not help to clarify matters. During his brief mission in the country, he became different things to different people. Idara constructed himself as a diviner, healer, prophet, proselytizer and reformer. An impenetrable mystique seemed to surround him; a mystique embedded even in his name, Konthorfili. Konthorfili means "mysterious or uncanny" in Soso and Temne.[66] Idara reinforced this mystique in popular imagination with claims of supernatural powers and the ability to affect the temporal and spiritual world, cure people and work miracles.[67] The masses who sought solace from him exalted him as an "angel" of God. The claim might have been exaggerated but well within popular *mentalité* and beliefs in the power of gifted Islamic practitioners known as *morimen* to divine, protect, heal or harm as well as mediate between the temporal and supernatural.[68] These practitioners provided a complementary and sometimes alternative source of power and authority to the existing political authority. Idara tapped into this popular *mentalité* from the onset of this mission.

In addition to his cultivated mystique and supernatural claims, Idara possessed a forceful and magnetic personality. Contemporary observers described his remarkable ability to convince people and inspire his followers.[69] This ability - usually labelled charisma - not only attracted people to him but also made them believe his claims and accept his injunctions. He enhanced the effect of that charisma by showing a certain

---

[65]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Chiefs, Kambia District to Governor, April 6, 1931.

[66]. While the name continues to bear the same meaning in Soso, it has also been preserved in popular memory albeit with an added meaning. In remembrance of the temper of the man and his time, 'Konthorfili' roughly means "trouble or crisis of extraordinary magnitude."

[67]. SLNA Kb 94/1930, District Commissioner, Kambia to Commissioner Northern Province, October 24, 1930.

[68]. Howard, "Big men, Traders and Chiefs," pp. 88-90.

[69]. Moore-Sieray, "Idara Konthorfili," pp. 72-77.

empathy with his poor constituents. Unlike the elite and the state, who continued to extract resources in a time of crisis, Idara demanded neither money nor presents for his services. This sense of self-righteousness complemented the confidence and zeal with which he prosecuted his cause. Idara's critique of elite power and exploitation, however, did not mask his intolerant and authoritarian tendency to compel others and force them, usually through the threat of violence, to accept his pronouncements.

With his cultivated mystique, acclaimed supernatural powers and authoritarian personality, Idara represented a potentially subversive element at several levels. First, he was contentious of the local socio-cultural order and those who had shaped and maintained it. Like many itinerant clerics before him, Idara contested and sought to displace Limba indigenous healers and their belief systems. Second, his mission threatened and eventually displaced the political authority of Chief Bombo Lahai. The displacement of political authority historically paralleled the religious and cultural displacement effected by the clerics. Many chiefdoms in the region have had Muslim clerics successfully insert themselves into position of authority. Third, the attempt and actual displacement of the chieftaincy undermined the colonial state at its most effective level in the Protectorate. Even if he did not openly declare it and in spite of his repeated protestations to the contrary, Idara's presence and his activities subverted the existing order. How did this subversion manifest itself?

Jihadism and Millenarianism

The eclectic religious associations and connections Idara made between his mission and other religious movements and ideas in West Africa contained elements which were inherently subversive of the existing colonial order. Idara claimed he was a disciple of Chiekh Amadu Bamba (1850-1927) and a member of the Muridiyya in Senegal.[70] In his letter to the colonial administration, he described his teachings as "tiani" (Tijaniyya) and "ghandri." (Qadiriyya). He claimed that about 1,360 of his followers were being instructed according to the Tijaniyya code. Idara claimed another

---

[70]. Aldridge, "Idara Rebellion," p. 10; Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule, p. 476.

1,650 of his followers were receiving Qadiriyya teaching.[71]

The Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya movements had been integral parts of the pre-colonial radical traditions of Islam in West Africa. Amadu Bamba drew his roots from the spiritual and anti-colonialist traditions of the famed Tijanniyya Brotherhood. Later in life, he studied Qadiriyya teachings. The Muridiyya, founded by Bamba, fused and refashioned the militaristic traditions of these brotherhoods into a more peaceful and spiritual struggle. Within the refashioned tradition, Bamba reached an uneasy accommodation with the French which continued after his death in 1927.[72]

Idara injected eclectic elements from the Muridiyya into his mission and activities in Northern Sierra Leone. He proselytized relentlessly and preached against moral laxity, slander and swearing.[73] The campaign for spiritual and moral probity were central to the spiritual jihad waged by the Murids. Like the Murids, he emphasized sanctification through work. He modelled his inner core, the *shekunnahs*, around the "talibes" of Bamba. Like Bamba's talibes, the *shekunnahs* followed Idara around, engaging in frequent "collective singing and chanting."[74] But was Idara really a Murid?

Idara's claims of membership of the Muridiyya were dubious. Throughout the career of Mbamba, the Muridiyya remained centred in Senegal and drew its following almost exclusively from the Wolof. Furthermore, the death of Bamba in 1927 temporarily halted the territorial expansion of his movement. The expansion of the

---

[71]. Idara's letter dated January 2, 1931 in Jusu, "Haidara Rebellion of 1931," pp. 149-150.

[72]. David Robinson, "Beyond Resistance and Collaboration: Amadu Bamba and the Murids of Senegal," Journal of Religion in Africa, 21, 2, (1991), pp. 149-171; Lucy Creevey, "Ahmad Mbamba, 1850-1927, in J.R. Willis, (ed.), Studies in the West African Islamic History Vol 1: The Cultivators of Islam (London: Frank cass, 1979), pp. 278-307; Jean Copans, Les marabouts de l'Arachide (Paris: Sycamore, 1980), Donal B. Cruise O'Brien, The Mourides of Senegal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[73]. P.O. Esedebe, "Independence Movement in Sierra Leone," Tarikh, 4, 1, (1977), p. 21.

[74]. Moore-Sieray, "Idara Konthorfili," p. 91.

movement resumed only in 1934.[75] Despite the parochial territorial focus of the Muridiyya, the fame, power and prestige of the movement became a part of the popular *mentalité* of Muslims in the Upper Guinea area. By associating himself with Bamba and the Muridiyya, Idara sought to tap into this *mentalité*.

Indeed, Idara's Islamic affiliations and the full dimensions of his mission are difficult to fathom precisely outside the colonial narrative. Little of what he wrote or said survived. The prophetic and pedagogical pieces (known as *batakaris*) which he wrote and distributed either did not survive him or are yet to be located. Apart from oral traditions, the only texts which could be directly associated with him are three letters, two to the colonial administration and one to the Imam of the Kambia mosque. The first letter, written on January 21, 1931, revealed the struggle between spiritual and militaristic elements of Jihad:

> ... the Mohammedan men that esteem themselves in the world who pretends to obey Annabi (Prophet Muhammad) while it is not in their heart, and some of them went on rubbing [sic] poor people money in telling lies to the people that don't know. ... Those that call themselves Mohammedan and never help the poor people but take money from them again instead. The beginning of the killing will start from them and the ending also to them.
>
> ... The time has come for you to see wonders so every should start to pray. Those that will sanction with me goes with exhilaration, and those that refuse to pray shall go with fire.
>
> Sory [sic] to say that twelve kinds of diseases will come and other wonderful things and if any one is killed by these diseases he will go to hell. Fire will come like rain. Thunder will crack and water will finish rice and many are for many have forgotten Annabi, that is the raeson (sic)... Will or we not have to pray and any who refused to pray will be killed with knife by Idarra.[76]

As convoluted as it was, the letter contained classic jihadist and millenarian elements. First, it criticized the Islamic elite for its religious hypocrisy and its exploitation of the poor. By extension, this represented an implicit critique of society. Second, it condemned the religious negligence among Muslims and paganism in the

---

[75]. V. Monteil, Esquisses Sénégalaises (Dakar: IFAN, 1966) p. 192.

[76]. Idara's letter dated January 2, 1931 in Jusu, "Haidara Rebellion of 1931," pp. 149-150.

society, and exhorted them to pray. Third, it predicted catastrophe as punishment. Fourth, it offered absolution and salvation through prayers and the acknowledgement of Idara's powers. Finally, it threatened violence as a means to achieve Idara's grand design.

The millenarian and jihadist themes became more elaborate after his receipt of the expulsion order from the state. He declared in a letter to the Imam of the Kambia Mosque dated February 10th, 1931:

> ... My former name was Idara and my present name is Mohamad Mahdihu... God send his messengers without guns, swords, staffs or daggers but I have the name of God with me, you shall look what is in the air, so that you should not fear the Europeans be he French or English as the four corners of the Earth are guarded by the prophet Mohammed all creatures are made by God. Bai Inga and the Government have fallen. I have cursed the D. Cs Interpreter. I have also cursed everybody who is under the Government. I am also telling you not to pay your House Tax to any Paramount Chief. You have been hearing about me. Birds, Ants, Beasts and all living creatures knows about me.[77]

The excerpt contains four key elements which indicate a significant progression from Idara's first letter. First, he claimed he was a "Mahdi" or "guided one." Second, he called for the demystification of European rule in Sierra Leone and Guinea. Third, he openly challenged the authority of the colonial state and its local agents. Lastly, he forcefully reiterated his supernatural powers. The contents of the two letters formed a single discourse of resistance with religious and anti-colonial elements fused together.

The confrontation with the state forced Idara to take the ultimate step to Islamic millenarianism and explicit anti-colonialism. In Islamic eschatology, the Mahdi was expected in a time of crisis to revitalize Islam and usher in a Golden Age similar to that of the Prophet and his Companions. Islamic reformers as far apart as Pakistan, Sudan and Nigeria have claimed the title.[78] In the eighteenth century, Europeans

---

[77]. Letter reproduced in Jusu, "Haidara Rebellion of 1931," pp. 150.

[78]. A self-proclaimed Yoruba Mahdi, Muhammad Jumat Adesina (1896-1959) was in fact contemporaneous with Idara. A. Rahman I. Doi, "The Yoruba Mahdi," Journal of Religion in Africa, 4, (1971-72), pp. 119-136; P.M. Holt, The Mahdist State in the Sudan 1881-1898 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) pp. 37-56; Humphrey J. Fisher,

observers referred to a certain "Mahadee" in the area of Northern Sierra Leone and Guinea, who waged a jihad against unbelievers and slavers.[79] In staking his claims, Idara drew not only from local but also ecumenical Islamic traditions of Mahdism.

If the "spiritual transformation" is linked with other decisions made by Idara, a more coherent portrait emerges of his mission and what was he seeking to construct. He renamed Bubuya, "Madina" and planned to erect a grand mosque in the town.[80] The change of name and construction plans were loaded with Islamic symbolism. The original Madina, a city in Saudi Arabia, provided refuge for Muhammad, the founding prophet of Islam, after he retreated from Mecca. Madina is the site of the Mosque of Muhammad.[81] His remains were interned inside the mosque. Regarded as the second holiest site in Islam, pilgrims undertaking the annual Hajj are encouraged to pray there. Prayer in the mosque provides not only absolution but is considered to be the equivalent of a thousand prayers elsewhere.

The value of a sanctified centre may not have been lost on Idara. After all, during his short stay at Bubuya, the town had already become the destination of hundreds of people from different parts of Sierra Leone and Guinea. Taken together with his declaration of Madhism, the "New Madina" revealed not only an alternative source of authority but also the form of the anti-colonial project of Idara. Who wanted to be part of this project or who did not? How do we disaggregate his following?

People flocked to Idara for many reasons. An attempt must be made to disaggregate them. What were their interests and needs? Why did they flock to Idara? What did they hope to achieve? How far were they willing to follow him? These questions can begin to help us differentiate his followers and supporters. Bombo Lahai pointed out to the commission of enquiry that nearly all the chiefs and

---

Ahmadiyyah: A Study in Contemporary Islam in West Africa (London: Oxford University Press) p. ix.

[79]. Matthew, A Voyage to River Sierra Leone, pp. 154-155. pp; Afzelius, Sierra Leone Journal, p. 126.

[80]. Moore-Sieray, "Idara Konthorfili," p.95.

[81]. Maxine Rodinson, Muhammad (New York: Parthenon Books, 1980 (1961)), pp. 309-312.

commoners in Kambia district consulted and sought the services of Idara. It is doubtful whether all wanted to build the "new Madina" with him. Nearly all of them would have considered his claims as a powerful *moriman*. Within these parameters, they searched for amelioration, improvement or consolidation of their personal or collective fortunes. They may have accommodated his religious mission but it does not necessarily mean they wanted a new social or religious order. When Idara's claims and actions threatened them, they recoiled or even went on the offensive against him. As the government pointed out, many chiefs whose power he had threatened, took strong actions against his supporters during and after the insurrection. Only one chief, Bai Sherbro of Mambolo, showed open signs of hostility to the state when he refused a canoe to Lieutenant Nugent's party.[82]

The second tier of supporters and followers included the mainly destitute peasants and recently freed slaves who admired him and constituted part of the itinerant entourage. They were the ones most attracted to him and his millenarian vision. The freed slaves - masterless, landless, and resourceless - may have looked forward to Idara's new Madina. They were the ones the colonial state dubbed "rag, tag and bobtail." The chiefs, who tried to extricate themselves from Idara's mission in official eyes, disparage them as consisting "chiefly of Muslim idlers and recently liberated domestic slaves who had settled with him for the purpose of supporting his vain proposal."[83] They had the least to lose and the most to gain in a new social order.

The *shekunnas* represented the core of Idara's supporters. They constituted his inner circle and his most ardent followers. Drawn largely from the Islamicized Temne and Susu sections of the population, they provided his immediate entourage. They chanted, sang and prayed publicly with him. When Idara divided his "new Madina," (Bubuya), he gave half to the Susu and the other half to the Temne. They were, perhaps, the ones most ready to build, defend and die for the "New Madina;"

---

[82]. PRO CO 267/633/9569. "Captain Thorburn's Report," in the Report of the 1st Kambia Detachment, from February 15, 1931 - February 17, 1931. The next chapter gives a clearer sense of why the chief may have refused to aid the colonial administration.

[83]. PRO CO267/633/5959, Petition, Chiefs, Kambia to Governor.

they were the most virulently anti-colonial. They were among the forty to fifty people who engaged the British troops at the Maligi Bridge. The people tried, jailed and deported by the state came from this circle.

Idara's actions contested and sought to delegitimize the colonial state. By calling on peasants not to pay tax, Idara attacked the most visible and symbolic nexus between them and state. He issued the same challenge as Bai Bureh had done a generation earlier. The presence of Bureh's son, Kombo Kamara, served to buttress that challenge and provide a sense of continuity in the tradition of anti-colonial resistance. His exhortation to peasants not to fear Europeans challenged the racialist underpinnings of colonial rule. By publicly trampling on his deportation order and chasing away colonial officials, Idara openly rejected the authority of the state to enforce its notion of law and order.[84] Lastly, he ignored and challenged the authority of the chiefs who acted at the behest of the state.

The confrontation at Maligi bridge indicated an extension of the challenge of the authority of the state by Idara. It did, however, involve a certain amount of pre-emptiveness on both sides. The British wanted to clip the movement before it became uncontrollable. The movement wanted to strike at the state and increase its standing before it was contained. The encounter, however, turned out to be far less melodramatic than its participants hoped. The skirmish terminated quickly and Idara died ignominiously. Both sides bungled their way into the skirmish. For Idara, it was a costly blunder, for the state, a profitable one. Neither side expected Idara would have fallen so easily.

Neither the brevity of the attack nor the ease of Idara's death mean it lacked military meaning or drama. Idara and his followers deliberately passed a false hint to the officials about his willingness to surrender peacefully and lulled Lieutenant Holmes into the false sense of security displayed at the Maligi bridge. Idara and his insurgents had foreknowledge of the colonial troop movement and went onto the offensive at a seemingly opportune moment.[85] They had a clearly defined purpose; to capture and

---

[84]. Aldridge, "Idara Rebellion," p.18.

[85]. Adas points that rumour was an important tactic used by Millenarian movements confronting far superior military forces. Adas, Prophets of Rebellion,

kill white officials, not African troops. Overall, it was clearly an inept exercise on both sides. How prepared was Idara for the confrontation?

Given the events at the Maligi bridge, those who posited a large scale peasant military insurrection are far from being on firm ground. Colonial informants reported a large armed presence in Bubuya. The commanding officer of the troops, who marched through Bubuya in the aftermath of the insurrection, claimed that people verified that Idara had assembled up to 700 followers before the insurrection.[86] The presence of Kombo Kamara, the son of Bai Bureh, and his promise to deliver his father's warriors raised the spectre of the great *krugba*, memories of the 1898 Hut Tax War and the alliance that he was able to cobble together. Despite the punishment of Bai Bureh's irredentist scion by the administrators, no solid evidence existed that he could deliver on his promise.

To analyze the encounter at Maligi Bridge solely in terms of military defeat or victory underestimates the political and social value of the encounter. Many millenarian movements proved deficient in organizing and waging war against superior colonial forces. Peasant followers usually hedged their bets on the power of the visions and charms of their prophet prevailing against the superior weapons and organization of their enemies.[87] Idara's followers were no different. Had the insurgents and their prophet escaped alive from the encounter, the hegemonic position of the colonial state would have been in jeopardy. But, they failed and that failure was the colonial state's gain. The failure restored and enhanced the legitimacy and invincibility of a colonial state which had been caught in the grips of a locust invasion, widespread unemployment and worldwide economic depression.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the failure of Idara's insurrection, it represented the most

---

p.140.

[86]. PRO CO267/633/9569, Capt, J.P. Huffman, Detachment, Sierra Leone Battalion, RWAFF in trek: The Report of the 1st Kambia Detachment, from February 15, 1931 - February 17, 1931.

[87]. Adas, Prophets of Rebellion, pp. 188-189.

serious challenge to the legitimacy of the colonial state since the 1898 rebellion. The insurrection demonstrated that the colonial moral and political economy, which had been predicated on "domestic slavery," was obsolete as a consequence of abolition, global depression and the locust attack of the late 1920s. Idara sought to recreate a new political consensus with an Islamic millenarian movement fashioned from popular *mentalité* and local and ecumenical religious traditions. The movement, which drew its following from mainly destitute ex-slaves and peasants, tried to replace the colonial state with an Islamic order. Idara's death ended his project, and the problems it sought to tackle remained unresolved. The next chapter considers how peasants and ex-slaves responded to continuing rural problems and how the colonial state attempted to craft a new political consensus.

CHAPTER SIX

COLONIAL CONSTRUCTIONS, PEASANT CONTESTATIONS 1932-1945

The conditions which underlay the ill-fated jihad of Idara Konthorfili persisted into the mid-1930s. The locust invasion subsided only in 1934, and trade began recovering in 1935. Despite the depressed economic conditions, peasants showed much resilience and actually increased their production of crops, especially swamp rice. However, it was minerals which superseded crops as the major source of colonial trade and revenue and which alleviated rural destitution and the government's fiscal crisis. Mining converted many peasants and ex-slaves into mine labourers. As a consequence, rural protest diverged into two different strands. The first strand reflected continuing peasant protest against excessive exploitation by the rural elite and the colonial state. The second strand highlighted the emerging struggle of unskilled labourers for better wages and working conditions in the iron mines at Marampa. Both peasants and unskilled labourers drew on communal solidarity to achieve their ends. The restlessness of peasants and mine labourers forced the government in the 1930s to began to reorganize rural institutions to contain the rural conflicts and harness productivity.

Depression, Mining and Peasant Production, 1932-1945

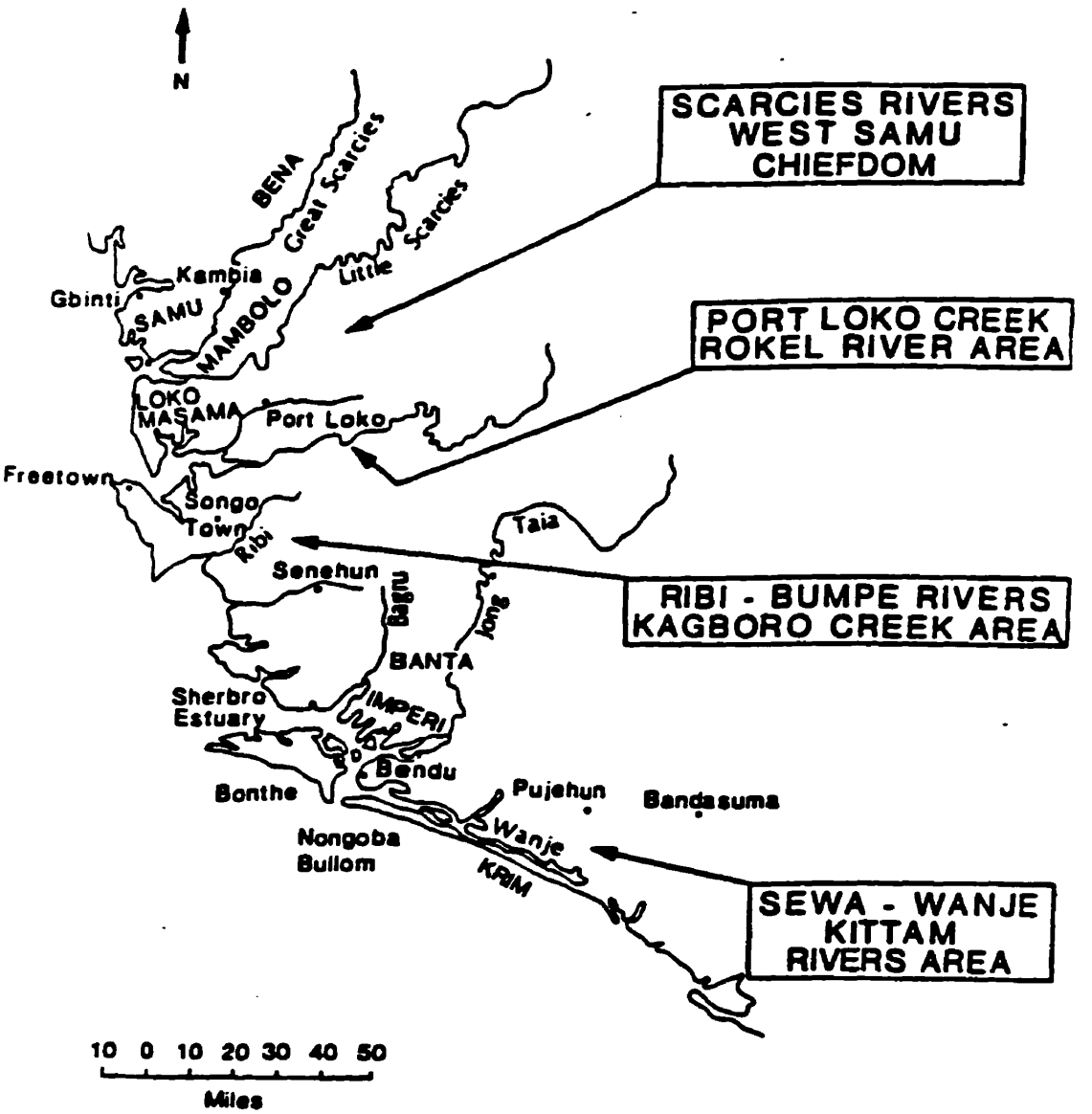
The two strands of rural struggle unfolded within an economy undergoing a cycle of depression, growth and recession between 1929 and 1945. During the depression, which lasted from 1929 to 1935, the value of colonial exports and imports fell by about 45 and 55 percent respectively. In 1934, oil palm products, the mainstay of the export economy, sold for only 38 percent of their 1929 price. In the internal market, the price of rice, the staple food, fell from around 13 shillings per bushel of 86 lbs. in 1929 to about five shillings by 1936.[1] Kola nuts which supplemented rural income tumbled from £5. 00 a measure (176 pounds) to £0. 40 in the Northern Province. The commodity became virtually unsaleable.[2] Peasants initially

---

[1]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, pp. 265-272.

[2]. Kaniki, "Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone," p.82.

MAP 6: Swamp Rice Producing Areas of Sierra Leone



Source: D. Moore-Sieray, "Evolution of Colonial Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone."

withheld their produce hoping that prices would rise. The strategy failed. They switched to an alternative strategy, increasing production with the expectation that the sale of greater volumes of crops would augment their incomes. Thus, the quantity of palm kernels exported improved from 54,462 tons in 1931 to 84,578 tons in 1936. The output of ginger, kola nuts and other exports were less dramatic and tended to fluctuate during this period.[3] The increase in crop exports lasted until 1938 when another recession began. Between 1938 and 1943, agricultural exports fell from £2,388,929 to £994,642, losing about 58 percent of their value. Palm kernel prices fell from £13.6s.0d in 1937 to only £11.8s 0d per ton in 1944. The fall in commodity prices was made less precipitous by the regulatory measures adopted by West African Produce Control Board. Despite the recession, the government ensured that peasants produced sufficient palm kernels and oil to meet its wartime needs.[4]

The dependence on customs duties and related revenue from trade meant the state's fiscal crisis persisted until 1935. Between 1929 and 1935, the net budget deficit hovered around £200,000. Increases in import duties and the Imperial Preference of 1932, which discriminated in favour of British colonial trade, did little to help. Customs dues from export and import trade fell from £558,465 in 1929 to £490,787 in 1936.[5] The drop in government revenue was partly ameliorated by the hut tax. Total tax receipts rose from £76,430 to £194,073 in the same period. Thus, throughout the depression, peasants financed the state through taxation and commodity production.[6]

The colonial state dealt with its fiscal problem by suspending projects, reducing salaries and retrenching European staff. The state applied for, and received annual grants from the Colonial Development Fund. The Fund, which was created by the Colonial Development Act (CDA) of 1929, aimed at stimulating colonial trade to

---

[3]. Ibid. p. 82-84.

[4]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, p. 211.

[5]. PRO CO272, Colonial Blue Books of Statistics, 1929-1936.

[6]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, pp. 281-297.

alleviate unemployment in Britain.[7] The state dispensed a fraction of the grants on urban construction projects and agriculture. It loaned the bulk of it, £500,000, to Sierra Leone Development Company (DELCO) for iron ore mining at Marampa in the Northern Province at a 5.5 percent rate of interest.[8]

Minerals eventually rescued the colonial state from its perennial fiscal crisis. By the late 1930s, minerals had surpassed crops as major contributors to government revenue. The minerals, gold, platinum and diamonds, had been discovered by government geological surveys in the late 1920s. Exploitation of the minerals was left to local and foreign investors. The main foreign investors were DELCO, a subsidiary of Northern Mercantile and Investment Ltd. and Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST), a subsidiary of Consolidated African Selection Trust (CAST). DELCO monopolized iron ore mining at Marampa, Northern Province while SLST focussed on diamonds in Kono, Eastern Province. Local investment flowed into gold and diamond mining, although they also attracted DELCO and other European and Syrian companies.[9] Between 1929 and 1936, minerals contributed only a total of £33,397 in royalties to revenue.[10] They performed better during the Second World War. Diamond exports rose from 689,621 carats in 1938 to 1,046,187 in 1942. Iron ore exports peaked at 1,029,970 tons in 1941. Chrome output soared from 497 tons in 1938 to 17,496 tons in 1940 and remained high throughout the war.[11] On the whole, exports of minerals during the war totalled £10,253,315. Thus, unlike the period of the First World War when

---

[7]. For a critical assessment of the Act see George C. Abbott, "A Re-examination of the Colonial Development Act, Economic History Review, 24, 1, (1971) pp. 69-81.

[8]. PRO CO267/658/32085, "CDF Schemes Progress Reports," enclosue in confidential despatch, Hilary H. Blood, Acting Governor to Secretary of State, Ormsby-Gore, June 6, 1937.

[9]. Ankie M. M. Hoogvelt and Anthony M. Tinker, "The Role of Colonial and Post-Colonial States in Imperialism - A Case Study of the Sierra Leone Development Company, Journal of Modern African Studies, 16, 1. (1978). pp. 67-79; Van der Laan, Sierra Leone Diamonds: An Economic Survey, 1952-1961 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[10]. Kaniki, "Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone," p. 161.

[11]. Ibid. pp. 201-202; Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, p. 240.

the government had struggled with budget deficits, it ended with a net surplus of £753,737 during the Second World War.[12]

Mining also alleviated unemployment caused by the abolition of slavery, depression and colonial retrenchment. Many peasants and ex-slaves flocked to mining. Over 5,000 participated in the construction of mining facilities, including the building of a 52-mile railway between Marampa and Pepel for DELCO between 1930 and 1933.[13] Others prospected and panned for gold in Makong, Maronda and other areas in the protectorate.[14] Maroc Limited, a British company, employed 1,000 while Sierra Leone Goldfields employed about 200 labourers. Some labourers worked as tributors and sold their gold winnings to licensed lease holders at a fixed rate, usually 50 percent or less of the actual value of the find.[15] A few went to the diamond fields in the eastern region where mining began in earnest in 1934. F. J. Martin, the Director of Agriculture, estimated that about 70,000 persons and their dependants were tied up in the mining industry. The Commissioner of Northern Province estimated that about 21,000 people switched from farming to mining in the region.[16] It is difficult to estimate the exact numbers of people who sought their fortunes in mining

---

[12]. Reports of the Sierra Leone Colony, 1939-1945; Blue Books, 1939-1945.

[13]. Siaka Stevens, What Life has Taught Me (London: Kensal Press, 1984) p. 77.

[14]. Katherine Fowler-Lunn, an American geologist, gives a vivid, if exaggerated and unreliable description of the gold rush in the early 1930s. She pointed to the extensive involvement of ex-slave labour in the rush. See Katherine Fowler-Lunn, The Gold Missus: A Woman Prospector in Sierra Leone (New York: W.W. Norton, 1938) pp. 109-136.

[15]. Abdallah, "Colonial State. Mining Capital and Wage Labour," pp. 170-171; A.B. Zack-Williams, "Merchant Capital and Underdevelopment: The Process Whereby the Sierra Leone Social Formation Became Dominated by Merchant Capital 1896-1961." African Review (Tanzania), 10, (1983), pp. 65-66.

[16]. PRO CO267/658/32085/1937, "CDF Schemes Progress Report," enclosure in confidential despatch, H.R.R. Blood, Acting Governor, to Secretary of State, Colonies, Ormsby-Gore, June 6, 1937; Kaniki stated that 16,506 people were employed in the mining industry in 1939. This number does not fully account for the people who reverted back to agriculture and searched for other employment in urban centres after the retrenchment of gold mining. Kaniki, "Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone," p. 377.

since many oscillated between farming and mining.

The development of the mining industry expanded the internal market for rice and other foodstuffs. Peasants' response to the increased demand for rice is one of the remarkable features of the economy in 1930s and 1940s. In northwestern Sierra Leone, peasants cleared more swamp land and produced an ample supply of cheap rice for the internal market. Most of the rice came from nine densely populated chiefdoms around the Skarcies Rivers area. In 1930 alone, the region produced over 32,000 tons of rice.[17] Imports of rice fell from 3,000 tons in 1929 to about 80 tons in 1934. Export trade in native rice revived and 1,035 tons were sold in the external market in 1935. Colonial administrators felt optimistic that the perennial food problems might be finally resolved.[18]

The high levels of rice production continued well into the Second World War. It was only briefly interrupted by unusual rainfall and pestilence in 1937. The government had temporarily to institute price controls in Freetown.[19] The precise yearly rates of increase in rice production are difficult to compute because of lack of concrete data. The revolving seed rice distribution scheme in the Skarcies areas provides a possible indication of the scale of improvement in production. Between 1938 and 1944, the scheme improved its stocks from 2,572 to 23,477 bushels (60 lbs to a bushel).

---

[17]. The Chiefdoms were Samu, Mambolo, Magbema, Bureh, Maforki, Bake Loko, Loko Massama and Koya. See PRO CO 267/647/22117, Agriculture Survey of the Existing and Potential Rice lands in the Swamp Areas of the Little Scarcies, Great Scarcies, Port Loko and Rokel Rivers by R.R. Glanville, Agricultural Department, 1930 in File titled, Rice Growing Scheme, 1934.

[18]. PRO CO270/63, Agricultural Department Report, 1931; See also Agricultural Department Reports, 1932-35; F.A. Stockdale, the Agricultural Adviser to the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, who had earlier visited Sierra Leone in 1929, was struck by the scale of expansion in rice production in 1936. See Sessional Paper Report No.2 of 1936, Report of Mr. F. A. Stockdale, Agricultural Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on his Visit to Sierra Leone in January 18, 1936.

[19]. SLWN, Feb 13, 1937; Moore-Sieray, "Evolution of Colonial Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone," p. 191.

6.1 Quantity of Swamp Rice distributed under the revolving credit scheme

Year	Bushels
1938	2,572
1939	3,275
1940	4,064
1941	6,435
1942	12,774
1943	21,835
1944	23,477
1945	11,215

Source: Agricultural Department Report, 1946.

The expansion in production benefited urban consumers and mining labour. Clean rice hovered between 4 shillings and 5 shillings per bushel in 1937-1938, a far cry from the median price of about 12 to 13 shillings ten years earlier. In the mining areas, the rice price averaged 7 shillings per bushel. For peasant producers, their lot was hardly any better. With the inflation and devaluation of the depression period, peasants would have had to work about five to ten times as hard to equal pre-depression income levels.[20] Given their technical capacity, this feat was impossible. Nonetheless, peasants did increase their productivity and rice production substantially in the 1930s. Cox-George estimates that male and female labour output in rural areas increased by about 30 percent. He attributes the increased rural productivity to government policies and "cumulative consequences of development."[21]

Discussions about labour productivity, however, should begin with the social character of labour. By the 1930s, 15 to 25 percent of the rural population had changed their status from servile to free labour. This emancipated class had more control over their labour, time and crops. Arguably, they had greater incentive to produce and employ their labour than previously. To a certain extent the increased productivity seems to vindicate those who had argued that free labour would mean greater crop productivity.

---

[20]. Kaniki, "Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone," p. 82.

[21]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, pp. 242-244.

The increased productivity may also be attributed to the fact that rural labour was healthier in the 1930s and 1940s. There was a relative absence of major disease epidemics and pestilence during the period. Locusts did continue to bother farmers and a small outbreak of smallpox was reported in the early 1930s. A colonial medical team treated and vaccinated 15,369 people in Samu, Mambolo and other Skarcies Chiefdoms in 1932.[22] However, these epidemics were less debilitating than those which blighted the northwestern region during the First World War.[23]

While the role of the colonial government in the expansion of the rice industry should be acknowledged, it must not be overstated. Generally, colonial policies produced more failures and subtle rural resistance than success. In the late 1920s, the government imported and sold ox-ploughs to farmers without much study. The ploughs proved unsuitable for upland soils and difficult to maintain because of the shortage of spare parts.[24] Secondly, the agricultural department was plagued with financial and staff problems at the time when peasants were expanding rice production. The funds allocated to the agricultural sector plummeted from £38,686 in 1928 to £13,996 in 1934. Like other government departments, Agriculture had to manage with a retrenched European and African staff. Shepherd commented in 1934, the department had, "fallen on evil days. It has passed, like many institutions and individuals, from affluence to penury."[25]

Ironically, the penurious state of the agricultural department produced a positive benefit. Experimentation and introduction of new crops had to be curtailed because the government could no longer afford "the costly failures of the past."[26] The

---

[22]. SLNA CSO M12/32, G.V. Herd, Chief Security Superintendent to Assistant Director of Health Service, March 20, 1932.

[23]. See Chapter Three.

[24]. Moore-Sieray, "Evolution of Colonial Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone," pp. 193-196.

[25]. Sessional Paper No. 4 of 1935, Report of Professor C. Y. Shepherd of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture on his Visit to Sierra Leone in 1934 (Freetown: Government Printer, 1935).

[26]. Ibid.

department took the advice of the experts more seriously and forged a more "clearly articulated policy."[27] The "new" policy maintained its old emphasis on the increased cultivation and exploitation of cash crops, especially oil palm, kola nuts, cocoa, coffee, piassava, ginger and coffee. It stressed the efficient preparation and marketing of produce. The government renewed its commitment to the reduction of deforestation and modification of shifting cultivation. The "new" policy gave more credit to peasant initiatives and placed a stronger emphasis on food production.[28] It regarded the extension of swamp rice production as the key to food self-sufficiency. F. A. Stockdale, one of the architects of the policy, unequivocally stated, "the future development of Sierra Leone would be largely dependent on swamp rice," and that the colony could become a "reservoir for rice in West Africa."[29]

To facilitate the development of swamp rice cultivation, the government established a research and experimental station, a crop revolving scheme and a swamp clearance project. In 1934, the colonial government had procured a loan from the CDF for a rice research station at Rokupr, Magbema Chiefdom. The mandate of the station was to breed and distribute high yielding rice strains and develop better harvesting and rice milling methods. The station bred Indian and local strains of rice like *G. E. B. 24, Toma, Bis, CO7* and *Kavinginpoothola* which it then distributed to selected groups of farmers for cultivation.[30] Some of these new varieties had a short maturation period and made it possible for peasants to grow two sets of crops within a single farming season. The CDF also helped financed the drainage and empoldering of swamp lands in Rosino in 1939. The project, however, failed by 1945 because of excess flooding and silting.

---

[27]. Gilbert Sekgoma, "Introduction and Impact of Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone, TransAfrican Journal of History, 17 (1988) p. 175.

[28]. SLNA CSO A/29/35, F.J. Martin, "A Memorandum of Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone; Annual Report of the Department of Sierra Leone, 1936.

[29]. See SLNA CSO A/26/20, Extract from Minutes of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Colonial Advisory Council of Agriculture and Animal Health, April 11, 1933.

[30]. PRO CO267/658/32085/1937, "CDF Schemes Progress Report," enclosure in confidential despatch, H.R.R. Blood, Acting Governor to Secretary of State, Colonies, Ormsby-Gore, June 6, 1937.

Along with the improvement and distribution of new rice varieties, the colonial state tried to tackle peasant indebtedness, inefficient commodity marketing and lack of credit. Thus, the agricultural department decided to organize cooperative societies in the Skarcies area in 1936. Cooperative societies had already been organized in the Gold Coast and Nigeria with encouraging results. The Nigerian societies provided the conceptual model for Sierra Leone.[31] Government officials believed that cooperative societies could provide a channel for the dissemination of new crop varieties as well as a link to the wider rural community for the Rokupr research station.[32] Lack of manpower and financial resources made it difficult for agricultural officials to construct cooperatives from scratch. They had to depend instead on already existing indigenous working societies to provide the embryonic matrix for the cooperative movement. These Indigenous working societies such as "An-Kump," "Ka-Botho," and "A-Kofo" had emerged around the 1880s as communal responses to the laborious task of clearing mangrove swamps in riverine areas. These societies were independent of the chieftaincy and local power structures but recognized and accepted by all. They gave agricultural officials an opportunity of "establishing contact with an organized and disciplined body of industrious and skilled workers."[33]

Based on these considerations, the Department of Agriculture helped organized a farmers' society in the Mambolo Chiefdom, Northern Province, in 1936. In the following year, the department set up two more societies in Rokupr, Magbema Chiefdom (near the research station) and Kychom, Samu Chiefdom.[34] The societies

---

[31]. The government of Nigeria printed ten leaflets which explained the various facets of the cooperative movement in 1936. These guided the thinking and efforts of colonial officials in Sierra Leone. Some of the leaflets were titled, "The Meaning of Co-operation," "The Reasons and Intentions of Government in introducing the Co-operative Movement in Nigeria," "Co-operative Marketing in its Application to Nigeria," "The Constitution and Working of a Co-operative Cocoa Sale Society and Union," "Cooperation and Thrift" and "Non-Economic Co-operation" and "The duties of Co-operative Staff."

[32]. Report of Shepherd on his Visit to Sierra Leone.

[33]. Ibid.

[34]. PRO CO267/671/32242/1939, Cooperative Society Legislation, June 20, 1939; Annual Report of the Protectorate, 1938.

had an average of thirty-three members with an agricultural officer acting as a secretary-accountant. Members of the societies received seeds from the Rokupr station on loan. The agricultural officers provided advice for cultivation, harvesting and drying of the crop. The societies pooled and marketed their harvest collectively.[35]

Peasants in the cooperative societies got slightly better prices for their rice (about half penny more per bushel) but they faced many problems. Market prices in the 1930s were unfavourable and peasants had no protection against price fluctuations.[36] The societies had little autonomy because of the heavy influence and direction of agricultural officers. Some Skarcies area paramount chiefs viewed the cooperative societies with much suspicion. Thus, even though the Legislative Council formalized the cooperative movement with a law in 1939, the initial optimism of the peasant members was fading.[37]

Trade, Migration, Land and Protest in the Skarcies

The expansion in rice production came at a price. It intensified trade competition as well as social conflict in the Skarcies area. The African elite, Syrian traders and petty hawkers battled to capture the rice trade on the ground. Syrians, with greater financial resources, held the ground they had won in the preceding two decades. Unable to dislodge the Syrians, the African elite tried to control the transportation of the commodity. In the late 1920s paramount chief Brima Sanda of Sanda Chiefdom, Alikali Mela of Bake Lokko Chiefdom, Kande Bali and other members of the elite pooled resources and formed the Bake Loko Transport Company with a fleet of trucks and launches.[38] Syrian merchants countered the efforts of the elite

---

[35]. SLNA CSO A/59/26 Farmers Cooperative society; SLNA CSO A/54/37; Farmers Cooperative society and SLNA CSO A/23/38, Farmers Society Rokupr, Tumbo and Rosino.

[36]. CO 267/671/32242/1939, Enclosure 1, "Report of Visit to Scarcies Rivers Area," in Cooperative Society Legislation, June 20, 1939.

[37]. SLWN, April 18, 1939; PRO CO267/671/32242/1939, Enclosure 1, "Report of Visit to Scarcies Rivers Area," in Cooperative Society Legislation, June 20, 1939.

[38]. Moore-Sieray, "Evolution of Colonial Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone," p.236.

with the launching of the Ahmed Brothers Transportation Company in the 1930s. The two groups then waged a bitter battle over fares.[39]

If Chiefs and Syrians fought to control the rice trade from below, the United African Company (UAC) tried to achieve the same goal with the sanction of the colonial state. Arguing that manual cleaning of rice was "uneconomical" and "laborious," UAC solicited permission from Governor Byrne to locate an "up to date power milling plant" in the Skarcies area. It also requested an exclusive license to purchase and process rice in the area. UAC's ultimate goal was to erect several powerful rice mills and take over the local and international marketing of rice.[40] The colonial government was prepared to grant a milling license to UAC but not a virtual monopoly over the rice trade. Governor Byrne opposed the granting of an exclusive license to a private company arguing that smaller private mills should be allowed to operate and peasants be able to sell their produce at the best possible price. The government also felt that rice was a strategic commodity and its trade should not be controlled by a single company. It wanted to ensure that an export trade in rice does not deprive the colony of sufficient quantities of rice.[41] Eventually, it was the government, not private agencies, that erected large rice mills. Gov. H. M. Moore set a large mill at Cline Town, Freetown with a grant £6,980.00 from the CDF.[42]

Competition and social conflict also erupted around land and attempts by the elite to maximize their extraction of resources in the different Skarcies area chiefdoms. Despite the rice boom, poor commodity prices, colonial and local financial obligations ensured many peasants remained mired in debt during the depression. Chiefs extracted one in every five bushels of rice harvested by peasants as tribute. They also extracted between £5 to £8 in rents for fertile swamp lands over which they claimed ownership. Rural indebtedness forced many peasants to pledge or rent some of their

---

[39]. SLWN. July 18, 1938.

[40]. SLNA CSO A/91/1930, Robert Waley cohen, Chairman, UAC to Brigadier-General J. A. Byrne, July 23, 1930.

[41]. SLNA CSO A/91/1930, Governor Byrne to Passfield, October 4, 1930; Lord Passfield to Byrne, January 19, 1931.

[42]. PRO CO267/641/2071, Rice Mills and Research Station at (Ro)Kupr, 1933.

lands to migrant tenants from surrounding chiefdoms at about £4 or thirty bushels an acre.[43] Glanville, an official of the Agricultural department, estimated that about 50 percent of the farms were worked by tenants. Pledging, tenancy and rents produced many disputes which ended in the courts. District Commissioners complained about the "troublesome Skarcies Chiefdoms" and regarded them as "a fruitful source of litigation."[44]

One of the "troublesome" Skarcies Chiefdoms was Mambolo. Its paramount chief, Bai Sherbro Kamara, had to be deposed by the state for extortion and despotism in 1934. Bai Sherbro, who had been elected and recognized as paramount chief of the mixed Bullom-Temne chiefdom in 1909, became so oppressive and extortionate that his people rebelled in 1921. The chief had to resign.[45] However, five neighbouring chiefs, with their typical elite solidarity, petitioned the colonial government in 1923 to reinstate Bai Sherbro. They promised government officials the chief would behave well in the future. Bai Sherbro also pledged to govern his people "justly." The state and the people of Mambolo accepted the chief.[46]

Bai Sherbro's pledge to govern justly lasted for only a few years. Between 1927 and 1933, he reverted to his old ways. In 1933, the peasants and elders of Mambolo chiefdom rebelled again and refused to harvest Sherbro's rice farm, pay tribute, fines or fees to him. The crisis in the chiefdom necessitated the intervention of the state. The Provincial commissioner summoned Bai Sherbro and the chiefdom elders to Port Loko while conditions in Mambolo were investigated. On the situation in Mambolo, the commissioner, N. G. Frere, noted:

> The state of native government was in a most scandalous condition of corruption - a reign of oppression and extortion existed carried on by a gang of

---

[43]. PRO CO267/647/22117, Agriculture Survey of the Existing and Potential Rice lands in the Swamp Areas of the Little Scarcies, Great Scarcies, Port Loko and Rokel Rivers by R.R. Glanville, Agricultural Department, 1930 in File titled, Rice Growing Scheme, 1934.

[44]. Annual Report, Northern Province, 1937

[45]. MP SLNA P/L 46/1921, Provincial Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, 11/1/1921.

[46]. SLNA CSO 583/1921, Situation in Mambolo Chiefdom, 12/1/1923.

men who were sheltered under and used the chief's name to cover their misdeeds.[47]

Despite the grim assessment, the commissioner treated Bai Sherbro leniently. He appointed a committee of three elders to help the chief govern Mambolo properly. The compromise failed to ameliorate the chief's behaviour. In December 1933, government instituted an enquiry into the chief's conduct in accordance with the revised Protectorate Ordinance of 1933.[48] The commission of enquiry consisted of J. S. Fenton, the acting Provincial Commissioner, Alikali Mela, Chief of Port Loko and Bai Inga.[49]

Many Mambolo residents saw the enquiry as an opportunity to express their disaffection against Bai Sherbro. The commission allowed only thirty seven people to testify, and the majority of them spoke against the chief. Peasants and elites united in their the condemnation of the Chief's oppression and extortion. Their charges against the chief fell into four broad categories. First, he ignored his legitimate advisers and relied on irresponsible outsiders to rule. Second, the chief adjudged cases unfairly and levied unjust punishment, including excessive court fees and fines. Third, he demanded excessive labour from chiefdom residents. Fourth, he employed "bad medicine" against his opponents.[50]

The charge of political exclusion of elders revealed an intra-elite struggle over resources. Many members of the elite had become wealthier and more powerful with the rice boom. Bai Sherbro had sought to curtail the power of this elite by excluding them from the governance of the chiefdom and undermining their social standing. He publicly humiliated, punished and impoverished them. The chief called an elder a "bastard" openly and made another clear his own garbage with his bare hands. As Pa

---

[47]. PRO CO267/648/1934, Report of Enquiry: Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

[48]. See PRO CO267/643/2191, An Ordinance to Consolidate and Amend the Law dealing with the Mode of Exercising His majesty's jurisdiction in the Protectorate (32/1933).

[49]. PRO CO267/648/1934, Report of Enquiry: Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

[50]. Ibid.

Sema, an elder, who testified against the chief reminded the commission, the "[p]ublic abuse of Elders is against native custom."[51]

Many of the elders and peasants who had been active in forcing the chief's resignation in 1921 received his wrath after his restoration. Bai Sherbro fined them heavily when they appeared in his court. One elder had to pay the chief £20, twenty bushels of rice and three cows over a land dispute. Another had to pay £40.[52] Many elders and peasants were forced to pledge their lands and crops to pay fines and tributes. Sherbro confiscated farms, cows and even insignias of office for minor offenses. He retained and rented or leased the land to his supporters or migrant farmers. To enforce his decisions, the chief used "outsiders," a cohort of relatives and supporters from other chiefdoms.[53]

The accusations of excessive labour demands also fell within the ambit of the punitive and exploitative actions taken by the chiefs against his opponents. As his estate expanded with seized lands, the chief required more labour to work them. Headmen, sub-chiefs and peasants had to provide more than the labour quota permitted by custom and colonial law. Peasants had to work more for him and less on their own farms. Consequently, other members of the elite had their access to their own labour and other peasant labour curtailed. Resistance to the labour demands of the chief invited fines and imprisonment.

While the accusation of utilizing bad medicine levied against the chief may seem strange, it was the most serious. Certain Temne groups, including the people of Mambolo, believed that medicine used by the chief, which involved the burial of a dog and *korte*, were fatal to people. Two witnesses claimed the chief buried such medicine in their towns. Santigi Bangura, an elder of Mambolo, even suggested that the

---

[51]. PRO CO267/648/1934, See the Pa Sema, an elder, in the Report of Enquiry: Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

[52]. PRO CO267/648/1934, See testimonies of Pa Sema, Ansumana and others, Report of Enquiry: Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

[53]. A catalogue of Bai Sherbro fines culled from Minute paper series numbered SLNA MP 46/1924; SLNA MP 128/1927; SLNA MP 84/1928; SLNA MP 8/1933; SLNA MP 18/1933 and SLNA MP 19/1933 in PRO CO267/648/1934 Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

medicine killed two sub-chiefs, Almami Momo and Almami Yangbe. Bangura publicly expressed his fear of the chief's medicine and received the concurrence of those present during the inquiry.[54] Bai Sherbro's employment of "bad" medicine against his opponents violated custom as well as the expected role of the chieftaincy.

Bai Sherbro and his supporters denied neither the accusations of extortion nor those of oppression. Instead, they defended the chief in the name of custom and his prerogatives. Santigi Bangura, an elder and sub-chief of Makerib remarked, "a Paramount Chief must live on other people's money. It is done in all chiefdoms: if it's excessive, still people should bear. " Santigi Kamara, the headman of Tumbo Village maintained, "Bai Sherbro is the chief: therefore he should feed on us, it is the custom. " Another headman, Pa Babadi of Yenkesa, supported Santigi Kamara.[55] He maintained, "Bai Sherbro send to me for work and tribute. A chief should prey on his people. " Realizing that his deposition may be unavoidable, Bai stated:

> I have already been punished... The chiefdom would not reap my rice last year when the D. C. told them. They almost made me a beggar... I am not the first chief but for some reason the people have chosen me to reject... It is not a Bullom custom to depose a chief. I do not agree to be a precedent."[56]

The appeal to custom proved unacceptable. Bai Sherbro's actions undermined the very custom he and his supporters had invoked. Rather than acting like the "father" of his people and maintaining the expected consensus among the elite, he had mercilessly oppressed them. Even peasant working societies, which the state had eyed favourably, had been attacked by the chief. Two witnesses claimed the chief fined and punished them for starting mutual benefit societies. Thus, from the point of view of his people, and the colonial state, Bai Sherbro had jeopardised the welfare and stability of his chiefdom and the province. The commission determined Bai Sherbro was culpable on all the charges including those of:

---

[54]. PRO CO267/648/1934, See testimony Santigi Bangura, an elder, in the Report of Enquiry: Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

[55]. PRO CO267/648/1934, See the testimonies of Santigi Bangura, Santigi Kamara and Pa Babadi of Yenkesa in the Report of Enquiry: Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

[56]. PRO CO267/648/1934 Testimony of Bai Sherbro in the Report of Enquiry, Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

> setting aside his proper advisers, of employing unworthy favourites in their stead, of excessive fines, of justly imprisoning persons, of requiring from the chiefdom excessive labour, and of employing bad medicine, and in the last twelve months of working to nullify the Port Loko settlement of 1933."[57]

The majority of Mambolo residents, about eighty percent, called for the deposition of the chief. The commission unanimously acceded to the popular view. Bai Sherbro was suspended and later deposed with the approval of the Colonial Office. Three co-regents were appointed in his stead to oversee the affairs of Mambolo.

The deposition of Bai Sherbro removed a nefarious chief but it did not resolve the nascent problems and tensions spawned by the rice boom and the arrival of migrants. Many witnesses complained that their lands and properties were being turned over to "strangers. " Alkali Bangura, an elder of Tumbo village, maintained, "[a]ll the sons of the soil are poor: we have been slaves of the chief: the only rich in Mambolo are strangers."[58] Despite the tensions in the Skarcies area, the colonial government still did not make the reform of Protectorate Land tenure a priority. Instead, it passed on the problems to the post-colonial government.[59] For the colonial government, a more serious problem was the functioning of the chieftaincy and the local political institutions. Bombo Lahai's ineffectual handling of Idara's insurrection and the despotism of Bai Sherbro illustrated the problem.

Native Administration, 1937-1945

If the cooperative movement was a colonial experiment at the socio-economic engineering of rural life in the 1930s, then its political complement was "native administration. " Whereas cooperation focused on peasants, native administration concentrated on the elite. Like cooperatives, the colonial government had already established model native administrations in the Gold Coast and Nigeria in the late

---

[57]. PRO CO267/648/1934 Report of Enquiry: Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

[58]. PRO CO267/648/1934, See the testimony of Alkali Bangura, Tumbo Village, Report of Enquiry: Deposition of Bai Sherbro of Mambolo.

[59]. Rhodes House Library (RHL) MSS.AFR. S1060, Policy with regards to the Protectorate Land Tenure." A.M. Sim, for Chief Commissioner to Provincial Commissioners. January 17, 1949."

1920s. However, it was a memo by Sir Donald Cameron, a former colonial administrator in Tangayika and resident in Nigeria which provided the impetus for the creation of similar structures in Sierra Leone. Cameron's memo, titled "The Principles of Native Administration and their Application," critically reviewed existing local government structures in Northern and Southern Nigeria.[60]

In his memo, Cameron reiterated the Lugardian argument that indigenous political institutions were useful to the colonial process and they needed to be preserved. What he advocated was the removal of administrative "defects" so that indigenous rulers could "become a living part of the existing form of government."[61] Cameron's observations and suggestions for Northern Nigeria were deemed inapplicable to Sierra Leone by colonial officials. However, those for Southern Nigeria were seen as appropriate. Consequently, the Sierra Leone colonial administration sent J. S. Fenton, a district commissioner, to observe and report on the operation of local administration in Nigeria. He visited Owerri, Calabar, Benin and other provinces in Southern Nigeria. Fenton reiterated and reworked Cameron's observations and ideas to fit Sierra Leone.[62]

For Cameron and Fenton, native administration entailed the creation of chiefdom "tribal authorities" under the control of the customarily elected, recognized and accepted community leaders, namely chiefs and sub-chiefs. The authorities were to include all villages heads rather than just a few of them. Once established, the new authorities had to hold public meetings and free discussions regularly. Proceedings of the meetings were to be recorded in a Minute Book. Tribal authorities also had to list its members and maintain files pertaining to taxation, court, staff and other chiefdom projects.[63]

---

[60]. Donald Cameron, Principles of Native Administration and their Application (Lagos, 1934).

[61]. Ibid.

[62]. Sessional Paper No. 3, 1935, Report by J.S. Fenton, District Commissioner, on a Visit to Nigeria and on the Application of Principles of Native Administration to the Protectorate of Sierra Leone (Freetown: Sierra Leone Government, 1935).

[63]. Ibid; Cameron, Principles of Native Administration.

Both Cameron and Fenton maintained that authorities should be made fiscally responsible and efficient. Native treasuries should be established and the chiefdom officials trained in fiscal responsibility and management. The authorities should have clear financial guidelines regulating the collection, recording and dispensation of money. All financial transactions must be well documented and organized. Revenue should be derived mainly from government sanctioned taxes, land rents, settler fees and market dues; all of which must be regulated to reduce abuses. This revenue should be dispensed on development projects and recurrent administrative expenditure. Administrative expenditure, including the salary demands of chiefs, clerks and messengers, was to be minimized and, if possible kept at 40 percent of the total budget.[64]

In 1937, the colonial state sent Bai Inga, the paramount chief of Bureh, a chiefdom in Northern Province, to Nigeria and Gold Coast to observe their local administration in action. The government hoped that the chief, impressed with the efficacy of the system, would encourage his colleagues to accept it quickly.[65] By the end of 1937, the government had organized ten Tribal Authorities in the Northern Province using Fenton's report as a guide. Four authorities were set in Port Loko District, one in Tonkolili District, two in Karene District and three in Bombali District. To give the new authorities a financial base, the state instituted a new levy of four shillings, payable by every adult male in a chiefdom. The Freetown Press optimistically speculated that the new arrangement gave chiefdoms "considerable autonomy."[66] The colonial approach to local administrative reform was gradualist and accomodationist. It aimed at enlarging local elite collaboration in government, and also at administrative efficiency and fiscal responsibility at the chiefdom level rather than breaking with the past. The state left the configuration of power and political relations at the chiefdom level intact.

Despite the underlying conservatism of the local government reforms, the new

---

[64]. Ibid.

[65]. Annual Report of the Northern Province, 1937.

[66]. SLWN, September 18, 1937.

bodies were plagued with problems. Even before the outbreak of the Second World War, animosities between different groups in multi-ethnic chiefdoms threatened to thwart the experiment. In Makari Chiefdom, a Loko sub-chief had to be deposed for rebelling against the Temne Paramount Chief and his Tribal Authority.[67]

Protest in the Iron Mines at Marampa, 1933-1939

While the government was busy reforming local structures of government, another site of potentially destabilizing protest had emerged at the iron ore mines at Marampa Chiefdom. Iron ore mining transformed a small proportion of unskilled rural labour into a mining "proletariat" in northern Sierra Leone. Ibrahim Abdallah has elaborated on the emergence of working class consciousness at the Marampa mines between 1933 and 1938. He argues that unskilled labourers acquired working class consciousness in the process of resisting DELCO's strategy of maximizing profits while reducing the cost of production. Abdallah maintained that DELCO forced labourers to increase their annual outputs of iron ore without a concomitant improvement in their remuneration. Abdallah focuses on two major strikes in 1935 and 1938 organized by unskilled labour for better wages, overtime conditions, medical facilities and treatment by their European supervisors. Although the strikes failed to achieve their objectives and were suppressed by the state, he maintained labourers "began to redefine themselves and to think and act like workers."[68] The emergence of a self-conscious working class was not limited to Sierra Leone. In the inter-war period, workers in other parts of Africa were also aggressively announcing their presence to colonial authorities and their employers with industrial actions and more effective organization.[69]

---

[67]. Annual Report of the Protectorate, 1937.

[68]. Ibrahim Abdallah, "Profit versus Social Reproduction: Labor Protests in the Sierra Leonean Iron-Ore Mines, 1933-1938, African Studies Review, Vol. 35, December 1992, pp. 13-41.

[69]. For working class activities in the 1930s in West Africa and elsewhere in Africa, see Arnold Hughes and Robin Cohen, "An Emerging Nigerian Working Class: The Lagos Experience, 1897 - 1937," in P.C.W. Gutkind, R. Cohen and J. Copans (eds.), African Labor History, (London: Sage Publications, 1978) pp.31-55; John Higgison, "Bringing

It is incontrovertible that unskilled rural labourers became "workers" in consciousness and organization by 1939. They formed a workers' union in that year. Before then, they had only been workers in the sense that they could freely sell their labour for wages to capital. They retained many elements from their agrarian origins including patterns of social reproduction, residence, communal networks and protest actions. Unskilled labourers were very difficult to categorize because of their mixed attributes. Were they workers or peasants, or both? The colonial state and DELCO recognized that mining organization and employment relations were different from those of subsistence agriculture. They were also aware that unskilled mining labour retained many agrarian features. Unable to find a suitable definition, DELCO and the state simply labelled them, "peasant-workers."[70] However, the emphasis was on "peasant" rather than "worker. " It was deliberate and strategic.

The emphasis on "peasant" justified DELCO's super-exploitation of unskilled labour and its transfer of the cost of their social reproduction to their community. The colonial state had routinely used the same strategy in its construction projects in the hinterland. It compensated slave and peasants labour poorly, expecting that their communal networks would provide the additional resources needed to keep them alive. DELCO also paid unskilled labourers poorly giving them small rice rations, and poor housing and medical facilities. Like the government, they paid labourers a basic wage of 9 pence a day.[71] These "starvation wages" were considered "sufficient" for unmarried labourers. For married men who had to swallow their "spittle with blood," it was insufficient. They only accepted it because of the glut in the labour market, their relative lack of bargaining power and their ability to augment their income through

---

the Workers Back In: Worker Protest and Popular Intervention in Katanga, 1931-1941," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 22, 2, (1988); Frederick Cooper, Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 88-104; Ian Henderson, "Early African Leadership: The Copperbelt Disturbances of 1935 and 1940," Journal of South African Studies, 2 (1975) pp. 83-97.

[70]. PRO CO267/665/33210, Marampa Mines, 1938.

[71]. The Weekly News described the pay as "starvation wages" compared to those offered by PZ, Elder Dempster and other companies who payed labourers one shilling and fed them well. SLWN, December 6, 1930.

family and communal networks.[72] Many labourers farmed part-time with the help of family members. Their wives provided additional support from petty trading, dyeing, garden-farms, sewing and palm-wine selling.[73]

Unskilled labourers also bore the cost of accommodation since those provided by DELCO at the Marampa mines were insufficient. The company housed mainly skilled European and African staff, and unskilled labour recruited from other provinces. The labourers found the narrow rooms provided by the company at three shillings a month incommodious and expensive. Some found it cheaper and convenient to stay in surrounding villages. Many joined other labourers in Lunsar, about six miles from Marampa mines. Since DELCO did not provide transportation, they had to trek to, and from the mines daily.

Initially, Lunsar was like a transient mining camp with little law and order in the town. Prostitutes, gamblers, thieves and other criminals joined job-seekers and mine labourers in the town.[74] It become more orderly after the paramount chief of Marampa chiefdom made it his capital. In Lunsar, mine labourers reconstituted their communal and cultural links. In the early 1930s, they resided in ethnically defined quarters. The Temne were the dominant group in the mines and the town since most of the mine labour came from the environs of Marampa. In December 1947, the ethnic composition of mining labour was Temne 42 percent, Limba 20.6 percent, Mende 16.2 percent and others, 21.2 percent.[75] The proportion of Temne residents in Lunsar

---

[72]. The Freetown Press defended the labourers' right to a fair wage pointing out that workers accepted the poor wages because of the unemployment created by the depression. As the paper aptly put the situation: "nar trouble make monkey eat pepper." SLWN, Dec 6, 1930 & SLWN January 17, 1931.

[73]. David Gamble, "Work, Family and Leisure in an Urban Setting," (unpublished paper) pp. 30-32.

[74]. Many of those who flocked to the mining area failed to find work. Many refused to go back to their chiefdoms and engaged in petty crimes. Until the paramount chief of Marampa moved and effectively settled in Lunsar, it was difficult to repatriate them. The Vagrancy Act of 1934 had to be passed to control unemployed migrants to mining areas. PRO CO267/648/2216, Marampa Mines, 1934; Annual Report, Northern Province, 1937.

[75]. David Gamble, "The History and Growth of Lunsar," (unpublished paper) p. 13.

tended to be higher than in the mines.[76]

Lunsar afforded mine labourers the opportunity to reconstitute peasant associations like *poro, ragbenle* and *bundu*. They also set up palm-wine bars which provided a better alternative to company controlled entertainment. The associations and bars gave mining labourers autonomous spaces where they could meet, interact and discuss without the watchful eye of the DELCO.[77] The extent to which unskilled labourers used these networks to plan, execute and sustain their protest actions against DELCO is unknown. Both DELCO and the state regarded palm-wine bars, however, as subversive sites. During the 1935 strike at Marampa, the governor ordered the closure of all palm wine bars to prevent unskilled workers from going to them.[78]

The protest tactics of unskilled mine labourers indicated continuity rather than a sharp break from the experience of slave and peasant resistance. Slaves and peasants frequently used absenteeism, shoddy work and escape to protest oppression by chiefs and the colonial administration. Rural residents also withheld tribute labour from unpopular and repressive chiefs. All of these tactics were employed by miners at Marampa against DELCO. However, the ethnic solidarity and communal networks, which were use to supported these protest actions up to 1938 proved insufficient. The state and DELCO remorselessly crushed major acts of protest by unskilled labourers in 1935 and 1938.[79] In his report on the 1938 strike, A. M. Sim, the

---

[76]. Milcah Amolo estimated that the town's population expanded by over 300% in the 1930s. Milcah Amolo, "Trade Unionism and Colonial Authority in Sierra Leone: 1930-1945," TransAfrican Journal 8, 1, 1979, p.39; David Gamble puts the population at 1742 taxpayers in 1960. The numbers give little indication of the real population of the town. Gamble pointed that while the number of tax-payers for the whole of Masimera-Marampa Chiefdom in 1958 was 6,781, the number of registered voters four years later, in 1962 was 47,876. see David Gamble, "History and Growth of Lunsar," (unpublished paper) p.15.

[77]. David Gamble, "Work, Family and Leisure in an Urban Society," (unpublished paper) pp. 50- 55.

[78]. Abdallah, "Profit versus Social Reproduction," p.28.

[79]. PRO CO267/650/32040/2, Governor's Deputy to Secretary of State, Colonies, Malcolm MacDonald, June 18, 1935.

district commissioner, harshly criticized the attitude and policies of DELCO and noted that labourers had legitimate grievances.[80] Nonetheless, unlike cases of blatant rural oppression where the colonial state usually intervened paternalistically, in Marampa it backed DELCO. The limits of what could be achieved in the mines with peasant based networks and tactics became evident. Working class consciousness took precedence over ethnicity in Lunsar and in the mines. In 1939, the Marampa and Pepel Mineworkers Union was formed.[81]

The anti-colonialist and pro-working class West African Youth League (WAYL) under the leadership of Isaac T. A. Wallace-Johnson helped in the formation of the Marampa and Pepel Mineworkers union. In 1938, the WAYL had emerged as the radical voice of the Freetown urban community and working class. The League called for independence from Great Britain and the amelioration of labour conditions in the colony. To achieved the latter goal, it helped in the establishment of several workers' unions around the colony, and the organization of strikes in Freetown in 1939.[82] The League also supported peasant protest against unfair assessment, brutal collection of taxes by zealous chiefdom messengers and excessive fines by chiefs.[83] Wallace-Johnson used his contacts in London to raise peasant grievances in the British parliament and to investigate the matter. The colonial administration did not hold the broad enquiry demanded by the league but it did investigate allegations of brutality by tax collectors in the Eastern Province.[84]

---

[80]. PRO CO267/655/32199, District Commissioner, Port Loko to Commissioner Northern Province, January 18, 1938.

[81]. Amolo, "Trade Unionism in Sierra Leone: 1930-1945," p.38.

[82]. Ibrahim Abdallah, "Liberty or Death,": Working Class Agitation and the Labour Question in Colonial Freetown, 1938-1939," International Review of Social History 40 (1995) pp. 199-208; La Ray Denzer, "I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League," Parts 1 & 2, The International Journal of African Historical Studies 6, 3 and 4, (1973) pp.413-452 and pp.563-580.

[83]. African Standard, July 7, 1939; CO 267/672/32249, Native Taxation, H.R.R. Blood to Williams, November 20, 1939.

[84]. PRO CO267/672/32248, Native Taxation: Treatment of Natives for non-payment of taxes.

The government regarded the activities of Wallace-Johnson and the WAYL as inimical to colonial law and order. While in the agrarian context, the state tried to use cooperatives and native administrations to harness peasant energies, in the mines and urban context, it resorted to more direct means of control. The government arrested and tried Wallace-Johnson for criminal libel in 1939 but failed to convict him. The government, nonetheless, incarcerated Wallace-Johnson for the duration of the Second World War on security grounds. The colonial government also passed laws to curtail the radicalism of the West African Youth League and the trade unions affiliated with it.[85]

The Second World War and Recession

The Second World War had mixed consequences for labour. The recession which began in 1938 led to retrenchment of many workers. Delco retrenched about 3500 workers in 1939. Gold and diamond mining also receded and many labourers were left jobless. The ensuing unemployment was partly relieved by the re-fortification of Freetown and recruitment into the army. Over 20,000 urban and rural labourers found work in these areas.[86] Over 85,000 people from the protectorate sought work in war-related employment in Freetown. This represented the largest single movement of rural population into the city. After the war, many of these migrants remained in the city and transformed its demographic composition.[87]

For the remaining rural labourers, the war meant increased burdens. To secure control over food supplies and strategic export crops, the administration introduced a barter and quota system. Peasants, through their headmen and chiefs, were required to sell some of their produce to the government. This produce was exchanged for imported commodities, ostensibly to reduce inflation. The government permitted its agents and Syrian traders to exchange three-quarters of the value of their transactions in commodities and a fourth in cash. The barter and quota system caused hardship

---

[85]. La Ray Denzer, "Wallace-Johnson and the Sierra Leone Labor Crisis of 1939," African Studies Review, 25, 2 & 3, (June/September, 1982), p.178.

[86]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, p.225.

[87]. Report of the Agricultural Department, 1942.

for many peasant households in some districts. Peasant families usually had to fill the quota of their kin who had emigrated from the chiefdom. They usually had to purchase rice to make up their quota at the "black market" rate. The "black market" rate of twenty-five shillings per bushel was far more than the quota rate of nine shillings offered by government agents. Although there were serious food shortfalls in some districts, the high rural labour productivity in the Skarcies region ensured that they did not become catastrophic. Government imports of rice fluctuated and declined between 1942 and 1945. In fact the administration deliberately overstocked rice during the war to preempt the shortages and social unrest that had been characteristic of the First World War period.[88] It regulated the price of rice and other basic commodities more diligently. Profiteers were arrested and fined.

Government regulations and punitive measures could not prevent war-time recession and inflation. Domestic exports fell from £2,388,929 in 1938 to £994,642 in 1943, a loss of 58. 4 percent of their value. Imports, on the other hand rose steeply and more than tripled in value from £1,500,342 in 1938 to a peak of £5,585,201 in 1943.[89] The rise in imports reflected the injection of cash into the local economy through government construction projects in Freetown. This apparent wave of consumerism merely fuelled inflation. Peasants paid more for imported commodities and received less for their produce. Workers received poor wages and benefits. Unionized workers in the iron ore mines and government employment responded to war-time conditions with strikes for better pay and working conditions. They struck thirty-two times during the war. Nine strikes were recorded in 1941 and thirteen in 1942.[90] In many cases, government responded with wage increases and war-time bonuses. Despite their hardships, peasants in northwestern Sierra Leone remained relatively quiescent during the war.

While rural and urban labourers suffered from war-time conditions, the colonial state profited. The relative availability of food, the steady production of export crops

---

[88]. Report of Agricultural Department, 1941.

[89]. Reports of the Sierra Leone Colony, 1939-1943.

[90]. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, p. 225; Abdallah, "Colonial State, Mining Capital and Wage Labor," pp. 300-315.

and minerals ensured that the colonial government remained solvent. Unlike the First World War, the government ended with a net budget surplus of £753,737 by the end of the Second World War.[91] This surplus did not translate into any beneficial project for the rural or urban populace. The government shelved most of its development plans until after the war. As in most of Africa, the reality of the war-time economics and policies was that peasants and workers ended up subsidizing the colonial government.

Conclusion

The 1930s and early 1940s were a period of mixed fortunes for peasants and their rural communities in northwestern Sierra Leone. Economic recessions brought slumps in prices, unemployment and rural destitution. The commencement of gold and iron ore mining partly attenuated rural labour problems. Peasants and ex-slaves in the Skarcies rivers area demonstrated resilience by increasing their output of crops with government support. The expansion of crop production in the Skarcies area and iron ore mining in Marampa generated social conflicts which threatened colonial law and order. Peasants in the Skarcies area protested the extortion and despotism of the chieftaincy. Unskilled labourers in Marampa fought DELCO for better wages and working conditions. DELCO, with the support of the colonial government, repressed the protests of unskilled labourers. In the rural areas, the government attempted to contain peasant restlessness with peasant cooperatives and native administrations. The Second World War interrupted this process. The resumption of government reorganization of the protectorate's politics and economy in the post-war period and the reactions of peasants to this process comprises the subject of the final chapter of the dissertation.

---

[91]. Ibid.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DECOLONIZATION AND POPULAR CONTESTATION: THE PEASANT REBELLION OF 1955 -1956

In the aftermath of World War II, the colonial state resumed its remaking and "modernization" of protectorate institutions. By then it had become part of a broad imperial project pursued by the French and British which involved not only rethinking and reshaping the role of rural groups but also that of the African working class.[1] By the 1950s, this project intersected with African demands for independence and the consequent process of decolonization. In response to these developments, the state integrated chiefs into the highest tiers of state and local government. The empowered chieftaincy accentuated its oppression and exploitation of the rural populace. In the northwestern Province, this led peasants and the rural poor to rebel against the chiefs and the elite between 1955 and 1956. The rural rebels contested the class structure and institutions which had been the linchpins of colonial rule and which the British hoped would buttress the post-colonial state in Sierra Leone. Their insurrection indicted British colonialism and its strategy of decolonization.

The rebellion in northwestern Sierra Leone ran counter to the contemporary trend in West Africa. As in most of Africa, the elite groups in West Africa rallied around the masses to demand independence. Colonial powers rode the initial nationalist storm and by the mid-1950s were executing relatively tranquil and formulaic transfers of power to sections of these elite groups.[2] Only in Algeria, Kenya and the Portuguese colonies did peasants and other rural groups violently engage the colonial state and sections of the indigenous elite. This was also the case in Sierra Leone.

---

[1]. Frederick Cooper, Decolonization and African Society, pp. 18-19, 173-175. For the origins of British developmentalism see J.M. Lee and Martin Petter, The Colonial Office, War and Development Policy: Organization and the Planning of A Metropolitan Initiative, 1939-1945 (London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies. 1982) pp. 243-256.

[2]. For typology of nationalist groups see Thomas Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa (New York: New York University Press, 1956), pp. 139-168. See also Thomas Hodgkin, African Political Parties (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

Unlike Sierra Leone, the others were settler-colonies and scholars agree their decolonization process tended to be more complicated and violent.[3] Unable to explain or fit the Sierra Leone rebellion into their neat narratives of the decolonization process in West Africa and Africa, historians have ignored or treated it cursorily.[4] The chapter examines the origins, context and character of the 1955-56 rebellion. It explores how peasants framed and articulated their grievances against chieftaincy and colonialism.

The Political Economy of Sierra Leone, 1945-1955

Colonial remodelling plans and peasant insurrectionary spirit germinated against the backdrop of a Sierra Leonean economy experiencing a cycle of prosperity. In the period after World War II, prices of export crops like palm kernel and oil, cocoa, coffee and ginger rose dramatically.[5] By 1954, their total export value had grown to £6,359,648 from a war-time low of £544,514.[6] Minerals added substantially to

---

[3]. Marie Perinbam, "Fanon and the Revolutionary Peasantry - The Algerian Case," Journal of Modern African Studies, 11, 3, (1973); Pierre Beysadde, La Guerre d'Algerie 1954-1962 (Paris, Editions Planéte, 1968); Philippe Trupier, Autopsie de la Guerre d'Algerie (Paris 1972); pp.427-445; Frank Furedi, The Mau Mau in Perspective (London: James Currey, 1989); Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, Unhappy Valley: Conflicts in Kenya and Africa: Books One and Two (London: James Currey, 1992), pp 265-504. For Portuguese colonies, see Chapter 7 in Patrick Chabal's Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 188-240.

[4]. John D. Hargreaves, The End of Colonial Rule in West Africa: Essays in Contemporary History (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 79-80. Tony Smith, "Patterns in the Transfer of Power: A study of French and British Decolonization," in Prosser Gifford and W. M. Roger Louis (eds.), Transfer of Power in Africa: Decolonization, 1940-1960 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 87-116. David Williams, "Chapter 7: English Speaking West Africa," in Michael Crowder (ed.), Cambridge History of Africa: Vol 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp.350-353; Jean Suret-Canale and Adu Boahen, "West Africa, 1945-1960," in Ali A. Mazrui (ed.) and C. Wondji (asst. ed.) General History of Africa VIII: Africa Since 1935 (Paris: Unesco and Heinemann, 1993), pp. 161-191.

[5]. Protectorate Report, 1947.

[6]. Economic Survey of Sierra Leone, (Freetown: Sierra Leone Government, 1949); Provincial Report, 1954.

exports. Official diamond sales went up from a yearly average of £1,647,000 in 1945-1949 to £2,038,000 in 1950-1954.[7] By 1955, the diamond boom had turned into a "rush," attracting over 68,000 independent or "illicit" miners from different parts of the country to the Kono District.[8] The tax and custom revenues from minerals and crop exports contributed substantially to the stabilization of the fiscal position of the state after the war.

The economic boom stimulated local rice production. With the removal of the hated war-time quota system and stabilization of market prices by the government, rice production rose to meet growing demand in the urban and mining areas. Up to 1953, rice producers in the Skarcies area in Port Loko and Kambia reported generally good harvests.[9] By 1955, however, the demand for rice had outstripped production. The government had to resort to importation of rice to feed the urban masses. Rice imports grew in value from £968,000 in 1955 to £1,237,000 in 1960.[10]

The "prosperity" brought some "visible" changes and conspicuous consumption in provincial urban centres. The number of houses roofed with corrugated iron-sheets, vehicles on the road and luxury goods imported went up. The imports of alcoholic beverages, tobacco and clothing grew from £2,894,000 in 1950 to £5,412,000.[11] Towns like Port Loko, Kambia and Makeni in the Northern Province displayed some of these outward signs of prosperity, but overall people in the region benefitted less than the cash crop and mineral rich South-Eastern and South-Western provinces.

The main beneficiaries of the economic upswing tended to be illicit miners, big

---

[7]. Peter Greenlagh, West African Diamonds 1919-1983: An Economic History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 39.

[8]. Illicit mining and smuggling became a serious problem as an estimated 698,000 carats or about £5,400,000 worth of diamonds a year left the country through unofficial channels. See H.L. van der Laan, The Sierra Leone Diamonds: An Economic Study Covering the Years 1952-1961 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 8-19.

[9]. Protectorate Reports, 1947-1953.

[10]. Jean M. Due, Changes in Incomes and Imports of Consumer Goods in Sierra Leone: Bulletin No: 719 (Urbana, Illinois, 1966), p.32.

[11]. Due, Changes in Consumer Goods in Sierra Leone, p.30.

farmers and traders. Peasants and the rural poor remained largely on the periphery of what colonial officials described as an "artificial" prosperity. The consequent inflation, however, equally affected them and those on fixed incomes.[12] Using 1939 as a base year, the government estimated that the average consumer price index in Freetown rose to 410 by 1954.[13] Average peasant incomes estimated variously at between £3 and £10 in the 1940s and 1950s did not increase dramatically. The Chief Commissioner observed in 1955 that the diamond boom passed by most rural communities, especially those remote from the mining areas.[14]

In the two generations of colonial rule, little had changed for the majority in the "provinces." Over 80 percent of the adult population continued to be engaged in agricultural production. Rice-producing peasants with holdings of three to ten acres dominated the rural landscape. Their yields, averaging between 700 lbs. to 1400 lbs. an acre in upland farms and 1200 lbs. to 1400 lbs. an acre in swamp farms, continued to be slightly above subsistence. Many peasants could not muster the labour needed to convert mangrove swamps into higher yielding rice farms. Only chiefs and other big farmers could do so. Colonial swamp clearance efforts and agricultural development efforts remained piecemeal and unsubstantial.[15] The dominant agricultural strategy continued to be shifting cultivation. Permanent crop trees, in the form of cocoa, coffee and palm kernel, took hold only in small areas of the Northern, and parts of the South-Western and South-Eastern provinces. In short, the export-led growth of the post-war years did not radically alter the basic internal social and economic structure of the country.[16]

The cash-flow generated by the "artificial" boom encouraged local chiefdom administrators to increase local taxes yearly. Chiefdom tax steadily increased from

---

[12]. Protectorate Reports, 1947 to 1955.

[13]. Due, Changes in Consumer Goods in Sierra Leone, p.61.

[14]. An Economic Survey of Sierra Leone, p.25; See also Protectorate Report, 1955.

[15]. Economic Survey of Sierra Leone; Protectorate Report, 1951.

[16]. Economic Survey of Sierra Leone; Van der Laan, Diamonds of Sierra Leone, pp. 165-182; Ralph Gerald Saylor, The Economic System of Sierra Leone (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1967), pp. 198-207.

about four shillings to five shillings in 1946 to around fifteen shillings to seventeen shillings in 1954. The hitherto contentious house tax remained constant at five shillings. House tax receipts rose steadily from £81,605.10.0 in 1946 to £95,060.08.0 in 1954.[17] The local chiefdom tax receipts in the same period went from £58,796.15 to £88,357.00.[18] No indication existed of the impact of the yearly tax increases on peasant income. The colonial state wanted to reorganize the tax system but they faced stiff resistance from chiefs and the local elite. The state did not press its case especially since the total tax receipts increased yearly.

The seemingly buoyant post-war economy provided impetus for colonial developmentalism and the restructuring which had begun in the 1930s.[19] In the late 1940s, this colonial mood was expressed in two development "plans" drawn up for Sierra Leone. The first was an elaborate ten-year development plan to improve communications, exploit the country's natural resources and expand welfare services done by a government appointed Development Council in 1946. The plan proposed export diversification through aggressive agricultural research and mineral prospecting. The cost of its implementation was £5,256,575; money that was expected to come from Colonial Development and Welfare funds, loans and taxation.[20] The second plan drawn up in 1949 by Hubert Childs, the Chief Provincial Commissioner, was essentially a sectorial elaboration of the first. Titled, A Plan of Economic Development of Sierra Leone, it set definite production targets for the different agricultural products: oil palm, kola, cocoa, rice, and coffee over a five year period. Childs outlined the necessary infrastructural development --inland waterways, railways and regional communication -

---

[17]. Handbook of Sierra Leone, p.15

[18]. Protectorate Reports, 1947 & 1954.

[19]. Protectorate Reports, 1949 & 1950.

[20]. Government of Sierra Leone, An Outline of a Ten-Year Plan for the Development of Sierra Leone: Sessional Paper 4 of 1946, (Freetown: Government Printer, 1946); For colonial development and aid policies see D.J. Morgan, The Official History of Colonial Development, Volume I: The Origins of British Aid Policy 1924-1945 (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press, 1980), pp. 198-237.

- needed to facilitate the achievement of the targets.[21] The Legislative Council approved the plan and devoted £300,000 to support it. The plans signalled the shift from the laissez-faire colonialism of the early period to a more structured one in the 1940s. They initiated the practice, which was taken up in the post-colonial period, of setting clear economic and agricultural goals in the short-run. Despite the fanfare around the plans, it was obvious that their aim was the improvement rather than the radical restructuring of the export-based colonial economy of Sierra Leone.[22]

To implement the plans at the rural level, the planners suggested a renewed focus on the cooperative movement launched in the 1930s. The government expected rural cooperation to achieve three main goals in the post-war period. The first goal was to bridge the rural communal ethos and colonial economics with the expectation that this would stimulate improvement in cultivation, and the production and marketing of high quality crops. The second goal was to create a thrifty and enterprising peasant. The movement would "Africanise" trade, provide credit and business training, and encourage the accumulation of savings and capital. The third goal of the cooperative movement was to provide a socially and politically responsible peasant. Such a peasant would be concerned with community welfare and development and would help build a democratic culture to complement ongoing political and institutional changes.[23]

To these ends, the government department of cooperation organized 232 credit, thrift, consumer and marketing societies between 1949 and 1956. Although the societies included women, the bulk of the membership consisted of "big men," who were regarded as heads of extended households. Many small peasants, especially those who failed to break into the cash-crop market, were left out of the movement.

---

[21]. Hubert Childs, A Plan of Economic Development of Sierra Leone (Freetown: Government Printing Department, 1949).

[22]. Annual Reports of Sierra Leone, 1947-1950, Protectorate Reports, 1947-1950.

[23]. Annual Reports of the Department of Cooperation, 1949-1954; For a comprehensive history of the cooperative movement in Sierra Leone see Robert Johnston, "The Transfer of the Co-operative Movement to a Non-Western Environment: Its Development, its Economic, Social and Political Functions, and its Role in Sierra Leone," (Ph.D diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1968).

The majority of the cooperative societies were located in the cash-crop producing regions of the South-Western and South-Eastern Provinces. The Northern Province had only eleven societies, six of which were situated in Port Loko, and three in Kambia. The societies in Port Loko and Kambia produced and marketed mainly rice. By 1956, the cooperative movement had 11,363 members countrywide. Only ten percent or 1,316 were women.[24]

For the colonial state, the cooperative movement provided a mechanism for mobilizing progressive peasants and rural traders within the colonial economy. As in the case of the working class, the state hoped the movement would provide a disciplined peasantry with a stronger stake in the colonial economy. The cooperative movement was part of the government's strategy to preclude the development of a radical rural alternative.[25] Peasants in the Northern Province, because of the slow development of cooperative societies, represented a weak link in the strategy. Furthermore, the producing and marketing functions of the cooperative societies ultimately predominated and shaped the character of the movement. By the early 1960s, they had been linked together by the Sierra Leone Co-operative Marketing Federation, an agent of the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board (SLPMB).[26]

The political dimension of the colonial developmentalist programme included reorganization, "modernization" and Africanisation of protectorate administration and local government structures. In 1949, the colonial government reorganized the Protectorate into twelve districts and three provinces. The historic Karene district was eventually dropped and absorbed into Port Loko, Kambia and Bombali. The new Northern Province enclosed five districts; Bombali, Kambia, Port Loko, Tonkolili and Koinadugu, with an estimated population of 712,212 and an area of 13,925 square miles. In size and population, the province was roughly equivalent to the two other

---

[24]. Annual Report of the Department of Cooperation, 1956.

[25]. Mukonoweshuro, Colonialism. Class Formation and Underdevelopment in Sierra Leone, p.162.

[26]. For the development of the SLPMB and its links with the co operative movement see F.B. Sawi's "The Sierra Leone Marketing Board 1949-1969," (M.Sc. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1975); Clarke, Sierra Leone in Maps, p. 88.

provinces combined.[27]

The remapping process complemented the ongoing development of local government structures. The government continued the expansion of Native Authorities which had been initiated in 1937. In 1946, it organized a Protectorate Assembly and District Councils. Both bodies had predominantly chiefs and their appointees as members. The Protectorate Assembly represented the revival of an earlier advisory forum of chiefs convened in the first decade of colonial rule. The new assembly, however, was constituted on a protectorate-wide basis rather than along ethnic or regional lines. With a General Purposes Standing Committee of six representatives from the three provinces, the new assembly had greater decision-making functions and powers than the previous ones.[28]

The colonial state deemed the district councils, which complemented the Protectorate Assembly and native authorities, as the major vehicles for managing local development schemes. These schemes included communications, agricultural extension, settlement, livestock, industries and afforestation. The councils started off as advisory bodies on local government, but in 1951, the Legislative Council gave them additional financial and administrative authority.[29] The institutional changes partly reflected the despatch from Arthur Creech Jones, the British Labour Secretary of State, Colonies, to governments in Africa in February 1947. The Labour Secretary advocated the rapid development of efficient and representative local government as a prelude to self-government.[30]

---

[27]. Protectorate Report, 1949/1950.

[28]. Protectorate Report, 1947; Kilson, Political Change in a West African State, pp. 154-161.

[29]. H.W. Davidson, The Functions and Finances of District Councils in Sierra Leone (Freetown: Sierra Leone Government, 1953), p. 6; For a detailed discussion of the evolution of local government structures in the provinces, see Noaman Qais Ghanem, "The Evolution of Provincial Local Government and Administration in Sierra Leone," (Ph.D diss., New York University, 1981), pp. 66-106.

[30]. For the Labour Party's post-war colonial policies see David Goldworthy, Colonial Issues in British Politics, 1945-1961: From 'Colonial Development' to 'Wind of Change' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 133-155.

Creech Jones was partly responding to the tide of anti-colonialism and nationalism sweeping Africa in the aftermath of the Second World War. At the Fifth Pan-African Conference organized in Manchester in 1945, Africans called for "positive action" to end European rule in Africa.[31] Between 1945 and 1960, a variety of political organizations emerged in the different Africa colonies to demand independence. One of the most radical anti-colonial organizations was the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) led by Kwame Nkrumah, a participant at the Manchester conference.[32] Although Wallace-Johnson also participated in the conference, the radical option had been foreclosed in Sierra Leone. The colonial state had effectively immobilized Wallace-Johnson and his WAYL by 1945. The alliance between urban and protectorate masses which the WAYL had assiduously pursued never came to fruition. By the time Wallace-Johnson went to Manchester, he was "a spent force."[33] Nonetheless, he continued to be a gadfly against colonialism. Idara Konthorfili had also briefly raised the spectre of anti-colonial religious radicalism in the rural areas. But the spark of Islamic radicalism died with him in 1931. If anything, Idara only succeeded in pushing conservative muslims closer to the colonial state in Sierra Leone.[34] The colonial repression of the radical option, epitomised by Wallace-Johnson and Idara Konthorfili, paved the way for a more moderate decolonization option.[35]

The "high" politics of decolonization in Sierra Leone was played out mainly between the conservative protectorate and Creole elite. The protectorate elite included

---

[31]. Olisanwuche Esedebe, Pan-Africanism: The Idea and the Movement (Washington: Howard University Press, 1982), p.171; George Padmore, History of the Pan African Congress (London: The Hammerstein Bookshop, 1945).

[32]. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957) pp. 111-122; C.L. R. James, Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution (London: Allison and Busby, 1977), pp. 125-135.

[33]. Akintola Wyse, H.C. Bankole Bright and Politics in Colonial Sierra Leone, 1919-1958 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.32; Hargreaves, End of Colonial Rule in West Africa, p.57.

[34]. For the career of Idara Konthorfili, see Chapter Five.

[35]. Mukonoweshuro, Colonialism, Class Formation and Underdevelopment, pp. 142-143.

chiefs and the educated protectorate Africans. The educated protectorate elite had announced their presence and political interests with the formation of the Sierra Leone Organization Society (SOS) ostensibly to protect the rural masses against chiefs in 1946.[36] Milton Margai, the scion of a Mende Chief and a wealthy merchant, and the first medical doctor from the protectorate, emerged as a leading figure in SOS. It was Margai who united the potentially hostile factions of the protectorate elite.[37] Siaka Stevens, a trade unionist who had displaced Wallace-Johnson as the leader of a colonially refurbished labour movement, allied with this elite.[38]

H.C. Bankole-Bright and his National Council of Sierra Leone (NCSL) led the Creole elite. He opposed the protectorate elite in the 1950s with the same vigour with which he had opposed Wallace-Johnson and the WAYL in the 1930s. His admirer and biographer, Akintola Wyse, described him thus: "[i]deologically, he was constitutionalist, even a liberal, but he was not a democrat."[39] In a strange twist of fate, the "radical" Wallace-Johnson briefly joined forces with the "conservative" Bankole-Bright against the protectorate elite in the early 1950s.

The contradictions between the protectorate and creole elite surfaced between 1947 and 1950 when Governor Stevenson tabled proposals to amend the constitution of the Legislative Council. The proposals expanded protectorate representation in the Council from four to fourteen to reflect demographic reality and representation of the colony was increased from four to seven members. The proposals also abolished the long-standing division between the protectorate and the colony and unified the

---

[36]. By 1946, the leading professional members of this new elite included Milton A.S. Margai, J.C. Massally, J. Karefa-Smart, Albert Margai, I.B. Taylor-Kamara, A.I. Massally, A.T. Sumner, Doyle Sumner, R.B. Kowa, W.H. Fitzjohn, F.S. Anthony and Amadu Wurie. Only three of these came from the Northern Province.

[37]. For portraits of Milton and Albert Margai see John R. Cartwright, Political Leadership in Sierra Leone (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 89-115.

[38]. Hargreaves, End of Colonial Rule in West Africa, p.67; Amolo,"Trade Unionism in Sierra Leone: 1930-1945," p.39.

[39]. Wyse, Bankole Bright, p.182.

administration of territory.[40] If passed, the proposals would effectively kill the hopes of the Creole elite of inheriting the colonial state. Creoles had long felt that their close cultural affinity with the British, their high level of education vis-a-vis protectorate peoples (60 percent against 5 percent) and long bureaucratic experience made them natural heirs of the British even though they comprised barely 2 percent of the country's population.[41] Led by Bankole Bright, the Creole elite bitterly protested Stevenson's proposals. Bright maintained in a letter to the SLWN:

> The Protectorate... came into being after the butchering and massacre of our Forefathers and Grandfathers...and their blood streamed in the streets of Mendi Land because they were described as Black English Men showing White English Men the country. Yes, their blood streamed with the blood of English men and after only fifty years of this treacherous and villainous act Loyal Sierra Leone is asked by the British Government to vacate her seats in their British Legislature (this is what it tantamounts to) for the descendants of the murderers of our ancestors.[42]

Many leading Creoles shared Bankole-Bright's sentiments, if not his irredentist rhetoric.[43] The response of Milton Margai, a usually paternalistic and self-effacing conservative,[44] was equally vitriolic. In the Protectorate Assembly, he stated:

> Sierra Leone, which has been the foremost of all the West African colonies, is still saddled with an archaic constitution with official majority. The reason for this backwardness is evidently due to the fact that our forefathers, I very much regret to say, had given shelter to a handful of foreigners, who have no will to co-operate with us and

---

[40]. Gershon Collier, Sierra Leone: Experiment in an African Nation (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 15.

[41]. The 1963 census puts Creole population at 41,783 out of 2,180, 355 persons in the colony. See 1963 Population Census of Sierra Leone (Freetown: Central Statistics Office, 1965).

[42]. Cited from SLWN, August 26, 1950 in Cartwright's, Politics in Sierra Leone, 1947-1967, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1970) p. 53.

[43]. Wyse, Bankole-Bright, pp .154-162. Abner Cohen, The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern Africa Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 131-132; SLWN, February, 1951; SLWN, April, 1951.

[44]. Cartwright, Political Leadership in Sierra Leone, pp.93-96.

> imagine themselves to be our superiors because they are apeing [sic] the Western mode of living and have never breathed the true spirit of independence....
>
> If the 30,000 non-natives of the Colony shall attempt a boycott of the proposed election for the new Legislative Council I make no hesitation to assure the government that all of the seats on the Colony side would be occupied by our countrymen. We mean to push ahead, and we are in no way prepared to allow a bunch of foreigners to impede us.[45]

Margai's sentiments were supported by other members of the protectorate elite.[46]

Governor Stevenson's proposals became law in 1951 and in the ensuing elections for the expanded Legislative Council, seven members were elected from the colony and fourteen from the protectorate. Before the election, the different factions of the Protectorate "petit bourgeoisie" and chiefs had coalesced into the Sierra Leone People Party (SLPP). In deference to age, education and "wisdom," they elected Milton Margai as leader of the party.[47] In 1953, Governor Beresford Stooke appointed Milton Margai as leader of government business. His brother, Albert Margai, was given ministerial responsibility for local government, education and welfare, while Siaka Stevens got that for land, mines and labour.[48] With the installation of a "responsible" SLPP government, the colonial government strategy of mobilizing within colonially designed political structures to prevent radical anti-colonialism seemed on track. But how effective was this strategy, especially at the local government level?

The local administrative bodies, especially the native authorities, did demonstrate some of the expected potential by undertaking a number of "progressive" projects. The local government bodies recruited court messengers, invested in agricultural services, swamp clearing schemes, schools, forestry and road maintenance

---

[45]. Proceedings of the Seventh Meeting: Protectorate Assembly, (September 26, 1950) pp.28-31.

[46]. Ibid, pp. 33-38.

[47]. Mukonoweshuro, Colonialism, Class Formation and Underdevelopment, p.149

[48]. Sessional Paper 1/1953, Assumption of Ministerial Portfolios; PRO CO270/87, Sessional Paper 2/1954, The Duties and Functions of Provincial Administration under the Ministerial System.

and also contributed to district councils. They set up seed plantations, oil palm nurseries and clearance schemes in Kambia. In Port Loko, although eighty-eight acres of swamp land were cleared; only twelve acres were eventually cultivated. Schools were built in various towns, including Bubuya, Mambolo, Kychom, Kambia Mahera, Port Loko and Magbeni.[49] In Port Loko, Kambia and Karene districts, native authorities provided funding for schools and scholarships for pupils.[50] However, many of the development schemes, which had been enthusiastically drawn up by native authorities, were eventually left for colonial officials to implement.

Furthermore, the new local government bodies were inefficient and riddled with problems. The functions of the native authorities and district councils overlapped, creating an "untidy and illogical" administrative arrangement.[51] The councils lacked adequate staff and proper internal organization. The staff shortage reflected the paucity of educated bureaucratic and technical cadre in the Protectorate. Education offered through government and mission institutions had progressed at a sluggish rate. In 1948, only 14,923 (4 percent) out of an estimated 370,000 children in the Protectorate attended school. In the Northern Province, the number (3,291) and percentage (less than 3 percent) were even lower. This sharply contrasted with the situation in the coastal colony where over 12,000 (more than 60 percent) of children were in school.[52] Sierra Leone presented one of the most glaring examples of incongruous educational development with its coastal colony possessing one of the highest, and its northern province having one of the lowest levels of education in the region.

Apart from qualified administrative cadres, local government also lacked adequate financial resources and therefore, the ability to implement a meaningful development project. The district councils, for example, depended on chiefdom subsidies, government grants and funds from the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing

---

[49]. Protectorate Report, 1949/1950.

[50]. Protectorate Report, 1951.

[51]. Davidson, Report on District Councils, pp. 6-8.

[52]. See Annual Report of the Department of Education, 1948.

Board and Protectorate Mining Benefit Fund. Most of these funds went into paying the salaries of chiefs and officials. In 1950, the Protectorate Assembly had to suggest that remuneration of local officials should not exceed 50 percent of total chiefdom receipts.[53] In 1952, the existing 147 native administrations had an average annual revenue of about £2,000, a rather paltry amount for any meaningful development project.[54] The government attempted to resolve this financial handicap by amalgamating chiefdoms and creating joint-treasuries. Their efforts were hampered by local "parochialism" and the "spirit of independence" within the various chiefdoms. In the end, many councils continued to function poorly. It was the need for greater financial resources that led to more taxation of peasants in 1954.[55]

Perhaps the most conspicuous problem with the new institutions lay in their conception and membership. The colonial state had fashioned the institutions to neutralize radical politics, incorporate the rural elite and encourage communal over class consciousness. It had therefore constructed them around chiefs and their appointees. This dependence on the chieftaincy, an autocratic and despotic institution, hampered the efficiency of the councils. Colonial officials were clearly aware of the dilemma of creating democratic institutions around the chieftaincy. In 1947, the Chief Provincial Commissioner remarked:

> The Tribal Authorities which by law should mean the Paramount Chief, the chiefs, the councillors and the man of note in the area elected by the people according to the native law and custom, too frequently lack coherence and effectiveness through too large and ill-defined a body, with the result that power and responsibility, for good or ill, are exercised by the Paramount Chief without the restraint which ought to exist. In other words he becomes a petty autocrat.[56]

The colonial state had hoped the new institutions would build consensus but they tended to exacerbate intra-class conflicts and anti-chief feelings. Chiefs and the local elite competed "to support the pomp and circumstance to which they feel

---

[53]. Ibid.

[54]. Report on District Councils. p.2.

[55]. Provincial Report, 1954; Report on District Councils, p.27.

[56]. Protectorate Report, 1947.

themselves entitled" by despotic and extortionate practices, which only intensified these contradictions.[57]

Rumblings, and Discourses of Discontent, 1945-1951

Coerced by "custom" and by naked force, few peasants in the Northern Province complained openly about local corruption and despotism. Popular grievances, however, accumulated and the colonial state had to take drastic actions against the substantive chiefs to maintain "law" and "order." In the interwar period, the Scarcies area was already turbulent and Paramount Chief Bai Sherbro of Mambolo had to be deposed by the colonial state.[58] Immediately after World War II, another chief had to be deposed for similar reasons. Tired of the excesses of their Chief, Alimamy Sattan Lahai (1945-1947), the people of Massumgbala in Kambia district refused to recognize his authority. They accused the chief, his court clerk and a chiefdom "elder" of tax malpractice, illegal extortion of rice quotas, theft of building boards, and sale of the headship of a section of the chiefdom. The people also disapproved of the Chief's ill-treatment and disgracing of "big men" in public. Consequently, they boycotted his court, refused to repair his house, provide carriers for him or clear the roads. According to the district commissioner, "[d]espite the continual beating of the Chief's drum, no one took any notice."[59] Members of the Tribal Authority eventually rallied around Alimamy Luseni and complained to the district commissioner, Mr. N.M. MacRoberts. MacRoberts held an inquiry which confirmed the allegations against Sattan Lahai, and so the colonial administration deposed him.[60]

Peasants' disaffection was not limited to northern Sierra Leone. Those in the southern region also flexed their muscles. In Bongor chiefdom, the Native Authority experiment failed completely and the chief was deposed after popular protests against

---

[57]. Ibid.

[58]. See Chapter Six.

[59]. CSO Open Files 2/37/12: Kambia 27/6/1945: Massumgbala NA, Kambia 483/18/2, 1956/7.

[60]. Ibid.

illegal levies, excessive fines and extortion. In 1950, the Chief of Boama chiefdom was removed after popular protests.[61] The administration also deposed the chiefs of Kissi Tungi chiefdom in Kailahun and Soro chiefdom in Pujehun district on similar grounds. In Sowa and Small Bo chiefdoms, the paramount chiefs were chased out of their chiefdoms by "irreconcilable elements" on charges of maladministration, extortion, excessive fines and illegal courts.[62]

In its yearly provincial reports, the colonial administration blamed chiefs, tribal authorities and unruly young men for the breakdown in law and order. It acknowledged that the deposed chiefs and their henchmen had been unpopular, extortionate or incapable of enforcing their authority. The administration posited that since some of the chiefs had been educated, they were less constrained by "customary paternalism." It maintained they had become incapable of mediating the interests of the various factions in their chiefdoms. The administration, however, showed little tolerance for the "ill-disciplined" and "defiant" gangs of young men who spearheaded the protests. These men who had provided leadership for protestors, were aggressive in their resistance to the chiefs. Far from being a post-war phenomenon, these "young men" had been active as far back as the 1930s.[63] It was this kind of unbridled radicalism that the state sought to prevent with its post-war institutions.

The administration did not hide its displeasure at those it called "professional trouble-makers" for fomenting disturbances in the provinces. This oblique reference implicated the radical populist agitator, I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson. Wallace-Johnson had actively protested government actions in the Boama Chiefdom disturbances. He had also actively solicited the interference of Fenner Brockway, the Socialist MP for Eton and Slough and the Colonial Secretary.[64] These efforts certainly did not endear him

---

[61]. PRO CO 554/718, Intelligence Reports, December 1951; PRO CO 554/718, Tel: Governor Beresford Stoke to the Secretary of State for Colonies, October 8, 1952.

[62]. Protectorate Reports, 1949-1952.

[63]. Ibid.

[64]. PRO CO 554/718, Tel: Wallace-Johnson to Fenner Brockway, February 2, 1952; PRO CO 554/718; Wallace-Johnson to Fenner Brockway, May 26, 1952; Wallace-Johnson to Secretary of State, Colonies, Lyttleton, October 8, 1952.

to the colonial administration which accused him of actively fomenting the disturbances for personal gain, an accusation which had no basis in reality.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the administration tried to resolve the nascent social discontent at the institutional rather than at the grassroots level. It expanded the size of the elite incorporated within the system. Council membership was opened to "tribal" authorities and other prominent persons in a district. Rather than basing representation on equality of chiefdoms, it was based on a ratio of one representative to forty-six taxpayers in the districts.[65] The persistence of protests, however, illustrated the ineffectiveness of these changes. It was hardly surprising. Chiefs and their cronies still dominated the institutions.

So popular discontent persisted. The discontent which had been evident in the Scarcies area chiefdoms continued to grow. In Port Loko, potentially the most volatile district in the Northern Province, this disaffection took the form of rebellious discourse. Rather innocuously, its genesis was signalled by two petitions sent to the administration in 1953 by Kali Morba Bempa, a "loyal native born at Port Loko and a Trader."[66] Bempa accused Paramount Chief Alkali Modu of injustice and victimization over a land lease. The lease had in fact been a subject of much dispute, and the Alkali had been made to apologize to another chief, Bai Koblo of Lunsar, over its disposal.

Bempa, an educated African trader, felt he had been cheated by the chief. The manner in which he framed his case was telling. Bempa expressed his cause as a struggle between the weak and the powerful, and as a struggle for liberty, justice and individual rights. In his first letter he wrote:

> I know what it has meant for me to acquire property and for it to be divorced from me in this manner does not in my humble opinion constitute an act which conforms to individual liberty nor to British law, order, good government and justice. I am well aware what my position is vis-a-vis that of the Honourable P.C. but my humble status does not nor can deprive me of the ordinary rights of a subject.[67]

---

[65]. Protectorate Report, 1949/1950.

[66]. SLNA SPA 507/4, Letter 1, Kali Morba Bempa to Chief Commissioner, dated August 13, 1953.

[67]. Ibid.

The colonial administration did not respond to the plea for justice. Undeterred, Bempa sent another letter to the commissioner complaining of further victimization by Modu. He complained the chief had wrongfully fined him for a crime he did not commit.[68] Bempa's second letter reiterated the respect he had for authority, but he questioned its efficacy in redressing his grievances. He stated "I respect the Chief. I however hardly feel this is British fair-play and justice that had been meted to me. Why the DC has taken no action again beat me."[69] Bempa's petitions invoked, and trod carefully between, the twin elements of chieftaincy paternalism and British liberalism.

Far from being unique, Bempa's complaints seemed emblematic of broader discontent against the reign of Alkali Modu. Two other petitions against the chief landed on the desks of Governor de Zouche Hall and Albert Margai, the Minister for Local Government and Education. The first, a well scripted four-page treatise, was penned in the name of the "Tribal Authority of the Maforki chiefdom" and dated 1st November, 1954.[70] The authors accused Alkali Modu of pilfering £775 from the chiefdom treasury and misappropriating a government loan of £8,000. The loan had been secured through the district council to develop an organized transportation system for the chiefdom.[71] The transport scheme had been one of many development projects enthusiastically drawn by District Councils and financed by government loans.

Like many of the other local government schemes, it had run into difficulties. In the case of Maforki Chiefdom, the petitioners claimed that Alkali Modu had used only £4,000 to buy useless "old army trucks" and had diverted the rest of the money

---

[68]. SLNA SPA 507/4, Letter 2, Kali Morba Bempa to Chief Commissioner, (August, ? 1953). The precise date of the second letter is unclear because of its condition. Its contents clearly reveal that it was a second letter since it made references to the previous letter.

[69]. Ibid.

[70]. SLNA SPA 507/4, The Commissioner, Northern Province to Chief Commissioner, Bo, November 1, 1954.

[71]. Davidson, Report on District Councils.

to develop his private transport and hotel businesses. The chiefdom transportation system had failed. The "big men," who as members of the Chiefdom Tribal Authority, had co-guaranteed the loan had to "mortgage" their property when the government demanded the first instalment of the loan repayment. The transportation loan debacle was, however, part of a wider dissatisfaction with the chief's commercial endeavour. The petitioners condemned his monopolization of chiefdom commerce which they maintained had stifled trade, driven "ambitious citizens of Maforki into exile and seclusion," and threatened the prosperity of the chiefdom.[72]

The underlying intra-elite struggle over trade and resources was obvious. It had long been part of the history of the region. What was significant was the transformed context in which this struggle was being played out. Paramount Chief Alkali Modu, a supporter of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party and a representative in the Legislative Council, commanded political power and support that extended far beyond his chiefdom.[73] Furthermore, his actions, far from being extraordinary, were part of the process of renewed accumulation of resources by the political elite in the period of decolonization. The context may explain the manner in which the petitioners framed their claims. They invoked their time-honoured obligations to defend popular interests:

> We are the leaders of our tribesmen, and although we elected Alkali Modu III as Paramount Chief of Maforki Chiefdom, we consider it remiss in our duty to our people, if we allow these things to pass without due notice. We are therefore asking that administrative justice be allowed to prevail in all matters, and strongly suggest that a commission of inquiry be set to look into the affairs of the whole Chiefdom.[74]

The petitioners requested discrete investigation of the chief. They appealed to the state to prevent the chief from assembling the "big men" to swear on "bad native medicine."[75] Within Temne culture, this act would immobilize the big men and

---

[72]. SLNA SPA 507/4, The Commissioner, Northern Province to Chief Commissioner, Bo, November 1, 1954.

[73]. Alkali Modu III was elected chief of Maforki Chiefdom in 1949 and became a member of the Sierra Leone Legislative Council in 1951, Goddard, Handbook of Sierra Leone (1955), pp. 12 & 24; Hargeaves, End of Colonialism in West Africa, p.79.

[74]. Ibid.

[75]. Ibid.

coerce them into supporting the chief. By claiming to defend the people and not themselves, the petitioners creatively linked their own disaffection with popular discontent against the chief. The state, however, paid no attention to them.

Undeterred by official inaction, the petitioners sent a second letter, this time in the name of the "Tax Payers, Traders, Farmers, Tribal Authorities and the Youths of Maforki Chiefdom." Dated 25 September 1955, it restated the earlier charges of financial misappropriation and "exclusive trade monopoly" against Alkali Modu.[76] The authors added forced labour and excessive fines to their growing list of grievances. They expressed disappointment that the colonial administration and the SLPP government had not investigated the earlier charges made against Alkali Modu.

The new petition was occasioned by a renewed levy of five shillings imposed by the chief to construct a personal house. The chief had collected an earlier levy in 1952 but had not constructed the house. The authors resented the insertion of another five shilling levy into the already inflated 1955 tax. Calling the levy an "extortion," the petitioners informed Albert Margai:

> We do not threaten your Ministry in the Local Government Schedule but repudiate any recourse to extortion of all kinds. We therefore hasten to inform you that if some plan for extortion works, which undoubtedly will deride of the power of good and healthy living due to lack of resources for getting finance, we may resort to violence in protest or desert the chiefdom and the environs, under the influence of a despotic climate.[77]

The hint of rebellion was unequivocal. The demand for redress was unmistakeable. The petitioners demanded a situation where "they could reasonably satisfy their ambitions to trade in a "free society of compatriots."" They maintained they wanted to "live healthy lives, under a free banner in a democratic society."[78]

The demand for reform and the threat of rebellion were not new. What was new was the forceful and uncompromising manner in which reform was being demanded. Two years earlier, a petitioner from Loko Massama chiefdom, writing

---

[76]. SLNA SPA 507/4, Tax Payers, Traders, Farmers, Tribal Authorities and Youths of Maforki to Minister Education Local Government and Welfare, September 25, 1955.

[77]. Ibid.

[78]. Ibid.

under the pseudonym "Shegbendeh" had complained about maladministration and the corrupt reign of Bai Sama. He had warned that "there is riot a-head."[79] In ignoring the petitions, the colonial government underestimated the seriousness of the crisis brewing in the Northern Province.

The second petition had clearly expressed popular disaffection with the 1955 tax in Maforki chiefdom. This tax, with the additional district precept, became the major catalyst for rebellion. The passage of 1954 Local Tax Ordinance had replaced the House Tax and Chiefdom Tax with a single poll tax of twenty-five shillings to forty shillings payable by all males who were twenty-one years and older. The new taxation system shifted the burden from property to persons.[80] For years, the administration maintained the House Tax at five shillings and chiefdom rates at four shillings. After World War II, it allowed chiefdom rates to slowly increase to meet the financial needs of the newly created Tribal Authorities. Chiefdom taxes grew yearly to a variable rate of six shillings and six pence in Bombali and ten shillings in Port Loko district. Peasant tolerance and willingness to pay the yearly increases might have created the impression that they could continue to pay additional taxes.

The crucial tax increases came at a critical historical juncture when the peasants found it difficult to meet additional financial obligations. By 1955, peasants in Northern Province had begun to feel the negative impact of the changing structure of the post-war economy. The artificial agricultural boom generated by diamonds had faded, and the production and value of key agricultural exports, including rice, had begun to decline. Export of agricultural commodities dropped sharply in tonnage and receipts. Total production of all commodities fell from 83,423 tons in 1954 to 70,136 tons in 1955. The 1955 value was £4,456,339 as against £6,359,648 in 1954.[81] The visible balance of trade worsened sharply, with the economy experiencing a formal

---

[79]. CSO SPA 506, Shegbendeh to Commissioner, Northern Province, January 2, 1952.

[80]. CO554/1329/25725, Governor R. de Zouche Hall to Secretary of State, February 20, 1956.

[81]. Provincial Report, 1955.

trade deficit of £1,505,000.[82]

During this period, a large number of peasants had joined the diamond rush in Kono. The labour drain compounded the food shortfall in the country, which was felt everywhere but more strongly in the Northern Province where the regional economy was dependent on the crop. The drain meant there was less labour available to meet farming needs and fulfil obligations to chiefs and other community projects. Peasants had less real income to pay taxes and the numerous financial levies at the local level. The Northern Province Commissioner described the economic situation in the region in 1955:

> Both the cost and standard of living continue to rise in urban areas but it seems probable that despite the increase in the price of rice the peasant farmer derived very little benefit from the increased amount of money in circulation, most of which was brought by persons engaged in illegal diamond mining activities. In fact the gap between the rich and poor became more pronounced than ever before.[83]

The conditions may have been bad, but did it mean that a rebellion was inevitable or even possible? What then made the rebellion possible?

Part of the answer lay in the timing of the tax hike. It had coincided with the implementation of two crucial administration decisions. These were the amendment of the district council ordinance and the disbandment of the court messenger force in 1954. The council amendment provided the opportunity for district councillors to replace district commissioners as presidents in ten of the twelve districts.[84] Except for Kono and Pujehun, the replacements were all chiefs. All the councils, with the exception of Kono, removed the district commissioner from the Finance and General Purposes Committees.[85] The replacements weakened the position of the District Commissioner vis-a-vis the chiefs and the SLPP government. Consequently, it sharply attenuated the paternalistic role commissioners could play in mediating the relationship

---

[82]. Due, Changes in consumer Goods in Sierra Leone, p.23.

[83]. Protectorate Report, 1955.

[84]. Protectorate Report, 1954.

[85]. Protectorate Report, 1955.

between peasant, the chief and the state.[86]

The retirement, re-employment or reintegration of some of the ex-court messengers within a reconstituted National Police Force removed an important local law enforcement mechanism.[87] By its training and organization, the police was an urban force and a poor substitute for the Court Messenger Force, whose focus and orientation had been primarily rural.[88] The administration definitely did not consider the impact of implementing the two changes almost simultaneously. The changes in the configuration of power took on an added significance with the tax increase. The diminution of the authority of the colonial state and empowerment of chiefs was lost neither on chiefs nor on peasants. The conjuncture of events in 1954 and 1955 constituted a "crisis" of colonial rule and an "opportunity" for its contestation.

The crisis and opportunity became apparent after a workers' strike in Freetown in February 1955. The workers had demanded better wages and conditions of service. The attempt by the state to broke up the strike led to three days of "rioting" in the city. The strike set the tone for the year. Except for urban workers in Bo, the events did not directly involve the people in the provinces. Its significance and achievements, however, did not go unnoticed. It became "common knowledge" that the wage demands of workers which had initially been rejected by employers were conceded after the riots.[89] The Freetown strike provided a lesson in protest and a reference point for rural rebels. Peasant protestors appropriated the discourse of "strike" and creatively applied it to their own circumstances for their own goals. As Chief Commissioner Childs explained:

> It was not altogether surprising that the words "strike" and "strikers" had found a place in the vocabulary of the country quite different from their usual connotation. Methods which were ostensibly in protest

---

[86]. Manchester Guardian December 8, 1956.

[87]. Protectorate Reports, 1947, 1954 and 1955.

[88]. Protectorate Report, 1947.

[89]. For the Freetown riots see Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry into the Strikes and Riots in Freetown, Sierra Leone, during February 1955 (Freetown: GPD, 1955).

against rates of local tax were from the start invariably referred to as a "tax strike," and those taking part in them as "strikers."[90]

The 1955-56 Peasant Rebellion: From Strike to War

The colonial consensus, which the state had worked so assiduously to maintain and refurbish in the post-war period, was in crisis. It was in Maforki Chiefdom, Port Loko district, which had been the epicentre of the 1898 rebellion, and where a rebellious mood already existed, that peasants first seized the opportunity to "strike" against taxes and their chiefs. On November 25 and 29, over seven thousand peasant protestors marched to the offices of the District and Provincial Commissioners and complained about the five shilling levy by Paramount Chief Alkali Modu for his new house.[91] They also protested against the excessive taxation, extortion and oppression in the chiefdom. The commissioners assured the crowd their grievances would be investigated. They dispersed.[92] The scale of popular discontent forced Alkali Modu to drop the tax.

Many of the Maforki protestors were unsatisfied. They wanted the administration to freeze the tax and to ensure Alikali Modu would not reimpose the levy. They scheduled another meeting for December 2, 1955. Wary about the potential of a such gathering, the government accused the protest leaders of merely attempting to use Alkali's Modu's "concession as a stepping-stone for further negotiations." Many peasants, it claimed, had been satisfied with the chief's retreat.[93] To prevent the meeting, the police blockaded the town. They arrested 73 people and dispersed the thousands of people who were on the way to the gathering. Many eluded the police and made it to the meeting site, but Pita (Peter) Kamara and Abu Sankoh, who had emerged as two of the informal leaders of the protest, did not.

---

[90]. Protectorate Report, 1955.

[91]. Daily Mail, November 21, 1955.

[92]. Reuters Report, December 1, 1955; PRO CO554/1329/25725, Appendix, Political Intelligence Reports: Chiefdom Disturbances, November -December, 1955.

[93]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Appendix, Political Intelligence Reports: Chiefdom Disturbances, November -December, 1955.

The government later suggested that Kamara stayed away from the meeting because he was satisfied with Alkali Modu's concession.[94]

Tensions remained high. Ffennell Smith, the Provincial Commissioner of Northern Provinces, declared a state of emergency, prohibited all assembly and instructed police to arrest armed protestors in Port Loko.[95] By then, peasant protests had exploded in other chiefdoms. In Buya Romende Chiefdom, peasants demonstrated against excessive taxation and misrule of Bai Banta, a native of Port Loko and close friend of Alkali Modu.[96] In Marampa-Masimera Chiefdom, the protestors destroyed the house and rice stock of the Section Chief, Almami Sheriffu. They accused the chief of extortion. The District Commissioner had to calm the crowd with promises of an enquiry in the chief's conduct.[97]

Peasants in Songo in the Koya chiefdom also held protests to coincide with those in Port Loko on November 29, and December 2, 1955. Led by Amadu Kanda, the crowd complained to the District Commissioner about high taxes, corrupt tax assessors and oppression by Paramount Chief Bai Kompa.[98] Kompa was described as "the worst corrupt Chief" in the Northern Province. Police dispersed the crowd with tear-gas and baton charges and removed the twelve road blocks that had been set up. The chief hid during the disturbances, and Amadu Kanda became the "virtual leader" of the Chiefdom. By December 5, the revolt had subsided in Maforki, Marampa-Masimera, Buya Romende and Koya chiefdoms. According to the colonial administration, the "constitutional approach" became ascendent among the

---

[94]. Ibid.

[95]. PRO CO554/1329, Ffennell Smith, Provincial Commissioner; SLNA MP 9236/6, Proclamation, December 19, 1955.

[96]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Appendix, Political Intelligence Reports: Chiefdom Disturbances, November -December, 1955.

[97]. Ibid.

[98]. The aforementioned Bai Kompa was elected as chief in 1941 and was different the one who spoke in Legislative Council in 1926 against abolition (See Chapter Four). Goddard, Handbook of Sierra Leone (1955), p. 12.

protestors.[99]

The most intense and perhaps destructive phase of the rebellion in Port Loko District took place in Kaffu Bullom and Loko Massama chiefdoms. The protestors destroyed properties and set up road blocks.[100] Clashes between the police and demonstrators from the December 18, to 26, resulted in the death of five people.[101] The government had to put the International Airport at Lungi under military guard after the police force was overwhelmed by the crowd.[102] Similar violence occurred in the two Bombali chiefdoms, Makari Gbanti and Bombali Sebora. In spite of efforts by leaders in Makari Gbanti to keep the protest peaceful, the crowd destroyed the Native Administration Court House and records, and the eight properties belonging to Native Authority members who they also "manhandled." Protestors pelted the car of the District Commissioner, J. Watson, with stones. They relented only after the neighbouring Paramount Chief Bai Sebora intervened and the District Commissioner promised an enquiry.[103]

By the time the protests spread to Kambia district on December 19, they had acquired the character of a war. Intelligence reports described the crowds as "better armed and organized and more directly and systematically aggressive in burning and

---

[99]. Ibid.

[100]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Telegram 537, Governor to SS, Colonies, December 12, 1955; In 1967, J. H. Riley, the former Registrar of Cooperation blamed the erstwhile Port Loko District Commissioner for the exacerbation, if not the precipitation, of the rebellion in Loko Massama in a letter to retired governor, De Zouche Hall. Hall disagreed. He maintained that the rebellion were "indissolubly bound" with the political and administrative changes made from 1951 onwards. RHL. Mss Afr. S 1752, J.W. Riley to Robert De Zouche Hall, February 14, 1967 & Robert De Zouche Hall to J.W. Riley, February 19, 1967.

[101]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Appendix, Political Intelligence Reports: Chiefdom Disturbances, November - December, 1955.

[102]. Thomas S. Cox, Civil-Military Relations in Sierra Leone: A case Study of African Soldiers in Politics (Cambridge: MA: Havard University Press, 1976), p. 32.

[103]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Appendix, Political Intelligence Reports: Chiefdom Disturbances, November - December, 1955; Reuters, December 5, 1955; Times, London December 6, 1955.

looting houses and stores of the Chiefs and Native Authority officials."[104] In Samu, protestors destroyed the houses and farms of Chief Yumkella. They claimed that the chiefs had enjoyed "these evidences of affluence for a long time and now did not need them any longer."[105]

Expectations that the crisis would blow over at the end of the year proved unfounded.[106] Fresh outbreaks of violence took place in Bombali and Kambia districts. The police arrested people in Tonko Limba chiefdom for arson. Police guards had to be posted at the rice mill at Kasseire in Mambolo to prevent its destruction. In Sanda Loko, the crowds protested taxation and extortion.[107] Armed with Dane guns, swords and machetes, they defied police tear-gas and baton charges. They construed police actions as "making war on the people."[108] The "rebels" associated the police with "steel helmets, tear gas and firearms and regarded them as people who had to be fought." Police became targets because they were perceived as defenders of chiefs and the corrupt local elite. Their appearance and aggressive tactics to restore order made them unpopular. By February 14, 1956, an estimated 20 people had died in the "war."[109]

The most aggressive protestors coalesced in two "hardcore gangs" which operated from Magbema and Samu chiefdoms. Police estimated that the "gang" based in Samu town had between 200 to 300 members. One of the gangs ambushed police officers at Kychom on February 24, 1956, injuring many of them. Another gang

---

[104]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Appendix, Political Intelligence Reports: Chiefdom Disturbances, November -December, 1955.

[105]. PRO CO554/1329, Zouche Hall to Vile, March 23, 1956.

[106]. PRO CO554/1329 Secret, From GHQ, West Africa to War Office, 29 December, 1955; Times, January 6, 1956.

[107]. PRO CO554/1329, Hall to Secretary of Secretary of State, Colonies, January 21, 1956.

[108]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Telegram 66, Deputy Governor to Secretary of State, Colonies, January 30, 1956.

[109]. PRO CO554/1329,25725, Governor Hall to Secretary of State Colonies, February 14, 1956.

attacked police at Mapotolon town, wounding a European Police officer. One of the protestors was killed in the fray.[110] Police attempts to penetrate the gang by infiltration proved unsuccessful. The two infiltrators sent by the police were discovered, denounced and abducted by peasant protestors. They were never found. The police presumed they had been beaten to death. The police eventually arrested the leader of one of the gangs, which reduced their activities.[111]

Before then, the protestors had succeeded in chasing six Kambia district chiefs, including Kande Yumkella, from their chiefdoms. Kande Yumkella, who was also the district council president, had been sent by the government to explain the tax increase to his people.[112] His mission failed. Peasants did not listen to him. The protestors also intimidated Paramount Chief Bai Farima Tass, who was also a Minister without Portfolio in the SLPP administration. Farima had to be escorted from the wrath of the crowd by the police.[113] Yumkella and Farima Tass, subsequently accused Commissioner Greenwood and the police of failing to protect them. The allegation was discovered to be false.[114]

The Southern Province also felt the shockwaves of the revolt but peasant protests actions there were less violent.[115] The only exception was Moyamba District where protestors burnt ten houses in Rotifunk and Bradford and attempted to destroy a section of the railway. Calm returned only after the police killed two people

---

[110]. PRO CO554/1329, Governor De Zouche Hall to Secretary of State, Colonies, March 2, 1956.

[111]. PRO CO554/1329, Governor De Zouche Hall to Secretary of State, Colonies, March 9, 1956.

[112]. Yumkella and other paramount chiefs had been despatched by the SLPP government to assuage the protestors. Daily Mail, December 29, 1955; Daily Mail, January 27, 1956.

[113]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Minute, P. A. P Robertson, August 31, 1956.

[114]. Report of Commission of Inquiry into Disturbances in the Provinces: November 1955 to March 1956 (London: Sierra Leone Government, 1956) (Hereinafter referred to as The Cox Report). Cox was the Chairman of the Commission. pp. 83-85.

[115]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Telegram 528, Governor to Secretary of State, Colonies, 13/12/1955.

and arrested about 335 demonstrators. Furthermore, the police proscribed public meetings and the possession of sticks and stocks.[116] By the time the riots subsided, over £750,000 worth of property had been destroyed and twenty-six people, including three policemen, had been killed.[117] In Bo and Pujehun districts, the thousands of peasant protestors displayed neither the animosity nor the violence of their Northern Province and Moyamba counterparts towards their chiefs.

What was to be made of this general outpouring of the rural discontent? Despite the numerous indications and hints of restiveness, the outbreak of mass protest came as a rude shock to the political elite and colonial administration. The elite had been busy formulating "constitutional" amendments and political arrangements for greater autonomy. They had put far more credence on the portions of the colonial reports describing the districts as "law-abiding and peaceful" than those pointing to social discontent. The instinctive reaction of the SLPP elite was to blame their political opponents for both the workers' strike and the rebellion. Their provincial journal, the Observer, based in Bo, accused SLPP opponents of using the "emotions of ignorant people" and "backdoor methods" to challenge them.[118] Yet, as clearly explained above, the warning signs had been evident from the late 1940s.

The Rebellion as a Historical Process

Political scientists who have analyzed Sierra Leone's political evolution have labelled peasant actions "reactionary" or "anomic."[119] Martin Kilson drew two major conclusions from the 1955 peasant rebellion. First, he argued that the rebellion challenged the myth that Nationalist elites and the masses had identical interests or acted harmoniously during the decolonization period. Second, although peasants had real and concrete grievances, their "reaction ... followed anomic lines, entailing violent,

---

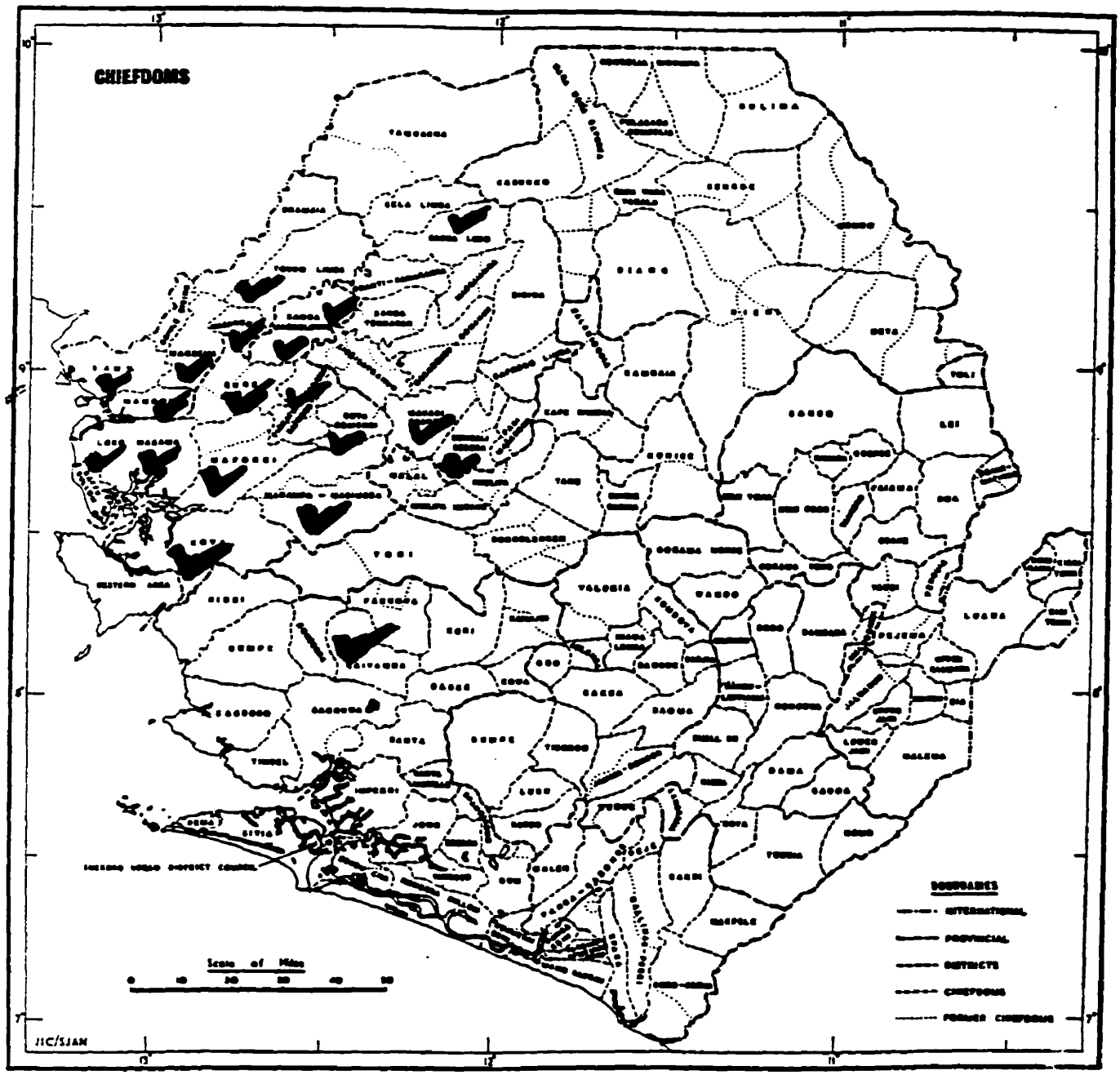
116. PRO CO554/1329, Reuters Report, December 16, 1955.

117. Cartwright, Political Leadership in Sierra Leone, p.68.

118. Observer (Bo) December 31, 1955.

119. Kilson, Political Change in a West African State, p.285; Cartwright, Politics in Sierra Leone, p.82.

MAP 7: Areas affected by the 1955-56 Peasant Rebellion.



riotous political expression."[120] John Cartwright essentially endorsed this broad view that peasants were "reactionary." While Kilson's first conclusion is tenable, the second needs reconsideration. Kilson had interpreted colonial political evolution in Sierra Leone as a struggle between "modernity" and "traditionality." As a consequence, he decried the ambivalence of the rebellious peasants towards the chieftaincy and their failure to push for "outright revolution."

Far from being an "anomic" or "reactionary" sequence of events, the 1955 rebellion should be understood as an unfolding historical movement -- composed of different strands and personalities in different localities -- held together by common class discontent and interests. It was also a historical discourse composed with the actions, intent, culture, language and historical reality of the participants. Thus, the revolt should be seen for what it was, not what the analysts want it to be.[121] What started as a strike against excessive taxation and the depredations of Chief Alkali Modu rapidly evolved into multiple "chiefdom rebellions" and "chiefdom revolutions." By December 1955, even the colonial administration had to concede that the events were a ""peasants' revolt" aimed at corrupt paramount chiefs and their henchmen by people suffering from a real sense of injustice and grievance."[122]

By using the language of "strike," peasants echoed the actions of workers in Freetown in the same year and strove to give a national dimension to their movement and rebellion. However, by the time the revolt was suppressed it had assumed the character of a "civil war" between the state, the chiefs and the peasantry. Although a civil war, it was largely restricted to the ethnic groups in the region. Looking at peasant rebellions in South Africa and Uganda between the 1930s and 1980s,

---

[120]. Kilson, Political Change in a West African State, p.285.

[121]. In an extreme case of Marxist historical teleogy, a Soviet historian, L.V. Pribytovskii, even characterized the revolt as joint peasant and workers' movement which was eventually sold out by their 'bourgeoisie' leadership. See Lev Naumovich Pribytovskii, "S'ERRA LEONE: KRESTi'IANSKOE DVISHENIE, 1955-1956. SG, Narody Azii i Afriki, 3, (1983), pp. 125-132. My sincere thanks to Steven Usitalo, a colleague and McGill Ph.D candidate, for translating the article for me.

[122]. PRO CO 554/1329/25725 Sierra Leone Political Intelligence Report, December 1955. Secret S.F.9102; PRO CO554/1329, Extract from the notes of a conversation between Minister of State and W.A. Creech-Jones, April 4, 1956.

Mahmoud Mamdani makes an interesting observation on this point. He posits that the peasant struggles against oppressive chiefs and indirect state structures assumed the "dimensions of a civil war inside the ethnic group."[123] Northwestern Sierra Leone proved to be no different in this respect.

The peasant rebellion had been primarily directed against their chiefs. It had started peacefully and purposefully though it quickly took on the character of a "civil war" with the destruction of the property of the chiefs and local authorities. The state escalated the war when it interposed the police between the peasant rebels and their chiefs in order to enforce law and order. The rebel peasants naturally associated the actions of the police with defence of rural despotism and opposition to their interests. The escalation of the protest into a "war" also reflected the hardening attitude of some of the protestors, the disintegrative effects of the confrontation and the lack of solidity of the peasant leadership. The destructive violence invested in the protest should also be seen as the consequent supersession of individual and sectarian concerns over the collective expression of peasant interests in the unfolding drama. This resultant anarchy, however, should not mask the fact that in the sequence of events, the protestors, except on rare occasions, directly targeted chiefs, local chiefdom authorities and property. They spared Europeans, Syrians and their properties.[124]

The "crowds," "demonstrators," "mobs" and "rioters" who were engaged in the rebellion were not faceless people. They consisted mainly of peasant farmers, fishermen, small traders and rural artisans with real interests and grievances. In the primary and secondary literature, the tendency has been to lump them together as "young men."[125] The term has ambiguous generational and political connotations. Young men had long been a local euphemism for the politically disempowered. In fact, it included all those - men and women - who did not hold positions of authority within

---

[123]. Mahmood Mamdani, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996) p. 196.

[124]. CO554/1329/25725, Telegram 66, Deputy Governor to S.S. January 30, 1956; Cartwright, Political Leadership in Sierra Leone, p.68.

[125]. Kilson, Political Change in a West African State, p.179; Barrows, Grassroots Politics in an African State, p. 102.

the local network of power.

That disempowerment of a section of populace, and the inability of newly created colonial structures to empower them, partly explains the nature of the peasant leadership that emerged. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s these young people had been dynamic and aggressive in the pursuit of their interests. The question was whether they had the credibility to challenge "traditional authority." The peasant protestors, therefore, did not just gravitate around any "young man." In every chiefdom and town, they gravitated around those "young men" who had the social standing and personality to ably represent their cause. Thus, in Port Loko, Bakorobah, Pita (Peter) Kamara and Abu Sankoh became the most prominent leaders of the protestors.[126] The colonial administration described Bakorobah as an influential and popular Mandingo businessmen of Guinean origin. He had operated a successful transport business at Port Loko, "until practically squeezed out by Alkali Modu."[127] Pita Kamara, also a trader, had a similar axe to grind with the chief. The third man, Abu Sankoh, had strongly opposed the amalgamation of Maforki and Port Loko Chiefdoms.

These men drew support from an assortment of local leaders, including Tejan Kamara, Abu Kamara and L. Bangurah, a clerk. The brothers of Pita Kamara, Maligie Kamara and Abu Kamara, also joined the campaign against Alkali Modu. Maligie and Abu were well known diamond dealers. The administration also tried to link the Port Loko leaders with Mahmoud Akar, a member of the United People's Party. It was said that the party took an active interest in the rebellion and actually held "propaganda" meetings around it.[128] Beyond this event, the administration had little concrete evidence to link Akar with the Port Loko leadership. In the end, the crucial point was that the confluence of grievances between the essentially elitist group of leaders and

---

[126]. Peter Kamara died a few years after the conflict. See Hargreaves, End of Colonialism in West Africa, p.80.

[127]. PRO CO554/1329, Telegram, Secretary of State Colonies to Governor Hall, January 16, 1956.

[128]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Extracts from CID Report on Ant-Taxation Demonstration and Disturbances in North and South Western Provinces from November, 1955 to February, 1956.

the peasant masses in Port Loko positioned the former to provide the requisite leadership for the rebellion.

The general character of the leadership did not differ radically in the other chiefdoms. In Loko Massama, the site of some of the most violent protests, Pa Buya, Yorro, Kaba Conteh and Mr. A. B. Kamara (Bai Bai) were identified as the inspiration behind the events. A.B. Kamara, a literate man, had very strong ties with Wallace-Johnson.[129] He carried copies of Mr Wallace-Johnson's correspondence with London and allegedly distributed party cards of the National Council of Sierra Leone (NCSL) to his peasant supporters.[130] Keku Bangura of Karsona, Abu Ibrahim, a retired civil servant and Sub-Chief Alkali Conteh were reported as being very influential among the protestors in Kaffu Bullom. In Masimera, Amadu Kule, popularly known as "An Boy-e-Kek," led the crowds.[131] Headmen, retired petty bureaucrats and educated men for a plethora of reasons led the peasant crowds against paramount chiefs and other chiefdom administrators. In short, the peasant movement drew its leadership from popular community figures who were not necessarily commoners. Drawn sometimes from competing and opposing royal houses and political factions, this leadership represented a "credible" but ambivalent alternative to paramount chiefs.

This elitist leadership helped the peasant movement by its ability to sufficiently

---

[129]. In the post-independence years, A.B. Kamara joined the All Peoples Congress (APC), a largely northern province based party. He rose through the ranks of the party to become Minister of Finance and Vice President of Sierra Leone.

[130]. The extent to which the NCSL benefit from its association with the peasant rebels was unclear but Akintola Wyse claims that people of Kambia asked the party to help them defeat Chief Yumkella in the elections of 1956. Apparently, the party's candidate Lerina Bright failed to register her candidacy for the area. See Wyse, Bankole Bright, p.174.

[131]. See SLNA File on Conciliatory Enquiries, 1955/6 Riots. See especially Chiefdom Conciliatory Enquiries: Loko Massama Chiefdom, A Wurie, Provincial Education Secretary to Secretary, Ministry for Local Government, March 27, 1956; Chiefdom Conciliatory Enquiries: Kaffu Bullom Chiefdom, A Wurie, Provincial Education Secretary to Secretary, Ministry for Local Government, March 27, 1956; Chiefdom Conciliatory Enquiry: Massumgbala Chiefdom. W. Greenwood, Ag. District Commissioner, Kambia to Commissioner, Northern Province, April 12, 1956; Chiefdom Conciliatory Enquiry: Sella Limba. John Watson, District Commissioner, Bombali to Commissioner, Northern Province, April 12, 1956.

represent the peasant cause to the state. They coherently articulated peasant grievances to the local and state authorities. The crowds accepted and publicly acknowledged their leadership. In some cases, peasants refused to talk with government administrators in their absence. Their unwillingness, however, to pursue peasant demands or challenge the state beyond a particular point hampered the movement. They accommodated the state when they perceived sufficient concessions had been made. For example, Abu Sankoh did not show up for the December 2, 1955 meeting in Port Loko because he felt the tax concessions were enough. Bakorobah, another prominent leader, withdrew when the whole thing got "too big" for him.[132] The limitation of this leadership to effectively represent peasant interests or provide a real alternative may have been responsible for the intensification of the violence and the degeneration to "gangsterism" in certain areas.

What triggered the rebellion and what motivated these peasant rebels and leadership? The increase in local taxation and the replacement of house tax with a poll tax in 1955 have been accepted by colonial authorities and scholars as the motive force behind the rebellion. There is much merit in this position because the increase did add to peasant burdens. Taxation became equal for the rich and poor. The "big men," who had carried the tax burden for "young men" and their dependants, were less inclined to do so when it went up to 40 shillings. Heavy extortion and overassessment by tax assessment committees compounded the burden on the poor.[133] The lack of visible benefit in remote villages made the tax increases questionable. Peasants perceived correctly that their taxes swelled the salaries of local officials and paid for their concrete and iron sheet roofed houses. The almost spontaneous outpouring of anger against the taxes is, therefore, understandable.

Eliphas Mukonoweshuro, however, cautions against over-emphasizing the taxation as the main cause of the revolt. He maintains that neither the concept of

---

[132]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Extracts from CID Report on Anti-Taxation Demonstration and Disturbances in North and South Western Provinces from November, 1955 to February, 1956.

[133]. Daily Mail, October 21, 1955; CO554/1329/25725, Appendix, Political Intelligence Reports: Chiefdom Disturbances, November - December, 1955.

taxation nor resistance against tax were new.[134] Mukonoweshuro essentially accepts the arguments of Chief Provincial Commissioner H. Childs, who maintained that the 1955 ordinance did not constitute a serious departure from the spirit of the 1937 tax amendment which already equated house with family. Both Mukonoweshuro and Childs have a point. The novelty of taxation had long worn off after 1898, and the house tax had effectively become a poll tax by 1937.[135] The system had always been riddled with extortion and assessment problems that the administration could not resolve. Lastly, the Cox Commission later concluded that 25 shillings was a reasonable and affordable tax level for peasants. Peasants, in fact, accepted and paid that amount after 1955. However, while this reasoning is useful in explaining why the protests did not erupt simultaneously or affect all parts of the provinces equally; it does not explain why the rebellion started in Port Loko or became extremely violent in Kambia and other districts.

Part of that answer may lie in the incidence and impact of the new tax system. The striking feature of the 1955 tax assessment was the dramatic increase in the tax amount and taxable population in the Northern Province. The province had an increase of 24.6 percent compared to 9.6 percent in South-Eastern Province and 1.8 percent in South-Western Province. In Port Loko, figures showed a staggering 53 percent increase in tax-payers. (See Table 7.1)

The figures indicate the inhabitants of Port Loko and Kambia felt the burden of the new tax-system more severely than those in other districts. The astronomical increase in tax revenue suggests that the paying population had been either previously under-assessed, or was over-assessed in 1955. Under-assessment meant people who had escaped taxation in the past now had to pay taxes. Over-assessment meant existing taxpayers had to pay more. The problem of assessment featured prominently among the widespread complaints received by the administration on abuses that accompanied the collection of the taxes. The taxes ranged from twenty-five shillings to forty shillings a head (in Kambia). This differential impact is important in helping to understand why rebellion started in Port Loko and why it assumed such violent

---

[134]. Mukonoweshuro, Colonialism, Class Formation and Underdevelopment, p.212.

[135]. Cox Report, p. 101.

proportions in Kambia.[136]

Table 7. 1 Taxpayers and Tax Receipts in 1954 and 1956

	Numbers of Taxpayers		Actual Tax Receipts(in £.)	
	1954	1955	1954	1955
South-western Province:				
Bo	45,058	48,753	56,322	73,483
Bonthe	24,420	23,075	28,348	32,497
Moyamba	46,625	47,899	46,625	52,381
Pujehun	24,314	23,256	26,727	32,467
South-Eastern Province:				
Kailahun	40,899	38,211	40,031	47,765
Kenema	46,579	53,995	45,886	52,266
Kono	27,953	34,256	22,716	32,467
Northern Province:				
Bombali	29,668	32,509	30,155	47,765
Kambia	17,551	23,241	17,532	37,629
Koinadugu	25,009	25,970	25,132	32,012
Port Loko	29,767	49,346	29,847	61,785
Tonkolili	23,460	25,510	23,460	31,609
	381,303	426,163	393,672	528,369

Protectorate Report, 1955.

The focus on taxation can partly explain why the rebellion happened when it did, but it cannot fully explain the virulence of the rebellion or the animosity towards the local elite. It also cannot explain the nature of peasant leadership. After all, the tax was imposed by the state and, until 1955, collected by its agents. To reach a deeper understanding, we have to turn to the plethora of grievances that underlay politics in rural areas. The rebellion had revealed an alarming extent of corruption, extortion and despotism by the local chiefdom elite. Local authorities interpreted "native custom" in diverse ways to extract forced labour, levies and fines from

---

[136]. Provincial Reports, 1954 and 1955.

peasants and the rural poor.[137]

Petitions sent to the government at the height of the rebellion graphically conveyed the manifold manipulations of "custom" for extortionate ends. Formulated in the language of the ruling elite, the documents were the work of "peasant intellectuals."[138] These "intellectuals" were usually educated men who had held minor clerical posts in the bureaucracy. What made them peasant intellectuals was not necessarily their immediate social status but their wider communal links and spirited presentation of peasant grievances. Their petitions marked a sharp departure from immediate pre-rebellion documents. Unlike Bempa and the other Port Loko petitioners, they made no concessions to the paternalism of the chieftaincy.

The SLPP government and colonial officials received many petitions which they largely ignored and discarded.[139] Two petitions from Loko Massama and Samu Chiefdoms, however, made their way to the Colonial Office in London. Mr. A.B Kamara, Alimamy Sampha Yorroh Kargbo, Pa Lamina Bonthor and Idrissa Fofanah authored the Loko Massama petition on behalf of the chiefdom residents. The Samu petition was penned by one M.S. Mansaray. The Loko Massama petition addressed from the office of the West African Youth League, 7 Trelawny Street, symbolized the facilitative role of Wallace-Johnson as well as the link between rural and urban radicalism. Significantly, the two petitions came from areas where the tax rebellion had assumed the character of a war.

---

[137]. Kilson, Political Change in a West Africa State, p. 189; Cohen, Politics of Elite Culture, p.133; Mukonoweshoro, Colonialism, Class Formation and Underdevelopment, p.212.

[138]. I have utilized the term 'peasant intellectuals' in a narrower and more attenuated sense than Steven Feierman who coined and applied the term to peasant leadership in Tanzania. For an elaboration of the concept, see Steven Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 18-27.

[139]. See for examples SLNA, Correspondence and Files of the 1955 riots, Fallah and Soriba Kamara (c/o M.S. Mansaray, Kychom, Selu Chiefdom, Kambia District) to Mr. Grey-Wood, District Commissioner, Kambia District, January 23, 1956; Petition from Santigi Thoronka of Masunba, a member of the Tribal Authority; Lamina Serrie of Maybean, a member of the Tribal Authority and Dura Tholi of Madorra, a headman to Sir Robert De Zouche Hall, January 12, 1956.

The petitions countered the stigmatization of peasant protestors as anomic, and shifted responsibility for the violence to the state and local elite. The Loko Massama petition attributed the violence to the local ruling elite and security forces, calling them the perpetrators of the violence. It stated, "[t]he people only protested and without an act of violence at all to the Paramount chief and Tribal Authority against excessive taxation."[140] M.S. Mansaray of Samu expressed similar sentiments describing the protestors as "law abiding and loyal inhabitants who have silently and patiently borne a variety of hardships" under the chief and not "hoolingans (sic) destroying property indiscriminately and wantonly."[141]

Both petitions censured paramount chiefs, Bai Sama of Loko Massama, and P.C. Bai Sherbro Yumkella II of Samu. The Samu petition painted an unflattering image of Yumkella. It described the chief as a self proclaimed "Black Governor," who was "intolerant of popular opinion, uninterested in the welfare of the people and exploitative of his people." Among his long list of transgressions were incompetence, despotism, corruption, bribery, malicious persecution, incarceration, victimization, extortion, financial misappropriation, use of "free labour without feeding them," and the imposition of a plethora of fines. Mansaray wrote:

> We have seen people fined £50 or more, or flogged, or asked to "pick pins" on one leg for a long time or to be placed in stocks in front of their wives and relatives, just because they had no money to pay; in some cases their farms are taken and given to the Chief so that the Chief now owns a lot of farms. Lands have been seized by this means and given to the friends of the Chief. The Chief is always after money and uses many ways to obtain the utmost from the people.[142]

He pleaded:

> We have been groaning under our yoke too long and it has now become intolerable... We look to Government for protection, for peace and comfort to enjoy our lives, to pay taxes within our capacity and reduce the present high tax and the variety. We want to be loyal and peace-

---

[140]. Petitioners (witnessed by A.B. Kamara) to Gov. R. Hall, March 21, 1956.

[141]. PRO CO 554/1329/25725, Mansaray to Commissioner, Makeni Division. cc. to Government, Local Minister etc, December 2, 1956.

[142]. Ibid.

> abiding, but with the present Chief and his crowd, it is impossible and might lead to bloodshed which we are very eager to obviate.[143]

Mansaray maintained Yumkella had insulted their "manhood." He claimed the chief had reduced people to poverty, enslaved them and made it impossible to maintain tranquillity. Many protestors later described their condition vis-a-vis chiefs as "domestic slavery."[144] The Provincial Commissioner of Northern Province dismissed Mansaray's allegations against Yumkella as "false and exaggerated," though he conceded that the general picture painted of the depredations of the chieftaincy was "fairly true."[145]

The Commissioner may have questioned the veracity of Mansaray's claims, but his accompanying despatch essentially legitimized the substance of the anti-chief discourse of the peasant intellectuals. In his despatch accompanying Mansaray's petition, he added his own long list of the omissions of the chieftaincy. High on his list was forced labour. Chiefs had continued to demand forced labour even though that right had been commuted to fixed salaries. The commissioner also conceded that chiefs set up illegal courts and collected undeterminable sums in fines and levies. There were levies for funerals, for sending chiefs to Legislative Council and for the crowning of "Black District Commissioners," as presidents of district councils became known. Peasants paid fees or fines for fishing, hunting, birth and death, carpentry, secret societies.[146]

The commissioner also pointed out that chiefs profited from sale of titles to the local elite and elections to public offices. Many chiefdoms were cluttered with *almamis*, *kaprs*, and *santigis*, many of whom had paid the various paramount chiefs for their titles. Chiefs also took bribes and presents from candidates for tribal authorities and district councils. These officials, more often than not, recouped their expenses from peasants. The district commissioner also maintained that with the

---

[143]. Ibid.

[144]. Cox Report, p.98.

[145]. Ibid.

[146]. PRO CO554/1329, The Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province to [Mr Hoe,] Colonial Office, March 3, 1956.

introduction of Native Authorities, "chiefs have revived old habits and got away with what amounts to a breach of contract."[147] The chiefs used every opportunity to line their pockets. Mansaray's petition was finally vindicated when the concession by the commissioner that the chiefs of Mambolo and Samu (Yumkella) had enriched themselves considerably by using unpaid labour for their farms.[148] Popular revulsion against the conduct of this chiefly elite was evident in widespread destruction of their farms, stores and houses.

Excessive taxation and local tyranny in 1955 had sparked the tinderbox of frustrations over colonial institution-building and modification of the historical relationship between the state, chiefs and peasants. Initiated with the native administrations in the 1930s, by the 1950s the changes had modified the chieftaincy giving chiefs greater access to resources and prominence in state politics. The refashioned and revitalized chieftaincy reassumed control over peasant lives in ways which were far "more powerful" than in the precolonial period.[149] In the decolonization period, the decision by Dr. Margai to anchor the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party around the chieftaincy considerably strengthened it. The propensity towards primitive capital accumulation and ostentatious consumption, which became the hallmark of the new political elite, sharply attenuated the traditional paternalism of the chieftaincy. Under these circumstances, the customary means of challenging local despotism became greatly circumscribed. The institutional modification of the relationship between chiefs and peasants and its ensuing contestation has been wrongly construed by colonial officials and academics alike as the struggle between "tradition" and "modernity."

The failure of customary mechanisms or the new institutions to accommodate or resolve the struggle produced the violent rebellion. Protestors had used petitions and peaceful demonstrations to articulate their grievances, contest and negotiate their relationship with the chiefs and the state, and defend their class interests. It was the

---

[147]. Ibid.

[148]. Chief Yumkella had several farms. One was estimated at about 1,000 acres. Cox Report, p.131.

[149]. PRO CO554/1327/25725.

failure of these peaceful actions to convey effectively the depth of peasant discontent and produce speedy results that led to the "riots" and the "war."

This offers a more plausible explanation than John R. Cartwright's suggestion that the impact of the diamond boom made it easier for commoners to challenge the chieftaincy. Cartwright argues that the mining boom weakened "traditional controls" and led to the introduction of new values and attitudes towards "traditional authority."[150] The dynamics of rural migration and how it affected the rebellion no doubt needs to be investigated but the "pace of change" argument and its implied assumption of a conflict between modernism and traditionalism is problematic.[151] Cartwright neither indicated the values and attitudes which were introduced into Northern Province, nor how they were expressed in the rebellion. Furthermore, the rebellion coincided with the peak of the illicit mining period. Many Temne and Limba migrants would have been busy digging for diamonds and negotiating to legalize their activities. These feverish mining activities, in fact, prevented the extension of the rebellion to Kono district.[152] Whether the impact of the diamond boom which began in 1954/1955 and peaked in 1956/1957 could have been so swiftly transferred into the rebellion remains to be investigated.

Until then, the reasons for the outbreak of violence should be sought in the contradictions between chiefs and commoners, and the inability of "custom" to accommodate them. To its credit, the colonial administration admitted that the "absence of any recognised means by which changes in chiefdom government could be made peacefully and constitutionally" had produced the violent confrontation.[153] The government's attempts at restoring order were not, therefore, limited to the use of force. It also tried mediation and conciliation. In short, as the situation worsened it sought to it tried to reassert its paternalistic role. At the end of 1955 and the

---

[150]. Cartwright, Politics in Sierra Leone, pp.68-73; See also Cohen, The Politics of Elite Culture, p.133.

[151]. Mukonoweshuro, Colonialism, Class Formation and Underdevelopment, p.211.

[152]. Provincial Report 1955.

[153]. Ibid.

beginning of 1956, it instructed Provincial administrators to conduct enquiries in the areas of unrest. The government advised administrators to give people the full opportunity "to voice their grievances and disclose the root cause for the comment."[154] African as well as European administrators took on the tasks of visiting, enquiring and reconciling the turbulent chiefdoms in Northern Province.

Administrators learnt about the level of animosity within the chiefdoms, the main targets of peasant grievances and the dynamics of the protests. In Loko Massama, the protestors refused to even meet or reconcile with the chief Bai Sama, who was described as despotic and tyrannical. In chiefdoms like Sella Limba and Kaffu Bullom, popular animosity was directed more at chiefdom clerks, tribal authorities, sections and headmen than at the chiefs. The Massumgbala Chiefdom enquiry revealed that sub-chiefs had spearheaded the protests against the chief and the government. Only the chief's house had been destroyed during the protests. According to administrators, the sub-chiefs had joined the protests because the institutional changes had curtailed their access to "illegal" resources.[155]

The conciliation exercise gave the opportunity to contending factions to articulate their grievances and for the administration to take stock of the situation. In a few cases, the "riot fever" seemed to have propelled unscrupulous individuals into action.[156] On the whole, however, they revealed the twin impact of the cumulative "customary" or "traditional" demands made by chiefs and new local government institutions. An administrator observed that peasants complained about a bowl of rice levied by the chief in Sella Limba. Putting the complaint in context, he maintained that the bowl of rice may seem negligible but when added to district and chiefdom taxes, birth and death taxes, circumcision taxes, palm wine taxes and many other seemingly minor customary "obligations," it became unbearably burdensome for peasants. The meetings also demonstrated that many people simply could not fathom the role and

---

[154]. PRO CO554/1329, Telegram: Hall to Secretary of State, Colonies, January 6, 1956.

[155]. Ibid.

[156]. SLNA, CSB, Tax Disturbances, Gbonkolenken Chiefdom: Ag. District Commissioner to District Commissioner, Northern Provinces, March 27, 1956.

functions of the new officials and institutions and their relationship to much more familiar ones.[157] What was the relationship between the court president and chief? What was the relationship between Native Administrations and District Councils? Colonial administrators and chiefs had not provided sufficient answers for these questions. The murky ground between intention and practice gave chiefs not only leeway for corruption, but also bred popular suspicion and antagonism to the members of the new institutions.

The Cox Commission: Validation, Arbitration and Intimidation

Even with all the unresolved questions, the colonial state felt that local enquiries would be cathartic and remedial enough. Both the governor and African-led government resisted demands for a general commission of inquiry. The demand for a general enquiry had been vigorously pushed by I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson, who accused the adminstration of using excessive force to quell the rebellion. He telegraphed socialist British member of parliament, Fenner Brockway, to demand a tax freeze and an inquiry into the disturbances from the Colonial Office.[158] Johnson reiterated this position in a letter of December 30, 1955, calling on the Colonial Office to resolve the "great burden of taxation thus obviating the threat of the incident which took place in the year 1898" by appointing a Royal Commission.[159] Pressured constantly by Wallace-Johnson, Fenner Brockway pushed the Colonial Secretary for Colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd, for an investigation into the rebellion.[160] Unsurprisingly, to deflect the pressure, the colonial administration in Freetown accused

---

[157]. Ibid.

[158]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Fenner Brockway to Lennox Boyd.

[159]. PRO CO 554/1329/25725, I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson to Colonial Secretary, through the Colonial Secretary, Freetown. December 30, 1955. (From Wallace-Johnson representing the West African Civil Liberties and National Defence League (incorporating the West African Youth League, Sierra Leone Section).

[160]. PRO CO554/1329, Brockway to Lennox Boyd, December 30, 1955; PRO CO554/1329, Brockway to Secretary of State, Colonies, January 6, 1956; PRO CO554/1329, Telegram, Secretary of State Colonies to Governor Hall, January 8, 1956.

Wallace-Johnson of being a prime instigator of the rebellion. Administrators charged him with having gone to Rofinka in Maforki Chiefdom to address demonstrators.[161]

The scale of the revolt and fear of further pressure from the British Parliament eventually compelled the Colonial Office to concede to the demand for an inquiry on January 16, 1956. The Local Government Minister, Albert Margai, felt that the district level inquiries that had been conducted were sufficient. Colonial Secretary Lennox Boyd insisted on a single official inquiry. The Leader of Government, Milton Margai, reluctantly agreed with him.[162] A commission of inquiry was set up on March 29, 1956. It consisted of three Europeans and an African, Sir Herbert Cox, a retired High Court Judge from Tangayika, Mr. A. J. Loveridge, Chief Regional Office, Ashanti Region in the Gold Coast, Mr. A. T. A. Beckley, a Sierra Leone civil servant, and Justice S. P. J. Q. Thomas. D. W. Turberville was appointed to serve as secretary to the Commission.[163] The government mandated the commission to inquire into the riots and the actions taken to deal with them. It was also requested to provide recommendations to the government on the matter.[164] The commission held several public sessions to collect evidence. Thousands of people attended the sessions held in the major towns in the northwestern region and, as observers, sporadically interrupted the proceedings. They verified or countered the testimony of witnesses, thereby shaping the perceptions and information received by the commission.[165]

The commission paid most attention to the events in the Northern Province since it was the epicentre of the rebellion. It authenticated the multitude of grievances -- excessive taxation, extortion, corruption and despotism -- already expressed by peasants and known to the colonial administration. The commissioners posited that

---

[161]. PRO CO554/1329, Telegram, Secretary of State Colonies to Governor Hall, January 16, 1956.

[162]. Ibid.; PRO CO554/1329, Eastwood to Zouche Hall, Colonial Office, January 21, 1956; PRO CO554/1329, Zouche Hall to Eastwood, Colonial Office, January 26, 1956; Observer, Januray 27, 1956.

[163]. The Cox Report, p.7.

[164]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Minute, Muller, December 12, 1956.

[165]. The Cox Report: p.8.

the tax problems which triggered the rebellion had been "a mere symptom of an administrative breakdown," for that the government should be held responsible.[166] In its view, the "riots" merely "unmasked" an administrative weakness which had been present in the system. They wrote:

> [T]he ordinary peasant farmers and fishermen who took part in the disturbances were, it seems, not unaware that the course of events was not as smooth as it had been, but they remain little affected by the breakdown and so little moved to violent protest, until their pockets were affected by ever mounting taxation.[167]

Apart from taxation and rural despotism, the commission mentioned other causal factors. It suggested that diamond digging and high taxation disorganized rural family life. Generally, it suggested that the sociological and economic changes following World War II had greatly corroded the fabric of rural life, but it did not elaborate on these changes. Its main focus throughout the report remained colonial institutional arrangements and provinces and the relationship between chiefs and peasants.

The commission confirmed the linkage between the workers' strike and the peasant rebellion. It referred to the language of protest and actions of the rebels. The peasant rebels in Maforki, who were essentially non-violent, called their protest against taxes a "strike." Others justified their violence by indicating that a strike involved the "indiscriminate" destruction of property.[168] The commission showed no sympathy for chiefs and other victims of violence, many of whom, it maintained, retained their "provocative conduct" during the rebellion. Even as it condemned the violence, the commission reiterated, "the people whose property has suffered were sometimes collectively and sometimes individually and to a greater or lesser extent, guilty of committing maladministration as to inflame the rioters."[169] In short, the Commissioners justified the actions of the protestors.

---

[166]. Ibid., p.9.

[167]. Ibid.

[168]. Ibid., pp.13 & 146.

[169]. Ibid., 14.

In explaining the "psychology" of the rebels and its occurrence in Northern Province, the commissioners went off tangent or rather into familiar territory - colonial anthropology. The Commission's argument was fairly simple. The nature of Temne institutions and ethnicity explained their behaviour. "Belligerency" and "subordination" defined Temne character. The belligerency became evident when they were provoked or intolerably oppressed. The subordination was apparent in their loyalty to their chieftaincy, a highly ritualized and inflexible institution. The oppressive rigidity of the Temne chieftaincy and its unresponsiveness to popular disaffection invoked Temne pugnacity. According to the commissioners, this stood in sharp contrast to the south of the country where the people and institutions were more pliable. As the Commissioners put it:

> Chiefs of Temne chiefdoms have, as one witness put it: 'crossed the boundary' from tolerable to intolerable oppression and the reaction of their people who in ordinary way would not even contemplate abusing their 'father' has been corresponding severe.[170]

Clearly, the commission interpreted the rebellion as a struggle between "modernity" and "traditionality," with colonialism representing the forces of modernity.[171] The interpretation was erroneous. No such dichotomy between "modernity" and "traditionality" existed with reference to the Temne chieftaincy or any other in the country. The Paramount Chieftaincy in 1950s was as much a creation of colonialism as it was of the precolonial period. It contained both modern and traditional elements.

Having placed omissions of chiefs at the heart of the rebellion, it was not surprising that the commission strongly censured them and the Tribal Authorities.[172] The commissioners indicated that considerable popular mistrust existed about the new government machinery and peasants wanted to return to the "supremacy of

---

[170]. Ibid., p.11. Similar sentiments are expressed on p.151 of the report.

[171]. Ibid.; PRO CO554/1329/25725, Sierra Leone Political Intelligence Report, December, 1955. Secret S.F.9102.

[172]. The Cox Report, p. 146

administrative officials."[173] This suggestion has been taken too literally to mean that peasants preferred colonialism rather than the rejection of colonial modification of the relationship between chiefs and Commoners.[174]

The future position of chiefs created a "dilemma" for the commission. It wanted to recommend their abolition but had to concede their relevance for the people and the state. To compromise, the commissioners advised the adoption of measures to reduce their power and influence. The state should restrict the access of chiefs to peasant labour and resources, and their role in politics. Their right to forced labour should be terminated. Chiefs must be kept away from party politics and commercial relations with their people. The emoluments of chiefs were to be strictly controlled and their rights to forced labour terminated. The commission suggested that no funds should be spent on buildings except those that were chiefdom property. Finally, the commissioners recommended that the state investigate the conduct of certain chiefs. The commissioners sincerely believed these steps would make rural life tolerable and the relationship between chief and commoners less oppressive. They believed historical change and institutional development would render the chieftaincy, a "sinecure."[175]

The commission supported administrative development at chiefdom rather than at district level. It suggested the scaling down of district councils because they had performed woefully. The commission recommended limitation of their role to local affairs and a return of some of their functions to chiefdom authorities. Chiefdom authorities should replace Tribal or Native Authorities, which had degenerated. The new bodies should be smaller, more representative and more closely supervised by government. The commission clearly outlined the role that chiefs and local authorities should play with reference to justice, law enforcement, taxation and issuing of licenses. Ultimately, the commission's emphasis leaned heavily on "regulation" and "control" of affairs in the provinces in view of the "desire for constitutional

---

[173]. Ibid., p 16.

[174]. Cartwright, Politics in Sierra Leone, p.86.

[175]. Cox Report, See Chs. XI to XVI.

developments and the social revolution of recent years."[176] Caught between popular demands and elite aspirations, these essentially institutionally-minded and bureaucratic men called for more state supervision and control.

The Cox Commission report concretized the information officials had already pieced together from petitions, administrative and police sources. It had elaborated and "legitimized" in a coherent and poignant manner some of the deep-seated peasant grievances and other causes of the revolt. The fact that the Cox commission characterized the rebellion as a consequence of "administrative breakdown" rather than nationalist agitation made its report palatable to the Colonial Office.[177] Certain omissions and recommendations, including lack of consideration of the consequences of illicit mining activities, and the suggestion to maintain chiefs, surprised the office.[178] Colonial officials nonetheless endorsed most of the commission's recommendations, including the institution of commissions of inquiries and deposition proceedings against certain chiefs.[179]

Like the Chalmers Commission of 1898, the Cox Commission served similar "public" and "hidden" functions. Publicly, the commission, in its procedures, its findings and recommendations, sought to reaffirm faith in colonial paternalism, liberalism and justice. It also gave the opportunity to the rural rebels to ventilate their grievances. This function was perhaps more crucial from a popular perspective in the late 1950s than it was in the late 1890s. Unlike the earlier situation, the rebels of 1955 lacked the means to voice their grievances. The former "colony" newspapers, especially the Sierra Leone Weekly News, which had provided a forum, ambiguous though it was, for "protectorate" voices, had disappeared.[180] The African Vanguard,

---

[176]. Ibid., p.230.

[177]. PRO CO544/1329, Colonial Office Minute, Muller, 28/9/56.

[178]. PRO CO 554/1331, R.J. Vile to A.N.A. Waddell. 10/8/1955. WAF 249/683/02.

[179]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Minute, 10/8/1956.

[180]. As if signalling the final eclipse of Creole political ambitions, the Sierra Leone Weekly News ended its run in 1951, the year of the Stevenson constitution and the election of the SLPP. See Bernadette Cole, Mass Media, Freedom and Democracy in Sierra Leone (London: Premier Publishing House, 1996) pp. 9.

owned by Wallace-Johnson, came out intermittently and was out of circulation for the duration of the rebellion. The most vocal politicians were in government and opposed to the rebels. Except for Wallace-Johnson, the Creole elite who were in the opposition, made no political capital out of the insurrection.[181]

In its "hidden" function, the commission gave the Colonial Office the opportunity to assess, and mediate the behaviour of its African partners in the decolonization process. For the Office, the rebellion and the report had revealed an apparent lack of popular support for the SLPP government and had confirmed it was merely an oligarchic "alliance of the Chiefs and educated element." Loveridge, one of Commissioners, accused SLPP ministers of being incompetent and the real "villains" of the rebellion.[182] The Colonial Office, never enamoured by the "independence" of African governments, suggested to the Governor R. De Zouche Hall that he should "clip the wings" of SLPP ministers.[183] It instructed Hall "to let the Ministers know that they have been given their yard of rope, that they came pretty close to hanging themselves and that in the future a much shorter length of rope would have to be used."[184] Colonial Officials insisted that the fact that the government had been maintained in power by security agents under "European direction" should be driven home. The extent to which the leverage, arising from the Commissioner, was used during colonial talks at the pre-independence negotiations between Sierra Leone politicians and the colonial office is unclear. What is clear was that the plans for independence in 1961 were executed with the minimum of difficulties.

The Colonial Office did not spare De Zouche Hall from criticism. Hall was seen as too familiar and tolerant of the SLPP regime. In the eyes of the Colonial Office, he

---

[181]. Akintola Wyse suggests that the workers' strike and rebellion brought certain Creole leaders closer to the masses. This may have been truer of the workers strike than of the rebellion. Wyse, Bankole Bright, pp. 174-175.

[182]. PRO CO554/1329, Loveridge to Vile, July 7, 1956.

[183]. PRO CO554/1329, Secret and Personal, Eastwood to De Zouche Hall, February 22, 1956.

[184]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Colonial Office [Eastwood] to Sir Robert De Zouche Hall.

displayed familiarity, indecisiveness and a lack of policy when dealing with the government.[185] Hall had been ailing for some time and could hardly be said to have been in firm control of the situation. Furthermore, his political position steadily grew weaker with "constitutional" developments and transfer of power to the new African ruling elite. For its part, the Colonial Office accepted no responsibility for the crisis and ensuing rebellion. Instead, it despatched a "conscientious and vigorous" governor, Maurice Dorman, "to tighten things up" in the colony at the end of 1956.[186]

Needless to say, the SLPP government found the report unpalatable, especially in its criticisms of the government's ignorance of and ineptitude in dealing with rebellion.[187] It rejected the commission's argument that rural oppression had intensified. The government blamed the conflict on the diamond boom and other economic changes. In general, the SLPP felt that it had been treated unfairly by its British partners in colonial administration. In the Legislative Council, the government, led by the Minister of Mines, Siaka Stevens, accused British provincial officials of intrigue and collusion in fomenting the crisis.[188] The SLPP government relented in its attack only after the Colonial Office and the Governor called for a more "constructive approach." In its public statement on the rebellion, the government endorsed the British provincial officials as "agents" of the government. It quickly addressed some of the recommendations and pressing demands by peasant rebels. The government, however, retained its critical tone of the Cox Report.[189]

As part of the recommendations of the Cox Commission, the government

---

[185]. PRO CO 554/1329/25725, Colonial Office [Eastwood to Sir Robert Hall, Government House, Freetown, SL; See also CO554/1329, Zouche Hall to Eastwood, Colonial Office, January 13, 1956, The governor calls the party an 'unholy alliance' of chiefs and politicians.

[186]. PRO CO554/1329/25725, Minute. J. S. Bennet.

[187]. The Statement of the Sierra Leone Government on the Report of Commission of Inquiry into the Disturbances in the Protectorate (November 1955 to March 1956 (Freetown: SLG 1956).

[188]. Sierra Leone Legislative Council Debates, 1956; Cartwright, Political Leadership in Sierra Leone, p.69.

[189]. Statement of Sierra Leone Government.

instituted two commissions of inquiry. The commissions found the conduct of eleven chiefs and many local authorities "subversive" of good government. Nine of the Paramount Chiefs were deposed or forced to resigned. Among these were Legislative Council members Alkali Modu of Maforki and Bai Farima Tass II of Magbema. The inquiries surprisingly exonerated Bai Sherbro Yumkella II and Bai Sama of Loko Massama. Both chiefs and others similarly exonerated were temporarily suspended from office. Many district council and Tribal Authority members and headmen lost their positions in the process.[190] The tax which triggered the revolt was reduced and set at an affordable maximum level of twenty-five shillings. The government proscribed many of the more oppressive aspects of rural life, including forced labour, illegal levies and extortion. Chiefs unsuccessfully fought to retain some of the proscribed privileges.[191] Representation in local government structures increased and was made potentially accessible to peasants and other rural groups. These gains partly reformed the relationship between the local "feudal" elite and commoners but they did not change it. Chiefs continued to be a significant force in the SLPP party and government. They even reclaimed some of their lost resources through the Riots Damages Commission created by the government. Chief Yumkella eventually received £32,290 out of the £394,360 that was set aside to compensate "victims" of the rebellion.[192] Despite the recovery of lost ground by the chiefs, it was evident that peasants and the rural poor had won a significant victories which included the deposition of despotic chiefs, the abolition of coerced labour and the reduction in taxation.

Conclusion

In a profound historical irony, the colonial state in Northwestern Sierra Leone

---

[190]. Reports of Commissioners of Inquiries into the Conduct of Certain Chiefs and Government Statement Thereon, (London: GPD, 1957). & Further Reports of Commissioners of Inquiries into the Conduct of Certain Chiefs and Government Statement Thereon, (London: GPD, 1957).

[191]. Cartwright, Politics in Sierra Leone, p.84.

[192]. Ibid., p.85.

had begun and ended in rebellion. The insurrection which accompanied its inception had been spearheaded by chiefs resisting the intrusion of foreign rule and the diminution of their authority. Almost sixty years later, the rebellion which signalled the state's twilight was launched by peasants against those very chiefs, who had by then become the linchpin of colonialism. Like the chiefs, the peasants had chosen their moment: decolonization, a period when the colonial process was in flux and a new "moral" and "political" order was in the process of being created. They used the 1955-56 rebellion to contest and negotiate the demands of, and their relations with their chiefs, and by extension, the colonial state. Peasants indicated that those demands and relations were neither tenable nor acceptable in the new order. Furthermore, in their recourse to violence, they illustrated the inadequacy and obsolescence of "traditional" and "paternalistic" forms of seeking redress in face of the British refashioning of the chieftaincy and local institutions. The public investigation and acknowledgement of the peasant grievances by the Cox Commission and the reluctant restitutive actions by the SLPP government affirmed the legitimacy of these peasant claims. With the 1955 rebellion, peasants in northwestern Sierra Leone like their chiefs in 1898, had negotiated the terms of a "new" political order. They had not destroyed the nexus that connected them with the chiefs or with the state. That may have not have been their intention. What they ensured was that some of the more obnoxious features of that nexus which predated, survived and were even enhanced by colonialism, were removed.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began with the aim of understanding rural subaltern actions, especially protest, during the colonial period in northwestern Leone between 1896 and 1955. It has shown that protests were concrete forms of political expression which compelled those in power to acknowledge and to respond to subaltern concerns. The power holders, colonial and African, reacted not only with repression but also with paternalism and readjustments to existing social relations. As a consequence, subaltern groups made the colonial reality a negotiated one, never giving power the leeway to ossify and hold its sway over them unchallenged. If Chamberlain had missed this point in his grand speech to parliament in 1895, the report of David Chalmers on the 1898 insurrection in Sierra Leone forced him to ponder over it. The Empire had to acknowledge subaltern agency and incorporate it into its rule. And it did. But subaltern agency or the incorporation of their interests into construction of power did not begin with colonialism.

The first chapter demonstrated how the struggle between slaves and masters in the precolonial era produced a moral economy of servitude which entailed reciprocal obligations and duties from both slaves and masters. It argued that the encroachment of British colonialism, and the consequent resistance by the local elite, exemplified by the 1898 insurrection, led to the redefinition of this moral economy of servitude. It suggested that this refurbished moral economy became the broad mechanism by which the British regulated internal slavery and colonialism in northwestern Sierra Leone.

Between 1899 and 1914, peasants and slaves continued to deploy "weapons of the weak" against the extraction of taxes, tribute and labour by the colonial and local elite within the confines of this refurbished moral economy. These "weapons" included rumour-mongering, tax evasions, migration, court challenges and escapes. The colonial state responded to these challenges mainly with legislation and attempts to immobilize labour. By the outbreak of World War I, a tense balance had been established between accommodation and resistance. What undergirded that balance was the favourable economic situation of the colony. Unfavourable climatic conditions, food shortfalls and commercial competition in northwestern Sierra Leone, however, threatened this balance.

The balance was in fact seriously tested in 1919 when subaltern crowds attacked and looted the rice stores and the properties of Syrian traders. The crowds, consisting of peasants, slaves, petty traders and the unemployed, believed that Syrian traders deliberately threatened their survival by hoarding and profiteering. The crowds utilized the discursive fragments of the colonial moral economy to defend what they believed were their rights to food and subsistence. The 1919 protest should be situated within the difficult conditions generated by World War I which included economic recession, burdensome imperial demands for revenue, labour and food, recurrent medical epidemics and a contraction in peasant food production.

The riots forced the colonial government to rethink its agricultural policies and pay greater attention to agrarian production. Government strategies to increase agrarian production, especially food production, led to the reconsideration of domestic slavery. The existence of slavery and the resistance of slaves were deemed to be obstacles to increased production. It was the perceived poor productivity and the intransigence of slave labour that ultimately led to the abolition of servitude in 1928. The abolition of slavery eliminated the distinction between "free" and "unfree" among commoners in the northern region. It also marked a terminal point in the moral economy which had been operative since 1899. Emancipation, however, came at an inauspicious moment in the history of the northwestern region: the eve of the Great Depression and a major locust attack.

Emancipation, the great depression and the locust plague produced rural destitution and despondence in the region. In the despondent climate and destitute populace, an itinerant cleric, Idara Konthorfili, found both the conditions and the latent social disaffection to organize a millenarian challenge against the colonial state. His "jihad" called for a new order based on Islamic revivalism. Idara called on peasants not to pay taxes and mobilized a section of his followers to fight the colonial state. After Bai Bureh, he was the first person to use colonial taxation as a justification for resistance and violent means to protest British rule in Sierra Leone. Despite the repression of Idara's protest, his millenarian movement should be seen as an attempt to replace an outmoded colonial moral economy with a new one.

The obsolescence in the colonial moral economy, highlighted by the Idara Revolt, was sharply underlined with the discovery of minerals in the 1930s and 1940s.

The shift in the political economy of Sierra Leone occasioned by mining led to a differentiation of rural protests into two main strands. The first indicated the continuation of peasant protests against the oppressive practices of the rural elite. The second strand pointed to the new battles that were being waged by transitory peasant labourers against mining capital for better pay and working conditions in the Marampa mines. In both circumstances, peasants and mine labourers used communal solidarity to protest oppressive practices by chiefs and mine owners. The government intervened with force as well as paternalism to restore social peace. It also began the reorganization of local political and social institutions to harness rural productivity and contain social conflicts. This process was interrupted by World War II.

When colonial reorganization of rural institutions resumed after the war, it was violently contested by peasants. They protested the new financial demands and the accentuated despotism of chiefs who had been further empowered by the colonial reorganization process. Through petitions, demonstrations and organized violence, peasant groups succeeded in getting the state to attenuate the power and the oppressive demands of the local elite. Even though occasioned by the immediate political changes and colonial demands of the 1950s, the rebellion should be placed within the relative impoverishment of the region, and the vast social and economic gap between northwestern Sierra Leone and other portions of the country on the eve of independence. The protestors indicated by their rebellion that existing power relations and the demands made on them were no longer acceptable. Their eventual use of violence demonstrated clearly the obsolescence of the "traditional" and "paternalistic" forms of control and negotiation which had undergirded the old colonial moral economy. Nonetheless, the ultimate aim of the protestors was not to destroy the chieftaincy or the state but to remove those features of rural life which constrained their social reproduction. In its timing and virulence the anti-chief rebellion of 1955 and 1956 represented a major paradox in African history. It had occurred during the moment of decolonization; a period when the colonial transfer of power to the new African elite was following formulaic and relatively peaceful lines.

In the process of uncovering and elaborating on the theme of subaltern protest, this study has extended the historical narrative of the northwestern region of Sierra Leone up to 1955. As a regional study, it has highlighted those elements which made

the colonial context and therefore the subaltern politics similar to, and different from those of the other parts of the country. It has also illustrated those moments in Sierra Leone history where linkages were established between subaltern actions in the northwestern region and other parts of Sierra Leone. Four such occasions were the 1898 Hut Tax War, the 1919 anti-Syrian riots, the 1931 Idara revolt and the 1955-1956 anti-chief riots. The 1898 Hut Tax War in the northwestern region inspired the outbreak of insurrection in the southern portion of the country. The subaltern crowds in northwestern Sierra Leone and Freetown "rioted" in an analogous fashion against perceived Syrian infractions in 1919. Idara's revolt sent shockwaves to parts of the southern region. Lastly, the peasant rebels of 1955-56 drew direct inspiration from the earlier actions of workers in Freetown. Wallace-Johnson, who realized the tremendous potential of such linkages in challenging the colonial state, made unsuccessful attempts in the late 1930s and again in the 1950s to unite subalterns in the town and countryside.

This dissertation has pointed out a whole of range of strategies used by peasants and slaves to contest power and domination in northwestern Sierra Leone. These subaltern groups used covert as well as confrontational strategies to resist elite groups and the colonial state. Covert actions, which included evasions, escape and migrations, became interwoven into the general tapestry of life and politics under colonial rule. Against these actions, the state used legislation, fines and other punitive measures with limited success. It was around these issues that the tense balance between "accommodation" and "resistance" were constructed. Confrontational actions included strikes, "riots," and open revolt. They tended to be more spasmodic and violent, and they erupted when social oppression or conditions for subalterns became intolerable. Through these actions peasant demanded immediate redress for their grievances or readjustment in their relations with elite groups and the state.

The timing of subaltern protests was not spontaneous or irrational but closely tied to the political economy of colonialism in northwestern Sierra Leone. The primary struggle for social reproduction in northwestern region depended on nature. It was this struggle that shaped the basic contours of power, political relations and domination in the region. As long as nature was generous, and the demands of hegemonic groups "reasonable," slaves and peasants grudgingly gave up their surplus resources and

labour. However, when nature became inclement and dominant groups refused to be magnanimous, subaltern capacity for self-reproduction was usually threatened. This usually set the stage for open confrontation.

The colonial state also conditioned the timing of subaltern protest with the new demands it made on them. These demands, which necessitated the sale of their product or labour, increased subaltern dependence on the market. This market was an extension of the global capitalist system. Periodic convulsions within this capitalist system had negative implications even for subalterns in peripheral areas like northwestern Sierra Leone. The reluctance by the colonial state and its local agents to minimize their demands on subalterns during these convulsions, as evidenced during the two world wars and the great depression, also set the stage for open confrontation.

While the presence of unfavourable conditions provide an approximate gauge for understanding the time and context of subaltern protests, they should not be read as formulaic or predictive. The confluence of factors which produced such conditions suggested the likelihood that subalterns *might* take the opportunity to contest the domination of the elite; it offered no guarantees that they *would*. The anti-Syrian riots during World War I and the Idara revolt of 1931 represented occasions when subalterns seized the opportunity to challenge elite domination. However, there was no major subaltern protest in the northwestern region during World War II when conditions were similarly difficult. The precise timing and execution of subaltern protest depended on a whole gamut of shifting factors which included prevailing social and economic conditions, leadership, subaltern consciousness, elite behaviour, opportunity and chance.

Much of the debate over the reactionary or revolutionary nature of subalterns, especially peasants, has been informed by a certain teleology about what they *should* be fighting for, rather than what they *were* actually struggling for. In northwestern Sierra Leone, many of the subaltern protests were not for grand ideas or grand political projects but for their daily bread. They protested mainly to remove those obstacles which made it difficult for them to procure this "bread" and to defend those "rights" which facilitated its procurement. In their actions and discourses, they clearly expressed their grievances: taxation, forced labour, unfair prices, fines and other

excessive appropriations carried out in the name of "custom." Their protest actions had clear targets: chiefs, traders and the colonial state. This is not to deny that there were not moments when this quotidian struggle was nearly transformed into some grand project which threatened to displace the existing order. The Idara revolt and 1955 anti-chief rebellion displayed this transformative potential but even then, these rebellious projects were ultimately embedded in the everyday realities of subaltern life.

In the grand narrative of African history, it is not so much that the theme of "continuity" is wrong as much as it needs revision. This much is conceded by T. O. Ranger, one of the initial exponents of theme.[1] This study proposes two revisions. The first is an adumbrated concession that there was continuity between the precolonial elite and the nationalist elite, and that the legacy of "primary" resistance was indeed their legacy. For in Sierra Leone, the independence leaders were drawn precisely from the ranks of the chiefs, who, sixty years earlier, had violently contested the extension of British colonial rule over their domains. The key element in this continuity was, however, not the persistence of their opposition to the state but the reconfiguration of their position from one of opposition to one of collaboration. Colonialism maintained the precolonial institutions and forms of domination and power but reconfigured them to serve its purpose as well as those of the local African elite. In both form and essence, the chief that went into colonial rule was the chief that came out. The only difference was that the latter in northwestern Sierra Leone was far more powerful and oppressive than the former.

The second revision in the theme of continuity which this dissertation makes is in subaltern resistance against power and domination in Africa. Subaltern resistance predated colonial rule and continues in Africa today. Precolonial political institutions, the colonial state and the post-colonial state are merely different configurations of power and domination, all of which make oppressive demands on subaltern groups. Mamdani underlines this crucial point in his formulation of the colonial and post-

---

[1]. T.O. Ranger, "Resistance in Africa: From Nationalist to Agrarian Protest, In Resistance, pp. 32-52; For the continuist theme see T.O Ranger, (ed) Emerging Themes in African History (London: Heinemann, 1968) pp. 189-200.

colonial African state as essentially despotic in orientation.[2] Given that, the more far-reaching continuity in resistance in African history was not that of the struggle of elite groups, but that of subaltern groups against the changing forms of power and domination.

This was perhaps the resounding message relayed by the peasant rebellion of 1955-56 (and the workers' strike of February 1955) when the euphoria of independence was sweeping the continent. For in that "grand narrative" of triumph and liberty, it was nearly forgotten that the obstacles to "freedom" were not only the European colonialists, but also the manifold demands that were being made on subaltern groups by the "new" African leaders and the state they were about to inherit. This should perhaps be the lesson to be drawn for the current reconfigurations of power in Sierra Leone as well as in other parts of Africa.

---

[2]. Mamdani, Citizen and Subject, pp. 16-22 & 25-32.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I PRIMARY SOURCES:

A: ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

1. **Sierra Leone National Archives, Freetown. (SLNA).**

Correspondence:

Minute Papers (MP) 1890-1955

CSO (Colonial Secretary's Office) Series.

A/85/38 Cooperative Society Ordinance.

A/59/36 & A/60/36 Farmers Cooperative Society, Mambolo.

A/54/37 Farmers Cooperative Society, Kychom.

A/23/38 Farmers Society, Rokupr, Tombo and Rosino.

A/34/35 Cooperative Society, Scarcies.

2. **Public Records Office, Kew, U.K. (PRO):**

CO 267 Original Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governor of Sierra Leone

CO 554 Colonial Office Correspondence Concerning West Africa.

CO 270 Sessional Papers on Sierra Leone.

CO 271 Blue books of Statistics

CO 368 register of correspondence.

CO 879 Confidential print on Africa.

3. **Rhodes House Library, University of Oxford, Oxford (RHL).**

MSS.AFR. S388-290: Materials for a Projected Encyclopedia of Sierra Leone from 1900 BY L.W. Wilson.

MSS.AFR. S388(3): Sierra Leone Government: Report on Cooperatives in Sierra Leone (1949)

MSS.AFR. S1752: Agricultural Credit Schemes for Farmers, Sierra leone (1955) and Correspondence Concerning Port Loko Disturbances of 1955 by J.Henry and G.B Riley.

MSS.AFR. S1203: Six Personal letters from Paul Shuffrey, administrative officer, Professor Hale Bellot.

721.13 S2/1936(2): Report by F.A. Stockdale (later Sir Frank Arthur) Agricultural Adviser to Colonial Secretary on Visit to Sierra Leone, 1936 (Sessional Paper 2/1936).

710.14 3/1916: Committee on Land Tenure in West Africa: Colonies and Protectorates: Draft Report and Minutes of Evidence. (West African No: 1046-48).

721.13 S2/1927(4): Correspondence Relating to the General Survey of Disease in the Protectorate (Sessional Paper 4/1927).

721.145.1: Report on the Forests and Forest problems in Sierra Leone gp. 1909.

721.13 S2/135 (3): Report on Native Administration in Sierra Leone by J.S. Fenton.

MSS.AFR. S1060: Policy Regarding Protectorate Land Tenure System, 17th January, 1949.

721.13. S2.1939(5): Correspondence Relating to the Reorganisation of Protectorate Administration (Freetown, 1938).

MSS.AFR. S1752: Agricultural Credit Schemes for Rice Farmers in Sierra Leone October 1955.

B: GENERAL GOVERNMENT REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS

Annual Reports of Department of Agriculture, 1911-50.

Annual Departmental Reports Relating to Sierra Leone 1893-1961, (40 Reels) (ICRL- CAMP).

Annual Reports, Protectorate (Provincial) Administration, 1914-1952 (ICRL-CAMP)

British Parliamentary Papers, Colonies, Africa: 54, Papers Concerning Sierra Leone and surrounding districts, 1887-95. Shannon, Irish Universities Press, 1971. 532 pp.

British parliamentary Papers, Colonies, Africa: 5.5, Report of the Royal Commission on the insurrection and affairs generally in the Protectorate adjacent to the Sierra Leone Colony, 1898-99. Shannon, Irish Universities Press, 1971.

Census of the Colony and Protectorate of Sierra Leone, 1911 (London: Waterlow, 1911).

Census of the Colony and Protectorate of Sierra Leone, 1931 (Freetown: GPD, 1931).

Census of the Colony and Protectorate of Sierra Leone, 1948, (Freetown: Government Printing Office, 1949).

Census of the Colony and Protectorate of Sierra Leone, 1921 (London: Waterlow, 1922).

CMD 3020: Correspondence Relating to the Abolition of Slavery

Childs, H. A Plan of Economic Development for Sierra Leone, (Freetown: Government Printer, 1949).

Correspondence Relating to the Reorganization of the Agricultural Department, Govt. Printer, 1930

Further Reports of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the Conduct of Certain chiefs and the Government statement therein. (Freetown: GPO, 1957).

Great Britain Colonial Office: The West African Land Committee, 1912.

Great Britain: Report by F. A. Stockdale on Agriculture in Sierra Leone, (1929)

Great Britain: Report by F. A. Stockdale on his Visit to Nigeria, S.L and Gambia 1935-36 (1936).

Great Britain: Report by W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore of his Visit to West Africa in 1926 (1926).

Proceedings of the Protectorate Assembly, 1946-1955. (Freetown: G.P.D, 1946-1955).

Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Conduct of Certain Chiefs, (November 1955 to March 1956). (Freetown: GPO, 1956)

Report and Statistics of Census of the Colony of Sierra Leone, 1891 (Freetown, Government Printer, 1891)

Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Disturbances in the Provinces :November 1955 to March 1956, (Freetown: GPD, 1956).

Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry into the Strikes and Riots in Freetown, Sierra Leone, during February 1955. (Freetown: GPD, 1955).

Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Conduct of Certain Chiefs, (Freetown: GPD, 1957)

Sierra Leone Legislative Council Debates

Sierra Leone Government: Swamp Rice Cultivation in S. L. (Session Paper 4/1925).

Sierra Leone Government: Correspondence and Report on the Irrigation and Cultivation of Rice in Sierra Leone by A.C. Pillai (1927).

Sierra Leone Government: Further Report on Irrigation for Rice in Sierra Leone by A.C. Pillai (1927).

Sierra Leone Government: Commission on Rice Industry (Session Paper 7/1927).

Sierra Leone Government: Report on the visit of Prof C. Y. Shephard of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture to Sierra Leone in 1934, (Session Paper 4/1935)

Sierra Leone Government: Survey of Existing Rice Lands in Swamp Areas in the Southern Province (Session Paper 78/1938).

Sierra Leone Government: Correspondence with the Secretary of State Colonies on plan for Economic Development, (Session Paper 7/1949)

Sierra Leone Government: Soil Conservation Land Use in Sierra Leone, (1951).

Sierra Leone: An Economic Survey of Sierra Leone (1951).

Sierra Leone Government: A Preliminary Survey of the Vegetation of Sierra Leone by F. J. Martin. (1938).

C: NEWSPAPERS

African Standard, 1938-58

Colonial and Provincial Reporter (CP&R), 1911-1920 continues as West African Mail and Trade Gazette (ICRL-CAMP).

Sierra Leone Daily Mail, 1932- (or continues West African Mail and Trade Gazette (ICRL-CAMP).

Sierra Leone Guardian and Foreign Mails (SLG). 1906-1932 (continued by Sierra Leone Guardian. (ICRL-CAMP).

Sierra Leone Weekly News (SLWN), 1884-1951 (ICRL-CAMP).

Sierra Leone Times (Times), 1890-1904 (ICRL-CAMP).

West African Mail and Trade Gazette (WAMTG), 1920-1932 continues as (Daily Mail)

Observer (Bo)

II: UNPUBLISHED THESES, DISSERTATIONS AND PAPERS

Li, Anshan. "Social Protest in the Gold Coast: A Study of the Eastern Province in the Colonial Period," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1993).

Abdallah, Ibrahim D. "The Colonial State, Mining Capital and Wage Labour in Sierra Leone 1884-1945: A Study in Class formation and Action." (Ph.D diss., University of Toronto, 1990).

Alie, Joe Anthony. "Agricultural and Strategies in Southeastern Sierra Leone: 1945-1990," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1993).

Alldridge, S. "The Idara "Rebellion' in the Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1931, (An Essay For M.A. Area Studies, SOAS, University of London).

Cole, Festus. "Sierra Leone and World War I," (Ph.D diss., SOAS, University of London, 1994).

Deveneaux, G. H. K., "The Political and Social Impact of the Colony in Northern Sierra Leone, 1821-1896. (Ph.D diss.: Boston University 1973).

Gamble, David. "Work, Family and Leisure in an Urban Setting," (unpublished paper).

Gamble, David. "The History and Growth of Lunsar," (unpublished paper).

Howard, Allen M. "Big Men, Traders and Chiefs: Power, Commerce and Spatial Change in the Sierra Leone-Guinea Plain 1865-1895" (Ph.D diss., University Wisconson, 1972.)

Ijagbemi, E. A. "A history of the Temne in the Nineteenth Century," (Ph.D diss., Edinburgh University, 1968).

Johnston, Robert. "The Transfer of the Co-operative Movement to a Non -Western Environment: Its Development, its Economic, Social and Political Functions, and its Role in Sierra Leone," (Ph.D diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1968).

Kaniki, M. H. Y. "The Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone, 1929 -1939." (Ph.D diss., University of Birmingham, 1972).

Lenga-Kroma, J.S. "A History of the Southern Temne in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (Ph.d diss., Edinburgh 1978.

Lipschutz, Mark R. "Northeast Sierra Leone After 1884, Responses to the Samorian Invasions and British Colonialism" (Ph.D diss., University of California, Los Angeles. 1972).

Ojukutu-Macauley, Sylvia. "Women, Power and Change in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1896-1993," (Ph.D diss., Howard University, 1997).

Moore-Sieray, David. "Idara Konthorfili (1880-1931) and the 1931 Insurrection in North West Sierra Leone" (B.A. Hons. Thesis, F.B.C., University of Sierra Leone, 1978,

Moore-Sieray, David. "The Evolution of Colonial Agricultural Policy In Sierra Leone: With Reference to Swamp Rice Cultivation 1908-1939." (Ph.D diss., School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London, 1988).

Noaman, Qais Ghanem. "The Evolution of Provincial Local Government and Administration in Sierra Leone" (Ph.D diss., New York University, 1980).

Sawi, F.B. "The Sierra Leone Marketing Board 1949-1969," (M.Sc. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1975).

Sekgoma, G. A. "The History of Mining and Agriculture in Sierra Leone: A Study of the Impact of some Aspects of Colonial and Post-Colonial government's economic policies, 1929-1982. (Ph.D diss., Dalhousie University, 1986).

Sibanda, M.J. M. "Colonial Policy and Development in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1896-1939." (Ph.D diss., University of Birmingham, 1978).

Skinner, David. "Islam in Sierra Leone During the Nineteenth Century," (Ph.D diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1971)

Thayer, James Steel. "Religion and Social Organization among a West African Muslim People: The Susu of Sierra Leone." (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1981).

III: PUBLISHED MATERIALS: ARTICLES AND BOOKS

Abdallah, Ibrahim. "Liberty or Death,": Working Class Agitation and the Labour Question in Colonial Freetown, 1938-1939," International Review of Social History, 40, (1995), pp. 199-208.

Abdallah, Ibrahim. "Profit versus Social Reproduction: Labor Protests in the Sierra Leonean Iron-Ore Mines, 1933-1938, African Studies Review, 35, (December 1992), pp. 13-41.

Abdallah, Ibrahim. "Rethinking the Freetown Crown: The Moral Economy of 1919 Strikes and Riot in Sierra Leone." Canadian Journal of African Studies, 28, 2, (1994), pp. 202-213.

Abott, George C. "A Re-examination of the 1929 Colonial Development Act", Economic History Review, 34, (February 1971), pp. 70-76.

Abraham, Arthur. Mende Government and Politics in Sierra Leone: A Historical Study of Political Change in Sierra Leone: 1890 - 1937 (Freetown: Sierra Leone University Press, 1978).

Abraham, Arthur. "Women Chiefs: A Historical Appraisal" in Arthur Abraham (ed.) Topics in Sierra Leone History (Freetown: Leone Publishers, 1976), pp. 75-89.

Abraham, Arthur. Bai Bureh, the British and the Hut Tax War, International Journal of African Historical Studies, 7, 1, (1974), pp. 99-106.

Adas, Michael. Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protests against European Colonial Order (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

Adas, Michael. High Imperialism and the New History (Washington: American Historical Association, 1993).

Adeleye Ijagbemi, "The Yoni Expedition of 1887: A Study of British Imperial Expansion in Sierra Leone, Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria, 7, 2, (1974), pp. 241-254.

Afonja, Simi. "Women, Power and Authority in Traditional Yoruba Society," in Leela Duba, Eleanor Leacock, Shirley Ardener (eds.) Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 136-157.

Afzelius, Adam. Sierra Leone Journal 1795-1796 tr. & ed by Peter Kup (Uppsala: Ethnographical Uppsaliensia, XXVII, 1967).

Amin, Samir. Neocolonialism in West Africa (London: Penguin, 1973).

Amolo, Milcah. "Trade Unionism and Colonial Authority in Sierra Leone: 1930-1945," TransAfrican Journal, 8, 1, (1979).

Banton, Michael. West African City: A Study of Tribal Life in Freetown (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

Beckles, Hilary. Black Rebellion in Barbados: The Struggle Against Slavery (Bridgetown, Barbados: Antilles Publication, 1984).

Berman, Bruce and John Lonsdale. Unhappy Valley: Conflicts in Kenya and Africa: Books One and Two (London: James Curry, 1992).

Berry, Sara. "The Food Crisis and Agrarian Change in Africa: A Review Essay," Africa Studies Review, 27,2, (June 1984), pp. 59-112.

Beysadde, Pierre. La Guerre d'Algerie 1954-1962 (Paris, Editions Planéte, 1968).

Biyi, Esu "Temne Land Tenure" Journal of African Society, 12 (1913), pp. 407-20

Biyi, Esu. "The Temne and How They Make Their Kings," Journal of the African Society, 12, (1913), pp. 193-199.

Boyd, Jean and Murray Last. "The Role of Women as 'Agents Religieux' in Sokoto," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 19 (1985) pp. 283-300.

Brooks. George E. Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society and Trade in West Africa, 1000-1630 (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1993.

Butt Thompson, F.W. Secret Societies of West Africa (London: H.F. & G. Withby, 1929).

Butt-Thompson, F.W. Sierra Leone in History and Tradition (London: H.F. & G. Withby, 1926).

Cameron, Donald. Principles of Native Administration and their Application (Lagos, 1934).

Cardew, Gov. F. "Note on Loko Massama Chiefdom, Sierra Leone Protectorate, Sierra Leone Studies, 5 (1922), pp.49-59

Carter, Charles W. A Half Century of American Wesleyan Missions in West Africa (Syracuse, New York: Wesleyan Methodist Pub. Assoc., 1946).

Cartwright, John R. Political Leadership in Sierra Leone (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

Cartwright, John R. Politics in Sierra Leone, 1947-1967 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970)

Chabal, Patrick. Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for Indian Pasts?," Representations, 37, (1992) pp. 1-26.

Clarence-Smith, Gervase. Slaves, Peasants, and Capitalists in Southern Angola (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Clarke, J.I. Sierra Leone in Maps (London: University of London Press, 1966).

Cohen, Abner. The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern Africa Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

Cole, Bernadette. Mass Media, Freedom and Democracy in Sierra Leone (London: Premier Publishing House, 1996).

Collier, Gershon. Sierra Leone: Experiment in an African Nation (New York: New York University Press, 1970).

Conway, H.E. "Labour protest activity in Sierra Leone During the Early Part of the Twentieth Century", Labour History, (1968), pp. 49-63.

Cooper, Frederick. "The Problem of Slavery in African Studies," Journal of African History, 20 (1979), pp. 103-125.

Cooper, Frederick. "Peasants, Capitalists and Historians: A Review Article," Journal of Southern African Studies, 7, 2, (1981).

Cooper, Frederick, F.E. Mallon, S.J. Stern, Allen F. Isaacman and William Rosberry. Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

Cooper, Frederick. Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Copans, Jean. Les Marabouts de L'Arachide (Paris: Sycamore, 1980).

Corby, Richard. "The Mende Uprising of 1898 as it affected the United Brethren in Christ Mission at Rotifunk, Africana Research Bulletin, (January 1975), pp. 3-20.

Cotay, A.B. "Sierra Leone in the Post War World", African Affairs, 58, 232, (1959) pp. 210-20.

Cox, Thomas S. Civil-Military Relations in Sierra Leone: A case Study of African Soldiers in Politics, (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1976).

Cox-George, N.A. Finance and Development in West Africa: The Sierra Leone Experience (London: Denis Dobson, 1961).

Craton, Michael. Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies, 1627-1838, (Ithaca: Cornell University Pres, 1982).

Creevy, Lucy. "Ahmad Mbamba, 1850-1927," in J.R. Willis, (ed.), Studies in West African Islamic History Vol. 1: The Cultivators of Islam, (London: Frank Cass, 1979), pp.278-309.

Crooks, J.J. History of Colony of Sierra Leone (London: Frank Cass, (1868) 1903).

Crooks, J.J. A History of the colony of Sierra Leone, (London, Frank Cass, 1971 (1903)).

Crowder, Michael. West Africa Under Colonial Rule (London: Hutchinson, 1968)

Davidson, John. "April 27, 1898, The Mende War Revisited," Sierra Leone Studies at Birmingham, 1983 (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1984) pp.86-102.

Davidson, H.W. The Functions and Finances of District Councils in Sierra Leone (Feetown: Sierra Leone Government, 1953).

Denzer, La Ray "Wallace Johnson and the Sierra Leone Labour Crisis of 1919" African Studies Review 25, 2/3, (June/September 1982) pp. 159-184.

Denzer, La Ray & Crowder, Michael. "Bai Bureh and the Sierra Leone Hut tax War of 1898," in R.I. Rotberg and A.A Mazrui (eds.) Protest and Power in Black Africa, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 169-212.

Denzer, La Ray. "Sierra Leone -Bai Bureh." in Michael Crowder, M. (ed.), West African Resistance: the Military Response to Colonial Occupation, (London, Hutchinson, 1971) pp. 233-267.

Denzer, La Ray. "Sierra Leone-Bai Bureh" in Michael Crowder (ed.) West Africa Resistance (New York: Africana Publishing Corp, 1971) pp. 233-267.

Denzer, L. "A diary of Bai Bureh's War: Part 1: February 1st -April 1st: Bai Bureh holds the initiative", Sierra Leone Studies, (new series), 23, 1968, 39-65.

Denzer, La Ray. "I.T.A Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League," Parts 1 & 2, The International Journal of African Historical Studies 6, 3 and 4, (1973) pp. 413-452 and pp.563-580.

Denzer, La Ray. "Diary of Bai Bureh's War: Part II: April 2nd - June 20th 1898: British Strategy and Counter Offensive and Bai Bureh's Surrender," Sierra Leone Studies (new series) 24 (January, 1969) pp. 52-68.

Deveneaux, Gustav. "Public Opinion and Colonial Policy in Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone," International Journal of the African Historical Studies, 9, 1 (1976). pp. 45-67.

Doi, A. Rahman I. "The Yoruba Mahdi," Journal of Religion in Africa, 4, (1971-72), pp. 119-136.

Dorjahn, V. R. "The Changing System of the Temne, Africa, 30, (1960).

Dorjahn, V.R. "The initiation and Training of Temne *Poro* Members" in Simon Ottenberg (ed.), African Religious Groups and Beliefs (Delhi: Archana Publications, 1982) pp.35-62.

Dudgeon, C. The Agriculture and Products of British West Africa (Imperial Institute Handbooks, 1911).

Due, Jean M. Changes in Incomes and Imports of Consumer Goods in Sierra Leone: Bulletin No. 719 (Urbana, Illinois, 1966).

Echenberg, Myron. "Slaves into Soldiers: Social Origins of the Tirailleurs," in Paul Lovejoy (ed) Africans in Bondage (Madison: African Studies Program, 1986), pp. 311-333.

Echenberg, Myron. Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Senegalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960 (London: Heinemann, 1991).

Eminent Sierra Leoneans (Freetown: GPD, 1961)

Esedebe, P.O. "Independence Movements in West Africa," Tarikh 4,1, (1977).

Fage, J.D. "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of West African History;" Journal of African History, 10 (1969) pp. 393-404.

Fanon, Frantz. Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1966).

Feierman, Steven. Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

Finnegan, Ruth. "Swears among the Limba," Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion, 6, 1. (June 1964). pp. 8-25.

Finnegan, R. H. A Survey of the Limba People of Northern Sierra Leone (London: HMSO, 1965).

Foray, C.P. A Historical Dictionary of Sierra Leone (London: Scarecrow Press, 1977).

Fowler-Lunn, Katherine. The Gold Missus: A Woman Prospector in Sierra Leone (New York: W.W. Norton, 1938).

Furedi, Frank. The Mau Mau in Perspective (London, James Currey 1989).

Fyfe, C. A History of Sierra Leone (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

Fyfe, C. Sierra Leone Inheritance, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964)

Fyle, Magbaily. "Oral Tradition and Sierra Leone History". History In Africa, (1985), pp. 65-72.

Fyle, C. Magbaily "Precolonial Commerce in Northeastern Sierra Leone" Working Papers No.10 African Studies Center, Boston University 1979, 24 pp.

Fyle, C. Magbaily. The Solima-Yalunka Kingdom: Precolonial Politics, Economics and Society (Freetown; Nyakon Publishers, 1979).

Genovese, Eugene. From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the New Word (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1979).

Genovese, Eugene. Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, 1972). pp. 597-599.

Glassman, Jonathon. Feast and Riots: Revelry, Rebellion and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast 1856-1888 (London: James Currey, 1995).

Goddard T.N, Handbook of Sierra Leone (London: Grant and Richards, (First printed in 1925) 1956).

Grace. J. Domestic Slavery In West Africa with Particular Reference to Sierra Leone (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1975).

Greenlagh, Peter. West African Diamonds 1919-1983: An Economic History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

Guha, Ranajit. "On some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India in Ranajit" in Guha and Gyatari Chakravorty Spivak, (eds.) Selected Subaltern Studies (New York, 1988).

Guha, Ranajit. Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984 and ff.).

Hailey, Lord. An African Survey (London: Oxford University Press, 1945).

Hargreaves, J.D. Prelude to Partition of West Africa (London: Macmillan 1963).

Hargreaves, John D. "The chronology of Imperialism: The Loaded Pause," Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 7, 2, (June 1974), pp. 231-239.

Hargreaves, John D. The End of Colonial Rule in West Africa: Essays in Contemporary History (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979).

Hargreaves, J. D. "The Establishment of the Sierra Leone Protectorate and the Insurrection of 1898, Cambridge Historical Journal, 12, 1, (1956), pp. 56-80.

Hargreaves. J. D.Decolonization in West Africa (London: Macmillan, 1988).

Hess, Robert L. "The 'Mad Mullah' and Northern Somalia," Journal of African History, 3 (1964) pp. 415-443.

Heuman, Gad. (ed.), Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World (London: Frank Cass, 1986).

Hill, Polly. The Migrant Cocoa Farmer of Southern Ghana (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

Hobsbawm, E.J. Primitive Rebels (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959).

Hodgkin, Thomas. African Political Parties (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

Hodgkin, Thomas. Nationalism in Colonial Africa (New York: New York

University Press, 1956).

Holt, P.M. The Mahdist State in the Sudan 1881-1898 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

Hoogvelt, Ankie M. M. and Anthony M. Tinker, "The Role of Colonial and Post-Colonial States in Imperialism - A Case Study of the Sierra Leone Development Company, Journal of Modern African Studies, 16, 1, (1978). pp. 67-79.

Hopkins, A.G. An Economic History of West Africa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973).

Howard, Allen M. "Pawning in Coastal Northwest Sierra Leone, 1870 -1910," in Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy (eds.), Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 267-284.

Howard, Allen M. and David E. Skinner, "Network Building and Political Power in North-western Sierra Leone, 1800-1865," Africa, 54, 2, (1984).

Ijagbemi, A. "Oral Tradition and the Emergence of Temne Chiefdoms," African Research Bulletin, (March 1977).

Ijagbemi, E. Adeleye. "The Freetown Colony and the development of legitimate Commerce in the adjoining territories". Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 5, 2, (June 1970), pp. 243-256.

Ijagbemi, Ade. "Chiefs, Warriors and the Europeans: Warfare and Diplomacy on the Rokel in late Nineteenth Century," Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria, 10, 2, (June 1980), pp. 13-34.

Ijagbemi, E. Adeleye. "The Rokel River and the development of inland trade in Sierra Leone." Odu, (new series), 3, (April 1970), 45-70.

Inga, Bai. "Ceremonies on the Death and Crowning of Chief in Temne Country, Sierra Leone Studies (old series) II, 1919.

Ingham, Ernest Graham. Sierra Leone After a Hundred years (London: Cass, (1894) 1968).

J. Fisher, Humphrey. Ahmadiyyah: A Study in Contemporary Islam in West Africa (London: Oxford University Press).

Jamburia, Omar. "The Story of Gehad or Holy War of the Foulahs," in Sierra Leone Studies, (old series) 3, (1919) pp. 30-32.

James, C.L. R. Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution (London: Allison and

Busby, 1977).

James, C.L.R. The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingue Revolution 2nd ed., Rev. (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

Johnston, Robert. "Cooperatives and Agricultural Production in Sierra Leone", Rural Africana, 8, (1969), pp. 47-57.

Jones, Adam. From Slaves to Palm Kernels: A History of the Galinhas Country (West Africa) 1730-1890 (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1983).

Jusu, B. M. "The Haidara Rebellion of 1931," Sierra Leone Studies, (December 1954), pp. 147-153.

Kaniki, M. H. Y. "Attitudes and Reactions towards the Lebanese in Sierra Leone During the Colonial Period," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 3, 1, (1973), pp. 97-113.

Kaniki, M.H.Y. "The Idara Rebellion of 1931: A reappraisal," Journal of the Historical Society of Sierra Leone, 1, 2, (June, 1977), pp. 57-64.

Kiernan, V.G. Lords of Humankind: European Attitudes Towards the Outside World in the Imperial Age (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969).

Killingray, David. "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919 in the British Caribbean, The Society for the Social History of Medicine, 7, 1, (1994) pp. 59-87.

Kilson, Martin. Political Change in a West African State: A Study of the Modernization Process in Sierra Leone (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966)

Kilson, M. "Nationalism and Social Classes in British West Africa" Journal of Politics, 20, 2, (1958) 368-387.

Klein, Martin. "Slavery and Emancipation in French West Africa," in Martin Klein (ed.) Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 171-197.

Klein, Martin (ed.) Peasants in Africa: Historical and Contemporary (London: Sage Publications, 1980).

Kup, Peter History of Sierra Leone, 1400-1787 (Cambridge University Press, 1961).

Laing, Captain Gordon. Travels in Timanee Kooranko and Soolimania Countries (London, John Murray, 1825).

Langley, E. R. "The Temne: Their Life, Land and Ways," Sierra Leone Studies 22 (1939) pp.64-80.

Lee, J.M. and Martin Petter, The Colonial Office, War and Development Policy: Organization and the Planning of A Metropolitan Initiative, 1939-1945 (London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies. 1982).

Little, Kenneth. The Political Function of Poro, Part I Africa, 35, (1965), pp. 349-365; Kenneth Little, The Political Function of Poro, Part II Africa, 36, (1966).

Littlejohn, J. L. The Temne *Ansasa*, Sierra Leone Studies, 13, June 1960, p.32.

Lonsdale, John. "The European Scramble and Conquest in African History," in Roland Oliver and G.N. Sanderson, The Cambridge History of Africa, Vol. 6: 1870-1905 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) pp. 680-766.

Lonsdale, John. "States and Social Processes in Africa: A Historiographical Survey," African Studies Review, 24, 2/3, (1981), pp. 139-226.

Lovejoy, Paul. "Slavery in the Context of Ideology," in Paul Lovejoy (ed.) The Ideology of slavery in Africa (London: Sage Publication, 1981). pp. 11-38.

Lovejoy, Paul. The Ideology of Slavery in Africa (London: Sage Publications, 1981).

Lovejoy, Paul and Jan Hogendorn. Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897-1936 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Lugard, Frederick. The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa (Edinburgh, 1929).

Macauley, K. The Colony of Sierra Leone Vindicated from the Misrepresentations of Mr McQueen of Glasgow (London, 1827).

Mamdani, Mahmood. Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Mannah-Kpaka, J.K. "Memoirs of the 1898 Rising," Sierra Leone Studies (new series), 1 (1953) pp.28-39.

Mason, John Edwin. "Hendrick Albertus and his Ex-slave Mey: A Drama in Three Acts," Journal of African History, 31 (1990), pp. 423-445.

Matthews, J. A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone (London: 1788).

McCulloch, Merran. The Peoples of Sierra Leone (London: Institute of African Studies, 1950).

McGowan, Winston. "The Establishment of Long-Distance Trade between Sierra Leone and its Hinterland, 1787-1821," Journal of African History, 31 (1990), pp. 25-41.

Miers, Suzanne, and Igor Kopytoff, Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives (Madison: 1977).

Migeod, F.W.H. A View of Sierra Leone, (London, 1926).

Mitchell, P. "Notes on Land Tenure in Sierra Leone Protectorate" Sierra Leone Geographical Association Bulletin, 1964. pp. 39-43

Mitchell, P. K. "Trade Routes of Early Sierra Leone Protectorate," Sierra Leone Studies, (1962) pp. 204-217

Monteil V. Esquisses Sénégalaises, (Dakar: IFAN, 1966).

Moodie, T. Dunbar. "The Moral Economy of the Black Miners Strike of 1946, Journal of Southern African Studies, 13, 1, (October 1986), pp. 1-35.

Morgan, D.J. The Official History of Colonial Development, Volume I: The Origins of British Aid Policy 1924-1945 (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press, 1980).

Mukonoweshuro, Eliphas Colonialism, Class formation and Underdevelopment in Sierra Leone (Lanham: Md: University Press of America, 1993).

Nkrumah, Kwame. Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957).

Nowak, Bronislaw. "The Mandingo Slave Revolt of 1785-1796," Hemispheres, 3, (1981) pp. 150-169.

O'Brien, Donal B. Cruise. The Mourides of Senegal, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

Ohadike, D.C. "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919 and the Spread of Cassava Cultivation on the Lower Niger: A Study in History Linkages, Journal of African History, 22 (1981) pp. 379-91.

Okihiro, Gary Y. (ed.) In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean and Afro-American (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).

Olson, Filbert. Church Growth in Sierra Leone: A study of Church Growth in Africa's Oldest Protestant Mission Field (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Willan

Edermans Pub. Co., 1969).

Opala, Joseph, "'Ecstatic Revolution!': Street Art Celebrating Sierra Leone's 1992 Revolution," African Affairs, (1994) pp. 195-218.

Ottenberg, Simon. "Male and Female Secret Societies Among the Bafodea Limba of Northern Sierra Leone" in Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E. A. Van Beek & Dennis L. Thomson, Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression London: James Currey, 1994, pp. 363-387.

Padmore, George. History of the Pan African Congress (London: The Hammerstein Bookshop, 1945).

Parkes, J.C. Ernest Elementary Geography of the Colony of Sierra Leone and its Hinterland (Freetown: J.T. Sawyerr's Excelsior Printing Works, 1894).

Paterson, David K. "The demographic impact of the 1918-1919 in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Tentative Assessment,' in Christopher Fyfe and David Patterson, "African Historical Demography, II (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 401-431.

Patterson, David K. The Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919 in Western Samoa," Journal of Pacific History, (1992) 2 pp. 181-191.

Patterson, David. "The Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919 in the Gold Coast, Journal of African History, 24 (1983) pp. 485-505.

Patterson, Orlando. Slavery and Social Death, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Perinbam, Marie. "Fanon and the Revolutionary Peasantry - The Algerian Case," Journal of Modern African Studies, 11, 3, (1973).

Porter, Arthur. Creoledom: A study of the Development of Freetown Society (London: 1963).

Pribytovskii, Lev N. "S'ERRA LEONE: kREST' IANSKOE DVIZENIE 1955-56 GG." (SIERRA LEONE: THE PEASANT MOVEMENT OF 1955 -1956) Narody Azii I Afriki, 3, (1981), pp. 125-132.

Ranger, T.O. (ed.) Emerging Themes in African History (London: Heinemann, 1968).

Ranger, T.O. "Connexions between "Primary Resistance Movements" and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa I & II," Journal of African History, 9, (1968), pp. 437-454 and pp. 631-641.

Rankin, F. Harrison. The White Man's Grave: A Visit to Sierra Leone in 1834 (London: Richard Bentley, 1836).

Reade, Winwoode. The African Sketch Book, Vol II (London: 1873).

Richards, Paul. Coping With Hunger: Hazard and Experiment in an African Rice-Farming System (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986).

Riddell, B The Spatial Dynamics of Modernization in Sierra Leone (Evanston. Il.: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

Roberts, R. "The End of Slavery in French Soudan, 1905-1914," in S. Miers and R. Roberts, (eds) The End of Slavery in Africa (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) pp. 282-307.

Roberts, R. and M. Klein. "The Banamba Slave Exodus and the Decline of Slavery in Western Sudan," Journal of African History, 21, (1980), pp. 375-94.

Robinson, David. "Beyond Resistance and Collaboration: Amadu Bamba and the Murids of Senegal," Journal of Religion in Africa, 21, 2, (1991), pp.149-171.

Robinson, Ronald and John Gallagher, with Alice Denny, Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism (London, 1961).

Rodinson, Maxine, Muhammad, (New York: Parthenon, 1980 (1961)).

Rodney, Walter. "Jihad and Social Revolution in Fouta Djallon in Eighteenth Century," Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 4 (1968), pp. 269-284;

Rodney, Walter. "Slavery and other forms of Social Oppression in the Context of the Atlantic Slave Trade, Journal of African History, 7, (1966), pp. 431-443

Rodney, Walter. A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970)

Rodney, Walter. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972).

Rude, George. The Crowd in History 1730-1848 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981).

Saylor, Ralph Gerald. The Economic System of Sierra Leone (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1967).

Schlenker, C.F. A Collection of Temne Traditions, Fables and Proverbs (London, 1861)

Schmidt, Elizabeth. "Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain: Men, Women

and the Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1939," Journal of Southern African Studies, 16, (1990), pp. 622-648.

Schwartz, Stuart B. "The *Mocambo:* Slave Resistance in Colonial Bahia, Journal Social of History, 3, (1969/70), pp.313-333.

Scott, James. Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

Scott, James. The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South East Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

Scott, James C. Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

Sekgoma, Gilbert. "Introduction and Impact of Agricultural Policy in Sierra Leone, TransAfrican Journal of History, 17 (1988).

Sharafi, Mitra. "African Collaboration in the Illicit Slave Trade, 1791 -1849," Historical Discourses: The McGill Undergraduate Journal of History, 10 (Spring 1996), pp. 45-70.

Sibanda, M.J. M. "Dependency and Underdevelopment in Sierra Leone 1896 -1939" African Affairs 78, (October 1979), pp. 481-492.

Sharp, Granville. Memoirs, (London, 1820).

Sibanda, M.J.M. "Dependency and Underdevelopment in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1896-1939, African Affairs, (October 1979), pp. 481-492.

Sibthorpe, A.B.C. A History of Sierra Leone (London: Frank Cass, 1881)

Siddle, D.J. "The Evolution of Rural Settlement Patterns in Sierra Leone *circa* 1400-1968," Sierra Leone Geographical Journal, 13, (1968), pp.33-43.

Sierra Leone Heroes (Freetown: GPD, 1987)

Sik, Andre. History of Black Africa: Vol. II (Budapest: Akadémai Kiado, 1966).

Skinner, David E. "Mande Settlement and the Development of Islamic Institutions in Sierra Leone, International Journal of African Historical Studies, 11, 1 (1978), pp. 32-62.

Skinner, David E. Thomas George Lawson: African Historian and Administration in Sierra Leone (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1985).

Skinner, David E. "Islam in the Northern Hinterland and Its Influence on

the Development of the Sierra Leone Colony," in Alusine Jalloh and David E. Skinner (eds.) Islam and Trade in Sierra Leone (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press Inc., 1997), pp. 1-20.

Smith, Tony. "Patterns in the Transfer of Power: A study of French and British Decolonization," in Prosser Gifford and W. M. Roger Louis (eds.), Transfer of Power in Africa: Decolonization, 1940-1960 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 87-116.

Spitzer, Leo. and LaRay Denzer. "I.T.A. Wallace and the West African Youth League" International Journal of African Historical Studies, (1973), pp. 563-580.

Spitzer, Leo. Creoles of Sierra Leone: Responses to Colonialism, 1870 -1945 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974).

Spivak, Gyatari Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Larry Grossberg and Cary Nelsons (eds.) Marxism and the Interpretations of Culture (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988)

Spivak, Gyatari Chakravorty. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," Subaltern Studies, 1985, pp. 330-363.

Stevens, Siaka. What Life has Taught Me (London: Kensal Press, 1984).

Sumner, D. L. Education in Sierra Leone (Freetown: G.P.D, 1963).

Sundiata, Ibrahim K. From Slavery to Neoslavery: the Bight of Biafra and Fernando Po in the era of Abolition, 1827-1930 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

Suret-Canale, Jean and Adu Boahen. "West Africa, 1945-1960," in Ali A. Mazrui (ed.) and C. Wondji (asst. ed.) General History of Africa VIII: Africa Since 1935, (Paris: Unesco and Heinemann, 1993).

Temu, A. and B. Swai, Historians and Africanist History: A Critique (London: Zed Press, 1981).

The Missions of the Church Missionary Society, The Sierra Leone Mission (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899).

Thomas, Northcote W. Anthropological Report on Sierra Leone: Part 1, Law and Customs of the Timne and other Tribes (London: Harrison and Sons, 1916).

Thompson, E.P. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century, Past and Present, 50, (1971), pp. 76-136.

Tomkins, Sandra. "The Failure of Expertise: Public Health Policy in

Britain During the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic," The Society for the Social History of Medicine, 5, 3, (December 1992), pp. 435-454.

Tomkins, Sandra. "Colonial Administration in British Africa during the Influenza Epidemic of 1918 -19," Canadian Journal of African History, 28, (1994), pp. 60-83.

Trimingham, J.S. A History of Islam in West Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

Trupier, Philippe. Autopsie de la Guerre d'Algerie (Paris, 1972).

Van der Laan, H.L. Sierra Leone Diamonds: An Economic Survey, 1952 -1961 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

Van Der Laan, H. L. Lebanese Traders in Sierra Leone (The Hague: Moulton Press, 1975).

Wallis, C. Braithwaite. Advance of West African Empire (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903).

White, Frances E. Sierra Leone Settlers Women Traders: Women on the Afro-European Frontier (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987).

White, Frances. "Creole Traders in the 19th Century", International Journal of African History, 14, (1981), pp. 626-642.

Williams, David, "Chapter 7: English Speaking West Africa," in Michael Crowder (ed.), Cambridge History of Africa: Volume 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) pp.350-353.

Willis, John Ralph. "The Ideology of Enslavement in Islam," in John Ralph Willis (ed.), Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa: Volume 1: Islam and Ideology of Enslavement (N.J: Frank Cass, 1985) pp. 1-26.

Winterbottom, Thomas. An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone: Part I & II (London: C. Whittingham, 1803)

Wolf, Eric. Europe and the People without History (Berkely: University of California Press, 1982).

Wright, Marcia. Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life Stories From East/Central Africa (New York: L. Barber Press, 1993).

Wylie, Kenneth. Political Kingdoms of the Temne: Temne Government in Sierra Leone, 1825-1910 (New York: Africana Company, 1977).

Wyse, Akintola. The Krio of Sierra Leone: An interpretive History

(Freetown: W.D. Okrafo Smart, 1989).

Wyse, Akintola J. "The 1919 Anti-Strike and Anti-Syrian Riots: A Krio plot?" The Journal of the Historical Society of Sierra Leone, 3, 1 & 2. (1981), pp. 1-14.

Wyse, Akintola. H.C. Bankole Bright and Politics in Colonial Sierra Leone, 1919-1958, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Zack-Williams, A.B. "Merchant Capital and Underdevelopment: The Process Whereby the Sierra Leone Social Formation Became Dominated by Merchant Capital 1896-1961." African Review (Tanzania), 10, (1983).